**Parallels in Propaganda?**

**A comparative historical analysis of Islamic State and the Nazi Party**

Politicians overestimate the strength of IS. IS is a tiger of paper. It is a fake state, a puppet state. Nazism was a very hard adversary. IS compared to this is negligible.

(Levy, 2015)

Assessments of Islamic State’s operational and communications strengths are contested but for Bernard-Henri Levy, politicians continue to overestimate its operational efficacy and influence on public discourse. This paper aims to increase understanding of the largely subterranean public relations and propaganda operations of Islamic State (IS) by offering a comparative historical analysis with the German National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDP or Nazi Party) in the 1930s and 1940s. This approach attempts a methodological expansion of public relations historiography by applying the theoretical approach of historical institutionalism as the basis for comparative investigation, alongside interdiscursive analysis based on evidence from communications artefacts from both organisations. The project is intended as a contribution to contemporary public relations history that offers a summary of IS communications operations and places its output in the historical context of National Socialist (NS) propaganda. This comparative historical approach based on institutionalism aims to reduce the uncertainty associated with extremist terrorism that has led to media, political and academic commentators overestimating its efficacy in what Jackson (2016, p. 33) has described as the “epistemological crisis” of Western counterterrorism.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The place of Nazi propaganda in public relations history remains unsettled by scholars. No papers have been offered on the topic during seven years of the International History of Public Relations Conferences, although the period features explicitly in Bentele’s (1997) stratified model of public relations as media relations and political propaganda under the Nazi regime. One explanation for this reticence is unease at the “highly effective and catastrophic application and development of propaganda theory by Hitler and his Nazi propaganda chief, Joseph Goebbels” including the “propagandist psychological manipulation” associated with Bernays and other US public relations practitioners (Weaver, Motion & Roper, 2006, p. 10). The initial reaction to novel propaganda that unsettles the established political order is often underestimation, followed, by a swing to overestimation, with Bramsted (1965, p. vii) recording of Goebbels “a tendency to romanticise the man, to concentrate on personal traits, to exaggerate his importance as a policy maker.” Fifty years later, an extensive biography made the point that Goebbels himself contributed to this overestimation by propagating a “very effective myth of a virtuoso master of an all-powerful propaganda machine” (Longenrich, 2015, p. 693).

Underestimates followed by overestimation have also accompanied the growth of IS, which emerged from Al Qaeda in Iraq and refined its parent’s post-classical brand of terrorism (Wieviorka & White, 2003) that goes beyond regional groups campaigning on territorial issues, recruiting locally and undertaking acts primarily in that locality, such as the Basque separatists and the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Post-classical groups adopt a global outlook, emphasis on the propaganda of the deed and interaction with global media infrastructures such as satellite television and the internet for communications outreach. Former US intelligence official Derek Harvey claimed that the US and other Western governments underestimated IS and its promotion of jihadist ideology (Matharu, 2015): “This isn’t just lone wolves inspired by propaganda. This is coordinated.” As late as 2014, United States (US) President Barack Obama dismissed IS as a “JV team” (junior varsity) prompting the interviewer to point out that the “JV team just took over Fallujah” (Kessler, 2014).

Interactions between terrorism, propaganda and public relations are a suitable area of inquiry for public relations scholarship because of the highly communicative nature of terrorism and the role of terror in totalitarian regimes, including Nazi Germany. The concept of terrorism as communication was advanced convincingly by Schmid et al. (1982) who theorised spectacular acts of terror as communication, with publicity from media reports contributing to its overall effectiveness. In this theorisation, terrorism combines political purpose with violent action in propaganda of the deed that uses spectacular acts to grab media attention (Simonson, 2001, p. 300) in a tactic that creates concern and “social noise.” Rada (1985, p. 28) identified the “symbiotic relationship with the mass media” of both public relations and terrorism, reinforcing the notion that “terrorism is essentially a message” (Matusitz, 2013, xvii.) that depends on public relations to gain the media coverage needed for public awareness. This need for media to act as an encoder, and transmission multiplier for terrorist messages has made exploitation of media an essential dependence or “conduit metaphor” (Reddy, 1979, p. 284). This symbiosis means that scholars of terrorist communications have shared theoretical frames with public relations scholars. Tuman (2003, p. 19) for example, modelled “the rhetorical dimensions of terrorism” with an approach similar to that of Heath (2000, p. 69) in his Aristotlean-derived perspective of public relations as rhetoric. The two elements were combined in the 2008 (O’Hair, Heath, Ayotte & Ledlow, p. 4) edited book*, Terrorism: Communication and Rhetorical Perspectives*, which saw terrorism as not only acts of violence bust as “a process that is always and already communicative and rhetorical.”

