

# Ritual and Violence: Divergent modes of religiosity and armed struggle

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## ***Abstract***

*The theory of ‘divergent modes of religiosity’ proposes that religious organizations tend to cluster around two socio-political ‘attractor positions’: the one large-scale and hierarchical (doctrinal) and the other highly cohesive but localized or regionally fragmented (imagistic). The applicability of the theory to religious traditions has been demonstrated by means of extensive cross-cultural comparison and ethnographic case studies, longitudinal analysis of archaeological and historical materials, and psychological experiments. Here we consider the applicability of this theory to the formation and spread of rebel groups in civil conflicts. Although the sample of case studies considered here is small it is sufficient to demonstrate a powerful new set of tools for explaining the emergence and spread of armed groups in war-torn regions of the world.*

## **1. Introduction**

Some of the greatest atrocities in human history have been caused by groups defending or advancing their resourcing interests and sacred values. In order to comprehend and address the wanton violence of war, terrorism and genocide, it is necessary to understand the forces that bind and drive human groups. This chapter explores one of the most powerful mechanisms by which groups may be formed, inspired, and coordinated: ritual.

Ritual may be defined as *the socially stipulated imitation of teleologically opaque behaviour*. There may be more than one way to crack a nut but most viable methods involve the use of hard objects to crush shells. If we are shown a new way of cracking nuts we can judge the effectiveness of the technique based not only on results but economy of energetic outlay. Heavy tools will achieve the goal but, as the saying goes, we shouldn’t use a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Rituals break with these commonsense understandings by requiring energetic outlay that is causally unwarranted by the stipulated end goal and sometimes by failing to postulate end goals at all. Consequently, people do not try to justify ritual actions in rational-causal terms, indeed would recognize how inappropriate that would be, but instead seek justifications with reference to custom, reciprocity, duty, myth, and symbolism.

Social scientists have long recognized that rituals play a role in building social cohesion and collective identity. Recent convergences and developments in cognitive science and evolutionary theory point to new directions for inter-disciplinary research on this topic. One such approach, the theory of Divergent Modes of Religiosity (hereafter, DMR theory), has sought to explain contrasting patterns of ritual and social morphology in religious traditions (Whitehouse 1995, 2000, 2004). The theory distinguishes a *doctrinal mode* characterized by routinized ritual, diffuse cohesion, hierarchical structure, and rapid dissemination to large populations and an *imagistic mode* characterized by rare and traumatic ritual ordeals and intense cohesion within small cults. The DMR theory promises to explain why certain

religions spread rapidly and widely, in many cases crystallizing into long-standing traditions encompassing vast numbers of people, while others remain confined to much smaller populations even though they too can endure for very long periods.

Viewed within a broader evolutionary framework, the two modes may be understood as adaptations to distinct resource extraction problems (cf. Beardsley and McQuinn 2009). The imagistic mode prevails where groups depend for their survival on exceptionally high levels of cohesion (i.e. where incentives to defect are especially strong), for instance where extraction or protection of group resources entails grave risk and temptations to defect. The doctrinal mode prevails where group survival depends on more modest forms of cooperation (e.g. payment of tax or tribute) across much larger populations, requiring forms of cohesion that are more widely spread if less intensely felt.

Although the DMR theory has mainly been used to explain the formation and spread of religious traditions, in this chapter we apply the theory to armed groups engaged in civil conflicts,<sup>1</sup> some of which explicitly incorporate ‘religious’ traditions while others vehemently repudiate supernatural beliefs of any kind. We contrast two distinct modes in which armed groups create and maintain cohesion. The imagistic mode uses rarely performed and intensely dysphoric group rituals to create a culture of coercion that binds small groups together. In contrast, the ‘doctrinal’ mode produces larger rebel communities and a tendency to codify political and ideological commitments as doctrines transmitted through routinized rituals. Rebel groups, like religious traditions, may draw upon the cohesion effects of both modes but preliminary research suggests that rebels typically utilize either doctrinal or imagistic dynamics rather than exploiting both modes at the same time.

## **2. Introducing the DMR Theory**

The DMR theory begins with the observation that rituals tend to be either routine occurrences, woven into the fabric of everyday life, or somewhat distinctive perhaps unique occasions, associated with major events in the histories of individuals and groups (Whitehouse 2004). In its early formulations (Whitehouse 1995, 2000), the DMR theory proposed that most rituals are either high in frequency and low in emotional arousal or low in frequency and high in emotional arousal. Systematic cross-cultural comparison has produced a somewhat more nuanced picture, however. In a recent survey of 645 rituals from more than 70 language groups, the predicted inverse correlation between ritual frequency and aggregated emotional arousal has been confirmed, as has the clustering of rituals around high-frequency/low-arousal and low-frequency/high-arousal ends of the continuum, but it has also been shown that these patterns are strongest when considering only negative arousal (e.g. pain and fear) excluding measures of more euphoric emotional states (Atkinson and Whitehouse 2010). These patterns of ritual frequency and emotionality have important social consequences.

High-frequency rituals (routinization) are thought to facilitate the storage of elaborate and conceptually complex religious teachings in semantic memory supporting the transmission of doctrinal orthodoxies and standardized interpretations of ritual meaning. This ‘doctrinal mode of religiosity’ values oratory and sacred text, capable of being spread widely with great efficiency by small numbers of proselytizing leaders (gurus, prophets, messiahs, missionaries,

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<sup>1</sup> Civil wars are internal conflicts characterized by a non-state armed group violently challenging state authority where more than 1,000 battle deaths occur annually. The definition of civil war and civil conflict are based on the published reports of Uppsala Conflict Data Program and International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (UCDP/PRIO).

etc.). Religious communities formed in this way comprise the sharing of identity markers (beliefs and practices) rather than requiring direct interpersonal contact between members. The demands of policing the orthodoxy, together with the emphasis on oratorical skill and doctrinal mastery, favour the emergence of professionalized priesthoods and centralized systems of regulation. Thus the doctrinal mode produces large anonymous communities of followers and multiple levels of jurisdictional hierarchy.

