Chapter Seven

Conformism, Group Behaviour and Collective Identities

1. Introduction

International crimes are, by definition, manifestations of collective violence and are therefore social events. From criminological research we already know that ordinary and common crime is predominantly a social event (Warr 2002) but this is particularly true for forms of collective violence. In chapters 2–5 we discussed the social context in which these crimes are usually committed. In this chapter we will focus on the effect of groups upon individuals and will – as we have done in the previous chapter – draw lessons from social-psychological research which can help us explain why people engage in mass atrocities. Let us however start by saying that obviously not all groups have a negative effect on the individual nor do all groups engage in violence. Nevertheless, some groups do and because group dynamics are sometimes difficult to control, groups might end up showing behaviour which was not foreseen or intended.¹ This can be true for small groups like for example a group of youngsters transformed into a violent street gang but it can be equally true for masses committing international crimes. International crimes are group events by definition and therefore we need to study the effect of groups on individuals and the situations in which groups start to discriminate and commit crimes against another group. According to Gupta (2001) who studied political pathology and – what he called the path to collective madness – we need to take both the individual and the collective identity into account when studying mass violence. Gupta defines collective identity as ‘a psychological state where people submerge their identities and assume a group identity; they choose actions that will benefit the group even to the detriment of their individual selves’ (Gupta 2001, xi). Gupta concluded that collective violence is a form of collective ‘madness’ which in turn ‘is a special case of collective identity gone berserk’ (Gupta 2001, xi).

¹ See also Williams’s powerful novel Lord of the Flies (1954).
In the following sections we will first discuss the experiments by Asch (1955) (section 2.1) then we will look more closely into the formation and influence of groups and the social identity theory (section 2.2). We will deal with questions such as: Why are people often so eager to be an accepted member of a group? What is the effect of this desire and to what extent does the group influence the behaviour of an individual? Why do groups often define themselves in juxtaposition to others? In section 2.3 we will describe how groups tend to construct their own social reality and how attribution errors can play a role in such a construction process. In section 2.4 we will see how certain psychological phenomena lead to escalating commitments and ultimately to extreme group behaviour (section 2.5). In section 3 we will discuss the nature of mass movements as these are examples of extreme conformism and group behaviour. In section 3.1 we will describe what happened at a high school in Palo Alto in 1967 when a history teacher tried to make his students experience the attractiveness of mass movements (see *The Wave* by Rhue 1981). In the sections which follow we will focus on several characteristics of a mass movement: the followers (3.2), the need for an enemy (3.3) and the role of a leader (3.4).

2. The Effect of Others and Especially Groups on Human Behaviour

Within social-psychology it is beyond dispute that man is a social being and that groups are a ‘key element in human experience’ (Baron & Kerr 2003, xii) and ‘play a crucial role in human affairs’ (Baron & Kerr 2003, 1). There are several theories which explain why groups are so important. The *conditioning perspective* argues that ‘from infancy we learn to depend on others’, see the benefits of joining together and aim for social approval. According to Festingers *social comparison theory* we ‘feel very strong pressure to have accurate views, both about our environment and our abilities. One way to verify our views is to compare our opinions and ability-related performances to those of others. In other words, if physical reality is ambiguous, we create a social reality’ (Baron & Kerr 2003, 2). The *social identity theory* and *self-categorization theory* argue that our identity, self-esteem and self-image are dependent on the group to which we belong. According to the social identity view ‘we affiliate with groups in part as a means of feeling good about ourselves’ (Baron & Kerr 2003, 3). The *social categorization theory* holds that ‘the group categories we belong to can affect our sense of identity’ (Baron & Kerr 2003, 3). According to the *exchange theory* ‘people gain certain advantages through group membership and, therefore, individuals will try to join those
groups that provide them with the greatest gains’ (Baron & Kerr 2003, 3). According to the sociobiological theory human beings have a genetic predisposition to bond with others and form groups in order to survive. Groups can therefore have a very positive effect on the individual. According to the optimal distinctiveness theory individuals however also have the needs to distinguish themselves from others as a unique person and therefore human beings need to find a balance between their need to be socially accepted and their need to be distinctive.

Whatever the general reason why human beings want to be part of a group, once within a group both explicit and implicit group pressure will have a profound effect on the group members. Particularly group norms play a crucial role. Group norms are socially accepted beliefs and values concerning what is to be considered normal, acceptable and good and as such have a strong influence on the ideas, thoughts, moral judgment and behaviour of the individual group members. Group members often want to become a fully respected group member and feel a strong internal drive to adhere to the group norms. Alongside, these internal drives some groups exert strong external pressure on group members to stick to these norms and to show compliant behaviour. In the following sections we will study compliance and conformity and the effects of groups on individuals; particularly situations in which groups start to distinguish themselves from others and begin to show extreme, cruel and criminal behaviour. In the first subsection (2.1) the experiments by Asch will be described. These experiments just like the Milgram and Zimbardo experiments can be found in every textbook on social-psychology.

2.1 The experiments of Asch: measuring compliance

In 1955, Solomon Asch conducted a set of experiments in which he aimed to test how social influences shape a person’s judgments and beliefs. He specifically aimed to see to what extent people let themselves be influenced, by testing how they would react when confronted with a majority opinion around them which contradicted their own opinion. Subjects were told that they would participate in an experiment on visual judgment. The subjects were grouped into groups of 7–9 young men and they had to compare the lengths of lines shown to them on a white card. The subjects had to indicate which line (out of three lines) was of the same length as the line shown on the other card. One line was indeed the same while the other lines were different. One after the other all men had to successively give their judgment. Not known to the real subject, all other men in his group were confederates of the experimenter and had agreed to unanimously give wrong answers at certain
points. The aim of the experiment was to see how the real subject, always the last man in line to respond would react to the overwhelming majority which would in some cases give a view which would be in clear contradiction to what he actually saw. There were 18 rounds and the confederates gave the wrong answer on 12 occasions. In total 123 male subjects went through this procedure. Asch found that in 36.8% of the cases the subjects gave the wrong answer whereas under ordinary circumstances – when the individual was not met with a majority opinion – only 1% of the answers were wrong. One quarter of the subjects always stuck to their own opinion despite the majority opinion around them, while some subjects always conformed to the majority opinion, yet others yielded sometimes. The experiment clearly shows the conformist influence of the group and moreover, that not everybody is equally influenced by peer pressure.

