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Asian Psychology and Asian Societies in the Midst of Change

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Chapter 1

Collective Action and Social Change

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Abstract

The paper will review a research program on identity and norms that explores the inter-relationship between collective action and social change. We take the opportunity to review the different treatment of collective action from within mainstream social psychology and peace psychology, and then hone in on the question of whether there is anything special (or not) about collective harm-doing: collective action to hurt or kill others. We use this as a springboard to comment on the impact and antecedents of radicalisation, before closing with a discussion of what is missing from the scholarship of collective action in our view.

Collective Action: Why Bother?

In this paper, we define collective action as action by individuals on behalf of groups (e.g., Louis, 2009a, 2009b). We focus in particular on political and social collective action. Many other spheres of collective action – such as sport, music and theatre – remain largely unexplored by social psychologists, despite their obvious cultural and social importance. Yet one reason to study political and social collective actions is that these are often catalysts for social change that transforms societies, economies, and cultures. In the Philippines, for example, street marches of thousands ("People Power") precipitated the end of the Marcos dictatorship; in the USA, the 'Boston Tea Party' action famously gave rise to the American Revolution.

There are many such examples (Louis, 2009a, 2009b; Louis, Amiot, Thomas, & Blackwood, 2016; Louis et al., 2016), yet there are many other cases in which collective action movements have failed to spark societal transformation.

One point worth emphasising is that collective action often signals a desire for social change that is contested – that is, the mass mobilisation of communities, and of citizens in their tens, thousands or millions is made necessary by the resistance of others. Political oppression or repression by the state may give rise to street marches, demonstrations, and sit-ins. Rallies in favour of marriage equality may signal the government's opposition to equality, or be met with the counter-mobilisation of citizens for 'traditional marriage'. Given that, in the context of collective action, it is likely that some people want social change while some others oppose it, can social psychological research tell us which kinds of social change are likely to win out where others fail? When will a demonstration of a few hundred people in one city or town turn into a movement that can sweep a nation and change public opinion, or policy and law?

It is likely that many people's folk theory of how social change occurs is based on the idea of transmitting new ideas or opinions (see also, Louis, 2009a, 2009b; Thomas & Louis, 2013).

Collective actors put forward a particular point of view or piece of information that is then retransmitted by journalists and news media, as well as bystanders to a lesser extent. Success or failure occurs when this point of view or piece of information diffuses out to reach more and more people, and more and more voters, until politicians eventually become impelled to act. So you might hear about a rally or petition about an injustice, become informed on this topic, tell your friends, and eventually momentum would build to develop change as your social networks also become informed. But is that really how collective action works?

What about the end of the world?

A vivid example of the limitations of this type of information diffusion model of change is given by data published by the Public Religion Research Institute, which was cited in the *Washington Post*, 21 November 2014 (Boorstein, 2014). American respondents were surveyed with the stem, "The severity of recent natural disasters is evidence of ..." and asked to give answers for "Global climate change" and for "What the Bible calls 'the end times'". It turns out that in this sample, (only) 62% of Americans agreed that the severity of recent natural disasters provided evidence of global climate change, while 49% perceived that the severity indexed the imminent end of the world. Furthermore, within some faith communities large majorities – e.g., 77% of White Evangelical Protestant respondents –indicated that the severity of the disasters signalled the coming Biblical end times, which clearly would have a major impact on their motivation to take political and social action to try to mitigate climate change or control carbon emissions.

The point that this data illustrates, we argue here, is that communication of opinions and facts requires openness and trust on the part of the receiver, and this openness and trust in fact is typically given *within* social groups and networks. Across group boundaries, communication of opinions and information by group A often has no impact or reinforces the contrary opinions of group

B. No matter how many times climate scientists or Evangelical missionaries speak to each other on this topic to repeat their messages, they are unlikely to convince each other, because the groups are not open to or trusting of each other. Each listener's original beliefs will be untouched, or may even be hardened, by the communication of this conflicting worldview.

