



The Role of Religion in the Recruitment of Militant-Jihadis in the UK.

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to analyse the role of religion in the recruitment of militant-jihadis in the UK, specifically focusing on the group Al-Muhajiroun. The research primarily focuses on the religious ideology propagated by the group, the extent to which these ideas are rooted in scripture, as well as the scholars they cite to justify their beliefs. There is also a discussion on the ‘process of persuasion’ that takes place during the recruitment process, in order to fully assess the extent to which religion is a motivating factor for potential joiners, noting any other relevant factors that may lead to individuals seeking out this organization, and others like it. By drawing comparisons to other related groups, such as Hizb-ut Tahrir, as well as various new religious movements (such as the Moonies), the research is able to demonstrate that Islamic activism (even in its militant forms) is not unique, and that the role of Islam and religion generally has been overemphasized in this recruitment and radicalization process.

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Introduction

There are a number of terror attacks that have been committed in the last two decades which claimed to have been enacted ‘in the name of Islam’, perhaps the most notable of these being the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. in 2001. This event shocked the world, and sparked a wider, global discussion about Islam’s place in a western, secular society. The pre-existing societal tension was escalated further in the UK, when a group identifying themselves by the name of Al-Muhajiroun, organized a demonstration outside their offices in Tottenham, North London, on the second anniversary of the attacks, venerating the plane-hijackers as ‘the Magnificent Nineteen’, and describing the attacks as ‘good deeds in the eyes of Islam’.¹ Naturally, this generated a great deal of animosity amongst the British public, and the group developed a reputation for their media stunts but were initially not perceived as a threat.

However, this perception of Al-Muhajiroun (AM) was dramatically changed after the events of the July 7 bombings in 2005, where the lead perpetrator Mohammed Siddique Khan, was known to have attended multiple talks hosted by Omar Bakri Muhammad (former leader of AM). In discovering the group’s connection to the perpetrator, further investigation was conducted, with British terror analyst Raffaello Pantucci connecting AM to half of the terror plots (either carried out or foiled by police) in the United Kingdom between the years 1995-2005, demonstrating that the group posed a real, tangible threat to society. This resulted in renewed discussions about the role of Islam in society, as well as ‘Britishness’, and far right groups such as the English Defence League (EDL) were able to capitalise on the anger and fear of the public, which every-day, peace-loving British Muslims felt the real-life implications of.

This dissertation directly deals with the role of religion in the recruitment of militant-jihadis in the UK. This research takes a case study approach, focusing primarily on AM for two reasons.

¹ Sean O’Neil ‘ “Magnificent 19” Praised by Muslim Extremists *The Telegraph* 12 September 2003
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1441270/Magnificent-19-praised-by-Muslim-extremists.html>

Firstly, by their own admission, the group share ninety-five percent of the same ideological precepts as the other militant-jihadist groups in the UK,² which allows the findings to be somewhat generalised. Secondly, the group is perhaps the most visible out of all the groups active in the UK, as they have not shied away from media attention, gaining much notoriety for their publicity stunts, therefore making them easier to research. The first chapter discusses the creation of AM, focusing on the activities of the two key members, Omar Bakri Muhammad, and Anjem Choudary, as well as the significant events that occurred under their leadership, such as the legal issues faced by the group and its various offshoot organizations. The second chapter deals with the religious ideology of the group, with particular attention given to Salafism, which is the branch of Islam that AM adopted, as well as specific concepts that are emphasized, such as Jihad and Martyrdom. The third chapter will provide a discussion on the 'process of persuasion' that occurs during the recruitment process, detailing the role of religion, as well as other factors that may predispose an individual to join the ranks of the group. Finally, there will be a concluding section, discussing the key findings of this research in greater detail, and discussing the extent to which religion plays a role in the recruitment process of AM.

² Quintan Wiktorowicz *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (2005) pg 77

Chapter 1: The Origins of Al-Muhajiroun

Before we can begin to analyse the religious ideology espoused by Al-Muhajiroun, it would be helpful to first have a better understanding of how the movement came into being, by focusing on the key figures who helped to establish and influence the ideology of the group, discussing the legal issues faced, as well as noting the more recent activities of its various splinter organizations.

Omar Bakri Muhammad

Omar Bakri Muhammad was born in Syria in 1958 and had a long history of activism from a young age, joining the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood at the age of fifteen. In 1977 he fled Syria from the security services and relocated to Beirut, where he became affiliated with Hizb ut-Tahrir (arabic for Party of Liberation). He completed a brief stint of study at the renown Al-Azhar University in Cairo, but clashed with his professors over his activist views, eventually forcing him to restart his studies in the Islamic School of Saltiyah in Mecca. It was here that he quickly set up a Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) cell and sent requests to the nearest branch of leadership to commence activism, which was rejected due to leadership being concerned about mobilization, and not wanting to anger the Saudi monarchy at the time. Despite this, Bakri continued his activism, claiming to recruit some thirty-eight members by 1983.³ This prompted the group to suspend his membership, which he ignored, continuing to work as a member under the new name of *al-Muhajiroun, wilayat al-Jazira al-arabiyya* (the Emigrants, Arabian Peninsula region) which he established in Mecca.⁴ The movement underwent a series of arrests

³ Raffaello Pantucci *We Love Death As You Love Life: Britain's Suburban Terrorists* pg 89

⁴ Quintan Wiktorowicz *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* pg 8

between 1984-5, which resulted in a significant drop in membership, and the deportation of Bakri from Saudi Arabia in 1986.

Because of previous business travel, Bakri had a visa for the UK, and settled in London. He began organizing a HT cell with the support of the German *amir* (commander) almost immediately. Under his leadership, the new cell was able to attract a substantial number of new members, (estimated around four-hundred members in 1990) and particularly university students. Bakri has noted that his own activism from 1990 onwards became much ‘bolder’⁵ organising increasingly controversial demonstrations which generated a media frenzy around himself and the group. A particularly controversial statement was made in 1991, when Bakri stated that Prime Minister John Major could be a ‘legitimate target’ for assassination if he went to Saudi Arabia, which was understood as a direct death threat. Bakri later claimed that he only meant that Major would be seen as such if he went to a Muslim country.⁶ Despite the overall success of the British branch under Bakri, the leadership expressed their concerns over his aggressive activism and were angered by the media attention, which did not focus on the political ideologies of the party.⁷ Additionally, whilst Bakri and HT leadership agreed on the establishment of an Islamic caliphate and implementing *shari’a* (islamic) law, HT wanted to limit this project to countries which they felt they would have the most success (Muslim majority countries). However, Bakri argued that the group should try to convert the United Kingdom to Islam, rather than just recruiting people to support the HT efforts abroad. This proved to be the conclusive factor that solidified the inevitable splintering of the group. According to HT spokesperson Taji Mustafa, Bakri was formally removed from the group with the support of the worldwide amir Abdul Qadeem Zaloum due to his refusal to curtail media activity, but Bakri disputed this claim, arguing that the UK amir asked him to stay on as an informal leader, and so never told his members of the change until he formally resigned in January 1996, officially established Al-Muhajiroun (AM) as a separate entity days later.

Creating Al-Muhajiroun

⁵ Mahan Abedin, “Al-Muhajiroun in the UK: An Interview with Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad” *Jamestown Spotlight on Terror Volume 2 Issue 5* May 25th 2005 <https://jamestown.org/interview/al-muhajiroun-in-the-uk-an-interview-with-sheikh-omar-bakri-mohammed/#.VTatGvnF8no>

⁶ Audrey Gillan “Many Faces of Bakri, Enemy of West, Press Bogeyman and Scholar” *The Guardian* 13th August 2005 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/aug/13/terrorism.syria1>

⁷ Michael Kenney ‘Interview with leading activists, Ilford, East London’, November 13, 2010 found in *Islamic State in Britain* (2018) pg 11

The official establishment of AM can be dated to January 15 1996, in which Bakri, Anjem Choudary, and Farid Kassim (who later left) formed the organization as a splinter group of HT. Whilst AM differs from HT, it must be noted that many of the political views and aims of the group were retained. An example of this is that both groups aim to establish an Islamic political order derived directly from shari'ah, making them both Islamist in nature (although it must be noted that the term Islamist is a contentious one, and despite some misconceptions, violence is not a characteristic of Islamism).⁸ In addition to this, both groups can be identified as Pan-Islamist, which can be defined as a form Muslim Nationalism, seeking to coordinate solidarity between Muslims globally through political and economic cooperation, and serving as an important motivator in recruiting Muslim support against 'foreign aggressions'.⁹ Nevertheless, there are some crucial differences that can be established between the two groups.