By contrast, low-frequency rituals involving physical and psychological trauma (dysphoric arousal) are recalled as distinct episodes in participants' lives. People remember who else underwent the ordeals and experience intense bonds with the group of fellow sufferers. The teleologically opaque character of the ritual ordeals prompts long-term reflection and diverse interpretation among participants. The resulting illusion of shared mental content is thought to reinforce ingroup cohesion. This 'imagistic mode of religiosity' creates relatively small and exclusive groups, even if these are often in turn embedded in wider forms of group identity.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Doctrinal Mode Predictions</b>	<b>Imagistic Mode Predictions</b>
<b>1. Ritual frequency and arousal</b>	Daily collective rituals that impart ideological teachings	Rarely performed but extremely terrifying or painful (dysphoric) ritual ordeals
<b>2. Codification</b>	Standardized body of ideology/dogma	No standardized ideology/dogma
<b>3. Exegesis</b>	Transmission of exegesis to all members	Meaning of rituals inferred independently
<b>4. Scale</b>	Homogeneous tradition spreads rapidly across a wide area	Tradition remains localized or fragments into multiple traditions as it spreads
<b>5. Rate and reach of Spread</b>	Ideology broadcast through a variety of media. Most prominent is word-of-mouth transmission	Organization expands membership through group oriented activities and not ideological transmission
<b>6. Social Structure</b>	Highly elaborated hierarchy with designated ranking of offices	Authority exercised personally rather than institutionalized
<b>7. Cohesion</b>	Diffuse within 'imagined communities'	Intense within localized communities

*Table 1: DMR theory summarized (adapted from Whitehouse 2004)*

Although the term 'modes of religiosity' suggests that the target domain of the hypotheses above must be 'religion' rather than any other type of organization, the DMR theory is more accurately understood as a theory of modes of ritual group formation. Most ritual traditions, ancient and modern, postulate beliefs in one or more gods and largely for this reason are typically described as religions. Nevertheless, the 'religion' label is slippery and is also used to refer to cultural traditions that entail beliefs in ancestors (the spirits of dead people), creator beings (not necessarily gods in the senses most commonly used), or various kinds of magic (whether or not requiring the intervention of supernatural agents). While there is nothing wrong with referring to ritual traditions that espouse such beliefs as religions, we

cannot assume that the category ‘religion’ has underlying coherence and may simply comprise a loose assortment of ideas (e.g. about gods, ghosts, creation, magic, etc.) that have quite distinct and unrelated causes (Boyer 2001, Whitehouse 2004). We argue below that the DMR theory can be extended to explain recurrent features of ritual traditions that lack many or all beliefs typically labelled ‘religious’.

## 2.1 Low-Frequency, High-Arousal Rituals and the Imagistic Mode

It has long been appreciated that rare, traumatic rituals promote intense social cohesion but efforts to tease apart the psychological mechanisms involved only really took off in the 1950s, much of the work inspired by Festinger’s theory of ‘cognitive dissonance’ (1956). Rituals *incur costs* (e.g. time, labour, and psychological endurance) often with the promise of only poorly defined or indeterminate rewards, and in some cases for no explicit purpose at all. In the case of initiation rituals, for instance, the costs are typically extreme, involving physical or psychological tortures. In a now classic application of Festinger’s theory, Aronson and Mills (1959) demonstrated that the more severe the requirement for entry into an artificially created group, the greater would be the participants’ liking for other group members. Their explanation for this was that our feelings towards the groups we join will never be wholly positive and the experience of *disliking* aspects of the group will be *dissonant* with the experience of having paid a price to join; this dissonance could be resolved by downplaying the costs of entry but the greater the severity of initiations into the group the less sustainable that strategy will become. Under these circumstances, dissonance reduction will focus instead on generating more positive evaluations of the group (see also Aronson 1997; Baron 2000; Berkowitz 1989).

Traumatic ritual ordeals increase cohesion and tolerance *within groups* but they also seem to intensify feelings of *hostility and intolerance towards outgroups*. Recent studies using psychological experiments, economic games, and cross-cultural surveys suggest that within-group liking and outgroup hostility are directly correlated (Cohen, Montoya, and Insko 2006). As one games theorist neatly put it: “When Joshua killed twelve thousand heathen in a day and gave thanks to the Lord afterwards by carving the Ten Commandments in stone, including the phrase ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ he was not being hypocritical” (Ridley 1996: 192). Cognitive dissonance does not appear to be the whole explanation for the observed correlations. Two other factors also have crucial consequences for ingroup cohesion and outgroup hostility.

The first is *memory*: one-off traumatic experiences, especially ones that are surprising and consequential for participants, are remembered over longer time periods (and with greater vividness and accuracy) than less arousing events. Such memories have a canonical structure, sometimes referred to as ‘flashbulb memory’ (Conway 1995), specifying not only details of the event itself but what happened afterwards and who else was present. One hypothesis is that the procedures of traumatic rituals are ‘seared’ into the memories of participants thereby contributing to the persistence of ritual traditions over many generations, even in the absence of written records or other external mnemonic supports (Whitehouse 2000; for critical discussions see Barth 2002, Houseman 2002). Another postulated consequence of low-frequency dysphoric rituals is that they produce exclusive ritual communities. There is little scope for adding to or subtracting from ritual groups whose membership derives from uniquely encoded, one-off experiences: people are either remembered as co-participants or they are not (Whitehouse 1992, 2004).

A second and related factor appears to be *interpretive creativity*. Since the procedures entailed in rituals are a matter of stipulation, and are not transparently related to overall goals (if indeed those goals are articulated at all), the meanings of the acts present something of a puzzle for participants. In the case of traumatic ritual experiences that are recalled for many months and years after the actual event, questions of symbolism and purpose are typically a major focus of attention (Whitehouse 2000; see also Paez et al. 2005, 2007, 2009). In a series of experiments using artificial rituals and varying levels of arousal it has been shown that, after a time delay, the volume and specificity of spontaneous reflection on the meanings of rituals are significantly greater in high-arousal conditions than in controls (Richert, Whitehouse, and Stewart 2005). Similar effects have been observed in field studies, by systematically comparing the interpretive richness of people's accounts of rituals involving variable levels of arousal (Whitehouse 1995, Xygalatas 2007). Since low-frequency dysphoric rituals are typically also shrouded in secrecy and taboo, participants have little opportunity to compare the contents of their personal ruminations and so form the impression that their rich interpretations are shared by others undergoing the same experience, increasing the sense of camaraderie. Activities involving high risk and temptation to defect (e.g. raiding, head-hunting, bride-capture, sectarian violence, and gangland disputes) would seem to be correlated with the presence of low-frequency rituals involving severe physical and psychological tortures (Cohen et al. 2006).