The meaning of the words propaganda and public relations is a relevant consideration for a project that examines two communications regimes separated by 80 years. In the UK, L’Etang (2004, p.82) suggested that until 1955, the concepts of PR and propaganda were used “interchangeably and apparently unproblematically.” An earlier paper (L’Etang, 1998, p.414) referred to the importance of using the terms as they were in the particular historical context. Goebbels himself appeared sensitive about the term and asked for a name change to Ministry of Culture and Enlightenment (Hachmeister & Kloft, 2005) in order to remove the word propaganda but Hitler turned him down. UK equivalent was named Ministry of Information, but the more fundamental structural point is that a propaganda ministry of any sort in peacetime Europe was a rarity. Islamic State co-ordinates its communications through a branch for “public information” and does not use the word propaganda, although an ethnographic film described one extremist celebrity as “a PR man” for Islamic State (Roberts, 2016). With these examples of terminology in mind, this paper does not dwell further on definitional matters and instead accepts a degree of interchange between the terms propaganda, public relations and public information both in the 1930s to 1940s and in the case of IS and other extremist groups today, favouring Bentele’s (2015, p. 33) view that these and other terms have connections “conceptually as well as historically.”

**RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY**

RQ 1: What parallels exist between the propaganda of Nazi Party and Islamic State?

The first stage of the research considered the identity of the two institutions under study, the nature of their propaganda organisations and what these institutions did based on evidence of communications materials and distribution systems. This initial consideration of the institutions and their related communications infrastructures applied the theoretical and methodological approach of historical institutionalism as defined by (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 937) and applied primarily to political institutions such as parties seeking votes and organises investigations in terms of the nature of the institution and its identity, the ideas and messages summarising its purpose, the source of institutional support, channels of communication and institutional outcomes. Although not without critics, (see Hay and Wincott, 1998, p. 953, for example) the theory of historical institutionalism and the related methodology has been advocated and deployed in public relations historiography. In a paper delivered at the 2015 International History of Public Relations Conference (IHPRC), Sandhu (2015) encouraged more widespread use of historical institutionalism due to its theoretical strengths in ensuring communications output is considered within a societal context as “institutions are carriers of ideas that in turn constitute preferences of the actors.” This call was taken up at IHPRC in 2016 by Bentele and Wiesenburg (2016) who used historical institutionalist methods in an investigation into the Protestant Church in Germany. For the assessment of communications output for Nazi Germany in this paper, the source material was historical literature on Nazi propaganda and artefacts in the form of communications material from archives and museums. For Islamic State, original online publications, news releases and videos were reviewed. The analysis of communications content applied a methodology deployed by Baines and O’Shaughnessy (2014) in their analysis of Al-Qaeda’s messaging and positioning at content, propaganda and semiotic levels. An initial triage of the content was made using these three levels and the sorting refined using a manual tabulation, in which the contemporary media institutions, strategy and tactics of Islamic State were compared with the equivalents in Nazi Germany. The discourses of propaganda were analysed and grouped through several iterations into ten proposed areas of commonality, or parallels in propaganda, which are discussed in the paper and summarised in table 1. While the discourse analysis acknowledges engagement with language materials, the research approach focussed on the content and meaning levels regarding discourse as a “domain of statements” (Foucault, 1984) rather than seeking to apply advanced sociolinguistics which would not have addressed the essentially communicative nature of this inquiry. However, the project did deploy aspects of Fairclough and Wodak’s (1997, p. 13) approach to identifying causal effects in linguistics forms such as the naming of Islamic State and the National Socialist party. The research question was addressed by confirmation of the recurring themes, symbolisations and messages in the form of a ten point comparative analysis and categorisation of propaganda output, unpicking the information operations of IS using the historical precedent of Nazi Party.

The decision to attempt a comparative historical analysis of these two institutions and their communicative approaches was stimulated by calls to move beyond public relations history as studies of single nations, organisations and episodes towards “comparative studies across nations, cultures and organisations” (Watson, 2014, p. 876) and fill the gap identified by Bentele (2015, p. 21) resulting from there not having been “much comparative history so far.” The methodological basis for the comparative analysis was the interdiscursive or hybridization approach as specified by Fairclough (2003, p. 37) as a subset of critical discourse research to place propaganda texts in terms of discourse over time at “a mediating level between the text per se and its social context”. This methodology was favoured because of its suitability for considering institutions and public relations content over time, as a result of its understanding that “greater or lesser hybridity depend on social and historical circumstances” and that some texts are “more hybrid than others” (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001, p. 241). The decision to pursue comparative research reflects the underpinning conceptual approach of a belief in the value of comparison but does not mean to infer or assume similarities between the different temporal, religious and societal contexts – to name just three criteria – of the Islamic State and the Nazi Party. While these two institutions, their times and their social contexts and obviously brimming with difference, what follows is an attempt to draw out comparisons and commonalities where they are found to occur.