Promoting Positive Social Change

So what's the answer? Before we get bogged down in the nitty gritty of empirical studies, it is worth anticipating some key take-home messages of research on intergroup communication – because we won't have time to talk about all of them, and it's important to have a big picture overview before closely engaging with the research of our particular group. As summarised elsewhere (Thomas & Louis, 2013), in order to promote positive social change as a majority or powerful group, the following actions have an evidence basis for being effective: a) Reduce structural inequality; promote institutional, policy means that increase social mobility; b) Define shared group identities inclusively (value diversity; value minorities); and c) Listen to dissent respectfully; respond to grievances; reduce corruption.

As a minority group, the following actions are supported by evidence: a) Build a culture of solidarity within the group; b) Nurture diverse leadership and networks; c) Send messages about desired change privately within the elite / hierarchy as well as in public; d) Create alliances and bridges that are mindful of divisions within the advantaged group or elite; e) Seize opportunities to appeal meaningfully to the superordinate identity and values of opponents; f) What we can do depends on our time frame: asking how we can create social change in 5 weeks vs. in 5 decades can lead to a focus on different priorities and tactics.

We hope that readers will look to our other work as well as that of other social psychologists, for explications of this dense page of prescriptive jargon. As well as our own work, we encour-

age readers to look at Matthew Hornsey's research on the "intergroup sensitivity effect" (especially Bain, Hornsey, Bongiorno, & Jeffries, 2012; Hornsey, 2005) and Robert Cialdini's work on persuasion and norms (e.g., Cialdini, 1988, Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1991) as two great starting points for exploring the social psychology of communication and persuasion.

When do people take collective action?

There is now more than 100 years of research concerning when people will be motivated to take collective action, and we summarise this research very briefly now (see also La Macchia & Louis, 2016; Louis et al., 2016). To anticipate, people take collective action when they identify with a group, feel angry about injustice, and feel the action has the power to effect change or to express group values (e.g., Hornsey et al., 2006).

First, people act when they identify psychologically as a member of a group. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorisation theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) have both highlighted how individuals as well as defining themselves by personal identities ("I") can define themselves by social identities ("We"). We all have a variety of social identities available to us, from nationality and religion to work and family. When we take collective action, it is often because we identify with a group which is advantaged or disadvantaged compared to another group.

For disadvantaged groups in particular, the motivation for collective action often draws not only on cognitive awareness of one's social identity, but also on an emotional sense of injustice or anger, as highlighted by theories such as SIMCA (van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). A final motivation for collective action is the perception that the action has the potential to benefit their group (instrumental collective motives, stressed by resource mobilisation theory; e.g., McCarthy & Zald,

1977) or to express core group values (symbolic motives; e.g., Snow, 2001).

What kind of action do they take?

If someone is motivated to take collective action about an injustice, how do they choose which actions to take? Research shows that group members normally pick normative actions – i.e., actions supported by group norms, which are standards or rules for behaviour (Louis, Mavor, La Macchia, & Amiot, 2014; Louis & Taylor, 1999; Smith & Louis, 2008, 2009). Each group has norms laying out the range of expected and appropriate actions, from petitions to rallies, or from assassinations to angry gossip. The forms of acceptable collective action change over time and across groups: social psychologists are not normatively allowed to use assassination to increase their funding compared to neuroscientists, and modern protestors are not prone to throwing shoes into machinery to stop it working, although in historical Europe that was a noted form of protest.

A further complexity in understanding collective action decisions is that at any given point in time people are faced with different types of norms, which may not align: **descriptive or behavioural norms** (what people in the group commonly do, how they behave) may be different from **injunctive or moral norms** (what people believe should be done, what is morally appropriate; see, Smith & Louis, 2008, 2009). When a behavior is perceived of as uncommon or rare, a supportive moral norm is not necessarily sufficient to generate action (e.g., Smith et al., 2012). With this caveat however, we reach a valuable insight about how to predict collective action: there are **norms** – social rules or standards for behaviour; people identify with groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and enact their norms (Terry & Hogg, 1996; Turner, 1991; Turner et al., 1987). Thus, for example, past research has shown that people engage in environmental action when they identify with a supportive group (e.g., Fielding, McDonald, & Louis, 2008).