Traumatic and painful rituals, or 'rites of terror' (Whitehouse 1996), produce intense cohesion in small groups, one of the hallmark features of the 'imagistic mode of religiosity'. More than simply a mode of religious expression, however, imagistic practices are best understood as a *mode of group formation*. Rites of terror bind together the warring tribes of many traditional societies studied by social anthropologists, for instance in West Africa (Hojberg 2004), native America (Verswijver 1992), and Melanesia (Barth 1987). But this method of building groups also features prominently in the traditions of military cells in modern armies and terrorist organizations as well as emerging spontaneously in civil conflicts such as the 1994 atrocities in Rwanda (Whitehouse 2004: Chapter 6).

## **2.2 High-Frequency, Low-Arousal Ritual and the Doctrinal Mode**

High-frequency ritual (or *routinization*) is a hallmark of world religions and their offshoots, but is also characteristic of a great many regional religions and ideological movements. Routinized rituals play a major role in the formation of large-scale identities, enabling strangers to recognize each other as members of a common in-group, facilitating trust and cooperation on a scale that would otherwise be impossible. This syndrome, the so-called 'doctrinal mode of religiosity', heralds not only the first large scale societies but also the first complex political systems in which roles and offices are understood to be detachable from the persons who occupy them. As in the case of imagistic dynamics, the strengths and limitations of human memory play an important role in the formation of the doctrinal mode.

When people participate in the same rituals on a daily or weekly basis it is impossible for them to recall the details of every occasion. Instead they represent the rituals and their meanings as *types* of behaviour – a Holy Communion or a Call to Prayer, for instance. Psychologists describe these representations as procedural scripts and semantic schemas (Baddeley 1997). Scripts and schemas specify what typically happens in a given ritual and what is generally thought to be its significance. In a group whose identity markers are composed mainly of scripts and schemas, what it means to be a member of the tradition is generalized beyond people of our acquaintance, applying to everyone who performs similar acts and holds similar beliefs. This route to the construction of communal identity, based on

routinization, is a necessary condition for the emergence of ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983) – large populations sharing a common tradition and capable of behaving as a coalition in interactions with non-members, *despite* the fact that no individual in the community could possibly know all the others, or even hope to meet all of them in the course of a lifetime.

Routinization has other important effects as well. For instance it allows very complex networks of doctrines and narratives to be learned and stored in collective memory, making it relatively easy to spot unauthorized innovations. Moreover, routinization artificially suppresses creativity, in effect producing more slavish conformism to group norms. Part of the reason seems to be that having achieved procedural fluency one no longer needs to reflect on *how* to perform the ritual and this in turn makes one less likely to reflect on *why* one should perform it. Thus routinization would seem to aid the transmission of doctrinal orthodoxies: traditions of belief and practice that are relatively *immune to innovation* and in which unintended deviation from the norm is *readily detectable*.

In light of the above, it would seem that routinized rituals provide a foundation for the establishment of large-scale communities, capable of encompassing indefinitely many individuals singing from the same hymn sheet (both literally and metaphorically). Expanding the size of the ingroup in this way has implications for the scale on which people can engage in cooperative behaviour, extending both *trust* and *tolerance* even to strangers, simply because they carry the insignia that display shared beliefs and practices. At the same time, however, the cohesion engendered through common membership of the tradition is less intensely felt than that accomplished in small groups undergoing rare and painful rituals together. In other words, as cohesion is expanded to encompass greater populations, it is also in an important sense spread more thinly.

Some routinized traditions, however, manage to get the best of both worlds: a mainstream tradition, constructed around regular worship under the surveillance of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, may tolerate much more colourful local practices, involving rare, dysphoric rituals (such as self-flagellation at Easter parades in the Philippines or walking on red hot coals among the Anastenaria of Northern Greece). While these localized practices undoubtedly produce highly solidary groups distinct from the mainstream tradition, the resulting cohesion can be projected onto the larger community, rejuvenating commitment to its unremitting regime of repetitive rituals (Whitehouse 1995). Other patterns are also possible, however. One grand theorist of Muslim society, Ernest Gellner, showed that rural tribes bound together by high-arousal rituals formed the most formidable little military units in Islam, capable of periodically toppling urban elites, whose more routinized rituals and doctrinal beliefs failed to generate the kind of cohesion needed to mount an effective defence (Gellner 1969). Other major patterns include periodic splintering and reformation (Pyysiainen 2004).

### **2.3 Modes of Religiosity and the Evolution of Religions**

Although much research inspired by the DMR theory has been concerned with understanding the effects of psychological affordances, biases, and constraints, efforts are now being made to model the ultimate causes of patterns of religious group formation over time (Whitehouse, Bryson, Hochberg, and Kahn *submitted*). What factors favour the appearance and persistence of routinized rituals and the large-scale communities they engender? Some recent efforts to answer this question have focused on the first appearance of routinized collective rituals in the Neolithic Middle East (Mithen 2004).

A watershed in the evolution of modes of religiosity seems to have occurred around 8,000 years ago at Catalhoyuk, in what is now Central Anatolia in Turkey (Whitehouse and Hodder 2010). In the early layers of Catalhoyuk, the imagistic mode prevailed. There much evidence of low-frequency, high-arousal rituals may be found, such as animal bones left over from hunting and feasting activities, pictorial representations of major rituals, and human remains manipulated in elaborate mortuary practices. These practices would have produced highly cohesive groups necessary for coordinated hunting of large, dangerous animals. The small scale of these groups may still be visible today in the deep trenches that appear to have divided communities in the earlier phases of settlement. But as hunting gradually gave way to farming, the need for such groups disappeared and instead more day-to-day forms of cooperation across the settlement were required to sustain novel forms of specialized labour, reciprocity, pooling, and storage. Sustainable exploitation of the commons now required the dissolution of small-group boundaries and inter-group rivalry in favour of larger-scale forms of collective identity, trust, and cooperation extending to tens of thousands of individuals at the enlarged settlement.

