

# **A call to faith: How do faith leaders from diverse Islamic communities contribute to counternarratives that oppose extremist violent ideologies in the UK?**

**Thomas Gillespie:**

**PhD thesis re-submitted to St Mary's University and Liverpool Hope University as required for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

**Submitted 29h October 2025**



**St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London**

# Thesis Author Declaration Form

**Author:** Thomas Gillespie

**Title of Thesis:** A call to faith: How do faith leaders from diverse Islamic communities contribute to counternarratives that oppose extremist violent ideologies in the UK?

**Thesis submitted:** 29<sup>th</sup> October 2025

The above author has agreed their thesis shall be available:

- ◆ for reading
- ◆ ~~for sending away to other libraries~~
- ◆ for photocopying in accordance with the regulations governing the use of Liverpool Hope University theses and in compliance with UK Copyright Law

I declare that the work in the thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of St Mary's University and Liverpool Hope University and is an original work I have authored. No part of this thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Name: Thomas Gillespie

Signed: 

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> October 2025



## Acknowledgments

---

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Peter Tyler, Dr. Zin Derfoufi, and Professor Ian Linden, for their patient support and encouragement throughout this part-time PhD. Without their guidance and kind advice, I would never have completed this research project. There have been many challenging times outside of the study due to work, family commitments, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which have been traversed. There have also been moments of joy and time for reflection and growth when attending an interfaith conference in Toledo, as well as moments of love and laughter with my daughter, Eileen, that have seen me through.

The famous words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ring true for me - 'it's not about the destination, it's about the journey.' I started and did not finish my first PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University. It has taken me another twenty-five years to arrive at a place where I can submit a totally different PhD to St Mary's University and Liverpool Hope University. Thank you to all the staff who work across St Mary's and Liverpool Hope University who have made it possible for me to have this opportunity.

I would like to thank all my participants who gave their time to assist me with my field work. The qualitative data provided me with the means to push my research forward into areas that were unforeseen at the outset.

I remember my late father, Tom Gillespie, who passed away on Friday 28th March 2025 shortly after my PhD Viva Voce. I would like to thank him and my mother for their enduring love that always inspired me to work hard and never give up. Finally, I thank God. I lift my eyes to the mountains; where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven, creator of the earth (Psalm 121). When I see Your heavens, the work of Your hands, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained, what is mortal man that you care for him and the son of man, that you visit him (Psalm 8). Here I am Lord.

## **Abstract:**

---

### **A call to faith: How do faith leaders from diverse Islamic communities contribute to counternarratives that oppose extremist violent ideologies in the UK?**

**Thomas Gillespie: PhD Thesis for St Mary's University and Liverpool Hope University**

---

The aim of this research thesis is to extend knowledge of how UK Muslim faith leaders from a selection of diverse communities contribute to counternarratives opposing extremist violent ideologies. Using qualitative interviews it answers this question by examining how Muslim community faith leaders' voices counter violent extremist ideologies. This is made richer by the provision of some of the social context and distinctive individual case backgrounds and stories recorded. This includes considering questions around the impact of the UK Government's Prevent policy, the experiences of Islamophobia and subsequent responses that have arisen from Muslim faith leaders to violent acts of terrorism in the UK. Drawing on qualitative research methods and selected interviews with a sample of Muslim faith leaders from diverse Islamic traditions in the UK, this study addresses the research question by presenting evidence-based narratives that articulate resistance to violent ideologies. This approach has facilitated an in-depth examination of the lived experiences and voices of selected faith leaders, which may sometimes be overlooked by mainstream narratives of Muslims in the UK or insufficiently contextualized by larger empirical, data-driven studies. These interviews also present valuable insights into the practical ways in which the faith leaders actively contribute to countering extremist narratives and building resilience in their communities. As well as offering alternative and complementary methods to existing government strategies to combat extremism, such as Prevent, in the UK.

This research aims to contribute to and add to previous counternarrative studies, such as those by Joosse et al, on young Somali Muslims in Canada and a similar later study by Sandberg and

Andersen in Norway.<sup>1</sup> It seeks to distinguish itself from these earlier studies by presenting the unique counternarrative contribution of a selection of UK faith leaders' voices that resist extremism. Voices that are often not recognised in the public sphere and overlooked by mainstream dominant media narratives.<sup>2</sup> Set within the theoretical framework of the sociology of religion this thesis will also seek to contribute a substantive body of evidence that supports closer collaboration with community-based faith initiatives to inform more effective and constructive approaches to deradicalisation and preventing attraction to ideologically extremist forms of violence.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sandberg, Sveinung, Colvin, Sarah, 'ISIS is not Islam: Epistemic Injustice, Everyday Religion, and Young Muslims Narrative Resistance.' In the *British Journal of Criminology*, 2020, Vol.60 (6), pp1585-1605 and Joesse, Paul, Bucerius, Sandra M Thompson, Sara K. Surname. 'Narratives and Counternarratives: Somali Canadians on Recruitment as Foreign Fighters to Al-Shabaab.' In *British Journal of Criminology*, 2015, Vol.55 (4), pp811-832.

<sup>2</sup> Poole, E. (2002) *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*. London: I. B. Tauris.

## PhD Thesis Contents

---

<b>Abstract</b>	5
<b>Chapter One: An introduction to UK Islamic counternarratives to violent extremist ideologies.</b>	
1.1 Introduction: The central research question	9
1.2 The rise of extremist ideology and movements	12
1.3 My introduction to Hizb ut-Tahrir	17
1.4 The historical evolution of extremist ideology	20
1.5 UK faith voices counter extremism	24
1.6 Conclusion	26
<b>Chapter Two: Understanding the roots of radical anti-colonial Islamic thinking and the contemporary twenty first century lineage to this inheritance.</b>	
2.1 Introduction: The roots	28
2.2 A radical alignment	28
2.3 The roots of modern ideologically extremist movements	36
2.4 Twenty first century echoes of Qutb	40
2.5 The growth of extremist Islamic Ideology in the UK	45
2.6 The push and pull of attraction to extremist Ideologies	47
2.7 Deradicalisation of the nation's	52
2.8 Conclusion	57
<b>Chapter Three: UK Muslims question the efficacy of Prevent and offer Islamic counternarratives to extremism</b>	
3.1 Introduction	59
3.2 Government attempts to prevent radicalisation	59
3.3 Muslim faith community voices oppose Prevent	63
3.4 New counternarratives to extremist ideology	74
3.5 European examples of combating terrorism	82
3.6 Conclusion	86

## **Chapter Four: Evidence of UK faith communities countering narratives to violence and opposition to Prevent**

4.1 Introduction	90
4.2 Going back in time to predict the future	90
4.3 Case study of the Manchester Arena Bombing Inquest	96
4.4 Radicalisation of the nation: Abolish prevent and bolster faith communities	106
4.5 Conclusion	116

## **Chapter Five: Methodological foundations and approach to undertaking research**

5.1 Introduction	118
5.2 Methodology: Basis of research approach	119
5.3 Data analysis: Liberating the voices of individuals	125
5.4 Interview method and execution	128
5.5 Formulating fieldwork	132
5.6 Ethical and research considerations	139
5.7 Conclusion	148

## **Chapter Six: Listening to Islamic counternarratives to violence**

6.1 Introduction	149
6.2 A spectrum of participants from different strands of Islam in the UK	149
6.3 The state strikes back	154
6.4 Faith versus political ideologies as the key to countering extremism	159
6.5 Religious formation and teaching	163
6.6 Community, social responsibility and building a personal relationship with the Prophet Muhammad	167
6.7 The power of local culture versus the absolutist juggernaut	174
6.8 Conclusion	181

## **Chapter Seven: Islamic counternarratives that meet the challenge of violent ideologies in the UK**

7.1 Introduction	181
7.2 Faith counternarratives as alternative voices	182
7.3 Questioning the origins of violent ideologies and rejecting the politicisation of Islam	187

7.4 Are converts from the West more susceptible to extremism?	195
7.5 Faith versus extremism	203
7.6 Conclusion	206

## **Chapter Eight: Faith leadership and mosque life as a counternarratives to violent extremism**

8.1 Introduction	209
8.2 Muslim faith leadership meet the challenge	211
8.3 Who controls mosque life and what needs to change	219
8.4 Faith development in the face of global online extremism	229
8.5 Conclusion	235

## **Chapter Nine: Conclusion: Extreme times**

9.1 Introduction	238
9.2 A question of faith	239
9.3 The times are changing	250
9.4 New questions for future research in the field	253
9.5 Conclusion	254

<b>Appendix A:</b> Consent Form	259
---------------------------------	-----

<b>Appendix B:</b> Participation Information Sheet	259
----------------------------------------------------	-----

<b>Bibliography</b>	263
---------------------	-----

## **Chapter One:**

### **An Introduction to UK Islamic counternarratives to violent extremist ideologies**

#### **1. 1 Introduction: The central research question**

The central question of this thesis is how Islamic faith leaders from a sample of communities contribute to counternarratives opposing extremist violent ideologies in the UK. This thesis aims to address this question by examining the unique impact of UK Muslim community faith leaders' voices in countering violent extremist ideologies, as well as providing the social context and distinctive individual case backgrounds of those interviewed. The faith-based counter to extremism will be demonstrated through a combination of using qualitative interview methods and content analysis to present common counternarrative themes. The thesis touches on some of the associated issues raised by diverse strands of UK Muslim communities regarding: i) the problems that have arisen during the imposition of the country's Prevent strategy to prevent violent terrorist acts ii) the response of Islamic faith leadership to violent incidents of terrorism and corresponding experiences of Islamophobia iii) and reflections from Muslim faith leaders about mainstream media and political narrative interpretations of Islam that speak out against what they perceive to be divisive attempts to portray the Islamic faith as a source of violent extremism.

This thesis aims to research British Muslim faith leader counternarratives primarily through qualitative interview analysis, situated within the theoretical framework of the sociology of religion. The counternarratives in this thesis will seek to present the nuanced stories and social context of a selection of Muslim faith leaders from diverse Islamic traditions. This will aim to equally show opposition to extremist or violent Islamic ideologies and acknowledge the agency, depth, and significance of the lived experiences of Muslim faith leaders from various communities across the UK. In doing so, it will endeavour to present a multifaceted picture based in time of the varying methods used by UK Muslim faith community leaders to counter

extremism. Talal Assad argues that Islam is a 'discursive tradition' bound by the reference to Quran scripture and Hadith (biographical saying of the Prophet) and that studies related to Islam need to be undertaken through the prism of understanding the search for 'orthodoxy' in different ways in varying social contexts.<sup>3</sup> Whilst acknowledging with Asad that Islam is a 'discursive tradition' this thesis does not focus solely on textual based Islamic adherence but on the lived experience of British Muslim faith leaders, with the aim of demonstrating the complexities and contradictions found in the counternarrative discourse of individuals interviewed. This thesis does not set out to claim a fully representative account of all perspectives related to violent extremism in the UK Muslim community. Neither does this thesis aim to present a definitive answer on how to deradicalise individuals but instead focuses on counternarrative voices from a variety of UK Muslim community faith leaders. This includes addressing critical contemporary issues experienced by faith leaders interviewed as they counter violent extremist discourses within their respective communities.

The research undertaken in this thesis aims to add to previous counternarrative studies, such as those by Joosse et al. on young Somali Muslims in Canada and a similar later study by Sandberg and Andersen in Norway.<sup>4</sup> This thesis distinguishes itself from these earlier counternarrative works by: (i) examining the unique contribution of UK counternarratives from a sample of Muslim faith leaders (ii) presenting stories that highlight how Muslim faith leaders work with all agencies to prevent attraction to violent ideologies and (iii) documenting how UK Muslim faith leaders are responding to Islamophobic discourse with counternarratives to extremism. This research aims to present voices of resistance to extremism that are often not recognised in the public sphere and occasionally overlooked by mainstream dominant media narratives that sometimes present Islam in a homogenised fashion.<sup>5</sup> Purposive sampling has been used to select faith leaders from

---

<sup>3</sup> Asad, Talal (2012) *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. Occasional Paper Series. Georgetown University, pp5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Sandberg, Sveinung, Colvin, Sarah. 'ISIS is not Islam: Epistemic Injustice, Everyday Religion, and Young Muslims Narrative Resistance' In *British journal of criminology* 2020 Vol.60 (6), pp.1585-1605. Also Joosse, Paul Bucerius, Sandra M.; Thompson, Sara K. 'Narratives and Counternarratives: Somali – Canadians on Recruitment as Foreign Fighters to Al-Shabaab.' In *British Journal of Criminology*, 2015, Vol.55 (4), pp.811-832.

<sup>5</sup> Poole, E. (2002) *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*. London: I. B. Tauris, p15.

different Islamic traditions, involved in opposing extremism and violence, with their own specific counternarratives. The methodological approach for this thesis is set out in Chapter Five.

Chapters One to Four of this thesis consist of a comprehensive literature review, discussing the origins of violent extremism and its evolution within the UK context. These chapters also examine various deradicalisation approaches, including shedding light on how the implementation of strategies, such as Prevent, have impacted on the Muslim community in the UK and influenced community dynamics. Chapter Five of this thesis then details the methodology used to undertake this thesis and how fieldwork is to be conducted. The second half of the thesis from Chapters Six to Nine will then focus on the qualitative research evidence by presenting an in-depth exploration of the findings and insights drawn from the interview data collected.

It is over eighteen years since the United Kingdom (UK) government created the Prevent Strategy to prevent people becoming terrorists and carrying out acts of violence that identify with extremist Islamic ideologies. It came into being in April 2007 stating it wanted to 'isolate, prevent and defeat' violent extremism by 'winning hearts and minds,' and offering solutions to enable individuals to be 'deradicalised.'<sup>6</sup> In the last two decades. Prevent has made extensive efforts through the multi-agency Channel programme to engage all communities and individuals who are perceived to have been at risk of being ideologically 'radicalised' or being drawn into committing 'extremist' terrorist activities within the UK.<sup>7</sup> This is not specifically focused on threats from Islamic associated terrorism but also extreme right wing movements.<sup>8</sup> However, in the last ten years of Prevent there have been continued questions about its efficacy and numerous studies have shown opposition from sections of the UK Muslim communities who

---

<sup>6</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government. 'Preventing violent extremism: Winning hearts and minds Action Plan.' Communities and Local Government Publications, April 2007. <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20120919122719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/320752.pdf>. Accessed 20 June 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Home Office. 'Prevent Strategy.' Published by Home Office: UK.Gov. June 2011. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78966aed915d07d35b0dcc/prevent-strategy-review.pdf>. Accessed January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Home Office. 'Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations.' Home Office: UK.Gov. Updated 26 April 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations-accessible-version>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

perceive themselves to have been profiled as a 'suspect community.'<sup>9</sup> Various civic society organisations have also labelled Prevent as a 'toxic brand' that misunderstands Islam.<sup>10</sup> There have been extensive independent reviews that have argued in contrary that Prevent has focused on Muslims while ignoring other threats, at the expense of respecting human rights.<sup>11</sup> This thesis seeks to show that, amidst the ongoing debate over the efficacy of Prevent, the question of how counternarratives from UK Muslim faith leader voices contribute to preventing attraction to extremist ideologies has become equally important and has a significant part to play.

## 1.2 The rise of extremist ideology and movements

Historically Salafi Jihadist movements have been inspired by a transnational religious political ideology, based on a broad belief in war in countries in order to return to what adherents believe to be a truer version of early forms of Sunni Islamic expression.<sup>12</sup> An example of the use of the term 'Salafist Jihadist' can be seen in the work of Giles Kepel in relation to international Mujahideen (Arabic term for people who engage in war) volunteers of the war against the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan, who came from around the world to fight for Islamic countries against communist forces.<sup>13</sup> Fighters, such as Osama bin Laden, who had previously been funded by the USA Central Intelligence Agency, would later return from Saudi Arabia to Afghanistan to fight against perceived American colonial imperialism.<sup>14</sup> In the 1990s members of the

---

<sup>9</sup> See Spalek, B. and McDonald, L. 'Terror crime prevention: constructing Muslim practices and beliefs as anti-social and extreme through CONTEST 2.' In *Social Policy and Society*, 9(1) Home Office. 'Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations.' Home Office: UK.Gov. Updated 26 April 2024.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations-accessible-version> pp123–132. Kundnani, Arun. 'Radicalisation: The Journey of a Concept.' *Race and Class* 54 (2), 2004 pp3-25. Lister, M. and L. 'Disconnection and Resistance: Anti-Terrorism and Citizenship in the UK.' In *Citizenship Studies*, 17 (6-7) 2013, pp756-69.

<sup>10</sup> Halliday, Josh and Vikram Dodd. 'UK anti-radicalisation Prevent strategy a toxic brand.' Article in *The Guardian newspaper*, 9th March 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/mar/09/anti-radicalisation-prevent-strategy-a-toxic-brand>. Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International UK. 'This is the Thought Police: Prevent Duty and its chilling effect on human rights.' Report published by Amnesty International UK, November 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-shawcross-review-prevent-deeply-prejudiced-and-has-no-legitimacy>, p3.

<sup>12</sup> Kepel, Giles (2002) *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, p15.

<sup>13</sup> Kepel, Giles (2002) *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, p 15.

<sup>14</sup> Scheuer, Michael (2011) *Osama bin Laden*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Osama bin Laden founded Al-Qaeda and was the first general emir of al-Qaeda from 1988 until his death in 2011 in Pakistan. He was one of the

Mujahideen in Afghanistan and from wider afield turned their attention to fighting against Western countries and later evolved into pan-Islamist groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban who opposed Western governments' international political interventions and promoted Islamic political frameworks.<sup>15</sup> Osama bin Laden was a key founder of Al-Qaeda and took an active part in planning the attack on the New York World Trade Centre on September 11th, 2001.<sup>16</sup> Hegghammer considers the principal movements of this period and region to be the precursors of contemporary of 'Salafi-Jihadist' movements.<sup>17</sup> Politically inspired Salafi movements primarily have their roots in the middle half of the twentieth century, when countries such as Egypt were rediscovering their national identity at the end of the European colonial period. The theological doctrines of the Syrian-Egyptian Islamic scholar Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935) included reviving the traditions of the early Muslim generations and reforming to establish sovereignty on territory perceived as occupied or dominated by non-Muslims, as well as denouncing groups – such as Sufis – as not fulfilling the tenets of Islam.<sup>18</sup> This was the reaction to the demise of the Ottoman Caliphate that ended in Turkey with the advent of the new secular state. What Muhammad Rashid Rida wanted to create was an Islamic state for modern times, to protect Muslims and fight against the expansion of European imperialism. This approach also greatly influenced the foundations of future Salafi-Jihadist movements, such as Al-Qaeda, the now defunct Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA), and the Egyptian group Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya who sought a purer form of Islam, devoid of local culture, that reflected the early founding elements of the faith.<sup>19</sup> The work of Muhammad Rashid Rida also influenced seminal Islamist thinkers, Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. I will address this in greater detail in relation to Hassan al-Banna

---

chief strategic planners of the attack on the World Trade towers in New York in 2001. He spent many years in hiding - most of his children and one of his wives went to Iran - and was eventually killed by an American military mission in Pakistan in 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p33.

<sup>16</sup> Scheuer, Michael (2002) *Through our enemies' eyes: Osama bin Laden, radical Islam, and the future of America*, Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, pp10 to 25.

<sup>17</sup> Hegghammer, Thomas. 'Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism.' In *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, Meijer, R. (ed.) (2009). Columbia University Press. pp.244–266.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p250.

<sup>19</sup> Maher, Shiraz (2016) *Salafî–Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, London: Hurst, p75.

and Sayyid Qutb in Chapter Two.

Whilst it can be argued the main proponents of Islamic political ideology emerged in the twentieth century, the origins of this ideological doctrine are derived from an earlier time and older sources. As an Islamic revivalist and reformer, Muhammad Rashid Rida chose the Hanbali school in Syria to inform his vision of a renewal based on the revival of the values of the *Salaf*, the first three generations of Islam.<sup>20</sup> He argued that Salafism was an Islam purged of impurities and Western influences and that a pan-Islamic state needed to be created. The Hanbali school is one of the four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence within Sunni Islam. It is named after and based on the teachings of the 9th-century scholar, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and is the smallest and most strict traditionalist of the four major Sunni schools, the others being the Hanafi, Maliki and Shafi'i schools.<sup>21</sup> The Hanbali school also informs the later origins of the eighteenth-century Wahhabi tradition based in Saudi Arabia. Rida supported the Wahhabi school of thought advocated in Saudi Arabia that looked for a renewal of the Islamic world and distanced itself from community or cultural interpretations of faith.<sup>22</sup> Wahhabism champions the Hanbali school of thought and has gone further by opposing rituals related to the veneration of Muslim saints and pilgrimages to their tombs and shrines in the Saudi peninsula. Wahhabism, and its search for Islamic purity, remains a strong influence on groups such as Al-Qaeda, Daesh and the Taliban in first part of the twenty first century.<sup>23</sup>

Takfiri is an Arabic term used by ideologically extremist groups to indicate a fellow Muslim has

---

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin, Simon, Daniel, Steven (2002). *The Age of Sacred Terror*. New York: Random House Inc., pp. 59–63.

<sup>21</sup> Mack, Gregory, 'Jurisprudence.' In *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Islamic Political Thought* (2012) Bowering, Gerhard, Patricia Crone, Wadad Kadi, Devin J. Stewart, Muhammad Qasim Zaman (associate editors), Mahan Mirza (assistant editor). Princeton University Press.

Muhammad Qasim Zaman (associate editors), Mahan Mirza (assistant editor) (2012), *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Islamic Political Thought*, Princeton University Press, p. 289

<sup>22</sup> Belkeziz, Abdelilah (2009), *The State in Contemporary Islamic Thought: A Historical Survey of the Major Muslim Political Thinkers of the Modern Era*. London: I.B Tauris. pp. 86–87.

<sup>23</sup> Wagemakers, Joas. 'The Citadel of Salafism.' In *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements*, Cusack, Carole M., Upal, M. Afzal (Editors.) (2021). Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion. Vol. 21. Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers. p. 341.

become an unbeliever and is no longer sufficiently Muslim.<sup>24</sup> It has been adopted as an ideological approach in the modern era by groups such as the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and later Daesh to sanction the use of violence. Takfiri ideology is predicated on supporting acts of violence as legitimate methods of achieving religious or political goals, and a polemic that i) accuses certain Muslim communities of being ‘apostates’ ii) rejects innovations within Islam and different sects within Islam, such as Shias and iii) places a focus on Jihad against ‘infidels’ who are seen as oppressing Islamic people.<sup>25</sup> The key to this form of Islamic ideology is that adherents want to return to an early form of Sunni practice with the creation of a Khalifa (leader) of a Caliphate state to fight those who are against this, and reject all who are judged to be apostates or non-believers.<sup>26</sup> Political Islamic ideology, advocated by seminal thinkers such as Rida, which seeks to protect Muslims from persecuting enemies and defend the faith, has had an incalculable global impact and has attracted support from all over the world, including the UK.<sup>27</sup>

In the UK forms of Salafi Jihadist and Takfiri Jihadi identity has been manifested in various guises, but most prominently by groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation) and Al-Muhajiroun in the periods of the 1990s and into the 2000s. UK Government initiatives under the Prevent strategy were established after the July 7, 2005, London bombings. Prevent aimed to counter the rise of groups identified as proponents of hate crimes, that were divisive within communities, and posed potential terrorist threats, but without imposing a ban at this stage. Hizb ut-Tahrir arrived in the UK in the late 1980s and began gaining prominence in mosques from the early 1990s.<sup>28</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir was founded in 1953 as a political organization in Jordanian-controlled Jerusalem by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, a Palestinian Islamic scholar from Haifa who had served as

---

<sup>24</sup> Poljarevic, Emin. ‘Theology of Violence-oriented Takfirism as a Political Theory: The Case of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).’ In *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Islamic Political Thought* (2012), Bowering, Gerhard, Patricia Crone, Wadad Kadi, Devin J. Stewart, Muhammad Qasim Zaman (associate editors), Mahan Mirza (assistant editor). Princeton University Press, pp485-486.

<sup>25</sup> Meijer, Roel (2013). *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 25–26,

<sup>26</sup> Sonn, Tamara (2004) *A Brief History of Islam*. Blackwell Publishing, p11.

<sup>27</sup> Belkeziz, Abdelilah (2009), *The State in Contemporary Islamic Thought: A Historical Survey of the Major Muslim Political Thinkers of the Modern Era*. London: I.B Tauris, pp. 86–87.

<sup>28</sup> Farouki, Suha Taji (1996) *Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate*, London: Grey Seal Books.

a Qadi (the Romanized term for 'religious court judge') in Palestine before the establishment of the state of Israel. Al-Nabhani's writings focus on liberating Arab-Muslim countries from the effects of colonialism, reflecting the influence of the inter-war and early post-independence periods on his intellectual development.<sup>29</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir remains an international pan-Islamist and Islamic political organization whose stated aim is the re-establishment of the Islamic Caliphate to unite the Muslim ummah (Romanised Arabic for community) to implement Sharia law to form the basis of an Islamic state.<sup>30</sup> The party has been active predominantly across the Middle East, with its headquarters in Lebanon, as well as parts of Africa and Asia, and, in more recent decades, the USA and Europe.<sup>31</sup> In the UK, it has been supported by people emigrating to cities such as London from the Middle East, but mostly followed by a majority of young men of South Asian descent.<sup>32</sup> It has established a broad international presence and over the years its members have been arrested in connection with a number of suspected coup plot attempts in Jordan, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt and it has been repressed.<sup>33</sup> Al-Nabhani saw world history as an eternal conflict between Islam and non-believers, with the nation state considered a historical assault on Islam that could only be remedied with the political creation of a new Caliphate and *Dar al Islam* (literally meaning house of Islam), where an Islamic state had sovereignty.<sup>34</sup> Discussion in this thesis will return to the political and ideological narrative of the Caliphate in Chapter Two. The UK branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir reflected the group's original vision of establishing an Islamic state in a Muslim country, as envisioned by Al-Nabhani. Whilst Al-Muhajiroun was created as separate group, conditioned by the social dynamics and cultural context of Britain. Both these groups have had an important influence in the recent history of promoting extremist ideologies within the UK.

---

<sup>29</sup> Al-Nabhani, Taqi al-Din (1998). *The Islamic State* London: De-Luxe Printers.

<sup>30</sup> Farouki, Suha Taji. '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, October 2000, pp. 21-46.

<sup>31</sup> Ayoob, Mohammed (2008). *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World*. University of Michigan Press.

<sup>32</sup> Farouki, Suha Taji (1996) *Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate*, London: Grey Seal Books. p102.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p55.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Nabhani, Taqi al-Din (1998). *The Islamic State* London: De-Luxe Printers, pp.240–276.

There have been a variety of different studies on the effectiveness of Prevent in the UK, as well as studies of specific Muslim communities on countering extremism. One of these was the study by Robert Lambert of the London 'Brixton Salafi community' battle against 'Islamically inspired terrorism' and contesting ways of 'predicting violence.'<sup>35</sup> Lambert presents a Salafi community whose strict adherence to the Quran and Hadith and theological teaching opposed groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, Al-Muhajiroun, Al-Qaeda and Daesh, repudiating their actions as 'Takfiri' (Arabic term that denotes excommunicating another Muslim as an apostate) and 'haram' (forbidden).<sup>36</sup> This study highlighted the Brixton mosque Salafi outreach Strategy to Re-educate and Empower Teenagers programme and a Salafi movement in the UK who were dedicated to ending extremist interpretations of Islam rather than inspiring it. It set out to build a better understanding of the Islamic faith for those converting or returning to the faith to ensure they had the knowledge to resist attempts by the hate preachers, such as Omar Bakri Mohammed and Abu-Hamza of Al-Muhajiroun.<sup>37</sup> The work of this thesis adds to previous UK based research, such as studies by Lambert, to show how a corpus of British Muslim faith leaders have gone on to create even stronger methods of combatting ideologically extremist hate narratives

### **1.3 My introduction to Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun**

My initial introduction to Hizb ut-Tahrir came as a Master student at King's College, University of London, writing an ethnographic based dissertation in the mid-1990s before the 9/11 attack on the World Trade buildings. I spent six months undertaking participant observation research in the Turnpike Lane mosque in Wightman Rd. During this time, I built an acquaintance with Omar Bakri Mohammed, then leader of the group, who lived with his family a few streets away in the Tottenham area of north London. This included attending Hizb ut-Tahrir rallies and conferences

---

<sup>35</sup> Lambert, R. 'Salafi and Islamist Londoners: Stigmatised minority faith communities countering Al-Qaeda.' In *Crime Law Society Change*, 2008 50, p75. DOI 10.1007/s10611-008-9122-8. Lambert outlines existing counternarratives within certain London Islamic communities to violence.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p83.

<sup>37</sup> Barclay, Jack. 'Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET): A Case Study in Government-Community Partnership and Direct Intervention to Counter Violent Extremism.' *Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation Brief* (2011).

in Trafalgar Square, Wembley Arena, Luton Mosque, and Ilford Town Hall. Some of the Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun members I met, such as Omar Bakri and Anjem Choudary, went on to openly support Al-Qaeda and Daesh. They were perceived by the Muslim community at the time as a radical uneducated fringe who were a peripheral minority, lacking Islamic scholarship or knowledge.<sup>38</sup> Their hate speeches and frequent antisemitic and homophobic language were therefore not taken seriously or prohibited by state interventions or mosques at this time.<sup>39</sup> By the time of the conflict in Iraq and Syria and advent of Daesh a number of Al-Muhajiroun members had travelled to the war zone and were also linked to inciting hate crime and espousing violent Islamic political ideology in the UK.<sup>40</sup> Many, including former Al-Muhajiroun leader Anjem Choudary, went on to be prosecuted through the British criminal justice system. Choudary was first imprisoned in Britain in 2016 for encouraging support for the Daesh inspired terrorism and encouraging people to travel to join the Caliphate set up in 2014. In 2024 Choudary was extradited to the United States and given a life sentence for the same criminal act after setting up an online Al-Muhajiroun group.<sup>41</sup> He praised the men responsible for the 9/11 attacks in the United States and is quoted as saying he wanted to 'convert Buckingham Palace into a mosque' to create a Caliphate in the UK.<sup>42</sup> The influence of Al-Muhajiroun is shown in the case of Michael Adebolajo, a member of and follower of Choudary who converted to Islam. Michael Adebolajo killed Lee Rigby in Woolwich in 2013.<sup>43</sup> There is also the later 2017 case of Al-Muhajiroun member, Khurram Shazad Butt, who, with two other men, killed eight members of the public in the London Bridge attack.

Following the completion of a master's degree at King's College, University of London, I went on

---

<sup>38</sup> Hoque, Ashraf (2019) *Being Young, Male and Muslim in Luton*, London: UCL Press, p94.

<sup>39</sup> Watson, Richard. 'Has Al-Muhajiroun been underestimated?' *BBC News online*, Published 27 June 2017. Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40355491>.

<sup>40</sup> Hoque, Ashraf (2019) *Being Young, Male and Muslim in Luton*, London: UCL Press, p24.

<sup>41</sup> Dodd, Vikram. 'Anjem Choudary jailed for five-and-a-half years for urging support of Isis.' *The Guardian newspaper* 16<sup>th</sup> September 2018. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Also 'Anjem Choudary sentenced to life in prison for directing terrorist group.' *Aljazeera News online* 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024, accessed 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024.

<sup>42</sup> Fenton, Siobhan. 'Anjem Choudary proposed converting Buckingham Palace into mosque.' Article in *The Independent newspaper* 16<sup>th</sup> August 2016. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Kelly, June. 'Lee Rigby murder: Adebolajo and Adebowale jailed.' *BBC News online*, Published 26 February 2014. Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26357007>.

to start a PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies focused on the impact of Al-Muhajiroun on the Muslim faith formation of young people in the UK. I was unable to finish this research thesis due to personal circumstances. My awareness of the impact of groups such as Al-Muhajiroun, however, continued as a trainee psychotherapist at the University of East London into the 2000s. As a psychotherapist I have worked with clients of many faiths who have sometimes been conflicted by faith identity and personal life choices. This includes a client I worked with for a brief number of sessions in 2017 who had been a former member of Al-Muhajiroun. This man had experienced criminal justice and Prevent interventions before and after being a member of Al-Muhajiroun and experienced feelings of paranoia due to believing that he was being watched at the mosque and previously of not being 'accepted' by his father. He told me that having a new child had 'softened his view of the world' and that he no longer wanted to be associated with any groups who could compromise him as a 'family man.'<sup>44</sup> This therapy encounter raised questions about the state of Muslim faith practice in the UK in the face of Prevent government policy funded programmes. It is partly this client conversation that inspired me to begin to re-examine my previous research of Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun before 9/11 and decide to undertake doctoral research at St Mary's University. The world in 2018 was a quite different place from the 1990s and the early 2000s. However, the UK Muslim faith leader voices now offer a unique faith based counternarrative to violent ideologies that is the focus of this research thesis. This adds to earlier studies of Muslim counternarratives by Joosse In Canada and Calvin and Sandberg in Norway by looking at the UK context, which will be discussed further on in this thesis.<sup>45</sup>

Ideologically extremist Islamic informed groups have also evolved further internationally with the creation of Daesh in the Levant region of Syrian and Iraq and beyond. Daesh attracted a surge in

---

<sup>44</sup> Gillespie, Thomas (2017). Therapy notes.

<sup>45</sup> Joosse, P., Bucarius, S. M., & Thompson, S. K. 'Narratives and counternarratives: Somali Canadians on recruitment as foreign fighters to Al-Shabaab.' In *British Journal of Criminology*, 55(4), pp811-832. Andersen Jan C, Sandberg Sveinung, 'Opposing Violent Extremism through Counternarratives: Four Forms of Narrative Resistance.' In *The Emerald Handbook of Narrative Criminology*, Jennifer Fleetwood; Lois Presser; Sveinung Sandberg; Thomas Ugelvik (Editors) (2019) Emerald Publishing Limited, pp.445-466.

participation of foreign insurgents in Syria and Iraq between 2014 and 2019. This included UK participants who had previously participated in, or had sympathy with, Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun and who have been identified in the Global Coalition Against Daesh.<sup>46</sup> Many individuals who participated in the Daesh insurgency in the Levant either remained in the battle arena to meet their fate or, at the end of the war in 2018-19, were imprisoned locally or sent back their place or origin upon attempting to travel back home.<sup>47</sup> There is a growing body of evidence that presents conflicting stories of UK individuals who joined these organisations. Their encounters with government agencies, and their life stories and backgrounds documented through police investigations and journalistic enquiries across different European countries, in reports by groups such as Human Rights Watch.<sup>48</sup> An example of allegiance to groups such as Daesh is that of the French-born Algerian brothers, Saïd Kouachi and Chérif Kouachi who committed the Charlie Hebdo attack in 2015. The brothers were identified by the police as 'radicals' years before they undertook the terrorist acts that killed twelve employees of the magazine for satirizing the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>49</sup> Another example is of the much larger Bataclan theatre, Saint Denis and Stade de France attacks in Paris in November 2015, which saw one hundred and thirty people killed. This included suicide bombers of Syrian and north African decent, such as Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who had been based in Belgium and claimed the attack on behalf of Daesh in retaliation for French airstrikes on their forces in Syria.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Global Coalition against Daesh. Online homepage. Accessed May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/>. The Global Coalition was formed in September 2014 and is unique in its membership, scope, and commitment. Together, the Global Coalition is committed to degrading and defeating Daesh. The UK Government is a member of the coalition.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, Global Coalition online homepage.

<sup>48</sup> Human Rights Watch have issued numerous reports that record the lives of people retained in camps in Syria on the border with Turkey and those who have returned home. Such as 'Tunisia: Scant Help to Bring Home ISIS Members Children.' Human Rights Watch online news, 12<sup>th</sup> February 2019 and, 'Bring Me Back to Canada: Plight of Canadians Held in Northeast Syria for Alleged ISIS Links,' Human Rights Watch online June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Guerrin, Michel. 'Charlie Hebdo Murder.' Article in *Le Monde*, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Henley, John. 'Paris attacks: EU in emergency talks on border crackdown.' In *The Guardian newspaper*, 20 November 2015. Accessed on 10 May 2024. In this Article the French prime minister of the time, Manuel Valls, is quoted as saying 'some of the killers had taken advantage of Europe's migrant crisis to slip in unnoticed.'

## 1.4 The historical evolution of extremist ideology

It can be argued that Salafi and Takfiri Jihadists can be seen to be engaged in a struggle to find a faith perspective that is part of what Bauman calls a 'religion of protest'.<sup>51</sup> I would argue there is no systematic pattern that can be applied to the form of 'protest' Salafi or Takfiri Jihadists express. It is therefore vital to listen and hear the voices of the Muslim faith community in creating positive effective change to counter attraction to extremism in UK society. This requires a deeper exploration of the multifarious interventions, such as the Prevent programme, used to break the connection with paradigms set out by exponents of extremism. I will be addressing this in Chapter Two by examining the evolutionary roots of Islamic groups who have supported ideological extremist violence, and the opposition to this expressed in the complex journeys back to towards a non-violent faith practice. To this extent, this thesis goes beyond mainstream media definitions, such as 'radicalisation' and 'extremism,' to explore an understanding of the attraction to extremist ideologies. It also includes corresponding Muslim community faith leadership stories and observations about what works to prevent attraction to extremism and assist the journey of individuals back to a more integrated holistic forms of Islamic practice.

Many of the faith leaders I interviewed for this thesis had a vast experience of working with individuals who had been attracted to violent extremism. They identified a diverse number of non-specific triggers that caused attraction to extremist ideologies, such as socio-economic or psychosocial, or perceptions of global injustices against Muslims. This thesis will not be seeking to offer a distinct hypothesis about why people join extremist Islamic groups in the UK.<sup>52</sup> The main body of research has taken into consideration some of the wider global factors behind extremist Islamic ideologies, the contemporary responses of UK Government agencies, and the response of Muslim community groups to this phenomenon. This will include numerous

---

<sup>51</sup>Bauman, Z. 'Postmodern Religion.' In *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, Paul Heelas (Editor) [1997]. London: Blackwell Publishers. p72

<sup>52</sup> Marco Nilsson. 'Foreign Fighters and the Radicalization of Local Jihad: Interview Evidence from Swedish Jihadists.' In *Conflict & Terrorism*, 19 Feb 2015 pp. 343-358. Nilsson's work is one example of studies in the northern European context that attempt to explain terrorist attraction.

examples of polemical debate on how to stop attraction to extremist Islamic ideologies and exposition of contrasting views on the impact of Prevent on the Muslim community. I will be coming back to this topic in both Chapter Four and Chapter six of this thesis.

Over the years there have been numerous UK Prevent government funded groups that have attempted to counter extremist Islamic terrorism in the UK. One of the foremost of these was the Quilliam Foundation set up in 2007 by Ed Husain, Maajid Nawaz, and Rashad Zaman Ali, three former members of Hizb ut-Tahrir. This UK Home Office funded think tank group focused on countering Islamist ideology and provided a critique that sought to lobby government and public institutions for more nuanced policies regarding Islam, and on the need for greater democracy in the Muslim world, whilst empowering ‘moderate Muslim’ voices.<sup>53</sup> Quilliam influenced UK Prevent policy and argued that Islam is a faith, not an ideology, and that ‘Islam is not Islamism.’<sup>54</sup> It also argued that ‘Islamists’ are extreme because of their rigidity in understanding politics.<sup>55</sup> It also attempted to work with individuals who may have previously been members of groups identified as extremist and in university campuses to promote universal human rights to ‘counter extremism.’ The Quilliam Foundation went into liquidation in 2021 during the Covid pandemic period due to a stated lack of funds and is no longer operative.<sup>56</sup> This was not only about lack of continued funding and support from government, but also because of a lack of trust and validation from within the UK Muslim community. Quilliam leaders were perceived to have advocated ‘spying’ on its own community using surveillance methods and to have promoted Prevent and the overall CONTEST Strategy.<sup>57</sup> Once again, I will be coming back to Prevent and CONTEST Strategy in Chapter Two of this thesis.

---

<sup>53</sup> Quilliam Foundation. ‘A Muslim Think Tank to Counter Extremism.’ Published on Quantara, 7<sup>th</sup> August, 2008. <https://qantara.de/en/article/quilliam-foundation-muslim-think-tank-counter-extremism>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

<sup>54</sup> Ed Husain. ‘You ask the questions.’ Article in *The Independent newspaper*, 14 April 2008. Accessed November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, Accessed November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Ahmed, N. ‘The Charmed Life and Strange Sad Death of the Quilliam Foundation.’ *Byline Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021. <https://bylinetimes.com/2021/05/11/the-charmed-life-and-strange-sad-death-of-the-quilliam-foundation/>. Accessed July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

<sup>57</sup> Murray, Douglas. ‘Quilliam's toxic take on liberty.’ *The Guardian newspaper*, 23 October 2009. Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022.

Groups or individuals who identify with extremist ideologies affiliated to groups like Al-Qaeda or Daesh are no longer openly visible or contactable via mosques in the UK.<sup>58</sup> This is primarily due to i) rejection by the majority of Muslims in the UK from mosque settings ii) the demise of global movements such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh due to sustained attacks and limited access to funds and iii) fear or direct experience of UK individuals of prosecution through Prevent and other aspects of CONTEST investigations. There are also other factors that have reinforced this, such as mosques becoming more aware of who was using their facilities and handing out faith marketing material after news reports of terrorist incidents.<sup>59</sup> A quantitative analysis using survey research methods is therefore difficult to undertake and I will be coming back to the methodological approach of this research in Chapter Five. This thesis seeks to include certain elements of the debate concerning the effectiveness of the UK Prevent ‘deradicalising’ initiatives from voices from within the Muslim community in the UK. This includes exploring the opinion of UK Muslims who feel they are victims of repressive counter-terrorism legislation and an Islamophobic discourse whereby Muslim identity is perceived to be stigmatised and conflated with extremism.<sup>60</sup> The lack of understanding about Islam and experiences of Islamophobia are illustrated in this thesis through the personal stories of individuals. This approach is not generic but is grounded in the lived experiences of participants, as revealed through using qualitative interview methods. Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that identity is not fixed and that there are spaces of dissonance that cannot be ‘essentialised.’<sup>61</sup> I apply Appiah’s approach by arguing that one cannot define or essentialise Islamic British faith identity or the many different counternarratives to extremist ideologies presented in this thesis. I would therefore argue that

---

<sup>58</sup> Neumann, Peter. ‘Foreign Affairs Committee Oral evidence: The UK’s international counterterrorism policy, HC 1832.’ UK Parliament House of Commons Publication. Tuesday 12th September 2023. <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/13628/html/>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

<sup>59</sup> Osborne, P. and Jones, J., (July 2008) *Muslims Under Siege: Alienating Vulnerable Communities*. Democratic Audit, Human Rights Centre, University of Essex in association with Channel 4 Dispatches. <https://www.channel4.com/press/news/dispatches-vindicated-over-undercover-mosque-film>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

<sup>60</sup> Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All Runnymede Trust (1997). The term Islamophobia was used first in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but came to prominence in this paper in which evidenced prejudice and anti-Muslim sentiment in the UK was evidenced.

<sup>61</sup> Appiah, Kwame Anthony (2018) *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*, London: Profile Books

Muslim faith identity in the UK is fluid and diverse and cannot be essentialised. Faith leader participants interviews shown in later chapters illuminate the complex multifaceted, often hybrid, understanding of what it is to be a Muslim in Britain.<sup>62</sup> It should be stated that this thesis is not a direct comparison of Prevent policy effectiveness compared to faith counternarratives. However, this thesis does set out to make a case for enhanced collaboration with faith-based community initiatives to inform the development of more effective and contextually grounded deradicalisation strategies.

### 1.5 UK faith voices counter extremism

In the struggle of Muslim faith communities in the UK to find their voice, we see an echo of post-colonial discourse that continues to judge what it means to be perceived as British or integrated into UK society.<sup>63</sup> After events such as the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001 and the 7/7 bombing in London in 2005, Islamophobic incidents against Muslim communities in the UK increased, with reports of racism and hate crimes at places of worship.<sup>64</sup> It is in this climate that the sociologist Tahir Abbas states Islamophobia has arisen:

Historically, Islamophobia had pro-Christian and anti-Muslim features, namely at the time of the Crusades, empire, and colonialism. In the modern era, secular notions have replaced religious characteristics, namely a focus on the ideas of freedom, democracy, and global values. Islamophobia is a complex, multifaceted, economic, political, and cultural phenomenon, and its impact on Muslim/non-Muslim relations will remain an

---

<sup>62</sup> Bhabha, H. K. 'Of Mimicry and Man.' In *Tensions of Empire: Colonial cultures in a Bourgeois world (1984)*. Cooper, F. & Stoler, A.L. (ed.), California: University of California Press.

<sup>63</sup> Hall, Stuart, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora (2009)* London: Routledge. Hall states, 'like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power,' p10.

<sup>64</sup> Pandya-Wood, Jason. 'Still no Place for Hate: Analysis of the findings of the Nottingham Citizen's Hate Crime Survey including recommendations.' Published 10 May 2018, Nottingham Trent University, P8-10. This report states that attacks against Muslims doubled in number over a decade in this city.

important feature of social life in Britain for some time.<sup>65</sup>

The Islamophobia and heightened dissonance within British society that Abbas highlights is reflected in the stories of individuals presented in this thesis. Many community faith leaders, including the ones I interviewed, felt not trusted as British citizens. This has at times been evidenced by numerous news reports within certain sections of the mainstream UK media that reflect intolerance and heightened discrimination against Muslims as a permissible narrative.<sup>66</sup> These sensationalised media headlines have focused on the fear around community cohesion, threats to 'traditional British values', and associated Muslims with issues of immigration and national security.<sup>67</sup> There has also been a wider political discourse in the UK that has presented Islam as an 'existential threat' to Western civilization that has facilitated violence and terrorist acts.<sup>68</sup> This will be evidenced in Chapters Six and Seven, where several participants interviewed communicated that negative press about Islam had impacted directly by making them feel discriminated against and 'Other' in British society.<sup>69</sup>

The Cambridge University psychologist, Sara Savage, has led on researching the effectiveness of interventions to prevent 'radicalisation' of young UK Muslims using an empirically based

---

<sup>65</sup> Abbas, Tahir, 'Islamophobia in the United Kingdom: Historical and Contemporary Political and Media Discourses in the Framing of a 21st-Century Anti-Muslim Racism.' In *Islamophobia. The Challenge of pluralism in (2011) the 21st Century*, edited by John L. Esposito and I. Kalin. Oxford University Press, pp. 145-168.

<sup>66</sup> In the Times, 9 November 2016, 'Islamist School Can Segregate Boys and Girls.' In the Daily Express website in 2017, 'Anger as less than a third of Muslim nations sign up to coalition against Isis.' In the Sun online, 1 December 2016. 'Secret is Safe: Half of British Muslims would not go to cops if they knew someone with Isis links.' In the Daily Express 1 December 2016, 'New £5 notes could be BANNED by religious groups as Bank CAN'T promise they're Halal,' and in the Sunday Times, 1 December, 'Enclaves of Islam see UK as 75% Muslim.' The Mail on Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016, 'Isolated British Muslims are so cut off from the rest of society that they see the UK as 75% Islamic, shock report reveals.' On August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Boris Johnson stated in an article for the Telegraph that 'it is absolutely ridiculous that people should choose to go around looking like letter boxes,' adding that any female student who appeared at school or in a lecture 'looking like a bank robber' should be asked to remove it. All the above news articles accessed 20<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Poole, E. (2002) *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*. London: I. B. Tauris.

<sup>68</sup> Gove, Michael Celsius 7/7 (2006), London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. Also Phillips, Melanie (2006), *Londonistan: how Britain is creating a terror state within*. London: Gibson Square.

<sup>69</sup> Morey, P. and A. Yaqin (2011) *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11*. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press.

integrative complexity model.<sup>70</sup> This involved a 16-hour course using films and group activities that enabled participants to solve problems according to a broad array of their own values. The course was pre- and post-tested with eighty-one young Muslims across seven pilot groups around the UK. Using value complexity, the central hypothesis of the approach is that group discussions using conflict resolution type models and written responses to moral dilemmas allow individuals to i) end attachment to extreme views and ii) increase empathy with wider diverse groups. Thus, attachment to extremist groups is ended through cognitive changes, without using the justice system to impose new boundaries. In the same spirit as Savage, I have sought to investigate the comparable effectiveness of faith leadership in challenging individuals' extremist and violent worldviews, and whether there is any learning that can be utilised in different spheres to divert people away from affiliation with extremist and violent ideologies.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the central argument of the thesis regarding Muslim faith leaders' counternarrative responses to ideologically extremist groups that promote violence. It has also explained how this will be examined within the body of this research study. Counternarratives from within the Muslim faith community are instrumental in driving change and challenging dominant narratives that may otherwise negate or silence the voices of faith leaders. The voices of faith leaders hold major influence within various Muslim communities, playing a critical role in shaping solutions to reduce terrorist incidents of ideologically inspired violence and, by extension, challenging Islamophobic discourse. The UK Government's approach to deradicalisation, primarily through the Prevent programme, remains a potent state intervention in combating extremist ideologies. However, as stated, at times Prevent has not obtained the complete support of the UK Muslim community to achieve its end goals. Furthermore, the term radicalisation has at times, been politically weaponised by media and various government sources to disempower Muslim communities, or even misappropriated by far-right groups to

---

<sup>70</sup> Liht, Jose and Savage, Sara. 'Preventing Violent Extremism through Value Complexity: Being Muslim Being British.' In *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, Number 4 2013, p47.

justify attacks against Muslim places of worship.<sup>71</sup>

The next chapter further examines the twentieth-century origins of contemporary ideologically extremist Islamic groups, influenced by postcolonial history and seminal activists like Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. It also discusses how these legacies have manifested in contemporary global movements, such as Daesh and Al-Qaeda, and how different sections of the UK Muslim community has responded to this phenomenon. Additionally, it highlights how the UK's government Prevent policy has established initiatives to prevent terrorist attacks and compares this with other European models that offer deradicalisation programmes to prevent the growth of violent extremist groups.

---

<sup>71</sup> Knupfer, Helena, Kaskelvičiute, Ruta, Matthes, Jörg, 'Silent Sympathy: News Attention, Subtle Support for Far-Right Extremism, and Negative Attitudes Toward Muslims.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence Journal*, (December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023) Volume 37, Issue 2, pp186-190.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Understanding the roots of radical anti-colonial Islamic thinking and the contemporary twenty first century lineage to this inheritance**

---

#### **2.1 Introduction: The roots**

This chapter presents the twentieth-century roots of ideologically extremist Islamic movements, which primarily emerged from interactions during the European colonial period. These movements were shaped by the political, social, and cultural disruptions caused by colonial rule, as well as the responses from Muslim intellectuals and political figures seeking to navigate the challenges of modernity, identity, and sovereignty. Through a literature review, it acknowledges key theological and historical reference points that have contributed to the rise of modern extremist Islamic ideologies. It further examines how this inheritance is expressed by contemporary groups such as Daesh on the global stage, and Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun in the UK, as well as the origins of the Prevent policy implemented by the UK Government. This includes presenting studies and theories on the factors that attract individuals to violent extremist groups, as well as deradicalisation theories and programmes designed to prevent involvement in terrorist activities. Finally, it presents some examples of how some majority Muslim states have developed deradicalisation programmes that incorporate faith based counternarratives to counter the growth of extremist group membership.

#### **2.2 A radical alignment**

Understanding the origins and sources of ideologically extremist Islamic movements is crucial when examining their development and appeal in the contemporary context of the UK. Movements such as Daesh, Al-Qaeda and groups inspired by the search for Caliphate, or an Islamic state, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, have taken recruits mostly among young people on the principle of what Olivier Roy terms 'Caliphate as a sort of dream an Islamist utopia' in competition

with the west's dystopia.<sup>72</sup> This dream and struggle, in this context, have nothing to do with historical or geographical considerations in the Middle East. Instead, they are rooted more in an internal search for personal purpose and identity, a desire to contribute to an empowered political movement, and a coherent socio-political narrative that seeks to explain their marginalisation within society and the perceived persecution of Muslims by Western governments internationally. Olivier Roy contends that a globalised 'reimagining' of the Muslim ummah (international community) has arisen in the West that enables Muslims to claim an identity that counters negative state narratives concerning Islam and transcends national ethnic allegiances.<sup>73</sup>

Olivier Roy gives a comprehensive assessment of the attraction to Daesh and Al-Qaeda, and profiles of 'radicals' called to '*Jihad*' in *Jihad and Death*.<sup>74</sup> Roy starts by *giving* reference to extremist Islamic movements seminal use of the *Quranic text Surah 9:5*

But when the forbidden months have passed kill the polytheists (who are at war with you), wherever you find them. Take them captive and besiege them and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent and take to prayer regularly and pay the alms, then let them go their way. God is forgiving and merciful.<sup>75</sup>

This Quranic text was first used more commonly by the 14th century theologian Ibn Taymiyya, who believed that the threat posed by the invading Mongols was so great that *Jihad* had become a duty and the enemy could reasonably be defeated as apostates.<sup>76</sup> Roy argues that this sanction, that historically had been used in extreme circumstances, became common justification for terrorist acts and guiding reason for rejection of Muslims considered not in unity with mainstream Sunni Islam or forces or nations perceived to be in opposition to Islamic states. Thus, *Jihad* in the context of Daesh is not truly derivative of Quranic exegesis or earlier Islamic thinkers like Ibn Taymiyya but is in fact a new contemporary nihilistic phenomenon in which death (of

---

<sup>72</sup> Roy, Olivier (2017) *Jihad and Death*, London: Hurst, p25.

<sup>73</sup> Roy, Oliver (2004) *Globalised Islam*, London Hurst & Co., pxi.

<sup>74</sup> Roy, Olivier (2017) *Jihad and Death*, London: Hurst.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p13. *The Quran*, Surah 9: 5,

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p30.

others) has become the central objective.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, I would argue, in agreement with Olivier Roy, that Daesh and similar groups are less connected to mainstream Sunni Salafism or the idealised interpretations of Islamic history, including the writings of seminal thinkers like Ibn Taymiyya. Instead, these groups are more closely aligned with modern cultures of violence, resembling other contemporary anti-Western forms of extremism and radicalism.

The call to Jihad as interpreted in the *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) and *Sunnah* (life of the Prophet Muhammad) is the other major reason used by ideologically extremist groups committing and promoting violent acts of terrorism. Whilst linguistically meaning ‘to struggle’ in Arabic, Jihad is defined quite broadly in Islamic scripture as being a ‘duty to realise and struggle towards God’s will’ and ‘Jihad al-nafs’ to be the greatest jihad in the struggle to overcome the lower self.<sup>78</sup> Since the rise of Islamist extremism, outlined in Chapter One, a great deal of academic and public attention has been devoted to understanding the concept of Jihad. Glen Robinson argues that twenty first century ‘Global Jihad’ is connected to what he terms ‘movements of rage’ that harness unease with the United States and other Western nations on an international scale to recruit and promote their ideology.<sup>79</sup> Jihad has risen to the forefront of public knowledge, becoming the most known and possibly most misunderstood Islamic concept. Since part of this wide concept pertains to military conflict and ‘combatting the enemies of Islam’, Jihad has often been simply understood as a ‘just Islamic war’ rather than a greater internal call to struggle to obtain greater faith and overcome obstacles to this.<sup>80</sup> The last two decades in particular have witnessed the unprecedented misinterpretation and application of the term Jihad, as Islamist ideological extremists have used Jihad as a rallying cry to globally conscript Muslims to their causes. This common abuse of Jihad has been countered by many normative Sunni Muslims, who have emphasised the meaning of Jihad to be a divinely ordained command to take part in spiritual struggle that is strongly established in primary sources of Islamic law and jurisprudence.<sup>81</sup> In particular some have argued that misappropriation of the term Jihad, has

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p31.

<sup>78</sup> Winter, Tim, (2008) *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge University Press, p15.

<sup>79</sup> Robinson, Glenn E (2021), *Global Jihad: a brief history*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, pp10-20.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p 17.

<sup>81</sup> Winter, Tim, (2008) *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge University Press, p45.

been used as a central vehicle of discriminatory Islamophobic portrayals of Muslims by Western sources, including UK Prevent policy.<sup>82</sup> I will be coming back to the use of the term Islamophobia in greater detail in later chapters of this thesis.