Firstly, in terms of membership, AM is much more informal, with no formal contract to sign or *bayat* (pledge) to take. Membership is based on both administrative and intellectual affiliation, which requires members to participate in AM activities (such as *da'wa* stalls) and internalize its ideology by attending *halaqas* (study circles).¹⁰ Secondly, even though both groups believe in re-establishing the caliphate by military coups, HT places a limit upon this project and applies it to countries they perceive they will have the most success, which tends to be Muslim majority countries. However, AM argued that Britain should be included, on the grounds that God commands the establishment of his rule on earth, and does not specify a location, making the UK as much of a priority as other countries.¹¹ Thirdly, HT tends to disassociate itself from the jihad propagated by groups such as Al-Qaeda, which involves a *takfiri* approach (declaring other Muslims as apostates or non-believers). This is because they believe this form of jihad cannot be waged by those not directly affiliated to the Islamic state. However, AM has vocalised their support for groups such as Al-Qaeda, so much so that after the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, AM adopted a more salafi-based approach to their militant jihadism, even adopting the Salafi *aqeeda* (creed), a belief system which became central to the organization.¹² Finally, AM adopted a higher profile style of moral correction, which has led them to be more confrontational in their attitudes and actions, particularly

⁸ Sam Mullins 'Home-Grown' Jihad: Understanding Islamist Terrorism in the US and UK (2016) pg 293

⁹ 'Pan-Islamism' The Oxford Dictionary of Islam. Ed. John L. Esposito. Oxford Islamic Studies Online. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1819>

¹⁰ Kenney, Islamic State in Britain (2018) pg 101

¹¹ Wiktorowicz Radical Islam Rising (2005) pg 10

¹² Abedin, "Al-Muhajiroun in the UK" Jamestown Spotlight on Terror Volume 2 Issue 5 May 25th 2005 <https://jamestown.org/interview/al-muhajiroun-in-the-uk-an-interview-with-sheikh-omar-bakri-mohammed/#.VTatGvnF8no>

towards other Muslim groups as well as the government. Ultimately, what can be established is that the AM ideology is a synthesis of the political views and goals of HT, combined with a Salafi approach that directs its activists to strive for the Caliphate in Britain, because they feel they are divinely obligated to do so.

It was this totalitarian, absolutist, action-based ideology that appealed so much to its members, and allowed Bakri to draw in recruits from HT, as many members were left dissatisfied with the vague descriptions about the superiority of Islamic systems, and did little to answer the relevant social issues affecting British Muslims communities.¹³ This factor, combined with Bakri's popularity amongst the Muslim youths, and his ability to give passionate speeches and engage with an audience, made him a threat amongst other competing organizations. During this time that he began to form close working relations with rival preachers, such as Abu Hamza, who was able to exert some influence on Bakri's ideology, compelling him to move towards the Salafi ideology. It was by working in close proximity to these preachers that allowed him to differentiate himself and AM from alternative groups such as Abu Hamza's Supporters of Shariah, by insisting his followers were actually practically taking steps towards implementing the Islamic State in Britain, instead of just talking about it.¹⁴

AM managed to develop a reputation in the media for their provocative and morally shocking demonstrations, from da'wa stalls to protests and conferences. One of their events which gained them a great deal of notoriety was on the second anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, in which they organized a press conference and referred to the plane hijackers as the 'Magnificent Nineteen Martyrs' and spoke of the 'good deed' they committed.¹⁵ Bakri has often insisted that he and AM were not supporting acts of terrorism, but that the media were at fault for misrepresenting what was said, although arguably such statements are difficult to misconstrue.

Despite the bids for media attention, it would be a mistake to simply brand AM as a group of loud-mouth nuisances. British terror analyst Raffaello Pantucci has connected AM to half of the terror plots (either carried out or foiled by police) in the United Kingdom between the years

¹³ Sadek Hamid *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism* (2016) pg 49

¹⁴ Kenney *Islamic State in Britain* (2018) pg 84

¹⁵ Jason Burke 'Fury at Muslim Talks in Memory of 9/11 Hijackers' *The Guardian* September 7th 2003
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/07/terrorism.immigrationpolicy>

1995-2005.¹⁶ This statistic demonstrates that AM has at some time or another been affiliated with the most extreme militant-jihadis in the country, which arguably could be indicative of the wide-reaching impact of their totalitarian ideology. Some of the most infamous terrorist attacks to occur on British soil can be attributed to either past or current members of AM, an example being Mohammed Siddique Khan, who was a perpetrator in the 7/7 bombings in London 2005, and was known to attend talks by both Bakri and Choudary, albeit infrequently.¹⁷ Approximately a month after the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005, Bakri fled the UK for Lebanon, anticipating the government crack-down on activists and organisations present in the country. The Home Secretary announced that Bakri would be barred from returning to the country on the grounds that ‘his presence [was] not conducive to the public good’.¹⁸ In 2014, Bakri was arrested due to being involved with the establishment of training camps in Lebanon on behalf of the militant-jihadist Al-Nusra Front in Syria, and was sentenced to six years of hard labour.¹⁹

Anjem Choudary

Choudary was born in 1967 in Welling, Kent, where he grew up in a non-religious household, and attended the University of Southampton to pursue a degree in medicine. Choudary is known to have come from a secular background, garnering a reputation as a ‘party animal’, consuming alcohol and drugs, and subsequently failed his first year exams. He then switched to Law, which he completed and became a fully practising lawyer, becoming the Chairman of the Muslim Society of Lawyers until being removed from the roll in 2002.²⁰ Choudary began exploring religion in the 1990’s, taking a particular interest in the Muslim community, and visited a local mosque where Bakri happened to be giving a *tafsir* (an explanation of Qur’anic verses).

¹⁶ Loulla-Mae Eleftheriou Smith “Radical Islamist group Al-Muhajiroun linked to half of British Terror attacks in past 20 years” *The Independent* Monday 23rd March 2015
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/radical-islamist-group-al-muhajiroun-linked-to-half-of-british-terror-attacks-in-past-20-years-10128492.html>

¹⁷ Kenney *Islamic State in Britain* (2018) pg 221

¹⁸ Jenny Stanton ‘Tottenham Hate Preacher Omar Bakri’s Son Killed Fighting for ISIS’ *Daily Mail* 29th December 2015
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3377973/Son-Tottenham-Ayatollah-killed-Iraq-sources.html>

¹⁹ Stanton ‘Tottenham Hate Preacher Son Killed Fighting for ISIS’ *Daily Mail* 29th December 2015
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3377973/Son-Tottenham-Ayatollah-killed-Iraq-sources.html>

²⁰ Murray Wardrop ‘Anjem Choudary: Profile’ *The Telegraph* 4th January 2010
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/6930447/Anjem-Choudary-profile.html>

After this initial meeting, Choudary became a devout follower of Bakri, leaving HT with him to establish AM, becoming the spokesman for the group, and later taking over leadership of the various offshoot groups after Bakri's eviction from the country. Like his leader, Choudary was seen as an engaging and charismatic speaker, and was vocal about his support for the September 11 attacks, as well as organizing a protest against the Jyllands-Posten (Danish Cartoons) in 2006, holding a placard that stated, 'Massacre those who insult Islam'.²¹

Choudary has also been cited as the individual responsible for radicalizing the infamous Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, the individuals responsible for the murder of the off-duty soldier Lee Rigby in Wootton Bassett in 2013. Adebolajo, who took the lead in the killing, had been involved with AM on and off for approximately six years before this event, participating in a local study circle hosted by Choudary and attending talks by Bakri. Whilst denying that he was an official member, Choudary did acknowledge that Adebolajo 'was on our ideological wavelength'.²² Adebowale, the younger of the two, frequently participated in network demonstrations, and was last seen in attendance at a protest outside St Paul's Cathedral only months before the murder.²³