This primary research focus on the content and discourse of propaganda alongside institutionalist research was supplemented with first-hand and second-hand ethnography. The original ethnography included discussions with Imams working on de-radicalisation in the UK, lawyers working with terrorist suspects along with a second hand review of ethnographic films on Islamic State and extremist sympathisers.

**Table 1: Parallels in propaganda between the Nazi Party and Islamic State**

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|  |  | **Nazi Party** | **Islamic State** |
| 1 | **Polycratic communications management** | Decentralised polycracy of shared responsibility and overlapping ministries, despite claims of Goebbels. | Dispersed content generation and distribution via media centres, along with hands-off approach to social media. |
| 2 | **Nomenclature of claim** | ‘National’ and ‘worker’ elements of NDSAP name claim Nazis as the party of all Germany. | Two-word ‘Islamic State’ nomenclature claims Islam and statehood at simple and linguistic level. |
| 3 | **Language of conviction and authority** | High conviction rhetoric to propose authoritarian enforcement of law and order. | High conviction language of claim plus authoritarian interpretation of Islamic texts as underpinning for Sharia law. |
| 4 | **Rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion** | Biological, racist and historical foundations for inclusion or exclusion from *Volksgemeinschaft*. | Religious exclusion of non-believers (*kuffir*) and Shi’a Muslims versus inclusion of Sunni Muslims. |
| 5 | **Homeland claim & overseas expansion** | Beyond *Volksgemeinschaft*, the Reich expands to secure food supply and space for living (*Lebensraum*). | IS motto of enduring and expanding reinforces need for action to terrorise what Osama bin Laden called the far enemy. |
| 6 | **Mythology and legend – including leadership myths** | Hitler leadership myth was supplemented by generic Ayran legend based on of racial superiority. | Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi myth as self-declared caliph and descendent of Muhammed plus apocalyptic mythology. |
| 7 | **Martyrdom, ultraviolence and gang culture** | Lionisation of martyrs who died in provocative gang violence, designed to humiliate opponents. | Gangster context and faux defence narrative as incentive to violence by young recruits. |
| 8 | **Propaganda of the deed** | Deeds of violence and civic intervention to seize state control in power vacuum and ensure terroristic dictatorship. | Well-rehearsed tactic using atrocities such as beheadings, in management of savagery for didactic purpose. |
| 9 | **Media modernity** | Sophisticated two-phase approach to media engagement plus use of cinema and radio. | Media technologies used to build a digital caliphate – plus physical territory based on mastery of internet. |
| 10 | **Visual aesthetic** | Fascist aesthetic in architecture, posters and film. | Extremist aesthetic of Islamic videos and publications. |

**FINDINGS**

1. **Autocratic political leadership and polycratic communications management**

Islamic State and the Nazi Party both had singular dictatorial leaders who filled power vacuums. According to Gellately, Hitler made the transition from rabble-rousing political speaker into deeply beloved Fuhrer in a “remarkably short time” (2001, p. 9). A similar tempo accompanied the assertion of power by Abu Bakr al-Bagdadhi and the transition of what was Al Qaeda in Iraq into a proto-state. But in neither case did autocracy of political control extend to a centralised management of communication, where there was diffusion and functional overlap. The 13 March 1933 establishment of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda under the youngest member of Hitler’s cabinet, 35 year old Joseph Goebbels, may appear a definitive event that confirmed Goebbels as head of communication but responsibility for propaganda was shared by several overlapping ministries reflecting the “fragmented nature of authority” in Nazi Germany (Roberts, 2009, p. 581). In 1934, for example, Hitler issued an edict giving the Nazi press chief Otto Dietrich responsibility for issuing public relations material to the National Socialist newspapers, making it clear that “Goebbels’s claim to be in control of the press was by no means absolute” (Longerich, 2015, p. 340). There was further overlap with Gregor Strasser, head of the Reich’s Propaganda Directorate since 1926 and effective builder of a propaganda distribution infrastructure (Broszat et al., 1987, p. 61). This “polycracy” of communications control (Kallis, 2008, p.8) also included Hitler’s longstanding friend Maz Amann’s Reich Media Chamber and together these many hands undermined any sense of a centralised system. So while public discourse was tightly controlled by the Nazi Party and many aspects of public communication strongly influenced by Goebbels and his ministry, despite his self-propagated myth of mastery, one authoritative biographer maintained that Goebbels failed to control the “Nazi propaganda machine in a way that could match his ambition” (Longenrich, 2015, p. 693).