The French political scientist, Giles Kepel, observes that the transition from transient migrants to being settlers in Europe has been marked, to some extent, by a clash of cultures and the alienation of first and second-generation Muslims. This has consequently led to the 're-invention of Islam as a contingent identity of protest' and 'radical narrative' of resistance.<sup>83</sup> In this context, re-definition of identity grows out of the newness of settlement and feelings of exclusion from mainstream society. However, in the context of Islam in the UK there is no straightforward return to self-definition obtained in the country of origin, but rather a selection and adaptation of features which have proven appropriate to the organisation or movements in the country in which they are set. Kepel highlights the fact that a complex relationship of imitation and differentiation with the rest of European society exists, and that the overt expression of Islam does not subsume the totality of groups of Muslim origin.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, individuals, or those who decide to represent them, can choose to reconstruct any mixture of theological, social, political, or cultural identity they prefer, free of old prohibitions and traditions. In such an environment, where Islamic identities are competing, it is impossible to impose a monolithic identity. Muslims living as a minority in the UK embrace this position as a way of finding a voice in a climate where their wishes are not always granted, and integration into mainstream UK society not always tolerated.<sup>85</sup> Thus, Islam does not have an absolute or dominant hold in UK

---

<sup>82</sup> Karipek, Asena. 'Portrayals of Jihad: A Cause of Islamophobia.' In *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 2 Fall 2020, pp. 210-255,

<sup>83</sup> Kepel, Giles. 'Islamic Groups in Europe: Between Community Affirmation and Social Crisis.' In *Islam In Europe: The Politics of Religion and Community*, Steven Vertovec and Ceri Peach's (1997). London: Springer, p49.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, pp49-50.

<sup>85</sup> An example of this is that full government funding of Muslim schools has not been granted in the UK or in the fact that data provided in 2024 showed that Muslims make up 18% of the prison population - according to Ministry of Justice this has increased from 8% in 2002 up 10% in 2022 (Sturge, Georgina. 'UK Prison Population Statistics.' House of Commons briefing paper, Number CBP-04334, 8 July 2024). It is thus disproportionate to the overall Muslim population in the UK. The last UK Census in 2021 showed the Muslim population of the UK to be 6.5%.

society. As a minority religion, it must find its place among other religious groups and diverse thought systems, contributing to the development of a cohesive society in contemporary Britain.

In the 1990s and into the early part of 2000s groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir [HT] and later, Al-Muhajiroun, offered a compelling ideological package to young British Muslims that drew from earlier Islamic revivalist and reformist movements.<sup>86</sup> Both HT and Al-Muhajiroun promoted a revivalist form of pure Islam with strong political identity which was highly attractive to young British Muslims seeking an alternative to the predominantly South Asian ethno-religious identities of their parents.<sup>87</sup> The other primary appeal of HT and Al-Muhajiroun to new members was solidarity and identity through the concept of the Islamic '*ummah*' (community) that transcended the nation state and rejected the 'neo-imperialistic' geo-politics of Western states and perception of not being included by wider mainstream British society.<sup>88</sup> Both groups were thought of as divisive and provocative (e.g. expressing homophobic and antisemitic views) on student campuses and were banned by the National Union of Students from universities in 2004.<sup>89</sup> HT and Al-Muhajiroun were perceived as a 'talking shop' and a conveyor belt for terrorist development and a possible intellectual precursor for individuals who would go on to support and incite violent acts of terrorism domestically and internationally.<sup>90</sup> HT's anti-Western government stance in the 1990s and its open campaigns in mosques supporting the liberation of perceived occupied territories such as Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, and Iraq received minimal response from the UK Government, and no legislation was enacted to securitise this group.

The ideology of Hizb ut-Tahrir was taken further by the group Al-Muhajiroun [AM] who, under the leadership of Omar Bakri Muhammad split from Hizb ut-Tahrir in 1996 over disagreements on policy, leadership style and methods. Omar Bakri declared that Al-Muhajiroun was an

---

<sup>86</sup> Hamid, Sadek [2016], *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The contested ground of British Islamic Activism*. London: IB Taurus, p90.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p15.

<sup>88</sup> Kenney, Michael, 'What is to be done about Al-Muhajiroun? Containing the emigrants in a democratic society.' Paper published by the *Commission for Countering Extremism*, 7th October 2019. London: UK, p10.

<sup>89</sup> Hamid, Sadek [2016], *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The contested ground of British Islamic Activism*, London' IB Taurus, p91.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, pp120-121.

independent organisation seeking the establishment of a Caliphate was an obligation for Muslims not only all over world but also in the UK.<sup>91</sup> This distinguished itself from HT who continued to push for the establishment of a Caliphate in a majority Muslim country. Omar Bakri Mohammed and then Anjem Choudary led the new Al-Muhajiroun group and took with them the majority of UK HT members and gave a platform for Abu Hamza, otherwise known as Mustafa Kamel Mustafa. Abu Hamza was an Imam at Finsbury Park Mosque for brief period until he was deselected after the intervention of the Charity Commission in 2003. He preached outside the gates of Finsbury Park Mosque until May 2004, when he was arrested at the start of US extradition proceedings against him.<sup>92</sup> There is evidence that Abu Hamza mentored one of the 9/11 attackers, Zacarias Moussaoui, the shoe bomber Richard Reid and the perpetrators of later terrorist acts in Yemen.<sup>93</sup> This radical ideology promoted by Al-Muhajiroun called for transnational Islamic activism and influenced young Muslims at the time with its media headlines spearheaded by Omar Bakri. Omar Bakri's use of sensationalist media soundbites attracted the attention of the BBC and prompted a government response that began to seek a ban on Al-Muhajiroun.<sup>94</sup> Omar Bakri, like Abu Hamza, has subsequently been prosecuted for inspiring terrorist activities and both have been deported from the UK. The legacy of first generation of proto-terrorist Jihadist activists from HT and AM has evolved as the spread of Jihadist thinking has spread through global movements. Due to being proscribed as terrorist organisations HT or Al-Muhajiroun members no longer meet in public arenas or have a presence in mosques but instead meet in non-public settings.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> Mahan Abedin, Mahan. 'Al-Muhajiroun in the UK: An Interview with Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed.' The Jamestown Foundation, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2005. <https://jamestown.org/interview/al-muhajiroun-in-the-uk-an-interview-with-sheikh-omar-bakri-mohammed/>. Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

<sup>92</sup> Casciani, Dominic 'Profile: Abu Hamza.' *BBC News online*, 9 January 2015. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11701269>. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

<sup>93</sup> Husain, Ed. (2007) *The Islamist: why I joined radical Islam in Britain, what I saw inside and why I left*. London: Penguin.

<sup>94</sup> Kenney, Michael, 'What is to be done about Al-Muhajiroun? Containing the emigrants in a democratic society.' Paper published by the Commission for Countering Extremism, 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019. London: UK, p5-6.

<sup>95</sup> James Cleverly and Tom Tugendhat. 'Hizb ut-Tahrir proscribed as terrorist organisation.' *UK.Gov. News story*, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hizb-ut-tahrir-proscribed-as-terrorist-organisation>. Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> June 2024. Hizb ut-Tahrir was once again 'proscribed' as a terrorist organisation after Parliament approved a draft order.

This question about the Muslim population's presence in the UK has become more pronounced since the major events of the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001 by Al-Qaeda operatives and the 7<sup>th</sup> of July bombing in London in 2005 by British born recruits of Al-Qaeda. This led the UK Government to review its anti-terrorist legislation and develop social policies, including the Prevent Strategy. Additionally, attention was drawn to the question of loyalty to the state among sections of the Muslim community, as well as increased policing of mosques and scrutiny by local authorities of integration levels in education and other areas.<sup>96</sup> The UK Government's Casey Review on 'opportunity and integration' in 2016 found that 78% of Muslims surveyed wanted to integrate into 'UK life in most things—but not all.'<sup>97</sup> The Casey Review was symptomatic of the desire of UK Government at the time to find different ways of managing internal conflict within UK society and remains a topical question. Conversely Hizb ut-Tahrir leadership in the Middle East required that the group in the UK adhere to a moderate non-violent stance in the search to create a Caliphate before 9/11. This changed after 9/11 and the advent of Al-Qaeda in which Hizb ut-Tahrir leads in the UK supported military engagement with Western countries.<sup>98</sup>

As a point of contention this raises the question of the types of people in the UK who are vulnerable to be radicalised. In a 2021 paper on rehabilitation of 'Islamist extremist converts' the European Commission proposes that converts may be more susceptible and vulnerable to 'radicalisation' and joining 'Jihadist' groups as limited evidence has shown up to 40% of US members of groups such as Daesh were converts.<sup>99</sup> It caveats this by stating that European and

---

<sup>96</sup> European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. 'The Impact of the 7 July 2005 London Bomb Attacks on the Muslim Communities in the EU.' European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia publication, November 2005. [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/197-London-Bomb-attacks-EN.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/197-London-Bomb-attacks-EN.pdf). Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

<sup>97</sup> Casey, Louise, 'The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration.' An independent review published online Gov.Uk by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 5th December 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration>. Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

<sup>98</sup> Hizb-ut-Tahrir. *America and Britain declare war against Islam and the Muslims*. Pamphlet issued by Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Britain, October 2001.

<sup>99</sup> Ravagnani, Luisa. 'Challenges and Recommendations for Rehabilitation Work Islamist extremist converts.' *Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) Paper* written for the European Commission, December 2021.

[https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-12/ran\\_challenges\\_recommendations\\_for\\_rehabilitation\\_work\\_122021\\_en.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-12/ran_challenges_recommendations_for_rehabilitation_work_122021_en.pdf). The source for this evidence is the

US converts attracted to terrorism are a 'minority within a minority' of people and one cannot homogenise this group or extend to be representative of Muslim people throughout the world. This paper presents the how and why converts may be vulnerable in the following key areas and challenges:

- Isolation (exacerbated by COVID pandemic)
- Converts have never known/lived a moderate form of Islam
- Troubled Families – e.g. rejection by the family after converting
- Discrimination is an impact for younger converts who believe that extremist claims are the answer to their experience of suffering, discrimination and marginalisation.
- Conversion within the prison system
- Gender discrimination for women converting
- Marginalisation by mainstream Muslim community and cultural and language barriers.<sup>100</sup>

It goes on to propose the following relational counter solutions to 'deradicalising' lies very much within faith communities:

- Family mediation and psychological support
- Religious counselling and faith mentoring
- Strengthening the relationship with regular Muslim communities and empowering them about the need to be part of rehabilitation strategies.
- Involving schools in social inclusion projects
- Involving regular Muslim communities who can offer alternative narratives beyond extremist interpretations

---

sociological search of Bergema R. and van San M. (2017). 'Waves of The Black Banner: An Exploratory Study on The Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria And Iraq.' *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42, no. 7 pp. 636-61. Bartoszewicz work is also referenced; Bartoszewicz, M.G. 'Controversies of Conversions: The Potential Terrorist Threat of European Converts to Islam.' *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, n.3, 2013 pp 17-29 focusing on the role of identity and the need of belonging in the conversion narratives, argues that the experiences lived during the process of conversion (becoming a Muslim) strongly influence the path to being a Muslim. She concluded that the risk of radicalisation is higher when the convert rejects their former identity, social environment and culture, losing at the same time the sense of belonging while potentially feeling rejection from the society they live in.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, pp6-15.

- Rebuilding a positive social network with all the different subjects at stake
- Involving (radicalised) converts in non-formal learning environments and neighbours (i.e. sport)
- Offering specific gender-oriented counter/alternative narratives.<sup>101</sup>

In this context the European commission report recommends that environments can offer individuals a place of inclusion and tolerance that are critical to limit rejection and challenges discrimination and Islamophobia are critical.<sup>102</sup> The field of ‘radicalisation’ at the stage of conversion therefore has a learning scope for all others who are attracted to violent ideologies as the rehabilitation recommended here may be shared across other groups who are attracted to violence. This thesis supports the above EU report by arguing that faith leaders and the communities they serve have the potential to play a crucial role as providers of counternarratives; as well as presenting a vital alternative to singular state solutions focussed on security.

### **2.3 The roots of modern ideologically extremist movements**

The next section presents the origins of ideologically extremist Islamic movements, tracing the evolution of their ideas and examining how these movements operate in the current context and influence the responses of UK Muslim communities. It is important to recognise that current forms of extremist ideology that have radicalised individuals are not unique or new but echo a continuum of the Middle Eastern *Salafi* School, which found its focal point in nineteenth and twentieth century Egypt in response to the European colonial invasion and reflect its points of principle.<sup>103</sup> The *Salafi* school of thought emphasised classically Islamic use of *Usul-al-fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and strict adherence to *Sharia* law (a law based on interpretation of the Quran) as a way of restoring a Muslim society independent from the West. Jamil Abun-Nasr argued that

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p10.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p16.

<sup>103</sup> Abun-Nasr, Jamil M. ‘Military Islam: A Historical Perspective.’ In Gellner, E. (Ed.) (1985) *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists and Industrialization*, pp73-95. Berlin: Mouton Publishers.

reformist *Salafi Ulama* (learned religious) has adopted a model of rationalistic progressive religion, consciously or unconsciously, which imitated and reacted to economically prosperous, militarily effective, imperially dominant European nation states.<sup>104</sup> The impact of the encounter with European nation state colonial imperialism is still being felt in Islamic countries today. Until the modern period Islamic dominated areas of the world had managed to confine the impact of *Sharia* law to personal status and social matters, rather than political ones. However, with the ascendancy of European nation states, particularly in the nineteenth century, Muslims had to re-think their relationship to the world, and the religion with which they had conquered significant portions of the globe.<sup>105</sup> New colonial powers-imposed laws on Muslim countries and areas of the world, which had formerly been autonomous. One can see that the call to radical forms of Islamic based ideology and call for the creation of a Caliphate was part of this process of re-establishing Islam in the world and following what is believed to be a paradigm of the Prophet, who they believed laid the foundations of a state inspired by Muslim teaching.<sup>106</sup>

Mohammed Iqbal [1875-1938] and Abu Ala Maududi [1903-1979] have inspired generations of Islamic revivalists throughout the world, especially in the Middle East and South Asia, where they fought for the Indian subcontinent's independence from British colonial rule. However, Iqbal and Maududi's methodological stance was essentially different. Iqbal was an avid Muslim nationalist, drawn to the Sufi mystical tradition of intense prayer and poetry, whilst Maududi, in contrast, was more conservative in his Islamic practice, and opposed to the Partition of the Indian continent in 1947.<sup>107</sup> At the heart of Iqbal's message was the idea that polity and the legal concepts of civic significance are of a revelational character. The religious ideal of Islam is organically related to the social order it created, and therefore inseparable. This is why the revival of Islamic social order and enforcement of the *Sharia*, along with the re-awakening of faith and morality, and belief that Muslims, wherever they are, constitute a single Islamic *ummah*

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p74 and 75.

<sup>105</sup> Vatikiotis P. J. [1987] *Islam and the State*. London: Routledge, pp58-59.

<sup>106</sup> Enayat, Hamid [1982] *Modern Islamic Political Thought*. London: Macmillan Education, p2.

<sup>107</sup> Esposito, John L. (1992) *The Islamic Threat*. Oxford University Press, pp59-60. Towards the end of his life Iqbal supported the Muslim League, which was to be headed by Pakistan's first President, Ali Jinnah, in 1947. Maududi founded the Jammati-Islami movement in 1941.

(community) are the hallmark of revivalism. Abul Ala Maududi, as founder of Jamaat-i-Islami preached that:

Human beings must, individually and collectively, surrender all rights of over lordship, legislation and exercising of authority over others. . .none are entitled to make laws in their own authority, and none is obliged to abide by them, this right vests in Allah alone.<sup>108</sup>

Therefore, for Maududi theocratic political sovereignty belongs to Allah and vice regency to the elected Caliphate leader. As leader of the ideological political movement of Maududi's devotion to creating an Islamic state in Pakistan under the jurisdiction of Sharia was done so under the premise of what he conceived to be 'true Islam.'<sup>109</sup> He believed that Islam was essential for politics and that it was necessary to institute Sharia and preserve Islamic culture from what he viewed as the evils of secularism, nationalism and socialism, which he understood to be the influence of Western imperialism.<sup>110</sup> What we see here is that the creation of an Islamic modernist ideology that appropriates western political language whilst at the same time rejecting colonialism.

Similarly, Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949) founded the Muslim Brotherhood (*Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*) in Egypt in 1928 primarily under the guise of educating the people of Egypt about Islam and giving *Dawah* (call to Islam). *The Muslim Brotherhood's* main objective was that of creating an 'Islamic Order' (*Nizam Islami*), which opposed Western secular thinking. Hasan al-Banna taught a form of Islam which encapsulated all of human existence, and was strongly opposed, at the time, to Ali Abd al-Raziq, who argued that Islam was not a politically active religion and that the Prophet was foremost a spiritual guide who in no way desired a theocratic

---

<sup>108</sup> Maududi, Abu Ala, 'Political Theory of Islam.' In *Islam in Transition*, Donohue, John and John L. Esposito [eds.] [1982] Oxford university Press, pp252-253. Jamaat-i-Islami started as a political party in Pakistan during the British colonial period in the early part of the twentieth century. It opposed the creation of Pakistan as a nationalistic plot that was alien to Islam. Maududi's party have never been voted into power in Pakistan.

<sup>109</sup> Nasr, Seyyed Vali Reza (1996). *Maududi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>110</sup> Zebiri, Kate. 'Seyyed vali Reza Nasr: Maududi and the making of Islamic revivalism.' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, February 1998, Volume 61 (1) pp.167-168.

form of government.<sup>111</sup> As time went on it was expected that an Islamic government spearheaded by the Muslim Brotherhood would grow out of this, as ‘personal piety and good community’ were believed to be the right conditions for an Islamic State.<sup>112</sup> During the 1960s Sayyid Qutb’s (1906-1966) leadership of *the* Muslim Brotherhood took up where Hasan al-Banna’s teachings had left off in the search for political and social reform in the void left by British and French colonial withdrawal from the continent of Africa. Qutb made Mawlana Maududi’s idea of the contrast of Islam and non-Islam, conceived as *Jahiliyya* (ignorance), as the centre of his radical polemic against what he perceived to be official Egyptian political oppression of the people.<sup>113</sup> To get rid of *Jahiliyya* in society Qutb says *Hakimiyya* [sovereignty of God] has to be implemented in an Islamic State, and this is instituted by carrying out an Islamic revolution:

Society of ignorance [jahiliyya] is all society other than Islamic society...[Societies of ignorance] do not believe in the divinity of God alone and confer divine attributes on others than Him by allowing the exercise of sovereignty [hakimiyya] to others than Him. . .[It cannot be claimed:] this is the law of God except when the sovereignty of God is effectively declared . . .The total revolution against sovereignty of human beings in all forms and all institutions, total rebellion everywhere on earth, the hunting down of all usurpers of divine sovereignty who rule men with laws emanating from themselves; this means the destruction of the kingdom of God on earth. . .No more liberation of the Arab man by Islam, no more ‘mission’ for the Arabs, but man as such, the entire human race.<sup>114</sup>

Al-Banna was careful to distinguish between Sharia law and government, whereas Qutb’s concept of exclusive sovereignty of God, found in *Hakimiyya*, is both political in its governance. The only way to rebel against political ‘quietism,’ believed Qutb, and modern secular tendencies

---

<sup>111</sup> Ayubi, Nazih [1991] *Political Islam*. London: Routledge, p132. Al-Ikhwan’s slogan was and still is God is our objective; the Quran is our constitution; the Prophet is our leader; struggle is our way; and death for the sake of God is our highest aspiration.

<sup>112</sup> Zubaida, Sami [1989] *Islam, the people and the State*. London: Routledge, pp33-34.

<sup>113</sup> Qutb’s ideas were forged in intense debates between Marxists and Islamic militants in the prisons of Nasser. He spent extended periods of imprisonment and had much time to evolve a deep abiding hatred of official state apparatus, which had peripheralised opposition leaders.

<sup>114</sup> Qutb, Sayyid (1954) *Islam, the religion of the future*. Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, p75.

towards *Jahiliyya* [non-Islamic] society was to institute a Jihad against those who supported this state.<sup>115</sup> Malise Ruthven argues that the Arab Spring, which spread across much of the Arab world in the early 2010s, was a result of the division between secular states and theocratic inspired movements.<sup>116</sup> This conflict between secular states and Islamic ideological movements has continued and is reflected in the insurgent wars fought by Al-Qaeda and Daesh, with the search for an Islamic political solution remaining relevant in countries like Syria, Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Nigeria, Somalia, and other parts of the world.

The seminal ideas of Hassan Al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Mohammed Iqbal and Abu Ala Maududi were born out of the colonial experience. The historical experience of eastern and particularly Muslim civilizations being objectified as 'Other' by dominant Western colonial narratives is charted by the seminal twentieth century work of *Orientalism*, by Edward Said.<sup>117</sup> Said's *Orientalism* presents salient case studies, particularly from the Middle East, to indicate orientalism can be perceived to be 'subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arab-Islamic peoples and their culture' which derives from Western essentialisation and cultural misinterpretation of what is 'Oriental.'<sup>118</sup> It can be argued that UK Muslim communities in the twenty-first century continue to experience orientalist and Islamophobic discourses in various forms, reflecting elements of the post-colonial experience. *Orientalism* has shaped the development of cultural criticism and the field of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies, particularly in how academics approach their inquiries when examining, describing and explaining these subjects. In this thesis Said's awareness of the relationship between the researcher and the subject is applied and is reflected in the findings from qualitative interviews with a diverse selection of UK Muslim faith leaders in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight.

---

<sup>115</sup> Sayyid Qutb was put on trial under the regime of Gamal Abdal Nasser and hanged on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1966 as an enemy of the secular Egyptian state.

<sup>116</sup> Ruthven, Malise, 'How to Understand ISIS,' review of 'The New Arab Wars' by Marc Lynch and 'ISIS: A History' by Fawaz Gerges. In *New York Review of Books* Number 63, 23 June 2016. It began in Tunisia during the 'Arab Spring' in response to corruption and economic stagnation. From Tunisia, the protests then spread to five other countries: Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain.

<sup>117</sup> Said, E. W. (1978) *Orientalism*. Penguin classics edition London: Penguin Books.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, p37.

## 2.4 Twenty First century echoes of Qutb

In order to map UK faith leaders' counternarratives to ideologically extremist groups, it is crucial to trace how historical thinking behind this continues to impact these efforts. Qutb's radical ideological call to Islam in opposition to European colonisation of Egypt was preached in the face of state persecution and has armed future extremist Islamic ideological groups with a programme of action and example of political martyrdom.<sup>119</sup> This has been at the heart of Daesh ideology that refutes Western concepts of democracy and is dedicated to the principle of appointing one overall leader. One can see that historical precedents have therefore given impetus to future groups who espouse Jihad against Western governments. Such extremist sectarian tracts have gone on to inspire the Iranian Revolution theocracy, movements such as *Hizbollah* [party of God] in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, Al-Qaeda in Pakistan/Afghanistan and Daesh in the Levant region. Al-Qaeda under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden was more millenarian than political in design and it's thought was again underpinned by imposing *Sharia* jurisprudence and making the call to protect the faith through the concepts of Jihad and *Takfir* (excommunicating non-believers) and promotion of Islamic sovereignty (Hakimiyya). This millenarian approach has been Manichean and dualistic in its portrayal of Islamic goodness and perceived Western moral decadence and singular in its solution to an Islamic state being the only way to provide 'individual and societal wholeness.'<sup>120</sup> This has been at the heart of the Al-Qaeda declaration of 'Bara' (disavowal) from what it terms '*Mushrikun* (Romanised English for Arabic term for Polytheists) that opposed the *din* (religion) of Allah.'<sup>121</sup> This adversarial approach to all non-believers has been focussed on Western powers imposing their military force in the battle arenas of places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya. Daesh capitalised on the power vacuum opportunity in regions like Syria, Iraq and Libya that had been destabilised to promote its Salafi Jihadist ideology of a Caliphate.

---

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p63. Abdel Salim Farag was a part of the Jihad movement which assassinated President Sadat on 6 October 1981, and Shukri was part of the Muslim Society group.

<sup>120</sup> Rinehart, James F., *Apocalyptic Faith and Political Violence: Prophets of Terror* (2006) New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p118.

<sup>121</sup> Haykel, Bernard, 'Al-Qaeda's Path and Creed.' In *Global Salafism* (2009), Roel Maijer, London: Hurst, p53.

This Salafi Jihadist discourse and agitation for Islamic theocratic governance grew stronger in the period after the 9/11 attack on the New York World Trade Center and the period of the second Gulf War 2003-2011 that involved a period of US and UK military semi-occupation. It is geopolitical events like this that inspired groups such as Al-Muhajiroun in the UK to campaign against support for wars in majority Muslim countries. In order to explain the battle against the US led coalition forces in arenas such as Iraq Al-Qaeda wrote numerous tracts to explain their vision to supporters in the Middle East.<sup>122</sup> Al-Qaeda's key members were imprisoned or rejected by governments in countries such as Algeria, Egypt and Sudan and therefore left the Arab world to go to places such as Afghanistan. Under these conditions Al-Qaeda members changed their modus operandi consciously to cultivate a transnational agenda, which decoupled Muslim identity from geography and culture, and created a powerful transnational identity of an imagined *ummah* (community) beyond the boundaries of tradition, culture and singular countries.<sup>123</sup> This imagined community reached a new period in its dialectical development with the emergence of Daesh in the Levant region of Iraq and Syria. Daesh has been known by many names, including ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and IS (Islamic State). For this study I have chosen Daesh as it is commonly used in Arabic speaking countries and now by governments (including the UK) across the world. Daesh attracted a large body of people from Europe and across the world, including online, to move to the Levant region to participate in military wars to lead its surge. Daesh held power in the region for a brief period between 2014 to 2017 and lost its regional dominance in Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, and the northern Syrian city of Raqqa.<sup>124</sup> However, the demise of Daesh in this region has not ended its existence or ideological objectives internationally. Members continue to promote its ideology via loose online networks across the world and seeks new recruits to fight wars in various battle arenas under different leadership in destabilised regions such as Libya and Somalia.

---

<sup>122</sup> Burke, Jason (2004) 'Al Qaeda.' Article in *Foreign Policy Magazine*, issue 142, May – June 2004, pp.18-26.

<sup>123</sup> Maher, Shiraz *Salafi Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (2016), Oxford University Press p172.

<sup>124</sup> Cockburn, Patrick. 'Raqqa: Isis capital liberated by US-backed forces - but civilians face months of hardship with city left devastated.' *The Independent newspaper*, 17 October 2017.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/raqqa-liberated-isis-defeat-latest-mine-clearance-sdf-camp-residents-medicine-aid-a8005881.html>. Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

In his speech at Mosul's Great Mosque on 7th July 2014, when proclaiming himself to be leader of the Caliphate, Daesh leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi quoted from Abul Al Maududi's foundation of the Jamaat-i-Islami party in Pakistan in 1941.<sup>125</sup> Like Maududi Abu Bakr al Baghdadi stated the establishment of the Islamic State and the rule of the *ummah* (Islamic community) is to be one with the sovereignty of God.<sup>126</sup> I will be coming back to Baghdadi's speech in Chapter Four. Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and his followers believed themselves to be devoid of historical change or cultural bias and opposed to secular states and Western attacks on Muslims throughout the world.<sup>127</sup> Yet, the evidence that has emerged after the demise of Daesh is a picture of an ideologically violent movement who took no expense in degrading and murdering non-Muslims and Muslims in grotesque genocidal acts of war.<sup>128</sup> What Daesh brought to bear was in fact a nihilistic theology into the foreground of Salafi thinking that had little or no regard for respecting human life and was based on a culture of fear, in direct opposition to large bodies of normative Islamic teaching. This thesis will be demonstrating how current UK Muslim faith leaders reject the culture of violence and the misappropriation of Islamic faith through their counternarratives presented in later qualitative interview chapters.

Dr Shiraz Maher, a former member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, and current Director of International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at King's College, London University has researched the motivation of foreigners who have gone to war in Syria and Iraq and looked at the contemporary evolution of ideological terrorist groups in the UK and beyond. In his book, *Salafi Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, Maher states that Salafism has sought to revive the practices of the first three generations of Islam, who are collectively known as the *as-salaf as-saliheen*, meaning pious predecessors.<sup>129</sup> Maher calls Salafi-Jihadists 'violent rejectionists' who want to regain 'antique perfection' by military means as a 'millenarian project' that blocks 'progress through

---

<sup>125</sup> Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside, Charlie Winter (2020) *The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State Movement*, Oxford University Press, p10.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p12.

<sup>127</sup> Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff, 'Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the Imposter.' In *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, November 2014, Vol. 6, No. 10, pp. 4-7.

<sup>128</sup> Aljazeera: News Agencies. 'ISIL video shows Turkish soldiers burned alive.' In *Al Jazeera News online*, 23 December 2016. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/23/isil-video-shows-turkish-soldiers-burned-alive>. Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

<sup>129</sup> Maher, Shiraz *Salafi Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (2016), London: Hurst, Penguin p172

regression.’<sup>130</sup> They have thus, perpetuated a utopic projection of early forms of Islam that is in fact historically tenuous and theologically not true to the early formative origins of Islam. What Maher sets out is a corresponding historical rejection of ‘Salafi Jihadists’ from different periods of Islam by different thinkers. I will be coming back to this point in the counternarratives to extremism ideologies presented by faith leaders in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight of this thesis. Maher argues ‘the greatest period of anti-western intellectual development in Salafi-Jihadi thought took place in the years after the 9/11 terrorist attack’ and that as the most recent prominent Salafi Jihadist group Daesh’s ‘jurisprudential opinions are regarded as esoteric and eccentric’ by most ideologues and mainstream Muslims. Maher goes on to quote the fact that even the much-publicised London ‘hate preacher’ Abu Qatada had proclaimed Daesh as ‘renegades’ because of their indiscriminate use of intra-Muslim slaughter and slavery.<sup>131</sup>

After the death of Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahri the Al-Qaeda movement declined as a global force to be largely based in dispersed pockets of Afghanistan. The rise and fall of Daesh in Syria and Iraq over the last decade has reinforced the perception in the global media and government that an existential threat of terrorism exists within the context of Europe and that this is challenge plays out not only on the global stage in distant battlefields but amongst Muslims at home. Stories and reminders of Daesh members’ barbaric acts of violence displayed in the media, combined with the potential migration of thousands of foreign fighters back home, has led to questions about how the threat of terrorism can be negated.<sup>132</sup> The UK Government has remained on a high level of security alert, and anti-terrorist policies and legislation have continued to tighten Prevent policy towards potential acts of terrorism over the last 15 years. This has been especially seen in the ‘securitised’ approach of the Prevent programme that has involved aligning education, community, and other institutions with counter-terrorism efforts to prevent individuals from being drawn into extremism and terrorism. This approach has been combined with engagement with grassroots faith-based communities to find new solutions to

---

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p111.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p45.

<sup>132</sup> Spalek, Basia and Douglas Weeks, ‘The Role of Communities in Counterterrorism: Analysing Policy and Exploring Psychotherapeutic Approaches within Community Settings.’ In *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:12, 2017 pp 991-1003.

ending violent terrorist acts.<sup>133</sup> I will be exploring the application of the UK Government's Prevent policy in more detail later in this chapter and further on in this thesis.

## 2.5 The growth of Islamic extremist Islamic ideology in the UK

Extremist ideologies in the UK promoted by banned proscribed groups such as Al-Muhajiroun, that identify themselves with the Daesh goal of creating an Islamic state, remain a potent force for individuals drawn to violent forms of politicised Islamist expression. In his ethnographic study of Al-Muhajiroun Professor Michael Kenney, presents a large body of 'passive support' amongst those he interviewed after Al-Muhajiroun came out in support of Daesh in 2014. Kenney found Al-Muhajiroun had given members an 'ideological' framework to 'justify us vs. them' prism of viewing life and that many whilst sympathising with a terrorist organisation did not necessarily translate that into terrorist acts.<sup>134</sup> In writing this ethnography Kenney found that supporters had second hand views from their leaders of radicalised beliefs. They did not have and not a thorough knowledge of Islamic theology or Sharia Law and the leadership was often 'eccentric' with a charisma that attracts followers. In fact, Kenney states that Al-Muhajiroun's combative approach also resulted in a large body of the Muslim community in the UK boycotting and rejecting the group.<sup>135</sup> This UK Muslim counternarrative rejection of Al-Muhajiroun and other similar ideologically extremist groups, as well as how this takes place, is the core focus of this thesis. A critical part of understanding the journey towards radicalisation and de-radicalisation is the diverse profiles of individuals and varying responses. Kenney concluded 'there is no one behavioural profile of radicalised individuals.'<sup>136</sup> The profiles of individuals who have been involved in terrorist acts in London and abroad over the past two decade present complex and sometime unpredictable cases.

---

<sup>133</sup>Jarvis, Lee, Andrew Whiting, Stuart Macdonald (2024) *Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation and Prevent: A Vernacular Approach*, Manchester University Press.

<sup>134</sup> Kenney, Michael, 'What is to be done about Al-Muhajiroun? Containing the emigrants in a democratic society.' Paper published by the *Commission for Countering Extremism*, 7th October 2019. London: UK, p5-6.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p7-8.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p8.

There are numerous studies that explore reasons for joining Ideologically extremist groups that espouse violence. In *Islamism in the West: The Life-Span of the Al-Muhajiroun in the United Kingdom* Conner Kylie showed how one of the strongest reasons, especially for young men mostly of South Asian descent, for joining groups such as Al-Muhajiroun is the offer of a strong Muslim identity in the face of what is perceived to be harsh discriminatory conditions within the UK.<sup>137</sup> Catherine Raymond's later work, and interviews with Al-Muhajiroun members, also sets forth an argument that the search for identity, community and a rejection of Western forms of life in order to live in an Islamic state was a powerful discourse for recruiting members.<sup>138</sup> Raymond's interviews also present a need to take into account that people who joined Al-Muhajiroun did so out of a feeling of being victims of Islamophobia and sense of perceived direct racial discrimination and hostile stereotypes of their faith within UK society.<sup>139</sup> This also stemmed from what was perceived to be the humiliation and occupation of Islamic countries by Western powers and social marginalisation and economic deprivation.<sup>140</sup> This therefore supports the idea that domestic and geopolitical events cause attraction to extremist groups.

This symbolic fear of a threatened Islamic identity in the UK and call to extremist joint groups espousing violent ideologies predates Daesh and Al-Qaeda. Groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun in the 1990s and early 2000s were at the forefront of portraying Western society as a place that negates God, and therefore the derogative Islamic term, *Kufr* (in Arabic this means unbelief and unbelievers) was used to describe non-Muslims.<sup>141</sup> Other similar groups in the UK (off-shoots of Al-Muhajiroun) and groups with different alias names, such as Islam4UK and later Need4Khilafah, echoed the many tracts attributed to Al-Qaeda prior to and after the US 9/11

---

<sup>137</sup> Connor, Kylie. 'Islamism in the West: The Life-Span of the Al-Muhajiroun in the United Kingdom.' In *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. Volume 25 (1), 2005, pp117–133. Also Al-Ashanti, AbdulHaq and as-Salafi, Abu Ameenah AbdurRahman. (2009) *A Critical Study of the Multiple Identities and Disguises of 'al-Muhajiroun: Exposing the Antics of the Cult Followers of Omar Bakri Muhammad Fustuq*. London: Jamiah Media Press.

<sup>138</sup> Raymond, Catherine Zara. 'Al-Muhajiroun and Islam4UK: The group behind the ban, Developments.' In *Radicalisation and Political Violence*, (May 2010), Prof. Harvey Rubin, Dr John Bew (Editors). Paper published by *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence*, p19,

<sup>139</sup>Ibid, p19

<sup>140</sup>Ibid, p20.

<sup>141</sup> Mohammad, Omar Bakri (1999), *A Nation Without a Cause is Like a Body Without a Soul*, London: Al-Khilafah Publications.

attack.<sup>142</sup> Islam4Uk was created by former Al-Muhajiroun leader Anjem Choudary and its members had been involved in the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 London bombings, the later murder of Lee Rigby in 2013 and the London Bridge attack in 2017.<sup>143</sup> Other notable former members include Usman Khan who killed two people at Fishmongers' Hall attack in 2019 after being released from prison. There is also the case of Sudesh Amman who, in February 2020, after spending just over a year in prison, was released automatically at the midway point of his sentence, and within a week was shot dead by the police in London after carrying out a knife attack on Streatham High Rd.<sup>144</sup> Amman is reported to have refused to engage with attempts to turn him away from violence while in prison and had spoken about how acts of terrorism were justified.<sup>145</sup> While there is no definitive research evidence quantifying exactly how many individuals were influenced by former Al-Muhajiroun leaders Omar Bakri Mohammed and Anjem Choudary to engage in violent terrorist activities abroad, it can reasonably be deduced that the majority of their supporters did not go on to take direct part in regions of war, formerly controlled by Daesh. However, their ideological influence can be recognised as playing a contributing part in radicalising the above-mentioned terrorists.

## 2.6 The push and pull of attraction to extremist ideologies

An official report by the UK's independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Jonathan Hall QC, entitled *Terrorism in Prisons: Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation's Report and Government Response* was prompted by the release of Usman Khan and subsequent death of Saskia Jones and Jack Merritt at Fishmongers' Hall. This paper focused on legislation but also acknowledges that no UK Government Prevent policy or similar programme within institutional

---

<sup>142</sup> BBC News Online. 'Government to ban Islam4UK under terror laws.' *BBC News online*, 12 January 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8453560.stm>. Accessed June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

<sup>143</sup> Home Office, 'Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations.' Home Office: Gov.UK, 12 July 2013 Gov.uk. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2>. Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024. Islam4UK was listed as a proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2004. In an order on 14 January 2010, it was announced the proscription by the then British Home Secretary Alan Johnson and was banned.

<sup>144</sup> Dodd, Vikram and Dan Sabbagh. 'Streatham Attacker was released amid fears he felt terrorism was justified.' *The Guardian newspaper*, 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/feb/03/streatham-attacker-was-under-full-surveillance-from-day-of-release>. Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

<sup>145</sup> O'Neill, Sean. 'Sudesh Amman told inmates he wanted to murder an MP.' Article in *The Times newspaper*, 4<sup>th</sup> February 2020. <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/streatham-terror-attack-jihadist-told-inmates-he-wanted-to-murder-an-mp-5tg6xkc6s>. Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

settings is not, entirely 'fail-proof' in stopping radicalisation.<sup>146</sup> In prison Usman Khan had undertaken the Healthy Identity Intervention Programme, and, following release participated in the Desistance and Disengagement, designed to 'address the root causes of terrorism.'<sup>147</sup> The Hall paper continues to present the complex nature of inmates who are in prison for supporting violence and who are isolated with people who have similarly been detained for supporting and promoting groups such as Daesh. Hall also shows that although an extremely low percentage of Muslims in the UK are detained for supporting groups such as Daesh there is still much work to be done to ensure the faith leadership of Islamic chaplains in prison is supported to engage and combat radicalisation with religious literacy. The Muslim faith leaders interviewed for this thesis reflect the challenges of supporting a variety of individuals vulnerable to extremism identified in the Hall paper, as will be detailed in later qualitative interview chapters.

Fethi Benslama proposes that the faith dimension offers violent group members a framework to construct their own identity, as well as a clear set of norms, objectives and salvation associated with the pursuit of paradise but in fact is more akin to a 'nihilist dimension.'<sup>148</sup> This utopic view of martyrdom perpetrated by groups such as Daesh connotes a:

Psychological (not psychiatric) state of suffering, a discrepancy between their expectations and their social outcome, a need of recognition, in a word a narcissist Daesh, which makes them more open to either nihilism or to the narrative of heroism that Al-Qaeda or Daesh offer to them.<sup>149</sup>

With Benslama, I would argue that ideologically extremist groups offer a way of life and route to salvation that is often nihilistic in nature and contradictory to the Islamic faith. The attraction to

---

<sup>146</sup> Hall, Jonathan. 'Terrorism in Prisons: Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation's Report and Government Response,' 27th April 2022). Ministry of Justice online Publication. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/terrorism-in-prisons-independent-reviewer-of-terrorism-legislations-report-and-government-response>. Accessed 30 May 2023.

<sup>147</sup> Shaw, Danny. 'London Bridge: Usman Khan completed untested rehabilitation scheme.' *BBC Online News*, 4 December 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-50653191>. Accessed 2nd June 2022.

<sup>148</sup> Benslama Fethi and Robert Bononno [2009] *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam*. University of Minnesota Press, p189.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, p189.

extremist Islamist ideologies is thus less about faith and more aligned with the discourse of death, as described by Sigmund Freud's 'death drive' (Thanatos) theory. This theory suggests that propagating aggression towards the external world, similar to other conscious and unconscious instincts, acts as an underlying driver.<sup>150</sup> Psychologist of Religion, Jerry Piven, propose that religion in the context of Thanatos has been subjugated to justify the desire and fantasy of projecting delusional acts of violence to justify overcoming a position where individuals believe they are defending Islam against Western evil. Piven, states that radical Islamic groups offer a practical road by undertaking Jihad to individuation and finding deeper meaning and achieving the goal of self-acceptance and delivery from misery to counter vulnerability, anger, and low self-esteem.<sup>151</sup> Piven describes acts of terrorist violence as the 'apotheosis' pinnacle of perceived divine retribution and a paranoid attempt to eliminate personal weaknesses by creating enemies. He argues that the true challenge lies in the internal psychological struggle against one's own fears and insecurities, rather than the outward conflict of Jihad.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, interpreted through this lens one cannot focus solely on political, ideological, or national structural socio-economic disenfranchisement as motivations for attraction to violent extremist ideological groups and committing terrorist acts. This also moves beyond calling on the faith concept of Jihad to justify undertaking suicide terrorists' missions.<sup>153</sup> This thesis aims to develop a more textured understanding of individual counternarratives through the voices of a selection of British Muslim faith leaders who have actively opposed extremism.

There are several reports from the Muslim Council of Britain that evidence that Muslim communities living in the UK sometimes feel disenfranchised by prejudice and discrimination and a broader perception that UK society and government have no interest in providing support to combat Islamophobic attacks.<sup>154</sup> The Muslim Council paper, *Our shared British Future*, states that

---

<sup>150</sup> Freud, Sigmund, (1949) *The Ego, and the Id*. London: The Hogarth Press Ltd. Freud argues the death instinct expresses itself, in part, as an instinct of destruction directed against the external world.

<sup>151</sup> Piven Jerry S., 'Terrorist Theology, Delusion and Apotheosis in death.' In *Terrorism, Political Violence and Extremism*, (ed.) Christopher E, Stout Praeger (Editors) (2023). London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, pp58-59.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p63.

<sup>153</sup> Maher, Shiraz (2015) *Salafi Jihadism: The history of an Idea*. Oxford University Press, pp16-17.

<sup>154</sup> Muslim Council of Britain. 'Our Shared British Future: Muslims and Integration in the UK.' *Muslim Council of Britain*, 10th March 2018. <https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MCB-Our-Shared-Future-online.pdf>, p6.

this climate has helped to fuel the quest of many individuals to join ideologically extremist Islamic groups who reject Western society and embrace an alternative way of life.<sup>155</sup> Underlying this rejection is the identification with victimhood and consequently a sense that reparation is justified through aggressive acts of protest – including making allegiance to groups such as Daesh by individuals who believe their faith identity is under attack in the UK.<sup>156</sup> Therefore an anti-Western discourse arises that is derived from a response to those perceived geopolitical oppression of Muslim communities throughout the world.<sup>157</sup> Additionally, there is a recurring pattern of narcissistic 'self-victimhood' used to externalize blame and seek moral validation also aligns with radical Islamic ideologies that associate martyrdom with gaining paradise.<sup>158</sup>

Professor of psychology of social identity theory, Henri Tajfel, created the theory of 'ingroups' and 'outgroups' that addresses some of the dynamics around social identity and possible reasons for attraction to ideologically extremist groups.<sup>159</sup> Tajfel argues that 'despite differing economic, cultural, historical, political, and psychological backgrounds attitudes of prejudices towards outgroups and the behaviour of discrimination against outgroups clearly displays common characteristics.'<sup>160</sup> In a number of social experiments Tajfel poses that social norms are expectations of how others behave and how others expect individuals to behave. Thus, 'ingroups' are those to which we belong, and outgroups are those to which 'they' belong.<sup>161</sup> As part of this theory individuals favour in-groups and discriminate against perceived 'outgroups.' One can apply this principle to joining extremist Islamist groups in the context of the UK. The 'Other' can be seen to be strong identification with Islam that sets norms around Jihad and attacks on the infidel 'out-groups' made up of non-Muslims. If one applies Tajfel's theory in this context one can see that ideologically extremist Islamic groups can be argued to take part in a form of

---

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p5.

<sup>156</sup> Sian, Katy, Ian Law, and Salman Sayyid. 'Debates on difference and Integration in education: Muslims in the UK.' Paper for *Centre for Racism and Ethnicity studies*, University of Leeds, 2011, p6.

<sup>157</sup> Aggarwal, Neil Krishnan [2016] *The Taliban's Virtual Emirate*, Columbia University Press p65.

<sup>158</sup> Mesner, William, *The Paranoid Process* [1994], London: Jason Aronson Books, pp65-95.

<sup>159</sup> Tajfel, Henri [1974] *Social Identity and intergroup Behaviour*, Oxford University Press pp25-45.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, pp55-105.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid p55.

Occidentalism that normalises and dehumanises non-Muslims as 'Other' and creates an environment where radicalising individuals to fight for justice can take place.<sup>162</sup>

Social scientist Matteo Vergani, discussing prevention and reduction programmes for online extremist propaganda and the involvement in politically inspired violence and hate incidents, highlights the 'three Ps': Push, Pull, and Personal.<sup>163</sup> Push are 'pressures' and structural root causation such as war, state, or religious discrimination/persecution; relative poverty and the narrowing of non-violent options to these factors. 'Pull' is the incentive 'aspects that make extremist groups and lifestyles appealing to some people', such as personal status and friendship networks and excitement and danger that comes from seeking vengeance for acts against Muslims in the world wide context.<sup>164</sup> The 'Personal' includes factors such as the psychological, or possible personality traits or experience of trauma.<sup>165</sup> For Vergani all of the above variables overlap and work in conjunction with behavioural and cognitive factors to inform the journey of individuals becoming radicalised and there is no one all-encompassing factor.

Vergani's study is not a definitive study of attraction to violent and terrorist organisations. However, the 'Pull' factors he outlines relating to social networks or pre-existing social settings, such as 'clustering' around towns or communities, can be seen to be large contributing factors to why individuals join Daesh or Al-Qaeda.<sup>166</sup> Vergani found that the largest causation factor is the 'Pull' and the smallest the 'Personal.'<sup>167</sup> Personal factors have a part to explain the cognitive and

---

<sup>162</sup> Edward Said set out the seminal text of *Orientalism* London: Pantheon Books (1978) in the 1970s in which eastern cultures are stated as being made 'Other' and devoid of civilization to suit the Western colonial pursuit that, he argued, still exists conceptually.

<sup>163</sup> Vergani, M. (2018) *How Is Terrorism Changing Us? Threat Perception and Political Attitudes in the Age of Terror*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan. Matteo Vergani has combined the political sociality with psychological methodologies to understand and write about extremists' groups in individuals in the context of Australia and Southeast Asia for the last 10 years and is based at Deakin University in Australia.

<sup>164</sup> Vergani, M., Muhammad Iqbal, Ekin Ilbahar and Greg Barton, 'The Three Ps of Radicalisation: Push, Pull and Personal. A systematic Scoping Review of the Scientific Evidence and Radicalisation into Violent Extremism.' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Taylor & Francis Journals, 2020 vol. 43(10), pp. 854-864

<sup>165</sup> Ibid p855.

<sup>166</sup> Atran, Scott, Robert Axelrod, Richard Davis and Baruch Fischhoff. 'Challenges in Researching Terrorism from the field.' In *Science*, 355, no.6323, 2017, pp278-297.

<sup>167</sup> Vergani, M., Muhammad Iqbal, Ekin Ilbahar and Greg Barton, 'The Three Ps of Radicalisation: Push, Pull and Personal. A systematic Scoping Review of the Scientific Evidence and Radicalisation into Violent Extremism.' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Taylor & Francis Journals, 2020 vol. 43(10), pp. 854-864.

behavioural route to radicalisation and mental health also plays a part in stories of individuals, whether these be so called lone wolves or individuals who attach themselves to groups to find identity. I would argue that there is a need to go beyond theorising using situational factors as primary drivers and that counternarratives to violent extremism from within faith communities also have large part to play in preventing individuals from being attracted to this type of discourse.<sup>168</sup>

## 2.7 Deradicalisation of the nation's

In response to what was perceived as the risk of 'home grown terrorism' Prevent Strategy was first created by the UK Government in 2003 and more extensively in 2011.<sup>169</sup> It has been revised since. It was introduced as part of the broader counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, which was launched in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.<sup>170</sup> It was initially designed to stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorist sympathisers and has evolved over the years in response to other terrorist attacks and identified threats. Prevent includes countering terrorist ideology and challenging those who promote it, supporting individuals who are especially vulnerable to becoming radicalised and working with all public sector organisation and institutions, such as education establishments, where the assessed risk of radicalisation is deemed to be high.<sup>171</sup> The UK Channel deradicalisation programme led by the police and in association with Muslim faith mentors has been operating in tandem with government policy for the last twenty years.<sup>172</sup> UK Government Prevent approaches to perceived 'radicalisation' and its effectiveness has become a highly contested area and heavily critiqued within sections of the UK

---

<sup>168</sup> King, Michael and Donald M Taylor. 'The Radicalisation of Homegrown Jihadists: A Review of Theoretical Models and Social Psychological Evidence.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no.4 2011, pp602-622.

<sup>169</sup> Home Office. 'Prevent Strategy.' London: Home Office: UK.Gov. publications, June 2011.  
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78966aed915d07d35b0dcc/prevent-strategy-review.pdf>.

<sup>170</sup> Lowe, David, Robin Bennett (Edited) (2020) *Prevent Strategy: Helping the Vulnerable Being Drawn towards Terrorism or Another Layer of State Surveillance?* Routledge Advances in Sociology, London: Routledge, p55.

<sup>171</sup> Home Office: 'Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST), The four Ps: Pursue, Prevent, Protect, and Prepare.' London: Home Office, UK GOV. Home Office Publication, 22 September 2023.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2023>. New statutory guidance for England and Wales was issued on 7 September 2023 under Section 29 of the Counterterrorism and Security Act 2015. It came into force on 31 December 2023, replacing the 2015 guidance which came into force in July 2015.

<sup>172</sup> Home Office: 'Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST), The four Ps: Pursue, Prevent, Protect, and Prepare.' London: Home Office, UK GOV. Home Office Publication, 22 September 2023.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2023>. Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

Muslim community. Once again, I will be coming back to Channel and Prevent in Chapter Four and touching on this once again in later chapters.

Deradicalisation programmes, designed to guide individuals and groups away from violent extremism, have also significantly expanded in scope across various countries. These programmes are diverse, targeting various groups such as potential terrorists and recovering extremists. Their objectives range from encouraging the abandonment of extreme views and disengagement from terrorism to facilitating rehabilitation into society. Government backed programmes take different forms, including job placements, doing something about arranged marriages, providing new lives for participants, and educating them on nonviolent alternatives.<sup>173</sup> Despite this diversity, common themes and challenges arise. Frequent cases involving supposedly 'deradicalised' individuals have also sparked questions about the effectiveness of these programmes and their design. This is no more apparent than in the case of Usman Khan who killed two people near London Bridge on 29 November 2019 at a prisoners' rehabilitation event. Khan had previously been jailed for eight years and served half his term for planning to set up a terrorism training camp and had been through Healthy Identity Intervention (HII) rehabilitation programme before being released from prison in December 2018. He was deemed an example of someone who had engaged in a programme and been rehabilitated before he committed the violent attack.

Coming from a psychosocial view, a report by Renee Garfinkel outlines significant factors involved in the psychological transformation inherent in moving from involvement in violence to non-violent activity.<sup>174</sup> Garfinkel conducted a series of telephone interviews with former members of militant groups, all of whom were described as 'now working for peaceful change.'<sup>175</sup> Garfinkel describes this transformation as taking place against a 'backdrop of vulnerability', catalysed often by 'stress and trauma.' Garfinkel also describes how some of the interviewees

---

<sup>173</sup> Horgan, John, and Kurt Braddock. 'Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the effectiveness of De-Radicalization Programmes.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 22, No. 2, April 2010, pp. 267–291.

<sup>174</sup> Garfinkel, Renee, 'Personal Transformations: Moving from Violence to Peace.' *United States Institute of Peace Special Report*, 186, April 2007, p186.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, p3

underwent what might be conceptualised as a form of de-radicalisation in ‘a reorientation in outlook and direction.’<sup>176</sup> A key factor Garfinkel notes in the transformation from violence to peace was the role-played by personal relationships: ‘change often hinges on a relationship with a mentor or friend who supports and affirms peaceful behaviour.’<sup>177</sup>

John Hogan’s theories of ‘disengagement’ from radicalisation are built on the premise of building effective counternarratives, amongst the many factors, to assist change to take place.<sup>178</sup> Hogan identifies psychological and physical [e.g. moving away from a group or involuntary imprisonment as examples] disengagement with the most important factors, including the following: i) development of negative sentiments as a result of experiencing negative qualities associated with sustained, focused membership and as a result; ii) a change in priorities (e.g. the longing for a social/psychological state) to regain something that the member feels is lacking, or existed before membership, often a result of self-questioning and iii) a sense of growing disillusionment with the avenues being pursued, or some quality of them (e.g. with the political aims or with operational tactics and the attitudes underpinning them).<sup>179</sup>

In further studies on deradicalisation Horgan and Braddock address the idea of offering a communication and psychology theory-based procedure for analysing terrorist narratives and constructing counternarratives that challenge terrorist narratives, as well as ways of disseminating counternarratives to overcome barriers to persuasion. In line with Garfinkel Horgan and Braddock I plan to show that deradicalisation programmes should incorporate broader efforts to not only encourage militants to give up pathways to violence but also work to change their worldview to effect real change of beliefs and attitudes based on community and faith narrative.<sup>180</sup> The dissemination of non-violent counternarratives is therefore a critical factor needed to contradict the themes that sustain the radical narratives that foster terrorism. Just as

---

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, p1

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, p4.

<sup>178</sup> Horgan, John, ‘Disengagement or Deradicalisation: A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiation in need of evaluation.’ In *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 2 No.4 2008, p5.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p6.

<sup>180</sup> Horgan, John, and Kurt Braddock. ‘Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the effectiveness of De-Radicalization Programmes.’ In *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 22, No. 2, April 2010, p271.

terrorist ideologues use narratives via media to attract membership, so Horgan and Braddock argue it becomes important to infiltrate online sites. Those who have turned their back on radical groups can engage with members to refute teaching in dialogue and thus build new relationships with more moderate voices.<sup>181</sup> This involves the Muslim community as the optimum persuasive counternarrative voice to 'identify tenets of Islam that are most at odds with Islamist strategy and actions that understand which of these contradictions are most likely to resonate with Muslims in the Middle East and elsewhere.'<sup>182</sup> In this context the answer to changing mind sets lies in who and how a counternarratives message is delivered to enable the audience to trust in a credible source.<sup>183</sup> The power to offer credible counternarrative therefore does not lay in government but within the hands of Muslims and Muslim faith leaders across the world who want to form a more moderate approach to co-existence with people of other faiths and ideological persuasions.

In Muslim majority countries faith-based rehabilitation methods have been used as a form of counternarrative. This can be seen particularly in Saudi Arabia that has been a target of perceived extremist threats and at the same time also a major provider of recruits and funds to Daesh.<sup>184</sup> This led the Saudi state to put laws in place to outlaw terrorist funding. It has also responded by creating a counter-radicalisation programme in prisons that aims to 'deprogramme Jihadist radicals,' changing their beliefs and behaviours through religious courses delivered by clerics until they no longer pose a threat to the state or abroad.<sup>185</sup> All detainees are expected to pass a jurisprudence exam before being permitted to complete their deradicalisation programme. Boucek argues that this model is based on engagement with the ideology and narratives of Islamic extremists to defeat the ideas that 'nurture political violence' and offer intellectual

---

<sup>181</sup> Braddock, Kurt; Horgan, John, 'Towards a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counternarratives to Reduce Support for Terrorism, Studies.' In *Conflict and Terrorism*, 2016-05, Vol.39 (5), p.381-404.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p390

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p394.