What about violent oppositional action?

But why, for example, burn a flag? It is clear that it is a collective action: we rarely hear of people burning a flag in the privacy of their living rooms. And it is clear that it is generally supported by other protestors, or some of them, so it is normative in that sense. But it is also clear that some protest behaviours, such as flag burning, derive their meaning not just from acting out one group's support, but from deliberately violating the norms of another group, or disrespecting the values and practices. Thus, in collective action, our research has shown that there are multiple groups and that other groups' norms matter too (Louis, Taylor, & Douglas, 2005; Louis, Taylor, & Neil, 2004).

Our work has proposed specifically that people conform to (or flout) outgroup norms to send messages: non-normative forms of collective action capture more attention, signal anger and rejection, signal determination, and attempt to make the status quo less attractive to an advantaged group to induce concessions or negotiation (Christie & Louis, 2012; Louis, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Louis & Taylor, 2002; Louis, Taylor, & Douglas, 2005; Louis, Taylor, & Neil, 2004; McGarty, Thomas, & Louis, 2012; Thomas & Louis, 2013, 2014; Thomas, McGarty, & Louis, 2014). A concern however is that the action deliberately violating other groups' norms may evoke anger and retaliation from opponents. In particular, powerful groups may also use violence and coercion to eliminate or terrorise opponents. But much work remains to be done on these forms of collective action, which are under-studied compared to conventional, normative actions.

How do multiple groups affect us?

Thinking about collective action, it is clear that we do not only have to worry about the norms of our own group (or ingroup) and those of our opponents (or outgroups). Our own multiple ingroups' norms also matter: we may belong to multiple groups, and

at least some of these other groups may oppose the action which our protest-group is endorsing. For example, our family or work-place may not support an environmental protest, or our community or friends may not rally behind an anti-racism protest, or union march. Of course that is true of more radical actions, but it can be true even if our protest tactic is quite conventional. How does the diversity of our ingroup norms play into our motivation and choice of tactics?

Little work has examined the impact of multiple group norms on action, but we have found that when asked to reflect about the conflicting norms of ingroups, some group members are paralysed and some are energised (McDonald, Fielding, & Louis, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). A concern is that the people who are demotivated by norm conflict are those who might normally be the target audience of protest: those who are less favourable or positive towards the action being advocated. Is there any solution to this paralysing effect of norm conflict on political action?

What about the human group?

A noticeable feature about intergroup prejudice is that it is associated with dehumanising beliefs and behaviours (e.g., Haslam, 2006), and this has led researchers to propose that positive, pro-social attitudes and actions can be promoted if we all focus together on our common human identity. In our work, for example, we found that correlationally that it is only people who identify weakly as human who show more prejudice towards foreigners when they have higher national identification; high human identifiers do not increase their xenophobia when they identify strongly with their country (Nickerson & Louis, 2008).

This line of work is exciting, but other work has shown that the common human identity isn't always so functional as a solution to dilemmas of collective action (e.g., Wright & Baray, 2012). In several studies by Katharine Greenaway in our own lab, we found that higher human identity doesn't always prevent prejudice

and subgroup conflict: it can let perpetrators off the hook and it may (often) defuse the militance of the disadvantaged group (Greenaway & Louis, 2010; Greenaway, Louis, & Wohl, 2012; Greenaway, Quinn, & Louis, 2011). For example, we found that making salient the common human identity led Indigenous Australians to be more forgiving about historical atrocities and to lower their intentions to engage in collective action, but it didn't actually make White/European Australians less racist or more supportive of reparations and reconciliation. Instead, when the human identity was made salient, White/Europeans saw the disadvantage of Indigenous Australians as more legitimate. These studies are a reminder that sometimes clear attention to social boundaries of unfairness and mobilisation by the disadvantaged group is necessary for social change.