IS has a centralising and totalitarian culture yet its media management is similarly dispersed, with “enormous resources” (Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2014) allocated to its communications function. The Islamic State Institution for Public Information (ISIPI), which was led by Abu Muhammed al-Adnani al-Shami, “the most significant figure in Islamic State after Caliph Ibrahim and his deputies” according to Atwan (2016, p. 142) until his death by air strike in August 2016. The ISIPI is the “central command for digital operations” that gives orders and provides resources for distributing content (Cohen, 2015, p. 53). The distribution task is undertaken by affiliated media operations with separate brand names and on-screen logos which make content available on their own channels as well as social media platforms. In the West, the best known is Al-Hayat Media Center, which produces news articles, annual reports and videos, mainly focussed on recruitment and featuring Western *jihadis*. Al-Furqan Institute for Media Production is the oldest Arabic distribution channel, established in 2006 alongside the Al-I’tisam Media Foundation, which was most active in 2013 and 2014.

**2. A nomenclature of claim**

Islamic State’s naming system is a two-word nomenclature of strategic claim that simultaneously asserts the group’s Islamism, statehood and the promise of a caliphate (*kalifah)* for the global Muslim community (*ummah)*. This verbal identity is supplemented with the visual identity of a distinctive black flag with white lettering. Monochrome flags have a place in Islamic history, with Muslims believing one of the Prophet’s original banners was black. The slogan of enduring and expanding (*baqiya wa tatamaddad)* further conveys assertion and intent in relation to nationhood. The nomenclature of claim is a well-designed, logical and self-reinforcing combination of IS ideology, Islamic theology and political declarations that forms a messaging framework for IS publications, media statements and propaganda.

A similar sense of national claim and new statehood was used by the Nazi Party, which described itself as the German National Socialist Workers Party. Nationalistic claims were made in the Nazi Party’s naming, visual identity and supporting elements, including the use of music by German composers. Nazis were popular, according to the opposition SDP’s magazine, *The Free Word*, because they professed to “fight for an idea” of a new type of nationhood and engaged the public in the sphere of ideology using non-specific positive slogans and idealistic phrases’ which were compelling propositions for a new kind of state (*Das Freie Wort,* 19 October 1930).

1. **Language of conviction and authority**

The naming system of IS communicates with conviction and claims Islam at a linguistic level. The group also makes selective use of Islamic texts but is scornful of scholarship, dismissing academics as “donkeys of knowledge” in an audio statement (al-Adnani, 2015) compared to the simple authority of fundamentalist interpretation and use of simple language.

A similar language of authority was used by the Nazi Party, with Hitler deploying high conviction rhetoric to “serve our own right, always and unflinchingly” rather than to present policies with “academic fairness” (Hitler, 1971, p. 182). Compared to the political disorder of the Weimar years, the Nazi Party used authoritarian language in snappy slogans to promote a proposition of stability through law enforcement. This language of national renewal via discipline was appealing in the same way that Islamic State’s offer of life under Sharia Law is attractive to some recruits. Although the suppression of individual priorities for the common good may seem authoritarian, Deeyah Khan has described how, for Muslim women, the strictures and submission associated with joining IS can be “almost a liberation….an exaggerated expression of religiosity gives more freedom” (Urwin, 2015).

The societal discourse of domestic regeneration and a new German identity meant promotion of the party through generic messages of hope in slogans and simplifications that appealed across class, age, religious and political differences (Peukert & Deveson, 1993). The authoritative simplicity of NS messages worked well in posters, some of which were used in outreach to young people, such as Ludwig Hohlwein’s call for young students to be “propagandists” for the Fuhrer – an example of recruitment focus on young people also shared by Islamic State. Within this discourse of a new state, both the NS and IS used authoritative language to embed a set of values for the long-term development of a utopia that includes and excludes.