<sup>184</sup> Ministry of Defence. 'Evidence of ISIL Funding' (SIF0006). UK Ministry of Defence written evidence paler. 26th April 2016. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/67779/html/>. Accessed 20th June 2024.

<sup>185</sup> Boucek, C., 'Saudi Arabia's Soft Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare.' Paper issued online by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008, p23.

arguments that resonate with the values of the recipients.<sup>186</sup> The main objective of this approach is to educate and persuade individuals that their Jihadist interpretation of the Quran is incorrect and that Islam has been misinterpreted. Besides its emphasis on takfir, Wahhabism also emphasises loyalty and obedience to leadership, endowing the clerics with a crucial degree of legitimacy to challenge the thoughts and behaviours of individuals in the programme. The Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef Centre for Counselling in Riyadh has adopted faith instruction from respected religious leaders and scholars, combined with Cognitive Behavioural therapy counselling methods rather than focussing solely on punitive measures such as prison sentences. At the heart of this model is instruction from Imams of key aspects of Sunni teaching that emphasises that Islam and terrorism are not synonymous, and offering social interventions, such as rehousing and finding suitable wives, to rehabilitate.<sup>187</sup> Similarly, Indonesia and Jordan's 'Anti-Terrorist' arms of government have set up deradicalisation programmes that have sought to delegitimise certain radical interpretations of Islam to disseminate a moderate and apolitical Islam, including one to one instruction with Imams, family involvement and a planned support structure.<sup>188</sup> The above examples of deradicalisation programmes in majority Muslim states, such as the Bin Nayef Centre in Riyadh, must be contextualised and their efficacy questioned as there is limited evidence available to suggest this model is one that can be adopted by Western countries that face different challenges and cultural circumstances. It may also be argued that the Saudi approach works to the extent that Saudi faith tradition is more unified and supported by greater acceptance of state directives by its population. The conditions in the UK context are different, as a number of diverse Islamic traditions are practiced and some government interventions have been called into question. I will be coming back to this last point in Chapter Four of this thesis.

---

<sup>186</sup> Boucek, C. 'Counter Terrorism from within: Assessing Saudi Arabia's Religious Rehabilitation and Disengagement Programme.' *The RUSI Journal* 2008, Volume 153, p60.

<sup>187</sup> Gardner, Frank. 'Inside Saudi Arabia's Rehab Centre for Jihadists.' *BBC News Online*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-40061550>. Accessed 11th January 2019.

<sup>188</sup> International Peace Institute. 'A New Approach: Deradicalization Programmes and Counterterrorism.' International Peace Institute paper, June 2010. [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/a\\_new\\_approach\\_epub.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/a_new_approach_epub.pdf). Accessed 20th June 2020.

The model of employing faith instruction through the medium of respected clerics to assist deradicalisation is not exclusive to majority Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia. This is reflected upon in Robert Lambert's study, *Empowering Salafis and Islamists Against al-Qaeda: A London Counterterrorism Case Study*.<sup>189</sup> In this study, Lambert poses the argument that conservative respected Salafi Muslim faith leaders are more likely to have the credibility to undermine and counter extremist views from within communities.<sup>190</sup> Lambert demonstrates how engaging with non-violent Salafis with conservative theological views can serve as valuable partners in counter-extremism efforts, provided they reject violence and have legitimacy within their communities. In the context of Brixton Mosque Lambert presents how Al-Qaeda-inspired extremists were challenged and opposed by resident imams.<sup>191</sup> I would argue that in the UK Islamic faith leader counternarratives provide a powerful voice from within British Muslim communities and I will be addressing this as part of the major question of this thesis in later chapters dedicated to qualitative interviews.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has addressed the historical context, the contributions of seminal thinkers and analysed the key theological and political points of debate that have shaped the landscape in which extremist ideologies have emerged in the UK and globally. This includes addressing the influence of the Salafi school of thought, with its emphasis on purist interpretations of Islam, as well as the political responses and grievances that emerged during and after the European colonial period. It has also addressed several critical factors that have precipitated and acted as catalysts for ideologically inspired terrorist incidents in the UK. Highlighting, for example, issues of identity conflict, perceived injustice and social marginalization that have led to potential radicalisation. Furthermore, it has examined some of the actions taken by governments to prevent such events, including legislative measures, community engagement initiatives, and counter-radicalisation programmes. In this context faith leaders and Muslim communities in the

---

<sup>189</sup> Lambert, Robert. 'Empowering Salafis and Islamists Against al-Qaeda: A London Counterterrorism Case Study.' In *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 1, January 2008, pp. 31–35.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, p35. Also see Lambert, Robert. 'Salafi and Islamist Londoners: Stigmatised Minority Faith Communities Countering al-Qaida.' In *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Vol. 50, Nos. 1–2, September 2008, pp. 73–89.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, p31.

UK have a significant role to play, not only by providing counternarratives to groups such as Daesh but also acting as powerful instigators of positive change for individuals who may be vulnerable to groups who support violence. The thesis will be going on to examine the application of UK Prevent policy in response to the threat of terrorist violence and corresponding impact on the UK Muslim community. It will also present critiques from within the UK Muslim community, highlighting the call for more inclusive and improved methods of countering violent extremist ideologies and comparative examples of how other European countries have addressed ideologically violent and extremist threats.

## Chapter Three:

### UK Muslims question the efficacy of Prevent and offer Islamic counternarratives to extremism

---

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on Muslim faith opposition to violent extremist groups, such as Daesh and Al-Qaeda, and the response of the UK Government anti-terrorist Prevent strategy. To do so it will be necessary to examine of the deeper context, one that acknowledges the recent history and longer story and the broader experiences of Muslim communities in the UK in their encounters with counter-terrorism efforts. This will include further sections reviewing literature and exposition of the critiques of Prevent that have arisen amongst various strands of Muslim communities in the UK. There have been numerous challenges to the imposition of the Prevent strategy by Muslim communities, many of whom perceive Prevent to be not achieving its goal of community cohesion or community interventions but infringing on civil liberties and the right to protest.<sup>192</sup> This will include a brief comparative analysis of deradicalisation programmes employed by other European governments to counter potential violent terrorist acts, with the inclusion of Muslim communities.

#### 3.2 Government attempts to prevent radicalisation

The UK Government's Prevent Strategy forms part of a wider counter-terrorism strategy, known as CONTEST and aims to safeguard people from being radicalised and becoming terrorists.<sup>193</sup> It is part of the 'four Ps', termed Prevent, Pursue, Protect, and Prepare, which aim to reduce terrorism at all levels. The Prevent strategy was built under the then Labour government to be the 'hearts

---

<sup>192</sup> Home Office. 'Prevent Strategy.' London: Home Office: UK.Gov. publications, June 2011. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78966aed915d07d35b0dcc/prevent-strategy-review.pdf>.

<sup>193</sup> Home Office. 'The Independent Review of Prevent.' London: Home Office UK. Gov. publication, 8 February 2023. <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/09/07/independent-review-of-prevent-factsheet/>. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

and minds' dimension of the overall CONTEST strategy.<sup>194</sup> The CONTEST strategy had three strategic objectives consisting of i) responding to the ideological challenge of terrorism ii) preventing people from being drawn into terrorism and ensuring that they are given appropriate advice and support and iii) working with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation.<sup>195</sup> In 2015, the 'Prevent Duty' iteration was established on a legal footing through the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, requiring authorities such as higher education institutions, social workers and health services to have 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.'<sup>196</sup> Since then, specified authorities have created and implemented policies and procedures that demonstrate compliance with this new Prevent Duty. A partnership approach with Muslim communities has been at the heart of delivering these Prevent objectives and community engagement has been key to its operational delivery. However, as I will show further on in this chapter, there has been an increasing amount of criticism and distrust of Prevent from within UK Muslim communities and directly from faith leaders.

As part of Prevent, the Channel Programme was created as a pilot programme in 2007 and is now one of the cornerstones of the government's counterterrorism efforts. Channel is designed to support teens and young adults who are at risk of radicalisation but only in the pre-criminal space.<sup>197</sup> These interventions were designed on a bespoke framework that allows Channel review panels to deliver individualized support based on the needs of the individual. The review panels are made up of a wide range of statutory partners but are always led by the police and chaired by local authority representatives. This support might include a variety of mechanisms that range from mentoring, life skills counselling, anger management training, education opportunities, sports, job placement/employment assistance, family support, drug and/or alcohol rehabilitation

---

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Home Office: 'Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST), The four Ps: Pursue, Prevent, Protect, and Prepare.' London: Home Office, UK GOV. Home Office Publication, 22 September 2023. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2023>. Accessed December 20th, 2023.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Home Office. Channel and Prevent Multi-Agency Panel (PMAP) guidance. London: Home Office UK. Gov., 22nd February 2021. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/channel-and-prevent-multi-agency-panel-pmap-guidance>. Accessed December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

programmes, or housing support. The UK's Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Channel Guidance evolved the aim of Channel from just 'Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism' to also challenging the ideologies behind violent activities.<sup>198</sup> The conflation of radicalisation as the precursor to terrorism has also changed the focus of many Muslim communities across the UK. In an Equality and Human Right Commission report, *The impact of counter-terrorism measures on Muslim communities*, Tufyal Choudhury and Helen Fenwick of Durham University argue that Prevent counter-terrorism measures have added to 'perceptions of racial and religious profiling and discrimination' and fueled division.<sup>199</sup> Prevent can therefore be seen from this perspective to be predicated on a narrow understanding of faith practice, making it more likely to disproportionately target and securitise Muslim communities. Choudhury and Fenwick propose this overemphasis fosters perceptions of discrimination and 'creates a culture of mistrust within the community', that ultimately undermines the Prevent policy's intended goal of building community partnership and resilience.<sup>200</sup> This unease and distrust of Prevent is an area this thesis will be coming back to again in later chapters that present interviews with UK Muslim faith leaders.

The Counterterrorism and Security Act 2015 that made Prevent a statutory duty for public organisations to report extremists or those at risk from 'radicalisation' is not supported by large sections of the Muslim community as there are concerns as to how a doctor, teacher or a social worker can reliably assess without prejudice whether someone is at risk from 'radicalisation.'<sup>201</sup> This has also led to certain communities of accusing Prevent of discriminating against Muslims and encouraging Islamophobia.<sup>202</sup> A significant number of referrals made to the Channel Programme have been made by schools and local authorities due to an evidenced lack of understanding of Islam; henceforth the referral rate is higher although the actual cases emanating as a result are very low. A review of the Prevent strategy by the UK Government was

---

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Choudhury, Tufyal and Helen Fenwick (2011) *The impact of counter-terrorism measures on Muslim communities*. Equality and Human Right Commission Report, p5.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, p9.

<sup>201</sup> Balazard, H el ene and Timothy Peace, 'Confronting Islamophobia and its consequences in East London in a context of increased surveillance and stigmatisation.' In *Ethnicities*, Sage Journals, 2023, Vol. 23(1), p88 to p92.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, p101.

first announced in 2019 and restarted in 2021 after protests about the independent integrity of the chair and the impact of the Covid pandemic. It concluded in February 2023 and has brought into focus the question of whether there are possible alternatives to a government sponsored deradicalisation programme that have limited but not eradicated violent terrorist incidents.<sup>203</sup> Not all who have engaged in the government's Prevent programme have been prevented from going on to plan in or directly undertake acts of terrorism in the UK, as seen in the previous mentioned case of Sudesh Amman. Amman undertook a Prevent deradicalisation programme in prison and went on to attack people in Streatham High Rd upon release to a bail hostel.<sup>204</sup> Another case is that of the London Bridge Fishmonger Hall attacker, Usman Khan, who in 2018 killed two people at a prisoner education conference he had been invited to attend less than twelve months after being released from prison, and not perceived as a risk.<sup>205</sup> Such events are evidence that Prevent cannot comprehensively succeed in specifying the total methodology and processes of countering groups with an online presence - such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh - and the ability to induce individuals to rethink their faith identity or shift from a certain attitudinal, behavioural and relational disposition to another. In this context engaging communities in a dialogue to address not only terrorist groups but also the presence of lone violent extremists is another vital area. This thesis argues that including faith leaders in offering solutions to preventing radicalisation is not only imperative but necessary to maximise effectiveness.

Whilst these rare terrorist events show that Prevent is, to some extent, limited in its ability to stop the process of individuals being attracted to the message of ideologically extremist groups, it has made concerted attempts to prevent acts that challenge the security of the UK population and successfully stopped terrorist acts.<sup>206</sup> In terms of Prevent outcomes, there has yet to be a

---

<sup>203</sup> Home Office, 'William Shawcross to lead independent review of Prevent.' Home Office News UK. Gov., 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/william-shawcross-to-lead-independent-review-of-prevent>. Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

<sup>204</sup> Simone, Daniel, 'Sudesh Amman: Who was the Streatham Attacker.' In *BBC Online news*, 3rd February 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51351885>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

<sup>205</sup> Weaver, Matthew. 'Fishmongers' Hall terrorist Usman Khan was lawfully killed.' *The Guardian Newspaper*, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jun/10/fishmongers-hall-terrorist-usman-khan-lawfully-killed-inquest-jury-finds>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2024.

<sup>206</sup> MI5. 'Countering Terrorism: Prevent Programme as Support.' Security Service MI5 online, 2024. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/what-we-do/countering-terrorism>. Accessed 10 June 2024.

fully independent assessment, sanctioned and separate from government evaluations, to conclusively approve or disprove the effectiveness of its initiatives. Neither did the William Shawcross review of Prevent fully assess existing capabilities in a consultation that meaningfully incorporated faith-based interventions and the voices of prominent faith leaders, which could be instrumental in shaping future improvements to the strategy. I will be coming back to the Shawcross review later on in this chapter. The urgency to prevent individuals with affiliations to Al-Qaeda and Daesh from being drawn to these groups has increased since the destruction of Daesh's main powerbases in Syria and Iraq in 2019. The threat of returnees who have influenced families and friends back in the UK to adopt extreme violent views against fellow UK citizens remains a possible future challenge and concern of UK Government.<sup>207</sup> It is estimated that in the region of nine hundred people joined Daesh from the UK and that in the region of three hundred British citizens have not yet returned, whilst others were killed in the arena of war or directly stripped of their right to citizenship or return to the UK.<sup>208</sup>

There have been a variety of community engagement programmes operating across the UK, funded by the Home Office, that encourage faith communities to work closely with the police. These initiatives are numerous and have actively sought to involve communities, schools, universities, youth justice agencies, police agencies and others to counter all forms of terrorism. These initiatives cover a broad spectrum of issues, such as:

- Involving community members in counterterrorism investigations to help them understand the process.
- Having police guide local authority representatives through fictional counterterrorism cases to enhance their comprehension of the process.
- Conducting workshops on radicalisation case studies to educate the public about the

---

<sup>207</sup> Barret, Richard (October 2017), *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*. Soufan Centre Publication. Barret suggests that the conditions that lead to the likes of Daesh remain and may reignite, p7.

<sup>208</sup> UK Parliament, 'UK Nationals returning from Syria.' Volume 654, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2019. *UK Parliament Online*. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-02-18/debates/69E286BB-03A2-4467-AB65-B3059436CD53/UKNationalsReturningFromSyria>. Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022. Reporting the answers of the then Home Office Secretary of State, Sajid Javid. The case of Shamina Begum from east London is discussed here. In 2021 she remained stripped of her citizenship and the right to return to her place of birth in the UK.

process.

- Implementing internal programmes for police to minimize community impacts during counterterrorism arrests.
- Co-leading reviews of missed opportunities where statutory partners could have alerted authorities to potential attacks.
- Engaging with women's groups to create a network of informed and active community members.
- Bringing together individuals from various statutory bodies to explain their roles in Prevent.<sup>209</sup>

To this extent the UK Government has invested and recognised community support and engagement activities as an important part of maximizing its counterterrorism efforts. This approach has been complemented by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), which pairs individuals convicted of, but not prevented from, terrorism-related charges, or those identified as radical or extreme, with community-based intervention providers as a condition of their licence agreements.<sup>210</sup>

### **3.3 Muslim faith community voices oppose Prevent**

UK Muslim faith leaders have played a crucial role in providing counternarratives to extremist Islamic ideologies, offering credible and trustworthy voices in this effort. This role is often overlooked by mainstream narratives. Faith leaders also engage with and monitor individuals who, at times, may not be reached or influenced by police or criminal justice structures. UK Government data published each year by the Home Office suggests that Channel is effective in addressing various dimensions of possible terrorist threat in partnership with the criminal justice

---

<sup>209</sup> His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. 'Counter-terrorism policing: An Inspection of the Policies contribution to the government's Prevent Programme.' *HMICFRS Publication Report*, 2019. <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/counter-terrorism-policing-an-inspection-of-the-polices-contribution-to-the-governments-prevent-programme/>. pp10 to 24. Accessed July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

<sup>210</sup> Ministry of Justice. 'MAPPA Guidance.' Produced by the National MAPPA Team National Offender Management Service Offender Management and Public Protection Group. London: Ministry of Justice, 2012. <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/mappa/mappa-guidance-2012-part1.pdf>. Accessed 14 February 2021.

system equally of both far right movements and ‘radical Islamist’ groups in the UK.<sup>211</sup> Yet, as I will demonstrate in this next section, despite the data evidence, Prevent is still perceived by Muslim leaders as a framework that sometimes misinterprets Islamic faith and is ineffective. Consequently, this has led to responses from UK Muslim faith communities, who have critiqued Prevent and offered alternative ways of preventing violent extremism.

There have been various other independent international observations of different UK counter terrorism government policies, such as commissioned reports by Fionnuala Ni Aolain of the UN Human Rights Council. Ni Aolain stated that the UK Prevent strategy has had a ‘negative and discriminatory effect on Muslim communities’ and has ‘targeted Muslims in the UK’ above all other forms of extremism.<sup>212</sup> In the report on the counter to terrorism, Ni Aolain highlights the rights and freedoms have been neglected when addressing terrorism issues and recommends governments:

Meaningfully engage civil society and affected communities to fully understand the risks, needs and impact of initiatives at the sub-regional and local levels and ensure civilian oversight of the security sector and counter-terrorism efforts as essential to effective, human rights-compliant and sustained counterterrorism efforts.<sup>213</sup>

From this UN perspective it is the engagement of communities rather acts of government and law that impinge on civil liberties that is most effective in countering extremist ideologies. Once again, this view supports the argument set forth in this thesis that counternarrative from within

---

<sup>211</sup> Home office. ‘Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2019 to March 2020.’ London: *Home Office, UK. Gov publication*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/individuals-referred-to-prevent/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2022-to-march-2023#type-of-concern>. Each year the Home Office provides data analysis of the UK Government’s response to terrorism in terms of data. Individuals referred and supported through the Prevent Programme period April 20 to March 2020. In this year there were 1404 referrals of far-right groups and 1658 of those were categorised as attracted to ‘radical Islamist’ groups.

<sup>212</sup> Aolain, Fionnuala Ni, ‘Promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism,’ Note article to UN General Assembly, 3 August 2021. <https://undocs.org/en/a/76/261>, p6. Accessed 18<sup>th</sup>.October 2022.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, p15.

the Muslim community can offer preventive discourses that complement government initiatives, providing a more holistic approach to countering violent extremism.

Throughout UK history, times of national challenge and emergency have similarly eroded individual rights and posed questions about the ability of state interventions to engender trust amongst all communities. This can be seen in the response to the Northern Ireland conflict and ‘Troubles’ between Catholic and Protestant communities, which lasted over thirty years and continues to have an impact today.<sup>214</sup> The security and safety of people remains the ultimate shared goal of both government and communities. However, government and communities achieve this goal through differing means. The UK *Government* has sought security through legislation and Prevent policing whereas certain faith communities and civic protest groups often seek security through social justice mechanisms that diametrically oppose the Prevent agenda. In this context faith communities can sometimes be seen to act as the bridge, as they did in Northern Ireland or South Africa, to end misunderstanding and build trust and faith-based interventions that not only counter terrorism but also build community cohesion and put an end to violence. In Northern Ireland, the political agreement of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 was aided by grassroots faith leaders working to end division in schools and give opportunities for reconciliation in faith communities.<sup>215</sup> Another example is that of Bishop Desmond Tutu who similarly led the Truth and Reconciliation commission in South Africa that put ‘compassion’ at the heart of overcoming division with the end of the Apartheid regime in the 1990s.<sup>216</sup>

At the same time, although faith communities are willing to engage and support anti-terrorism programmes, the UK Government's prioritisation of security over community inclusion has

---

<sup>214</sup> The ‘Troubles’ refers to a violent thirty-year conflict that began with a civil rights march in Londonderry on 5 October 1968 and concluded with the Good Friday Agreement on 10 April 1998.

<sup>215</sup> Stefan Wolff, ed. (2004), *Peace at Last: The Impact of the Good Friday Agreement on Northern Ireland*, Berghahn Books, p18.

<sup>216</sup> Battle, Michael (2009), *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*. Pilgrim Press, p10.

fostered suspicion among broadly amongst some UK Muslims. Many fear that programmes such as Prevent may be used to target or surveil people of faith unfairly or that they might be mistakenly labeled as 'extremists.'<sup>217</sup> In a study of UK and Danish Hizb ut-Tahrir members Richard McNeil-Wilson argues that contentious Islamic activist organisations have been so heavily 'repressed by UK counterterrorism tactics' through surveillance and targeted association with extremism that their numbers in the UK have dwindled.<sup>218</sup> Prevent, on many levels, has attempted to engender a sense of inclusion and partnership between state-led operations and communities. However, the impact of Prevent security duty focused counterterrorism measures, that requires public health workers in areas such as education and health to identify and report those who appear at risk of 'being drawn into terrorism', has caused distrust to arise. This has led to the negative effect of profiling an entire faith group in what Spalek and Macdonald term as the 'pathologising' Islamic faith concepts as 'inherently dangerous and un-British.'<sup>219</sup>

Writing on counternarratives to violent ideologies Arun Kundnani argues that the Prevent agenda has in fact undermined community cohesion and 'destabilised police community relations' by casting Muslims as the 'suspect other.'<sup>220</sup> Consequently, there has been growing and widespread opposition to the Prevent anti-terrorist strategy from large sections of the UK Muslim faith community who see it as wrongly categorising some forms of Muslims' faith expression as extremist. An example of this is a written statement from the leadership of the East London Mosque (ELM), which has one of the largest mosque congregations in London. When asked by a

---

<sup>217</sup>Amnesty International UK. 'This is the Thought Police: Prevent Duty and its chilling effect on human rights.' Report published by Amnesty International UK, November 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-shawcross-review-prevent-deeply-prejudiced-and-has-no-legitimacy>, p7.

<sup>218</sup> McNeil-Willson, Richard, 'Counter terrorism and the repression of Islamic activism: Hizb ut-Tahrir in Britain and Denmark.' In *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 2022-04, Vol.30 (2), pp.220-235.

<sup>219</sup> Spalek, B. and McDonald, L. 'Terror crime prevention: constructing Muslim practices and beliefs as anti-social and extreme through CONTEST.' In *Social Policy and Society*, 9(1). 2009. pp123–132.

<sup>220</sup> Kundnani, Arun (2014) *The Muslims are Coming: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*. London: Pluto Press, pp10-15.

parliamentary committee in 2018, the East London Mosque (ELM) stated that a significant number of referrals to the Prevent Channel programme came from members of schools and local authorities who has 'lack of understanding of Islam and Muslims.'<sup>221</sup> ELM argued that this high referral rate does not accurately reflect most of the UK Muslim community, who overwhelmingly reject terrorist violence. In the example of ELM one can see the Prevent counter terrorism policy is distrusted and the social capital needed for government and community leaders to work together to bridge this divide is a point of issue.

There are also other examples of the UK Government attempting to build bridges of trust. This can be seen in the commissioning of the independent 2023 Bloom Review of government engagement with faith communities in the UK that provides important insights from a faith perspective. This report describes faith as a 'force for good' and calls for greater faith literacy within the government and public sector, recognising that 'all groups have the right to speak' and acknowledging the 'contribution of faith communities.'<sup>222</sup> While the report does not explicitly mention Islam, it implicitly includes the Islamic faith as part of its broader message. During the reading of the Counter Terrorism and Border Security Act on 12 February 2019, the UK government committed to carrying out an independent review of Prevent.<sup>223</sup> It was Initially led by Lord Carlisle who was chosen by the then Conservative government Prime Minister. Rights Watch (now called Rights and Security International) legally contested this choice through a judicial review as Lord Carlisle was thought to be biased against the UK Muslim community and

---

<sup>221</sup> UK Parliamentary. 'Written evidence by the East London Mosque to a UK Parliamentary Committee,' PDF page, 2018. *UK Parliament online* <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/64507/pdf/#:~:text=Prevent%27s%20focus%20on%20ideology%20alone,push%20an%20individual%20towards%20radicalisation>. This included examples in schools of children who had come under scrutiny for using the terms 'jihad' and their parents coming under 'suspicion.'

<sup>222</sup> Bloom, Colin, 'Does Government do God: An independent review into how government engages with faith,' *The Bloom Review*, April 2023, London: Gov.UK. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64478b4f529eda00123b0397/The\\_Bloom\\_Review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64478b4f529eda00123b0397/The_Bloom_Review.pdf), p5.

<sup>223</sup> UK Parliament. 'UK Parliament, Counter-Terrorism and Border Control Bill Signed into Law.' *UK Parliament News*, 12th February 2019. UK Parliament online. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2019/february/royal-assent--counter-terrorism-and-border-security-bill-signed-into-law/>.

it was decided a new person would be chosen.<sup>224</sup> William Shawcross was then appointed as the new Independent Reviewer of Prevent on 26 January 2021 to consider the UK's strategy for protecting people vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. Shawcross went on to make recommendations in a report that was submitted to the Home Office in February 2023. This process was delayed by the COVID-19 Pandemic and William Shawcross was once again opposed by many Muslim faith leaders as it was shown that William Shawcross had a history of expressing anti-Muslim sentiment and therefore was not trusted to be objective or partial in his recommendations.<sup>225</sup> This raised doubts about the government of the time's openness and process in choosing an independent reviewer. A coalition of more than 450 Islamic organisations, including 350 mosques and Imams, representing thousands of British Muslims officially boycotted the review and opposed the leadership of this by William Shawcross since it was deemed to continue to perpetuate 'Islamophobic' and 'right-wing leaning commentary' that was not understanding of Islam.<sup>226</sup>

The UK Government Shawcross Prevent review findings' main recommendations were that too much focus has been on 'far right groups' who as a majority do not commit violent acts and that Prevent was not doing enough to challenge non-violent ideologically 'Islamist extremism' or groups funded to combat future terrorist acts and therefore should have funding removed.<sup>227</sup>

The Shawcross review also stated that Prevent was being 'wrongly used to support vulnerable people', with a focus on mental health and even supporting extremist ideologies.<sup>228</sup> Therefore

---

<sup>224</sup> Right Watch International. 'Government Conceded Permission for RWUK Judicial Review of Prevent Reviewer.' *Rights Watch International News online*, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2019. <https://www.rightsandsecurity.org/impact-post/government-concedes-permission-for-rwuk-judicial-review-of-prevent-reviewer/>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

<sup>225</sup> Dugan, Emily and Rajeev Syal. 'Public left at risk over UK counter-terrorism strategy, says Prevent review author.' *The Guardian Newspaper*, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/22/public-left-at-risk-uk-counter-terrorism-strategy-william-shawcross-prevent-review-author>. Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023.

<sup>226</sup> Grierson, Jamie, 'Hundreds of Islamic Groups Boycott Prevent Review. In *The Guardian newspaper* 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/17/hundreds-islamic-groups-boycott-prevent-review-william-shawcross-protest>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

<sup>227</sup> Home Office. 'The Independent Review of Prevent.' London: Home Office UK. Gov. publication, 8 February 2023. <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/09/07/independent-review-of-prevent-factsheet/>. HMG Independent Review of Prevent (2023) <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/independent-review-of-prevent>. Accessed 12 January 2024.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

‘non-violent Islamism’ is posed by Shawcross to be misinterpreted as it is seen to fall below the terrorism threshold but in fact provides the environment from which the UK’s primary terrorist threat comes.<sup>229</sup> The publication of this report with thirty-four recommendations was accepted in full by the then UK Home Secretary, Suella Braverman. It has not only been subsequently questioned in its intention and delivery by UK Muslim faith leaders, but has also been opposed by international groups, such as Amnesty International. Amnesty claimed Prevent was ‘prejudiced against Muslims’ in the UK and thus lacked legitimacy as it was incompatible with the UK’s international human rights obligations, disproportionately violating the human rights of young ‘minoritised people’ with insufficient transparency or oversight.<sup>230</sup> I will be coming back to the application of recommendations from the Shawcross review in concluding chapter of this thesis.

There is a wide body of commentary suggesting that government sponsored counter-terrorism movements are enhanced and supported by community engagement and that this is an important part of the solution. In *Responding to the threat of violent extremism failing to prevent* Paul Thomas argues that Prevent policy and CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy has further alienated British Muslim communities and that encouraging greater trust and integration across all communities represent the best defence against terrorism.<sup>231</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that community inclusion is an essential prerequisite for preventing radicalisation and attraction to extremist ideologies. In the UK this same fact can be seen historically - as mentioned earlier on in this chapter - within the Northern Ireland with the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Key to this peace was the message of, ‘communities defeat terrorism.’<sup>232</sup> Prevent Strategy has

---

<sup>229</sup> Home Office. ‘Prevent programme strengthened a year on from independent review.’ London: Home Office: Gov.UK publications, February 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prevent-programme-strengthened-a-year-on-from-independent-review>. Accessed 1 March 2024.

<sup>230</sup> Amnesty International. ‘Shawcross review of Prevent is ‘deeply prejudiced and has no legitimacy.’ *Amnesty International press release*, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2023. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

<sup>231</sup> Thomas, Paul (2012) *Responding to the threat of violent extremism failing to prevent*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, p45. Also see Rachel Briggs, Catherine Fieschi, and Hannah Lownsborough (2006), *Bringing it Home: Community Based Approaches to Counterterrorism*. London: Demos.

<sup>232</sup> English, Richard, *Counter Terrorism and Peace in Northern Ireland* (9 May 2023). International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, ICCT Publication, p15.

attempted to include this community driven approach by placing an emphasis on building social resilience in communities in the prevention of extremist ideologies and terrorist organisations. The renewed 2011 Prevent Strategy advocated that citizenship carries with it certain sets of responsibilities, one of which is counterterrorism. The sense of duty is captured in the statement ‘our society does not just confer rights; it demands responsibilities of us too. You have the freedom to live how you choose to live—but you must also respect the freedom of others to live how they choose to live.’<sup>233</sup> Linking those responsibilities with the government’s interpretation of ‘British Values’ the strategy asserts that all citizens subscribe to those values by further stipulating, ‘we will also consider ... how we can more easily revoke citizenship from those who reject our values.’<sup>234</sup> Underlying this directive was the inference that some sections of UK society are not integrated or supportive of ‘British values’, as well as opening up the divisive question about what it was to have a British identity. Since the war in Iraq and Syria we have seen this maxim imposed on individuals, such as Shamina Begum, who was stripped of her British citizenship due to Daesh membership amidst claims she still holds allegiance to this group and had held a position within this organisation.<sup>235</sup>

In November 2018, the All-Party Parliamentary Group of British Muslims adopted the working definition of ‘Islamophobia’ as ‘a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.’<sup>236</sup> Working as lead for the All Party Parliamentarian Group, Baroness Warsi, stated that one of the biggest challenges for the police has been, ‘operating Prevent within a policy of disengagement with British Muslim communities whereby more and more individuals and organisations are simply seen as beyond the pale and are not engaged with,’ and that ‘disengagement with British Muslim communities has taken place rather than with problematic

---

<sup>233</sup> Home Office. ‘Prevent Strategy.’ London: Home Office: UK.Gov. publications, June 2011. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78966aed915d07d35b0dcc/prevent-strategy-review.pdf>.p6.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, p7.

<sup>235</sup> Sabbagh, Dan. ‘An appeal was made but lost and Shamina Begum’s case remains contested.’ *The Guardian newspaper*, 21 February 2021. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/feb/26/shamima-begum-cannot-return-to-uk-to-fight-for-citizenship-court-rules>.

<sup>236</sup>All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, ‘Islamophobia Defined: The Inquiry into a Working Definition of Islamophobia.’ November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018. APPG Report Publication, p23. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>. Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> December 2022.

organisations.’<sup>237</sup> Warsi also uses language that described Prevent as a ‘toxic brand’ that has made Muslims the ‘enemy within’ and recommended it should be paused and counterterrorism measures reviewed.<sup>238</sup> There have been questions posed about the scope and influence of the All-Party Parliamentarian Group. John Jenkins observes, the ‘All Party Parliamentarian Group fails to offer any example of the type of criticism of Islam, or Muslims, or especially, Islamists, which might fall outside the definition of Islamophobia’ that they urge UK Government and others to accept. Instead, the report makes clear that a new definition could be the prelude to new kinds of ‘civil offences,’ pursued through the courts.<sup>239</sup>

There has also been questions about the effectiveness of Prevent from within government from a variety of UK Muslim groups, such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). MCB have argued that Prevent has unfairly targeted Muslim students and Muslim educational establishments, damaging civil liberties and undermining academic freedom by not fulfilling the Education Reform Act 1988 which guarantees staff and students the right to question, test and challenge received ideas freely.<sup>240</sup> This situation has been further exacerbated by the introduction of security measures on university campuses and higher education colleges across the UK. Shenaz Bunglawala explains that the current understanding of radicalisation often ends up divesting religious conservatism of its legitimacy as a form of religious expression.<sup>241</sup> She continues that this is based on the ‘mistaken belief that by enhancing a secular Islam we bring Muslims closer, philosophically and behaviourally, to the mainstream,’ ultimately rendering ‘observant’ Muslims

---

<sup>237</sup> UK Parliament. ‘Counterterrorism and Border Security Bill.’ UK Parliament: Hansard. Debated in House of Lords on Monday 17th December 2018. UK Parliament online <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-12-17/debates/A45EE86B-0D09-472D-BF99-D64DDF9D5D20/Counter-TerrorismAndBorderSecurityBill>.

<sup>238</sup>BBC News, ‘Baroness Warsi: Prevent scheme should be paused.’ *BBC News online*, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/UK-39399011/baroness-warsi-prevent-scheme-should-be-paused>. Accessed 10 September 2021.

<sup>239</sup> Jenkins, John, Sir (2018) *Defining Islamophobia: A Policy Exchange Research Note*. London: Policy Exchange, p13.

<sup>240</sup>Asim, Qureshi. ‘Prevent: creating “radicals” to strengthen anti-Muslim narratives.’ In *Critical Studies in Terrorism*, Volume 8 2015, pp181-191.

<sup>241</sup> Bunglawala, S., ‘How do we prevent radicalisation?’ *Theos Think Tank Brief*, 2014. Paper issued by Theos Think Tank at <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2014/09/24/how-do-we-prevent-radicalisation-by-shenazbunglawala>, p10. Accessed 3rd August 2021.

‘invisible or dangerous’ and further alienating faith communities from Prevent.<sup>242</sup> Whilst the problems with Prevent in education are multi-faceted it is important to distinguish between state-level Islamophobia and civil-society level Islamophobia. Rupert Sutton, writing for the Henry Jackson Society, proposes that it is opposition to Prevent from within the university campuses, which has been a hindrance for its effective implementation, and that this has fuelled the extremist narrative by hosting speakers who defend and perpetrate extremist views.<sup>243</sup> Therefore, the Prevent policy has been dismissed by future university leaders without an opportunity for thorough engagement. There have been instances where certain UK Islamic faith-based movements have directly associated faith as a catalyst for fostering radicalisation. An example of this is a Quilliam Foundation report entitled *Radicalisation on British University Campuses* back in 2010.<sup>244</sup> It made a direct links between conservative theology and radicalisation and also advocated ‘spying’ as something to be considered ‘morally right’ from within Muslim faith communities if it helped counter the terrorist threat.<sup>245</sup> However, Arun Kundnani argues in opposition that UK Government policy has relied too heavily on think tanks like the Quilliam Foundation and the Henry Jackson Society, which have vested interests and are therefore not impartial.<sup>246</sup> Kundnani observed that the Quilliam Foundation had aligned itself with government as a ‘moderate’ group to receive funds and was thus compromised. Quilliam’s Radicalisation Awareness Programme for training for teachers and other local authority workers on how to spot the signs of extremism was also at risk of subjectively confusing radical religious and political opinions with terrorist indoctrination.<sup>247</sup> This perception of the Quilliam Foundation being influenced by government and adding to the narrative of UK Muslims as a suspect

---

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, p9.

<sup>243</sup> Sutton, Rupert, (2015) *Preventing Prevent: Challenges to Counter Radicalisation Policy On Campus*. London: The Henry Jackson Society, p32.

<sup>244</sup> Husain, Ed, ‘You Ask The Questions.’ In *The Independent newspaper*, 14 April 2008. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/ed-husain-you-ask-the-questions-808652.html>. Accessed 13th May 2021.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, *The Independent newspaper*.

<sup>246</sup> Kundnani, Arun, ‘Spooked: How not to Prevent Terrorism.’ *Paper for the Institute of Race Relations*, 2009. <https://irr.org.uk/article/spooked-how-not-to-prevent-violent-extremism/>, p10. Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2024.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, p7

community contributed to distrust from sections of UK Muslim communities.<sup>248</sup> It was disbanded in 2021 due to funding being withdrawn during the Covid pandemic.

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), with the support of over five hundred affiliated mosque leaders, 2016 paper on Prevent, states that despite terror laws not being written with reference to specific religious groups, they are still in effect discriminatory.<sup>249</sup> The MCB paper further claims that through these laws, 'suspect communities are created, fuelling Islamophobia: whilst the language of the legislation is faith-neutral, there is a serious concern about discrimination in the implementation of terrorism legislation.'<sup>250</sup> Similarly, in a paper on the 2019 Counter Terrorism and Border Security Act the Muslim media lobby group Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) argued that counter-terrorism legislation has specifically focused on expressions of the Islamic religion, resulting in Muslims being disproportionately identified as extremists, which accordingly has the effect of disadvantaging them in having a role to play in public life and wider British society.<sup>251</sup> MEND has continued to advocate for more balanced media and defend Muslims against Islamophobic news and promote arts based projects across the UK. However, there have also been strong counter arguments from within government against. Sara Khan, the former Commissioner for Countering Terrorism, has argued that 'Islamists' have exploited the concept of 'Islamophobia' for political gain, claiming they have 'weaponized Islamophobia' to stifle debate on Islamic extremism while undermining efforts to combat anti-Muslim hatred.<sup>252</sup> This argument does not explain or put into doubt the existence of Islamophobia but questions the use of it in the context of community politics. It is important to note that at the time, Sara Khan, who served as the Commissioner for Countering Extremism and was later appointed in

---

<sup>248</sup> Bouattia, Malia. 'The Quilliam Foundation has closed but its toxic legacy remains.' In *Al-Jazeera*, 20 April 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/4/20/the-quilliam-foundation-has-closed-but-its-toxic-legacy-remains>. Accessed 23rd July 2024.

<sup>249</sup> Qureshi, Asim, 'Prevent: creating "radicals" to strengthen anti-Muslim narratives.' In *Critical Studies in Terrorism*, Volume 8 2015, pp181-191.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, p185.

<sup>251</sup> Mend. 'MEND's response to the Second Reading House of Lords Briefing on the Counter- Terrorism and Border Security Bill.' *Mend briefing online*, 9th October 2018, pp6 to 15. <https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/MENDs-Response-to-the-Second-Reading-House-of-Lords-Briefing-on-the-Counter-Terrorism-and-Border-Security-Bill-2017-2019.pdf>.

<sup>252</sup> Khan, Sara with Tony McMahon (2016) *The Battle for British Islam: Reclaiming Muslim Identity from Extremism*. Sara Khan Publications, p15.

2021 as an independent adviser to the UK Prime Minister on social cohesion and resilience, would have been expected to align with the government's position on counter-extremism strategies.

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) along with Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), MEND, Cage, Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) and other mainstream Islamic faith backed groups, have continually campaigned against Prevent and against its counter-extremism strategy on the basis it is a state-led attack on Islam that attempts to define Islam as something that it is not. The Prevent strategy has posed challenges to certain Muslims communities in the UK because it has been perceived to have wrongly categorised extremist ideas with practices that groups such as MCB, MEND and Cage support. MCB, has issued a number of statements warning that the Prevent strategy will fail if it continues to conflate conservative faith views with violent extremism without any evidence.<sup>253</sup> This includes defending Sharia councils against the accusation of sex discrimination. Similarly IHRC representatives have stated, 'the idea that they need to be probed because they oppress women is as offensive as it is inaccurate.'<sup>254</sup> On the government's plans to close mosques hosting extremist speakers MCB has questioned the government's authority to classify any mosque as 'extremist' and implied the government was leading a witch-hunt.<sup>255</sup> One of London's major mosques, East London Mosque (ELM), has similarly denied or ignored accusations of hosting speakers espousing misogynistic, homophobic, anti-Semitic, and supremacist views.<sup>256</sup> There is evidence that literature in MCB affiliated mosques calling for the death of Ahmadi Muslims - who MCB do not consider as obeying the norms of Muslim - has been common and the MCB has been undertaking action to counter this

---

<sup>253</sup>Versi, M. 'Meeting between David Anderson QC and the MCB: Concerns on Prevent.' *Muslim Council of Britain* Publication, July 2015, p5. <https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/20150803-Case-studies-about-Prevent.pdf>. Accessed 21 June 2022.

<sup>254</sup> Muslim Council of Britain 'MCB position on Counter-Terrorism policy and Prevent.' *Muslim Council of Britain*, March 2021. <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-position-on-counter-terrorism-policy-and-prevent/>. Also see MCB on its anti-terrorist stance in online page, 'Muslims Against Terrorism: Dealing with Terrorism.' <http://www.mcb.org.uk/againstterror/>. Accessed June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, Accessed June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>256</sup> East London Mosque. 'East London Mosque Refutes Extremism Allegations.' *East London Mosque & London Muslim Centre news*, March 2014. <https://www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/news/east-london-mosque-refutes-extremism-allegations>. Accessed 21 June 2022.

view.<sup>257</sup>

This section has explored the complex and contested nature of opposition to the Prevent strategy, highlighting the broader context in which British Muslim faith leaders and communities engage in efforts to counter extremist and violent ideologies. It has also discussed the divergent perspectives among Muslim civic and faith groups, as well as their ongoing struggle to have their voices meaningfully heard and recognised by the UK Government in shaping counter-extremism policy.

### **3.4 New counternarratives to extremist ideology**

Out of this sense of being wrongly persecuted or mistakenly labeled as part of extremist groups, many Muslims communities across the UK have looked to put distance between themselves and the ideology of terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and Daesh. New counternarratives have emerged within a selection of Sunni, Salafi, Shia affiliated and Sufi Islamic traditions, which affirm core Islamic principles and emphasise a commitment to peace. These narratives label individuals affiliated with extremist groups, such as Daesh, as Kharijites (a romanised Arabic terms to describe Muslims who have literally gone outside of Islam), rejecting their interpretations of Islam as illegitimate.<sup>258</sup>

Whilst Daesh was at the height of its land expansion in the Levant region between Iraq and Syria in 2014, a broad international coalition of Muslim scholars and leaders from across the world wrote an open letter to Mohammed Baghdadi. The seventeen page document condemns twenty four acts committed by the 'Islamic State' as a violation of Islamic faith principles and

---

<sup>257</sup> Naser, Tahir, 'The Muslim Council of Britain is failing Ahmadis like Asad Shah.' In *The Guardian newspaper*, April 25, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/25/muslimcouncil-of-britain-ahmadi-asad-shah>; Muslim Council of Britain, 'Independent Inquiry on Aalami Majlise Tahaffuze Khatme Nubuwwat, also known as Stockwell Green Mosque.' April 14, 2016, <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-updates/amtkn-april2016/>; Muslim Council of Britain *Our Affiliates*, October 5, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20181005001524/https://mcb.org.uk/about/affiliates/>; habibi (pseud.); Harry's Place Website. 'The East London Mosque – Surrealist Politics,' July 16, 2017. <http://hurryupharry.org/2017/07/16/theeast-london-mosque-surrealist-politics>. Accessed 20 May 2022.

<sup>258</sup>Watt, W. Montgomery (1985). *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p15.

misinterpretations of Quran, Hadiths (saying of the Prophet) and Sunnah (prophetic tradition) of the Prophet.<sup>259</sup> The letter also includes an executive summary of Islamic scholars throughout history on Jihad, the rights of non-Muslims and causing harm to them, the rights of women, and the illegality of creating an Islamic state without the consensus of all Muslims. It thus highlights that the actions of these groups, including practices such as human slavery, executions, and a general disregard for humanitarian principles, are explicitly forbidden in Islam. This demonstrates that there are exponentially more Muslims who oppose Daesh and are willing to speak out against it. It is acknowledged that the letter does not provide substantive representation from the Salafi or Wahhabi tradition derived from Saudi Arabia but nevertheless the grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia has passed an independent fatwa against Daesh.<sup>260</sup> Earlier, in 2010 Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri (a well-respected faith leader in Pakistan) issued a worldwide fatwa against suicide bombings. Tahir-ul-Qadri condemns Al-Qaeda ideology as non-Islamic and names them ‘heroes of hellfire.’ He goes on to ask young UK Muslims at risk of being on the pathway to radicalisation to ‘think again.’<sup>261</sup>

The Salafi Publications group based in Birmingham has continued a critique of the followers and leaders of the Daesh in numerous publications via the website Islam Against Extremism.com.<sup>262</sup> In one pamphlet entitled *Kharajites: Historical Roots of the Ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Al-Qaeda, Al-Nusrah and Isis* it is claimed that these groups are not only not practising Islam but are ‘harbingers of evil’ that use the Salafi tradition to conceal and camouflage their true intentions and deflect from their ideological based mission.<sup>263</sup> It is

---

<sup>259</sup>Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre. ‘An Open Letter to Baghdadi.’ Published by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, 14th September 2014. <https://rissc.jo/open-letter-to-al-baghdadi/>. Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

<sup>262</sup> Islam Against Extremism.com, ‘How Do Muslims View Al-Qaeda and ISIS?’ *Islam Against Extremism.com* April 2016. <http://www.islamagainstextremism.com/>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

<sup>263</sup>Islam Against Extremism.com, ‘Kharajites: Historical Roots of the Ideology of Extremism and Terrorism.’ *Islam Against Extremism.com*, April 2017. <http://www.islamagainstextremism.com/articles/nercnev-the-kharajites-historical-roots-of-the-ideology-of-extremism-and-terrorism.cfm>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> September 2021

emphasised there is a need to differentiate between the Salafi tradition and the so-called 'Kharijites,' creating a clear methodological and ideological separation.<sup>264</sup> The term Kharijites appeared in the first century of Islam for a sect that opposed the divinely imposed Caliphate of Also who defeated them at the Battle of Nahrawan in 658.<sup>265</sup> It is used in the contemporary context by Muslims to define extremist ideologies and violent movements who misconceive or misinterpret the Islamic faith.<sup>266</sup> Other similar Salafi publications have underlined what they call the influence of European politics and the foundation of twentieth century political movements inspired by Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood that sought for a pure form of Islam that held to the Quran and a few confirmed Hadiths and sought the creation of an Islamic state.<sup>267</sup> This counternarrative rejects misinterpretation of Islamic faith through extremist political ideologies whilst at the same time questioning the origin of this discourse.

There have been other prominent Muslim Scholars, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who have condemned Daesh and other extremist groups as Takfiri (refers to individuals or groups who accuse fellow Muslims of apostasy and, consequently, deem them as outside the bounds of Islam) which are divisive within Islam.<sup>268</sup> Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who supported the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, had his own show on Al Jazeera and formed Imams Online as Chair of the International Union of Muslim Scholars and was prominent across the Arab world. This type of worldwide online Muslim faith leadership counternarrative to extremist ideologies also raises the question of who has the authority to set out religious dogma and decide how they are understood and applied in a specific way at a given time. Additionally, it is important to determine whose voice

---

<sup>264</sup> Ibid. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

<sup>265</sup> Watt, W. Montgomery (1985). *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p15.

<sup>266</sup> Bunzel, Cole, 'The Kingdom and the Caliphate: Duel of the Islamic States.' Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Paper (2016). <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2016/02/the-kingdom-and-the-caliphate-duel-of-the-islamic-states?lang=en>. Accessed 10 June 2024.

<sup>267</sup>Islam Against Extremism.com. 'Abu Qatada - A Misguided, Bloodthirsty Takfiri,' *Islam Against Extremism.com* 2018. <http://www.islamagainstextremism.com/articles/bqa-el-abu-qatada---a-misguided-bloodthirsty-takfiri.cfm>. Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

<sup>268</sup>Azeena, Aaliyah, 'Apostasy and its Classification in Yusuf Al-Qaradawi' s View – Defining Apostasy.' *Islamopedia Online*, 20017. <https://www.islamopediaonline.org/apostasy-and-its-classification-in-yusuf-al-qardawis-view/>. Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

represents the true beliefs and whose views are considered heretical or apostate. Those branded as Kharijites, or apostates are marginalised and become 'Other.' Islamic religious writers in the West make a similar claim that terrorists who make use of Islam to promote violence have 'kidnapped Islam.'<sup>269</sup> This approach has been designed to protect Muslims living as minorities in the UK from discrimination and Islamophobia, countering the simplistic notion that most Muslims in the UK support violent views or label non-Muslims as Kufr (non-believers) to be avoided.

Ironically, this accusation of apostasy has been one of the primary driving forces behind Daesh's propaganda to destroy those who oppose its ambition to create an Islamic state. This has included killing thousands of non-Muslim Yazidis in Iraq and attacking Christians, who were forced to flee to the Kurdish territories of this country.<sup>270</sup> In No. 14 of the 2015 Daesh magazine, *Dabiq*, the text, 'Kill the Imams of the Kufr in the West,' provides an outline of how Daesh defines apostasy within Islam and how they make use of takfir or Kufr (the accusation that a fellow Muslim is an unbeliever) to brand other Muslims as heretics and apostates.<sup>271</sup> In doing this, they have argued that it is a religious duty to convert or fight and ultimately kill those who hold what Daesh consider wrong interpretations of Islam. The use of the term takfir or similar ways of branding enemies or Muslims who have a different opinion is a recurring theme among promoters of Daesh.<sup>272</sup> The dualistic outlook of the movement is clearly presented in the first issue of Daesh online magazine, *Dabiq*:

Amirul-Mu'minin said: O ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: the camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy—the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the Jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with

---

<sup>269</sup> Hughes, Aaron W. 'ISIS: What's a Poor Religionist to Do?' In *The Marginalia Review of Books*, Blog publication, 4th March 2015, pp319=320. Accessed 21st October 2021.

<sup>270</sup> Schaack, Beth Van. 'The Iraq Investigative Team and Prospects for Justice for the Yazidi Genocide.' In the *Journal of International Criminal Justice*. Volume 16, 2018, pp113–139.

<sup>271</sup> Carter Centre. 'Overview of Daesh's Online Recruitment Propaganda Magazine, *Dabiq*.' *The Carter Centre online*, December 2015. [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/countering-isis/dabiq-report-12-17-15.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/dabiq-report-12-17-15.pdf). Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

<sup>272</sup> Nilsson, Marco. 'Jihadiship: From Radical Behaviour to Radical Beliefs.' In *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism Journal*, April 2018, pp181-197.

them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews.<sup>273</sup>

There have also been numerous articles and groups of leading Imams who have issued statements as individuals or collectively to oppose Daesh ideology and behaviours. This was principally seen in the Open Letter to Baghdadi, mentioned earlier in this chapter, that condemns 'Isis' but also by Muslim faith leaders acting in the UK. In *Muslims Against ISIS Part I* UK clerics and scholars added their voice to the critique of extremist behaviours exhibited by Daesh, stating:

IS is a heretical, extremist organisation and it is religiously prohibited (haram) to support or join it; furthermore, it is an obligation on British Muslims to actively oppose its poisonous ideology, especially when this is promoted within Britain and that it is a moral obligation upon British Muslims to help the Syrian and Iraqi people without betraying their own societies If they ask for your help in religion, you must help, except against a people with whom you have a treaty (quoted from *Quran Surah 8:72*).<sup>274</sup>

Numerous studies have shown that there is still a widespread tendency in popular culture, films and media publications to negatively portray Islam as a monolithic religion that supports violence.<sup>275</sup> Patrick Kingsley even goes as far as to argue that the discourse around the ways groups such as 'ISIS' (referred to as Daesh in this thesis) are spoken about by the UK media and by politicians needs to break the 'cognitive link' between the group's terroristic operations and the beliefs of the majority of Muslims throughout the world.<sup>276</sup> This is to prevent the marginalisation of minority Muslim populations in the United Kingdom and worldwide, as well as the legitimisation and spread of the group's violent ideology among young Muslims. In the UK,

---

<sup>273</sup> Carter Centre. 'Overview of Daesh's Online Recruitment Propaganda Magazine, Dabiq.' The Carter Centre online, December 2015. [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/countering-isis/dabiq-report-12-17-15.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/dabiq-report-12-17-15.pdf). Accessed 20th May 2023.

<sup>274</sup> Wilson Centre. 'Muslims Against ISIS Part 1: Clerics & Scholars.' Paper published by the *Wilson Centre*, September 24, 2014. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/muslims-against-isis-part-1-clerics-scholars>. Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

<sup>275</sup> Morey, Peter, and Amina Yaqin (2011) *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

<sup>276</sup> Kingsley, Patrick 'Call Islamic State QGIS Instead, Says Globally Influential Islamic authority.' In *The Guardian newspaper*, 27 August 2014. [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/27/islamic-state-isis-al-qaida-separatists-iraq-syria](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/27/islamic-state-isis-al-qaida-separatists-iraq-syria). Accessed July 5th, 2024.

the online magazine Haqiqah builds on the argument set forth by Kingsley by opposing Daesh through a series of poignant articles featuring Imams across the UK who advocate resistance to violence.<sup>277</sup> This included condemnation for the London Bridge attack, the boycott of offering a funeral to the murderer and direct challenges to online propaganda issued by Daesh. Writing in the Haqiqah magazine, Mohamed el-Sharkawy , of al-Azhar College of Islamic Studies, says:

Under Daesh [Isis] rule we have seen indiscriminate mass murder (Muslims and non-Muslims), the killing of Imams and scholars that exposed them for the irreligious beings they are, the corruption of sacred laws, the destruction of mosques and places of worship, the unjustifiable enslavement of innocent young girls. Time and time again the Qur'an and the prophetic teachings implore us to act in moderation, to act in kindness and with justice. Nowhere in the Islamic tradition do we see any justification for what Daesh are doing.<sup>278</sup>

One of the foremost individual scholarly texts rejecting Daesh was published by Sheikh Mohammad al-Yaqoubi, in his paper entitled *Refuting ISIS: A Rebuttal of its Religious and Ideological Foundations*.<sup>279</sup> Al-Yaqoubi challenges the authority and legitimacy that Daesh has claimed for itself. He was one of the leading clerics who wrote a letter to Baghdadi, and he has been active on social media, engaging both the Arabic-speaking and English-speaking world. He has also spoken to major news outlets such as the BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera. Al-Yaqoubi stresses that ISIS's behaviour 'is neither Islamic nor a state, but rather a deviant group that is driven by anger, hatred, and a thirst for power, using Islam to reach their goals.'<sup>280</sup> According to al-Yaqoubi, the connection between Islam and Daesh is promoted by Western media outlets, such as 'Fox news' in the USA.<sup>281</sup> He refutes Daesh as neither a state nor an Islamic Caliphate and that fighting its ideas and ideology is incumbent on all Muslims across the world. He further states that

---

<sup>277</sup>Shaukat, Warraich. *Haqiqah Magazine*, Issue 2 2015. <https://soundcloud.com/user-362346597/haqiqah-issue-2-editorial-shaukat-warraich>. Accessed 13th September 2023.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

<sup>279</sup> Al-Yaqoubi, Shaykh Muhammad (2015) *Refuting ISIS: A Rebuttal of its Religious and Ideological Foundations*. Virginia, Sacred Knowledge Books, piv.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, pxi.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, pxi.