Amongst his other controversial views, Choudary has been vocal in his support and admiration of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), calling the leader of the group Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi 'the Caliph of all Muslims'.²⁴ In September 2016, Choudary was convicted of supporting ISIS which is in violation of Section twelve of the Terrorism Act 2000. He was sentenced to a prison sentence of five-and-a-half years but due to UK probationary laws, was released only halfway through his sentence in October 2018. He has been heavily restricted in his communications and travel and has been added to the financial sanctions list of the United Nations and British government.²⁵

²¹ Andrew Anthony 'Anjem Choudary: The British Extremist Who Backs the Caliphate' *The Guardian* 7th September 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/07/anjem-choudary-islamic-state-isis>

²² Andrew Gilligan "Woolwich Attack: 'Lone Wolves' who run with the pack" *The Telegraph* May 25th 2013 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/10080864/Woolwich-attack-Lone-wolves-who-run-with-the-pack.html>

²³ Kenney *Islamic State in Britain* (2018) pg.199

²⁴ Anthony 'Anjem Choudary' *The Guardian* 7th September 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/07/anjem-choudary-islamic-state-isis>

²⁵ Counter Extremism Project: *Anjem Choudary* <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/united-kingdom>

Offshoot Organizations and Legal Issues

With Bakri banned from re-entering the country after his departure in 2005, the leadership role was left to be filled by Choudary, who would now have to find ways to navigate the new legal challenges AM faced. It must be acknowledged that the time period following the 7/7 London bombings in 2005 is particularly significant, as these events seemed to have a galvanizing effect on the government's counter-terrorism efforts. It would be impossible to provide an adequately detailed discussion of every offshoot organization that sprung up from the post-7/7 period, and as such, only those groups who had a direct impact on British legislation shall be discussed here.

Choudary began establishing offshoot organizations almost immediately, the first two being al-Ghurabaa (the Strangers in arabic) and the Saved Sect. Both groups used websites, media interviews and public demonstrations to convey their ideology, an example being the march organized in protest of the Jyllands-Posten cartoons in 2006, where members marched to the Danish Embassy chanting violent slogans, such as 'Bomb, bomb Denmark!'²⁶ Both groups were consequently banned by the Home Secretary under the newly amended Terrorism Act 2006. Sections 1-4 of the act make encouraging terrorism a criminal offense and details the criteria that must be met for groups or individuals to be proscribed, including a provision for the Home Secretary to identify different platforms when banning an organization.²⁷ This provision was aimed directly at AM, aiming to restrict their speech and therefore their main form of activism (da'wa stalls).

The next offshoot organization to be established was Islam4UK in 2008. In addition to their pre-existing methods, Choudary and the members used this group to promote their new forms of activism, such as 'Islamic roadshows', in which they performed more provocative, high-profile demonstrations on the street. Islam4UK sparked national outcry when they announced a march would take place against British troops in Wootton Bassett, the market town in Wiltshire where soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan were repatriated. This march was later cancelled, but the activities of this group led to the creation of the English Defense League, a

²⁶ Anthony 'Anjem Choudary' *The Guardian* 7th September 2014
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/07/anjem-choudary-islamic-state-isis>

²⁷ The Terrorism Act 2006, *Home Office*, April 11th 2006
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-terrorism-act-2006>

British nationalist group that sought to oppose AM demonstrations in its various forms over the next few years.²⁸ The group was subsequently banned under the Terrorism Act 2000, along with AM and a number of other platforms, such as Islamic Path, where it was noted that any reformulation of Al-Muhajiroun would be considered illegal, and they cannot avoid prescription by simply changing the name.²⁹

A number of offshoot organizations have been added to the proscribed list since 2010, such as 'Need4Khilafah' 'Muslims Against Crusades' and the 'Islamic Dawah Association'. While the proscription process was able to weaken the organization structurally, it has done little to impede the activities of its members. On the contrary, it seems that by creating these new platforms and identifying them as separate entities, the members felt emboldened to continue their activism. The events organized became progressively inflammatory with the intention of attracting the media, and therefore attracting supporters. When societal and political pressure became too much, the government would proscribe the new platform, and the cycle would continue.

It could also be argued that by inhibiting the organization's ability to perform their preferred methods of activism such as da'wa, this led activists to turn to the internet in order to spread their ideology, posting lectures, videos, and other materials on social media and websites. This has resulted in a number of spin off groups emerging across Europe, such as Sharia4Belgium, Sharia4Holland, and Prophet's Ummah (in Norway). The transnational scope of AM's influence allowed Choudary to make useful contacts, exploiting his social networks to assist the mobilization of activists to fight in Syria to fight for ISIS, particularly from Belgium, which holds the highest per capita contributor of Western European fighters to the conflict. As a result of this, the networks organized by Choudary have been described as 'the single biggest gateway to terrorism in recent British history'.³⁰

In conclusion, it can be established that both Omar Bakri Muhammad and Anjem Choudary played an instrumental role in the establishment of AM, and therefore the militant-jihadist

²⁸ Kenney, *Islamic State in Britain* (2018) pg.140

²⁹ Proscribed Terrorist Organizations *Home Office* 12th April 2019
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/795457/Proscription_website.pdf

³⁰ Peter R. Neumann 'Foreign Fighter Total in Syria/Iraq Now Exceeds 20,000' *ICSR* September 2014
<https://icsr.info/2015/01/26/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/>

movement in the UK as a whole. Whilst the organization encountered a number of legal issues that structurally weakened them, the network was able to show resilience and find loopholes in government legislation which allowed them to survive and continue to network, (albeit more covertly) and continue to espouse their ideology.

Chapter 2: Religious Ideology

It cannot be disputed that there is not a singular, homogenous, globally accepted interpretation of Islam. In this regard, the notion of ‘Islams’ is perhaps a more accurate description as opposed to a singular ‘Islam’, as summarized by scholar Aziz al-Azmeh, ‘There are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain them’.³¹ The result of this is that it presents some critical issues for the everyday Muslim, as well as the average lay-person when trying to decipher the validity of religious interpretations, creating an environment of ‘interpretive pluralism’ that various groups (including militant-jihadis) have to operate in and contend with. Quintan Wiktorowicz describes it as ‘a competitive marketplace of ideas characterised by alternative religious interpretations’.³²

With the majority of everyday Muslims presumed to be lacking in adequate *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) training, as well as the other Islamic sciences, combined with the almost unlimited access to thousands of sources as a result of the creation of the Internet, what is it about the messages of Al-Muhajiroun (AM) that appealed to its followers more than the others? To what extent are their messages rooted in the Qur’an and other authoritative sources? In order to examine this, it is necessary to examine how the group identifies itself in terms of ideological affiliation, in order to adequately assess their approach to interpreting scripture, as well as the emphasis of their messages, and how they apply it to their daily lives. As stated in the previous chapter, Omar Bakri Muhammad identified AM as a Salafi group, so this is where this discussion shall begin.

Salafism

The term Salafism or ‘Salafi’ remains an ill-defined, misunderstood and contentious term within the realm of Islamic studies. The term Salafi comes from the Arabic phrase *salaf al-salih*, meaning ‘pious ancestor’, a designation given to the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, and the first three generations of Muslim scholars.³³ Amongst Sunni Muslims, there is a strongly held view that the Companions knew and understood Islam in its truest form

³¹ Aziz Al-Azmeh, “Islams and Modernities” in *Middle East Journal* Vol.48 No.4 (1994) pg 735
https://www.jstor.org/stable/4328762?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

³² Wiktorowicz, Quintan *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (2005) pg 25

³³ Peter Mandaville *Islam and Politics* 2nd Edition (2014), pg 48

simply because of the temporal proximity and literal physical closeness to the Prophet, it is believed that these Companions knew and understood Islam in its purest form, a belief also reflected in Muhammad al-Bukhari's *Sahih* which states: 'The best of my community are my generation, then those who come after them and then those who follow them'. The term is therefore considered a prestigious one within Sunni Islam, used and understood to denote a higher level of religious purity. In light of this, Salafis are seen as a puritanical movement within the Sunni branch due to their efforts to rid Islam of any perceived external and cultural influences and return to the original model of the Prophet and his Companions. One of their distinguishable features is that they almost exclusively rely on sources and evidence from the earliest period of Islam, perceiving the work of subsequent scholars to be distorted and influenced by forms of religious *bid'a* (innovation) or new practises influenced by culture which have corrupted the pure message of Islam overtime. Such additions they argue, have resulted in schisms in the *ummah* (Muslim community), the only way to rectify this being to reject the cultural influences and return to the ways of the Prophet, and dismiss any behaviours that were not supported or enjoined by Muhammad himself.