1. **Rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion**

A platform of inclusion-exclusion rhetoric was used to create a new sense of German identity by the Nazis (Kallis, 2008, p. 65) based on the racial superiority of German-Aryans. This internal propaganda message of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (people’s community) was an attractive alternative to the disorder of the Weimar years (Gellately & Stoltzfus, 2001, p. 42). The Nazi Party presented itself as the energetic party of young people and created youth movements, such as the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls, whose press officer described her initial reaction to the inclusion theme of *Volksgemeinschaft*:

I first heard it spoken on the evening of Hitler’s appointment and it acquired a magical glow. What held my allegiance to this idealistic fantasy was the hope that a state of affairs would be created in which people of all classes would live together like brothers and sisters. (Maschmann, 1965, p.11)

This rhetoric of inclusion made it clear that the fit, the vigorous, the patriotic - and above all anyone not Jewish - were included in the new Germany. So this bid for unity only applied to “pure Germans” and excluded internal foes (*Volksfeinde*) and non-conformist minority groups, such as Jews, Romanies and homosexuals

The name Islamic State combines inclusion and exclusion simultaneously, which intensifies the value of belonging while annexing those who do not want to be involved or cannot because they are not Sunni Muslims. IS rhetoric on religious separation also has a sectarian elements in the way it excludes Shia Muslims. Having established a claim on the homeland in the form of the caliphate, the strategic intent of IS becomes expansion – as well as attacks on non-believers (*kufirs)* who are excluded from the Islamic State and as the far enemy.

1. **Homeland claim and overseas expansion: Near and far enemies**

Before Islamic State’s goals of military invasion to Crusader nations, the aim of extreme Islam (and Salafism movement within Sunni Islam in particular) was to achieve global transformation through prosletysing (*da’wah*) rather than violence. Sayyid Qutd, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood quoted widely by IS, argued for action beyond preaching urging “a revolutionary vanguard” to establish an Islamic state and impose Islamisation on Arabs and then the rest of the world (Ware, 2016). This expansionist ideology was complemented by the focus of post-classical global terrorism on attacking the far enemy, in a phrase coined by Osama bin-Laden (Gerges, 2005)*.* Warnings of planned terrorist acts by IS in videos are designed to create fear in the far enemy while rallying sympathisers. For the uncommitted audience in the Middle East, these threats also serve as demonstrations of power and the futility of resistance, as summarised in table 2. [Table 2]

During the 1938 re-taking of Austria and the Sudetenland, Goebbels took the initiative in celebrating the territorial gains by blasting “noisy propaganda” to the Czechs and to the homeland (Longenrich, 2015, p. 381) which stressed Germany’s cultural and economic role in the development of a new European civilisation. Territorial expansion of the fatherland was justified in posters and other propaganda, as protective action against external enemies who would otherwise take food away from German children. Just as IS advocates defence of the caliphate, so Nazi Germany presented aggression in a defensive light, as in the 11 March 1940 slogan of the week issued by the Nazi Party Central Propaganda Directorate, “Why We Fight – For our Children’s Bread!!” [Figure 1]

This territorial discourse justified expansion to allow additional space for living *(Lebensraum*) that gave an agrarian motive for expanding eastward into Poland, Russia and elsewhere, eliminating enemies the regime considered racially inferior. The assumed superiority of Germans as an Aryan master race (*Herrenvolk*) was at the heart of this ideology and drew its assumptions from a combination of science and mythology.

1. **Mythology and legend**

Several strands of Nazi propaganda sought out historical and mythological foundations for fascism. Otto Rahn, for example, was tasked by Himmler to explore the mythology of an elite Aryan race being the basis of Nazi superiority in a search that included archaeological investigations. Sir Richard Evans, claimed that “Himmler wanted to press forward with a new religion, including sun worship” in which the SS became an “Aryan aristocracy” (Lee, 2013). Alongside this generic mythology, a personality-focussed Führer myth stressed Hitler’s humble roots, heroism in WW1 and potential as a saviour of the nation (Kershaw, 2001, p. 29). The Hitler cult was an important tool of NS rhetoric that helped to overcome citizens’ discomfort with the party’s crass violence and muddled policies. The result was a dualism between the party machine and Hitler as he increasingly derived authority from personal charisma, a change was reflected in the more personal tone of political communications based on the Hitler myth, such as the “Yes Fuhrer we will follow you!” (*Ja! Fuhrer wir folgen Dir*!) poster of 1934 (Staatsarchiv, Bremen).