‘foundational ethics of Islam are based on mercy, wisdom and justice,’ and that the violence and injustice inflicted on the population of Syria by Daesh is a ‘great a crime’ as the infliction of cruel attacks of the Assad regime on the people of Syria and is not born out of faith.<sup>282</sup>

Sheikh Mohammad al-Yaqoubi’s book *Refuting ISIS: A Rebuttal of its Religious and Ideological Foundations* (2015) effectively acts as a fatwa (an Islamic legal opinion).<sup>283</sup> It provides an ideological and religious basis by an Islamic scholar with a large following, thus, repudiating Daesh and negating its claim to be representative of, or belonging to, the Islamic religious tradition. Al-Yaqoubi argues that i) ‘attacks against civilians and places of worship in the Muslim world are crimes, and the suicide bombers who commit these crimes are not martyrs,’ ii) ‘joining ISIS is forbidden and one cannot be a true Muslim and an ISIS member at the same time,’ iii) the actions of Daesh ‘are in complete contradiction to the Sharia, and their crimes cannot be justified in Islam,’ iv) ‘it is forbidden to kill non-Muslim citizens or visitors,’ v) ‘Muslims living in any non-Muslim country must abide by its laws and regulations,’ vi) ‘Slavery is now forbidden due to international treaties, which bind Muslims as well as the rest of the world,’ vii) ‘the implementation of Islamic penalties at times of war and ignorance is impermissible,’ viii) and lastly it is a legal obligation under Islamic law that the Muslims in the region fight ISIS.<sup>284</sup> Al-Yaqoubi contextualizes the actions of Daesh by comparing them to the Khawarij, a renegade sect that emerged in the 7th century during the early days of Islam from which the term Kharijite is derived. He draws on Hadiths to argue that Daesh, like the Khawarij, are condemned by Prophet Muhammad himself, pointing out that the Prophet's condemnation applies even though the Khawarij appeared long after his time.<sup>285</sup> This historical parallel is once again used to delegitimize Daesh's claim to Islamic authority.

In the UK many mosque leaders have initiated educational projects aimed at reinforcing the principles of peace and tolerance and countering extremist interpretations of Islam by grounding

---

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, ppxxiii-xxiv.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, p130.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid, p131.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid, p12. The term Kharajites is described as being derived from the Khawarji. Khawarji were the first identifiable sect of Islam. Their identity emerged as followers of Muhammad attempted to determine the extent to which one could deviate from ideal norms of behaviour and still be called Muslim.

students in a more holistic and historically rooted understanding of faith. One prominent example of a counternarrative response was the work of Imam Ather Hussain, who distributed educational leaflets across all mosques in Leicester to counter Daesh propaganda supporting violence.<sup>286</sup> *Imams Online* (UK based) has affirmed the rejection of extremist and violent forms of Islamic expression, and also Islamophobic hate crime against Muslims, by hosting digital summits and interactive events in partnership with Google at their HQ in London.<sup>287</sup> This brought together Imams, social media activists, community faith leaders such as Shaykh Riyaz Timol of Cardiff University, and Imam Mohammed Hamad of the Iqra Centre, Coventry, who issued a joint statement on methods of countering extremism online.<sup>288</sup> The Muslim Council of Britain has once again regularly issued statements condemning acts of terrorism in the UK as they arise but has also been occasionally singled out by UK Governments for not being able to take action to ban or condemn faith leaders if they have been proven to support ‘extremism.’<sup>289</sup> Popular Sufi Imams, like Dr. Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, have also contributed to the discourse against extremism. In 2015, Qadri published *The Islamic Curriculum on Peace and Counter-Terrorism*, a comprehensive ten-book series.<sup>290</sup> This work is designed to offer an Islamic perspective that promotes peace and counters extremist ideologies, serving as an educational resource for both scholars and the wider Muslim community. In this he sets out to reject all violent terrorist acts with the following objective:

The curriculum is to be used as the basis for educating and training imams, clerics, teachers and young people about the broad array of ideological and theological principles that underpin radicalisation, and what the true Islamic teachings are on each subject.<sup>291</sup>

---

<sup>286</sup> Pukka News. ‘Imam Launches Campaign opposing Isis Narrative.’ Pukaa News, Leicester. 2016. <https://pukaarnews.com/community-campaign-opposes-isis-narrative/17664/>. Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

<sup>287</sup> Makkah Mosque. ‘Imams Online 5th Digital Summit.’ *Makkah Mosque Publications* brief, 4th October 2019. <https://makkahmosque.co.uk/publication/5th-annual-digital-summit-in-partnership-with-twitter-uk/>. Accessed 20 December 2023.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, Accessed 20 December 2023.

<sup>289</sup> Versi, M. ‘Meeting between David Anderson QC and the MCB: Concerns on Prevent.’ *Muslim Council of Britain* Publication, July 2015, p7. <https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/20150803-Case-studies-about-Prevent.pdf>.

<sup>290</sup> Tahir-ul-Qadri. Muhammad, (2015). *Islamic Curriculum on Peace and Counter-Terrorism: For Clerics, Imams and Teachers, Clerics, Imams 2 (Peace Education Programme)*. London Minhaj Publications. p55.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, p25.

The work of Qadri is based firmly on rejection of violence against innocent civilians in pursuit of ideological objectives and his work is quoted by one of the interview participants in Chapter Seven of this thesis. Other Islamic clerics across the UK and the world have also supported the writings of Qadri, especially regarding separating the theology of Islam from extreme ideological groups who advocate violence.<sup>292</sup> However, the diverse nature of Islamic faith belief has also seen a number of scholars also criticising Qadri for being 'misguided' and for propagating religious views that have gone against mainstream Sunni consensus.<sup>293</sup>

### 3.5 European examples of combating terrorism

Across Europe there have been many joint and independent faith and government initiatives aimed at preventing the attraction to violent ideological movements. France, with the largest Muslim population of Europe, has experienced a series of significant terrorist attacks between 2015 and 2020 with two hundred and sixty people losing their lives. The French government has started many different programmes through emergency legislation and the criminal justice system rather than having an overarching strategy or government policy.<sup>294</sup> This has included the opening and subsequent closing of specialist centres created to deradicalise those returning from former Daesh strongholds in Syria and separate wings for those in prisons. It has seen investment made into the psychological care for the children returning from Daesh territories, tighter regulation of private Islamic schools, and more training for teachers to help them detect the early signs of radicalisation and debunk conspiracy theories.<sup>295</sup> Similar to Prevent, the French government's commitment to enforcing a sense of homogenous secular civic society has seen episodes of what has been identified by Amnesty International as direct discriminatory practice,

---

<sup>292</sup>Kurzman, Charles, 'Islamic Statements Against Terrorism.' *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Statement*, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001. <https://kurzman.unc.edu/islamic-statements-against-terrorism/>. Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

<sup>293</sup> 5PillarsUK.com. 'Scholars in the UK, India and Pakistan condemn Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri as "misguided".' *5 Pillars*, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2019. <https://5pillarsuk.com/2019/07/05/scholars-in-the-uk-india-and-pakistan-condemn-dr-tahir-ul-qadri-as-misguided/>. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

<sup>294</sup>Nielsen. Jorgen S. (2023), *Islamic studies in European Higher Education: navigating academic and confessional approaches*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp55 to 65.

<sup>295</sup> Day, Joel; Kleinmann, Scott. 'Combating the Cult of ISIS: A Social Approach to Countering Violent Extremism.' In *The Review of Faith & International Affairs Journal*, 2017-07, Vol.15 (3), Arlington: Routledge, pp14-23.

such as the conflating Muslim religious practice with extremism and the closure of certain mosques and religious schools.<sup>296</sup> Ahmed Shaheed, as Amnesty reporter for religious freedom and belief, states that widespread negative representations of Islam and security and counterterrorism policies across Europe and the world since 9/11 have served to perpetuate, validate and normalise discrimination and a sense that they are 'suspect communities' that are being forced to bear collective responsibility for the actions of a small minority.<sup>297</sup> Shaheed proposes that Islamophobic discrimination in both the public and the private sphere have often made it difficult for a 'Muslim to be a Muslim and manifest their beliefs.'<sup>298</sup>

In the context of France and other European nations there is a common theme of Muslim communities being perceived as suspect or potential enemies of the state and who oppose liberal Western values.<sup>299</sup> As previously noted, this has led to Muslims being stigmatised as not only separate from the broader society but also as targets of negative government policies and overly simplistic policing approaches. This is evident in the example of the French government's lack of tolerance for diversity in certain civic settings, such as denying female students the right to wear the hijab in schools and enacting a law that bans the wearing of hijab in certain public areas, enforcing a secular stance that suppresses religious identity.<sup>300</sup> Just as in the UK the French government strategy to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism has evolved according to the terrorist threat and changed according to terrorist events as they have happened.<sup>301</sup> The securitisation of the Muslim community intensified after 2014 with the discovery that French nationals, like other parts of Europe, were traveling to Syria to fight for Daesh. But unlike the UK,

---

<sup>296</sup> United Nations. 'A/HRC/46/30: Countering Islamophobia / anti-Muslim hatred to eliminate discrimination and intolerance based on religion and belief - Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.' *United Nations Report to the Human Rights Council, 46 th Session, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021*, p4 and 5.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc4630-countering-islamophobiaanti-muslim-hatred-eliminate>. Accessed July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, p5.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, p5

<sup>299</sup> Fredette, Jennifer (2014) *Constructing Muslims in France: Discourse, Public Identity, and the Politics of Citizenship*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, p75.

<sup>300</sup> Lang, Cady. 'The Complicated History of Frances Hijab Controversy.' *Time*, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Accessed 3rd November 2021. <https://time.com/6049226/france-hijab-ban/>. Many Muslim women in France felt they were the victims of xenophobic discrimination that denied their individual rights and choices.

<sup>301</sup> Hellmuth, Dorle. 'Countering Jihadi Terrorists and Radicals the French Way.' In *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Vol. 38, num. 12, 2015, p.979-997.

the approach in France has focused more on empowering the police to act against potential terrorists rather than prioritising community-based interventions.<sup>302</sup>

There are parts of Europe that have taken a more inclusive grass roots community approach to finding solutions to countering potential violent terrorist activity. An example is in Germany where policies to counter violent extremism have attempted to engage with more diverse elements of the Muslim community to find willing opposition to violent acts of terrorism. This has included Muslim groups from a wide range of theological persuasions, including orthodox, conservative groups and even groups defined as extremist in this context.<sup>303</sup> In Berlin the Verfassungsschutz (local authority) has held discussions with the Islamic Forum Berlin to include an entire spectrum of Muslim ideologies and traditions. The Verfassungsschutz inclusive approach has even seen the inclusion Muslim organisations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, and it pragmatically distinguishes between violent and non-violent Islamic groups. The Verfassungsschutz refers to the latter as ‘legalistically acting Islamist organisation’s that comprise orthodox political Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Pakistani Jamaat Islami, and the Turkish Millî Görüş.<sup>304</sup> At the heart of this pragmatic approach faith leaders have been included as key civil society networks to engage with new immigrant populations in the poorest areas of Berlin, such as Moabit and Soldiner Kiez. This has ensured open dialogue and prevention of extremism and potential violence by ensuring local Imams are empowered to challenge younger members of the community that may be more susceptible to attraction to joining violent groups.<sup>305</sup>

Engagement with faith communities is shown again by Floris Vermeulen in Amsterdam where the local authority has not only made financial investment in mosque communities but targeted certain parts of the population, such as the Moroccan community, to act as proactive partners in countering extremism and preventing violence. Here there is an acknowledgement by the

---

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, p997.

<sup>303</sup> Vermeulen, Floris. ‘Suspect Communities—Targeting Violent Extremism at the Local Level: Policies of Engagement in Amsterdam, Berlin, and London.’ In *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26:2, 2014. pp286-306

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, p287-288

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, p299.

Amsterdam local authority that making religious organisations partners in joint collaborations in order to target violent extremism is the best possible way to engage with hard-to-reach extremist individuals, as well as a practical where authorities have fewer opportunities to intervene than faith networks.<sup>306</sup> To fight Islamic political ideology a religious discourse is seen as necessary here to avert young people away from radicalising and to offer alternative ideas and respected religious sources that can offer persuasive theological interpretations of the world. In this Amsterdam example one can see that this approach can assist in providing resilience against radical ideologies. Germany, and the Netherlands differ significantly from the UK in the cited examples, by targeting violent Islamic extremism through an entire local Muslim community rather than focusing on larger counter terrorism initiatives such as Prevent. Vermeulen's research suggests that a more faith inclusive community approach in both Berlin and Amsterdam has had a degree of success. However, this is reflected differently in the UK, where the ethnic and sociopolitical context presents unique challenges, as this thesis will go on to illustrate.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

The political scientist Martha Crenshaw, and in a later work, Salim Galam, argue that extremists and those involved in terrorism are in fact competing with government for community support and narrative space.<sup>307</sup> Faith communities, like government, establish the boundaries of what is acceptable and what is not, as well as ensure compliance. Therefore, in this context Muslim faith communities are attempting to manage those who are considered to be 'insufficiently socialised' and take steps to influence without using the force employed by state funded agencies.<sup>308</sup> Whether that support is active, or passive is simply a matter of scale. This same battle for narrative space is being played out in the UK. The UK Government has made extensive efforts to engage Muslim communities and reassess strategies and policy in their counter-terrorism efforts, with varying levels of success. An apparent lack of trust between the UK Government and Muslim

---

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, pp300-301.

<sup>307</sup> Crenshaw, Martha, 'The Causes of Terrorism.' In *Comparative Politics* 13(4) (1981), p379–399. Also, Salim Galam, 'The September 11 Attack: A Percolation of Individual Passive Support.' In *The European Physical Journal B- Condensed Matter & Complex Systems* 26(3) 2002, pp. 269–272.

<sup>308</sup> Jackson Preece, Jennifer, 'Cultural Diversity and Security after 9/11.' In *The Empire of Security and the Safety of the People*, William Bain (ed). (2006). London: Routledge, p29.

communities is a significant larger issue that must be addressed before effective partnerships can be established. While the narrative of violent terrorism is not widely supported and is rarely expressed in the UK, the sub-narrative of defending Islam against perceived Western government persecution may resonate with many sympathisers. In this context, faith communities play a crucial role as a credible voice within UK civil society, working to dissuade support for extremist narratives through a compassionate approach. Both governments and faith communities are thus involved in defining, monitoring, and validating the social order, determining what is acceptable within the mainstream and what lies outside the boundaries of the norm.<sup>309</sup>

This chapter has addressed some of the impacts of UK Prevent policy on the Muslim community and responses to this. How to prevent violent terrorist acts and put measures in place that stop the need to securitise or use political legislation remains a battleground for Muslim groups, and the UK Government's Prevent policy interventions have conflicting approaches. Attempts to counter extremist ideologies by faith communities and Prevent programmes remain distinct within the UK. The last part of this chapter began to take a wider look at how faith and state funded government initiatives, when combined, can offer powerful new ways of countering ideologically extremist movements across Europe. As shown, there is both resistance to Prevent and support for its aims within UK Muslim faith communities, albeit with some questioning of the manner of its implementation. The support of grassroots counternarratives provided by faith communities, both within and outside the UK, plays a crucial role in offering sustainable solutions. However, the inclusion of faith leaders voices within the UK Government responses to violent incidents remains an area of contentious debate.

The next part of this thesis examines the context of the UK experience of Islamic places of worship and Muslim UK faith leaders who have actively developed counternarratives to violent extremist groups in the UK and abroad. This will include looking at the findings of the Manchester Arena Bombing Inquiry, particularly regarding the role of faith leadership at Didsbury Mosque and the mainstream political and media perspectives on Muslim communities in the UK. It will also highlight the significant impact of grassroots counternarratives, and the challenges faced by

---

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, p31.

places of worship when contributing faith-based counternarratives to prevent radicalisation and terrorism.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Evidence of UK faith communities countering narratives to violence and opposition to Prevent**

---

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This part of the thesis considers the involvement of Islamic places of worship and Muslim leadership organisations in the UK, with a focus on their engagement with movements that oppose violent extremist groups both domestically and internationally. To do this the chapter will be looking at community dynamics and challenges in places of worship, using the Manchester Arena Inquiry as a case study, thus, further examining the power of religious literacy counternarratives to violent and extremist ideologies at a grass roots level. The Manchester Arena Inquiry was established to investigate the deaths of the bombing victims, determine the circumstances surrounding the attack and identify measures needed to prevent similar incidents in the future, including strategies to deter individuals from engaging in violent extremism. The chapter also revisits the contribution of historical groups, such as Al-Muhajiroun, to the narrative of extremist radicalisation of Muslims in the UK, as well as grassroots level responses that have emerged from within the UK Muslim community.

#### **4.2 Going back in time to predict the future**

In 1998 I was completing fieldwork research amongst Al-Muhajiroun groups at both Finsbury Park Mosque and Turnpike Lane Mosque when the group were at their height in terms of membership. This was the continuation of an earlier Master's degree ethnographic study written for King's College, London University. Since its formation as an offshoot of Hizb ut-Tahrir in 1996 Al-Muhajiroun had similarly sought to promote an Islamic theocracy in Britain and in the predominantly Muslim world, grounded in its interpretation of Islamic scripture and history.<sup>310</sup>

---

<sup>310</sup> This was part of the PhD study I was undertaking at the School of Oriental Studies, University of London. I had finished my MA one year previously.

Al-Muhajiroun groups were openly held in both Mosques without challenge from the elders or mosque committee members and coincided with mainstream worship. Neither did Al-Muhajiroun members oppose non-Muslim outsiders like me from attending gatherings at 'Da'wah' (faith preaching) stalls on the streets of London, study circles at mosques or political protests outside Downing Street and other places as an outside observer. The Al-Muhajiroun members I met, such as group leader Omar Bakri Mohammed, and young men of mostly South Asian Pakistani descent in their 20s firmly believed their activities were imitating the practice of the *Sahaba* (companions) of the Prophet. They saw themselves as answering the urgent call to reject Western *Kufr* (non-believer who rejects the call to faith) ways of life and embrace a purer form of Islam, free from the cultural heritage and *biradari* (literally meaning brotherhood and pertaining to extended kinship and clan networks) of their parents.<sup>311</sup> Regular news media covered Al-Muhajiroun rallies, highlighting their opposition to those who did not adhere to their vision of a future Islamic state. This included the spread of homophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda targeting gay people and Jewish communities.<sup>312</sup> Al-Muhajiroun members regularly called for the setting up and jurisdiction of Sharia law courts across the UK for Muslim communities. It should be noted this was before the Terrorism Act 2000 and hate crime legislation had not come into effect. At this time there was no UK state intervention to stop Al-Muhajiroun hate speeches and political rallies taking place across civic facilities and mosques across England, as interpretation of freedom of speech at this time was more open. It could be argued that the group and its leader, Omar Bakri, were not taken as a serious threat and many from within the UK Muslim community also dismissed Bakri as a 'fool' without realising how divisive and dangerous his views would become.<sup>313</sup> At the time it could not be predicted that Al-Muhajiroun and its associate named groups' ideological stance could lead to inspiring terrorist

---

<sup>311</sup> Schirrmacher, Christine, 'Leaving Islam.' In *Handbook of Leaving Religion* by Enstedt, Daniel; Larsson, Göran; Mantsinen, Teemu T. (eds.) (2020) Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion. Vol. 18. Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers, pp. 81–95. *Kufr* is a derogative term used by some Muslims to refer to a person who disbelieves in God, denies the authority of faith, rejects the tenets of Islam or is simply not a Muslim.

<sup>312</sup> Fielding, Nick., 'Terror links of the Tottenham Ayatollah: Nick Fielding reveals the influence of a preacher once seen as a mere loudmouth.' Article in *The Sunday Times*, 24 July 2005. Accessed 24 February 2022.

<sup>313</sup> Watson, Richard. 'Has Al-Muhajiroun been underestimated?' *BBC New online* 27 June 2017. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40355491>. Accessed 29th May 2022.

acts in the UK and abroad. It had effectively, without preventive intervention, acted as a gateway to people who would either sympathise with or undertake violent terrorist acts in the future.<sup>314</sup>

At meetings I attended at this time Al-Muhajiroun members quoted at the beginning of each session the Quranic verse in English:

Muslims are those who, if we give them power in the land, establish the system of Salat and *Zakat* and enjoin virtue and forbid evil and inequity (Surah 22:41 from the Quran).<sup>315</sup>

This was used foremost to confirm the authenticity of their movement, supported by Quranic verse, Hadith texts and the Sunnah (life of the Prophet). The reality of establishing a Caliphate was a very compelling reality for the followers and members of the party I met, although it was never successfully realized in the UK. However, some followers continued to seek this ideal state by later traveling to Syria to join Daesh.<sup>316</sup> When I asked one of the main study group organisers, Tanvir Begum (anonymised name), at the Turnpike Lane Mosque, about the importance of establishing a 'Khalifa' as ruler the response was:

As you know Al-Muhajiroun exists by commanding good and forbidding evil. You need to implement the *Aqeedah* [Islamic doctrine] in order to live Islam as a complete way of life. We need to implement the command of Allah in full, and insha Allah this will be re-established, but not in a Western country, probably somewhere in the Middle east.<sup>317</sup>

Although this was a marginal UK Muslim view at the time, what was expressed by Tanvir was a strong conviction in the idea of a Caliphate and the political creation of an Islamic state was not simply a cherished utopia but perceived as a potential theological and ideological reality that could be reached through non-violent action. This also reflected the 'covenant of security'

---

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, Accessed 29th May 2022.

<sup>315</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir. 'The Method to Re-establish the Khilafah and Resume the Islamic Way of Life.' Pamphlet issued by Hizb ut-Tahrir in Britain, August 2000.

<sup>316</sup> Townsend, Mark, 'After Paris, Luton wages its own battle for hearts and minds of homegrown radicals.' *The Guardian newspaper*, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/nov/28/why-luto-mosques-schools-battle-against-jihadi-propaganda>. Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2022.

<sup>317</sup> Interview with Tanvir took place outside the entrance of Finsbury Park Mosque on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1998.

between British authorities and leaders of Muslim communities, before the 2005 7<sup>th</sup> July London attack, as an unwritten compromise in which the UK Government gave high levels of toleration in exchange for self-policing.<sup>318</sup> At the time Al-Muhajiroun members were required by its leadership to abide by the laws of the state one lived in and not attack fellow citizens as long as the group were allowed to preach religious beliefs in freedom. There have been many changes in the last twenty-five years both in the UK and across the world that have impacted UK Muslim communities. However, I would argue the Al-Muhajiroun view, expressed by Tanvir, that there is a need to 'purify' Islam and restore it to its former glories, remains a potent narrative for some - whether through violent or non-violent political means. This narrative also still influences the response of Muslim faith leaders in the UK to extremism and will be reflected upon within fieldwork Chapters Six to Eight of this thesis.

The genocidal events that killed Muslim populations in Bosnia, Kashmir, and Chechnya in the late 1990s and early 2000s and beyond and the perceived disenfranchisement and denouncement of Muslims during the Gulf War and subsequent destruction and division of the state of Iraq, were, and continue to be, significant rallying points for Muslims across the world. Recorded opposition and activism against Western governments' invasions of Muslim lands and support for Israel over Palestine have been catalysts not only for violent terrorism but also for democratic political activism and protest in the UK.<sup>319</sup> Michael Kenney writing about Al-Muhajiroun in a white paper for the UK Government reflects on geo-political events and invasions of Muslim lands as a contributing factor to radicalisation of those who joined Al-Muhajiroun.<sup>320</sup> The resurgence of the desire to create an Islamic State that opposed Western political and cultural domination also remains strong and is shaped by current global socio-political realities. Revivalist and militant Islamic movements such as Daesh and Al-Qaeda have placed themselves in opposition to

---

<sup>318</sup>Kenney, Michael, 'What is to be done about Al-Muhajiroun? Containing the emigrants in a democratic society.' Paper published by the *Commission for Countering Extremism*, 7th October 2019. London: UK, p9.

<sup>319</sup> Toguşlu, Erkan and Johan Leman (2014) *Modern Islamic Thinking and Activism Dynamics in the West and in the Middle East* Louvain, Belgium: Leuven University Press.

<sup>320</sup>During the first Gulf War Muslims throughout the world were faced with a difficult dilemma with regard to the NATO and UN alliance with Saudi Arabia, and many organisations, including Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), sided with Saddam Hussein's idea of striking West towards the State of Israel. At the height of the Gulf War the then UK spokesperson of HT, Omar Bakri Mohammed, called for the murder of John Major, and was subsequently taken into police custody for questioning after releasing this statement.

perceived liberal Western society and offer the idea of religion as a complete and absolute identity. There has been an inevitable backlash against the Western relativist postmodern idea that religion is one particular discourse in a world of many alternative views and is symptomised by what Zygmunt Bauman calls the invention of 'neo-tribes.'<sup>321</sup> Neo-tribes dare to infer absolute identities, inspire atavistic allegiance from their followers and control the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion from their group. Groups such as Al-Muhajiroun gave credence to this same zeitgeist and were an earlier start up recruitment group for what was to come as we moved into the twenty first Century. Al-Muhajiroun's opposition to what they perceived as a war on Islam and Muslim nations by Western democracies was often driven by a strategic use of the media to provoke attention. It was common for the group's two main leaders at the time, Omar Bakri Mohammed and Anjem Choudary, to appear in national news, making sensationalised calls for an Islamic state or opposing the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>322</sup> This approach of leveraging media attention has been maximised to a greater degree by Daesh operatives, who systematically staged highly choreographed murders of Westerners and planned violent campaigns against groups within Iraq and Syria to provoke maximum fear of their brand of war.<sup>323</sup> Daesh leadership also utilised social media channels to attract individuals from around the world to travel to the Levant region. This was built around promoting the idea of Jihad as a holy and just war against Western military oppression and offered the notion of abandoning corrupt Western countries to live in an Islamic state that valued and protected Muslim life.<sup>324</sup> This propaganda, often online, would go on to act as powerful lure for some individuals.

---

<sup>321</sup> Bauman, Zygmunt [1991] *Intimations of Postmodernity*. London: Routledge, p136. Bauman takes the idea of neo-tribes from Michel Maffesoli's work, 'Jeux de Masques.' In *Design Issues* IV [1988] Num. 1 & 2.

<sup>322</sup> Casciani, Dominic, 'How Anjem Choudary's mouth was finally shut.' *BBC online* on the 16th of August 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-36979892>. Anjem Choudary would regularly appear outside Downing Street and is quoted by before being prosecuted as saying, 'The flag of Islam will fly over Downing Street', was his favourite prediction, followed by a follow up rhetorical flourish. 'The Muslims are rising to establish the Sharia... Pakistan, Afghanistan and perhaps, my dear Muslims, Londonistan.'

<sup>323</sup> People like David Haines (an aid worker) killed by Daesh on camera in 2014 were posted online. Groups such as the Yazidis experienced genocide from 2013 to 2016 and had to flee Iraq. Yazidis men were killed on sight in public beheadings and women taken into slavery to be systematically raped and used for domestic purposes.

<sup>324</sup> Ostránský, Bronislav (2020) *The Jihadist preachers of the end times: ISIS apocalyptic propaganda*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

By the time of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack on the New York World Trade Towers in 2001 Al-Muhajiroun leadership were no longer continuing to espouse the commitment to non-violent activism or the covenant of security. Open support for groups such as Al-Qaeda was given in many statements to the media by Anjem Choudary and Omar Bakri Mohammed. Al-Muhajiroun metamorphosed for a period under different names, such as Al-Ghurabaa, Islam4UK, Sharuah4Uk and Muslims Against Crusades and was banned after an amendment to the Terrorism Act in 2010.<sup>325</sup> By 2014 former members had been implicated in supporting and promoting acts of terrorism and openly supporting the validity of the Daesh Caliphate and by ideologically training many individuals before they travelled to Syria and Iraq via Turkey.<sup>326</sup> The British Government imprisoned Abu Hamza, a prominent leader of Al-Muhajiroun, in 2004 for inciting acts of terrorist violence.<sup>327</sup> Omar Bakri Mohammed left the UK for Lebanon in 2005 shortly after the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 2005 bombing was planned and executed by individuals who had close links to an Al-Muhajiroun cell whose members came from around London and Luton.<sup>328</sup> The British government banned Al-Muhajiroun, and its alias group names that replaced it, as a proscribed groups officially in January 2010 and since this time it has been illegal for anyone to belong to or to organise activism in its name. In the case of Abu Hamza evidence was provided under the Terrorist Act with regards to directly planning and inciting individuals to kill non-Muslims in Yemen and direct links have been made to Michael Olumide Adebolajo who had been an active Al-Muhajiroun member who killed the soldier, Lee Rigby, in Woolwich in 2013.<sup>329</sup> Custodial sentences and laws passed under the Counter Terrorism and Border Security Act (2019) have not totally silenced terrorist violence or replaced the need for faith leaders to offer counternarratives to extremist acts of

---

<sup>325</sup> Raymond, Catherine Zara. 'Al-Muhajiroun and Islam4UK: The group behind the ban, Developments.' In *Radicalisation and Political Violence*, (May 2010), Prof. Harvey Rubin, Dr John Bew (Editors). Paper published by The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, p6.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid, pp5-6.

<sup>327</sup> On 5 October 2012, the British High Court granted the UK's government's request to extradite Hamza to the US. The removal process took place that same evening, when Hamza was taken from Long Lartin jail to RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk, where he was placed into the hands of the US Marshals. In 2015 he received a life sentence in the US without the option of parole and remains in prison in Colorado.

<sup>328</sup> Gillan, Audrey, Ian Cobain and Hugh Muir, 'Jamaican born convert to Islam coordinated fellow bombers.' *The Guardian newspaper*, 16 July 2005. Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> December 2022. Jermaine Lynsey was a convert who had attended Al-Muhajiroun circles.

<sup>329</sup> Al-Istrabadi, Feisal and Sumit Ganguly (2018) *The Future of ISIS Regional and International Implications*. Washington DC Brookings Institution Press.

violence from within their respective Muslim communities. This is an area this thesis will now seek to examine in the context of the comparative findings of the Manchester Arena Bombing Inquiry and via other examples of Muslim faith leaders in the UK who have opposed extremist Islamic ideologies and violence.

#### **4.3 Case study of the Manchester Arena bombing**

Twenty-four years after my research ceased at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University in 2001 the desire to create an Islamic state remains a potent global phenomenon and supporters of this idea remain in existence in Syria, North, East and West Africa regions, Gulf region, Europe and across the world in different guises. In recent years this has included Daesh and Al-Qaeda affiliated groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, fighting wars against democratic governments and French military in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.<sup>330</sup> The supporters of violent terrorism, such as former members of Al-Muhajiroun who went on to support group like Al-Qaeda, Daesh and the Taliban, have been in abeyance or driven underground or changed their operational practice by the prospect or the application of criminal justice interventions in the UK and rejection from within the mainstream UK Muslim community.<sup>331</sup> At the same time non-violent support<sup>332</sup> for the concept of an Islamic state has also continued alongside violent forms of Islamic expression.<sup>332</sup> An immediate counter to the pursuit of Islamic state ideology is evident in the majority of UK Muslims who actively participate in local politics and elect Members of Parliament (MP).<sup>333</sup> Since the demise of Al-Muhajiroun, there have been numerous violent incidents over the last two decades, coinciding with the rise of a global movements that have groomed individuals into supporting violence. This grooming has occurred

---

<sup>330</sup> Afriyie, F. A., 'A tale of two Jihads: Unravelling the Atrocities of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nasr al-Islam Wal Muslimin.' In the *Sahel Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, 12(23) (2023), pp p.244-271. DOI: 10.22456/2238-6912.122348.

<sup>331</sup> Kenney, Michael, John Horgan; Horne, Cale Horne, Peter Vining, Kathleen Carley, Michael Bigrigg, Mia Bloom and Kurt Braddock, 'Organisational adaptation in an activist network: Social networks, leadership, and change in al-Muhajiroun.' In *Applied Ergonomics Journal*, 2013-09, Vol.44 (5), pp.739-747.

<sup>332</sup> Lambert, R. 'Salafi and Islamist Londoners: Stigmatised minority faith communities countering Al-Qaeda.' In *Crime Law Society Change*, 2008 Volume 50, p80.

<sup>333</sup> Gencturk, Ahmet, 'Record number of Muslims elected to UK parliament despite rising Islamophobia.' In AA Europe. 10<sup>th</sup> July 2024. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/record-number-of-muslims-elected-to-uk-parliament-despite-rising-islamophobia/3270749>. Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

both online via social media platforms and in person within conflict zones.<sup>334</sup> One example of this type of phenomenon was seen in the Manchester Bombing incident that took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017, which involved a number of individuals of Libyan descent.

The Manchester Arena Inquiry , started in 2021, provides an example of a faith leader countering extremist forms of violence and is the type of community-based faith opposition illustrated in Robert Lambert’s work, *Countering Al-Qaeda in London* (2011) mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis. Lambert’s case scenarios similarly showed how Salafi influenced faith leaders at Finsbury Park Mosque removed Abu Hamza and his followers and how Brixton Mosque leadership reduced the influence of Al-Qaeda inspired violent extremists, including Abu Qatada and Abdullah el-Faisal by banning access to their mosque. In both cases the changes were inspired by voluntary civic duty without the assistance of government funded Prevent initiatives.<sup>335</sup> In another earlier study, *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: A London Study* (2010), Robert Lambert and Jonathan Githens-Meyer found that Muslim community organisations and mosque leadership teams were offering a strong counternarrative to violence that was not recognised within the mainstream narrative concerning UK Muslims.<sup>336</sup> Lambert and Meyer argue that negative perceptions of Muslim communities had arisen due to excessive media focussed singularly on extremist Muslims by leaders, such as Anjem Choudary.<sup>337</sup>

The Manchester Arena Inquiry sought to analyse the motivations for the attack and connections with the ‘Islamic State’ group in Libya of the offenders who undertook this terrorist act.<sup>338</sup> The actual attack was undertaken by Salman Abedi and supported by his brother, Heshem Abedi, who was imprisoned in August 2020. Salman Abedi killed twenty-two people, plus himself. Heshem Abedi is quoted as supporting the ‘Islamic State’ and ‘Jihad’ and framing the Manchester attack

---

<sup>334</sup> Ostránský, Bronislav (2020) *The Jihadist preachers of the end times: ISIS apocalyptic propaganda*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>335</sup> Lambert, R. *Countering Al-Qaeda in London* (2011) London, Hurst.

<sup>336</sup> Githens-Meyer, Jonathan and Robert Lambert (2010). ‘Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: A London Study.’ University of Exeter: European Muslim Research Centre, p21.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, p35.

<sup>338</sup> The Manchester Arena Inquiry was a statutory public inquiry. It was established by the then Home Secretary in 2019 to investigate the deaths of the victims of the attack on the Arena on 22 May 2017. It was chaired by the Hon Sir John Saunders.

as an attack against the 'West.'<sup>339</sup> As this statement was interpreted by Crown prosecutors to be Daesh propaganda it has not been made available to the public in its full form. However, what the inquiry did look at was the path to radicalisation of Salam Abedi in relation to Libya and his attendance and participation in the Manchester Islamic Centre Mosque, also known as the Didsbury Park Mosque. The inquiry also took a broader look at the role of the police, the venue organisers and the response of emergency services led by NHS staff during the incident that led up to the death of twenty-two individuals. During the inquiry, the families of the deceased issued statements in the UK media, accusing the mosque of 'not doing enough to stop extremism.'<sup>340</sup> However, they also commended Imam Mohammed El-Saeiti, stating that he had 'tried to confront extremism,' but his efforts were 'rubbished by the leadership of the mosque both at the time and this week.'<sup>341</sup>

The primary aim of the inquiry by the Crown's legal representatives, who interviewed several key members of the Manchester Islamic Centre, was to investigate whether the mosque had contributed to the radicalisation of Salman and Heshem Abedi. The inquiry also attempted to define whether there was support from Islamic State and the mosque members or support from Daesh affiliated bodies in places such as Libya. What was revealed in the inquiry was an insight into the running of a UK mosque. Although no conclusive evidence was provided, the inquiry showed the conflicting theological views of the Imams of the mosque and how this mosque was run by the Chairman leading up to the bombing. The Didsbury mosque not only functions as place of prayer but also as a place of religious instruction for the whole Muslim community in this area of Manchester. This is especially defined in the contribution and assessment of the state of the mosque by two opposing Imams of Libyan decent, Mustafa Graf and Mohammed Saeed El-Saeiti. The focus of this discussion will be on the leadership dynamics of the two Imams and the insights provided by their interaction with the Chairman of the mosque.

The Crown representatives questioned whether Didsbury Mosque was a place where a

---

<sup>339</sup> BBC Northwest. 'Manchester Arena Inquiry: Mosque failed to act on extremism, families say.' *BBC Northwest News Online*, 4 November 2021. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-59404102>.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid, BBC Northwest News Online.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid, BBC Northwest News Online.

worshipper was at ‘risk of radicalisation,’ and if so, whether ‘that was caused or permitted by those responsible for the mosque.’<sup>342</sup> On day one hundred and seventy-one of the inquiry Fawzi Haffar, a trustee and Chairman of Didsbury mosque was questioned. He made it clear he supported Imam Mustafa Graf, who had been asked to leave the mosque on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2017 days after the Manchester attack. Mr. Fawzi Haffar revealed that the reason for ‘radicalisation’ of the Abedi brothers was not the mosque but the influence of their father and Mohammed Abdallah, a convicted terrorist and the brother of Abdalraouf Abdallah and Raphael Hostey. Mohammed Abdallah was known by UK Government services as an ‘ISIS’ recruiter who came from Manchester.<sup>343</sup> Evidence during questioning of Fawzi Haffar showed that Heshem, Ismail and Salman Abedi were found to have downloaded considerable amounts of Daesh material and supported this through social media posts on Facebook. They idolised images of death, such as the burning of a Jordanian pilot, and were groomed online directly by individuals who were actively taking part on the battlefields in Libya, Iraq, and Syria. What we see in the example of the Abedi brothers is that the online world and family influence acted as a facilitator of radicalisation and is thus outside the sphere of the mosque or any counternarrative that can be made through religious literacy alone. The story of Salman and Heshem Abedi also mirrors and reflects the same radicalisation discourse and stories of numerous other adolescent men and women who were groomed online before going on to take an active part in violent acts of terrorism.<sup>344</sup>

In contrast to Imam Graf's support, Mr. Fawzi Haffar argued that Didsbury Mosque is a ‘moderate, middle-of-the-road’ Sunni institution, not Salafist’—which he defines as adhering

---

<sup>342</sup> Manchester Arena Inquiry, ‘Opus 2 Court papers, Day 173, Volume 2, Section 33. 2022.’ In *Home Office Gov.Uk Publishing* <https://www.gmp.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/images/greater-manchester/news/2022/november/mai-volume-2-large-format-ia-ib-ic-ii.pdf>.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid, Section 33.

<sup>344</sup> Conway, Maura, ‘Determining the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Six Suggestions for Progressing Research.’ In *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 40 (1), 2017, pp: 77–98. The role and use of the internet and online grooming has been well researched and is the topic of numerous government and policy papers. An example is *Exploring the role of the Internet in radicalisation and offending of convicted extremists* (2021) Jonathan Kenyan, Jens Binder, Christopher Baker-Beall, Ministry of Justice Analytical Series Publication. Whilst there is no direct correlation between online attraction to violence and offending the relationship individuals have with online sites can be seen to have influence.

strictly to the early form of Islam and the teachings of the Prophet.<sup>345</sup> Haffar emphasises that the mosque was open to all Muslims and that it did not have a formal policy to ban gatherings or sermons that might support extremist viewpoints. He was also clear that ‘extremism’ was opposed and consistently countered, and that the mosque sought to accommodate all types of mainstream Sunni based schools of thought:

Didsbury Mosque is diverse, pluralistic representative of Muslims in the UK. Our congregation is made up of various ethnicities and different schools of thought. It has been our long-established policy to accommodate all these schools of thoughts without differentiating between them, nor preferring one over another. We follow the basic Islamic teachings which are common to all Sunni schools of thought.<sup>346</sup>

One of the main points of the inquiry was the Friday sermon delivered by El-Saeiti in 2014 in which he denounced ‘Islamic State’ and discouraged acts of violence. El-Saeiti opposed any form of extremism ‘in a sacred religious place to be not only wrong but serve to encourage a breeding ground for radicalisation.’<sup>347</sup> He also stated he was unable to persuade the mosque committee, led by Mr. Fawzi Haffar, to prevent Libyan community members—including Salman Abedi and his family—from hosting groups on the premises. He said that his fellow Imam, Mustafa Graf supported the work of ‘Islamic State’ funded activity from his position of authority in the mosque. Furthermore, he was actively ‘praying for the groups, for the terrorist groups in Benghazi,’ and for their victory, while they were beheading civilians and killing innocent people.<sup>348</sup> El-Saeiti gave evidence that Imam Graf had openly raised funds for Syria unopposed by the mosque committee.<sup>349</sup> The inquiry also revealed how Imam El-Saeiti used his work at Friday sermon to

---

<sup>345</sup> Manchester Arena Inquiry. ‘Opus 2 Court papers, Day 173, Volume 2, Section 33, 2022.’ In Home Office Gov.UK Publishing, <https://www.gmp.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/images/greater-manchester/news/2022/november/mai-volume-2-large-format-ia-ib-ic-ii.pdf>.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Manchester Arena Inquiry, ‘Opus 2 Court papers, Day 171, Volume 2, section 1 to 13, 2022.’ In Home Office Gov.UK Publishing. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part\\_i\\_Accessible\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part_i_Accessible_.pdf) Manchester Arena Inquiry Opus 2 Court papers, Day 171, section 1 to 13.

<sup>348</sup> Manchester Arena Inquiry, ‘Opus 2 Court papers, Day 171, Volume 2, Section 26, 2022.’ In Home Office Gov.UK Publishing. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part\\_i\\_Accessible\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part_i_Accessible_.pdf) Manchester Arena Inquiry Opus 2 Court papers, Day 171, section 26.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid, Section 26.

convey a counternarrative message against violence and any terrorist acts to attendees to the mosque worshippers in 2014 and up until August 2020. He summed up his key message with the following statement:

This is the first and most important warning given to us by our Prophet ... before he passed away. That is because transgression against the sanctities of the people are one of the most grievous of sins that threaten Muslim society and engenders Allah's wrath. To violate the sanctity of any Muslim in any situation or place equals violating the sanctity of the Sacred Precinct of Mecca and the Sacred Months – and what an enormity that is . . . And whoever aids and abets the killing of someone is a partner in the crime, as it has been reported that the Prophet ... said, 'Whosoever helps in the killing of a Muslim, even if by a segment of a word, then he will meet Allah and it will be written between his eyes: Despaired of Allah's mercy.' Let us be frank with each other, dear brothers, and sisters. What we see today is of takfir, where people declare Muslims disbelievers, and religious extremism and ghastly crimes done by fanatics – whatever they call themselves.<sup>350</sup>

This exchange of views between Didsbury Mosque and Imam El-Saeiti highlights a powerful example of a counternarrative to violence and some of the spaces of contention and challenges when combatting extremist and violent ideologies at grassroots level in a UK mosque. It underscores how a faith leader used religious literacy to educate and inform worshipers about the correct teachings that oppose violent extremism and is relevant to the context and subject of this thesis. It directly countered the culture of violence espoused by Daesh and similar groups and articulated an effective example of faith leaders at the front-line of everyday engagements to counter violence at grassroots level.

In the case of El-Saeiti his Friday sermon was challenged by Fawzi Haffar and Libyan contingents in the mosque who were unhappy with the fact he had preached a political sermon on Friday rather than the fact he had condemned the 'Islamic State' group. This counternarrative to the

---

<sup>350</sup> Manchester Arena Inquiry, 'Opus 2 Court papers, Day 171, Volume 2. section 45. 2022.' In Home Office Gov.UK Publishing. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part\\_i\\_Accessible\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part_i_Accessible_.pdf) Manchester Arena Inquiry Opus 2 Court papers, Day 171, section 45. This Quranic text from Imam El-Saeiti is taken from Surah 32 of the Quran.

violent extremism spoken by El-Saeiti in his sermon was in effect rejected by lead members of his mosque committee and eventually led to his deselection as an Imam in the mosque after the bombing had taken place. Whilst El-Saeiti's experience is reflective of the wider opposition within the UK Muslim community to challenge expressions of violence, it is also symptomatic of the clash of cultures that take place in mosques. El-Saeiti is quoted in the inquiry from his Friday homily stating:

A (Answer): Let us be frank with each other, dear brothers and sisters what we see today of takfir, where people declare Muslims disbelievers, and religious extremism and ghastly crimes done by fanatics – whatever they call themselves... and terrorism – which is one of these grievances – has never been a solution to any problem and has never fixed anything, so it is absolutely incumbent upon us to stand united against the scourge of takfir and extremism.

Q(question): When you refer to 'ghastly crimes done by fanatics,' to what were you referring?

A(answer): I refer to ISIS, Al-Qaeda, suicide bombings, beheadings of innocent people. All their crimes.<sup>351</sup>

El-Saeiti opposed any form of extremism in a sacred religious place and spoke out about the mosque being used as a breeding ground for radicalisation but was unable to convince the mosque committee to prevent Salman Abedi and his family from hosting 'pro-ISIS' groups in the premises of his mosque as he held no power to prevent this.<sup>352</sup> El-Saeiti went on to counter that 'Islamic State and Al-Qaeda' affiliated supporters were allowed to host meetings in mosque rooms without intervention by the mosque committee and that this was recorded in a film to be

---

<sup>351</sup>Manchester Arena Inquiry, 'Opus 2 Court papers, Day 172, Volume 2. Section 45-50. 2022.' In Home Office Gov.Uk Publishing. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part\\_i\\_Accessible\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part_i_Accessible_.pdf) Manchester Arena Inquiry Opus 2 Court papers, Day 172, section 45-50.

<sup>352</sup> Manchester Arena Inquiry, 'Opus 2 Court papers, Day 172, Volume 2. Section 173-199. 2022.' In Home Office Gov.Uk Publishing. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part\\_i\\_Accessible\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part_i_Accessible_.pdf) Manchester Arena Inquiry Opus 2 Court papers, Day 172, section 173-199

supervised by Imam Graf.<sup>353</sup> El-Saeiti's story presents a divided mosque and differentiates from the Didsbury Mosque committee by acknowledging that small extremist elements at the mosque with direct links to Libya had gone on to make death threats towards him in person and by phone and contributed to him being asked to move on from the mosque in a job restructure.<sup>354</sup>

The division in the mosque prior and post the bombing between Imam El-Saeiti, Mr. Fawzi Haffar (mosque Chairman) and Imam Graf is a narrative that is not explored in-depth in the inquiry. However, the inquiry went on to interview other witnesses who indicated that the mosque committee remained neutral and did not intervene or express concerns regarding Imam Graf. Graf, who had fought in the Libyan civil war, delivered a sermon about Jihad in response to the events in Syria, particularly the Russian and Iranian-backed bombings. This sermon, some suggested, could have been open to misinterpretation. It also shows that Imam Graf did not oppose those who fought in Libya and that he was trusted by the Mosque Committee. Imam El-Saeiti, who had openly condemned 'ISIS' had also been condemned by the mosque committee for undermining their authority by talking directly to the media after the Manchester Bombing, that led to families of the victims accusing the mosque of doing nothing to challenge radicalisation.<sup>355</sup> By 2019 the mosque chairman, Fawzi Haffar, had imposed a 'restructure' of religious leadership at the mosque and both named Imams were asked to 'stand down' after feeling his mosque had been 'scapegoated' for the Manchester bombing.<sup>356</sup>

The scrutiny by legal teams during the inquiry not only revealed the opposing views that can emerge within mosques but also the lack of formal structure or safeguarding measures to provide

---

<sup>353</sup> Manchester Arena Inquiry, 'Opus 2 Court papers, Day 172, Volume 2. Section 16-19. 2022.' In Home Office Gov.Uk Publishing. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part\\_i\\_Accessible\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part_i_Accessible_.pdf) Manchester Arena Inquiry Opus 2 Court papers, Day 172, section 16 16-19.

<sup>354</sup> Warren, Jessica, 'Muslim cleric who condemned Islamic extremism at the Manchester Arena bombing inquiry is forced to flee the city after receiving death threats.' *Daily Mail newspaper*, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2022. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10774427/Muslim-cleric-forced-flee-Manchester-condemned-Islamic-extremism-bombing-inquiry.html>. Accessed 4 July 2023.

<sup>355</sup> BBC Northwest. 'Manchester Arena Inquiry: Mosque failed to act on extremism, families say.' BBC Northwest News Online, 4 November 2021. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-59404102>. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

<sup>356</sup> Jones, Abbie and Lauren Hirst, 'Mosque would have done anything to prevent Manchester Arena attack.' *BBC News Online*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-64801301>. Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023.

clear role guidelines for this mosque's faith leaders. Reporting to the inquiry as a 'specialist in Islamic extremism' for the UK Government, Dr Matthew Wilkinson agreed with Fawzi Haffar that Didsbury was a 'middle of the road moderate mosque' and that the concept of Jihad spoken about in the homily of Imam Graff could be broadly interpreted within Islamic theological terms and could not be directly blamed as 'inciting the violence that led to the Arena bombing.'<sup>357</sup> Dr Wilkinson outlined that the general Muslim community alienation from Prevent strategy emanated from a sense of being persecuted and discriminated against as Prevent does i) not define what an extremist is and differentiate from what is not extremist ii) and Prevent is perceived to overtly target the Muslim community. Dr Wilkinson also responded in the inquiry by referencing the *Rowley Report* that recommended a 'whole societal approach' that includes an emphasis on long-term education and religious literacy counternarratives that oppose violent extremism rather than solely state-based solutions.<sup>358</sup> It should be noted that the *Rowley Report* was sponsored by the government Commission for Countering Extremism and based on the state responses that focused on changes to legislation to securitise Muslim communities and did not include faith community interventions as recommended in the Manchester Arena inquiry view of Dr Williamson.

Sir Mark Rowley and Sara Khan of the Commission for Countering Extremism set out to demonstrate how 'hateful' extremists can operate lawfully due to a lack of legislation designed to capture the specific activity of 'hateful extremism.' As the report evidences, 'hateful extremists' are creating a climate conducive to hate crime, terrorism, or other violence; or are attempting to erode and even destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of democratic society as protected under Article 17 of Schedule 1 to the Human Rights Act 1998.<sup>359</sup> The Rowley report made three main recommendations i) to commission a legal and operational framework

---

<sup>357</sup> Manchester Arena Inquiry, 'Opus 2 Court papers, Day 163, Volume 2. Section 12-18. 2022.' In Home Office Gov.Uk Publishing. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part\\_i\\_Accessible\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-Part_i_Accessible_.pdf) Manchester Arena Inquiry Opus 2 Court papers, Day 163, section 12-18. Dr Matthew Wilkinson is an academic who has provided specialist advice to thirty-two courts cases involving a trial or inquiry of a Muslim individual being tried for acts or support for violent extremism.

<sup>358</sup> Khan, Sara and Mark Rowley, 'Operating with Impunity: Hateful extremism: The need for a legal framework.' Report by the *Commission for Countering Extremism*, 24 February 2021, p11.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid*, p10.

to robustly counter the hateful extremism threat ii) to expand current offences relating to stirring up of hatred and strengthen current resources and capability of law enforcement agencies iii) to elevate hateful extremism to be a priority threat alongside terrorism and online child sexual exploitation.<sup>360</sup> Dr. Williamson's interview highlights a lack of understanding of Islam among those leading the inquiry. This oversight, therefore, fails to fully acknowledge the significant contributions of faith leaders, such as Imam El-Saeiti, in countering extremism and could be argued to have not fully recognised his role in countering extremism in Didsbury.

This Manchester Arena inquiry interviews provide strong evidence of a need for faith voices and leadership of mosques to have an active part to play in the space between state-based legislation and Prevent sponsored programmes as a complementary factor in challenging extremism and disagreement within communities. It can be argued that although the inquiry placed much emphasis on the role of mosque leadership it did so without comparing to the wider context of challenges mosques face. The Abedi family met in small cells with people of Libyan origin who were inspired to fight in Libya and there was no internal surveillance system within the mosque that could have stopped this. The fault lines between what is conceived to be extremist and what was believed support for the people of Libya were also shown to be, at times, unclear. However, the overt political and violent ideology promoted at this mosque was also shown to have no place in this community.<sup>361</sup>

#### **4.4 Radicalisation of the nation: Abolish Prevent and bolster faith communities**

In 2017 a UK Home Office government white paper, entitled *Radicalisation: The counter-narrative and identifying the tipping point* set forth the argument that in the wider Muslim Community the Prevent agenda 'has appeared toxic' and therefore begun to call for the review of Prevent.<sup>362</sup> This paper also argued that to facilitate the Muslim communities' resilience to extremism the UK

---

<sup>360</sup> Ibid, p11.

<sup>361</sup> Michael Kenney, *The Islamic State in Britain* (2018) Cambridge University Press, p232.

<sup>362</sup> Home Office. 'Radicalisation: the counternarrative and identifying the tipping point: HM Government response to the eight reports from the Home Affairs Select Committee Session.' London: Home Office policy paper UK. Gov. December 2017-17 HC 135. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/radicalisation-the-counter-narrative-and-identifying-the-tipping-point-government-response>.

Government needed to set up regular meetings with leaders of the UK's Muslim community to build counternarratives that would enable 'better civil society and community cohesion.'<sup>363</sup> There has been a growing demand from grass roots mosques that Muslims attending places of worship and religious leaders are best placed to monitor and offer counternarratives to extremist ideologies and that having 'radical' views does not necessarily imply individuals will go on to commit violent terrorist acts. Imam Hasnain – who I will be introducing as an interviewee in Chapter Six – felt that the generalised distrust emanating from Prevent policy had been applied to all UK Muslims:

It was a few individuals that committed the acts like 7/7. But why generalise it to the whole of the Muslim community? Not every Muslim is a potential terrorist, and that is exactly what they are saying.<sup>364</sup>

John Horgan has argued that too many studies of radicalisation fail to acknowledge that the adoption of extremist ideology represents one of a wide number of factors which may encourage involvement in terrorism, and that 'not every terrorist necessarily holds radical views.'<sup>365</sup> Horgan and many others also argue that studies on radicalisation are disproportionately focused on 'jihadist terrorism' in relation to Islam.<sup>366</sup> According to Arun Kundnani, 'radicalisation' discourse emerged after 9/11' in order to 'target and demonise Muslims and Islamic belief and practice', and to take attention away from what he views as the true causes of radicalisation, namely government policy, both foreign and domestic.<sup>367</sup> Seen from this perspective radicalisation discourse has been circumscribed by the demands of counter-terrorist policymakers rather than an attempt to objectively study how terrorism comes into being.<sup>368</sup> I would argue counter to Kundnani that government policies cannot be apportioned with complete blame for the rise of radicalisation or attraction to forms of violent

---

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3rd, 2022.

<sup>365</sup> Horgan, John, 'Lessons learned since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001,' Paper delivered at START Symposium conference, 1 Sept. 2011. Washington DC.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Kundnani, Arun, 'Radicalisation: The Journey of a Concept.' In *Race and Class* Volume 54 (2), 2012 p.23.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid, p30.

extremism and that a place exists for faith counternarratives to extremism. Therefore, this research seeks to provide a more nuanced view of counternarratives from sections of British Muslim faith leaders with diverse stories working at grassroots level within communities.

Zin Derfoufi of St Mary's University argues that even if exposed to the 'root causes' and 'triggers' associated with radicalisation or having direct contact with violent extremists the majority of Muslims in the UK reject violent extremism and terrorism.<sup>369</sup> Derfoufi proposes that radicalisation studies have exhibited a bias towards a small minority of individuals perpetrating violent terrorist acts and that this has led to what he calls the invention of 'folklore radicalisation.'<sup>370</sup> In his unstructured interviews with thirty seven Muslim participants he collected data from within the UK Muslim community that supported rejection of 'state' (using examples such as the Iraq war) and 'Non-State' (associated with Daesh and Al-Qaeda) terrorism and violent extremism, as well as showing resilience to binary UK anti-terrorism policy that was perceived to target Muslim communities and discriminate against it with a securitisation approach. What is also revealed through Derfoufi's informative field study interviews is that radicalisation does not have to correspond to extremist violence and that there is space for a more nuanced view, that he champions. Derfoufi states that his faith participants are called to radical action as 'activists,' emphasising that this activism exists without recourse to violence.<sup>371</sup> In this study the majority of Derfoufi's faith interviewees consistently opposed extremist violence and presented a moral awareness and civic responsibility founded on faith opposition to rare incidents of violence. He found that all participants he interviewed disavowed and rejected terrorism, but a few talked about situations and contexts, such as wars in places such as Syria, where killing was a possible option due to the fight against the state sponsored acts of indiscriminate violence.<sup>372</sup> As explored in the previous chapter, the concept of Jihad can be interpreted in many ways and at times has been used to question and wrongly label British

---

<sup>369</sup> Derfoufi, Zin, 'Radicalisation's Core, Terrorism and Political Violence.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence*. ISSN 1556-1836, June 2020 Volume 34 (6), pp1-22.