This change in the scale of political association was facilitated by the appearance of the first ever regular collective rituals, focused around daily production and consumption, and the spread of identity markers across the entire settlement, for instance in the form of stamp seals used for body decoration and more standardized pottery designs. The appearance and spread of routinized rituals seems to have been linked to the need for greater trust and cooperation when interacting with relative strangers. Consider the difficulties of persuading people you scarcely know that they should make long-term investments in your services based on a promise or should pay taxes or tribute in return for protection or sustenance in times of need. In the absence of more detailed information about trustworthiness of prospective trading partners or remote governors to fulfil their part of any bargain, shared insignia proclaiming commitment to common beliefs and practices becomes a persuasive form of evidence. In such conditions, groups with routinized rituals capable of uniting large populations will tend to out-compete those who lack shared identity markers of this kind.

### **3. Applying the DMR Theory to Rebel Groups**

Until now, applications of the DMR theory have been most extensively explored by scholars of religion. But McQuinn, who has many years of experience working in countries torn apart by civil war, realized that the theory has potential relevance for understanding competition and evolution among warring groups even those that eschew religious teachings of all kinds.

In this section we apply the DMR theory to five rebel groups: FARC-EP (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo), AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia), Lebanon (Hezbollah), CPN-Maoist (Community Party of Nepal – Maoist), and RUF (Revolutionary United Front - Sierra Leone). In selecting these five case studies, effort was made to ensure a variety of regions were represented globally. We include only armed groups that have operated for at least ten years so as to ensure sufficient data from secondary sources for the purposes of our analysis. Moreover we consider only rebel groups engaged in conflicts that at one point reach the level of ‘civil wars’, defined as civil conflicts producing more than 1,000 battle-related deaths in one year. Severity of conflict serves as a proxy, when combined with longevity, for an organization able to sustain itself and marshal substantial resources to its cause.

Evidence for the applicability of the DMR theory to our dataset is summarized in Table 2. The predictions in the table are grouped by mode (doctrinal and imagistic respectively). The strength of evidence supporting or contradicting each major prediction of the DMR theory is distinguished based on the legend below. It has five values: strong evidence for, weak evidence for, strong evidence against, weak evidence against, and no evidence. These evaluations are based on the number of corroborating sources for each prediction and the quality of each observation. Unlike many religions, rebel groups in our sample tended to exhibit the predictions of only one mode although this may be an effect of small sample size.

<b>Doctrinal Mode</b>						
<b>Feature</b>	<b>Predictions</b>	<b>CPN-Maoists</b>	<b>FAR C-EP</b>	<b>Hezbollah</b>	<b>AUC</b>	<b>RUF</b>
<b>1. Ritual frequency and arousal</b>	Low arousal/ high frequency	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
<b>2. Codification</b>	Elaborated ideology	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
<b>3. Exegesis</b>	Transmission to all members	☑	☑	N/E	N/E	N/E
<b>4. Scale (Integrated or Autonomous)</b>	Integrated	✓	✓	✓	✗	☒
<b>5. Rate and reach of Spread:</b>	Broadcast/ efficient	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
<b>6. Social Structure (Hierarchy)</b>	12-17 levels of hierarchy	✓	✓	✓	✗	☒
<b>7. Cohesion</b>	Expansionist/ Diffuse	N/E	N/E	N/E	N/E	N/E
<b>Imagistic Mode</b>						
<b>1. Ritual frequency and arousal</b>	High arousal/ low frequency	✗	✗	N/E	✓	✓
<b>2. Codification</b>	Absent or stagnant	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
<b>3. Exegesis</b>	Not transmitted	✗	✗	N/E	N/E	N/E
<b>4. Scale (Integrated or Autonomous)</b>	Autonomous	✗	✗	✗	✓	☑
<b>5. Rate and reach of Spread:</b>	Group oriented/ inefficient	✗	✗	✗	☒	☒
<b>6. Social Structure (Hierarchy)</b>	< 8 levels of hierarchy	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
<b>7. Cohesion</b>	Expansionist/ Diffuse	N/E	N/E	N/E	N/E	N/E
<b>Legend</b>						

- ✓ - Strong evidence for prediction
- ☑ - Weak evidence for prediction
- ✗ - Strong evidence against prediction
- ☒ - Weak evidence against prediction
- N/E - No evidence

***Table 2: Preliminary evidence of modes predictions***

In the sub-sections that follow we consider each of the two modes of group formation (imagistic and doctrinal) in turn, examining detailed evidence that the five rebel groups in our sample cluster around one or other of these respective modes, but not both.

### **3.1 Rebel Groups Operating in the Imagistic Mode**

Rebel groups utilize low-frequency, dysphoric rituals in a variety of ways but perhaps most commonly as part of the process of induction into the group. Initiatory ordeals are typically extremely painful or terrifying, documented cases including coerced acts of dismemberment, torture, or murder of captives (Human Rights Watch 2003). Human rights observers have documented the systematic use of such practices in the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), concluding that “execution [was] being [used as] a significant part of the paramilitary training process” (Ibid). According to one ex-member of the AUC, “They give you a gun and you have to kill the best friend you have. They do it to see if they can trust you. If you don’t kill him, your friend will be ordered to kill you” (Ibid). The inclusion of in-group members as targets of violence ratchets up the socially forbidden nature of the experience and creates a ‘culture of terror’ (Maclure 2006). Other documented practices in the AUC include assigning new recruits a human body part to be carried with them until it has rotted away (Botero 2002).

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone similarly incorporated infrequent but highly dysphoric rituals. RUF inductees were usually coercively recruited (Zack-Williams 2001). The process began by inductees witnessing or being forced to participate in the murder of family or community members (Bangura 2010; Human Rights Watch 1999; Maclure 2006). Reports and interviews with ex-combatants<sup>2</sup> suggest that these ritualized murders were later augmented by periodic acts of group violence like public executions (A. Kamara 2010a; Maclure 2006). The systematic drugging of recruits with stimulants also served to heighten the emotional and physical experience (Ibid), while lowering inhibitions and intensifying cognitive dissonance effects (C. Kamara 2010b; Prestholdt 2009; Richards 1994).