Peace Psychology and Collective Action Research

At this stage in the paper, we turn to a new direction, to talk about the difference between collective action research and peace psychology in how they approach group members' tactical choices in conflict. A few years ago, one of us (Louis) was working as an associate editor for two journals that cover collective action research from these different perspectives: *Peace and Conflict: The Journal of Peace Psychology*, and *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, a mainstream experimental journal in social psychology. It was striking to see the different approaches in the two areas.

In the kind of collective action research published in *GPIR,* scholars normally start with a presumed injustice by an advantaged group that is 'out there', in the historical past and present, beyond the frame of the study. In the face of injustice, the disadvantaged group experiences resistance and solidarity, and is motivated to engage in collective action, which leads to empowerment and cohesion. The kind of actions they choose are normatively supported, and it is common to measure what may be called "generic intentions": group members are asked about intentions or willingness

to engage in a handful of tactical options which at face value are common and endorsed by the group (petitions, rallies), and then the researcher averages across the different tactical options to create an index of collective action which is then the dependent measure. These actions are the collective solutions to the problem posed by the threatening, unjust outgroup, and serve to create positive social change.

Yet while this is a common approach, it is clear that it under-emphasises the dynamic nature of collective action, and in particular the likelihood that collective action is a part of both positive and negative social change. As a basic point, touched on previously in this paper, it is clear that the conciliatory or belligerent responses of political opponents help to define, motivate, and shape collective action tactics. For example, as the state moves to criminalise dissent and protestors, increasing repressiveness may result increasing radicalisation on the part of protestors, shifting both parties along a continuum which might culminate in martial law, civil war, and revolution (Crelinsten, 2002).

In one preliminary study which aims to unpack this dynamic from a social psychological perspective, Blackwood and Louis (in press) recruited a sample of Mturkers (American online participants, N=90) for a study on leadership. The respondents were asked to imagine that another group was threatening them and that within the group, two potential leaders were advocating divergent tactics, with one leader who preferred to negotiate, and one to organise opposition. Half of the participants were told that "The leader of the other group has issued a statement saying they are prepared to negotiate", and these overwhelmingly chose the negotiator as their leader (87%). Half were told that the other group is "...not prepared to negotiate", and a majority of these chose the oppositional leader (53%). This simple and unsurprising result highlights that it may be productive to focus on radical *contexts* in which actions are chosen instead of radical groups or radical actors – a profound change of lens, if adopted, and an important one.

Similar results highlighting the importance of context on choice were observed with a sample of animal rights activists, in a

study (Thomas, McGarty, & Louis, 2014) showing that small groups of animal rights supporters brought together to discuss action tactics showed more willingness to break the law when they were reminded of the failure of past conventional democratic action. In other research, Thomas and Louis (2014) showed that among environmental activists, non-violent collective action was generally seen as more effective and legitimate than violent action, and more effectively conveyed a sense of illegitimacy of the issue and efficacy of the group to mobilise change. Yet this advantage of non-violent action was undermined – in fact disappeared - if people were told that the decision-making body was perceived to be corrupt.

Taken together, the studies support the contention that oppositional tactics and violence arise in part from the intergroup dynamic. Conventional and violent tactics form part of a group's collective action repertoire, with violence most likely to be supported given failure of past conventional actions, others' refusal to negotiate, and an illegitimate or corrupt status quo. Taken together, this line of work generates the insights that group norms are important, norm conflict is common, and collective action occurs in an intergroup context in which there are two (or more) players.

And what might peace psychology add to these conclusions?

There are several other insights that are salient (Louis, 2014; Louis, Amiot, & Thomas, 2015): that morality matters: choices of radical or conventional tactics involve contested appraisals of right and wrong. That history matters: how people respond to other groups' actions in the present often depends on the narratives and memories of the past. That as well as anger as a motive for collective action, there are other emotions: fear and pride, joy, and hate also play roles. Finally, from peace psychology, we may emphasise that there are issues of injury, trauma, and healing that affect people's choices in conflict: that people can be

damaged mentally and physically, and heal, or be healing; and that they can lose and grow their capacities to act in particular ways.