<sup>370</sup> Dr Zin Derfoufi used the term 'folklore radicalisation' in a presentation I attended at the Toledo interfaith conference on 8th April 2023.

<sup>371</sup> Derfoufi, Zin, 'Radicalisation's Core, Terrorism and Political Violence.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence*. ISSN 1556-1836, June 2020, Volume 34 (6), p2.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid, p3.

Muslims supporting extreme violence with a misunderstood concept. In this paradigm Derfoufi argues one can be a radical activist sharing similar views of anti-Western political opposition to war with exponents of terrorism whilst being part of the mainstream and not being extremist or carrying out acts of violence. I would argue that Derfoufi's nuanced perspective on 'folklore radicalisation' highlights the need for a broader understanding of the contributions of the majority of UK Muslims who follow non-violent paths. It also underscores the importance of exploring faith-based counternarratives in the UK, which is the focus of this doctoral thesis. Derfoufi's research paper illustrates the multilayered complexity and distinctions between the use of the term absolutist 'jihadists,' who support terrorism, and 'Islamists,' who promote the concept of a Caliphate in the context of progressive religious-based awareness without recourse to violence. This broader view of the application of the term radicalisation, also shows the need to respect the ability of UK Muslims to protest peacefully without being labelled as potentially violent.

The link between religion and violence is challenged by Theologian William Cavanaugh. He argues it is not religion, exclusively, that makes extremist groups and the assumed link between religion and violence by examining how 'religion' has been constructed in the modern West and in colonial contexts according to specific configurations of political power.<sup>373</sup> Cavanaugh defines the myth of religious violence as 'the idea that religion is transhistorical and a transcultural feature of human life' that promotes violence is a mistaken conclusion.<sup>374</sup> He argues three main points: i) there is no transhistorical and transcultural essence of religion, and what counts as religious or secular in any given context is a function of political configurations of power; ii) such a transhistorical and transcultural concept of religion as non-rational and prone to violence is one of the foundational legitimating myths of Western society; iii) this myth can be and is used to legitimate neo-colonial violence against non-Western others, particularly the Muslim world.<sup>375</sup> With Cavanaugh's argument in mind I would also argue that the notion that Islam is inherently violent is equally nonsensical and dangerous when politicised or misunderstood. Therefore, while

---

<sup>373</sup> Cavanaugh, William (2009) *Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, p30.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid, p52.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, p53.

historical conflicts and wars cannot be denied, it is essential to recognise the complex nature of faith practice. In the contemporary context, faith-based counternarratives to violence within the UK's diverse Muslim community serve as powerful tools to dispel fears and suspicions that have fueled divisions in the battle against extremist ideologies.

This is also evidenced by other UK studies, such as that of Anisa Mustafa. In her 2015 ethnographic study of political movement amongst Muslim communities in the Midlands, Mustafa, found that the young Muslims she interviewed were resisting Islamophobic marginalisation and stigmatization of Muslim identities in the UK through civic activism and finding ways to protest politically about perceived injustices without recourse to violent extremism.<sup>376</sup> Another similar study of young British Muslims, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*, Sadek Hamid argues that the provision of compelling models of British Muslim identity is a contested space for Muslim faith leaders who face reductionist attacks from negative media narratives of Islamic activism.<sup>377</sup> Sadek Hamid's study examines the evolving nature of British Muslim identity, with particular attention to second-generation British Muslims. He explores how these groups have engaged with transnational Islamic ideologies as a means of articulating identity and attracting followers within a localised British context. Muslim faith leaders interviewed for this thesis reflect on how young Muslims can be prevented from joining extremist groups who compete for their attention and form their faith identity without recourse pan global extremist ideologies. I shall be coming back to this area once again in later finding chapters of thesis.

The narrative of alienation from UK Government counterterrorism policies, such as Prevent, by British Muslims and their subsequent disengagement has been challenged by other quantitative sociological studies. The sociologist, Sadi Shanaah, in three surveys of British Muslims between 2017 and 2018 found that the majority of her participants were satisfied with and trusted UK

---

<sup>376</sup> Mustafa, Anisa. 'Active citizenship, dissent and power: the cultural politics of young adult British Muslims.' PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham, 2015. <http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/30533/>.

<sup>377</sup> Hamid, Sadek (2016) *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: the contested ground of British Islamic activism*. London: I.B. Taurus, p5.

counter-terrorism policies as well as the government and the police.<sup>378</sup> A total of 44% approved. The level of willingness to take action against 'Islamist extremism' was also high at 91% in terms of reporting 'extremism' to authorities.<sup>379</sup> Shanaah goes as far as to propose that the vast majority of studies that point to the 'alienation thesis' (to Prevent and other anti-terrorist UK Government policy) rely on either purely theoretical accounts or empirical data from small quantities of qualitative research and are therefore questionable. Therefore, through Shanaah's research optics, one needs to question the representative validity of groups such as MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development) and the Muslim Council of Britain who consistently oppose Prevent interventions. This is problematic as engaging Muslim communities in counter terrorism has been one of the key aims of the UK Government and is part of the mantra of 'communities defeat terrorism' that has underpinned the UK Government counter-terrorism approach.<sup>380</sup> However, one can also see that this bold proposition does not negate the impact of post 9/11 circumstances in which Muslims have been subjected to i) increased profiling, surveillance, and security checks at points of entry to the UK; ii) stop-and-search policies; iii) highly publicised police house raids; iv) deportation and control orders v) financial scrutiny and other counter-terrorism measures.<sup>381</sup> It could be argued that some of these measures concern only a small group of individuals. Yet, due to the extensive social networks of those impacted, primarily from South Asian backgrounds who make up the largest portion of the UK's Muslim population, the effects can extend further. As a result, these measures can leave portions of the Muslim community feeling stigmatised, stereotyped and unfairly targeted.<sup>382</sup> Finally, it should be noted that Shannaah's quantitative analysis itself remains a snapshot in time and the response to questions set in this period, some of which have changed in light of further deterioration in positive support for Prevent since the period of her research. Thus, this study is not conclusive

---

<sup>378</sup> Shanaah, Sadi (2019), 'Alienation or Cooperation? British Muslims Attitude to and Engagement in Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Extremism.' *PhD Thesis* (2019) Warwick University Publications, p2.

<sup>379</sup>Ibid, p2.

<sup>380</sup> Home Office. CONTEST: The UK Government Strategy for Countering Terrorism. London Home Office. UK. Gov., 4 June 2018. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2018>.

<sup>381</sup> Mustafa, Anisa. 'Active citizenship, dissent and power: the cultural politics of young adult British Muslims.' PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham, 2015. <http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/30533/>.

<sup>382</sup> Kundnani, Arun, (2014) *The Muslims are Coming: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* London: Verso Books, p85.

but acts as a counterbalance to a large body of UK studies that offer criticism of UK Government policy and an 'alienation thesis' that dissuades Muslims from associating with Prevent initiatives.

A number of Muslim community groups have emerged to challenge Prevent, advocating for its abolition while also providing faith leaders with a platform to offer counternarratives to extremism. Cage has supported the abolishment of Prevent by launching its own project called 'Abolish Prevent' to empower Muslim communities affected by UK Government counter terrorist measures.<sup>383</sup> Cage has opposed and questioned Prevent's solutions to preventing terrorism with a wider view of UK Muslims, whom it believes also have a role to play in offering counternarratives to violence. A large body of Muslim faith leaders, academics and legal counsels – including non-Muslim members - in the UK have also supported Cage. Many of these acted as signatories when Cage published a social justice paper, entitled *Beyond Prevent* in January 2020.<sup>384</sup> This paper opens with the clear statement 'Prevent is a failed policy that must be abolished and firmly uprooted from society', and proposes a commitment to 'build a safe society free from violence' where all anti-terror legislation is repealed and 'discriminatory' frameworks ended.<sup>385</sup> Cage further argues that these measures disproportionately target and securitise the Muslim community rather than the 'far right.'<sup>386</sup> They explain that safeguarding the population has been conflated with the Prevent strategy, and this conflation must be addressed to ensure that public services, such as schools and social services, can operate independently without taking on the 'job of the police' to 'securitise' Muslim communities.<sup>387</sup> This counter to Prevent set out by Cage focuses on the civil rights of UK Muslims and the need for a whole society approach to beat violence rather than the imposition of criminalisation through Prevent agencies. Whilst the Cage paper offers no structured alternative to Prevent it does include Muslim faith leaders' voices and poses questions about re-addressing the way political structures within the UK address i) the root grievances from which violence draws strength ii) counters

---

<sup>383</sup> Cage was set up in 2003 principally to oppose the prison terms and conditions of those imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay and the War on Terror led by the US government.

<sup>384</sup> Cage. 'Beyond Prevent: A Real Alternative To Securitised Policies Report.' London: Cage Publications, 16th January 2020, pp7-10.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid, p4.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid, p11.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid, p33.

disenfranchisement and alienation that hinders communities from organising for their betterment iii) and dismantles the ‘repressive policy architecture established by Prevent and counter terrorism.’<sup>388</sup>

Cage has requested that UK Government move away from securitized approaches and policies that it argues encourages a culture of ‘spying on the Muslim community’ and inevitable distrust of Prevent.<sup>389</sup> It has also challenged yearly outcome data provided by Prevent and asks for a more transparent methodological explanation of its approach and an end to what it terms ‘rights abuses’ that occur when Prevent interventions have been applied by social workers and teachers in the context of children and adolescents. It is in this space that civil society movements such as Cage have been looking to build a dialogue with government to find areas that can be agreed to end violence and situations of conflict. It should be noted that since this period, Cage’s ability to negotiate on behalf of the Muslim community with government has been challenged. In 2024 Cage was named by the then Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, as an organisation which ‘gives rise to concern’ and which ‘would be assessed against a newly introduced government definition of extremism.’<sup>390</sup> By implying that Cage are complicit in extremism or passively tolerant of it, overlooks times when Cage has explicitly condemned terrorism and violent extremism and leaves it no recourse to respond or defend against this accusation.

Similarly, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) on behalf of over 500 UK mosques and led by faith leaders has openly criticised Prevent. The Muslim Council of Britain has both provided legal evidence to the UK Government and, as mentioned, rejected the William Shawcross review of Prevent, criticising it as ‘biased against Muslims’ and accusing it of creating ‘a McCarthyite blacklist of Muslim groups that are dangerous and counter-productive.’<sup>391</sup> Although MCB has

---

<sup>388</sup> Ibid, p33.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid, p37.

<sup>390</sup> Wallis, Holly and Jeremy Culley. ‘Gove names groups as he outlines new extremism definition in Commons.’ *BBC News Online*. 14th March 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/uk-politics-68560294>. Accessed 20 March 2024.

<sup>391</sup> Versi, Miqdaad, Assistant Secretary General MCB, ‘Concerns on Prevent Report,’ July 2015. London: *Muslim Council of Britain*. Also, the Muslim Council of Britain, ‘Briefing on Proposed Changes to Prevent following the

never officially supported an alternative to Prevent, it has continually engaged in grassroots conversations with faith communities and set up frequent listening exercises to assess how Muslims are affected by counter-terrorist legislation. MCB has previously issued a 'Safe and Secure 6-step guide' to keeping mosques safe and secure in 2021 after the murder of MP David Ames and the Manchester Arena bombing.<sup>392</sup> It gave dedicated guidance for mosques that details the steps mosque management should take to ensure their institutions and congregations are protected against the advent of potential hate crime offences. The title of the MCB Safe and Secure programme was derived from workshops delivered previously at mosques by Dal Babu, a senior retired Muslim police officer, and Mike Howes, who offered engagement with mosques around safeguarding and counternarratives to extremism as an alternative to Prevent.<sup>393</sup> Babu and Howes focused primarily on themes of vulnerability, and went beyond concepts of radicalisation to include supporting those with low self-esteem and lacking the sense of belonging that attract members to violent groups. The initiative, *Safe and Secure*, delivered workshops at major places of worship, such as the East London Mosque, Finsbury Park Mosque and the London Muslim Centre and claimed it had informally received the support of MCB.<sup>394</sup>

Whilst the MCB Safe and Secure guide was primarily in response to the Manchester Arena Inquiry and the killing of MP David Ames, it was also in response to an increase of hate crimes attacks against mosques and Muslims as a whole.<sup>395</sup> This guide gives support to Muslim communities against Islamophobic attacks and a simple way of reporting hate crime within community settings. What is significant about the MCB initiatives set out above is the need for credible faith

---

Shawcross Review,' February 2023. <https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MCB-Briefing-Proposed-Changes-to-Prevent-Following-Shawcross-Review-070223.pdf>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

<sup>392</sup> Muslim Council of Britain. 'Six Step Guide to Keeping Mosques Safe & Secure.' *Muslim Council of Britain* press release, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2021. <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-releases-6-step-guide-to-keeping-mosques-safe-secure/>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

<sup>393</sup> Siddique, Haroon. 'Mosques launch anti-radicalisation scheme as alternative to Prevent.' In *The Guardian newspaper*, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/22/mosques-launch-anti-radicalisation-scheme-as-alternative-to-prevent>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Tell MAMA. 'A Decade of Anti-Muslim Hate: Tell MAMA Report.' London: Tell MAMA Publication, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023. <https://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/A-Decade-of-Anti-Muslim-Hate-TellMAMAReport.pdf>. Accessed 25 November 2023. Tell MAMA offers a confidential way of reporting anti-Muslim hate crime. It reported a marked increase post October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021, when David Ames was killed. This included attacks against mosque buildings across the UK.

leadership inclusion as an effective counternarrative to extremism. This level of vigilance and call for faith communities to protect freedoms of practice is an important part of being more present and visible in UK society and one I will be addressing in qualitative field work data presented later in this thesis.

Over the years there have been numerous examples of individual UK based Imams who have made known their commitment to non-violence and communicated Islam as a religion of peace through inter-faith dialogue.<sup>396</sup> Counternarrative voices have particularly arisen when terrorist incidents have occurred. Joint public statements have been made under the banner of the Muslim Council of Britain by prominent UK Muslim faith leaders, including Imam Qari Asim of Makkah Mosque Leeds, Dr. Omer El-Hamdoon, President of the Muslim Association of Britain, Shaykh Salman Younas of the University of Oxford, Imam Timothy Winter of the University of Cambridge, and Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra of the Muslim Council of Britain. These are just a few of the over five hundred faith leaders who have participated, affirming the inviolability of all human life as a founding principle of Islam, condemning attacks as ‘un-Islamic’ and calling for peace and unity with all victims as fellow British citizens.<sup>397</sup>

I conclude this chapter with a quote from Imam Shakeel Begg of Lewisham Islamic Centre who brought a case against the BBC’s Andrew Neil Show in 2016 because it argued he supported Jihad and was an ‘extremist’, as well as an opponent of Prevent:

As a Muslim, I am committed to combatting extremism in all its forms because it is destroying our social harmony, creating suspicion, and poisoning the minds of our youth. The actions of groups such as the so called ‘Islamic State, ISIL or ISIS,’ are responsible for destroying the reputation of Islam, a religion that promotes peace, tolerance, justice, fairness, and equality. I am totally opposed to ISIS and have actively campaigned and

---

<sup>396</sup> The Toledo Interfaith Conference I attended in April 2023, is one example of how dialogue between different faiths - including Imams - supports more cohesive communities.

<sup>397</sup> Muslim Council of Britain. ‘Over 130 Imams & Religious Leaders from diverse backgrounds refuse to perform the funeral prayer for London attackers in an unprecedented move.’ *Muslim Council of Britain Press release*, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2017. <https://mcb.org.uk/over-130-imams-religious-leaders-from-diverse-backgrounds-refuse-to-perform-the-funeral-prayer-for-london-attackers-in-an-unprecedented-move/>. Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2023.

spoken out against the evils of ISIS. The teachings of Prophet Muhammad, Peace be upon him, (pbuh), have been misconstrued and I consider it my duty to deconstruct any warped interpretations of Islam that may encourage someone to commit unlawful violence against the teachings of Islam.<sup>398</sup>

Imam Begg goes on to state 'I believe that the government should not alienate Muslim leaders but rather, engage with credible Muslim Imams, scholars, academics and the wider Muslim community in tackling extremism.'<sup>399</sup> Although Begg lost his case against the BBC and was branded as a proven extremist in court, because he had been found to support anti-Semitism in previous online activity, this case shines a light on UK media coverage that feeds into a larger narrative of suspicion and Islamophobic narratives of Muslim communities. In this case the BBC's legal defence presented historical evidence of his speeches, which were highly political and controversial, addressing wars in 'Muslim Lands' such as Bosnia and Palestine. These speeches occasionally leaned towards anti-Semitism. However, it can be argued that they did not definitively prove his continued support for ideological acts of violence or terrorist groups. Rare incidents of violence keep the debate about how to best counter the terrorist threat to public safety as a topical issue. It also shows, once again, the challenges of being a faith leader and how extremism is broadly interpreted by different sections of UK society. In a court interview Chief Inspector, Graham Price, of Lewisham Police described Imam Beg's objection to the Prevent programme as 'principled' and identified him as a 'valuable contact' for Lewisham police as a well-known local figure within partnership circles and local community links.<sup>400</sup> This case manifests the fact that faith leadership within the UK Muslim community whilst playing a significant role in opposing terrorism and enhancing the partnership between civic society and the state, also faces challenges being heard. However, this also shows the ground on which

---

<sup>398</sup> High Court of Justice Bench Division. 'Between Shakeel Begg and British Broadcasting Corporation.' Case No: HQ14D04379, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2016. EWHC 2688 (QB) at the Royal Court of Justice, p65. <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/shakeel-begg-v-bbc-judgment-final-20161028.pdf>. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid, p44.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid, p8.

countering violence and terrorism sits is less clearly defined within British legal and political system.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Although the UK Prevent policy has worked diligently to counter extremism, it would appear it has struggled to consistently gain the backing of many sections of the UK Muslim community. Therefore, a gap exists where it is increasingly important to acknowledge the inclusion of faith leader's voices in future solutions. The Manchester Arena Inquiry case illustrates the complex nature and social context of being an Imam in a UK mosque, as well as the fact that not all individuals can be prevented from choosing paths of violence, as seen in the example of Salman Abedi. Additionally, it demonstrates how people of faith counter extremism in their daily lives, and there is a deeper need to build up understanding of the Islamic practices and theology of mosques, such as Didsbury. Imam Mohammed El-Saeiti confronted extremism in his homilies at the expense of losing his post and the support of the leadership of the mosque. A lead Imam of any mosque in the UK has ultimate responsibility for the content, vision and the tone of the religious practice and instruction based at the mosque. However, this also requires the support of other associate Imams and the mosque management committee and board of trustees who hold joint power.

Mosques in the UK present a diverse expression of faith, along different ethnic and sectarian lines, in which different groups compete for ascendancy for their voices to be heard. Many of the major religions in the UK have a chosen overall leader and structure that relates to political authority, but this is not the case for Islam in the British context. Islam is at times misinterpreted, as a univocal doctrine that political bodies within the UK can shape according to need, such as calling on leaders to combat terrorism. Yet the reality is different, as UK Islamic faith traditions are multi-vocal, and are characterised by a diversity of ethnic, sectarian and organisational structures that go beyond mosques. Therefore, it impossible to impose one uniform version of Islam or single path relationship with the state.

This thesis will go on to illustrate how faith practice and leadership within various Islamic traditions offer robust counternarratives both to violent extremism and to Islamophobic discourses that seek to portray religious teaching as an inherent driver of terrorism. It will argue that such portrayals are non-conclusive and fail to demonstrate a decisive causal link, overlooking the complex interplay of social, psychological, and political factors that underpin radicalisation. The next chapter outlines the methodology for conducting this research. This will include the approach used to conduct qualitative interviews that explore counternarratives to extremist and violent ideologies, along with a detailed explanation of how the interviews were structured, how participants were selected, how findings were collected and the ethical considerations involved in the research process. This will also address why qualitative interviews were chosen as the most suitable approach for capturing the complex perspectives and lived experiences of a selection of British Muslim faith leaders.

## Chapter Five:

### Methodological foundations and approach to undertaking research

---

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodological structure and theoretical framework used to undertake the research of this thesis. It will address questions related to the basis of this study, as well as detail the rationale and context for choosing qualitative approaches to gather data and an assessment of the expectations and limitations of using this approach. This will show how the research methods used have facilitated this thesis, which provides in-depth insights into counternarratives and amplifies the voices of a diverse group of UK Muslim faith leaders. Lastly, it outlines the ethical framework followed, detailing the processes implemented to ensure that interviews with participants were conducted with academic rigour, adhered to academic standards transparently and upheld the integrity necessary for this research project.

The prism through which this thesis finds its focus is counternarratives research. Social scientists, Solorzano and Yosso, define counternarratives ‘as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society).’<sup>401</sup> These narratives challenge the status quo by countering the dominant hegemonic discourse and exposing and challenging privilege over the way communities are portrayed within the mainstream. This thesis seeks to tell the stories that detail the experiences and perspectives of UK Muslim faith leaders who have historically felt excluded or silenced by the dominant UK Government Prevent strategy. It also strives to gain a deeper, immersive understanding of UK Muslim faith community counternarrative voices to Islamophobia and polemical views that create UK Muslims as ‘Other.’<sup>402</sup> The notion of Muslims in the UK being made ‘Other’ signifies them as an ‘out-group’,

---

<sup>401</sup> Solórzano, Daniel G. Yosso, Tara J. ‘Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research.’ In *Qualitative Inquiry* 2002-02, Vol.8 (1). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp23-44.

<sup>402</sup> Given, Lisa M. (2008). *Otherness. The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, p88–99. ‘Other’ in this context is a term used to define another person or people as separate from oneself.

whose identity is considered lacking, or non-Western, and who may be subject to discrimination.<sup>403</sup> I have therefore chosen to use qualitative field research methods as my main research tool because qualitative approaches enable research participants to articulate their own narratives, in their own words, thereby offering counternarratives to the dominant discourse. I will be outlining this method in later subsections of this chapter.

The violence of Islamic groups, such as Daesh, recorded online and through news broadcasts remains visceral, emotive and current. As outlined in Chapter Two the concept of fighting for an Islamic state and ending state corruption in the Levantine region between 2014-2019 was a potent force that attracted international membership from all over the world.<sup>404</sup> The discourse of an independent Islamic state is still reflected in the background discourse, and it is a common pedagogic instrument used by 'hate preachers' in the UK and globally to inspire individuals to commit violent terrorist acts.<sup>405</sup> This offer of absolute certainty of identity proposed online by groups such as Daesh and 'hate preachers' is a worldview that remains potent even with the end of Daesh as a force in the Levantine region. There is a strong discourse against radicalisation from within Muslim communities in the UK that counters the types of narratives promoted by groups such as Daesh. As I will show, this includes alternative discourses that challenge extremist ideologies and Islamophobic perceptions of Islam in the UK.

## **5.2 Methodology: Basis of research approach**

The foundation of the methodological research approach is informed principally by qualitative enquiry practice. Qualitative research covers a broad range of approaches which are linked to different beliefs about what there is to know about the lived world of participants and

---

<sup>403</sup> Said, Edward (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books (Random House), pXi.

<sup>404</sup>European Parliament, 'Foreign Fighters: Member States' responses and EU action in an international context.' *European Parliament Briefing paper*, February 2015, p1. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-548980-Foreign-fighters-FINAL.pdf>. Accessed 20th January 2024.

<sup>405</sup>Grierson, Jamie. 'Hate Preaching and Anjem Choudary.' In *The Guardian newspaper*, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/sep/11/hate-preacher-anjem-choudary-freed-weeks-threat-chaplain>. Accessed 12 February 2019. This can be seen in the prosecution for hate crimes of Anjem Choudary (formerly of Al-Muhajiroun), including inspiring Michael Adebolajo in 2013 to murder the soldier Lee Rigby in southeast London. In recent years all Muslim prison chaplains are required to attend courses on how to deal with prisoners with Islamist extremist ideologies, as directed by the UK Ministry of Justice.

approaches to conducting empirical research. Although definitions vary, the aims of qualitative research are generally directed at providing an in-depth and interpretive understanding of the social world by learning about people's social and material existence.<sup>406</sup> I seek to avoid homogenising or proving or disproving the stereotypes about perceived 'radical Islamists' in mainstream media and focus on the individual counternarratives of the people interviewed.<sup>407</sup> To explore the multiple meanings of each narrative, the primary tool used has been the interview method, employing semi-structured questions to illustrate how faith approaches within the Islamic tradition have developed counternarratives to oppose violent ideologies. Interviews were also accompanied by questions exploring the theological literacy required for countering attraction to ideological violence.

In her sociological study of religion Meredith McGuire proposes that the material collected during qualitative interviews and observations encourages insight into the lived experience and everyday life of people. She states:

Realising the complexities of individuals' religious practices, experiences, and expressions, however, has made me extremely doubtful that even mountains of quantitative sociological data (especially data from surveys and other relatively superficial modes of inquiring) can tell us much of any value about individuals' religions.<sup>408</sup>

In this context the attainment of objective facts can be seen to be more complex and nuanced than any limits or expectations set within the multitude of data collection approaches. Therefore,

---

<sup>406</sup> Partha Sarathi Basu (2021) *The Foundations of Research Methodology: A Guidebook of Research Techniques, Along with Measurement & Sampling*. London: Lambert Publishing Press.

<sup>407</sup> Osborne, P. and Jones, J., (July 2008) *Muslims Under Siege: Alienating Vulnerable Communities*. Democratic Audit, Human Rights Centre, University of Essex in association with Channel 4 Dispatches, pp11-12. There have been numerous occasions in which British media articles and news coverage have at times not represented Islamic belief in a balanced manner over the last 20 years since 9/11 and 7/7. Including using emotive headlines that can be seen to be potentially Islamophobic. Also see Miqdaad Versi, 'Islamophobia in the Press must be tackled head on, Silence is not an option.' *The Guardian newspaper*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/02/islamophobia-press-muslims-negative>. Accessed 23 December 2023.

<sup>408</sup> McGuire, M. B. (2008) *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Religion*. Oxford University Press, p5. Dr McGuire has taken a holistic approach to shining a light on the anomalies and diverse patterns of individual's lives in her work.

it is not the quantity of data collected but the depth of texture and insight gained that provides information over a particular period. It is also the texture and contradictions within lives that offer real insights through which we interpret different realities as we conduct qualitative interviews. The counternarratives examined in this research project, set within the theoretical framework of the sociology of religion, are informed by qualitative data research studies in combination with content analysis. In a similar vein *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* by the sociologist Robert Weiss poses that interview techniques not only allow for multiple perspectives from participants but also a 'holistic and detailed description' and 'bridging intersubjectivities' so that one can obtain an insider view directly from the voices of those who have had direct experience.<sup>409</sup> In the context of this thesis the intersubjectivities are the multiple subjects and approaches to countering violent terrorist narratives. Thus, influenced by the approach to qualitative studies set out by Robert Weiss, I seek to place the counternarrative voices of faith leader participants at the forefront and center of my research methodology. The lived experiences of my interviewees provide a rich source of local information from various Islamic communities in the UK.

The research approach of this thesis is multi-disciplinary and set within the broad framework of the sociology of religion. The interpretive perspective set out aspires to chime with the essence of what Bronislaw Malinowski spoke of when first pioneering ethnographic studies, with regard to 'understanding my participants relation to life and their visions of the world' and again stating that 'the science of man, must not shun him in his innermost self, in his instinctive and emotional life.'<sup>410</sup> What Malinowski is observing here in his seminal work, *Argonauts of the West Pacific* (1921) is that the person and the experience are paramount beyond quantitative scientific research alone. Malinowski was also a key pioneer of firsthand interviews rather than simply inferring meaning from observation or relying on the accounts of intermediaries through content analysis. Malinowski is perceived, by writers such as Edward Said, in the contemporary period to

---

<sup>409</sup> Weiss, Robert S. 'Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies.' In *Harvard Educational Review*, 1996, Vol.66 (1), Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, p162.

<sup>410</sup>Malinowski, B. (1921), *Argonauts of the West Pacific*. Waveland Press, p35. The Chicago School played a formidable part in the 1920s and 1930s in identifying qualitative research as key to the human enquiry.

be part of the ‘colonial exotification’ of peoples from non-European cultures.<sup>411</sup> However, in many ways, he pioneered research methods of early ethnographic studies which remain relevant today when interviewing people. What I am seeking is the narrative of individuals of faith who are able to tell their stories directly but also shed light on faith-based approaches to deradicalisation, as well as indirect comparative reflections on contemporary programmes, such as Prevent. In this sense the qualitative interviews I have completed seek to engender a conversation that produces an authentic enquiry that includes the voices of the faith leaders about which I have written.<sup>412</sup>

Another key contributor to the development of qualitative studies within this research tradition is Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). His writing emphasised the importance of ‘understanding’ (*verstehen* in his native German) and of studying people’s ‘lived experiences,’ which occur within a particular historical and social context.<sup>413</sup> Dilthey argued that self-determination and human creativity play important roles in guiding our actions. He therefore proposed that social research should explore the ‘lived experiences’ in order to reveal the connections between the social, cultural and historical aspects of people’s lives and to see the context in which particular actions take place. Max Weber (1864–1920), one of the founding fathers of sociology and the sociology of religion, was influenced by Dilthey’s ideas and particularly his views on the importance of ‘understanding.’<sup>414</sup> However, rather than taking a strictly interpretivist stance, Weber tried to build a bridge between interpretivist and positivist approaches. He believed that analysing material conditions, as done by those using a positivist approach—such as observing or recording evidence of deprivation or affluence—was important but not sufficient for a ‘full understanding of people’s lives.’<sup>415</sup> He emphasised that the researcher must understand the meaning of social

---

<sup>411</sup> Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism*, (1993) New York: Knopf. Said argues that early anthropologists contributed to the exotification of the other of peoples from non-European cultures. It should be noted one of the early pioneers, Bronislaw Malinowski, was in fact a vocal critic of British colonial policy and Said does not acknowledge this history.

<sup>412</sup> May, Tim (editor) (2002) *Qualitative Interviewing: Asking, Listening, and Interpreting*, Sage: London.

<sup>413</sup> Dilthey, W (2002) *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. Princeton University Press, p16–17 and p38–39.

<sup>414</sup> Gerth, H.H., & Mills, C.W. (Eds. & Trans.) (1946). *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Oxford University Press, p13.

<sup>415</sup> Adair-Toteff, Christopher (2016), *Max Weber's Sociology of Religion*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, p25.

actions within the context of the material conditions in which people live. Weber stated that ‘a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its cause and effects’ is of the key *modus operandi* of sociological research and an essential part of representing the essence of lived experience in the world.<sup>416</sup>

Weber went on to propose two types of understanding i) direct observational understanding and ii) explanatory or motivational understanding. He argued that there is a key difference in the purpose of understanding between the natural and social sciences. In the natural sciences, the purpose is to produce law-like propositions whereas in the social sciences, the aim is to understand subjectively meaningful experiences.<sup>417</sup> The school of thought that stresses the importance of interpretation as well as observation in understanding the social world is known as ‘interpretivism.’ This has been seen as integral to the qualitative research tradition. The related movement of ‘constructionism’ emphasised that knowledge is actively ‘constructed’ by human beings, rather than being passively received by them.<sup>418</sup> Both approaches reject the idea of ‘value neutral’ observations and universal laws, and both focus on understanding lived experience from the points of view of those who hold it. The interrelatedness of different aspects of people’s lives is another important focus of qualitative research, while psychological, social, historical and cultural factors are all recognised as playing an important part in shaping people’s understanding of their world. Qualitative research practices reflect people's views of the world through methods that aim to provide a holistic understanding of participants' perspectives and actions within the broader context of their lives.<sup>419</sup> Sociologists, Denzin and Lincoln, argue that despite the inherent diversity and subjective complexity within qualitative research, it can be described as:

---

<sup>416</sup>Gerth, H.H., & Mills, C.W. (Eds. & Trans.) (1946). *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Oxford University Press, p15.

<sup>417</sup> Weber, Max (1909) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, translated by E. Fischhoff, edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich (1978), Berkeley: University of California Press, p10. Also see Allan, Kenneth D. (2005). *Explorations in Classical Sociological Theory: Seeing the Social World*. Pine Forge Press, p149.

<sup>418</sup> Holstein, James A. and Jaber F. Gubrium (2007) *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, New York: Guildford Press, p25.

<sup>419</sup> Josselson, Ruth (2013) *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry*, The Guildford Press: London, p92

A set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to self ... qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.<sup>420</sup>

It is interpreting the meaning of participants' lives and the meaning that they give to them that it is most potent and one that is sought in this thesis. Qualitative research lends itself across academic disciplines and facilitates the exploration of content in interviews that illuminates individual experiences, in-depth life stories, cultural and faith content and historical information. Denzin and Lincoln, describe the qualitative researcher as a 'bricoleur' who is able to borrow from various approaches—interpretive, narrative, theoretical, political, and methodological. Thus, making it well-suited for research of sensitive and complex subject areas.<sup>421</sup> This is the one of the primary reasons I have chosen this method to be at the heart of my research approach when recording the voices of UK Muslim counternarratives to ideological and violent forms of extremism.

The research of this thesis has also drawn on elements of thematic analysis of counternarrative data to inform interviews. The transcripts produced present the common reoccurring patterns and meaning that arise from the varying perspectives, behaviour and social processes and practice of individuals. Thus, beginning with a micro perspective allows for an examination of broader macro themes that emerge from the counternarratives provided by individual faith leaders interviewed. Therefore, Chapter Six of this thesis begins with a selection of case studies from the interviews conducted with individuals, including life stories and backgrounds that influence counternarratives. Chapters Seven and Eight then expands to the broader themes that emerged from the collective interviews. This also considers the language used to unlock the meaning in interview data collected, as well as the rich sources of explicit and implicit meaning

---

<sup>420</sup>Denzin, N and Y. Lincoln (2011) *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publication, p3.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, p4.

held within. Themes are therefore conceptualised as patterns of shared meaning across data items, and underpinned or united by a central concept, which have been important to the understanding of a phenomenon and are relevant to the research question.<sup>422</sup> Using thematic analysis for describing qualitative data collected and interpretation in the processes of selecting counternarratives and constructing themes has also enabled me to gain insights and emphasise the social, cultural, and structural contexts that influence the experience of Muslim communities in the UK. The development of knowledge in this research study has been constructed through interactions with research participants and common themes which arise. Thematic analysis has informed the approach to data collected through interviews but is also combined with critical discourse analysis of counternarratives to examine the rich social background of faith leaders and power relations. More importantly, it has provided a framework for assessing the narrative voices of the participants interviewed and understanding the approaches used to shape the discourse around counternarratives to ideological violence. Using critical discourse analysis has also enabled this research to examine the dominant and subordinate discourses around perceptions of Islamophobia, and faith counternarratives to radicalisation. It has further facilitated the interpretation of how these narratives are discursively constituted and the different counternarratives strands from diverse Islamic communities in the UK.

### **5.3 Data analysis: Liberating the voices of individuals**

A number of leading proponents of thematic analysis have come from the psychological tradition. These, notably, are the psychologists Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke who distinguish between three main types of thematic analysis: codebook approaches, matrix analysis and reflexive approaches.<sup>423</sup> Braun and Clarke argue in their preferred reflexive approach that coding precedes theme development and themes are built from codes. In this approach qualitative research can reflexively acknowledge that researchers are not free from their paradigmatic and

---

<sup>422</sup> Braun, Virginia and Clarke, Victoria. 'Thematic analysis: Handbook of Research Methods.' In the *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*, (Editors) Pranee Liamputtong. Hoboken, New Jersey: Springerpp, 2019, pp843-860.

<sup>423</sup>Braun, Virginia; Clarke, Victoria. 'Using thematic analysis in psychology.' In *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2006, 3 (2): pp77–101. Braun and Clarke describe their own widely used approach as reflexive thematic analysis, using psychology.

epistemological assumptions when representing others. However, it can be argued that this does not definitively compromise research findings as all research findings, whether qualitative or quantitative, are set within a historical temporal context. A key part of this thesis, therefore, has incorporated the maintenance of reflexive feedback to acknowledge changing values or experience of research practices that shape the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data collected. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the sociologist and philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) argues that for words and concepts that we assume have real, distinct referents, we must relate 'them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their historical appearance.'<sup>424</sup> For Foucault truth and power are intrinsically linked and power does not prevent but produces dominant discourses.<sup>425</sup> Therefore, power over knowledge is conditioned by dominant discourses. It is my view, for this very reason, that methodological flexibility within the qualitative paradigm is advantageous. It allows for the accommodation of different epistemological positions while maintaining the overarching ontological perspective that power structures shape dominant discourses in ways that marginalize the views of the Other. Thus, moving away from generic dominant worldviews that offer an all-defining perspective on events, such as when Muslims have become intimately linked with fanaticism after terrorist attacks or blamed for the activities of an extremist minority. The counternarrative voices of Muslim faith leaders recorded in this thesis challenge dominant discourses by resisting ideologically violent narratives by fellow Muslims and combating Islamophobia. They do this by correcting false images and skewed misrepresentations about Islam and Muslims and replacing these with alternative narratives.

The field of qualitative case study research facilitates the analysis of individual participants and the ability to capture the complexity of the object of study. Case study research is described by Robert Stake as drawing together 'naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, and

---

<sup>424</sup> Foucault, Michel (2000) *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2000), London: Routledge Classics p.227. The work of Michel Foucault has been particularly influential in critical discourse analysis (in what is typically called Foucauldian discourse analysis). This 'body of rules' leads to the formation of dominant discourses, or texts whose authority permits their passing as knowledge, truth, immutable law, or 'common sense.' Critical discourse analysis emphasises that ideas, facts and knowledge are not static but change as the discourse changes.

<sup>425</sup> Foucault, Michel. 'Truth and power.' In *The Foucault Reader*, P. Rabinow (Ed.) (1984). New York: Pantheon Books, p61.

biographic research methods.<sup>426</sup> A key part of this is the phenomenology of experience obtained from interviews and understanding the dynamics that account for this experience. This involves careful and in-depth consideration of the nature of each case, historical background, physical setting and other institutional and political contextual factors.<sup>427</sup> An interpretive or social constructivist approach to qualitative case study research supports a transactional method of inquiry, where the researcher has a personal interaction with the case. Therefore, the case is developed through the relationship between the researcher and the informants and is presented in a way that engages the reader, inviting them to participate in this interaction. In this approach the biographies and verbatim quotes of individuals are sought in first-hand interviews who have certain experiences in common with one another but multiple perspectives.<sup>428</sup> I believe it is vital to recognise the distinct background of each person when undertaking fieldwork. The case study approach has directly informed the fieldwork of this thesis in terms of focusing on a small sample of individual to explore common patterns and some of the cross-cutting themes arising from the unique perspectives of each participant. Rather than undertaking large volumes of interviews, this thesis focuses on thirteen in-depth primary interviews to carry out research of a sensitive topic area. This approach has allowed this to address the less coherent conceptions of self and the conflicting perspectives on countering violent discourse in its various forms.<sup>429</sup> It has also allowed me to break down the situation and stories conveyed by individuals to offer i) in-depth insight ii) the process of identification through which individuals project their views iii) more open ended, variable assessment of current counternarratives to radicalisation that exist within UK Muslim faith communities. This is the situation in which my participants exist and therefore my research has undertaken to reveal the nuanced faith-based counternarratives to violent

---

<sup>426</sup> Stake R. E. (1995) *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. p33

<sup>427</sup> Ibid, p34.

<sup>428</sup> Merriam S. B. (2009) *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (3rd ed.) San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>429</sup> Lyotard, Jean Francois [1984] *The Postmodern Condition*. Manchester University Press, p44. Lyotard's theory of breaking down grand 'metanarratives' added to Michel Foucault's discourse of relativism; this has influenced how current ethnographic studies are written, and meant that politically inspired theorists, such as feminists or those interested in racial inequality have, to some extent, been awarded a secondary status. Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* establishes its philosophical base on the premise that the social field is non-totalisable and heterogeneous, and that metanarratives are no longer applicable in the modern world. Therefore, social theory which employs power dynamic categories such as gender, class, sexuality, or race are considered reductive, and unable to facilitate the complexities of social identities.

radicalisation that challenges larger metanarratives about Muslim communities in the UK. It should also be noted that this thesis has aimed to be self-reflective at all times by situating and acknowledging the impact of myself as a researcher in the dynamic of interviews conducted.

The research data of this thesis are presented across Chapters Six, Seven and Eight according to five emergent core counternarrative categories.

- i. Faith leadership as a credible trustworthy counternarrative voice
- ii. Faith Instruction as key counternarrative
- iii. Lived faith Practice and social responsibility as part of local community
- iv. Support for Prevent and police counter-terrorist interventions as British citizens
- v. Pastoral outreach counternarrative

Each chapter will provide a brief narrative describing the most salient findings related to a particular counternarrative category that emerged from interviews, and will also address emergent subcategory areas, such as responses to experiences of Islamophobia.

#### **5.4 Interview method and execution**

The interview method I have adopted for this research is that of semi-structured interviews. These interviews have enabled the collection of open-ended qualitative data, allowing the examination of participants' thoughts, feelings, and ideas about counternarratives, as well as delving deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues. This method of collecting data has also enabled holistic flexible questions from myself as a researcher and answers from participants to allow for each person's individual experience to be distinctly recorded. Interviewing individual Muslim faith leaders has enabled my research insight into people's perceptions, beliefs, and behaviour in relation to experiences of identifying how faith-based approaches can counter ideologically extremist and violent world views, promoted by groups such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh. In this way, I have aimed to listen effectively to the participants' stories to ensure their views, as well as their reflections on the associated Prevent programme, are understood from a multidisciplinary perspective. The British sociologist, Jenifer Mason, writing on qualitative research methods, states that semi-structured interviews give the opportunity not only to 'build

an informative dialogue' between interviewer and interviewee but also to learn certain 'aspects of their own lives.'<sup>430</sup> My research methodology is grounded in the joint experience with participants that breaks down barriers between interviewer and interviewee. During the writing of this thesis, I have sought to foster an open dialogue with individuals that provides space for participants to challenge or offer insights from broader areas of their lives. This process has raised questions about my role as an interviewer and has influenced reflections on the interviews given by participants.

All interviews undertaken have been co-constructed. To this extent material produced by the interviewee is included in this thesis with their approval, with acknowledgment of the context and the response of the interviewee. This includes the interpreted meaning of events as recounted by interviewees and the insights they provide during the interview, as well as the narratives that emerge when transcripts are reviewed. An interview is therefore a meeting of two subjectivities, and the analysis and write-up produced have been shaped by what is known as the 'intersubjective context.'<sup>431</sup> One cannot negate the fact that responses to material brought to the interview has meant that this has also shaped what can be told and how it has been told as each interview has been transcribed. Therefore, it has become even more imperative to recognise both the content and process of interviewing during fieldwork research. Additionally, understanding how these aspects have developed has been critical to ensure that necessary corrections are made, making interview transcripts richer and more representative of what has been said.

The sample of thirteen individuals interviewed have been undertaken using case studies of individual stories, combined with thematic analysis. This has enabled the identification of broader counternarratives across the various Islamic traditions represented by participants. The controversial nature and political sensitivity surrounding the topic of this thesis has contributed to limiting access to certain individuals. In addition to this conceptual complexity, the subject of

---

<sup>430</sup> Mason Jenifer, (2002) *Qualitative Research*, London: Sage Publications, pp13-23.

<sup>431</sup> Briggs, C. L. (1986) *Learning How to Ask: A sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social research*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p10. Briggs gives an overview of the 'intersubjective' relationship and the need for reflective thinking to ensure interview transcripts give power back to the interviewee voice.

research is evolving within a continually changing political and security environment. For this reason this thesis has explored counternarratives to extremist violent ideology through the prism of individuals in leadership positions from within diverse Islamic faith communities in the UK. It also presents critical understanding and practice reflecting on the personal and interpersonal experiences of individuals when countering violent extremist worldviews. Within the target interviewee profiles, the research sought to ensure that the views and perspectives of women were captured. There was a gender restriction in terms of participant access due the fact that leaders within the UK Muslim faith communities are male. When I contacted places of worship, I did not specify gender and was predominantly put in touch with male faith leaders who act as Imams in mosques and responded to enquiries. I was mindful of sensitivities around mixed gender interactions and reduced receptivity of females being interviewed by males within certain communities. However, after an extensive period of reaching out to mosques two London based women were interviewed face to face in a community centre for this study. Both these two women were at the forefront of challenging extremist discourse and played a critical educational role in socialising and transmitting culture and values to the younger people as leaders of faith circles in their respective mosques.

My participants were all adults above the age of eighteen and up to sixty, with the majority coming from the thirty to fifty age range due to the demographic trend of most faith leaders being from an older population. Purposive selection of faith leaders from various segments of the Islamic community in the UK has been undertaken to represent a broad range of views from different Islamic traditions in the UK. These individuals also worked in diverse capacities at the grassroots level, including as Imams and chaplains and some were involved in larger national organizations such as the Muslim Council of Britain. Non-faith leaders and younger people specifically were not the target profile for interview participants and are therefore not represented in this thesis. All research interviews have sought to explore a deeper understanding of the relationship between faith communities and their role in helping individuals develop resistance to radicalisation and overcome tendencies to engage in ideologically extremist activities. The majority of interviews have taken place online and some at locations chosen by interviewees, mostly within the London and southeast region of England. This was due to

restrictions set by the St Mary's University Ethics Committee in the early part of research, which requested that all interviews take place online to minimise risk due to the Covid pandemic. This option was taken by the committee to ensure all types of possible harm to myself were kept to an absolute minimum. Whilst undertaking research interviews risk was further minimised when meeting people by doing so in a public place and letting others know my whereabouts and expected times of completion.

The participants who agreed to be interviewed for this study were predominantly from second or third generation South Asian diaspora background, representing the largest segment of the UK Muslim population, which accounted for 65.9% according to the 2021 Census.<sup>432</sup> Whilst one person was white British and two others were of Bosnian heritage. In order to represent the diverse ethnic and sectarian identities of Muslim communities and varying counternarratives UK Muslim faith leaders were purposively chosen from across different communities of faith, including from Sunni, Shia, Salafi, Sufi, Ahmadis and Ismaili communities. As stated, due to the sensitive nature of this research area access to participants remained a challenge throughout this study and I endeavoured to reach out to individuals in pre-interview meets when required to explain the purpose of the study and provide assurance of confidentiality. All participants who took part in interviews spoke English as a primary or secondary language and there was no need for access to research information in a different language or translation.

## **5.5 Formulating fieldwork**

The original intention of my research was to interview people who have voluntarily used the Channel programme and found ways to overcome attraction to extremist movements. However, due to the sensitive confidential nature of the Channel programme there were restrictions and limitations on gaining access to people to interview. There were also restrictions on interviewing those who have been or are in the process of being investigated by the criminal justice system

---

<sup>432</sup> Office for National Statistics. Religion, England, and Wales: Census 2021. Office for National Statistics Publication, 2021.

[https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion#:~:text=Religion%2C%20England%20and%20Wales%3A%20Census%202021&text=For%20the%20first%20time%20in,33.3%20million\)%20in%202011%3B](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion#:~:text=Religion%2C%20England%20and%20Wales%3A%20Census%202021&text=For%20the%20first%20time%20in,33.3%20million)%20in%202011%3B). Accessed 29th June 2024.

for any associated involvement in potential terrorist acts. Other major factors that shaped my research project, apart from the impact of the Covid pandemic on meeting people, was being prohibited from undertaking face-to-face interviews by the ethics committee at St Mary's due to initial concerns about my safety and interviewing potential individuals who had undertaken criminal acts. It was perceived that i) there may be too much risk if interviewing individuals, who may have had former violent histories one to one ii) the ability to gain access to interview individuals from these backgrounds may also be limited due to a range of factors, such as Prevent or criminal justice restrictions. Once it was clear the focus of the thesis had moved to researching counternarratives from UK Muslim community faith leaders who opposed violence the Ethics Committee changed their view and ethics approval was granted. The prolonged period it took to pass my ethics approval and reformulate the focus of the thesis directly impacted on my ability to pursue research participants in the field and consequently extended the period it took to gather participants and engage in interviews.

As stated, this thesis aims to focus on faith leader counternarrative themes that combat extremism in the UK context and is therefore limited in its qualitative case-based research scope. Participants for this research thesis were chosen on the study aim basis of sourcing interviews with UK Muslim faith leaders who expressed counternarratives to extremism. Interview participants were accessed directly through writing to over one hundred different mosques across the UK via email. These mosques were sourced via online directories, such as the UK Mosque Directory.<sup>433</sup> I also phoned over thirty mosques who responded to emails, visited places of worship directly and followed up recommendations to obtain potential interviews. Out of this number of enquiries I was contacted back by twenty-five people in various leadership roles and eventually after pre-interview discussions to refine and determine whether the individuals met the study aim criteria (people in roles as Muslim faith leaders) a total of thirteen individuals agreed to take part in interviews. To guard against sampling selection bias participants were purposefully recruited from a wide range of Islamic traditions, with a range of experiences of the

---

<sup>433</sup> Mosque Finder. UK Mosque Directory online. <https://www.mosquedirectory.co.uk>. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

subject being explored.<sup>434</sup> Research bias was further reduced by ensuring each person interviewed was given the same participant information prior to interview and open and transparent validation of the criteria to take part in the study shared.<sup>435</sup> A total of three people decided to opt out after pre-interview conversation with a personal 'fear' that any research topic relating to 'extremism' may, by association, have a negative impact and 'reflect badly' on Islam.

Several participants spoke openly about the impact of Prevent 'securitisation approach' as part of the UK Government's 'war on terror' and how they had seen people 'wrongly investigated' and were guarded when responding to interview questions.<sup>436</sup> One particular Imam in Southeast London sought prior permission from his mosque committee and reported he had 'not been permitted' to undertake an interview. However, it should be noted that the same question of the use of the term extremism in this study thesis was also addressed by individuals who decided to undertake interviews and this did not prevent dialogue about this fear taking place with participants. The total of three people who opted out of engaging in interviews after an initial introduction to the study presented two common themes around fear of possible association of Islam with violence but also fear of being possibly misinterpreted after previous negative experiences with Prevent engagement. Therefore, it is possible that the full spectrum of views on extremism in the UK are not fully represented in this research. Once again, these areas were also addressed by participants who decided to engage in interviews and I was aware that as a perceived outsider I had to provide as much information as possible to build trust before any interview was undertaken. I reflect on the nature and dynamics of my relationship with interviewees in later findings chapters of this thesis.

The potential misappropriation of research in security and government policy and fear it may contribute to further stigmatization of Muslim communities expressed by faith leaders in this

---

<sup>434</sup> Denscombe, Martyn (2017), *The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects*. London: Open University Press.

<sup>435</sup> Schmidt, Frank L. and John E. Hunter (2015), *Methods of Meta-Analysis: Correcting Error and Bias in Research Findings* London: SAGE Publications, Ltd, pp10-20.

<sup>436</sup> Kundnani, Arun (2014) *The Muslims are Coming: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*. London: Pluto Press, p101.

thesis is a recurring concern among scholars of radicalisation and counterterrorism.<sup>437</sup> Researchers have also raised ethical concerns about the instrumentalisation of their work in surveillance and pre-crime initiatives, which risks eroding trust between researchers and communities.<sup>438</sup> This thesis therefore seeks to maintain integrity by contextualizing findings and avoiding selectively interpreting data to support preconceived political arguments or securitised interventions, such as the UK's Prevent strategy. Participant identities have been anonymised to ensure that the findings cannot be used to identify individuals, particularly in ways that could contribute to surveillance or securitisation. The findings chapters of this thesis present complex counternarratives from Muslim faith leaders, shaped by intersecting influences such as faith identity, religious traditions, and the individual backgrounds of participants. As a result, the findings are context specific and not intended to be generalisable.

It is essential to acknowledge social desirability bias and the dynamics around gatekeeper access to participants in undertaking this thesis and the limitations and complexities this has created when interpreting findings. The nature of qualitative research as a lone researcher means that one has to take into account one's own and the interviewees personal positionality, expectations and bias in the process of a research project, and mitigating actions have been taken in an attempt to guard against this.<sup>439</sup> In line with social desirability bias Bergen and Labonté argue that respondents in qualitative studies have a tendency to present a world in which 'everything is perfect' and a version of reality that aligns with what is perceived to be 'socially acceptable.'<sup>440</sup> The sensitive and contentious nature of this research area may have led to some interviewees

---

<sup>437</sup>O'Toole, T., Meer, N., DeHanas, D. N., Jones, S. H., & Modood, T. 'Governing through Prevent? Regulation and Contested Practice in State–Muslim Engagement.' In *Sociology*, Volume 50 (1) 2016, pp160–177. Thomas, Paul. 'Changing experiences of responsabilisation and contestation within counter-terrorism policing and the Prevent counter-radicalisation programme: implications for policy and practice.' In *Policing and Society*, 27(5), 2017, pp535–550. Abbas, Tahir (2005) *Muslim Britain: Communities under pressure*. London: Zed Books.

<sup>438</sup> Awan, I. 'I am a Muslim not an extremist: How the Prevent strategy has constructed a 'suspect' community.' In *Politics & Policy*, 40(6), 2012, pp1158–1185. Heath-Kelly, C., & Strausz, E. (2019). *Counterterrorism and the Counterfactual: Producing the 'Radicalisation' Discourse in the UK*. In *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 12(2), 297–318.

<sup>439</sup> Douglas, Heather, and Elliott, Kevin C. (2022), 'Addressing the Reproducibility Crisis: A Response to Hudson.' In *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* Volume 53, 2022, pp201–9.

<sup>440</sup> Bergen, Nicole, Labonté, Ronald (2020). "'Everything Is Perfect, and We Have No Problems": Detecting and Limiting Social Desirability Bias in Qualitative Research.' In *Qualitative Health Research*, Sage Publication, 2020-04, Vol.30 (5), p.783-792.

possibly tailoring, omitting and self-editing their responses and including or excluding specific information during interviews.<sup>441</sup> Courtesy bias may have also possibly taken place in which responses were made to suit or please what they projected to be the non-Muslim perspective of myself as an interviewer, rather than their true feelings. These included various reasons, such as being an active participant in historical debates on countering extremism and therefore wishing to present events in a particular light, through to a desire not to present negative views of Islam in the face of perceived hostile Islamophobia. Consequently, care has been taken to critically address individual counternarratives of interviewees during the writing of this thesis and is explored in Chapters Six to Nine of this thesis. The pitfalls of gatekeeper dynamics when interviewing Muslim faith leaders and the possibility of repeating institutional hierarchical community narratives is another challenge to this research.<sup>442</sup> To mitigate gatekeeper bias research has focused on building strong relationships of trust through i) pre-interview conversations ii) providing a participant information sheet and consent forms to establish the objectives of the study iii) as well as gaining an understanding of the gatekeeper's role and perspective and acknowledging their power in providing data. Additionally, a diverse number of Imams from different traditions has also helped to reduce the influence of any single gatekeeper's bias.<sup>443</sup>

Questions for the thesis have been designed to be neutrally worded and non-leading and asked in a randomized order to minimize social desirability bias and response bias.<sup>444</sup> The interviews undertaken with participants lasted between forty and sixty minutes for each participant and gained insight into their journey by posing primary open-ended questions related to:

- What counternarrative has enabled deradicalisation using faith-based approaches. Also,

---

<sup>441</sup> Droitcour, J., Caspar, R., Hubbard, M., Parsley, TL., Visscher, W., & Ezzati, TM. 'The item count technique as a method of indirect questioning: A review of its development and a case study application.' In *Measurement Errors in Surveys*, PP. Biemer, RM. Groves, LE. Lyberg, NA. Mathiowetz, & S. Sudman (Editors) (1991) John Wiley & Sons, pp185–210.

<sup>442</sup> Vinkenburg, Claartje J. 'Engaging Gatekeepers, Optimizing Decision Making, and Mitigating Bias: Design Specifications for Systemic Diversity Interventions.' In *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 2017-06, Vol.53 (2), pp212-234.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid, p214.

<sup>444</sup> Presser, Stanley; Stinson, Linda (1998). 'Data Collection Mode and Social Desirability Bias in Self-Reported Religious Attendance.' In the *American Sociological Review*. 63 (1), p140.

what is the teaching that supports individuals to resist attraction to violent ideologies and be able to obtain an integrated sense of self that is able to connect with others with others that hold different diverse world views?