As is characteristic of groups operating in the imagistic mode neither the AUC nor the RUF exhibited an elaborated body of written texts. At its inception, the RUF published a political manifesto entitled, *The Basic Document of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL): The Second Liberation of Africa* (RUF-SL 1995). Yet upon close analysis, the document was plagiarized from another revolutionary group in Sierra Leone with which the RUF leaders had previous affiliations (Abdullah and Muana 1998). As Abdullah and Muana (1998) describe, “Parts of it were butchered to appear as Foday Sankoh's words. But the document had nothing to do with Sankoh or the RUF; it predated the formation of the RUF, and was appropriated by the RUF-to-be before they entered Kailahun [Sierra Leone] in 1991”

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<sup>2</sup> All interviewees referenced in this paper are assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy

(Abdullah and Muana 1998: 217). Importantly, no further ideological writings were produced after the publication of this document. A number of commentators have highlighted the lack of ideologues in the RUF and AUC (Abdullah 2004; Clapham 1998; Utas 2008). In the absence of codified ideology, groups operating in the imagistic mode generate highly idiosyncratic reflection on the significance of traumatic ritual ordeals. Testimonials from former AUC members who underwent systematic homicidal initiations reveal wide variation in participants' explanations of the purpose and meaning of the rituals they underwent (Human Rights Watch 2003: 64; 66; Bangura 2010; C. Kamara 2010b).

Patterns of scale and group structure in the RUF and AUC are also typical of the imagistic mode. The AUC was created as an umbrella organization for paramilitaries in December 1994 during a national summit of "like-minded groups" that was organized by the AUC's future leader Carlos Castaño Gil (Sanin 2008: 14; HRW 2003: 55-58). Before its demobilisation, the AUC was constituted by as many as 37 different sub-organisations, each with its own history and interests (AECID 2005). The AUC's leader described the relationship of these sub-units thus, "Each front is autonomous and responsible for its region in terms of funds and should take responsibility for or reject responsibility for actions that are attributed to them" (HRW 2003: 55-56). The autonomous nature of the organizations sub-units possesses challenges for the stability of the organization. Sanin (2008: 17) describes the results in the AUC, "In other terms, paramilitarism was a social success, in the sense that it propagated to all the country, was able to create dense and long social networks, and consolidate regional political support. But it was an organizational no-go, as it failed to establish a minimal internal cohesion to maintain stable regional structures, let alone build a national anti-subversive project." (Sanin 2008: 17) Although systematic evidence on the nature of the RUF's level of integration is sparser, interviews with former combatants suggests that the sub-elements of the organization existed as autonomous entities with little or no sense of common identity (Bangura 2010; A. Kamara 2010a; C. Kamara 2010b).

Preliminary evidence suggests that neither the AUC nor RUF possessed sophisticated hierarchies (Abdullah 2004; HRW 2010). It is clear from commentators that the RUF did not have any of the committee structures prevalent in more doctrinal rebel groups and was headed by a loose coalition of three leaders: Sankoh, Mansaray, and Kanu (Abdullah 1998, 221). Reports suggest that the RUF's hierarchy was made up of only three levels—senior leaders, regional commanders, and conscripts/captives—with little differentiation within echelons (Abdullah 1998, 232). Anecdotal evidence from journalists and interviews with ex-combatants suggest that a sophisticated military ranking structure did not exist in the RUF and Monikers like "Commander Blood" or "Colonel Kolon" were simply *noms de guerre* and were not an indication of military rank (Kleveman 2001). This was commented on by one Sierra Leone specialist, "A common feature in these wars was the military hierarchical terms used by the rebels or revolutionaries. These terms made absolutely no sense. One could meet a 14-year-old "commander" or a "company" of 10 year olds, an 18-year-old "general," a 28-year-old "high commander" (Golden 2005). Investigative reports of the AUC reflect this same lack of organizational formality. Each of the sub-organizations that collectively made up the AUC had distinct identities and operating structures (Sanin 2008: 15-16).

### **3.2 Rebel Groups Operating in the Doctrinal Mode**

Initial evidence from the CPN-Maoists, Hezbollah, and FARC-EP case studies strongly suggests that each organization relies heavily on the doctrinal mode of ritualized group cohesion. In all three groups, doctrine is typically adapted from a variety of political and religious teachings including Communism, Leninism, and Maoism. The appropriation of national symbols, traditional songs, and popular narratives serves as evocative vehicles for the transmission process. In these groups, collective ritual is centred around daily political and ideology training (Brittain 2010; Dudley 2004; Hanson 2009; Harik 2004; Harper 2003; Herrera and Porch 2008; Human Rights Watch 2003, 2010; International Crisis Group 2007a, 2009; Jaber 1997; Kunz and Sjöberg 2009; Norton 2007; Offstien 2003; Ortiz 2002; Penhaul 2000; Petras 2000; Ranstorp 1994; Saab 2009; Saad-Ghorayeb 2002; Sanín 2008). This includes not only transmission of ideological teachings but also group norms. Collective ritual is led by a recognized local commander or ideologue and involves elaborate and repetitive sermonizing to gatherings of combatants, usually composed of numerous sub-units (Botero 2002; Eck 2007; International Crisis Group 2005; Onesto 2005).