Asch argued that there can be two reasons why the subjects gave the wrong answers: first of all people became convinced that they had it wrong and therefore sincerely started to believe that the wrong answer must be the right one. These people have what is called informational needs. Informational needs refer to the fact that we check our perceptions against those of others. Other people might have information we do not have and which might be important to us. The second possible reason is that subjects did not start to doubt their own observations but conformed just because they wanted to be accepted by the group. This is usually called a normative need: we adjust our perception to others because we are more likely to be accepted by them if we agree with them. From the outcome of the experiment it is impossible to tell which reason was more prevalent.

In follow-up experiments Asch found that it did matter whether one, two or more individuals gave the wrong answer. If only one person gave a wrong answer few subjects were influenced, if two people gave wrong answers this resulted in 13.6% wrong answers from the subject, if three or more people gave wrong answers than 31.8% of the answers from the subjects were incorrect. It also mattered whether the subject had someone who agreed with him. Only one out of four (25%) subjects who found someone who like him disagreed with the majority gave the wrong answer. If, however, in the next experiment the fellow dissenter suddenly followed the majority again then this had an immediate effect: most subjects yielded to the majority opinion as well. Another important finding was that ‘the greater the privacy, the less the conformity. […] pressure to conform to the judgments of others has little (if any) effect on the private judgments of experimental participants’ (Aronson 2004, 19). If the subject has made a commitment to an initial judgment or knows that he has to justify himself in front of the group the conformity level increases. It was found, furthermore, that people with a low self-esteem are more likely to conform to the majority opinion than others.
The experiments by Asch have been replicated on many occasions over the last 50 years (Bond & Smith 1996). The experiments occasionally confirmed the results found by Asch but also occasionally contradicted them. According to Mori and Arai (2010) this could be caused by the use of confederates whose behaviour, on occasion, could be considered ‘unnatural’ and therefore influenced the outcome of the experiment. Consequently, Mori and Arai used the so-called MORI-technique to replicate the experiment of Asch without relying on confederates. The subjects in this experiment had to wear special glasses which caused that one of the subjects actually saw something different from the others. In their experiment Mori and Arai found clear sex differences: while women made many errors, men did not and therefore men did not yield to the majority opinion. This is a remarkable finding as all the subjects which participated in the original experiment were men. Another interesting finding which was completely opposite to the finding of Asch was that ‘the frequency of conformity of minority participants was almost the same regardless of whether the majority answered unanimously or not’ (Mori & Arai 2010, 390). It is not clear whether cultural differences, generational differences or the fact that no confederates were used explains the different outcome of the experiment but the two Japanese authors suggest the latter. More research, however, needs to be done to test whether indeed the behaviour of the confederates played such a huge role. But even if they did, it shows the immense effect people can have on each other.

Within social psychology nowadays, three responses to social influence are distinguished: namely, compliance, identification and internalization. Compliance refers to people who adapt their behaviour in order to gain social acceptance or other rewards or because they aim to avoid rejection or other punishments. We speak of identification if a person identifies himself with another person. The person desires to be like the other person and aims to establish a satisfying relationship with the other by identifying with him or her. Internalization refers to a phenomenon in which people accept a certain opinion as their own and integrate it in their system. The belief or opinion then becomes independent of its source and the person will express the opinion even if the person who influenced him is not present. Internalization is the most extreme adaptation and the most permanent because the person has actually changed his or her belief. The reason why people internalize a specific opinion or attitude can be because they believe the person who initially expressed it is trustworthy and they themselves want to be right. A very interesting experiment was conducted by Berns et al. (2005). They used brain scanning methods to measure the effect of social conformity or non-conformity on the brain and concluded that disagreeing with others and therefore non-conformity resulted in measurable emotional distress. Their findings are the first biological evidence that social non-conformity
has negative emotional effects. These findings coincide with the results of the obedience experiments which showed that subjects who disobeyed showed more signs of distress than those who obeyed and therefore conformed to the authority. We can therefore conclude that human beings have a natural tendency, at least to some extent, to adjust their behaviour in order to conform and comply with others and this knowledge can help us explain why groups to which we belong have such a powerful effect on us.

2.2 The social identity theory and the danger of polarization

The social identity theory was developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979 and 1986) and is considered a very influential theory in social-psychology. According to the social identity theory our sense of self depends to a large extent on the social groups and categories of which we are considered members. The theory states that people will not merely see themselves as individuals but also as representing their social group or category. The effect thereof can be positive: people will often gain positive self-esteem from their membership of the group. They feel good about the group and therefore good about themselves and this is a positive consequence of acquiring a social identity: it enhances self-esteem. To categorize the world into groups and categories is a natural tendency and is used in order to make the world more comprehensible. The human mind works by categorization: we remember objects and people by specific characteristics, by tags and labels we give them.

Next to an enhanced self-esteem and social categorization the forming of a social identity can lead to social comparison. Social comparison refers to a mechanism in which groups tend to compare each other and simultaneously distance themselves from other groups. In order to enhance their own and the group's self-esteem, individuals will favour their own group and members. Groups tend to define their identity in contrast to the identity of others. The good part is that people feel good about their own group the downside is that they simultaneously devaluate the other group: superiority cannot exist without the inferiority of the other. Strong and cohesive groups can make people feel proud of their cherished collective identity but it can also lead to elitism and make the members look down upon those who are not a member of the group. People, in other words, divide the world into Us and Them. Us is defined as good and considered the in-group, Them is defined as bad, inferior and considered the out-group. Often the essence of their relationship is perceived as: Us versus Them.

The initial aim of Tajfel (Tajfel et al. 1971) who formulated the social identity theory was to investigate how the social context affects inter-group relations and to understand inter-group discrimination. In his initial experiment he tested the so-called minimal group paradigm by allocating participants
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into two groups on the basis of meaningless and arbitrary criteria. Despite the fact that the groups were formed in a complete arbitrary matter Tajfel and his colleagues found that the group members nevertheless favoured their own group and its members compared to the other groups. Tindale and Munier (2002, 145–146) noted that the reasons behind the categorizations are self-enhancement and uncertainty reduction. These authors explain how the process works and how this categorization can lead to polarization: ‘[...] group-level categorizations become more prevalent in intergroup situations, and once group-level categories are activated, members try to differentiate their group from the comparison group. The process of categorization can therefore lead to stereotyping and prejudice. Prejudice can be defined as ‘a hostile or negative attitude towards a distinguishable group based on generalizations derived from faulty or incomplete information’ (Aronson 2004, 243). Stereotyping can be defined as assigning ‘identical characteristics to any person in a group, regardless of the actual variation among members of the group’ (Aronson 2004, 244). Social identities can therefore have downsides if those who do not qualify as belonging to the same group and therefore not sharing the same social identity are considered as inferior.