To foster this purification, Salafis have developed an *aqeeda* (creed/method) for determining proper religious interpretations based upon the Qur'an, the Sunnah and for following the example of the Companions which are applied to their daily lives. Wiktorowicz identifies the first component as a focus on hadith that are deemed *sahih* (sound) due to their chain of transmission being considered unbroken and reliable, which in turn purifies the religion and is seen as supporting the true prophetic model, which is why Salafis also call themselves *ahl al-hadith* (the people of hadith).³⁴ It is because of their belief that the Qur'an and Sunna are the sources which reveal the perfection of Islam, that any deviation away from these is considered *bid'a* (innovation) which is seen as un-Islamic and therefore heretic in nature. This is also why many Salafis choose to adopt dress codes that emulate the prophetic model and reject western-style clothing. More radical manifestations of rejecting *bid'a* include rejecting modernity itself, largely due to the fact that the Qur'an is silent on many contemporary issues faced today, using the Sunna primarily as a model for avoiding innovations altogether. In addition to this, there is also an emphasis on reverence for *tawhid* (oneness with God) as well as actively avoiding acts considered *shirk* (idolatry/ascribing partners to God), which has led to the rejection of many common practises, such as praying to saints. It must also be noted that the majority of Salafis

³⁴ Quintan Wiktorowicz "The Salafi Movement" in *Muslim Networks: From Hajj to Hip Hop* pg 211

reject the division of Islamic jurisprudence into separate *madhhabs* (schools), as they believe that following one without searching for direct evidence encourages *taqlid* (blind adherence), which could lead Muslims astray. However, despite the rejection of following a single *madhhab*, the literalist approach taken by Salafis tends to make the movement align with and resemble the Hanbali school.³⁵

Whilst Salafis are generally in consensus about the basics of their ideology (such as their adherence to the aqeeda), it must be noted that the movement itself is represented by a variety of actors and perspectives, none of which are cohesive and coterminous with the entire movement. In fact, it has been noted that frequent disagreements often arise concerning specifics and plans of action, such as the extent to which they become involved in politics. These conflicts within the movement are difficult to resolve, largely because unlike formal movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, there is not an organizational president or spiritual guide, as the individual scholars develop reputations through their social interactions, such as lessons, and religious rulings, with the process of recognition also being a highly subjective process of individual assessment and reputation formation. The result of this is that it leads to multiple sources of authority within the movement. The combination of this, as well as the relatively limited hierarchy of scholarly authorities Salafis subscribe to, makes it notably easier to become an authority figure amongst the Salafis.³⁶ It could be argued that the intellectual environment of the Salafis would work in favour of the militant-jihadist groups, as it would allow them to espouse their views with almost no restriction and little justification required, allowing them to establish themselves as religious authority figures.

As previously stated, one of the main points of contention amongst Salafis largely revolves around the extent to which they involve themselves in politics, as well as how to apply their principles to their everyday life. Wiktorowicz notes the three main types of Salafis; the first of which being ‘quietists’, who reject political activism as ‘religiously deviant’ and therefore counter-productive and prefer to focus on their own personal education and purification. The next type is ‘activists’ or ‘politicos’, which refers to those that embrace their activism as a way of implementing Islamic law, as well as increasing social justice. Finally, there are those

³⁵ Q Wiktorowicz “The Salafi Movement” in *Muslim Networks* pg 212

³⁶ Bernard Haykel “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action” in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* pg 36

referred to as ‘Salafi-jihadis’, who go above and beyond in their activism, viewing acts of violence as a just means to their religious ends (which is ultimately to establish God’s rule on earth).³⁷ Al-Muhajiroun and its various offshoot groups (such as Islam4UK and Need4Khilafah) have aspects of both the latter two categories, but ultimately fall more into the Salafi-jihadist branch, due to the violent actions committed by various members which were deemed permissible by the group, as well as their outright support of other militant groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

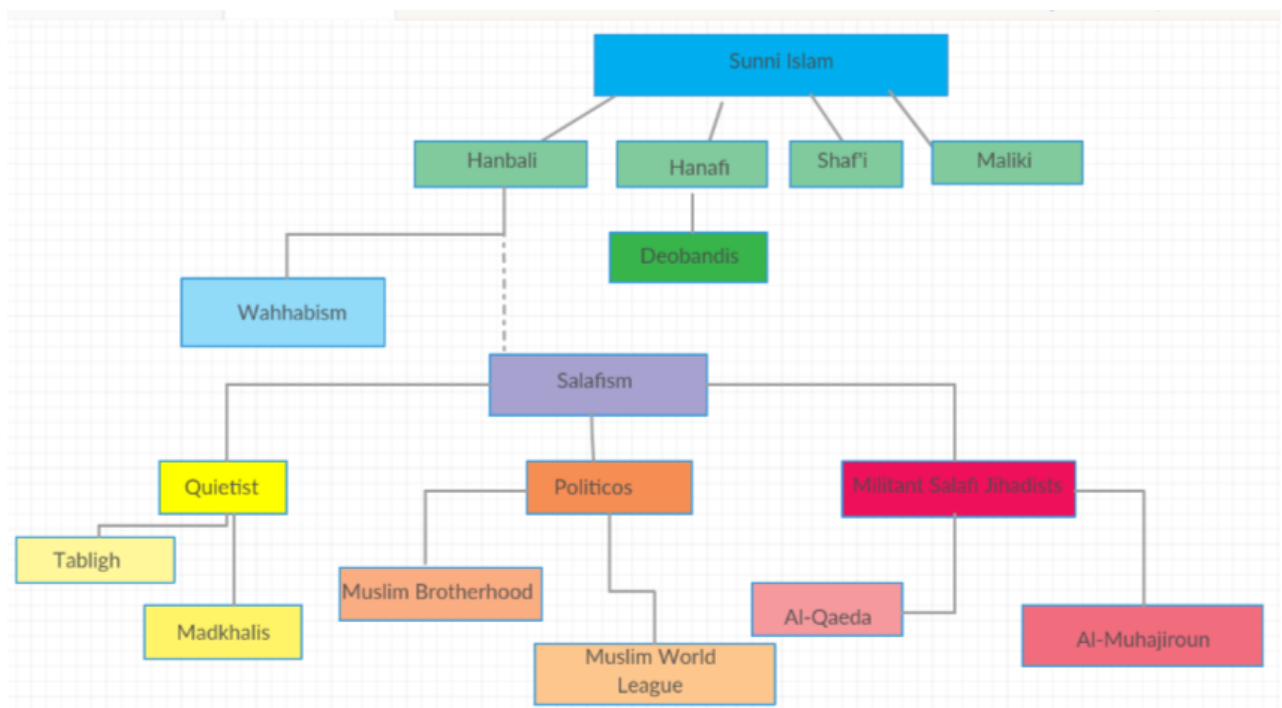


Figure (1) Original diagram of Sunni Islam and the Salafi typology.³⁸

Whilst the diagram above is limited in terms of the offshoot groups it displays, ultimately it is useful in demonstrating the wide spectrum of views concerning political involvement held within Salafism, as well as establishing the ideological similarities between the Hanbali school, Wahhabism and Salafism, which are often mistaken to be one and the same.