These issues of injury, trauma, and healing are particularly explored in recent work that examines perpetrator-induced traumatic stress (McNair, 2002) – psychological traumatic stress caused by harming others – and the related concept of moral injury (Litz et al., 2009), psychological harm from harm-doing. With colleagues, we explored these themes in a recent special issue of *PAC:JPP* on collective harm-doing (Louis et al., 2015) – a special issue that takes up victims' quests, as well, for war crimes trials and reparations, and advantage group members' resistance to those who try to hold them to account, both in the political/legal sphere and psychologically. Perpetrators of collective harm-doing psychologically defend themselves by putting forward other frames for their action which focus on the ingroup-serving justification, and by derogating and dehumanising the other. Yet is this always psychologically easy? Is there a psychological cost to harm-doing?

In several recent studies, we have considered the concept of self-determination in collective harmdoing, drawing on the formulation of self-determined behaviour as freely chosen and internalised put forward by Deci and Ryan (2000). The idea is that a particular act of harm-doing such as shooting a civilian can vary in the quality of motivation that group members bring to bear, from varying degrees of external or extrinsic motives – amotivation, a lack of motivation to act; through a sense of being coerced by punishments and threats; to a sense of being driven by guilt and negative emotions – along a continuum of possible intrinsic or self-determined motives, including a sense of duty or obligation to obey orders; a positive sense that the act is important and beneficial; all the way up to a sense that the action is enjoyable or fun (e.g., Cooke, Fielding, & Louis, 2016).

The question we have been examining in these lines of work is whether it is harder to acquire self-determined motives for discrimination than equality – is harm-doing harder to internalise than pro-merit or pro-parity actions? To make a long story short,

some research suggests that it is (e.g., Amiot, Sansfaçon, Louis, & Yelle, 2012), although some other work cautions that if group members identify with a group, and the group's norms support the action, internalisation of harm-doing actions can be achieved over time (e.g., Amiot, Sansfaçon, & Louis, 2013a, 2013b, 2014).

Our lab has also found similar evidence about the asymmetry between harm-doing and positive actions to other group members in a series of neuroscience studies led by Pascal Molenberghs. In one study, we examined the neural processes associated with rewarding and punishing people in one's own group compared to members of other groups (Molenberghs et al., 2014). Participants were introduced to confederates who were from their own or a rival university, and then put on a red shirt or blue shirt that reinforced the group divide. The participants were then "randomly" chosen in a rigged device to become the teacher to the other students, who were confederates, and who were "randomly" chosen as learners. The confederates then answered various general knowledge and trivia questions either correctly (in which case participants had to push a button to reward them) or incorrectly (in which case participants had to push a button to punish them with an electric shock – and previously, participants had undergone the electric shock themselves, so they understood that it was painful). Across a repeated measures design in which all participants delivered rewards or shock to people either in their own group, or another group, people showed activation in the reward areas of the brain when delivering rewards, and especially when they were rewarding ingroup members. When delivering shocks, participants showed no significant difference between shocks delivered to people in their own group vs another group: overall, participants showed empathic responses, and activation in these centres was associated with higher perspective-taking, and lower psychopathy scores. Again, participants seemed to have difficulty acquiring harm-doing behaviour. But there was a provocative interaction such that higher psychopathy was especially associated with desensitisation to shocking outgroup members!

To summarise the broad series of studies in neuroscience

from our team, we also have shown that when watching members of one's own and another group harm members of one's own and another group, there was more activation in a particular area (the lateral orbitofrontal cortex) linked to moral sensitivity or aversiveness when a member of another group was attacking a member of one's own group (Molenberghs, Gapp, Wang, Louis, & Decety, 2016). We also showed that when participants imagined themselves shooting civilians while watching a first person shooter perspective, greater activation was found in this same area compared to shooting soldiers (Molenberghs et al., 2015).