Social identities in combination with social categorization can if they become part of political rhetoric of extremists or opportunistic political entrepreneurs lead to mass hate and collective violence. This happens if a group gains political power and considers another group as the enemy which has to be silenced, expelled or even destroyed. Political entrepreneurs who use political rhetoric and propaganda to gain support for their ideas can mobilize groups by building on existing social prejudice and stereotyping in order to ‘create’ an enemy. Having a common enemy is known to be a strong binding factor for groups: people identify themselves as distinct from the enemy who is simultaneously blamed for all injustices. Some political entrepreneurs have managed to construct a political reality which inflames the masses. They build on the sense of a collective identity and use cultural amplifiers to widen the gap between the in-group and the out-group, to polarize and exaggerate the differences (see Gupta 2001, 105). Myths, symbols and rituals are often used, as they have a strong emotional appeal. The enemy is usually depicted as pure evil (Cf. Baumeister 1997, 60–96) and is considered a threat to well established norms and values of a society and a threat to the in-group itself and this threat needs to be dealt with. Since the other group is considered pure evil all means to fight this enemy are considered acceptable; including maiming, torturing, killing and committing genocide. Staub (1989) has noted that especially within difficult life conditions, it is psychologically comforting to blame others for the misfortune of the group. This explains why periods which are marked by economic depression, a lost war, insecurity or
the threat of terrorism are fertile grounds for extreme political ideologies which can easily lead to mass hate and discrimination.

2.3 Constructing social reality and the role of attribution errors

Groups come to construct their own social reality based on their own social identity and scheme of social categorization. Cognitions, attitudes and beliefs are social phenomena which are derived from the social environment and transmitted through groups. In this transmission of attitudes, beliefs and cognitions the social groups of which the individual is a member, plays a crucial role as such attitudes might be linked to the social identity of a person and a group. Tindale and Munier (2002, 149) note that ‘evidence suggests that the perceived validity of a belief is increased simply by communicating it to someone. Therefore, social representations are believed because they are shared, not because they are inherently valid outside of our social reality.’ According to the social impact theory ‘the impact that others have on a person’s attitudes, beliefs, preferences and so on is determined by the strength (e.g., status, expertise), immediacy (closeness in terms of physical or social distance), and number of influence sources’ (Tindale & Munier 2002, 151).

Groups can thus construct a social reality which is based on wrong assumptions. In order to stay psychologically healthy, individuals tend to see themselves in a favourable light. They have a positivity bias and in their perception of both themselves and the outside world they make many attribution errors. Zimbardo (2007, 261) concluded that: ‘Most of us construct self-enhancing, self-serving; egocentric biases that make us feel special – never ordinary, and certainly ‘above average’. Such cognitive biases serve a valuable function in boosting our self-esteem and protecting against life’s hard knocks. They enable us to explain away failures, take credit for our successes, and disown responsibility for bad decisions, perceiving our subjective world through rainbow prisms.’ To some extent it is therefore psychologically healthy to make such attribution errors. Sometimes individuals are aware of wrongful self-presentation but sometimes they are not and people can also come to rely too much on attribution errors and start to tell clear cut lies which are ultimately no longer recognized as such. Erber (2002) concluded ‘[…] repeating lies may convince liars of the truth of the lie they tell. However, liars may convince themselves that a more general variant of the lie, is in fact true […] what may have begun as an internally generated lie may eventually achieve the status of an externally generated ‘truth’, resulting in the conviction that what we believe about ourselves is derived from what others say about us. Ironically, because of this failure to monitor the source of the lie, it may well be that in many cases liars are the only ones who are convinced that their lie represents the truth.’
In judging the behaviour of others, people also tend to make fundamental attribution errors. In these cases people tend to overstate the importance of dispositional factors rather than situational factors. Even in cases where people have brought about a certain situation they do not sufficiently take this into account. This mechanism can therefore help to further reinforce prejudice. Prison guards, for example, can prevent prisoners from regularly relieving and washing themselves and simultaneously complain that prisoners are filthy and smell – not taking into account that their ill treatment caused this. Both stereotyping and prejudice can lead to consistent attribution errors and can escalate if ‘people tend to make attributions consistent with their prejudice’ (Aronson 2004, 249). This is called the ultimate attribution error. People can end up in a spiral as explained by Aronson (2004, 249): ‘Not only does prejudice influence his attribution and conclusions, his erroneous conclusions justify and intensify his negative feelings. Therefore, the entire attribution process can spiral. Prejudice causes particular kinds of negative attribution or stereotypes that can, in turn, intensify the prejudice.’ These mechanisms can easily lead to extreme group polarization (see Bar & Kerr 2003, 93 ff).  

Specifically, when mass propaganda is used by a state and based on prejudice and stereotyping this can have an enormous effect. Staub (1989) explained that many targeted groups are blamed and scapegoated for a lot of unfairness and injustice. The reason why people both individually and collectively do this is that blaming someone else is psychologically comforting – at least far more comforting than examining the self. In general, groups which are ‘distinctive, powerless and socially stigmatized’ (Baron & Kerr 2003, 157) are likely to be used as scapegoats. Mass propaganda and deliberately spreading false rumours can play an important role in this process. Kressel (2002, 34) describes how several completely false but horrifying stories about crimes committed by Muslims were used in the Bosnian war to inflame the population: ‘People who hear stories like these repeatedly may begin to believe them. And once they believe the stories, the situation becomes ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’. The most flagrant violators of human dignity at Omarska cited ‘proof’ that the Muslims were going to put their women in harems and breed soldiers for the Jihad. For these men, the perpetration of atrocities became revenge for crimes that (with a few exceptions) had never taken place.’ Extreme atrocities can occur when the collective identity of a certain group is perceived to be threatened. Mass hate can come to infect people and can – like in Rwanda

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2 See also chapter 5 and the role of prejudice in genocidal ideologies.
3 See also the book by Gurr (1993) *Minorities at Risk* and chapter 5.
in 1994 – lead neighbours who have lived together peacefully for many years to suddenly kill each other simply because they no longer see each other as individuals but as an enemy who needs to be killed.