³⁷ Wiktorowicz, Anatomy of a Salafi Movement *Studies in Conflict and Terror* no.3 (2006) pg 207-09.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10576100500497004?journalCode=uter20>

³⁸ Quintan Wiktorowicz's Salafi-typology was used as the basis for this flowchart, with additional original research added (see Wiktorowicz, Anatomy of a Salafi Movement *Studies in Conflict and Terror* no.3, 2006)

There has also been some debate as to the usefulness of the term Salafism when discussing political involvement. As previously stated, the term's association with the 'pious ancestors' denotes doctrinal purity, giving authority and authenticity to its bearers, which explains why it is readily used as a self-descriptor by various groups, both militant and quietest alike. For this reason, Thomas Hegghammer argues that because of this, the term 'Salafi' is often better understood not as an indication of a specific political programme, but rather as a bid for legitimacy and authenticity.³⁹

However, Richard Nielsen argues for the use of the term, and that while not all, or even most, clerics and followers of Salafism will make the move towards jihadism, he acknowledges an 'ideological affinity' between Salafism and Sunni jihadism, meaning that it would be a fairly easy transition from one to the other because jihadists have constructed their ideology as an 'outgrowth' based on Salafi thinking, meaning that there are less ideological 'barriers' to overcome, as many of the ideas previously held would remain unchanged.⁴⁰ Of course, this is not to say that all militant-jihadists are exclusively Salafis (or even Sunni for that matter), or that non-Salafis will never become jihadists, but it does provide some insight on how Salafi ideas have impacted jihadist ideology as a whole, particularly the scholars who have become synonymous with the Salafi movement, which shall be discussed in the next section.

Militant-Jihadist Ideology

It must be acknowledged that there is no singular, universally accepted doctrine regarding jihad, as it is a concept that has been the topic of heated debate for centuries, from the early years of Islam, to the present day, by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, thus making the task of defining the term jihad a problematic one. Even within the Qur'an itself the references to jihad are habitually ambiguous, with it often being observed that the concept actually evolves and develops throughout the text in a somewhat contradictory way.⁴¹ This has resulted in scholars emphasizing either the peaceful or more violent character of the term, depending largely upon

³⁹ Thomas Hegghammer "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries?: On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islam" in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer, 2014 pg. 249

⁴⁰ Richard A. Nielsen *Deadly Clerics: Blocked Ambition and the Paths to Jihad* (2017), pg 75

⁴¹ Humayan Ansari "Attitudes to Jihad, Martyrdom and Terrorism among British Muslims" in *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure* 2005 Pg 146

the circumstances in which they wish to apply the context, as well as their own understanding of the religion and the sacred text. While it is crucial to acknowledge the existence of such different interpretations, in order to save time, the ones that will be focused on in this section are those strictly relating to the development of Salafi jihadist ideologies, specifically those that have influenced the ideas of Al-Muhajiroun and its various offshoots and affiliated groups.

The term jihad is derived from the verb *jahada*, which means ‘to exert’, ‘to struggle’ or ‘to strive’, jihad literally means ‘exerting one’s own utmost power, efforts, endeavours... striving towards a worthy goal’.⁴² It has been acknowledged by most Islamic scholars that there are different types of jihad, as well as different ways of implementing and practising it, in order to struggle for the betterment of the Islamic community, and the ummah (global community of Muslims) as a whole. The idea of a ‘higher’ or ‘greater’ jihad (*al-jihad al-akbar*) is one that is postulated more by the Sufi traditions, and is characterised by ‘an internal struggle’ or a ‘spiritual struggle for moral self-improvement and the reform of society’.⁴³ The notion of ‘lesser’ jihad (*al-jihad al-asghar*), refers to ‘armed fighting in the path of Islam’.⁴⁴

Ibn Taymiyyah (1268-1328 CE) is perhaps one of the most well-known and influential Islamic scholars, and one of the first to emphasize a more militant form of jihad, as an external fight to protect Muslims from alien, outsider forces, as opposed to merely an internal struggle with one’s self in order to be a better Muslim. For Taymiyyah, the need for a more militant jihad was so important, that he categorised it as a higher obligation than the *hajj* (pilgrimage) and *som* (fasting).⁴⁵ The views of Taymiyyah with regards to a more militant strand of jihad are credited for inspiring the work of Muhammad al-Wahhab (1703-1792 CE) who took to a more puritanical view, arguing that it was acceptable to take up an armed jihad against fellow Muslims who did not subscribe to his own views, as well as all the ‘infidels’. This is perhaps one of the most well-known interpretations of the term jihad, which is arguably why many westerners (most notably the media) have misinterpreted the term to mean ‘holy war’. It must be noted that there are historical circumstances that must be considered in order to fully contextualise the different interpretations of jihad at particular times in history. For example, Ibn Taymiyyah’s emphasis on armed jihad to protect Muslims and their lands from outside

⁴² R.L. Euben *Killing (for) Politics: Jihad, Martyrdom and Political Action* pg 12
https://www-istor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/3072484?seq=18#metadata_info_tab_contents

⁴³ Ansari, “Attitudes to Jihad, Martyrdom and Terrorism among British Muslims” (2005) Pg 146

⁴⁴ Ansari, “Attitudes to Jihad, Martyrdom and Terrorism among British Muslims” (2005) Pg 146

⁴⁵ Ansari, “Attitudes to Jihad, Martyrdom and Terrorism among British Muslims”(2005) Pg 147

forces was largely the result of the threat of the Mongol invasions in the 13th century, and their adopting of Islam but not implementing shari'a law.⁴⁶

Another influential figure in the ideological viewpoints of militant-jihadists is the work of literary critic and activist Sayyid Qutb (1906-66 CE), who also took inspiration from Ibn Taymiyyah's work, and was affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, and thus their views influenced his own writing as well. Qutb is perhaps most noteworthy for his strong political views on the opposition of the West, Israel, and the leaders of Islamic societies whom he saw as entirely disregarding Allah's word and law, claiming them to be living in a state of *jāhiliyyah* (literally meaning the ignorance of the truths of revelation)⁴⁷, which, in his view, is to be abhorred, and is reason enough to incite armed jihad against them. Qutb deviates from other traditional Salafi scholars due to his suspicions surrounding the use of human reason to interpret sacred texts (*ijtihad*), instead arguing that the understanding of true knowledge is not a matter of intellectual pursuits or activities, but rather the receptions of these divine truths.

It must be noted here that Al-Muhajiroun and other militant jihadi groups that are present in the UK tend to distinguish between two types of jihad, the first being 'jihad of the tongue', which refers to an 'ideological struggle' and utilizes methods in which members speak out against the perceived anti-Islamic policies of the West, primarily the UK and US. This form of jihad is seen as the duty of those who are unable to physically join the ranks of groups such as ISIS or Al-Qaeda, whether it be due to security reasons or lack of funding.⁴⁸ Al-Muhajiroun specifically adopted two forms of activism that could be classified as such, the first of which is da'wa, which refers to 'calling society to Islam' by proselytizing, often through the use of da'wa stalls, which have become almost synonymous with the group.⁴⁹ However, the proselytizing done by Al-Muhajiroun differs from the da'wa performed by the general Muslim population, in that they are promoting an ideologically inspired version of Islam that demands activism from others, such as supporting the establishment of Islamic states through military coups, and jihad waged against Western militias. The second form of 'jihad of the tongue' utilized by the group is *hisbah*, which means 'to change the forbidden/reprehensible'⁵⁰, which

⁴⁶ R.L. Euben "Killing (for) Politics" in *Political Theory*, Vol. 30 No.1 (2002) pg 16

https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/3072484?seq=18#metadata_info_tab_contents

⁴⁷ Akhavi, Shahrough . "Qutb, Sayyid." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*. Oxford Islamic Studies Online <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/article/opr/t236/e0663>

⁴⁸ Michael Kenney *The Islamic State in Britain: Radicalization and Resilience in and Activist Network* (2018) pg 14

⁴⁹ Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (2005) pg 50

⁵⁰ Roel Meijer, "Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong As a Principle of Social Action" in *Global Salafism* pg 194

is normally implemented by organising public demonstrations based on political and social issues activists consider important, normally following similar themes to the da'wa stalls.