- What aspirations do participants have for further improvements within the UK Islamic communities to offer counternarratives to violent extremist ideologies and challenge Islamophobic tropes?

All recorded interviews and copies of transcripts were offered on request to interviewees and follow up interviews pursued if necessary to ensure their experience and opinion have been correctly captured or interpreted. The aim of this thesis has been to listen to the varying counternarrative approaches that have been used and their reflections on this and the wider context in which they have been set by following selection of the below sub-questions:

- What counternarrative worked for each interviewee and what were the limitations and views on what was effective?
- What were the interviewees' reactions to terrorist attack events and corresponding response to Islamophobic tropes that undermined faith counternarratives?

The reason for this was to ensure that events and stories that have been told mediate subsequent experiences and create possibilities for participants to explore methods used for encouraging attitudinal and behavioural change in regard to extremist views. It has also enabled further questions on the means by which interviewees reflect on the course of action and the impact of Prevent on Islamic faith communities when attempting to divert people away from violent terrorist groups. A semi-structured interview method has been employed to enable in-depth questions during interviews related to the main thesis question and the direct experience of Muslim faith leader participants.<sup>445</sup> The first interview served as a pilot to test interview questions, identify and address potential biases, and reflect on the power dynamics involved. It

---

<sup>445</sup> Edwards, Rosalind; Holland, Janet (2013). *What is qualitative interviewing?* London: Bloomsbury Academic. p2 and 3.

was reviewed in consultation with my thesis supervisors to ensure it aligned with the overarching aims of the doctoral research. This process informed a consistent and ethically sound approach for all subsequent participant interviews.

The interviews I conducted provided the option for interviewees to follow up with additional contact if needed, allowing for any further questions or information requests to be addressed. My goal has been to listen openly to counternarratives and the background to these to establish a full picture of each individual and varying approaches. Having the ability to ask flexible semi-structured sub-questions with all participants has enabled me to ensure that all events and stories told mediate experiences and create possibilities to explore the unique contribution of each person as part of different Islamic faith communities. Differentiating semi-structured core questions used have included the following:

- What in your life journey so far has been key to giving you the insight and ability to support individuals away from extremist or violent ideology?
- How do the faith-based methods enable you to counter violent or extremist ideology and provide alternatives for the people you support?
- In your experience has mentoring individuals vulnerable to violent extremism helped participants to also overcome mental health challenges and trauma to build more resilience?
- What do you believe are the differences between faith-based programmes as compared to the UK Government sponsored Prevent programme?
- How could faith based deradicalisation initiatives or other emerging government programmes further improve and/or work better together?

Using semi-structured interviews has enabled this thesis to conduct interviews related to the key questions above but also to flexibly change and adapt questions to individuals to collect authentic, firsthand, in-depth data around counternarrative views.

To learn about the rich uniqueness of each individual life story all interviews have had firm

boundaries set to ensure safety and foster trust and respect with all participants. This has included setting out the purpose, orientation, and particular area of the interview before each interview session began. These were formalized in the Participant Participation Sheet, which outlined the scope of the research, data protection measures, and the ethical standards adhered to in order to complete this thesis. By doing this and having strong levels of integrity within the project my aim has been to maximize the research relationship with each interviewee and solicit authentic engagement. Thus, allowing research undertaken to fulfill the goal of enabling each individual who participates to share the nuanced, complex views that have particular meaning to their lives. This thesis acknowledges the deficiencies and weaknesses of qualitative semi-structured interviewing, such as the subjective nature and the relatively small number of participants, which is highly dependent on the quality of the data obtained. The small sample size and counternarrative views expressed by participants in this thesis is not large enough to claim to be generalisable or fully representative of the entire UK Muslim population and this research is not designed for this purpose. However, what this thesis does present is a snapshot of current counternarrative themes and patterns from a selection of faith leaders from across diverse Islamic traditions within the context of the UK.

To undertake interviews with a suitable sample of people I have worked closely with faith leaders, mosque bodies and community-based settings to allow access to participants. By doing so I have aimed to ensure my work protects the confidentiality of the people I meet. In addition to adhering to the ethical boundaries established by the Ethics Committee of St Mary's University, this research project has been regularly reviewed throughout its duration by all supervisors assigned to support its completion. This has included regular reviews with supervisors and sign-off of each stage of this research project. None of the participants for this thesis have been subject to the criminal justice system but some have worked pastorally in a number of prisons as chaplains. By presenting counternarrative voices from a variety of UK Muslim faith leaders this thesis has therefore endeavoured to record a complex number of responses to violent extremist ideologies.

This thesis also includes participants' views on what might attract individuals to violent

ideologies, rather than relying solely on state-centric counter-terrorism discourse, which focuses on tackling belief systems and ideologies as the primary precursors to violence. The term 'Islamist radicalisation,' used by Prevent in the UK, has its roots firmly in the post-9/11 discourses and neo-conservative counter-terrorism policies endorsed by successive UK and US governments in their partnership on security policy. This focus has predominantly been on conservative Islamic groups as fertile recruitment grounds for terrorist activity, proposing that the central problem is the ideological conversion of individuals. In contrast, my research examines counternarratives to violent ideologies from members of the Islamic faith community. As deradicalisation is the language of the Prevent programme this study refers to this term. It has been used in interviews I have undertaken, as well as material referenced. As shown, there is a sizeable and growing body arguing that the term radicalisation is at times inappropriately used as a label, and not inherently suitable as those holding extreme views do not necessarily go on to commit terrorist acts of violence. Therefore, a clear distinction between supporting and acting out violent behaviours exists. This separation is recognised by the distinction between disengagement - still cognitively in support of terrorism but ceasing from directly engaging in it- and deradicalisation - both cognitively and behaviourally opposed to terrorism. This thesis attempts to avoid conflating the term radicalisation with extremist acts of violence and terrorism. Understanding the nuances and variety of counternarrative and the role of faith communities in their opposition to extremist violent ideologies on the micro and macro level is a vital approach I have sought to adhere to in this thesis.

## **5.6 Ethical and research considerations**

The research undertaken in this doctoral thesis received approval from St Mary's Ethics Committee in April 2021, as well as a resubmission approval in April 2022 to allow for online and face-to-face interviews to be permitted. The original submission to the Ethics Committee took place in August 2020 and three more paper iterations have been undertaken after extensive questioning on the nature of the research and requirements made to ensure it concurred with requirements set by the St Mary's University Ethics Committee. The prolonged period of seeking approval from the Ethics Committee due to concern about potentially interviewing people who

had previously committed violent acts allowed for reflective assessment of the focus of thesis research and a refinement of the study aims to take place. This contributed delays to the time scales for pursuing fieldwork but has also ensured that as a researcher I have obtained a more rigorous, in-depth understanding of the complexity of gaining access to individuals to interview. At the outset of the research the design intention was to interview people who had been involved in the Prevent programme as mentorees who had been deradicalised. The Ethics Committee provided insight to the level of sensitivity needed and time to reflect on the barriers to obtaining interviews and committing to undertaking interviews online to ensure safety. This crucial decision also effectively shifted the research focus to how faith-based communities provide counternarratives to violent radicalisation, rather than solely relying on gaining access to Prevent-funded initiatives. St Mary's Ethics Committee meets have made a major contribution to shaping and forming the course of this research project by facilitating an even stronger commitment to ethical practice and protecting the safety of all the people interviewed and myself.

Ethics applications have importantly enabled greater awareness of the potential barriers to research. Terrorist incidents taking place during the time of this thesis, such the murder of the MP David Ames in 2022, has also affected the engagement of Muslim faith leader respondents. One of the largest unnamed barriers has been building a bond of trust -as well as one that is hard to measure or fully quantify - to enable me as a non-Muslim to obtain access to interview Muslim community faith leaders. A key idea in the literature on trust is 'experiential theory.' Brehm and Rahn (1997) and Dinesen and Hooghe (2010) argue that 'generalised trust' is partly based on experience and these conditions human interactions in specific settings.<sup>446</sup> When people repeatedly feel they are treated unfairly, such as feeling they are discriminated against, or that the group to which they belong is somehow excluded, they develop lower trust in others.<sup>447</sup> My

---

<sup>446</sup> Brehm, J., and Rahn, W. 'Individual-level evidence for the causes and consequences of social capital.' In *American Journal of Political Science*, 41/3, 1997, pp999–1023. Research into the impact of lack of trust of communities that feel persecuted can also be found in Dinesen, P. T. and Hooghe, M. 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do: The acculturation of generalized trust among immigrants in Western Europe.' In the *International Migration Review Journal*, 44(3), 2010, pp697-727.

<sup>447</sup> Brehm, J., and Rahn, W. 'Individual-level evidence for the causes and consequences of social capital.' In *American Journal of Political Science*, 41/3, 1997, p1000

own positionality as an outsider and the issue of race and culture between participants and me have to be taken into consideration as this has also conditioned levels of trust during interviews, including the way interviewees, mostly of South Asian heritage, perceive being interviewed by a white middle class non-Muslim researcher. The question of trust in a sensitive complex research area is critical. As a non-Muslim outsider there were also benefits in terms of perceived objectivity, lack of bias, and an ability to maintain distance from group loyalties or pre-existing opinions derived from being a member of a community. During interviews I have attempted to maintain a high awareness of possible unconscious bias influenced by the optics of some brands of media that may influence even the best-intentioned approach to researching the UK Muslim community with Islamophobic narratives.<sup>448</sup> At no point during this research have I personally felt discriminated against. However, at the same time cultural and positionality factors have implicitly influenced the interview data collected and I therefore acknowledge my privileged position and the power dynamics between participants and myself as researcher.<sup>449</sup> The sensitivities that surround this topic of study have also had an impact, at times, on the level of access granted to undertake interviews.<sup>450</sup> A number of participants had distrust of external researchers, like myself, from outside the community who might by potentially associate Islam with extremist violence. I will be reflecting back on this within later chapters that include interview findings. One faith leader told me:

The trouble is your research needs to understand that many Muslims feel that questions around radicalisation bring the faith itself into question and this might confuse matters

---

<sup>448</sup>Esposito, John. 'Out of the Cycle of Ignorance.' In *The Guardian newspaper* 7<sup>th</sup> July 20006. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jul/07/comment.terrorism1>. Accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> December 2022. Esposito states that a 'combination of ignorance, stereotyping, history, and experience, as well as religio-cultural chauvinism, too often blind even best-intentioned when dealing with the Arab and Muslim world.'

<sup>449</sup> Reyes, Victoria, 'Ethnographic Toolkit: Strategic Positionality and Researchers Visible and Invisible Tools.' In *Field Research Ethnography*, Volume 21 (2) 2018, Sage Publications, p222.<sup>450</sup> Nannestad P., Svendsen, G. T., Dinesen, P. T., and Sønderkov, K. M. 'Do institutions or culture determine the level of social trust? The natural experiment of migration from non-Western to Western countries.' In *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40/4, 2014, pp544–565. This piece looks at the perception of Western discrimination against not only first but second-generation Muslims and non-Muslim minorities in Europe.

<sup>450</sup> Nannestad P., Svendsen, G. T., Dinesen, P. T., and Sønderkov, K. M. 'Do institutions or culture determine the level of social trust? The natural experiment of migration from non-Western to Western countries.' In *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40/4, 2014, pp544–565. This piece looks at the perception of Western discrimination against not only first but second-generation Muslims and non-Muslim minorities in Europe.

as what you're researching has nothing to do with faith.<sup>451</sup>

Therefore, as noted, several participants were guarded about sharing their experience and this, as mentioned earlier in this chapter - required further discussion and information to be provided before any interviews could take place. A large body of social science has called on qualitative researchers to adhere to standards of objectivity, impartiality, and neutrality, and King, Keohane and Verba argue that these standards have grown out of quantitative epistemologies.<sup>452</sup> Whilst, this research aspires to these standards the difficulty of cordoning interpretation off from the influence of life experiences and identities must also be recognised. Some have contended that research relies on interpretation, which itself is shaped by the social, economic, and cultural status of the interpreter.<sup>453</sup> It is therefore impossible to fully remove any bias or projection. This research is reflective regarding attention to my own position and thoughts and attempts to avoid reproducing what Winfield terms the 'objectifying and imperialist gaze' associated with 'traditional Western qualitative' research methods.

At all times, research practice for this thesis has ensured due diligence is followed and consent is obtained from all individuals. I have interviewed in line with data protection directives set by UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR Act 2018) to ensure the safety of data is protected. The principles of this are to make sure the information is used fairly, lawfully, and transparently and handled in a way that ensures appropriate security, including protection against unlawful or unauthorised processing, access, loss, destruction or damage. Adherence to UK General Data Protection Regulation has been included in all Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms (See Appendix A and B) about the storage of information and parameters within which my research will be used. Names of individuals have been anonymised by using pseudonyms to ensure the identity and safety of each interviewee is protected and confidentiality kept at all

---

<sup>451</sup> Interview with Tanvir, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

<sup>452</sup> King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, p75.

<sup>453</sup> Shaw, Rhonda M., Julie Howe, Jonathan Beazer, and Toni Carr. 'Ethics and Positionality in Qualitative Research with Vulnerable and Marginal Groups.' In *Qualitative Research*, Volume 20 Issue 3, 2019 pp277-293. Gherardi, Silvia, and Barry Turner. 'Real Men Do Not Collect Soft Data.' In *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion* (2002) Huberman, Michael A. and Matthew B. Miles (editors). London: Sage Publications, pp81-100.

times. Many of the participants were from recognizable niche communities and therefore keeping context details broad has been essential to protect anonymity and confidentiality. No participant is named but information, including location area, the specific Islamic faith community they are part of, and an indication of their background and the nature of their work is used. All participants have a right to privacy, and this has been respected with assurances provided in regard to protecting their personal data for as long as it is safely stored. Furthermore, all participants have been sent and signed the Consent Form (See Appendix A) before interview to provide explicit consent. The Consent Form gives a clear indication of confidentiality procedures and processes for complaint if they feel this has been contravened in any way. This research thesis abides by data management requirements set out by St Mary's University plan for the type of data I intended collecting, the storage method and how access will be given to data once research is completed and for how long this is kept. Therefore, anticipating any potential ethical or legal challenges regarding who may have designated access to the data.

All primary data, which may be published, will be securely stored for up to ten years in compliance with the St Mary University's Data Management Policy. Neither will personal identifying information be disclosed in any publication or to any third party. Any data will be kept on St Mary's University servers for a period of 10 years, and I have set up a University MS Team account for this purpose. I have personally transcribed audio files and stored data with a protected password on my St Mary's Zoom and Microsoft Team files. All files are password protected and stored with an encryption function available. Each transcript I have produced has an allocated pseudonym to protect anonymity, and any identifying features in the data have been deleted. All transcripts produced have been available to be shared if a request is made and identifying information and data analysis has been removed from the transcript to guarantee anonymity. The data may identify public figures and certain known places in the UK. All participants' identities and specific location names have been anonymised and their personal identities remained anonymised. The St Mary's Consent Form (See Appendix A) provided to all participants outlined the possibility of names of the places and people that may be identifiable as well as the places of output of research, such as journal papers, books, and possible conference presentations. All participants were given the option of withdrawing their data at a later stage,

if requested.

For the purpose of this research thesis, I have also sought permission from national and local leaders of Islamic faith settings before undertaking field work. Interviews carried out have been completed in a manner that respects the confidentiality and rights of the nine protected characteristics of all individuals set out within the Equality Act 2010. Having this strong adherence to a code of ethics gives my research a solid foundation so that all interviews have been undertaken with:

- Written signed off permission from all interviewees is obtained.
- Documented records kept will be accurate and transparent in the setting out of results, including sources of research material.
- Interview transcripts shared with interviewees upon request.
- It complies with the Data Protection Act of 2018 which applies to research that involves data collected about living individuals and requires that such data should not be used for purposes other than for those for which it was collected.
- All primary data has been securely stored for an appropriate time in compliance with the St Mary University's Data Management Policy. Disposal of data and samples will be carried out in accordance with appropriate internal or external policies and adhering to the University's Ethics Guidelines and Procedure.

Qualitative research is more empathetic and personal in terms of the encounter than quantitative research that has more personal distance from those being studied. It is true to say that in-depth interviews do arouse feelings and emotions, and this is recognised within the body of this research. As a heuristic rule interviews with participants who have challenged violent extremist ideologies and individuals may have touched on moments of perceived injustice and internal and external conflict across a spectrum of emotions and life experience. As a researcher, my role, whilst showing empathy, has not used therapeutic interventions as I maintained clear boundaries to focus on my primary role as a researcher. My research has attempted to reflect back if sensitive painful information is shared and ensure the wellbeing of individuals who may

want to investigate or seek further advice after being interviewed. This has included access links to Mind who provide free help in person or online to individuals who have mental health needs, and Sakoon, a Muslim counselling service. Access to both of these agencies has been dependent on need, and subject to the availability and capability of a variety of free local groups.

To further support individuals who may have had an adverse reaction or any pain during interview I have ensured to ask:

- If they would like to take time out or terminate the interview
- If they would like to seek further help/support through appropriate agencies
- Received research feedback during supervision to ensure interviews have been undertaken in a manner that acknowledges the sensitivity of the subject and interviewees safety

Dependent on the need identified I have also ensured to signpost individuals to local and multiple disciplinary agencies contained within Local Authority social services but also, when needed, national agencies and initiatives that can support, such as:

<https://www.mcapn.co.uk/counselling-directory> - This directory provides links to counsellors with different specialisms in local areas.

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/> - Offering practical help on mental health and links to agencies that can support.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/self-care/> - Mind centres support individuals with a variety of needs and also offer online support.

<https://www.sakoon.co.uk/> - A Muslim counselling service that will provide access to counsellors in your area.

There are also many other faith-based initiatives who operate across the UK in different forms and communities, who work with vulnerable individuals in a confidential manner. To ensure the

security of all interview participants no interviews were undertaken with those who were in the process of providing evidence against, or working with, criminal justice agencies or Prevent to combat terrorist acts. Consequently, I have also not interviewed individuals who may be too restricted around security sensitive information for this doctoral research. In keeping with the ethics commitment of this thesis all interviews have not been shared with others once access is granted, unless an individual has given me a written request to do so. I have also made it clear to all participants, before an interview takes place, that if information of a criminal nature is divulged, I am legally obliged to report it to the statutory authorities.

To maintain research confidentiality all data has been stored securely and informed consent and secure data transfer methods have been used, with limited access to myself and authorised people. All written research has been shared with participants if a request has been received in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act (2000). This thesis also abides by principles of accountability and responsibility; including giving permission for any manuscripts to be examined by anonymous reviewers and ideas challenged and scrutinised once published in the public domain. As part of all interviews, I have ensured written permission is obtained before interviews. If legally required to share my data due to any criminal investigation I will do so with equal legal guidance. As stated earlier in this chapter any data recorded abides by Data Protection Act 2018 and all legislation relating to General Data Protection Regulation. The principles of this being to make sure the information is used fairly, lawfully, and transparently and handled in a way that ensures appropriate security, including protection against unlawful or unauthorised processing, access, loss, destruction, or damage. In line with St Mary's Ethics Committee requirements, I have agreed to combine interviews online with the offer of in person meets and face-to-face interviews. I have used safe modes of communication made possible through Microsoft Teams with passwords where necessary to meet participants for interviews. All audio files have been kept in a password protected hardware drive. This audio will be kept with the consent from all participants for a twelve-month period until field research has been completed.

Finally, as mentioned, there have been extensive engagement challenges for this research thesis that have impacted and led to time delays to gaining access to participants. This was principally

due to time taken to gain ethics approval, and the impact of COVID pandemic restrictions between 2020 and 2021. The Covid pandemic led to extraordinary circumstances which were not envisaged when this thesis began, in which three years of my research have been undertaken. It has been even more vital therefore when recruiting interviewees that the introductions I have obtained have been from trusted faith leaders as I have not been able to meet the majority of my participants face to face. Having established contacts and a number of pre-interview conversations is another key detail that has been factored in before I have emailed Consent Forms prior to interview so that confidentiality and all parameters set for contact are abided to. All who agreed to interviews did so on a voluntary basis. If, by chance, I might have known the person I am interviewing I have avoided pursuing this interview, as it may compromise the research by having a prior relationship. All participants were told the purpose, benefits, risks, and funding behind the study – in this case my personal funds - before they agreed or declined to join an interview. Thus, participants gave fully informed consent before a decision was made to allow any interview to take place. With the option and freedom to opt in or out of the study at any point in time without feeling an obligation to continue or provide a reason for wishing to withdraw from the study. All participation was on a voluntary basis, and it was also made clear to participants that there were no negative consequences or repercussions to their refusal to participate and that their decisions were respected. If needed I have reflected on encounters with interviewees during supervision and received input and guidance from my supervisors on the way data has been recorded and communicated in this thesis. Including challenges to ensure the sources of my data are credible, fair and as representative as possible. This has further ensured interpretation of each interview is checked and the context is transparent to ensure true and lasting qualitative data that has integrity and can be transparently scrutinised by all readers.

As stated, the approach taken within this study is a holistic one, and this approach informs all interviews I have undertaken and consequent qualitative data analysis. By having the above-mentioned parameters and integrity within the ethical framework has therefore provided each participant with a safe and positive experience in which they feel listened to and respected with their dignity intact. This has been accompanied by the offer of access to sections of my research thesis to all participants upon request. The completed PhD thesis will also be shared with

participants upon request. No feedback will be provided to any other organisations unless officially requested by agencies such as government bodies to inform policy, strategy, and find better ways to engage with Muslim communities in the UK.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The methodological framework of this thesis, set within the sociology of religion, provides a strong foundation for conducting research that aims to represent diverse voices from across the UK Muslim community. Using qualitative interviews has provided an opportunity for firsthand recording of counternarrative voices from within faith communities. As stated, there have been many challenges posed by the COVID pandemic in the first years of this doctoral thesis, as well as the sensitive nature of this research topic, that have included deradicalisation and the impact of Prevent on Muslims in the UK in terms of perceiving themselves to be the victims of Islamophobia. This has been accompanied by resistance from a few potential participants, who have expressed fear of harsh criticism from within their own community for engaging in dialogue about violent extremism with a non-Muslim. They worried that their words might be misinterpreted or reported to a government agency, making them unable to participate. This is reflected upon within the body of my research findings and the nuances and complexities of counternarratives to violent ideologies. The next three chapters of this thesis will be going on to present fieldwork findings and analysis.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **Listening to Islamic counternarratives to violence**

---

#### **6.1 Introduction:**

This chapter presents selected excerpts from in-depth qualitative interviews with Muslim faith leaders actively engaging in their communities. It does so through direct quotes from faith leaders to explore the individual experiences and social context of each case. Interviews were conducted during a significant period when the UK Government had commissioned an independent review of the Prevent strategy. They capture participants' perceptions and insights, providing them with an opportunity to speak directly to the reader. These faith leaders offer diverse perspectives on how they provide counternarratives to extremist and violent ideologies in the UK, addressing the central question of this thesis. All the participants worked in similar or different contexts in their roles as Islamic faith leaders and have been involved in countering the propaganda of groups like Daesh, which use religious narratives to promote violent ideologies. These interviews do not claim to demonstrate the exclusive effectiveness of faith-based counternarratives as a fully validated method for preventing violent extremism. However, interviews undertaken with faith leaders do reveal the recurring themes and a range of meanings that exist within current UK Muslim community counternarratives to violent ideologies. The counter to extremist ideologies will be illustrated not only through direct quotes from the counternarrative interviews but also as a natural product of examples of everyday faith practices in Muslim communities the faith leaders are part of. The voices of these faith leaders, along with the full set of interviews conducted, will then be further examined in Chapters Seven and Eight.

#### **6.2 A Spectrum of participants from different strands of Islam in the UK**

I have endeavoured to interview individual faith leaders from different traditions within the UK Muslim community with a variety of counternarrative positions. To contextualise each interview a brief summary of the background of each person interviewed is set out below. All names and specific details and places have been anonymised to ensure this accords with participation

conditions set out in each participation form (See Appendix B). I will then begin to break down counternarrative themes collected and the common patterns:

- **Imam Khabir** (name anonymised): In his 50s. He worked in a position for the UK Ministry of Justice as a paid visiting chaplain to several prisons across the UK and was based in the Derby area. He practised what he termed ‘mainstream Sunni Islam’ and told me that he came from a South Asian Deobandi community.<sup>454</sup> Deobandism spread to the UK from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh with different waves of immigration. This included adhering to the cultural and religious norms passed down to him by his family at a local mosque in Derby, where he also deputised as an Imam.
- **Imam Bashir**: (name anonymised) In his early 50s and born in the UK of Pakistani descent. He was a graduate from Dewsbury Dar al-Ulum seminary in Yorkshire – a Deobandi led school. Bashir had two jobs, one as joint Imam of what he termed a ‘Salafi’ mosque in Burnley and the other as the founder of charity combatting radicalisation of young people across the Northwest of England in places such as Preston and other parts of Lancashire. This was funded by Prevent and the Home Office. Bashir delivered Prevent training to local authorities and had direct experience of working to ‘deradicalise’ individuals.
- **Assad** (name anonymised): In his early 40s, Assad worked for the propagation of the Islamic faith through a media centre in conjunction with Imams across the UK and the rest of Europe. He was part of the Ismaili community he had joined after coming to the UK from north Africa. The Ismailis are the only Shia Muslims to have a living, hereditary Imam

---

<sup>454</sup>The Deobandi movement or Deobandism is a revivalist movement within Sunni Islam that adheres to the Hanafi school of law. It formed in the late 19th century around the Darul Uloom Madrassa in Deoband, India, from which the name derives, by Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, and several others, after the Indian Rebellion of 1857–58. The movement pioneered education in religious sciences through the *Dars-i-Nizami* associated with the Lucknow-based *ulema* of Firangi Mahal with the goal of preserving traditional Islamic teachings from the influx of modernist, secular ideas during British colonial rule. The Deobandi movement's Indian wing, Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, was founded in 1919 and played a major role in the Indian independence movement through its participation in the Pan Islamist Caliphate movement and propagation of the doctrine of composite nationalism.

leader, represented by the Aga Khan, and they follow seven pillars of Islam instead of the five observed by mainstream Sunni Muslims.

- **Imam Kardi** (name anonymised): Was both an Imam and academic. Coming from a South Asian Punjabi Bareilvi background he was a mentor of young men in faith instruction at a local mosque in Leeds and worked as an Imam in a prison in the Midlands.<sup>455</sup> His father has been an Urdu speaking Imam and Kardi practice in English and he had taken up the same profession. Bareilvis consider themselves to be the continuation of Sunni Islam before the rise of Salafism and Deobandi Movement. Bareilvism emphasises personal devotion to God and the Prophet Muhammad, adherence to Sharia and Sufi practices such as veneration of Pirs (Urdu anglicisation for saint). In his 30s, with experience of working as an expert in Sharia law, Kardi worked with other Imams across the country from different Islamic traditions, as well as being a former advisor to government. He has taken an active part in membership of groups focused on the role of Imams and used media channels to communicate to his fellow Muslims.
- **Imam Ahmad** (name anonymised): Imam of a mosque in the Cambridge region, former chaplain to two prisons and religious scholar and at an Islamic College, in his early 40s. Ahmad was Bosnian. He had come to England with his family at the height of the Balkan wars to escape the genocide that was perpetrated by Serbian armed forces in the 1990s. He had an extensive experience of working in prisons with individuals who had committed or planned to commit terrorist acts. Ahmad told me he had trained within different Sunni traditions, including with Salafi scholars at Islamic universities in the Middle East region.
- **Imam Adem** (name anonymised): Imam of a mosque in north London area of Hackney. Originally from Turkey, Adem had connections to Kurdish community and the Sheikh

---

<sup>455</sup> The Bareilvi movement ( in Urdu: بریلوی, *Barēlwī*), also known as Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaah (People of the Prophet's Way and the Community) is a Sunni revivalist movement following the Hanafi and Shafi'i schools of jurisprudence, with strong Sufi influences and with over hundreds of millions of followers in South Asia and also in parts of Europe, America and Africa. It is a broad Sufi-oriented movement that encompasses a variety of Sufi orders, including the Chistis, Qadiris, Sohrawardis and Naqshbandis. Bareilvis are also called 'Sunni Sufis.' Ahmed Raza Khan Bareilvi (1856–1921) who was a Sunni Sufi scholar and reformer in north India wrote extensively in defence of Muhammad and popular Sufi practices and became the leader of a movement called Ahl-i Sunnat wa Jamàat.

Nazim group, which has mosques in Tottenham and Peckham. In his 30s He described himself as a mainstream Sunni Muslim and was as advocate for inter-faith dialogue groups in his area of north London.

- **Imam Omar** (name anonymised): Trainee Imam and part of Imam Adem’s Mosque in north London. Omar was Turkish and in his 20s. He had just completed a degree in theology and led a young men’s group at his mosque. He was still training and assisting Imam Adem as an assistant Imam.
- **Tanvir** (name anonymised): Sufi group leader from the UK of white British descent. A convert from London in his early 40s. The interview with Tanvir was brief as he was worried that he may in some form be ‘found out’ by his mosque that he had undertaken an interview, and this might be perceived as a potential ‘betrayal’ of his Islamic community. He attended various mosques’ groups, but also led his own Sufi circle and was learning Arabic and Quran in a London Islamic college.
- **Imam Hasnain** (name anonymised): A Quranic scholar in his 30s who taught in a Masjid in the Luton area and was also an academic at two higher education institutions in Bedfordshire. Hasnain also worked as a chaplain at a prison on a voluntary basis. Hasnain was born in the UK and identified himself as being of Pakistan Punjabi Barelvi origin. His Barelvi learning was a key part of his counternarratives to extremist and violent ideologies and he identified with this strongly during interview.
- **Imam Mohammed** (name anonymised): a community leader from the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in London, of South Asian descent in his late 30s.<sup>456</sup> Mohammed was originally from Pakistan and had settled in the south London area of the UK with his family. Ahmadis have experienced a number of attacks on members in the UK over the years by Sunni Muslims who believe this part of the faith is blasphemous as the Ahmadis believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was a prophet. Ahmadis have been considered non-Muslim by the mainstream Muslims since they consider Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, founder

---

<sup>456</sup> Morgan, Diane (2009). *Essential Islam: A comprehensive guide to belief and practice*. London: Bloomsbury Publications, p242. Ahmadis officially the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat (AMJ), is an Islamic messianic movement originating in British colonial India in the late 19th century.

of Ahmadis, also as the promised Mahdi and Messiah. Mohammed led two mosques in the Surrey area and had completed training to be an Imam ten years ago.

- **Imam Imran** (name anonymised): An Islamic scholar and Sufi faith group leader for men in the Croydon area of London. Imran was in his 40s and of Bosnian descent. He had come to London to study after he had to flee the fighting in the Balkans when his family home was destroyed by Serbian tank shelling. He had authored articles on various aspects of Islam and also had strong connection to a mosque in Cambridge where he had studied as a student.
- **Fatima** (name anonymised): Member of an east London mosque in Tower Hamlets area of London, in her 30s, of Bengali descent. An active member of her mosque and organiser of prayer circles and other gatherings of women in English and Bengali. Fatima identified as a Sunni Muslim, was a mother of three children and spent any extra time she might have volunteering as a helper to her mosque leadership with the setup of faith events.
- **Laylah** (name anonymised): Member of an east London mosque in Tower Hamlets area of London, in her 30s, of Bengali descent. An active member of her mosque and organiser of prayer events and other gatherings of women. A practising Sunni Muslim, and an academic with a clinical background as a doctor, who also responded to 'external information enquiries' (like mine) for her mosque.

The background biographies for each participant have been provided to offer context and insight into the sources of the counternarratives discussed. These biographies help to illuminate the personal, social context and cultural factors that shape the participants' views and experiences, thereby enriching the analysis of their perspectives on countering extremism and the broader issues explored in this research thesis.

All participants interviewed had varying faith leadership roles in Muslim faith settings. This included essential tasks, such as i) leading congregational prayers, including the five daily, ii) delivering sermons on Friday and extra duties during the holy month of Ramadan iii) engaging in faith instruction, Quran circles and providing essential knowledge classes in the observance of religion and other teaching roles iv) carrying out marriage contracts (nikah) and funeral

ceremonies v) serving pastorally in schools, prisons and hospitals vi) acting as mentor to youth and in family matters – such as divorce - as well as any other social conflicts. In addition to this, the faith leaders met also engaged in wider community events, such as giving talks, liaising with the police and Prevent initiatives, taking part in inter-faith dialogue and using media channels to communicate their faith. Thus, acting as religious authorities, all had a critical role to play in supporting the communities they were part of, including diverting people away from extremism.

### **6.3 The state strikes back**

At the beginning of his interview Imam Khabir read from a prior written statement that he would not talk about Prevent and that as a person working for the Ministry of Justice was ‘not permitted to do so without media clearance.’<sup>457</sup> By doing this he wanted to set clear boundaries around protecting himself and ensure our encounter was controlled. There was a sense of self-censorship and distrust that I attempted to defuse by setting out the clear aims of the interview, confidentiality and my background as a researcher before we started the recorded interview. In respect of Imam Khabir’s wishes I therefore avoided direct questions that named Prevent and after a period the conversation began and Khabir appeared more relaxed. It did, however, set an awkward tone for the interview and certainly made me feel categorised as a possible threat he could not trust. Khabir also read from another rehearsed script that focused on safeguarding against sex offenders in his community in Derby and veered away from discussing about countering violent ideologies that individuals had attributed to Islam. An example was when asked if he had ever worked with people who had supported violent ideologies. He diverted away to talk about people who committed domestic violence and honour killings of women. He said this was in ‘contradiction of faith’ and that ‘no person of faith if violent to women could ‘rationalise their actions’ or live according to their essential faith calling.’<sup>458</sup> At all points during the interview he paused for periods before answering any questions. This, once again, made it

---

<sup>457</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>458</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

difficult to build a rapport and required further discussion before we could move return to core questions.

Difficult subjects, such as the use of the term Jihad were avoided by nearly all Imams interviewed due to fear of Prevent wrongly labelling the user as an 'extremist.' The meaning of Jihad was an area participants, such as Imam Khabir, made clear during interview that they did not wish to talk about as it had too much 'media focus' and had been used as a 'metanarrative' to explain all armed responses to Muslims under attack.<sup>459</sup> This silence around this issue of Jihad being misinterpreted during interviews can also be attributed to anxiety attached to the level of scrutiny and occasional misinterpretation of securitised language used by Prevent surveillance around the term Jihad.<sup>460</sup> The fear and paranoia exhibited by Khabir were justified in terms of potential adverse consequences of the interview that may impact his position at the Ministry of Justice and Prevent. This interview also reveals the sensitive nature of people in this period of 2022 as the William Shawcross review of Prevent was underway at this time. I was therefore careful not to pursue for clarification from this type of response in case this caused further anxiety during the interview. It may have also further diverted away from the main corpus of questions for the interview. The participant information provided to Khabir and interviewees had stated the aims of my research before interviews took place and the importance of respecting and caring for the mental health of all participants was critical to my ethical protocol. As the interview progressed Khabir opened up more and went on to focus on individuals being accountable in faith and spoke extensively about the role and position of Imams in mosques. This involved him touching on the recent Manchester Arena Bombing Inquiry and some freer speaking on what could be better in responding to 'extremism.'

Khabir saw violence as one of many acts that connote with 'extremism' that have a spiritual solution:

---

<sup>459</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>460</sup> There are cases of children and adults with vulnerable mental health issues being misunderstood and possibly wrongly referred to Prevent by agencies. See Versi, M (2015) 'Concerns on Prevent.' *Muslim Council of Britain Publication*. <https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/20150803-Case-studies-about-Prevent.pdf>. Accessed on 29 April 2024.

There's so many statements of the Prophet, peace be upon him, about the dangers of extremism. And here when we say the word, extremism we don't mean extremist. Where it sits is one small element of it might be violent extremism, but with the majority of extremism from an Islamic terminology, Hisbah [Duty of promoting good and community morals as well as discouraging evil] covers countering extremism in prayer. So you know anything that goes to an extreme is basically not moderate. So it's very easy to direct someone to the middle ground.<sup>461</sup>

Khabir gave examples of people doing extreme fasting that did not concord with the life of the Prophet. In all cases of 'extremism' he met his preferred counter to this was to mentor one to one in order to 'change behaviours and set back on the right path.'<sup>462</sup> Unlike some I interviewed Imam Khabir was supportive of state intervention under Prevent, which was to be expected as an employee of the Ministry of Justice. He felt there was a need for a challenge in mosques to deliver religious leadership due to religious leaders not always being equipped to counter extremism:

Do all the imams and mosques have the capacity to do that? There's a big fear people have. Some of the Imams prefer not to engage and allow other imams to engage, you know, because there's a fear about getting it wrong. I think in many places the mosques are not equipped or trained enough on how to take someone through the trajectory away from radicalisation. I think government has to establish certain norms onto religious bodies, which are independent so they can help without following cash. But normally most Imams have a difficult relationship with the mosque committee. On thinking about it most committees have the power in a mosque and not the Imam.<sup>463</sup>

In alluding to the 'cash' here Imam Khabir was talking about mosque-affiliated groups who are funded by Prevent to assist individuals to deradicalise and the need for faith leadership to sit

---

<sup>461</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>462</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>463</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

independently whilst being supportive of government initiatives. Khabir, with his experience as a prison chaplain, expressed support for the idea of the state becoming more engaged with Muslim communities. He believes that such engagement is critical for implementing effective measures against potential 'extremists' and that to some extent the reach of British government policy. By fostering a stronger relationship with these communities, Khabir believed that government could better understand their needs, concerns, dynamics and ultimately lead to more targeted and impactful interventions that prevent radicalisation and promote social cohesion. This view set forth by Khabir echoed Tim Winter, (also known as Abdal Hakim Murad and current Dean of Cambridge Muslim College), who argues that Imams avoid preaching on divisive political and social issues since this is a 'point of contention' and that 'the role of the government is limited because it lacks the competence of the traditional scholars, and not all who take part in deradicalisation efforts are linked to the government.'<sup>464</sup> One can see in the interview that Khabir had a deep desire to communicate faith to young people and that in his role as a Chaplain and Imam he felt powerless to assert his position at times and this meant he put his energy into supporting the Prevent policy of the UK Government. It should be recognised that this interview reflected Imam Khabir's personal experience and views and he distanced himself from his role at the Ministry of Justice. All interviews undertaken for this thesis are subject to the limitations set within the sample of faith leaders and reflect the themes that arose in this period.

The other point Khabir wanted to emphasise was the need to improve faith formation as the best counter to extremist ideologies, beyond undertaking Quranic recitation and prayer times and to include young people and women in wider engagement:

I certainly had the same problem when running a youth club. It is very difficult because all they were interested in is people coming to pray. They weren't interested in summer camps or, you know, taking people to activities, abseiling, they're not interested. So you

---

<sup>464</sup> Freytas-Tamura, Kimiko de. 'Nation Appeals to Anti-Extremist Imams in Effort to Uproot Seeds of Radicalization,' *New York Times*, 25 Aug 2014. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

have to do these outside of Muslim settings. So you get that kind of how to engage youth block. Young girls are not engaged at all. The mosque is not a place for women, for many mosques are male only. So, we're struggling on so many different fronts to reach people with the faith.<sup>465</sup>

In this context Khabir proposed insufficient faith engagement is an endemic problem faced across Muslim communities in the UK and that not enough mosques or Imams were relating to young people and the challenges they faced as part of contemporary British society. The outcome of this was the creation of a vacuum in which online communication narratives have more immediate power to disseminate ideologies and possible justifications for violence. One could also argue that the types of fears Khabir referred to reflect modern trends in which social media is beginning to take a larger role in young people's lives beyond the mosque or the family. The counternarrative that Khabir adhered to throughout his interview was that the correct faith teaching of the Quran, Sunnah and Hadith as well as the history of Islam would always supercede the misinformed interpretation of Islam of extremist violent ideologies. Out of this came the secondary need to give more support to the authority and role of the Imam to effect change as a life model for young Muslims and a force for good in the community. The interview with Khabir and other interviews highlighted that counternarratives to extremism discussed in this thesis were not always primarily focused on directly condemning violence. Instead, they were built around the theme of faith leaders promoting a way of life rooted in faith communities and practical preventative interventions. This approach showed the importance of fostering strong, positive community values and providing support systems that naturally counteract the appeal of extremist ideologies. By embedding these counternarratives within everyday practices and beliefs, the focus therefore shifted for faith leaders from reactive condemnation statements to proactive prevention in their communities.

---

<sup>465</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir October 1st, 2022.

#### 6.4 Faith versus political ideologies as the key to countering extremism

The focus on faith practice over political affiliation or supporting violence was another major theme repeated by participants. Imam Mohammed recognised that extremist ideology could be disconnected from faith or attachment to local community belonging with his community having ways of preventing this:

But then when you bring them in, you remind them of their duties to God, of service to mankind and prayer. Prayer is the biggest tool for Muslims to counter any bad stuff. What you call extremism. That's our message. Prayer, you know is the best. So like sometimes I forget who I'm talking to, but prayer is a shield that protects you. So that's why we pray five times a day and we always say to people - focus on your prayers because the stronger your shield is, the better protected you are. So focus on the quality of your prayer. Make sure you know what you're saying. Make sure you are humble in your prayers when you stand, so these are some of the things that we do as a community. So those act as a sort of internal prevention of extremism.<sup>466</sup>

Mohammed focussed on the practice of faith as the nexus through which attendees from all walks of life in his mosque could be prevented from extremism. This was based on 'integration' and proving Muslims were 'loyal British citizens,' who lived 'Islam as a way of life.'<sup>467</sup> This included practical counternarratives such as the UK Ahmadi's campaign 'United Against Extremism' that promoted peace and solidarity with all communities, aiming to break down barriers and foster common bonds through dialogue and a simple message of 'love for all, hatred for none.'<sup>468</sup> Throughout his interview, Imam Mohammed communicated a strong sense of belonging and civic duty and formation of a British Muslim identity, that he believed was the key counter to any form of attraction to committing violent terrorist acts in the UK.

---

<sup>466</sup> Interview with Imam Mohammed, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>467</sup> Interview with Imam Mohammed, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>468</sup> Interview with Imam Mohammed, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The Ahmadi UK community promoted the campaign, entitled United Against Extremism, with extensive marketing and local events across the whole of the UK from 2019 onwards.

At the beginning of the interview, Assad expressed an ardent desire to share his perspectives on how violence could be overcome and how Islam is viewed in Britain, particularly from the standpoint of someone who had settled in the UK. Assad had an acute awareness of the media contribution to views on Islam and had a background in supporting media campaigns that focussed on 'spiritual matters.' Assad stated that when he first came to the UK he had attended mosques in London where he had directly heard groups of men gathering who had verbally expressed views that supported violence as a means of opposing 'Western Kufr' life and that he wanted to record his opposition to this by being interviewed.<sup>469</sup> When asked if this was recent, he told me this was in the last ten or so years and was related to people who had been sympathisers of groups who had advocated an 'Islamic state.'<sup>470</sup> This statement felt like he was aware of surveillance and wanted it to be known that Islamic state supporters were 'Other' in which he had no part. This tendency to separate supporters of extremist violent groups from what was considered to be mainstream Islam was another key theme for all participants. For Assad, the idea of an 'Islamic state' was born out of modernist political thinking that he believed was a response to Western paradigms of thought and power:

All these ideas about an Islamic state controlling others is really coming out of pride and ego. So if you think about it that's what you should really handle day by day. But if you only think about what really matters, it is the call to worship and that's it. I'm sure you understand that from a psychological point of view what you think about is what you worship. So simply put the only thing that matters is to know God.<sup>471</sup>

Assad stated that the attachment to the idea of an Islamic state or Caliphate was also derived from a response to colonial attacks by Western states:

That's one of the symptoms of the modern world that we live in. Since maybe the eighteenth century. There's also a Muslim movement that managed to convince people

---

<sup>469</sup> Interview with Assad, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022

<sup>470</sup> Interview with Assad, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022

<sup>471</sup> Interview with Assad, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

that they have to think of politics, and a big problem that wasn't there. Politics has to be involved in everything, and we've been forced into that. Unfortunately, we know we have to think of politics, but actually it's not that important. But unfortunately that's the case and hence the thinking of religion as a state. That's where it came from. Fighting the modern Western, approach and governments, or so they claim. But then they are adopting the same regime that they are fighting.<sup>472</sup>

He went on to liken political debates and pursuing political ends to an 'illusion because it is not real or spiritual' and thus needed to be countered with a more 'mystical sense' of faith:

Once you know what is real, you just hold them to it. And that's all it is. That's what matters. The relative stuff you don't really know, you would find there is no interest in it anymore because it doesn't even matter because all that matters is for you to know God.<sup>473</sup>

To some extent this approach to countering extremism and violence is based on focussing on faith matters and not being drawn into what Assad considered to be temporal political views that subverted faith. Assad argued that many extremists came from the 'conversion experience' and struggled in the cultural transition to try to embrace a new Muslim faith and community.<sup>474</sup> The possibility of being influenced by violent or extremist thinking could be argued to be more challenging for converts who are forming their Islamic identity. I will be coming back to the theme of conversion in Chapter Seven. However, Assad's view could also be interpreted as perceiving converts as a primary group of people vulnerable to becoming terrorists. Each convert follows a personal path towards Islam and only has religious interest and the cultural background of origin in common with the others. Although there is no definitive research evidence to confirm the majority of converts will never be attracted to violent ideologies or be involved in terrorist acts, nevertheless, the area Assad was trying to focus on here was the need for proper spiritual

---

<sup>472</sup> Interview with Assad, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>473</sup> Interview with Assad, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>474</sup> Interview with Assad, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

formation to build a strong Islamic identity that can resist violent ideologies. A new narrative needs to be created in which faith identity was not associated in any way with violence which is sometimes misinterpreted divisively, leading to Islamophobic responses.

Assad was reflective of the Ismaili communities in the UK and in further abroad who have been considered as heretical and therefore have also experienced being persecuted for their faith by other Muslims. Assad let me know he had completed education with an Ismaili community in London that delivered postgraduate research in Islamic studies and social sciences at the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) and Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (ISMC).<sup>475</sup> He said that 'culture' in Ismaili discourse on religion functioned to challenge what it terms fundamentalist understandings of Islam. As Ismailis are seen as a Shia sect that diverges from the doctrines and practices of orthodox Sunni Islam there are numerous stories of sectarian persecution of Ismaili Muslims in South Asia and the UK.<sup>476</sup> Ismailis see Islamic fundamentalism as a potential threat to their existence and therefore attempt to address this in their discourse. One of the ways Ismailis do this is to redefine and reinterpret Islam in cultural terms to shift focus away from notions of religious correctness in doctrine and practice and place importance on what they term cultural diversity and pluralism. This shift from Islam as theology, law, and rituals, to Islam as culture and civilization can be seen clearly in the programmes offered by the IIS and the ISMC. For example, the prospectus for the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities of the IIS says that the programme situates theology, law and mysticism along with literature, art and architecture within the framework of a 'cultural history' of Muslim societies.<sup>477</sup> This means that 'religious

---

<sup>475</sup> The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) in London was established in 1977. It is as an academic institution of higher education created by the Aga Khan IV and is dedicated to the study of Islam, with a particular focus on its Ismaili and broader Shia traditions. It runs courses on the Islamic culture history across different periods.

<sup>476</sup> There have been isolated incidents of Ismailis being attacked in the UK but numerous incidents in Pakistan. The Jundallah group killed a total of 40 Ismaili Shia Muslims in Karachi in sectarian violence in 2015. Amnesty International has observed this as highlighting the threat of violence and focussed on the failure of the Pakistan state to prosecute the perpetrators and to protect religious minorities. 'While today's attack is alarming, it is the product of an equally alarming climate of impunity. We urge the Pakistani authorities to bring to justice the perpetrators of violence committed in the name of religion in this and many previous cases, in fair trials and without recourse to the death penalty. Official complacency will only encourage further attacks.' This is taken from an Amnesty International article, 'Pakistan: Attack on Ismaili Shi'a Muslims in Karachi is a product of a climate of impunity.' *Amnesty News*, May 13th, 2015. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/05/pakistan-attack-on-ismaili-shia-muslims-in-karachi-is-product-of-climate-of-impunity/>. Accessed May 1st, 2022.

<sup>477</sup> The Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities, Institute of Ismaili Studies. <https://www.iis.ac.uk/study/graduate-studies/>. Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

developments' will be seen as part of the development of thought and culture in Muslim societies. The programme, again according to its prospectus, attempts to 'reframe doctrinal and theological differences within Islam' as differences in cultural and historical term and promotes diversity within Islam.<sup>478</sup> For Assad teaching the diversity of Islam was the key message to opposing extremism and violence combined with a broader horizon of culture. The experience of studying at the Institute of Ismaili Studies and being from a persecuted minority within Islam influenced Assad's approach during this interview and was something he spoke about with passion. He presented a vision of Ismailis in the UK as leaders of inclusion and tolerance whilst at the same time remaining intolerant of misinterpretation of Islam or converts who he believed were major contributors to extremism. This theme of open inclusion and being able to engage more broadly on faith reasoning and the diversity of Islamic traditions was emphasised by a number of faith leaders interviewed. It was seen a critical narrative tool to oppose divisive ideologies that sought to impose the 'Salafi' concept of purity with Islamic practice, and this is examined further in the next section.

## **6.5 Religious formation and teaching**

As detailed in previous chapters there is extensive opposition from different strands of Islamic tradition within the UK to ideologically extremist groups such as Daesh. The justifications of violence using faith narratives concepts like Jihad, Sharia law, Hadiths, Quranic text and the establishment of a Caliphate have received regular condemnation from numerous UK based religious leaders, as I have shown. The dominant theme emerging from the majority of interviews conducted for this thesis was the emphasis on religious teachings as a critical counternarrative to violent ideologies and the importance of authentic religious instruction in countering the stereotypes and misinterpretations that fuel not only extremism, but also Islamophobic narratives. Faith literacy, particularly amongst young people, and how this took place was an area frequently referenced. The findings of this thesis reflect sociologist Margaretha Van Es' argument that contemporary European researchers need to move away from viewing Muslims

---

<sup>478</sup> Ibid, <https://www.iis.ac.uk/study/graduate-studies/>.

through a binary lens of 'moderate' versus 'radical.'<sup>479</sup> Instead, they should focus on understanding the worldviews of the vast majority who do not radicalise, rather than concentrating on the 'small minority' who do.<sup>480</sup> Through qualitative interviews Van Es illustrates how Norwegian Muslims in Oslo wanted to make explicit statements against violence committed in the name of Islam, as well as demonstrate 'multiple critiques' against i) terrorism ii) against stereotypical representations of Muslims and Islam, and iii) against the 'moderate/radical' dichotomy.<sup>481</sup> The interviews recorded in this thesis add to this research field by presenting a more nuanced view of Muslims rejection of extremism in the UK, as well as the corresponding pressure on faith leaders and the Muslim communities they represent to prove that they are loyal citizens. I am therefore, seeking to avoid terms such as 'moderate' or 'radical' forms of UK Islamic practice to focus on faith leader counternarratives.

Ahmad was Imam of a mosque in the Cambridge area and visiting lecturer at an Islamic college. Ahmad was conscious of being a survivor of the Balkan wars in the 1990s and thankful for his training across the world. This included time on Saudi Arabia and the far East, as well as in Bosnia, and he was fluent in Arabic and English. Unlike some of the interviewees for this thesis Ahmad made it known he was happy to speak, and although limited with time due to a busy life with religious and family commitments as an Imam, he answered all questions and appeared relaxed. He also hosted me as a guest at his mosque in a later visit. Ahmad said he had encountered 'extremists' in different contexts, including prisons and in social circles at various mosques. When asked about what counternarratives he had offered to those attracted to ideologically extremist narratives Ahmad answered by saying this was intrinsically connected to how faith was taught:

So, you asked me what's the best method, the one that I personally believe in, and I promote. I will chat to people as a mentor, but the best teacher is God. God really blessed me to have one hundred plus teachers who taught me Islam from all over the world. I'm telling you some of them were extremist, some medium mild you know some less

---

<sup>479</sup> Van Es, Margaretha A., 'Norwegian Muslims denouncing terrorism: beyond 'moderate' versus radical?' In *Religion*, 2021-04, Vol.51 (2), pp.169-189.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid p169.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid, pp169-170

moderate extreme, some also not extreme at all, some really tolerant and spiritual. So I had this, you know, like big spectrum of teachers that passed on to me, all those different views. So I could choose for myself what I think is the best and I believe is the best. So I firmly believe in spirituality because it's all about going back to yourself. Isn't it? So the moment you know how to control your lower whims, desires like your lowest self you can obtain spiritual fulfillment. So a Muslim that doesn't appreciate diversity or differences of opinions within our school of thoughts, like they don't believe they are four different Sunni schools of thought that are equally valid. That's a problem. They are single minded but if they are not open minded to accept Shias also as Muslims. There's the reform you have to do and that's how you begin. How can you become a preacher and a teacher when inside you are empty emotionally, mentally and also not learn it because you have the information with you, but you don't know how to digest the information? You don't also know how to certify. You don't know how to arrange it. Like I said, you are looking for a conflict, conflicting evidence to basically meet your own view. Your own purpose. You are not after the whole picture, isn't it? Why, because you're not objective. You are very subjective and you are single minded. So that is the crux of it, and you know individual reform then family. Once your own family is OK, you're OK with your wife and kids and you are not aggressive to them only then do you have the right to sort somebody else's garden out because you first sort out your own garden back and front you know front and back.<sup>482</sup>

An important part of this approach to countering extremism Ahmad espoused was the ability to be tolerant and open to different ways of Islam, as well as awareness of individual accountability when being instructed in faith. Ahmad expressed the view that all Islamic community traditions in the UK need to form individuals who have strong foundations in faith knowledge in order to be resilient when countering extremism. Ahmad was also attempting to show how Islam is a complex, diverse faith and that being less attached to the concepts of a pure 'Salafi form' of Islam and open to different approaches and understanding of how faith is taught is vital to faith

---

<sup>482</sup> Interview with Imam Ahmad, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

development and levels of tolerance.<sup>483</sup> Therefore, Islam was not monolithic and more nuanced and this contradicted and disarmed any extremist's absolutist thought practice. In this faith context, religious teaching can enhance an individual's ability to tolerate ambiguities without resorting to dichotomous worldviews that may lead to conflict or isolation from those with divergent life choices in contemporary pluralistic society within the UK.

Ahmad discussed people who had not had theological training misusing Quran and Hadith quotes to serve their own purpose without having a real handle on the content. He cited the fact that those who had a good foundation in spiritual reading and texts and read these were like those who had read the 'proper cannon' of English Literature and thus had a better command of the language and vocabulary to explain themselves and were as 'strong as a rock' when challenged.<sup>484</sup> Change and 'reform' had to be individual and based on an honest spiritual accountability that was strong enough in knowledge of Islam to treat diverse opinions and worldviews intelligently. Ahmad proposed that this was not only an important life skill but also something that could be taught to individuals in their formation and when training to be Imams in the UK. Many men Ahmad had met in prison were typical of the overall prison population in experiencing mental health challenges and although very articulate were often 'self-led' and were therefore often 'deceived by their own ego.' Ahmad met these men on a one-to-one basis to form faith communication pathways and 'build friendship':

Friendships, you know, like being in the good circles, you know, good companionship is equally important. So, you don't marginalise yourself, don't go in a virtual reality like online and this and that. So you know they will not be easily manipulated, but at the same time, when a difficulty arises, maybe they'll be more equipped to deal with it. So this is what I think. You know, the role of a mosque is a religious community to offer that chair.<sup>485</sup>

---

<sup>483</sup> Interview with Imam Ahmad, October 28th, 2022.

<sup>484</sup> Interview with Imam Ahmad, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>485</sup> Interview with Imam Ahmad, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Here the idea of being in good company and not isolated to overcome poor mental health was emphasised as a way of supporting all he encountered. As a guide to students Ahmad believed that key religious instruction from leaders gives young people the ‘strength of character’ as Muslims to withstand ‘extremism’ and be able to stand up when moving away from the mosque community or in the world of work:

When you equip the young child with the right information from a very young age, then they develop their immunity to extremism or wrong teaching. Also to resist some extreme ideologies or views that are online. There'll be probably gone from our churches and mosques, and they won't be able to attend the evening classes anymore, so that is the period when you have to basically instill the creed. This is the most important way of countering extremism or attraction to violent ideologies.<sup>486</sup>

As previously noted, this faith instruction was repetitive theme across the whole interview with Imam Ahmad and others. For him it was the foundation to preventing attachment to violent ideologies that may lead individuals to joining terrorist organisations.