2.4 Cognitive dissonance, foot-in-the-door technique and escalating commitments

Another interesting phenomenon which can explain the profound effect of group norms on the attitudes, ideas and values of a group member is the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957). Cognitive dissonance is a nagging feeling of distress when people act in a way which is opposed to their beliefs or attitudes (Festinger 1957). Within groups people can easily become involved in things of which they would not usually approve, for instance, a ‘nice quiet boy’ from a ‘well-off family’ finds himself stealing food and drinks in a supermarket with his group of friends. Such behaviour leads to a feeling of cognitive dissonance. People do not like such a feeling and therefore either stop showing this behaviour or they start to rationalize and justify what they have done. Aronson noted that the cognitive dissonance theory is essentially about ‘sense-making – how people try to make sense out of their environment and their behaviour- and therefore try to lead lives that are (at least in their own minds) sensible and meaningful’ (Aronson 2004, 228). People tend to rationalize and justify what they are doing by re-contextualizing behaviour. The cognitive dissonance theory can help us explain why people within groups sometimes engage in behaviour which they would not otherwise show and as a consequence change their ideas and attitudes about this behaviour.

In order to test the cognitive dissonance theory several experiments were conducted, the first ones by Festinger and Carlsmith (1959). They asked subjects to fulfil a very boring task. After the subjects completed their assignment they asked them to tell the next subject that the task was very exciting and enjoyable which was obviously a lie. Some participants were paid 1$ for lying while others were paid 20$. Virtually all subjects complied with the request to tell the lie. Remarkably however this led to an attitude change in the participants who had been paid 1$ to lie. In a questionnaire it was revealed that they had suddenly perceived the task as rather pleasant themselves. The subjects who had been paid 20$, did not show such a clear attitude change. The reason, according to Festinger and Carlsmith (1959), is that for those subjects who had been paid 20$ there was a clear excuse why they lied, this was not so for those who were paid merely the small sum of 1$. The latter therefore had more reason to feel ashamed of the lie they told and therefore felt more cognitive dissonance. They reduced this by adapting their own perception in retrospectively perceiving the experiment as less boring than it actually was.
Aronson (2004, 233) concluded: ‘the greater the personal commitment or self-involvement implied by the action the smaller the external justification for that action, the greater the dissonance and, therefore, the more powerful the need for self-justification.’ Cooper and Fazio (1984) concluded that the more people feel responsible for causing certain negative consequences the more likely it is that their behaviour will result in an attitude change.

Once people start to rationalize and justify their behaviour they can become trapped in what psychologists call an escalating commitment. In their book on group processes Baron and Kerr (2003, 110) stated that: ‘this process can produce a ‘one step at a time’ pattern of escalating commitment in which initial compliance triggers private beliefs change, which then leaves the indoctrinate susceptible to even more extreme requests from the group.’ If people rationalize and justify what they have been doing, the rationalizations and justifications in themselves might induce them to continue the same behaviour. Sometimes the mere continuation in itself is a justification of the behaviour. Social psychologists have called this the foot-in-the-door technique (Freedman & Fraser 1966). It refers to the fact that if a person has complied with a small request he or she is more likely to comply with a larger one. The point is that people’s attitude might change after they have complied with a certain request and are therefore more likely to comply with a following request. This is especially true if the attitude change entails a justification or rationalization of certain behaviour. This can be clarified in relation to the Milgram experiment. By continuing to press the shock levels subjects actually tried to justify their own behaviour. They no longer perceived themselves as giving a fellow human being electric shocks but perceived themselves as following orders and helping experimenters to conduct scientific experiments. It is all a matter of what one wishes to believe. However, at the same time, rationalizations and justifications can become a social or psychological trap. Baumeister (1997, 260) provides a powerful example by stating that people need to give a moral reason for their rejection to obey an order or follow the group because if they don’t do so the first time, the chance will get lost to do so the next time. By using an excuse rather than clearly and explicitly making a moral claim they implicitly accept the broad assumptions. Baumeister (1997, 262) explains the social trap as follows: ‘When confronted with the demand to do something that is possibly immoral, people usually look for a reason to object. And for obvious reasons, they don’t tend to object by saying that the entire authority structure (and its uniformed troops with all those guns) is doing something horribly, morally repugnant. They look for objections that will not require such a radical breach, or they simply look for the reason they think will work best. In either case, the eventual effect is to get them caught up in discussing and considering the problem on the
terms of practical procedures rather than a high level of moral principle.
And once one has abandoned the high level of moral principle and in this
way implicitly accepted the authority’s broad assumptions, one’s latitude for
returning to it later is reduced. Even if one’s excuse is accepted this time, one
will probably have to go along next time.’

2.5  Group dynamics, social learning and extreme behaviour in groups

In a group, members try to fulfil the expectations of the group and be a
good group member. In some cases groups show aggressive and forceful peer
pressure but in many cases the peer pressure is very subtle and often has an
internal source. Members conform because they want to belong to the group:
they want to be a good member. According to the SIDE model developed
by social identity theorists people conform due to ‘their desire to see them-
Themselves as loyal and well-established group members, not because they fear
group sanctions’ (Baron & Kerr 2003, 116). Social-psychological research has
shown that enforced compliance leads to cognitive changes. It has however
also shown that the more subtle the pressure, the stronger the effect. Within
groups such subtle peer pressure can lead to more and more extreme behav-
ior within groups. People, nevertheless do not respond to the situation as it
actually is but rather as to what they perceive it to be. Their perception and
subjective reconstruction is more important than the objective situation. It
is therefore more important what people think others believe than what they
actually believe. In some cases people might share the majority opinion but
because this opinion is never expressed, most people tend to believe that
their opinion is the minority opinion. Allport (1933) called this phenomenon
pluralistic ignorance and it might lead to a situation in which people come to
perceive certain norms as group norms while in reality these are not actual
representations of the group norms. It can also explain how, within groups,
the opinion of group members becomes more and more extreme: they all
want to be the perfect group member and therefore express the clearest and
thus often also the most extreme opinions believing that this is the majority
opinion. Self-categorization theory also argues that members try to position
themselves close to the most ‘prototypical’ member in the group. Since the
most prototypical member of the group tends to be the member most dif-
ferent from the out-group, this leads to more extreme positions or attitudes
by the in-group members when the intergroup context is made salient’ (Cf.
viduals often express stronger attitudes, and engage in more extreme
actions, when acting together as opposed to alone.’