While the militant jihadi groups that are present in the UK place an important emphasis on 'jihad of the tongue' as a concept, their views on 'jihad of the sword' is where their ideological beliefs diverge. The concept of 'jihad of the sword' is condoned, but often to varying degrees, or with conditions attached. One of the primary reasons for this is due to these groups conforming to a 'covenant of security' which is a verbal agreement which has its basis in the Qur'an, which states 'If any one of the idolaters should seek your protection, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of God, then take him to a place safe for him, for they are people of no knowledge' (Qur'an 9:6).⁵¹ This verbal agreement is one that prevents these network activists from attacking the people whom they live amongst, so long as the British government continues to protect their lives and livelihoods.⁵² However, this verbal agreement does have its limitations, primarily the fact that it does not cover conflicts that are occurring overseas, where it is perceived by these groups that Western forces have 'invaded Muslim lands'. This is used as a loophole of sorts, where violence may not be directly incited on a national level, but support will be gathered for other transnational movements and other conflicts taking place abroad.

An example of this being the militant group Hizb ut-Tahrir, that prescribes 'jihad of the sword' as the primary duty only for Muslims living in Palestine who directly face the threat of Israeli occupation, and instead urge their followers in Britain to fulfil the secondary duty of jihad through means other than fighting.⁵³ In comparison, a number of Al-Muhajiroun members have taken this a step further, by actively encouraging their members to offer financial support and actively recruit for other militant groups abroad, such as Hamas, as well as welcoming their suicide bombings.⁵⁴

While the covenant of security is often encouraged by the leading activists in these groups, ultimately it is up to the individual whether they choose to adhere to it. The Qur'an also states

⁵¹ All Qur'an references will be from the Abdul Haleem translation, (see Oxford Islamic Studies Online: Verse Look Up: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/#>)

⁵² Kenney, *The Islamic State in Britain* (2018) pg 19

⁵³ Ansari, "Attitudes to Jihad, Martyrdom and Terrorism among British Muslims"(2005) Pg 148

⁵⁴ Taji-Farouki, Suha 'Islamists and the Threat of Jihad: Hizb al-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun on Israel and the Jews' in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.36 No.4 pg.34
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00263200008701330?journalCode=fmes20>

that ‘If they break their oaths after their covenant and thrust at your religion, then fight the leaders of unbelief’ (Qur’an 9:6). This text could be interpreted a number of ways. Perhaps one interpretation of this is that any perceived attack on the individual’s religion would warrant a form of jihad being exercised. For example, if the perceived attack was merely verbal, would this constitute the ‘jihad of the tongue’, in order to engage them in a religious dialogue? Or is a verbal attack enough to warrant a ‘jihad of the sword’? And what if the attack was physical, then to what extent does one respond? Do you take arms against only that individual that attacked your beliefs? Michael Kenney interviewed a leading activist in Al-Muhajiroun in November 2010, who stated the following: ‘The only purpose Muslims have in the UK is to propagate Islam. If the government stops Muslims from propagating Islam, their only option is jihad’.⁵⁵ This demonstrates the reign of freedom these organisations have to exploit these uncontextualized, vague statements into ways of inciting acts of violence.

Martyrdom

Another way in which these organisations are able to create motivations for committing armed jihad is through the concept of martyrdom. The Arabic word *shahid* (martyr) can be translated to both ‘martyr’ and ‘witness’, and mainly refers to ‘bearing witness’ or being an ‘observer’ of the divine truth.⁵⁶ There are a number of verses within the Qur’an that support this definition of martyr, an example being: ‘establish witness for the sake of God. Anyone who believes in God and the Last Day should heed this: God will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him...’ (Qur’an 65:2).

For militant jihadists however, the interpretation of jihad as an armed struggle provides the basis for the ideology of martyrdom, in which violent death that occurs in combat/battle is emphasized as a ‘desired death’, and acts as a key motivator for engaging in violence. The rewards of potentially becoming a martyr outweigh the risk of potential death these activists may face, as it is thought that martyrs occupy a special status which can be likened to that of the prophets. There is also the incentive of being rewarded in the afterlife by earning a place

⁵⁵ Kenney. “Interview with leading activist, Leyton, East London, November 2010, in *Islamic State in Britain*, pg 223

⁵⁶ Fazaeli, Roja “Martyrdom” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women*, Oxford Islamic Studies Online http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/article/opr/t355/e0155?_hi=0&_pos=2

in *Jannat-al Firdaws* (the highest level of paradise).⁵⁷ An example of a quote from the Qur'an that is often cited in favour of martyrdom is as follows: 'Do not think of those who have been killed in God's way as dead. They are alive with their Lord, well provided for, happy with what God has given them of His favour; rejoicing that for those they have left behind who have yet to join them there is no fear, nor will they grieve' (Qur'an 3:169-170). While this quote does not implicitly mention being a martyr, it does imply the nobility of 'dying in the path of God'⁵⁸, which further demonstrates the lack of consistency with regards to the terminology and concept as a whole.

In conclusion, it can be acknowledged that the ideological inspirations for the various militant jihadi groups in the UK do have roots in authentic, authoritative scripture to a certain extent. This can be deduced due to their religious grounding in the Salafi movement, which is a movement within Sunni Islam that is heavily reliant on the literal interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith. The issue here is that there is a lack of consistency with regards of key religious ideas, such as jihad and martyrdom, and that this, combined with quotations from scripture and developments of the concepts being taken out of their historical contexts, leaves room for these groups to reinterpret these concepts as they see fit. The lack of a structured, and heavily layered scholastic tradition in Salafism, as well as its focus on personal interpretation (ijtihad) makes it considerably easier for these militant Salafi-jihadists to appear as legitimate authority figures.

⁵⁷ Ansari, "Attitudes to Jihad, Martyrdom and Terrorism among British Muslims" (2005) Pg 150

⁵⁸ Fazaeli, "Martyrdom", Oxford Islamic Studies Online
http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/article/opr/t355/e0155?_hi=0&_pos=2

Chapter 3- From Faith Seekers to Activists

In the previous chapter, the ideology of Al-Muhajiroun (AM) was discussed at length, with particular attention given to the adoption of a Salafi approach to interpreting scripture, in order to justify their militant-jihadist views. Upon hearing such views, it is safe to assume that the majority of the public would dismiss these ideas as ‘fanatical’, ‘irrational’ and ‘extreme’. Despite this, there are people that join the ranks of the movement and are clearly attracted to it for a reason. This leads to a line of questioning: Is AM open about their ideology when recruiting new members? Is religion a key motivator in joining? And are there other factors that predispose someone to become radicalized? These are the questions that shall be addressed in this chapter.

Demographic Profile of Militant-Jihadis in the UK

A study was conducted by scholars Yener Altunbas and John Thornton, comparing the characteristics of convicted ‘home-grown’ Islamic terrorists (those who have committed acts of terrorism in their own country against fellow citizens)⁵⁹ in the UK to the US. The results of this study revealed an extremely broad demographic profile. Perpetrators were often second or third generation immigrants coming from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. A small minority had converted to Islam, almost all had completed education up to secondary school level education at least, with up to a third of some samples having a university degree. Additionally, the sample were more often lower or middle-class, and were more likely to be employed and have some form of criminal record for varied minor offenses, although a few were lifelong criminals.⁶⁰ Ultimately, there are very few consistent trends that can be discerned from such a wide-ranging demographic. The most commonly occurring trend in this study is the overrepresentation of young males of African and mixed (at least one white parent) South-Asian descent of an educated, middle class background.⁶¹ This is concurrent with Michael

⁵⁹ Walter Enders, Todd Sandler, and Khusrav Gaibulloev. ‘Domestic versus transnational terrorism: Data, decomposition, and dynamics’ *Journal of Peace Research* 3rd edition (2011) pg.321

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022343311398926?journalCode=jpra>

⁶⁰ Yener Altunbas and John Thornton *Human Capital and the Supply of Homegrown Islamic Terrorists in the UK* (2009) Pg 5
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1516490

⁶¹ Altunbas and Thornton *Human Capital and the Supply of Homegrown Islamic Terrorists in the UK* (2009) Pg 3-5
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1516490

Kenney's observation of AM members, stating that it is 'largely a youth phenomenon', as most activists tend to join as young adults and teenagers, with many recruits coming from universities.⁶²

This study's findings suggest that a specific background is more susceptible to joining and engaging in militant-jihadist organizations and activities than others, which could arguably be due to a shared set of grievances and psychological stressors. Quintan Wiktorowicz notes that Islam is a crucial component of ethnic identity for South Asians, with ninety-six and ninety-five percent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, respectively, being Muslim.⁶³ Perhaps one explanation to be drawn from this is that children growing up in 'bicultural' families struggle to reconcile their dual identities, growing up in a traditional home with religious values, to then attend school, college, and/or work and be a part of secular British society and institutions, perhaps leading them to feel trapped between the two. However, this explanation and the findings are limited in their usefulness when one considers that this does almost nothing to explain why not everyone from this shared background chooses to join, suggesting that other individualistic factors may provide a more comprehensive explanation.