## **6.6 Community, social responsibility and building a personal relationship with the Prophet Muhammad**

A key theme that was brought up by several interviewees was the need for social praxis, and inclusive civic responsibility as an important practical act to counter extremism or violent narratives. The following Quranic verse was paraphrased and quoted by three interviewees as a their primary counternarrative to violence and Islam as a way of peace:

We ordained for the Children of Israel that whoever takes a life—unless as a punishment for murder or mischief in the land—it will be as if they killed all of humanity; and whoever saves a life, it will be as if they saved all of humanity.<sup>487</sup>

---

<sup>486</sup> Interview with Imam Ahmad, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>487</sup> Quran.com online. Surah 5:32. <https://quran.com/al-maidah/32>. Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2023.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the term Jihad has been debated within different traditions of Islam and can be applied to different aspects of life. It would be true that the rules regarding use of violence in Islam in the context of a justified war is that warfare is subject to a set of ethical guidelines that include a prohibition on the killing of civilians. However, quoting sacred text was also accompanied with the narrative of Islam being a religion that supported all communities and called people to consciousness through charitable acts and valuing life above all.

Kardi, an Imam from a mosque in Leeds had taken an active part in inter faith dialogue in various forums and running faith teaching groups for young people. As a faith leader Kardi expressed strong views on how the portrayal of Muslims as supporters or perpetrators of violence has dominated public perception since 9/11. He believed this has often led to Muslim communities being 'securitised' and becoming generic targets of Islamophobic hate attacks after terrorist incidents.<sup>488</sup> As a former advisor to the UK Government on faith matters and Prevent policy, he believed that the solutions to a more cohesive society in which violence was ended lay principally within the Muslim faith community. In this approach the development of counternarratives was presented as the responsibility of the UK Muslim community and not the state. He let me know that he wanted his confidentiality respected and did not want to 'appear on the internet' as he wanted to remain protected from being misquoted or used in media sources, over which he had no control. He said many had approached him for interviews and he was 'wary but happy' to speak to me as my research was focusing on faith to counter extremism and could be 'a good thing' to combat 'Islamophobia' and 'misrepresentations of Islam' in the UK.<sup>489</sup> Therefore the dynamic set here was one of using the interview to promote his own views and be in control. By setting the scene of it was clear that wanted to engage on his terms and would self-censor if needed as a form of self-protection. It took extensive pre-interview clarification conversations to satisfy Kardi that he would not be at risk of indirectly being reported to Prevent as he let me know he had to be 'careful.' Kardi had held prominent positions in his community and very much held the power in negotiations to set the conditions of what he would speak about during the

---

<sup>488</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>489</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

interview. He primarily supported the practice of social responsibility of Muslim communities in the UK and was concerned with the backlash against Muslims:

Any solution to the problem of extremism has to come from the community. The Muslim community has suffered more at the hands of these extremists than anyone else. It is not in our interests at all to condone what they are saying, it brings our faith into disrepute, it poisons our young people and it fuels anti-Muslim sentiment.<sup>490</sup>

For Kardi Islamic societal obligations were crucial, as were obligations to wider British society:

If I was to summarize the faith Islam, it's about creating a balance between obligations towards God and obligation towards human beings and so the rights and responsibilities towards human beings are of extreme importance and as a result anyone that breaches those obligations is actually guilty in the sight of God.<sup>491</sup>

And again:

That's one aspect in terms of why, as a faith leader, you want people to know how to follow the faith and understand the true meaning of faith. Secondly, I think every time a crime is committed due to radicalisation it increases Islamophobia. And so it's in our interest in a way to ensure that crimes are not committed, that hateful or violent extremism does not take place or radicalisation does not take place. It's a vicious circle and it affects the whole Muslim community. It firstly taints the faith. Secondly, it actually harms individuals because of the rise in Islamophobia. If you consider the Muslim faith community is still a minority in Britain and no parent would want their children to be lost to radicalisation that ultimately may take their lives or the lives of others.<sup>492</sup>

---

<sup>490</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>491</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>492</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Therefore, for Kardi counternarratives to extremism and terrorist acts of violence were inherently tied up with opposing Islamophobic tropes. The counternarrative Kardi was making strived to reclaim the purity of Islam and form a British Muslim identity that could withstand Islamophobic or racialised discourses and securitisation narratives imposed by Prevent policy.<sup>493</sup> He had strong sense of community responsibility and commitment to the idea that the best counternarrative to extremist or violence ideologies were enshrined within Muslims living according to Islamic values. I will be coming back to this in the findings presented in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Imam Adem served as the Imam of a mosque primarily established for the Turkish community, though it also welcomed people from diverse backgrounds, with around twelve hundred attendees each week. He had connections to Kurdish community and the Sheikh Nazım al-Qubrusi associated mosques in Peckham and Tottenham and was part of the Rumi Mosque group who had been created by the Anatolian Muslim Society. This background and performative role in this mosque network as an Imam had powerful influence on conditioning his counternarrative approach. He was heavily involved in youth work and mentoring people to learn about their faith as part of a network, as well as weekly hospitality events open to all that included breakfasts and dinners. He was accompanied by Imam Omar, a trainee Imam, so I therefore interviewed both. He wanted me to know he had ‘nothing to hide’ and would talk openly about ‘safeguarding’ sessions he runs at the mosque and the principles the mosque runs on love, charity and care.’<sup>494</sup> Imam Adem and Omar spoke about Prevent as ‘helpers’ and ‘protectors’ of the community from violence and let me know they had been in regular contact with the police in the locality, which included police being invited as frequent visitors to mosque events and dinners. Imam Adem let

---

<sup>493</sup> Meer, Naser, Modood, Tariq. ‘Islamophobia as the racialisation of Muslims.’ In *The Routledge Handbook of Islamophobia*, Meer, Naser, Modood, Tariq (Editors) (2019). London: Routledge.

<sup>494</sup> This mosque is also part of the Hizmet group that have been branded as terrorist by the Turkish government in May 2016 after the coup attempt on President Erdoğan's regime. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/turkey-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-gulenist-movement-turkey-february-2022-accessible-version#Gulenist-movement-declared>. The Gülenist movement is a term used to describe a worldwide cultural and educational initiative that is rooted in the values of Islam and inspired by Mr Fethullah Gülen. It is not a political party, neither is it a religion. The Gülenist movement is believed to have a large number of sympathisers in Turkey; some estimate the number to be in the millions.

me know his mosque-valued diversity and the inherent value of every form of life in London and that he wanted to help all people he met. Paraphrasing the Quranic verse 5:32 ‘the unjust killing of one person is like the killing of all humankind’ he argued, and that on this basis it was impossible for any Muslim to support violence against another human being and he used this verse to speak to young people when countering extremism in his work in the community.<sup>495</sup> This counternarrative was addressed to the community of people he led but also one he wanted to share more widely with all people in his local area. Adem said ‘a believer must always follow the concept of Sirat al-mustaqim’ (the middle way), avoiding harmful extremity at every level of life including thought, feeling and even in the practice of religion.<sup>496</sup> In this context killing is a grave injustice not just against the person killed and their loved ones, but also against the entire universe to which their existence gives meaning. Adem said the Prophet ‘admonished those who were too extreme in their fasting and praying’ to the point of neglecting their homes and families.<sup>497</sup> The practice of faith of this type is one from whom others are safe with respect to what this person says and does. This narrative used by Adem and Omar was used as a powerful faith instruction tool used to counter what they both believed to be the ‘misinterpretation’ of Islamic teaching.<sup>498</sup>

The best counternarrative for Adem was not in ‘direct head on battles’ and arguments but faith leaders advocating defeating violent extremism ideology by ‘daily practice of core Islamic teachings’ that underpin its values and actively negates violent extremist ideology.<sup>499</sup> Thus, a mind-set and behaviour come out of this that promoted positive outcomes and community inclusion without any direct reference to extremism or countering violence. Adem gave the example of offering young people opportunities to play football and giving new migrant communities in the area help and assistance with immigration procedures to become British citizens:

---

<sup>495</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>496</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>497</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>498</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>499</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

You know, we address the challenge of violent ideologies with confidence and on how we can we reconcile this dilemma. We want to put our young people at the heart of this Community to be British Muslims, and proud British Muslims. This is the sense of identity and sense of belonging we try to give our children.<sup>500</sup>

For Adem the key to finding a strong British Islamic identity comes from ‘living the call to faith’ through action and concerted efforts to integrate within British society. This practice he promoted was derived from the teaching of the key Hizmet Islamic scholar, Fethullah Gülen, whose books counter violent extremism and terrorism.<sup>501</sup> Imam Adem quoted Gülen condemning these acts as not consistent and symptomatic of the dichotomous clash of ‘dar al-harb and dar al-Islam’ (the house of war and the house of Islam).<sup>502</sup> The Rumi mosques Adem and Omar were part of adhered to Hizmet’s core teachings and values. Adem let me know that this teaching and values were diametrically opposed to extremist ideologies associated with ‘terrorist acts even though Hizmet has been identified as terrorist organisation by the Turkish government after the failed coup.’<sup>503</sup>

Adem talked in detail about playing an active part in the London-based Dialogue Society and recommended a book entitled *Dialogue in Islam: Qur’an, Sunnah, History* that was in a question-and-answer format to make the theological case for dialogue in Islam.<sup>504</sup> He used this as the foundation of his own teaching to promote the message that Islam necessitates dialogue and this empowered Muslims in his area to have knowledge to fight against exclusivist interpretations of

---

<sup>500</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>501</sup> Ozcan Keles and Ismail Mesut Sezgin (2015), *A Hizmet Approach to rooting out Violent Radicalisation* London: Hizmet Publications, pp15-45. Muhammed Fethullah Gülen (born 27 April 1941) is a Turkish Islamic scholar, preacher, and a one-time opinion leader, as de facto leader of the Gülen movement that Hizmet members in London follow. Gülen is an activist–dissident developing Hizmet theological perspective that embraces democratic modernity. Gülen was a local state Imam from 1959 to 1981 and he was a citizen of Turkey until his 2017 denaturalization by the government. Over the years, Gülen became a centrist political figure in Turkey prior to his being there as a fugitive. Since 1999, Gülen has lived in self-exile in the United States.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid, p25.

<sup>503</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Omar was referencing the coup attempt of May 2016 in Turkey in which the government blamed Hizmet members and classified the group as terrorist under the name of Fethullahist Terrorist Organization - even though Hizmet leadership had condemned the coup.

<sup>504</sup> Ahmet Kurucan and Mustafa Kasım Erol (2011) *Dialogue in Islam Qur’an - Sunnah- History*. London: The Dialogue Society.

Islam. The most important part of preventing attraction to violent ideology for both Adem and Omar was consistent dialogue sessions and meetings with the faithful to discuss theological issues. A *Sohbet* (conversation) took place weekly to discuss faith, religion, society and local Hizmet community projects:

But then what we currently do, Thomas, we are trying to keep our youngsters busy with actions or programmes. We do have a very strong youth department in the mosque and we do work with mental wise UK in dealing with young people. What we do is have a weekly and monthly gathering specifically for them. You know, it can be a burger party, it can be a kebab party. It can be, you know, something they feel to have confidence to touch on these controversial issues. What Islam is and we try to give them these, you know, confidence that they are Muslims. If they are Turkish, whatever, we are all British. A part of this lovely country.<sup>505</sup>

The main function of these gatherings was to inform belief with ‘right teaching,’ develop social responsibility and promote awareness towards activism. Out of these *Sohbets*, Adem and Omar ran smaller informal groups allowed to emerge between people who were willing to further commit themselves to discuss and contribute to Hizmet-related projects called *Istishare* (consultation or deliberation). The attention to community, accountability and the ‘praxis of faith’ in the lived experience was key for Adem and Omar, as well as working closely with the police and social services to support wherever needed. Both Adem and Omar fully supported Prevent and were committed to civic duties in their local area. Adem and Omar’s advocacy of Prevent services did not reflect the questioning and distrust of the majority of Imams interviewed. It could also be argued that this fell into the possible category of ‘response bias’s’ in which they portrayed their community relations in a consistently favourable light and made statements that were agreeable to the thesis questions asked.<sup>506</sup> However, what also came clearly out of this interview was a genuine commitment of Hizmet faith leaders, like Adem and

---

<sup>505</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>506</sup> Presser, Stanley; Stinson, Linda (1998). ‘Data Collection Mode and Social Desirability Bias in Self-Reported Religious Attendance.’ In the *American Sociological Review*. 63 (1), p141.

Omar, to community relations and embracing British life. The latter factor is also strong in Hizmet as their followers have increasingly taken refuge in other parts of Europe (such as the UK and Germany) due to being classified as a terrorist movement by the current Turkish government.<sup>507</sup>

### **6.7 The power of local culture versus the absolutist juggernaut**

Hasnain was a scholar and Quranic teacher in a Masjid in the Luton area. His main employment was working in prisons as a Chaplain but stated he would be talking from the perspective of Mosque community member, as he was limited in regard to talking about Prevent due to government restrictions. He let me know he was of Pakistani descent and 'proud to be of Punjabi Barelvi' background.<sup>508</sup> He started the interview by letting me know he had a big profile and gave regular public talks and did not want our meeting to be put in the public domain without his prior permission. Hasnain said he took an active part in the formation of young Muslims and enjoyed theological debate and avoided politics of any kind in the content of faith, including discussions about Prevent. During the interview, he blamed the 'radicalisation' of young Muslims and Daesh sympathisers on the political ideologies of historical 'Salafist groups' in the UK, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun, which were prominent from the 1990s through the early 2000s. He argued that groups like Al-Muhajiroun and Hizb ut-Tahrir had started a 'politicised form of Islam in England' that still resonated with different individuals in new groups, such as Daesh.<sup>509</sup> He was clear that extremists 'lacked knowledge of the din' (religion) and had misinterpreted and misquoted the Quran and Hadith to mislead and 'brainwash' younger people.<sup>510</sup> He mentioned that he grew up in mosques witnessing conflicts with the traditional Barelvi traditions of his father. He suggested that this conflict contributed to the future rise of violent ideologies and

---

<sup>507</sup> Yavuz, Hakan. M and Bayram Balci (2018). *Turkey's July 15th Coup: What Happened and Why*. Utah Series in Middle East Studies. University of Utah Press, p33.

<sup>508</sup> The Barelvi movement encompasses a variety of Sufi orders, including the Chistis, Qadiris, Soharwardis and Naqshbandis. They consider themselves to be the continuation of Sunni Islam before the rise of Salafism and Deobandi Movement. The movement drew inspiration from the Sunni Sufi doctrines of Shah Abdur Rahim (1644-1719) founder of Madrasah-i Rahimiyah and father of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, Shah Abdul Aziz Muhaddith Dehlavi (1746 –1824) and Fazl-e-Haq Khairabadi (1796–1861) founder of the Khairabad School. It emphasises personal devotion to God and the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, adherence to Sharia, and Sufi practices such as veneration of saints.

<sup>509</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

<sup>510</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

international membership in groups like Daesh. Former members of similar UK-based groups had travelled to Daesh territory to fulfil a mission to live under Islamic rule. Hasnain proposed that the attraction to extremism was exacerbated by global events, citing examples such as the invasion of Iraq by Western forces and Salafist anger over U.S. involvement in Saudi Arabia as key causes of terrorist acts in mainland Europe over the past twenty years.<sup>511</sup>

The Salafist and Wahhabi intolerance of all of other forms of Islam, combined with a desire to impose a pure form of Islam devoid of cultural elements was for Hasnain the greatest cause of extremism he believed should be combatted as it took a literal view from the Quran and Sunnah:

You know, these kinds of characters and you find that all extremist, terrorist ideas. You know, first you become a conservative and then you become an extremist and then you become a radical person and then you become a terrorist. So there are stages of how people develop into this. I mean I have experienced people that have become extremists. They have concerns. So the biggest counter extremist strategy in every Sufi mosque around the country is the Friday sermon. They are normal, you know, they happen every week, guaranteed. So this is against the Wahhabi influenced leaders who have been trained in Saudi Arabia. Sufis celebrate Molly (the Prophet's birthday) and the Saints and shrines, which is totally contrary to Wahhabism. This is contrary to the practice a celebration for Wahhabis, so if there's anyone that's stopping extremism and radicalism in the community, the vulnerable, for example, it is the Barelvi Sufis that are continuously anti-extremist.<sup>512</sup>

To counter violent ideology and support young people he had met at Mosque and in prison Hasnain educated on an individual basis about Sufi Pirs (saints) back in Pakistan and the importance of celebrating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday with people he met as a chaplain in prison; particularly, those who had supported violence. This was based on helping people, mostly of Pakistani descent from similar cultural and social contexts, rebuild community bonds

---

<sup>511</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

<sup>512</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

of faith back with their families 'biradari' network and a deeper personal relationship with God in faith. He believed the tolerant pluralistic flexible nature of Sufi Islam was rooted in community and humanity and was therefore the best way to counter extremism. This attachment acts as a barrier to extremist expressions of Islam and is termed by Fiore Geelhoed and Richard Staring in their study of converts and Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands as the 'institutionalisation of Islam.'<sup>513</sup> This strong sense of belonging and deep connection to the community context, as exemplified by Hasnain and other Imams interviewed, can similarly be argued to offer a positive source of identity. It seemingly functions as a protective buffer to radicalisation by neutralising the effects of exclusion or Islamophobia, which might otherwise lead individuals to be drawn to extremist ideologies.<sup>514</sup>

This counter to extremism forwarded by Hasnain reflected the approach of Berelvi communities in Pakistan, supported by the then President, General Musharraf, back in 2004. It took the measure of promoting the institutionalisation of Islam followed by the Barelvi school of thought, to prevent the growth of extremist Taliban support. Hasnain also spoke more widely outside of the UK context about the role of religious institutions to counter the influence of Wahhabi and Deobandi schools of thought, which were suspecting of sowing the seeds of extremism in Pakistani society.<sup>515</sup> However, what Hasnain did not acknowledge was other contradictory consequences that had arisen because of this Barelvi dominance. The promotion of Barelvi forms of Islam to counter rising extremism and terrorism in Pakistan has been argued to have deepened the sectarian divide, as it failed to acknowledge the inherent fault lines within the Barelvi school of thought, which has also inclined some of its followers toward political extremism and the killing of rivals over accusations of blasphemy.<sup>516</sup> This intolerance has also travelled to the UK, and there are examples, such as Tanveer Qadri (a Barelvi) who killed a member of the Ahmadi community

---

<sup>513</sup> Geelhoed, Fiore and Staring, Richard, 'What Do Overrepresented and Underrepresented Groups Tell Us About Risks for Involvement in Islamist Extremism?' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 2023-03, Vol. 3, pp.1-19.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid, p10. Geelhoed and Staring call this a 'barrier to radicalisation.'

<sup>515</sup> Suleman, Muhammad. 'Institutionalization of Sufi Islam after 9/11 and the Rise of Barelvi Extremism in Pakistan.' In *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 10, No. 2 February 2018, pp. 6-10.

<sup>516</sup> Behuria, Ashok K. 'Sects Within Sect: The Case of Deobandi-Barelvi Encounter in Pakistan.' In *Journal of Strategic Analysis*, 2008-02, Vol.32 (1), p.57-80.

over alleged blasphemy in Glasgow in 2017.<sup>517</sup> In the context of this thesis the story Hasnain told demonstrates the role played by religious institutions and faith leaders in religious socialisation in combatting extremism in the UK and the importance of cultural and ethnic identity in informing faith.<sup>518</sup> The Mawlid celebration of the Prophet's birthday was a point Hasnain came back to a few times during the interview.<sup>519</sup>

It's a counternarrative to terrorism. So, Mawlid – also called Molly - if you take as a touchstone, let's say, of figuring out extremism. So once, once upon a time, there was this person who was in danger of being an extremist. I felt that he was hanging out with the wrong people, and he was buying into that, and he was a convert and I got to him to the side, and I started teaching him the definition of Mawlid and then I gave him a book and he studied it two to three days and he I totally pulled him away from that crowd. So, what I'm trying to say that it doesn't necessarily have to be explicitly anti-extremist agenda.<sup>520</sup>

The Mawlid celebration for Hasnain was joyous and also fun and helped to counter isolation and poor mental health by including people by sharing food, friendship and love of the Prophet Muhammad. In Pakistan and the UK Eid Mawlid Al-Nabi, the birthday of Mohammad is celebrated in a carnival manner with large street processions and homes or mosques are decorated.<sup>521</sup> At these events Hasnain said charity food was distributed, and stories about the life of Muhammad narrated with recitation of poetry by children and adults alike. For Hasnain events such as Mawlid were the main point of cultural difference with Wahhabism, Salafist, and Deobandi schools:

---

<sup>517</sup> Iqbal, Sajid and Calum McKay. 'Asad Shah Murder: Killer Tanveer Ahmed Releases Prison Message,' *BBC News Online*, January 31, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-38815366>. Accessed May 3, 2023.

<sup>518</sup> Klingenberg, Maria and Sofia Sjö. 'Theorizing religious socialization: a critical assessment.' In *Religion* 49, Number 2, 2019. Routledge Journal Publication, pp163-178.

<sup>519</sup> Mawlid, Mawlid an-Nabi ash-Sharif or Eid Milad un Nabi (Arabic: المولد النبوي, romanised: mawlid an-nabawī, lit. 'Birth of the Prophet', sometimes simply called in colloquial Arabic مولد, mawlid, mevlid, mevlit, mulud, among other vernacular pronunciations; sometimes ميلاد, mīlād) is the observance of the birthday of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>520</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3rd, 2022.

<sup>521</sup> Ishtiaq, Muhammad. 'PM urges nation to celebrate Mawlid Al-Nabi in 'unprecedented manner' this year.' In *Arab News* 17 October 202. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1949486/amp>. Accessed March 23, 2023.

Prior to that, it was all traditional arguments with this mosque in this corner and other mosques in another area. As Sufis and Sunnis we celebrate the Mawlid and they don't. So it was all about this fight basically with Salafis. So, the main difference we grew up with was that.<sup>522</sup>

Hasnain believed that this issue was also rooted in geography and that the politics of the Wahhabi school of thought, emerging from the polemical politics of Arab nations, enforced a literal interpretation of the Hadith and Quran. This interpretation bypassed the four main Sunni schools of thought—Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali—which had dominated early Islamic formation from the ninth and tenth centuries. By the twelfth century, nearly all jurists had aligned themselves with these traditional schools.<sup>523</sup> He said this enabled Daesh followers to kill fellow Muslims on the basis they were not considered to be true Muslims and were Kufr (infidels). To present this he gave the example of the Jordanian fighter pilot who was burnt alive by Daesh members and the media reports of the killings that showed the murderers announcing their victims were not 'true Muslims.'<sup>524</sup> After reflecting on violent terrorist acts, Hasnain also noted that these fuelled prejudiced views that framed Islam as a religion of aggression within mainstream British society. He emphasised that the vast majority of Sunni, Shia, and Sufi Muslims strongly disassociated themselves from violent terrorist attacks, advocating instead for peace through clear faith-based narratives.<sup>525</sup> The dichotomy exposed here lies between the pursuit of purity of faith devoid of ethnic and cultural attachment and lived cultural expressions of faith, as well as the clear counternarratives against extremist ideologies. Cultural faith expressions

---

<sup>522</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

<sup>523</sup> The Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki and Hanbali schools recognise each other's validity and they have interacted in legal debate over the centuries. Rulings of these schools are followed across the Muslim world without exclusive regional restrictions, but they each came to dominate in different parts of the Islamic world, including North and West Africa Maliki School, the Hanafi School in South and Central Asia, the Shafi'i school in East Africa and Southeast Asia and the Hanbali school in North and Central Arabia.

<sup>524</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

<sup>525</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

opposed by the search for purity of certain Salafi and Wahhabi based teaching was constant debate that several faith leaders came back to in regard to combatting extremist ideologies.

Hasnain argued that lived celebrations of events like Mawlid can enhance appreciation of the humanity and communality of people, thereby countering divisive extremist ideologies. As part of this, he also cited the writings of Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, a Pakistani religious scholar residing in Canada, who founded Minhaj-ul-Quran International, an organization with a presence in over ninety countries worldwide. This organisation has promoted religious moderation, education, and inter-faith dialogue by employing methods of Sufi spirituality. Hasnain showed a book on screen by Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri called *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings*.<sup>526</sup> This book is an Islamic fatwa decree, which demonstrates theologically from the Quran and Sunnah that terrorism and suicide bombings are unjust and evil, and thus un-Islamic. It was published in London and is a direct refutation of the ideology of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban and all extremism. Hasnain said that he shared this book with many people in prison as Sheikh Tahir-ul-Qadri demonstrates that suicide bombings and other forms of terrorism are not just unjust but that perpetrators of acts of violence are outside of Islam. Hasnain, and other individuals quoted in this chapter had diverse ways of communicating their opposition to extremist forms of violence but the same commitment to taking direct action to prevent this taking place.

## 6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided qualitative data and case study analysis from interviews with selected individuals to illustrate the diverse existence of counternarrative resistance to extremist ideologies and the rejection of Islamic groups that misappropriate faith to justify terrorism. Some of the counternarratives revealed were not only based on direct spoken opposition to violence but also the way faith communities expressed their faith. The individuals I interviewed were open about the challenges they faced when confronting extremist ideologies and sought to distance

---

<sup>526</sup> Qadri, Tahir-ul, Muhammad (2011) *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings* Minhaj-ul-Quran International (MQI) UK; 1st edition.

themselves from Islamophobic tropes that politicised Muslims in the UK as 'Other' or as a homogeneous group. This involved attempting to subvert mainstream Islamophobic views that conflated their faith with violent incidents, as well as present voices that countered terrorism committed in the name of Islam. They wanted to change the way non-Muslims in the UK perceived Muslims, seeking to shift the narrative from viewing UK Muslims as a potential threat—often sensationalised in mainstream media coverage following violent incidents—to seeing them as integrated members of British society whose religious identity is equally committed to defeating violent terrorism. This included working with Prevent and the police when needed to ensure the safety of the communities they lived in. The next chapter will continue to explore associated counternarrative themes in greater detail, drawing upon insights from all interviews conducted for this thesis. This analysis will further investigate how these themes emerge across different contexts, the ways in which they challenge extremist ideologies, and their broader implications for counterterrorism strategies and community engagement in the UK.

## Chapter Seven:

### Islamic counternarratives that meet the challenge of violent ideologies in the UK

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents further qualitative case research interviews from the sample of individual faith leaders who participated in this research thesis to examine counternarratives to extremist violent ideologies. What is evidenced in the chapter is faith-based counternarratives from across the spectrum of Islamic tradition that reject violence. Some of the interviewees are with religious leaders, while others involve individuals who directly support faith communities without holding any formal status. Both groups are given equal priority and are not differentiated in this study, thus, supporting the argument that the most powerful counternarratives to violence already exist within the UK Muslim community.<sup>527</sup> Viewing these issues through a critical lens my aim is to challenge paradigms of thought around the origins of extremist Islamic ideologies and contest the prejudicial assumptions around mainstream narrative perceptions of UK Muslim faith communities. The chapter will be examining the larger common themes, patterns and shared meaning derived from across interviews with all participants. These themes reflect the sociopolitical context of the UK, and the critical challenges and discursive differences of the period interviews were undertaken. It acknowledges that data collected in this thesis relates specifically to each person's experience. It takes into account the relationship to their specific environment and the interconnections between counternarratives and areas of subjectivity and cognitive dissonance, as well as exploring how faith leader counternarratives contribute to resisting extremist ideologies and Islamophobic views of Islam.<sup>528</sup>

---

<sup>527</sup> Jooose, P., Bucerius, S. M. and Thompson, S. K. 'Narratives and Counternarratives: Somali-Canadians on Recruitment as Foreign Fighters to Al-Shabaab.' In *the British Journal of Criminology*, 55, 2015, pp811–832.

<sup>528</sup> Brown, S.D. & Stenner, P. (2009). *Psychology without Foundations: History, Philosophy and Psychosocial Theory*. London: Sage Publications. In this seminal book Brown and Stenner explore the psychosocial approach.

## 7.2 Faith counternarratives as alternative voices

The criminologists Sandberg and Colvin explore the rejection of religious extremism and religious narratives by giving an account of exclusion of 'jihadi extremists' through a collection of qualitative interviews of young Muslims in Norway. Sandberg and Colvin argue that Muslims suffer epistemic narrative injustice and reject what they believe to be mainstream characterisation of Islam as essentially a religion of aggression.<sup>529</sup> This approach is also supported by Paul Joose et al in the study of young Somalian community members in Canada. Joose states rather than focusing on a handful of Muslims who 'radicalise', researchers 'should choose instead to focus on understanding the worldviews of the vast majority who do not.'<sup>530</sup> Joose also draws upon narrative criminology to reverse the question of 'why they joined' the terrorist group Al-Shabaab based in East Africa and instead explores, 'why they would never join' by presenting a series of interviews with Somali-Canadians that oppose the attraction of Al-Shabaab with powerful counternarratives.<sup>531</sup> Similarly Margaretha Van Es, a professor of religious studies at University of Utrecht and a convert to Islam, has rejected anti-Muslim sentiment in the European context by presenting a model shift in focus to that of the 'vast majority' who reject 'extremism' amongst Muslim communities.<sup>532</sup> The research in this thesis contributes to and advances the counternarrative studies of Sandberg and Colvin and Van Es. It does so by presenting the multifaceted faith counternarratives and nuanced contexts specific to UK Muslim communities, as articulated through the voices of various Islamic faith leaders.

---

<sup>529</sup> Sandberg, Sveinung, Colvin, Sarah. 'ISIS is not Islam: Epistemic Injustice, Everyday Religion, and Young Muslims Narrative Resistance.' In the *British Journal of Criminology*, 2020, Vol.60 (6), p.1585-1605.

<sup>530</sup> Joose, Paul; Bucerius, Sandra M.; Thompson, Sara K. Narratives and Counternarratives: Somali – Canadians on Recruitment as Foreign Fighters to Al-Shabaab. In *British Journal of Criminology*, 2015, Vol.55 (4), p812.

<sup>531</sup> Joose, P., Bucerius, S. M., & Thompson, S. K. 'Narratives and counternarratives: Somali Canadians on recruitment as foreign fighters to Al-Shabaab.' In the *British Journal of Criminology*, 2015 55(4), p820.

<sup>532</sup> Van Es, Margaretha A., 'The promise of the social contract: Muslim perspectives on the culturalization of citizenship and the demand to denounce violent extremism.' In *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Volume 42 Num.16, 2019, pp.141-158.

A number of interviewees made a direct link with ‘radicalisation’ and Western colonial invasions of Muslim countries and ensuing violent acts of terrorism in the UK. Imam Ahmad said that the ‘war on terror’ in Iraq and then Syria, had created a situation of war that gave ideologically violent groups an opportunity to recruit vulnerable people who wanted to protest against this movement online.<sup>533</sup> During interview Imam Ahmad let me explicitly know that he would have to ‘censor what I’ve heard’ in the prison context and this therefore limited the content of what he could tell me in this respect.<sup>534</sup> This context was also connected with a perceived negative UK move towards securitised relations with Muslim communities that had inspired a surveillance culture under the auspices of Prevent. The majority of the interviewees believed counternarratives to radicalisation already existed in UK Muslim communities and were not being fully recognised or utilised by the UK Government.

Several participants stated that the securitised relationship between the UK Government and media narratives with Islam had fuelled Islamophobia and led to direct incidents of discrimination against Muslims and misinformation about the Islamic faith. Imam Kardi strongly opposed this narrative of faith being ‘hijacked’ and believed this was a repetitive problem that required him to ‘stand up’ up for his faith identity as ‘part of British society’:

So, I think the media at times, they conflate criminality with the faith, Islam itself. That causes a huge problem knowing that it is hugely upsetting for a person of faith. That and secondly, people want to do something because they feel that their faith is being hijacked by people who are extreme and feel powerless.<sup>535</sup>

Islamophobia, as understood by Imam Kardi, is the prejudice against Islam that frames the religion as a geopolitical source of terrorism. This bias associates Islam with lawless criminality and violent acts of aggression against the UK population. Islamophobia has its roots in cultural

---

<sup>533</sup> The ‘war on terror’ or the ‘war on terrorism’ was a global counterterrorism military campaign initiated by the United States following the September 11, 2001, attacks. This was supported by the UK Government, starting under Tony Blair, and has led to conflict spanning multiple wars and state destabilisation in the Levant region of Iraq and Syria over the last twenty years.

<sup>534</sup> Interview with Imam Ahmad, October 28th, 2022.

<sup>535</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

representations of the 'Other' and British Muslims and Islam follows these themes of being seen as un-British or not loyal citizens. In this interview I was aware that Kardi was also trying to indirectly communicate that I may be contributing to Islamophobic discourse in my research and that I needed to remain aware of this to prevent my findings being misappropriated or misused in security and policy contexts. One can also observe that this approach toward me as a researcher stemmed from a need to defend the Islamic faith, aiming to prevent non-Muslims like me from potentially misrepresenting it. Whilst acknowledging the impact of elements of my own identity, such as being white and non-Muslim, this has not prevented my research from being undertaken. These elements have conversely contributed by disadvantaging me in terms of gaining access to all participants. Some individuals decided after pre-interview conversations to opt out of being interviewed in first stage discussions as they felt there might be a risk of being attacked within their own community, even after being given assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. The research in this thesis has been undertaken for the purpose of making the voices of faith communities more manifest. However, it acknowledges the persistent power imbalances rooted in historical perceptions of knowledge, shaped by a colonial mindset that has often privileged the academic researcher over the subject. This point of issue has increased responsibility and accountability and corresponding awareness of the impact of myself as a white non-Muslim researcher needing to fully include my participant's voice, including questions about the nature of my research in this thesis.

An increasing body of research has argued that representations and discourses relating to Muslims in mainstream Western media tend to be negative and hostile and this can be traced back to a long history of Western colonial pursuit where a dichotomy of 'West' versus 'East' was first constructed.<sup>536</sup> This has culminated in times when British Muslims have been demanded by the political leaders and media propaganda to make more efforts to integrate into British society, and reassert their loyalty to the British state, no more so than when the then Prime Minister,

---

<sup>536</sup> Kundnani, Arun, 'In a Foreign Land: The Popular Racism.' In *Race and Class* Volume 43 2001 pp41– 60, Poole, Elizabeth and John Richardson (Editors) (2006), *Muslims and the News Media*. London: I.B. Tauris, and Edward, Said. *Orientalism* (1978), New York: New York Press. The seminal work of Said charts the relationship of East and West.

David Cameron, demanded that Muslims ‘end segregation’ and ‘combat extremism.’<sup>537</sup> The sensitivity around this issue was one I was cognisant of when interviewing Imams and people of responsibility in mosques as it was felt that they had a responsibility to remain above this discourse for fear of being labelled as supporting anti-British sentiment and being cancelled by the government sponsored committees that had requested their advice. During the time of the study this became manifest as one of my interviewees, who had previously participated in various government forums was banned from all such engagements. The ban followed an observed social media exchange with another cleric who had been linked to supporting certain terrorist groups. By association, my interviewee was identified as a potential risk, leading to the cessation of all membership of government forums and advisory bodies.

Imran distanced Islam from any violence of ideologies and countered that violence was ‘limited to a few and constructed in the West’ and that many promoters of political based ideologies had limited religious ‘education in Islam’:

So, when people are misinterpreting Quranic text or Hadiths outside of the mosque to justify supporting violent ideologies first, I think, to my knowledge, most of that happens in the sort of lunatic fringe as it were, you know, very close, small circles that are not really anywhere on the map. These are not the people who go to any of these kind of Friday prayers and they're probably learning a lot from the internet and taking things up and they are, you know, out of control, right. It's not we don't know where they're finding their information, how they're selecting it. And I think in a lot of cases those people who didn't really have any formal sort of education in Islam and tend to be late comers in a sense, you know, either to some or the sort of, you know became religious later on in their lives. They are more influenced by modern contemporary Western constructs of faith and politics that have no base in Islamic faith.<sup>538</sup>

---

<sup>537</sup> Cameron, David, ‘Speech against segregation.’ Article in *The Independent newspaper*, 20th July 2015. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/david-cameron-we-must-end-muslim-segregation-to-tackle-scourge-of-extremism-10403087>. Accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2023.

<sup>538</sup>Interview with Imam Imran, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Imran and interviewees such as Assad saw the Muslim community as broadly more eager than the UK Government to counter terrorist narratives as it was the Muslim community who suffered the fallout from attacks in the form of Islamophobia, alienation and attacks after violent incidents took place. Therefore, there was disappointment expressed by seven of the faith leaders interviewed that the UK Government's attempts at community engagement have at times been unsupportive and ignored core Islamic teachings as a resource to counter extremism and terrorism. Imran said that in his experience Islamic teachings and the words of people of faith and organisations they belong to are sometimes 'wrongly labeled as extremist and alienating the very faith community that can actually be of the most significant help in countering terrorism.'<sup>539</sup> In the context of this interview the reference to the 'lunatic fringe' is another point of distancing from what is conceived as mainstream Islam from the behaviour of a few who do not represent the broader Muslim community. On the other hand, the term is problematic as it is a derogatory phrase that trivialises the serious issue of how people with mental health challenges are supported within UK society.<sup>540</sup>

The overriding repeated concern for the interviewees was the limited understanding of Islamic faith by those who committed acts of violence, fuelled by the experience of Islamophobia and alienation in UK society. Criminal sociologists Tahir Abbas and Imran Anwar posit that the UK Government policy has created a climate of Islamophobia by drawing attention not to the socio-economic disadvantage of Muslim communities but to their cultural and religious norms and values.<sup>541</sup> Seen through this lens, UK Government policy has detrimentally impacted community relations and negatively influenced the perceptions of British Muslims towards government institutions and foreign policy. By fostering an environment where the Muslim community is perceived as a 'suspect community,' these policies have therefore contributed the perception of being treated as 'Other', leading to disengagement and alienation.<sup>542</sup> Based on the interviews

---

<sup>539</sup> Interview with Imam Imran, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>540</sup> Interview with Imam Imran, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>541</sup> Abbas, Tahir and Imran Awan. 'Limits of UK Counterterrorism Policy and its Implications for Islamophobia and Far Right Extremism.' In the *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 4 (3) (2015), pp16-29. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid*, p22. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023.

conducted for this research, and in line with the perspectives of Tahrir and Awan, a number of interviewees similarly expressed the idea that Islamophobia is entrenched institutionally within parts of the UK Government and society. This includes experiences of systemic bias and discrimination that have increased divisions and fostered a sense of mistrust and resistance among faith leaders that may impact on effective collaboration in countering terrorism.

### **7.3 Questioning the origins of violent ideologies and rejecting the politicisation of Islam**

A regular thematic pattern that came up in interviews was the argument that violent ideologies were essentially not the product of Islamic tradition but in fact firmly rooted and sourced from modern Western paradigms of thought and political ideologies. Imran was a graduate of Cambridge University and former trainee Imam at Cambridge Muslim College. He referenced the writings of the Cambridge based Islamic Scholar, Sheikh Abdul Hakim Murad (otherwise known as Tim Winters), whom he had followed as teacher and spiritual guide. Sheikh Abdul Hakim Murad has argued that the essentialist reductive association of Islam with violent groups like Al-Qaeda requires the Islamic world to come up with a ‘counter reformation’ to challenge this.<sup>543</sup> Murad even goes as far to call the association of suicide bombings and the violence of ‘neo-Kharijite’ groups such as Al-Qaeda to be another example of Islam being misportrayed through the optics of generalised Western media stereotypes.<sup>544</sup> Imran quoted Murad and contended that the origins of violent Islamic groups can be found not in ‘early medieval Sunnism but Western modernist political movements’ from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>545</sup> Seminal thinkers such as Al-Banna, Maududi and Qutb, who are a few of the conceptual fathers of Al-Qaeda and Daesh, for Imran, have negated Islamic normative tradition by mixing revolutionary political Marxism with faith. In line with Murad Imran listed the matrix of Western government sponsored violent war acts that he believes are the foundations of ‘radical Islam,’ including the bombing of civilians in

---

<sup>543</sup> Murad, Abdul Hakim (2008) *Bombing without Moonlight*, Bristol: Amal Press, p11.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid, p13 and 14. The term ‘Kharijite’ is discussed in Chapter 4 of this book. The Kharijites, also called al-Shurat, were an Islamic sect which emerged during the First Fitna. The first Kharijites were supporters of Ali who rebelled against his acceptance of arbitration talks to settle the conflict with his challenger, Mu'awiya, at the Battle of Siffin in 657.

<sup>545</sup> Interview with Imam Imran, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

WWII by the British in Dresden and comparisons with Hindu and Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka who have equally used faith narratives to substantiate suicide and killing innocent civilians.<sup>546</sup>

Laylah, whom I quote in more detail later on in this chapter, cited authorities on Islam having offered high-profile rejections of violent extremists, such as when several hundred Islamic scholars signed a letter denouncing Daesh and its theological views.<sup>547</sup> At the same time it can be argued that religious narratives have been seen to be a key part of understanding violent extremism and thus a frequent part of the analysis of the origins of violent attacks.<sup>548</sup> In reality, it can be argued that violent ideologies and narratives do not happen in isolation but interact with numerous factors and it is too simplistic to attribute them to being caused by religion. Therefore, it is important to consider these many factors, including socio-economic marginalisation of communities, international and national geopolitics, individual psychological challenges and influential online networks as one of many contributors influencing individual to embrace extremist ideologies.<sup>549</sup> For Assad, the idea of an Islamic state was born out of modernist political thinking that he said was a response to Western paradigms of 'thought and power' and for him did not communicate the spiritual essence of Islam:

All these ideas about, an Islamic state and controlling others is really coming out of pride and ego. So, if you think about it that's what you should yourself really handle day by day. But if you really think about it, what really matters, is the call to what you worship, and that's it. I'm sure you would understand that from a psychological point of view what you think about is what you worship, put simply, and then the only thing that matters is to know God.<sup>550</sup>

---

<sup>546</sup> Murad, Abdul Hakim (2008) *Bombing without Moonlight*, Bristol: Amal Press, p27 and 28.

<sup>547</sup> This letter is referenced in Chapter Four of this doctoral research thesis. Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre. 'An Open Letter to Baghdadi.' Published by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, 14th September 2014. <https://rissc.jo/open-letter-to-al-baghdadi/>. Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

<sup>548</sup> Halverson, J. R., Goodall, H. L. and Corman, S. R. (2011), *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>549</sup> There is a large body of research that charts the common profiles of Muslims who have made a decision to take part in terrorist activity. See Nesser, P. (2015), *Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History*. London: Hurst.

<sup>550</sup> Interview with Assad, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

In this context, violent Islamic movements such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh can, to some extent, be seen as having drawn their ideological roots more from modern Western traditions than from Islamic ones. On this basis both Assad and Imran rejected violent movements as having a tenuous grounding in Islamic martial history.

Whilst modern ideologically extremist Islamic movements are heavily influenced by global political contexts one cannot always extricate their teachings from the faith. War and martial combat are not anathema to Islam as concepts or in the early historical formation of Islam.<sup>551</sup> The Islamic faith guidance concerning war refers to what have been accepted in Sharia (law) and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) by Islamic scholars as the correct manner which is expected to be followed by Muslims in times of war. Fighting is justified for legitimate self-defence under the arguments of just war but should be stopped if these circumstances cease to exist and peaceful negotiation sought. The idea of Islamic Jihad war concept, discussed in Chapter Two, remains powerful within certain sections of Islam but is also a divisive point of reference by opposing groups. Many of my interviewees emphasised that Islam was not a religion of violence and had been misunderstood through the prism of Western media. Whilst this argument is distinctively true for many of my interviewees, the history of engaging in war from the earliest times of Islamic empires is an important reference for ideologically extremist groups such as Daesh.<sup>552</sup> Many major religions, including former Islamic empire powers have also used military force to not only protect but promote their discourse of the world. This connection to Islamic history and faith can be seen boldly in the contemporary theocratic dictatorships of countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. In the case of Islamic Brotherhood in Egypt, founded by Hassan al-Banna, this movement has continually fused political and social justice issues with Islamic teaching.<sup>553</sup> The

---

<sup>551</sup> Early forms of warfare occurred after the migration (hijra) of Muhammad and his small group of followers to Medina from Mecca and the conversion of several inhabitants of the city to Islam. At this time, Muslims had been persecuted and oppressed by the Meccans. There were still Muslims who could not flee from Mecca and were still oppressed because of their faith. The Meccans also refused to let the Muslims enter Mecca and by that denied them access to the Kaaba. There are also other examples of Muslim empires conquering the Iberian peninsula, the Moghuls in India and the Ottoman empire in parts of Europe and the Middle East.

<sup>552</sup> Esposito, John L. (2005) *Islam, the Straight Path*. Oxford University Press: New York, p20 to 30. Esposito explores the foundation Islam and impact on modern state dynamics and war.

<sup>553</sup> The Islamic Brotherhood played a seminal part in the Arab Spring and uprising against the military backed Egyptian government in 2011. It continues to play an important role in the political and faith landscape of Egypt.

argument put forth by several of my interview participants was that violent ideologies instigated by groups such as Daesh have taken this history out of context and therefore selectively applied an understanding that has misrepresented Islamic history. This argument did not disregard the martial military history of Islam but was founded in experiences of Islam being solely associated with violent incidents in the context of the UK.

The sample of qualitative interviews undertaken in this thesis present a common theme of opposition to violent rhetoric or promotion of war through religious instruction counternarratives. Three respondents referenced earlier UK incarnations of Al-Qaeda and Daesh in Al-Muhajiroun membership, as well as referencing the anger of communities to global events taking place for Muslims in Iraq and Syria, Palestine, the Balkans, Kashmir, and in the UK as a cause of violent acts. In this context the reference to Al-Muhajiroun and Daesh was made to give an example of groups who had misinterpreted political aspirations of an Islamic state and misused faith to justify their actions. Imam Bashir stated that Al-Muhajiroun members had championed the Islamic State concept and its members had remained dormant or 'hidden underground.'<sup>554</sup> Neither were they able to publicly declare their beliefs or allegiances in forums like universities due to the criminal justice crackdown, leading them to operate primarily online or meet covertly.<sup>555</sup> Imam Bashir proposed that contemporary anger for injustice in places like Palestine and Iraq was a real phenomenon that had been wrongly conflated with extremism:

So that is the most problematic thing, I think, which is linked to Islam and radicalisation, which is not a clear-cut issue because it's a live political issue. It's not textual analysis. It's not reading scriptures it is being angry with injustice. It's not Islam.<sup>556</sup>

The essential point of the above quote is that the anger expressed is not rooted in faith or scripture but represents a civil protest that does not necessarily have to be connected to religion

---

<sup>554</sup> Interview with Imam Bashir, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

<sup>555</sup> Al-Muhajiroun was banned from UK universities in January 2010. Also under other aliases, such as the 'Sharia Project' and the 'Islamic Dawah Association. Later known as the 'Emigrants' in 2014 this group accepted Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's Caliphate as legitimate, and the subsequent exodus of numerous activists to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), further cemented their extremist credentials.

<sup>556</sup> Interview with Imam Bashir, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

or, conversely, to violence. Imam Bashir argued that these have at times been conflated in UK media discourse with violence rather than opposition to injustice. Imam Ahmad made one exception in his narrative about protest against injustice when he distinguished protest against persecution of Palestinians from the period of the Lee Rigby attack in 2013 when he was working as a Chaplain in a UK prison.<sup>557</sup> He said he had met many Muslim inmates he pastored at this time who had supported the attack on the grounds that:

Attacking an officer who is wearing uniform even though he's travelling back from Afghanistan at the airport on in his barracks on the way to his house. As long as he is uniform, he's in on duty, like he is in the field in Afghanistan and a combat situation.<sup>558</sup>

Ahmad noted that this type of support by Muslim inmates at prisons he had worked in was not sustained beyond this period and had in fact lessened with British military forces leaving places such as Iraq and Afghanistan. He stated he had always countered the call for violence with use of Islamic teaching on 'preservation of life.'<sup>559</sup> Any association of Islam with violence made by groups such as Daesh was seen by interviewees such as Ahmad and Imam Khabir as contrary to faith adherence.

The question about the Islamic faith inspiring violence can be seen within Prevent discourse. Interviewees, such as Bashir, believed Prevent may have contributed to the securitisation of Muslim communities as being 'suspect.'<sup>560</sup> Bashir was careful how he worded his responses due to the fact he ran a Prevent sponsored service. Imam Khabir and Ahmad communicated they thought that it better to utilise faith leaders as counternarrative voices to ensure Prevent distinguished communities in the UK clearly from extremist groups. Whilst injustice against Muslims in places such as Palestine were also seen to be an influential factor in grooming and inciting individuals to violence in the UK and globally, it was indicated that UK foreign policy was

---

<sup>557</sup> On the afternoon of 22 May 2013, a British Army soldier, Fusilier Lee Rigby of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, was attacked and killed by terrorists Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebawale near the Royal Artillery Barracks in Woolwich, southeast London.

<sup>558</sup> Interview with Imam Ahmad, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>559</sup> Interview with Imam Ahmad, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>560</sup> Interview with Imam Bashir, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

partly responsible for the domestic terrorist threat. The terminology used in relation to Islam, such as radicalisation or extremism, was an area of concern for all the faith leaders interviewed for this thesis, and a point of issue raised during interviews. It is therefore necessary to caveat that words such 'radical' are open to interpretation as it can equally be used more broadly to describe those who protest against violence or discriminate against Muslims in UK society.<sup>561</sup>

Conversely, although a selection of interviewees I met questioned UK Government policy in inciting Islamophobia there was also sympathy with the government response to opposing extremist groups recruiting individuals searching for an Islamic response in certain instances. This included supporting the Prevent CONTEST strategy (2018) that stated that Daesh and Al-Qaeda exploit division in communities through the internet by promoting alternative narratives that urge those with extremist views to subvert faith with violence and groom vulnerable and young people to join their movements with 'radicalising messages.'<sup>562</sup> Bashir agreed with CONTEST that internet grooming had been exploited and proposed that incidents of violence and the Prevent response encouraged the Muslim community in the UK to address this:

I would say many found their own way to have a discourse and to understand this, and most of it was a kind of the anger with double standards and all the rest of it. I think then as a Muslim, you want to kind of find out more about how can I understand this? You would only understand it from those who are mobilised to present the perspective which tends to be much more extreme from the late 1990s and early 2000s and online Internet communication that was exploited. I would say that the events of 7-7 and Prevent really

---

<sup>561</sup> This area of redefining 'radicalisation' is explored in work of Dr Zin Derfoufi 'Radicalisation's Core, Terrorism and Political Violence.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence*. ISSN 1556-1836, 2020, pp1185-1206. In other works Derfoufi also explores the way government policy has controlled and prevented legal civil protest in UK society. See Derfoufi, Zin. 'Government's Prevent Strategy is hindering environmental and anti-racism movements, as well as Muslim Groups, new research finds.' In *Rights and Security International*, March 23rd, 2022. <https://www.rightsandsecurity.org/government%C2%92s-prevent-strategy-is-hindering-environmental-and-anti-racism-movements-as-well-as-muslim-groups-new-research-finds/>. Dr Zin Derfoufi states, 'While Prevents impact on Muslim groups is already well-documented, our research raises serious concerns that state authorities are abusing legitimate worries over violent behaviours to inappropriately target a range of peaceful, lawful forms of dissent.'

<sup>562</sup> Home Office. CONTEST: The UK Government Strategy for Countering Terrorism. London Home Office. UK. Gov., 4 June 2018. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2018>.

gave a kick up the backside of Muslim communities and showed leadership the need there was to support people.<sup>563</sup>

Through the reach of the initial online based movements, such as the Arab Spring, geopolitical wars in places such as Syria and Iraq have been exploited by movements like Daesh to leverage the fight against Western states by its own citizens. There is also substantial evidence to show that groups, such as Daesh, have selectively used Islamic concepts and teachings to give religious legitimacy to the group's political ideology and propaganda to recruit and raise funds David Holbrook investigated jihadist media preferences by analysing texts seized during counter-terrorism investigations in the United Kingdom.<sup>564</sup> In his review of no fewer than 1,700 media publications, Holbrook noted that the ideological currently extends beyond known celebrities of jihadist extremism like Anwar al-Awlaki and that works of theology from many hundreds of years ago can still be found on the virtual bookshelves of violent extremists today.<sup>565</sup> I would argue with Holbrook that wider contemporary internet-based communications, combined with classical texts, have enabled Islamist extremist groups to deliver their message to global audiences on an unprecedented scale with limited governmental or theological censorship. With Holbrook I would also argue that there is a direct link between their successful traction with individuals globally and the thought groundwork laid throughout the twentieth century by thinkers such as Maududi, who selectively propagated the goals of Islamism religious political ideology. Thus, the internet is a contributory factor as a medium used by to promote contemporary extremist and violent ideologies.

The sample of people interviewed for this thesis rejected political ideology in their counternarratives to violence and also frequently referenced the common theme that Islamic theology has been quoted out of context to falsely persecute and malign people of faith. All

---

<sup>563</sup> Interview with Imam Bashir, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

<sup>564</sup> Holbrook, Donald, 'What Types of Media Do Terrorists Collect? An Analysis of Religious, Political, and Ideological Publications Found in Terrorism Investigations in the UK.' In *The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* publication, no 11, 2017, p10. Accessed 1 December 2023. Anwar al-Awalkaki was an American Imam who was killed in a drone strike on the command of President Obama in 2011.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid, p10.

respondents proposed that normative practitioners of Islam in the UK held the view that Islamic faith teaching prohibited any form of violence against civilians, forbade hate speech against other persons or communities and rejected movements that supported radicalisation. In her interview Laylah made a distinction between those who practise their faith with varying levels of awareness:

Far from being religious zealots, a large number of those involved in terrorism do not practise their faith or understand it. Many lack religious literacy and could actually be regarded as religious novices. I think there is evidence that a well-established religious identity can actually protect against violent radicalisation.<sup>566</sup>

In the context of Laylah's view Islamic faith can therefore be seen once again to protect against attraction to violent ideologies and positively promote engagement with communities that encourage civic action and moral responsibility. The rejection of the ideology of groups such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh by participants for this thesis reflects the views made publicly known by hundreds of Muslim scholars in the UK and internationally and is backed by both open and classified research by UK Government agencies, such as the UK Home Office.<sup>567</sup>

Imam Kardi proposed that the 'normative' or 'socially conservative' Islamic teachings adhered to by a majority of Muslims in the UK have sometimes been misinterpreted as 'extremist' by those who either lack understanding of Islamic teachings or who deliberately do so in pursuit of anti-Muslim agendas. He believed this needed to be countered with 'Balanced teachings of Islam to encourage members of the Muslim community to steer clear of extremism and 'equip people with the tools' to challenge extremists and their violent ideologies.'<sup>568</sup> For Kardi, cases like the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013 or MP Sir David Amess in 2021 were 'rare incidents'; the majority of Muslims have channelled their anger through social protests and civic protest means other than

---

<sup>566</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 2022.

<sup>567</sup> Home Office. 'Radicalisation: the counternarrative and identifying the tipping point: HM Government response to the eight reports from the Home Affairs Select Committee Session.' London: Home Office policy paper UK.Gov. December 2017-17 HC 135. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/radicalisation-the-counter-narrative-and-identifying-the-tipping-point-government-response>. Accessed 24 August 2024.

<sup>568</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

recourse to violence.<sup>569</sup> Kardi drew attention to the fact that the causes of ‘radicalisation’ remain complex and multifaceted. Ideology, while significant, is just one of many risk factors. Other contributing factors commonly highlighted by interviewees included the exacerbation of grievances related to UK foreign policy, the lack of proper Islamic instruction by trained scholars among those who engage in violence, and issues such as poor mental health and lack of education.