Elements of mythology and destiny have combined in biography of IS leader and self-proclaimed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who is presented as a descendent of the tribe of Muhammed. This is an important qualifier in Islamic theology for becoming the leader of the caliphate (Zelin, 2014) but according to one security analyst, “his backstory is just myth” (Connor, 2014). While the broader IS messages are contemporary, some have their roots in Islamic mythology and apocalyptic claims. In a study of extremist propaganda (El-Badaway, Comerford & Welby, 2015, p.5) Islamic mythology appeared in 80% of material, with 48% including references to the end of days, a strand of Islamic myth promoted by “a new network of younger clerics and propagandists round the world” who were also “powerful advertisers of the brand that the Islamic State was able to construct as its successes built up” (Burke, 2015, p.137). The town of Dabiq in Northern Syria is central to this prophetic branch of IS ideology as the site of a last battle at which Islamic warriors overcome the West – as well as the highly symbolic name for IS’s glossy online terror magazine that targets westerners. IS combines Islamic mythology with geopolitical conspiracy theories to generate seemingly well-reasoned public relations messages that give IS fighters “huge succour” and convince them of the “righteousness of their cause and the nobility of their endeavours” (Maher, 2015).

1. **Martyrdom, ultraviolence and gangs**

Abu Bakr al-Bagdadhi, the current leader of IS, maintained the uncompromising and violent standards set by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq from 2004 to 2006. Al-Bagdadhi presided over a 10-fold increase in the terrorist output attributed to Al Qaeda between 2011 and 2012, a level not seen since 2007 according to the US State Department’s Bureau of Counterterrorism (2014). This culture of ultraviolence has attracted criminals and gang members to the ranks of IS fighters. Vertkaik (2016, p. 34) identified a shared “gangsta context” of outwitting law enforcement in the West among men young men who migrate to defend the caliphate which is presented as under threat of attack from enemies in the West and locally. This *faux defence* narrative is then used as the excuse for waging holy war against the West as a pre-emptive strike. *Jihad* is mentioned 41 times in the Quran and the need for holy war to protect the caliphate and avenge attacks was used by Mohammed Emwazi, the IS fighter known as Jihadi John, in the *Message to America* video of the execution of American journalist James Foley:

We are an Islamic army and a state. Any attempt by you, Obama, to deny the Muslims their rights of living safely under the Islamic caliphate will result in the bloodshed to your people. (“Islamic state Beheads American journalist James Foley,” 2014).

Instead of suicide attack, a new term*, inghimaasi*, has appeared in extremist publications over the last two years as a variant on *shuhada* (martyr). The word has a sense of a noble end and presents martyrs as delivering a dominant military tactic that shames non-believers by showing them “Muslim courage and that they love martyrdom in the Sake of Allah” Nuhas (2014).

In the final days of Weimar, Goebbels provoked Communist and Social Democratic parties with SA Stormtrooper marches into neighbourhoods where they had support, resulting in violence that was more typical of street gangs than a campaign by a political party. Those injured or killed in the resulting (and self-inflicted) battles were lionised in the media, in posters and in music. Visual propaganda celebrating martyrdom could be subtle such as H Hoyer’s *S-A Man Rescuing Wounded Comrade* [Figure 2] or more explicit exhortations to “Remember the victims” injured or killed in street fighting to create the new Germany. These 1926-1930 struggles against the Socialists in Berlin and elsewhere seem to have taught the Nazis the value of violent action in propaganda and in provoking and humiliating opponents, with Goebbels and his aides celebrating Nazi brand of ultraviolence and actively promoting it in the media.

1. **Propaganda of the deed**

Propaganda of the deed is a well-rehearsed tactic of Islamic extremism and is considered here as an element of terrorist communications. After the 11 September attacks of 2001, Osama bin Laden stressed the communications dimension of the suicide attacks that “by all standards, exceeded all expectations” (Al Jazeera, 2004). Propaganda of the deed has since become the most visible feature of Islamic terrorism for many Westerners, and while the beheadings, crucifixions and other ultraviolence may appear an “orgy of sadism it is far from being that” and is instead a systematic policy linked to establishing the caliphate (Atwan, 2015, p.153). The atrocities are didactic and designed to deliver a clear message - a *Message in Blood* to use the October 2014 title of one IS video of a beheading. Ultraviolence is documented most prominently in Islamist literature in Abu Bakr Naji’s book *Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Islamic Nation Will Pass*, which was published in 2004 and outlines a three-phase progression towards the establishment of the caliphate: 1. A struggle of vexation and fatigue on non-believers in the West; 2. The administration of savagery (including against other Muslims if necessary). 3 The establishment of an Islamic State under Sharia law (Naji, 2006).

Both IS and the Nazi party took power in the political context of collapsed states and subdued opponents with a mix of extreme violence and acts of civic virtue, such as the establishment of the Islamic State Health Service (ISHS). The use of violent deeds to ensure coercion led, in Hitler’s Germany led to what Kershaw (2014) called a “terroristic dictatorship.” After the Nazi Party exploited the martyrdom of the thugs who fought street battles with the Socialists in the Berlin in the 1930s, Goebbels used similar visual symbolism relating to violent deeds when Germany invaded Poland. Tightly-framed images of alleged atrocities such as the burning of German-owned farms in Poland were issued alongside exaggerated numbers of deaths of German citizens in order justify oppressive levels of aggression against Polish civilians in retaliation (Broszat & Hiden, 1981, p. 283).