The Rationales for Radicalization

Radicalization refers to the process of developing ideas and beliefs that are deemed 'extreme'⁶⁴, and is therefore a consequence of the recruitment process for radical movements such as AM, as the recruits are required to absorb the ideology of the group. But what makes these individuals susceptible to accepting the extreme views of a militant-jihadist group like AM? It can be assumed that individuals do not typically have a sudden epiphany that motivates them to join a radical group. Instead, it is a gradual process of persuasion that occurs for a prolonged period of time, in which the individual undergoes a lengthy socialization process, where they are exposed to the ideas of the movement, deliberate and debate, and even consider other groups, only committing to the group when the potential

⁶² Kenney *Islamic State in Britain* (2018) pg.216

⁶³ Quintan Wiktorowicz *Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam* (2003) pg.15
<http://insct.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Wiktorowicz.Joining-the-Cause.pdf>

⁶⁴ Randy Borum 'Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories' *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2012) pg.9
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol4/iss4/2?utm_source=scholarcommons.usf.edu%2Fjss%2Fvol4%2Fiss4%2F2&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

joiner is certain the group represents ‘true’ Islam. Quintan Wiktorowicz identifies four key factors which could increase the probability of an individual joining these radical groups, which are as follows: cognitive openings; religious seeking; frame alignment; and socialization.⁶⁵ Each of these will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

a) Cognitive Openings

A necessary condition prior to joining a movement is an individual’s willingness to associate and expose themselves to the movement’s message. While most individuals would dismiss and immediately reject a movement such as AM as ‘irrational’ and ‘militant’, the presence of a cognitive opening could mean that this is not the case. A cognitive opening refers to a more vulnerable state of mind, in which previously held beliefs become uncertain, making the individual more receptive to new ideas.⁶⁶ The cause of this mental state is often attributed to some form of personal crisis, which can vary from economic factors such as losing a job, political and social issues (racism, political discrimination) and even more individualistic factors, such as a death or a family break-up.⁶⁷ One of the more frequently discussed forms of crisis in literature which may lead to joining radical groups is an identity crisis or ‘dissonance’ (referring to mental tension or discomfort),⁶⁸ which is thought to not only foster a cognitive opening, but also result in the individual seeking out an alternate identity, by way of seeking affiliation with others to share in a strong group identity, or seek out an alternative identity altogether.

Cognitive openings can also be fostered by movements and activists themselves, by staging particularly inflammatory and provocative demonstrations about various political and social issues. An example of this can be seen in multiple AM demonstrations, such as da’wa stalls and public talks, where they can (and often do) resort to more conspicuous and eye-catching methods, shouting their message through loudspeakers, and displaying particularly shocking and gruesome images of mutilated, malnourished victims, claiming they are the victims of Western violence against Muslims. The idea behind such tactics is to create ‘moral shock’ and

⁶⁵ Q Wiktorowicz *Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam* (2003) pg.1
<http://insct.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Wiktorowicz.Joining-the-Cause.pdf>

⁶⁶ Q Wiktorowicz *Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam* (2003) pg.4
<http://insct.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Wiktorowicz.Joining-the-Cause.pdf>

⁶⁷ Sam Mullins *‘Home-Grown’ Jihad: Understanding Islamic Terrorism in the US and UK* (2016) pg.30

⁶⁸ Leon Festinger *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957) pg.2

outrage amongst bystanders, appealing to their moral sensibilities, and get them interested in their 'cause'.⁶⁹ Activists can cause individuals to feel a sense of crisis in more subtle ways, such as interactions with congregates at mosques, instilling a sense of urgency about certain pressing issues.

It must be acknowledged that while cognitive openings, (whether pre-existing or fostered by movements) do make an individual more susceptible, this does not mean that anyone who experiences one will experiment with militant-jihadist ideology and join groups like AM. On the contrary, most never will, as in many cases these crises can be addressed psychologically through their current belief systems, be it religion or other personal beliefs and views. It is only when these views prove to be inadequate in resolving the psychological distress, that cognitive openings may lead to the next stage of the process, which is religious seeking.

b) Religious Seeking

As previously stated, where an individual's belief systems are inadequate to resolve the cognitive opening, and an individual's identity is in part tied to their religious beliefs, this will lead them on a search for a system of religious meaning to resolve the discontent they feel.⁷⁰ Religious seeking can be undertaken independently, or with others. For those undertaking the task alone, they will begin by looking into the religion more deeply, using the internet, books, and other sources of religious learning. The seeker examines all the possible religious avenues until reaching a belief system that suits their needs, and it is in this way that this process could be comparable to shopping in a 'religious marketplace' of ideas.⁷¹ It is not uncommon for religious seekers to turn to family and friends for direction or as a source of religious learning. If pre-existing social contacts are already members of a movement, the likelihood of the seeker joining increases dramatically. Networking of this variety is particularly vital for those engaging in high-risk activism, (risks referring to threats to an individual's overall well-being and safety) where personal relationships facilitate trust and commitment. It has been argued by scholars Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko that the pull of love (both romantic and comradely) can be as strong as politics in motivating individuals to join a group, and that when

⁶⁹ Kenney *Islamic State in Britain* (2018) pg.88

⁷⁰ John Lofland and Rodney Stark "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective." *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 30, No. 6 (1965), pg 868
https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/2090965?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

⁷¹ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (2000) pg.97

the individual joins, their love for their fellow comrades and friends will only increase due to group cohesion and common threats and goals.⁷²

Whilst recruitment into groups can be facilitated by prior social connections, another strategy for recruitment used by activists is to form new personal ties with strangers, and example of which can be seen in the recruitment methods of the Unification Church (the Moonies). Members would often ‘pick up’ people in public places, inviting them to events and dinners while minimizing religious content. These dinners would then be used to develop more social ties with network members, effectively pulling them in where they could be converted into activists. Eileen Barker’s findings on this particular movement show that only a third of her sample were told immediately about the recruiter’s association with the Moonies, while the other two thirds were told either in a short amount of time after (ranging from hours to days), or a longer amount of time (after attending multiple lectures over the course of weeks).⁷³ A similar method is employed by AM members. Anjem Choudary, (who took over leadership after Bakri) admitted that during da’wa, members are deliberately encouraged to not discuss jihad, (which is a key concept in their ideology) and instead discuss broader social and political issues.⁷⁴

Religious seeking can also be fostered by movement outreach (whether this is public demonstrations, conferences, one-to-one discussions etc), also known as ‘guided religious seeking’. When this form of seeking occurs, the potential recruit is often guided by a movement member, helping them to ‘shop around’ and explore their ideological options, whilst subtly leading them towards the conclusion that the movement’s ideology is the most obvious and appealing choice that fulfils their needs.⁷⁵ This strategy is perhaps the most effective due to individuals feeling as though they have weighed all of their options and made an informed decision, which will serve to further solidify their beliefs when they learn more about the movement and become more involved as a member. It must be noted that a willingness to listen and an open mind to alternative ways of viewing the world does not explicitly lead to joining

⁷² Clark McCauley & Sophia Moskalenko ‘Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism’ *Terrorism and Political Violence*, (2008) 20:3 pg.421
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550802073367>

⁷³ Eileen Barker *The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing?* (1984) pg.177

⁷⁴ Catherine Zara Raymond ‘Al-Muhajiroun and Islam4UK: The Group Behind the Ban’ *Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence ICSR* (2010) pg.15
<https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/ICSR-Feature-Al-Muhajiroun-and-Islam4UK-The-group-behind-the-ban.pdf>

