

# Preface

My working title for this book was 'Dead Men's Tales'. Unfortunately, it had to be rejected because it received too many hits in Google (104 million) – especially popular films, TV series, pirate books etc, which came first in an online search. Reluctantly I had to let it go, even though losing it lost the signifier: 'the dead keep their secrets'. This, I believe, perfectly summarised my core topic, which is to focus on men of the forefront generation who, between the 1920s and the 1950s, pioneered comparative communications research, who worked in the United States and who have now been almost forgotten. They took their secrets with them, and even extensive archival research reveals only fragments of their lived lives as a route to understanding their work. Later generations of scholars either forgot the forefront generation and their work or presented them in a less than complimentary light – perhaps only to show why the newcomers' work was superior to that of the pioneers.

The new title, 'Dead Men's Propaganda', also signals the obvious, but too seldom acknowledged, gender obliviousness of histories of intellectual achievements and the gender bias that, largely, excluded women from scholarly work. I did not intend to write a book almost exclusively about men but the further I progressed in my research, the clearer it became that women were largely absent from the comparative research of the period I was writing about. *Dead Men's Propaganda: Ideology and Utopia in Comparative Communications Studies* emphasises the gender wall I hit in my research, and it may, even if reluctantly, strengthen a version of history that canonises great men. But it does reflect what my book is about.

## Analysing historical materials wearing conceptual lenses

As a social scientist I have learned to apply, if not a theoretical framework, theoretical concepts to empirical research, whether contemporary or historical. It took a long time for me to find the right conceptual heuristic to order and analyse the rich empirical materials on which I have drawn. The core concepts highlighted in the title, ideology and utopia, surprisingly did not come from far away but from a predecessor at my own university: from Karl Mannheim at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) where I have worked for more than 20 years. Of course, I knew about Mannheim's work before starting on the long enquiry which has been crystallised

in this book, especially his concept of a generation, but re-reading his work and learning about his life made me aware of how unfairly LSE treated him; how he has almost been written out of LSE's history and perhaps from the British history of sociology. The contribution of émigré scholars, notably from Central and Eastern Europe, to the growth of communications research is well known but Mannheim had the misfortune to be a doubly displaced émigré scholar (from Hungary and then from Germany) – as did others I consider in this work – notably Nathan Leites and Paul Kecskemeti. This is why I also needed Robert Merton's concepts of Insider/Outsider to undertake this work in the historical sociology of knowledge. Mannheim and Merton brought in two different intellectual traditions, the European and the American, which united, and divided, many of the figures about whom I write in this book. What unified the cases examined in my study? One central person was, of course, Harold Lasswell, whose wartime work brought together several of the émigré scholars whom I consider here, in their analysis of enemy propaganda.

## The importance of propaganda research

I did not want to write here a history of a discipline, or a field, of communications studies, rather I wanted to show what potentially happens before research is 'disciplined' in the writing of a history of a field. I was, and am, interested in who is remembered as an Insider and who is forgotten as an Outsider by the generations that follow. To understand how ideologies and utopias operate I included scholars whose names we know, such as Lasswell, but also, émigré scholars from Europe such as Kecskemeti and Leites, and men of practice, non-academics, such as Kent Cooper of the Associated Press, who contributed to policy science as much as did many of the academics. I chose émigré scholars from what is coming to be known as 'the Other Frankfurt School', many frequently forgotten, as was the Outsider central to my conceptual scheme, Mannheim. This is why I focus on anti-communist émigré scholars, several of whom ended up doing policy science in the RAND Corporation in California rather than in universities, again disregarded by disciplinary histories. In my view, a historical sociology of knowledge needs to be understood in a larger societal context if we are to understand the opportunities and pressures academic and non-academic researchers face in different historical periods, if they are to survive and develop their work.

The pioneering comparative work I focus on centres on propaganda, a topic that again needs our attention in our increasingly turbulent contemporary world. There is simply so much valuable work, ignored for decades, that has again become relevant. However, it is important to remember that the men I consider did not only research propaganda, but they were also propagandists (how else to understand the architecture of the canonical work *Four Theories of the Press* by Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm?). This is one of the dilemmas of policy science: how do researchers maintain their

independence and critical thinking when their research is financed by interested parties? Few would object to scholars working in the Allied war effort to hasten the defeat of the Axis powers – but Cold War warriors and those whose professional advancement depended on toeing funders' lines are more controversial. There are general and inescapable questions here: do researchers set aside their own utopias and conform to dominant ideologies supported by accepted institutions? Should researchers put aside their own values, ideologies, and defer to others' utopias? How does independent research survive when ideologies are as strong as they were in the post-World War II world in the United States? Who provides a safer work environment for independent research: universities or research institutes?

### **Why a reader should read this book**

I have intentionally written this book for readers outside my own field of media and communications studies. Most of my theoretical concepts come from outside my field, primarily from sociology and from its subfield, the sociology of knowledge. By applying theoretical concepts to historical materials from numerous archives (listed at the end of this book), I am hoping to reach both those interested in social science and transatlantic history, and not only in the US, but beyond as well, even though most of the research featured took place in the US. The period I research, from the 1920s until the 1950s, largely pre-dates the establishment of the field of communications studies and included political scientists, sociologists, psychologists and non-academics who pioneered comparative communications research, but also émigré scholars who came from Europe to escape Nazi terror and contributed significantly to the discipline. By introducing names who were not included in the Frankfurt School, I am hoping to reach those interested in the role of European émigré scholars. And anybody who is interested in war propaganda research may discover how much important work has already been done by academics and non-academics.

Finally, I hope this book will help all of us realise how much our own fields, whether comparative studies in general or international communication in particular, have been influenced by work done almost a hundred years ago. It enables us to see that our research rests on ideologies and utopias alive at the time when our concepts were first created and used. All this calls for a Mannheimian historical sociology of knowledge, and I hope this is what I have contributed to in this book. Sometimes the dead do talk but only if we listen to them!