1. **Modernity in media**

Hitler engaged with the electorate using a sophisticated two-phase approach of political promotion. An image of the Fuhrer plane flying above the people appeared on the cover of the Nazi Party’s campaign pamphlet, *Hitler uber Deutschland* (Hitler over Germany) as well as in posters and leaflets that promoted large scale public meetings, with almost one million people seeing him live at twenty large scale rallies in the 1932 election campaign (Kershaw, 2001, p. 363). Goebbels worked on publicity projects using radio and films of rallies and other party spectacles, which could then be shown at smaller meetings to put across party messages and win support (Chrystal, 1975, p. 32) and documentary-style films of the meetings increased Hitler’s exposure further. Even Otto Dietrich, the NSDAP press chief who often clashed with Goebbels, acknowledged that the innovative communications outreach in the 1932 elections had made a significant contribution to the party’s success. According to Gellately (2001, p. 6) Nazi Germany was a modern mass media society which was “for its day was in the vanguard of modernity” in which cinema, for example, “was soon transformed into a system-friendly industry.’

A similar fluency in modern media – this time online ideological promotion – has led one author to label the Islamic State “masters of the digital universe” who ‘could never have achieved their territorial ambitions nor recruited such a large army in so short a time without mastery of the internet” (Atwan, 2015, p. 15). One scholar of Islamic politics suggested “perhaps a degree of hyperbole” in the claim, but acknowledged that young people in the West are responding to ‘slick propaganda distributed online’ (Mortimer, 2015). Islamic State has used inexpensive communications tools to deploy a two-phase approach to distributing its PR material, often using a brief flash message in one format, such as twitter, to point to more substantial content such as speech texts or videos, giving a superb economy of communication and return on effort. Another example of the two-phase approach is the February 2016 launch of an Android app for al-Bayan online radio that allows listeners to tune in to live broadcasts and distribute audio content - an IS media innovation praised by early users as an “amazing project,” (Shiloach, 2016).

1. **Visual aesthetic**

The promotional communications of Islamic State – videos in particular - have such a distinctive visual signature that cultural commentators regard the group as having “fashioned a visual aesthetic of its own” (Rose, 2014) through a language of flying graphics and computer games imagery. Fast editing, the use of flames to transition between scenes and visual references to well-known video games such as *Grand Theft Auto,* create a fast-moving texture to IS videos. Output such as the hour-long *Flames of War* video presents the prospect of joining IS as an opportunity to play a part in a real version of an exciting computer game. Similarly, extremist magazines create tableau images that resemble desktops from James Bond or Jason Bourne action films, such as a page in *Inspire* issue 11 featuring a hand gun, iPhone and an operational to-do list. This aesthetic is a communications device that identifies violent extremism with the visual culture of action films and computer games, while representing fighters as heroes who span Western and *jihadi* culture. [Figure 3]

Similarly, the Nazi party promulgated a “fascist aesthetic” (Schulte-Sasse, 1991) in architecture, cinema, posters and uniforms that offered a visual representation of its ideology. For Rabinach (1976, p.43), the attempt ‘to legitimize political rule through aesthetic symbolization is perhaps the decisive characteristic distinguishing twentieth century fascist regimes from other forms of authoritarian domination. The concept extended to architecture with Albert Speer’s Bureau of Beauty of Labour (*Amt Schonbeit der Arbeit)* working to improve the quality of the built environment under the slogan - 'the German everyday shall be beautiful.' The project focussed on factories but also extended to public buildings, including the environments commissioned for the set pieces of Nazi political communications such as the mass rallies at Nuremberg from 1933-1938 and the 1936 Olympic Stadium in Berlin.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The scope and degree of commonality in the ten categorisations from the comparative analysis positively resolves the research question in confirming and identifying parallels between Islamic State and the Nazi Party in propaganda content, semiotics and discourses, alongside shared institutional and methodological characteristics. While this evidence of hybridization over time is a useful placing of IS propaganda in a historical context – and an inferred outcome of the interdiscursive methodology – there are also significant differences between the two organisations and their communications, starting most obviously with their relative scale. While awareness of the detail of IS propaganda is an important first step in building countermeasures, the comparative analysis offers the perspective that a balanced and effective response will avoid overestimating the effectiveness of IS propaganda overall and digital recruitment. With commentary on IS social media expertise in mind, the comparative historical analysis of the two cases offers the conclusion that the historical proposition of citizens being controlled by an all-powerful propaganda system is questionable. The strongest social network recruiting young people to IS remains the family (with brothers, sisters, wives and children joining together to travel to the caliphate), just as familial and peer pressure drove recruitment and compliance in Nazi youth groups.