Furthermore, group dynamics play an important role. Groups strive for
unity and continuity and thus want their members to conform. Many groups
require their members to show their loyalty to the group. In certain groups members have to go through an initiation period in order to prove that they are worth of becoming a member in other groups they need to fulfil a certain task to prove their loyalty. What usually happens within groups which conduct criminal behaviour is to make sure that everyone is involved and therefore members who do not agree with certain norms will not implicate others as they themselves are involved and guilty. Dara Cohen (2010, 12) notes that enforced gang rape is sometimes used amongst military groups to enhance group cohesion.\(^4\) Warr (2002, 46) concluded that ‘ridicule is a mechanism of social control in many and perhaps all human societies […] the very nature of ridicule it to express contempt or derision for the actions of another, and often, in so doing, to call into question his or her fitness for membership in a group.’ This mechanism not only plays a role in ordinary delinquent groups but also in groups which commit mass atrocities. Browning (1992) reported that many of the policemen in Reserve Police Battalion 101 explained that they committed the crimes because they were afraid that if they would not do so they would be thought of as cowards and thus ridiculed. Warr (2010, 46) therefore concluded: ‘…the mere risk of ridicule may be sufficient to provoke participation in behavior that is undeniably dangerous, illegal, and morally reprehensible. To risk ridicule is to risk expulsion from or abandonment by the group, or to place in danger one’s legitimate claim to be a member of the group. To lose the group is to lose identity and sometimes the prestige that it creates, as well as the sense of belonging it affords.’ Warr (2010, 49) further notes that ‘criminal behaviour raises questions of loyalty to levels that are rarely glimpsed in other domains of life’ since betraying another person can lead to his arrest or to retaliation of another group and a resulting threat to life. A third important mechanism which plays a role within groups is status. Group members attach status to their group membership but also have a specific status within the group. Status depends on the formal or informal rank of an individual within a group. In criminal groups those who commit most crimes without getting caught might attain the highest and most valued status. This is true for ordinary criminal groups but also for instance the killer groups in Rwanda in which three perpetrators testified as to such a mechanism:\(^5\)

\(^4\) Cohen (2010, 11–12) even states that ‘the unique element of group rape that makes this type of violence so efficient for creating and maintaining social cohesion within an armed group.’

\(^5\) All three quotes cited below are derived from interviews conducted by Alette Smeulers and Lotte Hoex in Rwanda in 2009 in Kigali Central Prison with prisoners suspected of
People show that they are tough in a group. It is a sort of competition. (prisoner B, personal interview with author)

Many people were unconvinced in the beginning. After the first time it got easier. Killing a lot of people earned more respect. They started killing each other and were drinking and doing drugs and killing a lot in the group. It was a kind of competition in the group. (prisoner C, personal interview with author)

The more people you killed, the more respect you gained in the group. I killed a lot of people, 400, and everyone was afraid of me. Everyone did what I asked them to do. Children, people of my own age, older people. They listened to me because I had experience. I would teach the people in the group how to kill, and how to kill without too much noise. I taught them how to be clever in the killing. (prisoner J, personal interview with author)

The consequence is that within groups, individuals tend to show far more extreme behaviour than when on their own (Baron & Kerr 2003, 93). Within groups, people can learn to show certain behaviour on the basis of social learning. Bandura conducted a set of experiments in which an adult knocked down an air-filled doll and children who saw the adult do this not only copied his behaviour but engaged in innovative aggressive behaviour (Aronson 2004, 223). Social learning can explain both legal and moral behaviour and illegal and immoral behaviour. Sutherland, Burgers and Akers applied Bandura’s social learning theories to delinquents who have been taught to commit crimes. Warr (2010, 77–78) explains: ‘As its name implies, what most distinguishes social learning theory from other learning theories is its sensitivity to the social sources of reinforcement in everyday life.’ Social imitation, vicarious reinforcements and direct reinforcement can play a role in the social learning processes. Theorists have explained how people can learn both mechanism and motivation for committing crimes from other people – usually fellow group member. Just as ordinary delinquents can be socialized into committing crimes so can people be similarly socialized into committing mass atrocities.

2.6 Conclusion

Man is a social being and heavily influenced by the groups around him. Groups might openly put pressure on others but there often is a more subtle form of pressure coming from within the group members themselves. Once in a group, people like to become a full member of the group by evidencing certain types of behaviour, merely in order to become an accepted group

involvement in the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Chris Amani acted as our translator. See also Smeulers and Hoex 2010.

6 See also Gustave le Bon (1895) Psychologie des foules.
member. Furthermore, peer pressure and the strong urge to belong often leads to changes in privately held beliefs and to an internalization of the norms and values of the group (Baron & Kerr 2003, 110). People who eagerly try to fit in are not always aware of crucial changes in their attitudes and behaviour.

Groups differ enormously in their size, structure, composition and the extent to which they enforce compliance from their members. Groups can be closed or open: they can have a clear authority structure or not, there can be a leader everyone looks up to or the group can have a very informal almost invisible leader or can be very egalitarian. Groups can stimulate open discussion or can reject all opposition and criticism. In extreme cases groups can go as far as to exclude all members who dare to criticize the group, its leaders or the prevailing norms and values and consider those who are critical as traitors. Groups which have political and ideological aims combined with a rigid ideology and elitist attitudes, demanding obedience, conformism and loyalty and who are not open to criticism, can become very oppressive towards both members and outsiders. Groups can come to construct their own social reality and often view themselves as superior to non-group members. The world often becomes divided, constructed as a competition: Us versus Them. Various mechanisms however, can also cause both groups and its members to become more and more extreme in their verbal expression as well as their opinions and ultimately their behaviour. Groups are capable of enlarging and amplifying individual behaviour with the identification of a group common denominator which can be constructive or destructive depending on the circumstances. The ‘group force’ can accomplish great things but they can also come to show great violence. Criminologists have concluded that crime is predominantly a ‘social event’ and crime, along with discriminative and violent behaviour, can be learned through the ordinary learning processes. Within groups, people apparently feel less responsible for their own behaviour which enhances further extreme behaviour. Once people come to show more extreme behaviour, mechanisms such as cognitive dissonance ensure that people start to rationalize and justify what they are doing. These rationalizations and justifications make it more likely that they come to show even more extreme behaviour the next time. Group processes can ultimately spiral towards extreme violence such as war and genocide.