⁷⁵ Q Wiktorowicz *Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam* (2003) pg.9
<http://insct.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Wiktorowicz.Joining-the-Cause.pdf>

a movement. These movements are voluntary in nature, requiring the potential joiner to engage in discussion and debate, and whilst they are often subtly persuaded, they are not directly coerced or indoctrinated. Essentially, they are active agents in their own conversion as opposed to a passive object of indoctrination.⁷⁶

c) Frame Alignment

Frames refer to an interpretive model (or models) of thinking that provide a cognitive structure for understanding and navigating the surrounding environment. They offer language and cognitive tools for making sense of experiences and events, by interpreting the cause, evaluating situations and providing proscriptive solutions.⁷⁷ Sociologist David Snow argues that frames ‘function as a way to organize experience and guide action, both individually and collectively.’⁷⁸ However, recruitment and active participation is only possible when there is ‘frame alignment’, meaning that the ideology of the movement must resonate with the individual’s own perceptions and understanding of the world, as if this is not achieved, they will either continue religious seeking elsewhere, or abandon the process entirely. In the case of AM, they frame their messages in the broadest terms possible. The goal is to try to appeal to all Muslims, attempting to tap into already formed beliefs and values addressing generic concerns as opposed to particular solutions, an example being ‘the oppression of Muslims’ in places of conflict, such as Chechnya, Kashmir and Palestine.⁷⁹

Anjem Choudary, explained that the members tailor the message of the da’wa depending on the area in which the demonstrations are taking place, in order to increase its appeal. In an interview, he stated that they ‘go to areas looking at the problems they have... with the youth, prostitution, drugs and alcohol and really tap into that, presenting Islam as an alternative’.⁸⁰ By engaging locals on issues that directly concern them, they are tapping into the individuals

⁷⁶ James T Richardson "The Active vs. Passive Convert: Paradigm Conflict in Conversion/Recruitment Research." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24, no. 2 (1985) pg 168.

https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/1386340?sid=primo&origin=crossref&seq=6#metadata_info_tab_contents

⁷⁷ Q Wiktorowicz *Radical Islam Rising* (2005) pg.15

⁷⁸ David A. Snow et al. "Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 45, no. 5, (1980) pg. 795

https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/2094895?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

⁷⁹ Q Wiktorowicz *Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam* (2003) pg.18

<http://insct.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Wiktorowicz.Joining-the-Cause.pdf>

⁸⁰ C. Z. Raymond 'Al-Muhajiroun and Islam4UK: The Group Behind the Ban' *Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence ICSR* (2010) pg.19

<https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/ICSR-Feature-Al-Muhajiroun-and-Islam4UK-The-group-behind-the-ban.pdf>

pre-determined beliefs, which will encourage further discussion, where they will be invited to another public talk, and/or open discussion circles. This method proves to be effective, as observed by researcher Catherine Zara Raymond, who attended one of the ‘Islamic roadshows’ staged by AM in Edgware Road, where she observed six members of the public convert to Islam.⁸¹

d) Socialization

Socialization refers to the process in which the individual becomes a willing learner and student of the movement, taking part in religious lessons and activities that facilitate indoctrination, value changes, and identity construction.⁸² In this beginning of this phase, AM does not ask for anything from these individuals. They are not required to engage in high-risk activities or pay dues, instead they are enabled to engage in low-risk activism and activities at their leisure, whilst reaping the rewards of a free Islamic education without incurring the risks of commitment. An example of a low-risk activity within AM is attending the halaqas. The lessons revolve around the movement’s ideology and is central to the process known by members as *tarbiya* (culturing). The religious lessons are mostly based on the writings and teachings of the original leader Omar Bakri Muhammad, and his blend of Salafism and jihad-oriented interpretations of the Qur’an, as opposed to studying the Qur’an itself.⁸³ This ideology stresses that the only way to achieve the ultimate spiritual rewards (salvation and entrance into Paradise on Judgement Day) is to follow the movement’s proscribed strategy. In addition to the rigorous religious training, members are also expected to learn about the social, political and cultural climate of the environment in which they live, which facilitates public communication, outreach, and recruitment.

From an outsider's perspective, it seems illogical to fully join a high-risk activist movement when you could reap the benefits without the full commitment. However, the goal of the process is to entirely alter the values of the individual so that their self-interest is defined in accordance with the self-interest of the movement, constructing a wider shared identity and encouraging solidarity amongst members with the intention that these will further facilitate the

⁸¹ C. Z. Raymond ‘Al-Muhajiroun and Islam4UK’ *Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence ICSR* (2010) pg.19 <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/ICSR-Feature-Al-Muhajiroun-and-Islam4UK-The-group-behind-the-ban.pdf>

⁸² Q Wiktorowicz *Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam* (2003) pg.1

⁸³ M Kenney *Islamic State in Britain* (2018) pg.106

joining process. At the point that an individual internalizes much of the ideology, and accepts it as their worldview, formal joining becomes the natural progression. It must be noted that the prior three processes discussed are necessary conditions for socialization to occur. If the individual is not open to new ideas, does not expose themselves to the message of the movement, or even rejects it after exposure, then they will not participate in the necessary movement activities in order to fully absorb the ideology.

Whilst this framework provides an overall useful trajectory that demonstrates the factors which increases the likelihood of an individual joining, there are some individualistic factors that are not accounted for, and perhaps even an over-simplification and generalisation of these steps. An example of such is the concept of a cognitive opening and how one is produced. Is it reasonable to presume that a provocative demonstration could be all that it takes to produce such a significant psychological crisis, shaking the firm beliefs of an individual? Does this not suggest the existence of other pre-existing factors? Furthermore, after experiencing a crisis, can we presume that everyone would immediately turn to religion to resolve this?

In conclusion, there are a number of factors which could influence an individual's rationale for joining a radical, militant-jihadist movement such as AM. By using this framework and comparing and contrasting with other movements (such as new religious movements), it helps to reaffirm that Islamic activism (even in militant forms) is not unique, nor is activism exclusive to Islam.

Conclusion

This dissertation has sought to analyse the role of religion in the recruitment of militant-jihadis in the UK, specifically focusing on the group Al-Muhajiroun (AM). In the first chapter, it has been established that Omar Bakri Muhammad adopted Salafism to distinguish the group from its original organisation Hizb-ut Tahrir, but maintained much of the political views and goals, such as Pan-Islamism, and the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate. In the second chapter, Salafism in its various forms was analysed in more detail, which demonstrated the very specific interpretation AM subscribes to, and their very particular interpretation of key concepts, such as Jihad and Martyrdom. Additionally, the argument that the relevance of the term Salafism only serves to denote doctrinal purity, and as a bid for legitimacy and authenticity was also discussed.

However, the findings of the third chapter are the most relevant in answering the question of this dissertation. In this chapter, it was found that when an individual experiences an identity crisis (also called identity dissonance), this is thought to foster a cognitive opening, which makes an individual more receptive to new ideas. Groups such as Al-Muhajiroun are by and large an identity movement. It propagates a very restrictive and specific brand of Islam, one that draws a clear distinction between the community of believers, and the deviant, sinful unbelievers. Not only does this serve to provide spiritual authenticity, reward, and justification for their participation within the group and their activities, but it also functions to further isolate them from wider society, solidifying the foundations of the alternative identity they sought out to begin with.

Another crucial finding of this research is that religious ideology is not at the centre of AM's recruitment method. Members who speak to the public at their da'wa stalls are discouraged from discussing the more controversial topics such as jihad, a concept that is actually central to their beliefs. By being tactfully deceitful and using Islam as a wider framework to discuss political and social issues, they are able to present Islam as a solution, whilst not alluding to their militant-jihadist beliefs until much later, in the socialization stage. By the time the core ideology of AM is discussed, it is likely that the individual already shares a strong identity with the group, aligning with their political views and already formed some solid social ties during

the recruitment process, which would only add incentive for them to stay. The deceitful method of recruiting is comparable to certain new religious movements, such as the Moonies, which demonstrates that these militant-jihadist groups are not employing new methods, and that the role of religion in the recruitment process is often over-emphasized.

In conclusion, the role of religion in the recruitment of militant-jihadis in the UK is minimal. It appears that their core ideology is hidden from recruits until a much later stage, and that Islam is used as a broad framework to discuss political and social issues, such as foreign policy, international conflicts, or even more local issues such as prostitution and drugs, and presents Islam as a solution to the ills of society.

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