While the confirmation of parallels is of interest from a public relations historical and historiographical perspective, an attempt is made here to draw on the findings to actionable insights on how to reduce the harmful effects of extremist propaganda and online public relations, suggest how existing countermeasures could be more effective and to propose areas for further research. The success of Nazi communications was linked to its ability to change. Flexibility in the communications management infrastructure meant that it was easy to make changes over time to adjust priorities and to swiftly create and promote a new discourse. While Islamic State’s messaging has been relatively static compered to Nazi propaganda’s different phases based on political acceptance and the progress of the war effort, it has swiftly adopted new media technologies. Well-informed commentary has proposed cutting off IS access to internet infrastructure as far as is possible in order to degrade the group’s communications (Cohen 2015). While the author encountered disabled Twitter and video accounts in this research, more aggressive disruption of IS’s network and server infrastructure could be explored, but is a technical challenge in a world of distributed cloud computing resources. Alongside existing military activity to degrade IS finances through disrupting oil production in the caliphate, there is a strong argument for digital communications activity focussed on degrading IS internet resources. However, loss of momentum in military operations and degrading of capability is the most certain way to undermine IS, just as a loss of military momentum by the Nazis undermined the efficacy of its propaganda.

Parallels between Islamic State’s focus on young people and the various Nazi youth organisations suggest that the task for planning counter measures in the area of communication with young people is challenging and involves being able to offer a better narrative than the combination of idealistic vision, bright future and companionship on offer from extremist groups. One countermeasure, the UK’s Prevent strategy, has been criticised by teachers’ unions, lecturers and students in the ‘Students not Suspects’ campaign for its burden on educators to monitor and report suspected extremism in ways that undermine “the very ethos and relationships of mutual trust and openness that are fundamental to education” (Students not Suspects, 2016). Two Imams consulted by the author for this paper had declined to get involved with Prevent because of the alignment with the state and the reporting obligation placed upon them when working with young people who needed to trust them as advisers without fear of being reported to the authorities. The historical perspective of the paper suggests that a policy that avoids debate in the name of protecting freedoms (about migration from the West, for example), suppressing difficult questions (about holy war, for example) and prohibiting certain political and religious materials in the defence of freedom (about the caliphate) is a counter-intuitive approach. Yet all three are consequences of Prevent, despite the insistence by its architect, Charles Farr of MI6 (Verkaik, 2016, p. 238) that the “last thing we seek is to drive debate underground.”

Rebuilding trust is the first stage of building a platform from which to present an alternative narrative to young Muslims, but it is simplistic to propose this as a communications fix if residual issues of racism and economic opportunity remain unresolved. Similarly, the linguistic subtlety of UK Prime Minister David Cameron who adopted the term *Daesh* (HC Deb 2 Dec 2015) is interesting in the content of this paper’s interest in the nomenclature of claim of Islamic State, but is a superficial and low conviction approach that has not been widely accepted by the public, the media nor moderate Muslims. Moreover, it does not reflect the links to Islam that jihadists exploit in the three core messages of IS propaganda – migration, caliphate and holy war.

**LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE WORK**

The paper sought to compare the propaganda operations of two institutions – and not to compare the political institutions themselves. While the combination of historical institutionalism and propaganda content analysis proved an effective methodological combination overall, the interests of methodological expediency meant that the comparative analysis involved a degree of subjective summarisation and reduction of complex and wide-ranging discourses into the ten categories. So while the decision to gather the diverse scope of both organisations’ propaganda output and infrastructure into ten thematic buckets manually based on the interdiscursive analysis offered a useful summary for discussion, it led to some areas of potential richness being under investigated. Another limitation of the comparative analysis approach and the resulting categorisation was the risk of a series of ten fragmented views emerging of the IS and NS propaganda operations rather than a meaningful whole. In particular, the inclusion of the polycratic theme, may have led to the overarching role of Goebbels being perhaps under emphasised. Despite several impressive general biographies on Goebbels – and a tendency to perhaps over investigate his historical role and relationship with Hitler – detail on his propaganda management is lacking and there is potential for more detailed biographical investigation into his role as a communications actor, his co-operation and liaison with the other institutions of Third Reich propaganda and any attempts at co-ordination of this dispersed political communications infrastructure.

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