In FARC-EP, a highly regimented daily schedule must be observed by all combatants. For example, ideological training is scheduled after the first set of morning drills and between 3:00 and 4:00 pm (HRW 2003). These patterns of ideological training are highly standardized and enduring, having been a consistent feature of the organization since its inception 45 years ago (Brittain 2010). FARC combatants are also required to undertake individualized study following a curriculum that includes the writings of Che Guevara, Jacobo Arena, and Lenin (HRW 2003, 63). The studying is done individually or in pairs (Botero 2002: 1). For the Maoists (Nepal), political training is also an integral component of the indoctrination process and combatants' daily schedule (Onesto 2005; Ogura 2008). In interviews with journalists Maoist leaders emphasize their belief that regular ideological training facilitates cohesion and minimizes the risks of faction-formation (Eck 2004: 25). Maoist combatants, like their FARC counterparts, observe a highly regimented schedule with both daily political training in groups and designated times for individual and small group study (Onesto 2005: 205; Zharkevich 2009: 30). Hezbollah represents a particularly interesting example where religious and revolutionary ideologies are intermingled (Ranstorp 1997: 34-5; ICG 2002: 4; Moaddel 1992: 354). Routinized schedules are also evident in Hezbollah with daily prayer and regular mosque attendance serving as central tenets of the organizational culture. The political aspects of Hezbollah's ideology are integrated into daily religious practice to such an extent that they are hard to disentangle (Palme Harik 2004:16; Schleifer 2006: 10). Regular participation in group ideological transmission is thought to express and consolidate the strict control Hezbollah leaders maintain over the organization (Rand 2005: 53). In the initial stages of Hezbollah's formation the emphasis on the regular repetition of ideological-religious rituals was especially pronounced, focusing on the recruitment and indoctrination of the radical Shi'ites in Biq'a area (Ranstorp 1997: 34-5).

As in many religions dominated by the doctrinal mode, Maoists in Nepal go to considerable lengths to integrate transmission of Communist ideology into everyday life. The organization has prolific writers and theorists, producing thousands of publications. The organization explicitly describes Dr. Bhattra as its chief ideologue, overseeing and developing the ideological foundation of the movement. The 'Prachanda path' (named after the Maoist leader Prachanda), contextualized this ideology calling for ongoing urban insurrection and continued encirclement of the towns (International Crisis Group 2005). FARC-EP and Hezbollah also promulgate elaborate ideologies documented and broadcast through print, Internet, radio, and in the case of Hezbollah, its own TV network. Hezbollah's body of doctrine is unique in that it explicitly draws upon Iran's notion of the "velayat-e faqih" (rule of the Islamic Jurist) (International Crisis Group 2002). Hezbollah ideology is grounded in

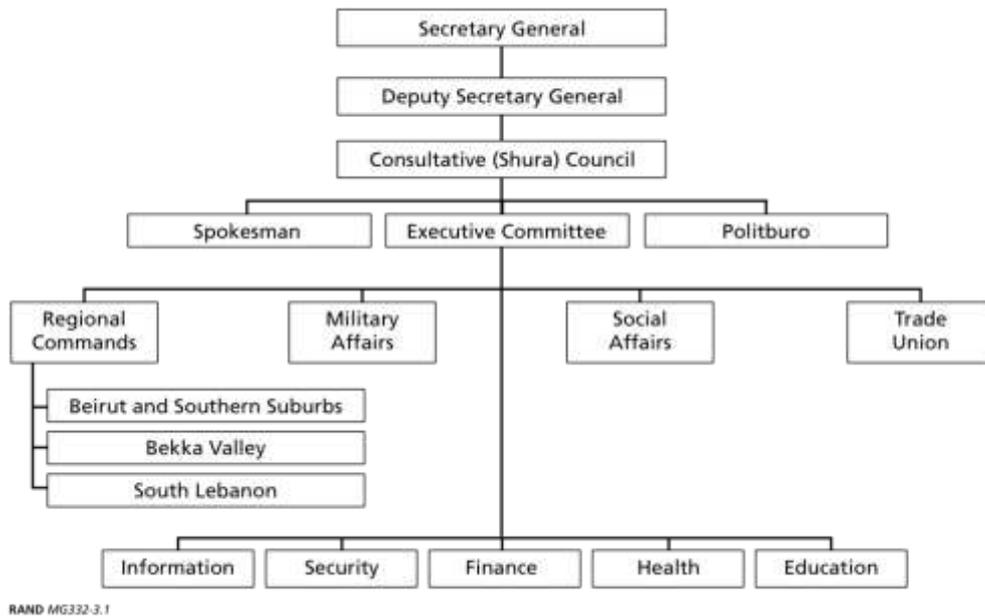
the Khomeini school of thought, “a mixture of Islamic and revolutionary secular motifs, taken from the arsenal of Shi’a fundamentalism, on the one hand, and the annals of twentieth-century national liberation movements, on the other” (Schleifer 2006). In all three rebel groups considered here, stable reproduction of the orthodoxy carries a high premium and infractions and unauthorized innovations are sanctioned.

Rebel groups operating in the doctrinal mode, much like world religions and their offshoots, tend to be hierarchical and centralized. FARC-EP exhibits an elaborated structure; its own documentation describes a ranking structure that includes seventeen levels of military rank (FARC-EP 1999). This level of sophistication is equivalent to many national military ranking structures. Various researchers with direct access to FARC-EP document the functioning of this system across the organization (Brittain 2010: 27; Sanin 2008: 8). Testimony collected from former FARC-EP combatants led Human Rights Watch (HRW) to conclude “that the FARC-EP is a highly vertical, organized, and disciplined military force.” (HRW 2003: 77) Other commentators have described FARC-EP as possessing a highly integrated and disciplined chain of command (Herrera and Porch 2008). Sanin’s analysis mirrors this conclusion, “Internally, the FARC-EP is characterized by verticalism. There is a clear line of command and any act of insubordination can be punished with death...” (2008: 13)

The CPN-Maoists structure is made up of “the standing, committee, politburo, central committee, divisional commands, regional bureaus, sub-regional bureaus, district, area and cell committees”(ICG 2005). Prachanda, the CPN-Maoist leader, sustained high levels of direct command over divisions despite growing numbers of combatants near the end of the war (Ogura 2008; ICG 2010). Just prior to the beginning of the peace process in Nepal, the International Crisis Group (ICG 2005) determined that, “The writ of Prachanda still runs throughout the Maoist movement, and central-level decisions are fed down to the regional, district and village levels. There have been no major disruptions to this chain of command, so to extent the movement remains united and disciplined. The reason is a well organised national command structure firmly in the grip of the central leadership” (ICG 2005: 13). As an example, in June 2002 during the central committee plenary the organization was reorganized into three divisions with the explicit purpose to ensure discipline and control of the central committee (ICG 2005: 9). Other examples of centralized control can be seen in anecdotal reports of interventions to correct incidents of corruption. One such report concerned local commanders who tried to make money out of the medicinal yarcha gumba trade but were strongly reprimanded when central leadership learned of the practice and required the unit, “to return the trade to its traditional private dealers, and confiscated and remitted the ill-gotten gains to the Maoist central treasury” (ICG 2005: 13).