Across the studies, it appears that there is a reward from helping others which is larger for ingroup members even with ad hoc groups (Molenberghs et al., 2014), and that there is a moral sensitivity or aversion from punishing others which has no main effect of group membership with ad hoc groups (Molenberghs et al., 2014) but which differentiated between civilians and soldiers (Molenberghs et al., 2015). Moral sensitivity is greater for perpetrators from other groups attacking victims in our own group (Molenberghs et al., 2014), and there is some evidence of individual difference moderators (see also, Eres, Decety, Louis, & Molenberghs, 2015; Eres, Louis, & Molenberghs, 2016). Which brings us back to our question, if there are barriers even at the neural level which make harming others aversive, **(How) do group members escape the consequences of harm-doing?**

To us, one answer appears to be that they partition out the dirty work to subgroups of others (mostly young men) who are cast off and marginalised, and yet who also often feel and are seen to be heroic, noble and self-sacrificial. In future work, we seek to continue to explore learned harm-doing and its internalisation, and to study the consequences for well-being and the process whereby harm-doing is challenged (e.g., when perpetrators leave the context of violence and return to a multiple-groups context in which harm-doing is disapproved of by other groups). How externalisation occurs – when individuals come to question accepted injustice, and the process by which the beliefs exit the individual and collective self – is an exciting area to take forward. We are also

exploring the social psychology of charitable giving, a specific form of collective action of great social importance. We seek to understand how multiple identities and their associated norms, ideological differences, and other psychological factors may influence decisions about who (and how) to help in both intra- and intergroup contexts (Chapman, Louis, & Masser, 2017a, 2017b). Beyond this focus, **What is missing from the scholarship of collective action?**

Most urgently, it seems to us, the research on collective action should take collective action as the independent variable (Louis, 2009a, 2009b) and seek evidence of what works in changing attitudes, actions and structures for creating change (cf., Thomas & Louis, 2014). Understanding not just if but exactly how interventions and social actions work can help change agents maximize their impact and efficiency (Chapman, Deane, Harré, Courtney, & Moore, in press). The field is ripe for theoretical and methodological integration, and it seems to us that great new work is being published, particularly in interdisciplinary outlets such as *Peace and Conflict: The Journal of Peace Psychology* and the *Journal of Social and Political Psychology.* We also are excited about the new special issue in *GPIR* (forthcoming in 2017) examining culture and collective action. New research from the Global South would be particularly exciting, to engage with theoretical models created principally by relatively advantaged European or North American scholars.

Another area of emerging interest in our lab is the issue of collective action undertaken by "Allies", i.e. advantaged group members who act on behalf of or with disadvantaged groups. We are seeking to understand such advantaged group "allyship" in the context of important social justice issues of our time, e.g., marriage equality and race relations. We are particularly interested in the conditions under which allies can harm or undermine the very people or causes they intend to support. To that end, we are currently looking at how people belonging to socially advantaged groups (such as White/European Australians and Heterosexual-identified Australians) respond to being reminded of their group

based privilege (race privilege and heteronormative privilege). We are also interested in examining the effect that privilege-denying or privilege-acknowledging responses might have on disadvantaged group members, especially in areas such as their emotional wellbeing, collective action inclinations and intergroup trust (Achia, Louis, & Iyer, 2017).

Another area of emerging interest is to explore the social identity dynamics of group transitions in political and religious contexts. Specifically, our focus is on the association between new group memberships, changing social identification and normative behaviours, and intentions to partake in collective action as well as changes in emotional well-being (Chonu, Louis, & Haslam, 2017a, 2017b).

Beyond what we are currently working on, we hope that some readers of these proceedings might consider developing this area of research, where so much else remains under-studied: religious collective action; collective actions beyond politics, such as funerals and celebrations; collective emotions beyond anger, such as solemnity, frivolity, fear, hope, and pride; the state as a collective actor, and agents of the state (such as police and soldiers) as group members who must learn tactics of action and enact them; the intersection of leadership and collective action; "ally" activism (see also, Droogendyk, Wright, Lubensky, & Louis, 2016); cross-domain activism (e.g., Louis et al., 2016); or how ideologies shape outsiders' willingness to challenge or reinforce an unequal status quo (Saeri, Iyer, & Louis, 2015). There is much of great social importance and theoretical interest to explore.

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