3. Mass Movements

One of the most extreme examples of demanding groups are mass movements like the Nazi-movement created by Hitler. Mass movements usually strive for political power and have a charismatic leader who has many followers.
Chapter Seven

The ultimate aim usually is to create a better world. Mass movements can easily become very authoritarian and come to destroy another people as the National-Socialist movement of Adolf Hitler in Nazi-Germany did. In 1969 in a high school in Palo Alto, California a history teacher taught his class about the Holocaust but failed to answer a question from one of his brightest students as to why so many people just went along murdering 6 million Jews. The teacher, Ron Jones was struck by the question and started to study the Holocaust and its causes more intensely that same night. When he came into class the next day he wanted to let his students experience the appealing aspects of a mass movements. What happened next has become known as the Wave (Rhue 1981) as will be described in subsection 3.1. In subsections 3.2–3.4 we will focus on the group dynamics within mass movements. In subsection 3.2 we will discuss who the followers of mass movements are. In subsection 3.3 the need for an enemy and in subsection 3.4 the role of a leader will be central.

3.1 The Wave

When history teacher Ron Jones came into the classroom he started the lesson by writing the following phrase on the blackboard: Strength through discipline and began to teach his class about discipline. He explained to his class that success was very much dependent on discipline: football players, ballet dancers, no one could succeed in life without discipline and that he now was going to show what discipline meant and entailed. He introduced a new set of rules. As of now the students should take a specific posture, sit right, legs straightened and therefore assume an attentive position. When answering a question they had to stand up at the side of their desks and they were to give their answers in short and precise wording and always say Mr. Jones before answering a question. The whole class had to follow the procedure. He furthermore did some exercises with them. First, he exercised the answering procedure: ‘Students who responded in a sluggish manner were reprimanded and in every case made to repeat their behaviour until it was a model of punctuality and respect. The intensity of the response became more important than the content. To accentuate this, I requested answers to be given in three words or less.’ Remarkably enough, many more students than the usual few actively participated and the quality of the answers clearly improved. Students had to walk around in the classroom and at his

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7 See the book on the experiment: Rhue 1981 and the film The Wave as well as the recent and modernized German version Die Welle.
signal go to their own places as quickly as possible and sit down. The first time the students did this it resulted in a chaotic situation in which everyone bumped into each other and it took the students a long time before everyone sat down. Jones then showed his students that if they organized themselves and would be very orderly and disciplined that they would do much better so he lined them up in front of the classroom and told them how to walk towards their places in a disciplined manner. The students experienced the lesson as a welcome break from the usual dull lessons and all complied with his requests and it worked perfectly well. What surprised Jones was that the students clearly enjoyed being disciplined.

The next day, the teacher, Ron Jones was going to pick up on his usual work but when he entered the classroom all students sat quietly waiting for him and they had all resumed the attentive posture he had taught them the day before. He was amazed as the students were usually running around in the classroom before the lesson started. They sat and awaited him earnest concentration. Jones remembers: ‘I hadn’t planned such intensity or compliance.’ He spontaneously decided to follow up on the lesson he had started the day before. This time he wrote *Strength through community* and *Strength through action* on the blackboard and told the students that discipline alone was not enough and that they could achieve even more by being good members of the community. Jones remembers: ‘To provide an encounter with community I had the class recite in union ‘Strength through discipline’, ‘Strength through Community’. First, I would have two students stand and call back our motto. Then add two more until finally the whole class was standing and reciting. It was fun. The students began to look at each other and sense the power of belonging.’ Jones told them that they would create their own community called *The Wave*, that there were specific rules to which everyone had to abide and that they would use a specific kind of symbolic greeting so that they would always recognize each other. The symbolic greeting was a ‘silent signal of recognition’. He furthermore chose some group members who were to report to him on members who would not abide by the rules. Ron Jones had been one of the most popular teachers before he started the wave but his popularity grew and the students thought the classes were fun. They enjoyed the efficiency of being disciplined and started to prepare for their homework better than they used to do. One student exclaimed: ‘Mr Jones, for the first time I’m learning lots of things…why don’t you teach like this all the time’. Students and teachers alike spoke about the Wave in school and more students wanted to join the class. After two

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9 See website footnote 8.
10 See website footnote 8.
days an additional 23 students joined the original 20 students in his class. A procedure for recruiting new members was initiated: students had to be recommended by a member and were given a membership card by Jones. Within a week time the total number of students joining the Wave was 200. The Wave seemed to affect everyone at the school. While many students participated others were more sceptical and some children began fighting about the Wave.

One of the students, Laurie\textsuperscript{11} who had been one of the best students before the Wave, had initially liked it and took part in the exercises but she now started to doubt whether the Wave was a good thing. She was editor-in-chief of the school journal and wrote a critical article about the Wave which suddenly made her unpopular. She was considered a threat by the others as they were afraid that she would spoil everything for the rest of them. It was clear that the Wave got out of hand. It had by now attracted a lot of new members and those who were into it liked it but the others became scared. The students at the school were divided in two groups: Wave members and non-members. The teacher, Ron Jones realized that he had taken the lesson far enough and called out for a big meeting for all Wave members. He told the faithful members that there were many other youth movements which had started all over the country and that their national leader was going to speak to them on a big party rally that same afternoon. All members had to assemble in the main hall dressed up in white and blue taking banners with them. He furthermore warned them that only loyal Wave-members were allowed in the auditorium where they would meet. They all were completely thrilled and excited about seeing their national youth leader on television. They had taken banners and all dressed up in white and blue. Two hundred students assembled and were all extremely excited while they waited for their national youth leader to appear on television. Ron Jones their teacher suddenly turned on a television screen which (very unexpectedly to the students) featured images of a mass rally in which Hitler spoke to the cheering masses appeared and Jones cried out: ‘There! There is your leader!’ The students were shocked but Ron Jones continued: ‘Now listen carefully! There is no national Wave youth movement. There is no leader. But if there was, he would have been it. Do you see what you’ve become? Do you see where you were headed? How far would you have gone? Take a look at your future! You thought you were so special! Better than everyone outside this room. You traded your freedom for what you said was equality. But you turned your equality into superiority over non-Wave members. You accepted the

\textsuperscript{11} The name Laurie is fictional and taken from the book by Rhue on The Wave.
group’s will over your own convictions, no matter who you had to hurt to do it. Oh, some of you thought you were just going along for the ride that you could walk away at any moment. But did you? Did any of you try it? Yes you all would have made good Nazis. You would have put on uniforms, turned your heads and allowed your friends and neighbours to be persecuted and destroyed. You say it could never happen again, but look how close you came’ (Rhue 1981, 104). The students were shocked and disappointed. The Wave which had been so exciting suddenly came to such an embarrassing end.