Hezbollah also exhibits a similarly well-organized hierarchy with complex committee structures and specialized departments (see Figure 3 for an overview of Hezbollah’s organizational structure). A recent evaluation by Jackson (2005: 43) concludes, “... Hizbollah is not composed of loose radical Islamic groupings but has developed a highly sophisticated hierarchical organisational structure, where decisions are taken from the top command leadership...” Yet the military pressure by the Israeli forces has meant there are clear separation between units to prevent infiltration and limit the effect of intelligence leaks (Cody and Moore 2006). The ability of the organization to deploy new military techniques and share intelligence among fire-walled fighting units is further evidence of a highly integrated communication network (Schleifer 2006).

**Figure 3.1**  
**Organizational Structure of Hizballah**



**Figure 3: Organizational Structure of Hizballah (from Jackson 2005)**

The modes theory predicts that routinized movements will be capable of rapid expansion through the broadcasting of ideology to new recruits by word-of-mouth and especially one-to-many broadcasting by proselytizing leaders. For instance, Maoists in Nepal developed sophisticated outreach strategies, propagating their ideology and training political cadres before beginning violent opposition to the government. Eck (2004: 13) summarizes the process,

“In 1995, the Maoists began a year-long campaign to build support amongst the peasantry in the western districts of Rolpa, Rukum, and Jajarkot. This campaign involved a number of measures, such as sending political-cultural teams into villages, organizing peasants to challenge local authorities, and mobilizing villagers for infrastructure improvement such as building roads and bridges.”

Operas and cultural performances combined local songs and cultural symbols with Maoist ideology, relating Maoist military victories and highlighting police brutality (Stirr 2010). Journalists and other media representatives were often invited to attend. Small teams would go door-to-door proselytizing the Maoists struggles and values (Onesto 2005).

Likewise, the rapid spread of Hezbollah in Biq’a, Beirut, and southern Lebanon is often attributed to the movement’s ability to reach and mobilize the destitute Shi’ite community. This included working through the existing networks of radical Shi’ite organizations and religious institutions (ICG 2002: 4). Yet it was the involvement of two imams, Sheikhs Abbas Al-Musawi and Subhi al-Tufayli, that proved decisive in Hezbollah’s expansion. Through their sermons and writings, each attracted large numbers of Shi’a followers in the Bir al-‘Abed quarters of southern Beirut (Ransport 1997: 37). Over time, Hezbollah’s broadcasting capacity expanded to include newspapers (al-Ahd), radio (Voice of the Oppressed) and television stations (Al-Manar). This allowed its leaders to propagate its ideological message and shape the community’s perception of the organization (Ransport 1997: 39).

FARC-EP developed a similarly sophisticated broadcasting capacity over the 46 years it has operated in Colombia. As an example, it possesses six mobile radio transmitters and can reach an estimated 45% of the country (Penhaul 2000). Like the Maoists, FARC-EP has also appropriated national songs and narratives as a platform for FARC-EP ideology. FARC-EP has also developed radio and TV soap operas that are very popular and widely broadcasted (Penhaul 2000: 5). Like doctrinal religious traditions, the spread of the organization is determined by the acceptance of the values and narratives it espouses. The more broadly these are shared in a community the more readily the group's support base can be extended.

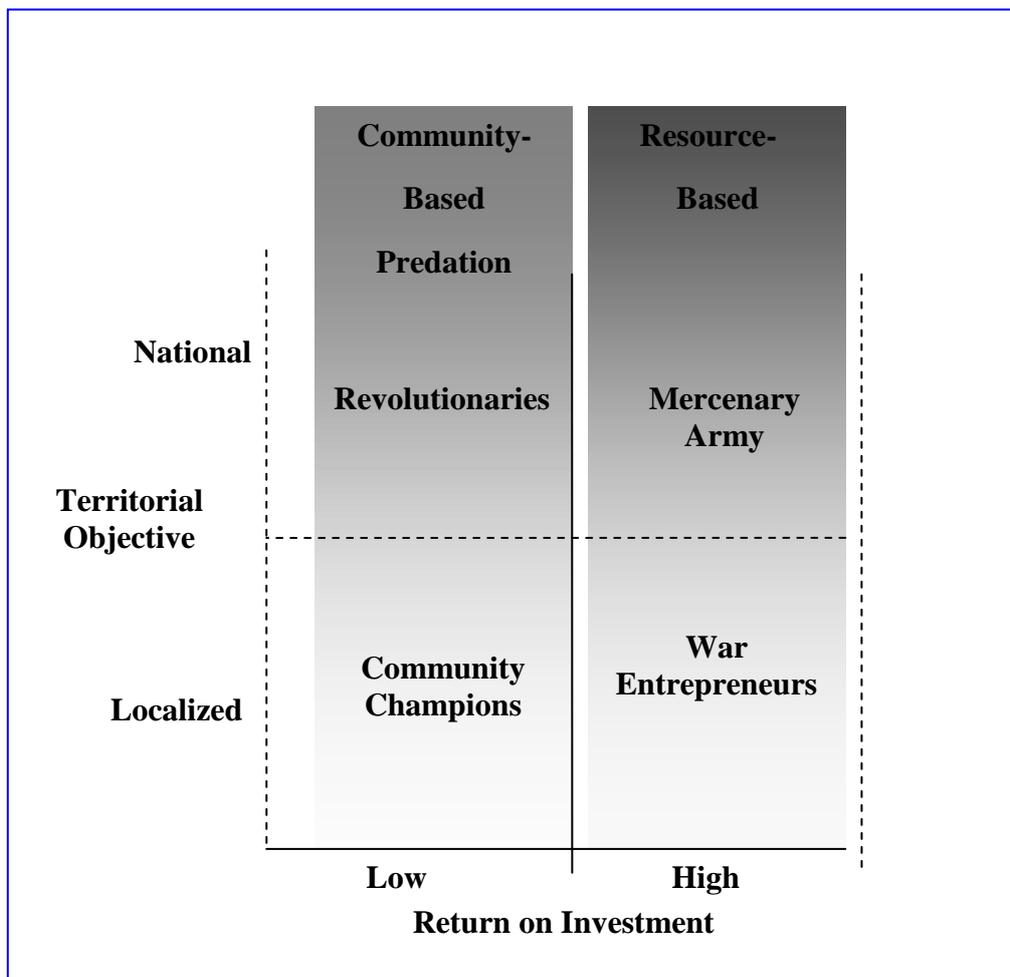
### **3.3 Combining Proximate and Ultimate Explanations for Rebel Group Formation**