The Wave clearly shows the attraction of a mass movement and the appealing nature of groups being led by a charismatic leader. The students enjoyed being part of something bigger, having a purpose, being a member of a community. Things worked out better and more efficient when they worked together, followed their leader and were very orderly and disciplined. In their enthusiasm they did not realize the downsides and the compulsive and coercive nature of the Wave: those who did not go along were considered outsiders. Non-members started to get scared and criticism was no longer allowed as some experienced. Members did not realize that by adhering to the group they give up independent thinking. They became mere followers at the whim of their leader. Students experienced how they got caught up in something which was beyond their control and they did not know where they were headed until it was too late. The Wave shows that many human beings naturally have a strong desire to follow and submit to a leader, to be a good member of a group and to show respect for authority. In the following subsection we will study the mechanisms of mass movements.

### 3.2 The followers

One of the most intriguing questions is, who are the people who make up the ranks of the followers of a mass movement. In his book *Fear of freedom* Fromm implies that human beings fear freedom and especially loneliness. According to Fromm they have an extremely strong desire to be guided, to follow a leader and to be part of a group or community (Cf. Hoffer 1951 and Staub 1989, 29). Mass movements are particularly attractive especially if they are led by charismatic leaders. Hoffer (1951) in his book *The true believer* concludes that: ‘All movements, however different in doctrine and aspiration, draw their early adherents from the same types of humanity; they all appeal to the same types of mind’ (Hofer 1951, xi). The principal follower of a mass movement is the true believer – the man of fanatical faith who is ready to sacrifice his life for a holy cause (Hoffer 1951, xii).

According to Hoffer, the frustrated make up the ranks of the followers of a mass movement. They are discontent with the present and themselves
and therefore favour change. They have to be distinguished from the liberal, the sceptic and the conservative who do not favour change and who prefer the things to be just as they are. The frustrated are discontented and strive for change, possibly a radical change in order to improve the world. What attracts them to the mass movement is that it takes them away from their unwanted selves (Hoffer 1951, 119). Freedom is a burden, a burden of free choice. Losing oneself in a mass movement is a means of escape: an escape from freedom (Fromm 1941). Erich Fromm’s thesis is that men who fear loneliness and isolation, escape into authoritarianism, destructiveness and conformism. Freedom, just like an autonomous existence, becomes an unbearable burden. They prefer to be taken up by the uniformity, equality, fraternity, individual anonymity and perfect unity of the mass movement. In their separate need to hold on they experience blind devotion to the holy cause of the mass movement. The frustrated, are the undesirables who feel rejected. They can be misfits, outcasts, minorities, adolescent youth, the powerless impotent and the poor. Not the abjectly poor, however, they will not rebel. Those who have much but want more are the ones to rebel.¹² Not those on the ‘borderline of starvation’ since they are too preoccupied by staying alive. The poor and underprivileged start to rebel when conditions improve. Frustration grows alongside the desire to rebel and follow a mass movement in order to change and improve things. Other types of people to whom mass movements will appeal are the selfish and ambitious who are susceptible to frustration and see unlimited opportunities arising; the bored (bored with themselves); the ‘sinners’, to whom the mass movement will be a refuge for their guilty consciences. The mass movement leads to a quick and total absorption of the frustrated. The attractiveness in mass movements lies in the fact that they strive and promise change. They offer substitutes for the failing self: they offer faith, hope, excellence and regained belief in one’s own identity. The disgruntled become part of something bigger; something special. Mass movements breed a sense of superiority and elitism. They give their members a sense of belonging and can create very strong desires within its followers to do whatever is necessary to create a better world.

Groups, like these create a so-called band wagon effect: once people start to join such a movement this will lead to more and more people joining. Difficult life conditions (Staub 1989), existing social imbalances and relative deprivation (Gurr 1970) are fertile grounds for mass movements and collective action. Successful social movements depend on a collective identity, leadership and organizational skills (Gupta 2001, 126). According to Gupta, individual participation can be explained by three behavioural deter-

¹² See chapter 3 on revolutions and relative deprivation theory.
minants: greed, fear and ideology. A successful movement needs to play on all three aspects and attract people who are driven by ideology and/or greed and make it clear that people are either with or against them and in this way make the masses fear to be left out. Once a member of the group or movement, the individual has to submit his or her individual identity to the collective identity. Gupta argues that ‘...when there is a strong ideology of the collective, the boundaries between religion and politics disappear. Issues of religious fervour quickly become one of politics. Similarly, matters of political ideology turn into religious faith, with all its symbolism, rituals and zeal’ (Gupta 2001, 230). In certain circumstances identities can become very polarized and force people who would otherwise not be inclined to do so to choose sides. Ultimately it becomes very difficult to separate truth from propaganda (Kressel 2002, 27). Activation of anger and feelings of injustice and humiliation are extremely powerful and fuel the nationalistic sentiment of a specific group. Hoffer (1951) powerfully described the mechanisms which cause extreme behaviour within these type of extreme groups: ‘All mass movements generate in their adherents a readiness to die and a proclivity for united action; all of them, irrespective of the doctrine they preach and the program they project, breed fanaticism, enthusiasm, fervent hope, hatred and intolerance; all of them are capable of releasing a powerful flow of activity in certain departments of life; all of them demand blind faith and single hearted allegiance.’

Individuals feel anonymous in groups: anonymity lowers feelings of fear: ‘fear of detection, evaluation or retaliation’ (Baron & Kerr 2003, 111). Within a mob, individuals show ‘a profoundly inferior mentality, and increased intensity of emotion, and a diminished capacity for moral judgment’ (Kressel 2002, 99). Le Bon furthermore concluded that groups can lead to deindividuation: ‘In such a state, one is presumed to be less susceptible to feelings of fear and guilt and less concerned with one’s ordinary standards and the consequences of abandoning them’ (Baron & Kerr 2003, 111). Groups also lead to a reduced sense of responsibility which makes individuals feel released from ordinary constraints. Kressel (2002, 99) concluded: ‘When mobs operate, they display a profoundly inferior mentality, an increased intensity of emotion, and a diminished capacity for moral judgment.’ It is therefore far easier to commit crimes in a group than when acting alone. It is significant and illustrative that the violence in Rwanda is not just an example of collective violence but that the actual killings were committed ‘almost exclusively in groups’ (Strauss 2004; Fuji 2009 and Smieulers & Hoex 2010).