Explaining why some rebel groups (e.g. Maoists, FARC-EP, and Hezbollah) tend to be dominated by the doctrinal mode while others (e.g. AUC, RUF) tend to be dominated by the imagistic mode can be partly explained in terms of cultural group selection (refs). We have already observed that religious organizations are adaptations to particular ecological problems. In particular, imagistic dynamics enjoy a selective advantage where access to resources essential for group survival depends on unusually high levels of social cohesion, reducing the risks of defection in the face of danger. Doctrinal dynamics, by contrast, enjoy a selective advantage where group success requires deference to a common cause across large or rapidly expanding populations. Might the same be said of rebel groups?

CPN-Maoists are a highly ideological organization spread across an inaccessible country. The group's primary source of revenue is derived from donations and 'taxes' extracted from local communities and businesses in one of the poorest countries in the world (Pande 2004). This resource ecology combined with Nepal's rugged terrain make coordination and revenue collection difficult. The Maoists are a highly ideological and disciplined force not simply because its leaders are thus inclined but rather because a doctrinal mode of operation has proven to be highly adaptive to the group's resourcing needs. In contrast, the resourcing strategies of the RUF required little investment in the hearts and minds of a large population. The ease of surface mining for diamonds combined with the geographic concentration of the mines produced high pay-offs with little investment (e.g. labour). Under such circumstances, a highly militarized organization exhibiting limited hierarchy and intense cohesion, and hence an imagistic mode of group formation, is highly adaptive.

A new model, the Predation Profile Matrix, informs these conclusions (Beardsley and McQuinn 2009). This model distinguishes community-based and resource-based extraction strategies, associated with distinct group morphology with divergent implications for levels of militarization, command structure, and relations with local communities. The two extraction strategies are cross-cut by the stated territorial goals of groups (distinguishing those seeking a separate homeland from those vying for national control). The result is a matrix that creates four categories of groups: war entrepreneurs, mercenary armies, community champions, and revolutionaries (see Table 3 below).

Preliminary research suggests that when armed groups are plotted onto the matrix, they exhibit remarkably similar characteristics *within* quadrants and starkly contrasting characteristics *between* quadrants (Beardsley and McQuinn 2009). Future efforts to overcome the limitations of small sample sizes in this initial study will draw on the UCDP/PRIO conflict dataset on all civil war armed groups since 1945. This future research will not be limited to three original characteristics of armed groups but include aspects of the civil war itself (e.g. duration and intensity of the violence) and the nature of the post-war transition (e.g. success of armed groups in elections).



*Table 3: Predation Matrix (from Beardsley and McQuinn 2009)*

#### **4. Conclusions**

The DMR theory has been used to explain a number of long-standing puzzles in the study of religion. For instance, historians and biologists have used this theory to explain why routinized religions sometimes break up into splinter-groups or sects and why reformations occur (Gragg 2004; Hinde 2005; Pyysiainen 2004). Archaeologists have used the theory to account for the great transition from small-scale Neolithic societies to the vast and complex civilizations of the Near East, Mediterranean, and North Africa (Mithen 2004, Johnson 2004, Whitehouse and Hodder 2010). The modes theory has now been tested against over a hundred case studies based on ethnography (e.g. collected essays in Whitehouse and Laidlaw 2004, 2007), history and archaeology (e.g. collected essays in Whitehouse and Martin 2004, Martin and Whitehouse 2005, Pachis and Martin 2009), and the cognitive sciences (e.g. collected essays in Whitehouse and McCauley 2005, McCauley and Whitehouse 2005). Some of the evidence needed to test the modes theory were not available from established scholarship and so a number of new field research projects have been undertaken, targeting data collection towards areas where evidential needs of the theory were especially great (Barrett 2005, Xygalatas 2007). To obviate potential problems of researcher and selection bias, additional strategies have been adopted, including experimental research (e.g. Richert, Whitehouse, and Stewart 2005), and the construction of large-scale comparative datasets

coding selected features of ethnographic descriptions of hundreds of rituals (e.g. Atkinson and Whitehouse 2010).

As research guided by the DMR theory has progressed, its applicability beyond the domain of 'religion' has become increasingly clear and host of new research questions have emerged. There remains much to discover about how people learn the rituals of their communities and how rituals promote social cohesion within the group and distrust of groups with different ritual traditions. Longitudinal databases are urgently needed to explore the evolution of ritual, resource extraction patterns, and group structure and scale over significant time periods. This approach will feature prominently in a new programme of research, funded by a Large Grant from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, running from 2011 until 2016. Whitehouse's new project will involve more systematic and in-depth research on rebel groups in Colombia and Nepal as well as controlled psychological experiments in war-torn regions of the Middle East, to explore the effects of ritual participation on ingroup cohesion and outgroup hostility.

In this chapter we have argued that the contrasting patterns of social and political organization of groups specified by the DMR theory, the one small-scale and intensely cohesive and the other large-scale and diffusely cohesive, may be widely manifested in armed groups publicly committed to waging civil wars. We believe the DMR theory holds significant potential for explaining broad patterns in intergroup violence and the dynamics of contemporary civil wars. Expanding the reach of the theory may change the way cognitive, social, and evolutionary scientists understand the role of ritual in coalitional behaviour and decision-making in explaining contemporary civil war and contribute to a richer understanding of the relationship between religion, ritual, and violence.

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