3.3 The need for an enemy

According to Hoffer, having an enemy is a characteristic feature of a mass movement. ‘Hatred is the most accessible and comprehensive of all unifying
agents. [...] Usually the strength of a mass movement is proportionate to the vividness and tangibility of its devil.’ According to Rauschnig (1940) Hitler answered him on the question whether the Jew should be destroyed: ‘No... We should have then to invent him. It is essential to have a tangible enemy, not merely an abstract one’ (Hoffer 1951, 91). Hitler furthermore apparently exclaimed: ‘It is impossible to exaggerate the formidable quality of the Jew as an enemy’ (Hoffer 1951, 93). Enemies are the scapegoats who can take the blame for everything that has gone wrong and who can consequently exonerate the frustrated. Their lack of success can be attributed to others. This is a comforting feeling: they themselves have been the victims of grave injustice and trying to fight the enemy, the follower joins an almost holy mission. ‘Passionate hatred can give meaning and purpose to an empty life’ (Hoffer 1951, 98). In Nazi Germany (and many other places where anti-Semitism is widespread) the Jew was considered to be the perfect enemy and scapegoat. Once an enemy is identified or created and thought to threaten the group an inflamed and passionate group or movement does not need much encouragement to act and fight (read: main, torture or kill) this enemy.

Mass movements are one of the most extreme examples of political groups likely to use collective violence because a mass movement demands (and requires) total surrender, absolute obedience and eternal faith. Within the movement these characteristics are usually qualified as core values. Furthermore, the doctrine is absolute; it is perceived and preached as the one and only truth which cannot be questioned. The ideology has to be believed in rather than understood. It is generally uncompromising and intolerant and members come to lose their freedom, independence and individuality due to the total absorption and assimilation with the mass movement. They are required to identify themselves fully with the mass movement. Being prepared to sacrifice oneself is a logical but crucial consequence. True believers are ready to die for their conviction and faith. The readiness for self-sacrifice is a demonstration of their faith and proof of their complete and full assimilation to the mass movement. Self-sacrifice leads to self-denial and this seems to confer ‘the right to be harsh and merciless toward others’ (Hoffer 1951, 99). ‘There is also this: when we renounce the self and become part of a compact whole, we not only renounce personal advantage but are personally responsible. There is no telling to what extremes of cruelty and ruthlessness a man will go when he is freed from fears, hesitations, doubts and the vague stirrings of decency that go with individual judgment. When we lose our individual independence in the corporateness of a mass movement, we find a new freedom – freedom to hate, bully, lie, torture, murder and betray without shame and remorse. Doubtlessly, the latter aspect holds part of the attractiveness of a mass movement. We find there the right to dishonour’
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(Hoffer 1951, 100). Fromm (1941) too concluded that human beings once they have given up their individuality and personality are prepared to do anything. Self-denial and self-sacrifice also leads to a feeling of superiority. It breeds pride and arrogance, the feeling of being part of the chosen few. It also makes people ruthless: if they are prepared to sacrifice themselves then they can easily sacrifice others too.

3.4 The role of the leader and the use of symbolism

Many groups are heavily dependent on their leader(s). To a mass movement a leader is crucial. There is no mass movement without a charismatic leader. A leader, however, needs the right set of conditions in order to rise to power. Without this set of conditions, no matter how gifted he (or she) is, he will not succeed. A leader might use propaganda but propaganda only works if people are already open and susceptible to it. Propaganda is effective when it seems to express the inner feelings residing already in the individual, when it states what they already know or think. When it expresses the ideas and passions which already boil inside them (Hoffer 1951). Moreover, a leader needs groups which show ‘an eagerness to follow and obey’. A leader has to be a realist but has to talk like a visionary and idealist in order to attract the masses. According to Hoffer (1951, 114) there is a specific set of talents needed: ‘Exceptional intelligence, noble character, and originality seem neither indispensable nor perhaps desirable. The main requirements seem to be: audacity, a joy in defiance; an iron will; a fanatical conviction that he is in possession of the one and only truth; faith in his destiny and luck; a capacity for passionate hatred; contempt for the present; a cunning estimate of human nature; a delight in symbols.’

Symbolism generally plays an important role in politics as well as in mass movements. The doctrine is perceived as being a holy cause and symbols are used to glorify the movement. Grand spectacles and dramatic performances appeal to the absolute faith. Action is important. It symbolizes that something is happening and people don’t want to miss it. There is something very energetic and powerful about grand spectacles, marching or even masses in general. Individuals feel like being caught up in something big and wonderful. They are spurred by craving and hope. True believers are spurred on by suspicion, an uneasy conscience and fear. Intriguingly the oppressed ‘almost invariably shape themselves in the image of their hated oppressors.’ According to Hoffer (1951, 97 and 96) ‘the undercurrent of admiration in hatred manifests itself in the inclination to imitate those we hate. Therefore every mass movement shapes itself after its specific devil’. We only hate those whom we envy to a certain extent. We cannot hate those we despise. If the movement is successful: there is a ‘deep reassurance for the frustrated in witnessing the downfall of the fortunate and the disgrace of the righteous’
(Hoffer 1951, 98). Within mass movements leaders try to deliberately create collective identities and make people completely identify with the mass movement and with the norms and values of the mass movement. As history has shown, once part of the mass movement, people blindly follow their leader – consider everything he says as the ultimate truth and can therefore come to follow a leader in committing genocide.

4. Conclusion

Social-psychological research has shown the effect of groups on individuals and how groups can influence the ideas, attitudes and behaviour of the group members and also how group behaviour becomes more and more extreme. Group processes and group dynamics can stir the process to a point at which these mechanisms gain a momentum of their own and are difficult to control. This can become a dangerous process when individual identities are completely submerged by collective identities. Within groups people tend to lose their sense of responsibility and accountability and as we have seen are more likely to engage in extreme behaviour such as disgraceful and despicable acts of violence upon innocent and arbitrary targets under the fictitious banner of 'the cause of immoral and aggressive behaviour. Our natural tendency to conform to groups and adjust to the social context in which we operate can explain why within a specific context many people who would otherwise not be violent and cruel can come to show such behaviour. People can come to share a collective mind set and if this process is stirred by a malignant political entrepreneur this can easily lead to collective violence and mass atrocities. Mass movements are consequently the most extreme examples of malignant group behaviour.

Suggestions for Further Reading