#### **7.4 Are Converts from the West More Susceptible to Extremism**

The importance of the communication of religious teaching to converts and young people who are forming their Islamic identity was a powerful counternarrative theme. It was proposed by several interviewees that in their formation many younger people and converts were more susceptible to violent or extremist political ideology. This was partly identified as due to the growth of ‘global Jihad’ organisations and social media and websites accessible to vulnerable individuals.<sup>570</sup> Four of the Imams interviewed referenced the ‘Salafi’ use of websites and social media in English to communicate Islamic knowledge. This approach focused on building a global Muslim community that transcended ethnicity and nationality was enhanced by Salafism’s promise of a form of Islam purified from cultural influences and innovations<sup>571</sup> Moreover, Salafism was seen by Imam Ahmad to promote the ideal of a global ummah (community), that offers space for Muslims regardless of their ethnicity and nationality to ‘fill the knowledge void.’<sup>572</sup>

The solution to challenging extremist ideologies or ideas of an Islamic purity posited by several interviewees was faith instruction which encouraged an appreciation of the diversity of faith and life perspectives as young people and converts formed their faith identity. Assad argued that

---

<sup>569</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>570</sup> Azani, Eitan and Koblenz-Stenzler, ‘Muslim Converts Who Turn to Global Jihad: Radicalization Characteristics and Countermeasures.’ In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Taylor & Francis Journals, Vol.45 (2) (2022) pp. 173-199.

<sup>571</sup> Geelhoed, Fiore (2014) *Striving for Allah: Purification and Resistance among Fundamentalist Muslims in the Netherlands*, Den Haag: Eleven International Publishing.

<sup>572</sup> Interview with Imam Ahmad, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

many extremists came from the ranks of converts who experienced a struggle in their cultural transition when embracing a new Muslim faith identity and community:

It can be a bit unstable. I'll give an example. I've seen a lot of trouble for English white people. They are completely fine and beautiful people when they convert, which is very good. But the trouble is not in converting. The trouble happens after they convert. Put on the outfit of a culture that's not his, that's not hers, and he's trying to be a person that is not him. He thought that this culture and embracing the religion is what he wants to embrace. So, if I borrow everything about this culture, then maybe I'll be a good Muslim, but it doesn't work that way. And that's the thing. And then what tends to happen is he gets into a collision with the culture that he lives in because he might find something's that not the same.<sup>573</sup>

In this context the possibility of being influenced by violent or extremist thinking could be argued to be more challenging for converts who are forming their Islamic identity. Assad was attempting to articulate the challenge that converts experience in terms of isolation, as they often move away from non-Muslim family and friends and embed themselves in a different relational context. This transition can offer challenges in terms of belonging and difficulties in adjusting to a new culture and causing isolation and susceptibility of imitating radical views to prove their Muslim identity. Assad's opinion is an example of a view that is often used by leaders in the Muslim community to distance Islam from association with violent acts. However, one can also argue this view could be seen as perceiving converts biasedly as a homogenous group of potential terrorists and radicalisation as essentially not an Islamic problem. It also does not consider the fact that each convert follows a personal path towards Islam and has in common with the others only the religious interest and the cultural background of origin. There is no definitive research evidence or data to confirm the majority of converts will ever be attracted to violent ideologies or be involved in terrorist acts. However, there have been studies of individuals who travelled to

---

<sup>573</sup> Interview with Imam Assad, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

fight for Daesh in Syria that suggests that a substantial percentage were converts to Islam.<sup>574</sup> Nevertheless, the corresponding area Assad was trying to explore once again was the theme of the need for proper faith formation and the supportive environment of the faith community to build a strong Islamic identity that can resist violent ideologies. This emphasis on faith development was an attempt to ensure that faith identity was not associated with violence or misinterpreted in ways that could potentially fuel Islamophobic responses. The importance of faith identity in the formation of individuals as a key factor in building resilience to radicalisation was a re-occurring theme repeated by the majority of participants in the interviews for this thesis. This approach was based on the premise that strengthening social bonds within communities and between different communities, can collectively help counter the risks of radicalisation. Thus, offering what Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen and Patrick Schack term as 'social bridging' and belonging to faith communities that can be linked to the role that 'social capital' plays in creating resilient communities.<sup>575</sup> This concept is tied up once again with creating an identity that strongly associates with the country that Muslim communities live in.

Imran believed that many converts and people finding their faith were being misled and were more vulnerable:

Muslims should be behaving in a kind of exemplary ethical way. This can be seen in the life of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who many followed. And it is powerful. It has educational value, but it's almost an exception. Most of the time you don't hear I would say anything that's necessarily right. So, when people are misinterpreting Quranic text or Hadiths outside of the mosque to justify maybe supporting violent ideologies, they are receiving the wrong information from the people they follow and may be vulnerable.<sup>576</sup>

---

<sup>574</sup> Rushchanko, Julia (2017) *Converts to Islam and Homegrown Jihadism*, Centre on Radicalisation and Terrorism at the Henry Jackson Society, Millbank, London.

<sup>575</sup> Dalgaard-Nielsen, Anja and Patrick Schack, 'Community Resilience to Militant Islamism: Who and What? An Explorative Study of Resilience in Three Danish Communities. In *Democracy and Security* Vol. 12, No. 4, October-December 2016. Taylor and Francis publication, pp309-327.

<sup>576</sup> Interview with Imam Imran, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Imran combined faith examples and teaching as the critical factors to deter violence but also referenced converts and those coming back to faith as the most vulnerable to being radicalised by violent narratives online. Once again it can be argued there is no conclusive correlating evidence to fully support the case that converts are more susceptible or likely to commit violent terrorist acts. The other factor missing here in Imran's world view is the impact of leadership at certain mosques who have acted as key influencers for individuals on the road towards radicalisation. Neither does this view recognise the separate complex personal motives that may have pushed an individual towards radicalisation, such as family distress, economic problems, or personal trauma.<sup>577</sup>

Tanvir, in his early forties, was a convert to Islam from South London, who had converted whilst he was a student at university in Manchester. He was the only member of his family to practise any sort of formal faith attendance of a mosque. For Tanvir attraction to extremist thinking of those coming back to faith or converts was dependent on who 'socialised' them into faith in the faith setting and who influenced them as peers. He explained:

When I become a Muslim, you know, I was surrounded by so many good people. It gave me a place but I could always ask questions and talk to people when we met. I met many people from different places and cultures, yet we all felt one. Just eating together or listening to teaching kept us all together. At no point did I feel I was in the wrong place when I came to faith.<sup>578</sup>

This illustrates that the social and cultural aspect of faith leaders creating a counter to extremist ideologies as a profound and sustainable solution within Muslim communities. Tanvir was part of a group who led a Sufi *Dhikr* group (romanised Arabic - meaning remembrance, recollection, or invocation).<sup>579</sup> In its widest sense, *Dhikr* can refer to any act through which one remembers

---

<sup>577</sup> Zebiri, Kate, (2008) *British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives*, Oxford, England: One world, pp1–2.

<sup>578</sup> Interview with Tanvir, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

<sup>579</sup> Esposito, John L (2003) *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Oxford University Press.

God, reciting or meditating on the Quran or Hadith. For Tanvir it was primarily used as a community tool:

It's a form of contemplative meditation to call on the name of Allah, to feel the direct presence of God, warding off evil and bad thoughts or any division or extremism with others.<sup>580</sup>

In his interview Tanvir highlighted the importance of a 'community of prayer' and overarching 'Muslim ummah' (wider Muslim community) supported him and which he believed was central in helping him avoid 'any involvement in extremism.'<sup>581</sup> Tanvir did not want to talk about wider issues relating to 'other groups' attracted to extremism as he felt he was not in a position to comment and that he may 'betray' his community.<sup>582</sup> Tanvir had noted that he had negative experience previously related to Prevent and this was his primary fear that impacted on his ability to answer interview questions. This form of local attachment narrative to a faith-based group counters what Simon Ozer argued is a lack of 'individual life-embeddedness in the local social-cultural context,' which can lead to a disconnection from society and, consequently, an increased risk of 'radicalisation' from global movements online.<sup>583</sup> In the case of Tanvir the fear he communicated was related to personal experience, and this led to silence. He was not at a risk of radicalisation.

A number of participants proposed that 'radicalisation' was something that often happened to individuals who were 'vulnerable.' The argument surrounding vulnerability to radicalisation and the need for community intervention is a contentious issue. This concern has been formerly addressed by UK Government policy when the Home Office introduced the Vulnerability Assessment Framework in April 2012 to assess the vulnerability of those referred to its Channel

---

<sup>580</sup> Interview with Tanvir, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

<sup>581</sup> Interview with Tanvir, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

<sup>582</sup> Interview with Tanvir, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

<sup>583</sup> Ozer, Simon, 'Globalisation and Radicalisation: A Cross-National Study of Local Embeddedness and Reactions to Cultural Globalization in Regard to Violent Extremism.' In *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* Volume 76 Number 33, 2020, pp26-36.

programme.<sup>584</sup> However, in subsequent years the application of the Vulnerability Assessment Framework by agencies implementing it has continued to face scrutiny for potentially contributing to the perception of younger Muslims as part of suspect community within UK society rather than combatting it.<sup>585</sup> This ongoing concern was reflected in the majority of interviews undertaken and highlighted the broader issues of trust and the feeling among many Muslims that they are being unfairly singled out by these measures. The Muslim faith leaders interviewed for this thesis argued that faith leaders have a key role in this solution as the counternarratives they offer provide support to alternative other rather than state security focused interventions. The faith formation theme and one to one mentoring was portrayed as a strong deterrent for preventing Muslims being ‘radicalised.’ Especially, for people who are vulnerable or who may need positive pastoral or referral to specialised psychological support.

Hasnain and Ahmad, both stated that converts may be more vulnerable to ‘radicalisation’ due to coming into contact with ‘Wahhabi preachers’ who preached in English and were ‘so absolutist’ that they had no space for diverse views of the world. The desire to deconstruct attachment to absolutist purity proposed by Ahmad aligns with Shahab Ahmed’s argument set out in his seminal book, *What is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic* that Muslims in the modern world need to move away from categorizing what is Islamic and what is not Islamic.<sup>586</sup> Coming from a historical perspective Ahmed challenges the notion that Sharia consists of an Islam’s orthodox core and argues it is ‘myopic’ as it reduces Islam to a number of narrow interpretations. Ahmed suggests while ‘purists’ (such as Wahhabis and Salafis) and many ‘modern Muslims’ cannot accommodate intellectual, cultural or religious diversity ‘pre-modern’ societies tolerated and engaged ‘difference, diversity and disagreement’ and it is colonialism that has put a chasm in the way of contemporary Muslims and blocks them from connecting to early Islam.<sup>587</sup> He gives examples of

---

<sup>584</sup> Home Office. ‘Channel: Protecting Vulnerable People from Being Drawn into Terrorism.’ London: Home Office, Gov.UK publications, 2012.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651e71d9e4e658001459d997/14.320\\_HO\\_Channel\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_v3\\_Final\\_Web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651e71d9e4e658001459d997/14.320_HO_Channel_Duty_Guidance_v3_Final_Web.pdf). Home Office. Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023

<sup>585</sup> Coppock, Vicki and Mark McGovern, ‘Dangerous Minds? Deconstructing Counter-Terrorism Discourse, Radicalisation and the Psychological Vulnerability of Muslim Children and Young People in Britain.’ Article in *Children & Society*, Edge Hill University publication 28, 2014.

<sup>586</sup> Ahmed, Shahab (2016) *What is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton University Press, p105.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid, p115.

not being able to engage with art and poetry. Reducing Islam to Sharia law is a reductive approach that leads to a reactionary search for coherent narratives, the universal, the normative, and the orthodox. Therefore, we should not be seduced into accepting the destruction of other civilisations by groups such as the Taliban e.g., the destruction of large building size stone Buddha statues that were thousands of years old and perceived as false idol images.<sup>588</sup> Neither should privileging certain types of Islam above others and creating polemical division that condemns cultural development and is intolerant of engagement with different worldviews be permitted. Ahmed asserts that one cannot categorise Islam into essentialist discourse as it is diverse and if one does one is also in danger of colluding with Orientalist or even Islamophobic paradigms that have persecuted Muslim civilisations. He instead promotes the complexity and plurality of Islam and values and what he terms the contradiction and perplexities of faith.<sup>589</sup>

The findings from interviews with faith leaders in this thesis agree with Ahmed's argument. They emphasised that the 'diversity' of interpretation and faith expression within their various Islamic traditions is an experiential truth, serving as one of the most nuanced yet powerful counters to extremism. In the context of faith communities, it is the ability to be discursive and socialised in the faith community that enables higher levels of resistance to radicalisation and was one of the strongest counternarratives to extremism presented by many of the participants. Rigid and absolutist extremist interpretations of faith were argued by Imam Ahmad and Nasnain to be ignoring Islam's rich diversity and historical adaptability. Therefore it was necessary to protect cultural manifestations of Islam, such as celebrating Sufi pirs (saints) and guard against Takfir (declaring other Muslims as non-believers) to justify violence against fellow Muslims with different beliefs. They depicted a broader Islamic spectrum of thought, including legal pluralism, spiritual mysticism and rationalist traditions that continue to thrive and evolve. This theme of rejecting purist interpretations of Islam also supported higher tolerance levels to difference and giving individuals the intellectual base from which they can not only manage conflicting views but co-exist with others in pluralistic British society who are different.

---

<sup>588</sup> Ibid, p115

<sup>589</sup> Ibid, p100.

This theme of faith leaders fostering open dialogue, which encourages less absolutist and purist interpretations of Islam and fosters more diverse views of the world, is a key counter to extremist ideologies. It also aligns with other studies, such as *The London Countering Violent Extremism Programme Report 2018-19*, sponsored by the Greater London Authority. It recommended solutions to overcoming attraction to violence needed to be founded principally on 'dialogue.'

<sup>590</sup> This report also quotes London faith leaders giving examples of the limited religious knowledge of violent terrorists who joined Daesh, and converts to religion being exploited by extremists due to their lack of religious knowledge.<sup>591</sup> Thus, the faith leaders interviewed for this research echoed the findings of the London Countering Violent Extremism Programme Report by proposing that faith identity can play a crucial role in i) protecting against individuals being drawn to violence ii) enhancing an individual's capacity to tolerate ambiguities without resorting to rigid, dichotomous worldviews and iii) preventing conflict or isolation from those with differing life choices in contemporary UK society.

The faith leaders met for this study made cogent arguments that converts and vulnerable people are more susceptible to attraction to violent and extremist ideologies. However, there is no quantifiable fully confirmed evidence to support this, either in the UK or abroad. There are UK examples of converts committing attacks, including Khalid Masood, who killed five people and injured dozens of others in the 2019 Westminster terror attack, 7/7 bomber Germaine Lindsay and Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale - both affiliated themselves to Al- Qaeda - who murdered the soldier Fusilier Lee Rigby in Woolwich (previously referenced). Convert extremists who travelled to Daesh in Syria and Iraq, have included Sally Jones and Mosul suicide bomber Ronald Fiddler, who called himself Abu Zakariya al-Britani. However, on a micro level this is not the complete story as many people are influenced online by global preachers and form their own understanding of faith practice independent of communities and mosques in the UK without

---

<sup>590</sup>Greater London Authority. 'A Shared Endeavour: London Countering Violent Extremism.' Programme Report, Published by the *Greater London Authority*, 2019, p54-55.

[https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cve\\_strategy\\_20\\_8\\_19.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cve_strategy_20_8_19.pdf).

<sup>591</sup> Ibid, p54.

joining extremist or violent movements which, presents a challenge to faith leaders attempting to counter extremism in the uk.

## **7.5 Faith v extremism**

Fatima and Laylah worked in an east London mosque and its adjoining education centre. They both provided religious, education, social welfare and training services to its worshippers and to the wider communities in the Tower Hamlets area of London. This mosque had a large membership of regular attendees for major faith celebrations. Laylah said they had built effective community relations at the mosque to encourage the congregation to draw on Islamic teachings to help counter attraction to ideologically violent groups and also helped form the faith of converts who were not 'extremists' or could be labeled as 'radicalised':

Any form of violence against civilians and any hate speech against other persons or communities is prohibited to all Muslims, converts or otherwise. We want to engage so as to promote civic social responsibility, as we know from experience that the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the UK reject the ideology of Al-Qaeda and ISIS (Daesh). This has been publicly articulated by hundreds of Muslim scholars in the UK and internationally. It is backed by both open and classified research by government too. In our experience the teaching of Islam encourages members of the Muslim community to steer clear of extremism and equips them with the tools to challenge extremists and their violent ideologies.<sup>592</sup>

Fatima, also echoed the theme around religious literacy being key to countering extremist support of violence, as well as sometimes being misinterpreted as 'extremist' by those who lack understanding of Islamic teachings and those of faith:

The ideology of ISIS (Daesh) is at total odds with Islam. However, we believe UK foreign policy, lack of Islamic knowledge and troubled backgrounds are far greater factors in extremism. We as Muslims are more eager than the Government to counter terrorism because ultimately it is us who suffer the fallout from such attacks in the form of

---

<sup>592</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Islamophobia, and alienation in the long run. Prevent is disappointing as it was not really developed in true partnership with communities but rather just enforced on it through a security framework. Rather than using core Islamic teachings as a resource to counter the narrative that feeds extremism and terrorism those very teachings and their practitioners as individuals are being labeled as extremist. It alienates people that can actually be of the most significant help with people who might want to do violence.<sup>593</sup>

Faith leaders like Fatima and Ahmad reflect what Yilmaz calls 'theological deprivation' - which he defines as a lack of scriptural knowledge - as a major contributing factor in the development of 'fundamentalist attitudes when socio-economic and political deprivations already exist.'<sup>594</sup> Participants, such as Fatima, were particularly vociferous with regards extremist interpretations of faith perpetuated by groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. Fatima said that 'extremist violent' acts were not 'eradicable' from any society and she thought it was 'unfair for Muslims to 'carry the burden' as violence is 'ultimately a crime for the police and related authorities to act on and counter through the law of the country.'<sup>595</sup>

During the interview with Fatima she questioned the use of the word 'extremist' as she thought this word was vague and 'unhelpful' and could be applied as a 'label to the vast majority of peaceable Muslims,' putting them in the same camp as the tiny minority of proponents of violence.<sup>596</sup> Fatima said that she felt 'distrustful' because in previous years she herself had encountered fellow Muslim Prevent representatives who she perceived to have 'unconsciously fell into the trap of supporting the view that Islam and followers of Islam are the problem that requires a solution.'<sup>597</sup> She went on to elaborate that she thought the wrong use of terminology could possibly fall into 'Islamophobic territory that contributes towards a narrative, which 'demonises Islamic faith.' This feedback was not used to disqualify my thesis but emphasised

---

<sup>593</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>594</sup> Yilmaz, I. 'Radical Muslim politics from comparative perspective: Theological deprivation as the major source of Hizb Ut-Tahrir's influence.' In *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika Cilt*, 6 (23) 2010, pp. 99-117.

<sup>595</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>596</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>597</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

the point of my positionality as a researcher and further evidence of participants being genuinely fearful of engaging with researchers who may misinterpret their words. For reassurance I re-emphasised to Fatima my research goal was not to look for evidence to prove extremism within any faith and that the focus of the thesis was counternarratives to extremism. Meaning and language associations are critical to this thesis and does not use words such 'radicalised' without placing them in context. The term extremist has not been used as a broad umbrella but a way of reflecting the language used by my participants and in association with the term 'radicalisation.' I engaged in a further discussion with Fatima about this post interview as this push back was founded on fear conditioned by previous experience with Prevent representatives, but nevertheless something I recognised and addressed within the interview.

Fatima felt on reflection, that the Prevent programme resulted in 'tarring members of an entire faith as suspect' and that institutions, like academic ones, had colluded by 'spying on Muslims.'<sup>598</sup> Prevent was thus a toxic brand that could not work effectively to counter extremism as it did not have enough buy in and was too focused on Muslims. Both Fatima and Laylah repeated throughout their interviews that they preferred to counter potential violent behaviour by making known their condemnation of violent terrorist acts and with faith instruction. Fatima went as far to say that Prevent itself was:

No good and counterproductive in the way it engages with Muslims and that the government sponsored review of it had done nothing to address not engaging well with Muslims. Prevents focus on ideology alone to counter extremism and terrorism is flawed. We know there are other particular drivers such a socio-economic and political factor that push an individual towards getting involved in the wrong groups who don't teach the right Islam.<sup>599</sup>

What we see here is the narrative that Prevent strategy has conflated fringe ideology with normative Islam, and therefore is perceived to discriminatively target Muslim beliefs or practices

---

<sup>598</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>599</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

as either extremist behaviours or potentially supporting extremist behaviours. The concept of 'the right Islam' forwarded by Fatima was focused on communicating faith as something that needed to be protected from misinterpretation. Both Laylah and Fatima and other faith leaders interviewed expressed anger with Prevent methodology and implementation that have alienated sections of UK Muslim communities. However, Laylah went on to say that as a member of her mosque she felt:

Fully supported by the police and interventions locally to stop crime and violence as we meet and support regularly. We are part of a community and want to work with people.<sup>600</sup>

This separation of local police relations from Prevent initiatives was a strong re-occurring point that emphasised a strong connection to local communities. What we see in the faith community of Laylah and Fatima is counternarratives to violence that do not support Prevent interventions but fully support and engage with the police and supports immediate action on any terrorist threat. At a local level, the support for this form of engagement as a counternarrative to extremism is powerful, reflecting a shared sense of social responsibility within communities. This suggests that such community-driven efforts are effective in fostering resilience against radicalisation. However, it is important to distinguish these localised examples of interventions from the broader Prevent strategy, which has often been criticised for its overly wide scope and lack of targeted impact. Laylah and Fatima's community conscious faith approach sought meaningful change within their local setting, as opposed to the more securitised approaches enforced through Prevent policy.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown interventions undertaken by faith communities, independent of Prevent, are able to offer an effective alternatives that opposes narratives of 'radicalisation' and 'extremism.' It has challenged some of the discursive thinking around the origins of violent Islamic ideological groups, as well as paradigms about what works as a counternarrative to this from the

---

<sup>600</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

perspective of selection of faith leaders from a variety of Islamic traditions. The roots of 'radicalisation' and the nature of securitisation and impact of Islamophobic perceptions of Muslim communities in the UK have also been considered. There was no one archetypal individual prone to 'radicalisation' but converts and those coming back to faith were identified as being more vulnerable to being influenced by extremist ideology. Neither could faith leaders interviewed predict attraction to extremist violence or offer one fail proof counternarrative to nullify all extremist violence. Random acts of violence are not entirely preventable by state or faith-based interventions, making it difficult to provide a one-size-fits-all solution. This unpredictable nature exposes the limitations of both state and faith leader efforts to fully address the root causes of extremism.

Interview participants spoke about faith counternarratives to violent forms of Islamic extremism being the most powerful but at the same time cited the fact that the Islamic faith teaching in the UK is regularly misconceived as a possible inspiration for violence. Certain faith leaders presented as occasionally suspicious of engaging with a non-Muslims prior to and during meetings. Feelings of grievance and injustice and the experience of being under threat from Prevent interventions was another background component that influenced the content of interviews. This was further compounded by the challenge participants faced in articulating and defending their Muslim faith identity, at the same time as strongly communicating the positive role of Islam in their own community. Although participants knew I had no direct association with Prevent I was constantly aware that fear of interviews being inadvertently used to further the discourse of securitising Muslims was one that would impact the answers provided. Therefore work was undertaken prior to and during interviews to build trust and communicate the aims and parameters of the thesis. This relational element was key in terms of examining my own position during interviews and being reflectively aware of the context of each interview.

The next chapter of the thesis examines how mosque faith leadership continues to directly address the central question of this doctoral thesis - how do UK Islamic faith leaders contribute to counternarratives that oppose extremist violent ideologies. A key aspect of this will involve examining the relationship between faith leaders and their communities, particularly the power

dynamics between Imams and mosque committee elders when responding to violent incidents. This will look at areas of contention and approaches to working with young people in understanding their faith, as well as considering the interplay between government intervention, community responsibility and civil society action. All crucial factors in addressing and mitigating attraction to violent ideologies.

## Chapter 8:

### Faith leadership and mosque life as a counternarratives to violent extremism

---

#### 8.1 Introduction:

The counternarratives presented through interviews in this chapter illustrate powerful stories of Islamic practice that promote peaceful opposition to violence. Five of the faith leaders interviewed contrasted this view of a peaceful faith with mainstream media narratives in the UK, which have at times portrayed Islamic faith practice as a potential contributor to inspiring violence.<sup>601</sup> The sample of interviews undertaken provide insights into the role of faith leaders in providing counternarratives that oppose extremist violent ideologies through a combination of theological instruction and practical social community interventions. As in the case of the Manchester Arena bombing inquiry, explored in Chapter Four, a number of Imams interviewed questioned the limits of their role and the imposed expectations of mosque committee elders. However, their focus was on common counternarratives to extremism they shared with the communities they were part of and presenting adherence to a normative paradigm of Islamic thought and practice, such as following the behaviours of the life of the Prophet Muhammad set out in the *Sunnah*.

The absence of one single religious authority across the majority of Islamic traditions in the UK and the fact that many mosques run autonomously also results in the emergence of various competing religious authorities. There are further inherited ethnic, intergenerational, cultural and sectarian differences within British mosques that make it challenging to totally prevent groups that exploit the space in-between to promote extremist ideology. Most of the faith leaders interviewed for this thesis were not solely responsible for leading their mosques but acted jointly with other Imams. None claimed complete authority for the faith practice in their

---

<sup>601</sup> Van Es, Margaretha A. 'The promise of the social contract: Muslim perspectives on the culturalization of citizenship and the demand to denounce violent extremism.' In *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42:16, 2019, pp141-158.

mosque settings and agreed shared projects with the committees and worshippers who volunteered. In contexts where extremist interpretations of Islam are gaining traction these faith counternarratives compete with other voices, but they also offer a cohesive and constructive alternative rooted in credible spiritual authenticity, community and ethical teachings.

Another relatively new challenge to faith leadership has come from global access to diverse online sources and teaching from autonomous preachers and online websites that promulgate the concept of an international Islamic ummah.<sup>602</sup> Faith leadership within mainstream majority Sunni mosques and other Islamic traditions, which theologically regard the Quran as the ultimate authority, is often decentralised according to various sectarian traditions in the UK.<sup>603</sup> This decentralisation can create a potential vacuum where diverse ideological approaches may sometimes emerge without restrictions. For centuries Mosques and Madrasas have functioned as sites of authority within Islam as protectors and custodians of theological tradition handed down over generations. However, this mode of faith communication could be argued to have been significantly disrupted by the current global digital revolution. Evidence suggests that a small minority of individuals in the Western context are still being influenced by hate preachers who claim that the Islamic 'ummah' is under global attack, leading them to support recourse to violent protest rather than democratic means.<sup>604</sup> In their ethnographic research, *The Attitude of Young Sunnī Muslims in Britain Towards Religious Authority*, Bayram and Kandemir explore the diverse and contemporary way young people in Leeds seek religious authority.<sup>605</sup> Using interviews this study found that sectarian orientations of people from South Asia, such as Deobandi, Bareilvi and Jamaat-i Islami primarily seek religious authority via following a school of law (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali) taught by an Imam and then widen their search for more expert ulema (Islamic scholar) internationally and online across their respective ethnic and

---

<sup>602</sup> Roy, Oliver (2004) *Globalised Islam*, London Hurst & Co, p25.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid, p30.

<sup>604</sup> Azani, Eitan and Koblenz-Stenzler, 'Muslim Converts Who Turn to Global Jihad: Radicalization Characteristics and Countermeasures.' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Taylor & Francis Journals, Vol.45 (2) (2022) pp.173-199.

<sup>605</sup> Bayram, Aydın Kandemir, Ahmet Mekin, 'The Attitude of Young Sunni Muslims in Britain Towards Religious Authority.' In *Atebe Journal for Religious Studies*. Turkey: Ankara Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi, Issue 8, 2022, pp.1-24.

sectarian communities.<sup>606</sup> Bayram and Kandemir's research argues that the search for religious authority in Britain remains subdivided according to particular communities and this complex picture is also similarly reflected within the sample of faith leader interviews within this thesis.

## **8.2 Muslim faith leadership meet the challenge**

Mosques in the UK remain a focal point of weekly faith practice for the majority of UK Muslims. At the same time as serving as a place of prayer, it is also a communal gathering space for major festivals, such as Ramadan and Eid, and a place for educational instruction in the faith. In the 1990s and into the 2000s, groups with extremist allegiances, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, openly used mosques as places for recruitment.<sup>607</sup> The UK leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir at this time, Omar Bakri Mohammed, presented himself as a scholar of Islam and would offer to lead prayers at mosques, set up study groups and offer youth activities to build personal relationships of trust with members. Major infiltration of Mosques by Hizb ut-Tahrir and subsequent groups like Al-Muhajiroun was not far reaching and limited to a few across England. This sometimes led to conflict in mosques between mosque elders and younger members of Hizb ut-Tahrir around the debate of what was the 'cultural Islam' of Pakistan and Bangladesh and what the group believed was purer Salafi practice that attempted to imitate the early foundations of Islamic faith.<sup>608</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun were referenced by several participants. Imam Bashir and Imam Hasnain indicated that Salafi influenced groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, had inspired British Muslim faith leaders to respond by re-envisioning how they engaged worshipers, and especially young people forming their faith. Salafi faith practice is discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. Prior to 9/11 and by the early point of 2000 Finsbury Park mosque in London had become a place where extremist ideology was openly propagated by leaders such as Abu Hamza of Al-Muhajiroun.<sup>609</sup> Much of this activity was obvious to the congregation and mosque committees subsequently moved to eject these groups post 9/11 to ensure they had no part in their faith

---

<sup>606</sup> Ibid, p3.

<sup>607</sup> Taji-Farouki, Suha (1996) *A Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate*. London: Grey Seal. p55.

<sup>608</sup> Hamid, Sadek. 'Islamic Political Radicalism in Britain: the case of Hizb-ut-Tahrir.' In *Islamic Political Radicalism: A European Perspective*, Abbas, Tahir (ed.) (2007). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p.149.

<sup>609</sup> Husain, Ed. (2007) *The Islamist: why I joined radical Islam in Britain, what I saw inside and why I left*. London: Penguin.

community.<sup>610</sup> Imam Hasnain was based in London at this time as a student and attended Finsbury Park mosque:

The members I met had a set pitch. Finsbury was a hotbed. They would get into an argument with you and ask provocative questions that I tried to avoid. You knew people who'd fallen for their message, and they took over a lot of the space. I think it taught me a lot and am still to this day about how not to run a mosque.<sup>611</sup>

Hasnain went on to state that as we moved through the '2020s extremist groups were no longer able to openly recruit' in the UK in the vast majority of mosques, as most communities have rejected their presence and internally police their places of worship without external intervention.<sup>612</sup> The impact of groups such as Al-Muhajiroun and the role of Imams in response to the events of 9/11 and 7/7 was referenced by seven of the faith leaders interviewed as a key focal point when communities started to gather their resources actively support mosque communities. Imam Hasnain focused primarily on teaching young men one to one in his role as a chaplain and felt that he did not have the same 'freedom to work with individuals as intensely' at his mosque in Luton due to what he identified as 'young men moving off' and not attending regularly.<sup>613</sup> Imam Mohammed said of his mosque group:

After every violent incident we emphasise the importance of congregating young and old, as studies show that happiness is linked to social interaction, while sadness is linked to isolation. The mosque is a place where people can congregate five times a day, standing shoulder to shoulder, regardless of wealth, gender, race, or culture. This practice is not only spiritually beneficial, but we believe it makes our people stronger to repel extremist challenges or attack. We stand together and reject any violence against the whole community.<sup>614</sup>

---

<sup>610</sup> Ibid, pp50-60.

<sup>611</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

<sup>612</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

<sup>613</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

<sup>614</sup> Interview with Imam Mohammed, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Philip Lewis terms this type of activity as ‘bridging social capital’ to be able to engage with young people, schools and civic bodies (such as the police) and create a culture of change.<sup>615</sup> Imam Mohammed came back to the theme of social responsibility and community activity throughout our interview. The countering extremism position Imam Mohammed provided to me was through the prism of everything being perfect in the approach of his mosque and he did not speak critically at any point of external agencies or Islamophobia. A group of supporting volunteers body of Ahmadiyya literature was also provided to evidence what was being done to counter destructive terrorist acts. However, this well-rehearsed positive view of communities effectively working together set forth by Imam Mohammed is juxtaposed with the experiences of the Ahmadiyya community members in the UK who have been sometimes victims of attacks by Sunni Muslims. Mohammed’s mosque had put extra security and metal detectors in place to ensure the safety of worshippers, but he opted to not speak further on risk to his own community but spoke more broadly on the work undertaken with young people.

For the majority of faith leaders interviewed, radicalisation was not rooted in religious ideology but rather in individuals' pre-existing personal or political grievances with the systems in place. Faith leaders, such as Imam Khabir, said many people they met that used language associated with extremist violent ideology had ‘mental health vulnerabilities’ that agencies ‘needed to prioritise for support beyond everything else.’<sup>616</sup> The last full outcomes report issued by Prevent in 2024 revealed that of the 6,809 referrals 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 31 March 2023 37% (2,505) were for individuals with ‘vulnerability present but no ideology or CT (counter terrorism) risk’, and of the total only 11% (748) were for ‘Islamist ideology.’<sup>617</sup> This evidence remains non-conclusive in terms of mental health and other vulnerabilities being the primary driver for terrorist acts but. While several faith leaders interviewed at times oversimplified the complex motivations underlying potential radicalisation by attributing them primarily to poor mental health, they

---

<sup>615</sup> Lewis, Philip, ‘Imams, ulema and Sufis: providers of bridging social capital for British Pakistanis?’ In *Contemporary South Asia* 15, 2006, pp273-87.

<sup>616</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>617</sup> Home office. ‘Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme April 2022 to March 2023.’ London: Home Office, UK. Gov publication. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/individuals-referred-to-prevent/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2022-to-march-2023#type-of-concern>. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

nonetheless acknowledged the importance of psychological profiles. This encompassed ideology, grievances, identity, and social networks as significant factors. They recognised that faith-based interventions alone were insufficient to fully address these dynamics, but believed it was important that government counter-terrorism measures addressed these factors.

In the UK there have been numerous examples of leaders in mosques countering violent ideology with theological approaches. Imam Mahboob, a Berelvi informed cleric, is quoted in a London mosque, by Bashir, as being able to ‘channel young people’s quest for faith enlightenment and anger’ with current geopolitical contexts for Muslims in the world. Mahboob did this by using novel Sufi based practices that overcame division and spoke to youth attracted to Hizb ut-Tahrir which influenced groups from the 1990s.<sup>618</sup> What distinguished Imam Mahboob historically was not only the fact he defended Berelvi traditions, such as celebrating the Prophet’s birthday, but engaged young people in English:

I was invited to attend sessions with Imam Mahboob on books by Muhammad al-*Bukhari* in London. I used to challenge him, but his knowledge of scholars and context inspired me. He was one of the few Berelvi Imams at the time able to speak English and was able to accompany youth intellectually. It has inspired me today when I work with youth to listen more openly.<sup>619</sup>

Bashir in this period had also attended Hizb ut-Tahrir study circles with group members who had been friends he had grown up with, and he was searching for his faith identity as he considered university. In the case of Imam Mahboob, he sought to enable the evolution of the faith in the UK beyond attachment to ethnic Berelvi Kashmiri and Pakistani derived practices by not rejecting youth who had previously joined Hizb-ut-Tahrir.<sup>620</sup> To do this he worked with mosque devotees

---

<sup>618</sup> Threadgold, Steven (2018), *Youth, Class and Everyday Struggles*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp18 to 22. Threadgold discusses the role of Imams in the UK to support young people in faith development.

<sup>619</sup> Interview with Bashir, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023. *Sahih al-Bukhari* is a Hadith collection and a book of Sunnah compiled by the Persian scholar Muhammad al-Bukhari around 846. The author was born in Bukhara in today's Uzbekistan.

<sup>620</sup> Geaves, Ron (1996). *Sectarian Influences Within Islam in Britain with Reference to the Concepts of ‘Ummah’ and ‘Community.’* Leeds: Monograph Series Community Religions Project, p40. Ron Geaves writing on Imam Mahboob wrote extensively on the Berelvi response to what was perceived as a Wahhabism influenced sectarian attack on the relationship between young people and elders who held on to traditions.

to create discussion groups outside daily mosque attendance to make ‘coherence of the world they were living in’ and engage with civic society.<sup>621</sup> This was an innovative and inclusive approach, but Bashir stated it was the events of 2005 7<sup>th</sup> July London bombing and Prevent that inspired and got Muslim communities and some of the leadership thinking about how they could ‘support and form people in faith.’<sup>622</sup> Bashir said from this period he has learnt from ‘Salafis’ that communicating the faith in ‘English was essential in finding the purity of Islam devoid of some of the cultural baggage’ as a British Muslim.<sup>623</sup> One can see in the case of Bashir that his early faith development, and encounters with Salafi groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir had positively influenced his current ministry.

The importance of fellowship and religious instruction to build Islamic identity and resilience was a repetitive theme in interviews undertaken. In his ministry to mosques in Leeds, Kardi highlighted his mosque had focused on educating people in faith with pastoral care on a day-to-day basis:

Faith is unique and incites passion and at times, in might be exploited, you know, to manipulate minds. Let’s say, you haven't got anything going in this world anyway, but actually if you take this action of taking others’ lives or harming others, then you know you'd get a place in paradise, which is completely against the faith itself because it's so far removed from the faith. But I think it's the unique passion for faith that can be used.<sup>624</sup>

It was pastoral care of all faith members that combatted extremism day to day for Kardi. Kardi incorporated a critique of the UK media into his counternarrative and was very aware of the concept of epistemic injustice. In his view it is not only violent extremists who are acting wrongly but the ‘mainstream media that actively furthers injustice by spreading the misrepresentation of what Islam teaches.’<sup>625</sup> Paradoxically both proponents of extremist ideology and Islamophobic tendencies within mainstream Western media are challenged by a counternarrative that defines

---

<sup>621</sup> Interview with Imam Bashir, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

<sup>622</sup> Interview with Imam Bashir, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

<sup>623</sup> Interview with Imam Bashir, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

<sup>624</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>625</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Islam as a peaceful religion and Daesh's misconceived 'Jihadist' teaching as wrong according to Islam. This negative approach to Islam in the media and narratives that assume Western superiority is supported by the media analysis of Mattias Ekman who argues that Islamophobic discourse is strengthened by xenophobic currents within mass media, and by the legitimisation of intellectuals and political actors.<sup>626</sup> Imam Kardi identified this as an 'injustice' that motivated him in his work and he spoke with great passion about countering misconceptions about Islam not only in the media but within groups he ran for people at his mosque looking to learn about their faith.

What was significant in the case of Kardi was that he had learnt to recite the entire Quran by his teens and was able to speak three languages: English, Urdu and Arabic. He stated his knowledge gave him 'respected authority' to engage people in his mosque community. Kardi believed the best counternarrative in response to any violent events was 'community engagement', interfaith dialogue and teaching courses inside and outside the mosque. These vary from Quran circles to essential knowledge classes in the observance of Islam. Every Friday he gave *Tajwid* classes (reading and reciting the holy book according to certain rules) to both adults and children. Kardi had made a conscious decision to engage in social media communication and appeared previously on the Ummah Channel and informed the policy of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB).<sup>627</sup> Kardi made it clear any killing of another human being was a 'crime' not sanctioned by faith. To counter this he instructed attendees in his study circles of the correct context of quotes of Quran and explored variation in translation from Arabic to English, such as 'kill them wherever you find them', often quoted by 'radicalised' groups in reference to 'disbelievers.'<sup>628</sup> For Kardi and Imam Khabir teaching Quran, Sunnah and Hadith use and understanding meaning in the context of which it used was intended as a powerful way for faith

---

<sup>626</sup> Ekman, M. 'Online Islamophobia and the Politics of Fear: Manufacturing the Green Scare.' In *Ethnic and Racial Studies Journal*, 38(11), 2015, pp1-17.

<sup>627</sup> Ummah Channel was an Islamic television channel based in the United Kingdom. It launched in August 2009 by replacing 9X's former Sky EPG slot on Sky Digital. It was closed at the end of 31 July 2017 and is no longer broadcasting

<sup>628</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Quote from Quran, Surah 2.91. For Kardi this is within the context of Mecca and Medina and specific in terms of opposing 'idolaters' in this time period and therefore quoted out of context.

groups to inspire 'reclaiming faith' narratives to 'positively project faith in the UK.'<sup>629</sup> What Imam Khabir and Kardi were illustrating here were counternarratives that reclaimed the history and theological meaning of Islam in line with what Professor Lana Oweidat calls the 'construction of Islamic ethos' that highlights what constitutes the guiding principles of its authority.<sup>630</sup> This 'Islamic ethos' was derived from multiple sources of religious, cultural and communal authority held within the historical basis of Islam. The faith groups operated by Imam Kardi were committed to promoting a diverse and tolerant view of faith. This was communitarian and focused on providing a moral framework of the world that set out rules for life for people in their pastoral care, such as explaining Islam as a religion of compassion and peace. Practically opposing the discourses of groups such as Daesh, which perpetuate violence and intolerance, involved a dual effort: challenging their narratives of extremism while simultaneously confronting Western Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice, which Kardi and other Imams interviewed believed too often viewed Islam solely through the lens of extremism. Both these elements were necessary to prevent the reinforcement of stereotypes and ensure that the true essence of the Islamic faith identity is not misrepresented or overshadowed by extremist ideologies or discriminatory narratives.

Throughout interviews many participants went on to make references to misconceptions of Islam prevalent within extremist 'Muslim factions', particularly the corruption of Islamic teachings by violent groups or dictatorships in countries outside of the UK. These narratives were based on discrepancies between participant's understanding of Islam and that applied by those they considered to lack of understanding of the application of the Islamic faith. For Imam Omar and Adem in north London, Friday sermons and discussion groups were the focal point for challenging what they termed 'dumb retaliation.' They focused on spiritual explanations of the world around as a response to the political interpretations of events of extremist groups:

You know the prophetic teachings of Islam teach principles to be a peacemaker, loving people forgiving their mistakes, prejudice, the inequalities, oppressions and

---

<sup>629</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>630</sup> Oweidat, Lana, 'Islamic Ethos: Examining Sources of Authority.' In *Humanities*, Vol. 8, Issue 4, 2019, p4. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h8040170>.

transgressions that take place for innocent people. You are not the only one who's been transgressed, who's been oppressed and is not because of your Muslim identity but unfortunately politics and societal problems.<sup>631</sup>

Imam Adem had weekly discussion groups. He noted that during 'violent events,' such as the London Bridge attack, he had organised specific discussions groups that addressed areas such as being persecuted 'because of your Muslim identity in prison' in open discussions about the 'mutual injustice of death' experienced by 'Muslims and non-Muslims' alike.<sup>632</sup> He emphasised none of his mosque attendees had 'sympathies with the perpetrators' violence,' and he and Omar repeatedly stated their faith identity as connected to the idea of being 'British Muslims.'<sup>633</sup> This type of counternarrative refuted simplistic reductionist interpretations of violence and is focussed on resilience to 'radicalisation' by being fully part of British society, including accepting Prevent policy. It also strongly opposed Islamophobic interpretations of violent events in the UK media by engaging with empirical evidence that shows only a small minority of UK Muslims have been involved in violent attacks. It further encourages open discussions on difficult subjects without fear of misunderstanding or wrongful persecution through Prevent surveillance. The discourse of Imam Omar and Adem highlighted not only the power of lived experiences within a faith community and a moral commitment to mainstream UK societal structures, but the important re-occurring theme of leveraging civic social responsibility as a crucial factor in opposing violent ideologies.

Imam Bashir ran a Prevent funded service in the Northwest of England and like Imam Omar fully supported the activity of Prevent to act with the police when necessary to counter extremist behaviour in all forms. At the time of our interview he was in the middle of an application for funding to continue running his charity which he openly admitted he found hard as he was under pressure to prove his 'value' but also 'prove' he himself was in anyway 'associated with extremists' for fear of losing funding.<sup>634</sup> The groups he ran were educational for the police and

---

<sup>631</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>632</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir October 1st, 2022.

<sup>633</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>634</sup> Interview with Imam Bashir, January 21st, 2023.

schools, and included a combination of faith instruction but also psychological support to build resilience:

A security response is not enough. The course we run for the youth address the underlying issues that can attract people towards violent extremism. You can compare it to deglamorizing gun-crime. The message I give is always about making the right decisions and knowing Islam. That way I empower young people is with education to expose violent extremists and reject violence. It can be practical too. So we teach kids about how to avoid abuser groomers on the internet.<sup>635</sup>

Imam Bashir counternarrative to extremism was based on extremist violence as a crime that harmed the community. His charity also provided practical support to people who wanted to move away from lives of petty crime, were looking for counselling to recover from addictions and put together CVs to find jobs. He was the only person interviewed who ran a directly funded Prevent project and therefore his ability to comment on it neutrally was compromised. At no point did he communicate, unlike others, that Prevent created a suspect community or attacked UK Muslim communities. However, he did acknowledge that his work in the community was dependent on Prevent funding and had to conform the expectations it set.

### **8.3 Who controls mosque life and what needs to change**

The *Understanding British Imams* Survey, led by Timol Riyaz at Cardiff University's Centre for the Study of Islam found the majority of Imams in the UK have little contractual or income security, with high turnover due livelihood challenges and are employed predominantly from Pakistan, Bangladesh or India with varying expectations of their role from mosque committees.<sup>636</sup> The Cardiff University research of Imams' working conditions that interviewed forty faith leaders also shows evidence that many mosque Imams feel their authority and role is limited by mosque committees to presiding over daily prayers, the ceremonies of marriage and death, and offering

---

<sup>635</sup> Interview with Imam Bashir, January 21st, 2023.

<sup>636</sup> Timol, Riyaz. 'Understanding British Imams.' Public lecture as part of a study undertaken for Cardiff University Centre for the Study of Islam (2023). <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/research/explore/find-a-project/view/understanding-british-imams>.

advice when sought.<sup>637</sup> There have been numerous other study reports, such as *The Missing Muslims: Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All*. Evidence found through interviews with 500 mosques showed that most UK based Imams from abroad are paid below the minimum wage and have little job security.<sup>638</sup> Although there are now more seminaries and mosques in the UK there is little concession still to the challenges of modernity and most instruction is in Urdu.<sup>639</sup>

The power dynamic of mosque life was explored in the interview with Imam Khabir. He stated that mosque committees in his experience are mostly made up of lay people, such as businessmen who belong to a set 'biradari clan network', who use their status and power in the community to 'set the rules and hold control' of theological teaching permitted in the mosque at Friday prayer. Therefore, for Khabir, Imams do not have the power to effect change or challenge certain individuals 'who pay their wage and the house they live in.'<sup>640</sup> He believed this is especially true for 'Imams coming from South Asia' on low wages with families to support, who had direct experience of this power dynamic. He also felt fear for his own position in the mosque he supported separate to his work as a chaplain:

So, I don't know how long I will last and so the Imams know that there is always a bit of tension and it's sometimes where it works is where there's respect on both sides it works well. But otherwise, Imams are normally at the whim and control of the mosque committee. So, you have to be careful what you say when teaching the faith.<sup>641</sup>

Khabir went on to propose that the problem is that not enough Imams are in a position to challenge extremist narratives that captivate vulnerable youth online and possibly on the fringes

---

<sup>637</sup> Citizens UK. 'The Missing Muslims: Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All.' London: Citizens Commission on Islam, 2017, p8 [https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Missing\\_Muslims\\_Report\\_execsummary.pdf](https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Missing_Muslims_Report_execsummary.pdf).

<sup>638</sup> Ibid, p10.

<sup>639</sup> Gilliat-Ray, Sophie, Hansjörg Schmid, Mansur Ali. 'Mapping Muslim Chaplaincy: An Analytic Review of Publications between 1989 and 2023.' In *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 14 2024 pp1–30. A large majority from the South Asian Deobandi school of thought have been at the forefront of the developing the role of Muslim chaplains in British prisons and hospitals.

<sup>640</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022

<sup>641</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

of the community on a face-to-face basis. He also stated that the majority of Imams in the UK are trained abroad, were poorly paid and their grasp of English was limited. This impacted in their ability to 'refuse the demands of their employers,' communicate with youth, as well as keep tenure at the mosque. So as the power sits with the committee they do not 'want to offend.'<sup>642</sup>

Khabir also believed the ability of religious leaders in mosques to respond to extremist or potentially violent mosque member was curtailed by the lack of power invested in Imams:

Management or whatever you call it, but normally most Imams have a difficult relationship with the mosque committee. On thinking about it, most committees have the power in a mosque and not the Imam. The mosque committees are often nearly always lay people. Businessmen or whatever it is, they've made it, you know. And they've got good reputation in the community or they're quite powerful. And so, they form the mosque committee and often the rules.<sup>643</sup>

Imam Khabir reflected that how own job security was low and that this led to a climate of fear and sometime bureaucratic restraint in terms of the limits of his job to support individuals. Khabir's critical view of compromised mosque leadership is supported by Anwar Amin El-Yousfi's ethnographic study of Imam authority in a London Mosque. Anwar argues that the role and status of the Imam has been undermined by powerful committees who want to control and choose religious leaders and that the religious and spiritual authority of the Imam, over time has 'become controlled by the bureaucratic authority of the committee members.'<sup>644</sup> Anwar stated that rather than experiencing a decline in Imams due to the rise of new religious figures outside traditional institutions, such as online preachers, mosques have become controlled by 'bureaucratic authority of the committee members' that undermine faith communication.<sup>645</sup> Several participants confirmed that whilst traditional authority is usually correlated with theology

---

<sup>642</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1st, 2022.

<sup>643</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>644</sup> Lewis, Philip. 'Imams in Britain: Agents of De-Radicalisation.' In *Islamic Movements of Europe*. Edited by Frank Peter and Rafael Ortega (2014). London and New York: I.B. Tauris, pp. 237–40.

<sup>645</sup> El-Yousfi, Amin Anwar, 'Conflicting paradigms of religious and Bureaucratic Authority on British Mosques.' In *Religions*, 30th September 2019, Volume 10, p7.

and piety, classically trained ulema, the public advocacy of Muslim community concerns is often headed by those with professionalized skillsets and secular civic experience.

In their work *Leadership, Authority and Representation in British Muslim Communities* Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Riyaz Timol argue that in an increasingly digital world, both women and men exercise leadership in novel ways, and sites of authority are moving away from traditional places, such as mosques and seminaries, to new places from across the UK community.<sup>646</sup> The theme of not being able to challenge the 'status quo' in mosques and a power imbalance was also picked up in the interview with Hasnain in his role as a mosque Imam and chaplain to a prison. He said, at times, he found it 'easier to work one to one with men in prison' in faith education than at mosque, where he felt if he were to report an individual to Prevent for being a possible terrorist risk he would be 'placing his reputation and job on the line and a lot of trouble.'<sup>647</sup> He went on to say he had 'no problem contacting the police' in an emergency and worked closely with criminal justice services as a chaplain as the 'best intervention' if he felt someone was 'a risk.'<sup>648</sup>

In contrast Imam Mohammed believed that Imams did have power in his Ahmadi tradition. This was instituted through an Ahmadi Caliphate leadership system with a method of 'one message' communication.<sup>649</sup> This prevented extremist and division as all Imams and elders who sat on mosque trustees were required to follow one teaching:

It's about one. if there is an Imam nominated in that role, you know, as a Muslim, we are told to hold obedience. Right. So, it's part of that journey. There have been a lot of mosque trustees who have lost control, and even in the end our trustees actually said, well, we've got no control because our youth are not coming to mosque and are not on board. Our Khalifa gives one homily message every Friday and other messages in the year we cannot divert from and must pass down in our own homilies.<sup>650</sup>

---

<sup>646</sup> Gilliat-Ray, Sophie, Timol, Riyaz (2021), *Leadership, Authority and Representation in British Muslim Communities*. Basel, Switzerland MDPI - Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute.

<sup>647</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

<sup>648</sup> Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

<sup>649</sup> Interview with Imam Mohammed, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>650</sup> Interview with Imam Mohammed, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

In response to this, Mohammed said his mosque had prioritized teaching young people and training UK based Imams who spoke English, as they could relate to the ‘challenges of being here in London’ but also teach the faith to prevent extremism.<sup>651</sup> Therefore this counternarrative was based firmly on unified community acts of faith that served all, as well as countering misinterpretation of Islam in the media.

Interviewees, such as Hasnain, connected with mainstream narrative rejection of extremists and violent terrorists of groups like Daesh by working with the criminal justice discourse to resolve crimes that by association sometimes suggested that all Muslims were a threat. Edwin Bakker, a professor of terrorism and counterterrorism at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs in the Hague, has written extensively on government policy and deradicalisation in the context of the Netherlands. He argues that community police liaison has been key to keeping community cohesion and limiting violence in the Netherlands.<sup>652</sup> This was again echoed by Imam Adem and Omar who organised breakfast mornings every month in which the police joined other invited experts, such as NHS mental health professionals, in a slot to speak on community issues. The mosque described by Imam Adem had a programme of active engagement with all parts of the community that was inclusive of external agencies.<sup>653</sup> Imam Adem worked with Prevent in the borough of Hackney as he said it was part of the ‘British system’ and he accepted it was an area he as a ‘leader had to negotiate with’ as his community had to stay open and ‘confident’ to support a variety of needs and engage as they had ‘nothing to hide.’<sup>654</sup> As mentioned earlier, for Imam Adem and Omar it was the Muslim community who had the best opportunity, that included practical action with all public agencies, and to provide an effective counternarrative to attraction to extremist groups. I would argue there is a need to include faith community groups, such as the

---

<sup>651</sup> Interview with Imam Mohammed, August 30th, 2022.

<sup>652</sup> Zuijdewijn, Roy van J.H. de and Bakker E. ‘Twenty years of countering jihadism in Western Europe: from the shock of 9/11 to ‘jihadism fatigue.’ In *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 18(4) 2023, pp421-434.

<sup>653</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>654</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

one led by Imam Adem, in forming more credible approaches to deradicalisation and building resilience to violent ideologies.

The effectiveness of mainstream mosque faith leadership was brought into question by other interviewees too who questioned whether it was equipped to fight battles against extremist ideologues or to face the challenges of modern UK society. Imam Bashir, a graduate from Dewsbury Dar al-Ulum seminary in Yorkshire, said the majority of the men who studied there still emanated from Pakistan and Bangladesh and that in the eight mosques he visited in the Burnley and Preston area most faith leaders were still reluctant to use community services to support their ministry. This, he said, had inspired him to search for and take part in a Salafi based mosque in Burnley more 'engaged in the local community', where he 'co-led' an Arabic study group to enable younger people to gain a better understanding of the Quran.<sup>655</sup> Bashir and four other Imams interviewed suggested younger generations might seek guidance outside the mosque due to not being able to connect with their Imam, turning to online platforms in English where they may be more vulnerable to the influence of extremist networks. These networks of violent ideology offer a narrative for those angry with injustices against Muslims globally in states such as Palestine and Kashmir or who feel discriminated against in local UK society. When he encountered any person who supported violence, he believed the best recourse to action was in prayer and in quoting from *Hadith* and Quran verse via *Tafsir* (Quran exegesis), and if needed referral to services, such as mental health services. For Bashir there was a chasm in communicating the faith not only to young people but females who were not always given a meeting space at mosque:

In the mosques I serve there is little space for young women who tend to meet at home. Most imams don't have the skills to be online. So actually, those who are online propounding normative Sunni mainstream views are often not mosque norms. Now it's, as I said before, a question of numbers and it's in the vacuum of not having enough Imams that are able to relate to young people. The online world has taken a bigger role in

---

<sup>655</sup> Interview with Imam Bashir, January 21st, 2023.

people's lives, especially since Covid and you can get all sorts of nastiness online, as you well know.<sup>656</sup>

The voices of women of Islamic faith and stories of countering extremism in the context of what Iman Bashir and Imam Khabir describes are overlooked but also not facilitated by the faith structure set up of mosques.<sup>657</sup> A 2024 study that interviewed three hundred and twenty two Muslim men and women in England and Wales on their attitudes surrounding the types of discrimination faced by Muslim women in public prayer spaces found that 96% of respondents said they believed women should not be stopped from attending the mosque to pray, and that women should not be excluded from mosque leadership.<sup>658</sup> Evidence from other similar data surveys compiled by Muslims in Britain in April 2024 revealed that a total of 28% of the approximately 1,858 mosques in the UK do not offer facilities for women.<sup>659</sup> Fatima believed 'misogyny was universally experienced by women of all faiths' and that in the mosque context women were under utilised by 'leaders' as they could bring a 'consensus approach to help conversations and dialogue to counter extremism.'<sup>660</sup> What Fatima was attempting to communicate here is that faith establishments and mosque leadership in its various forms across the UK is effective but sometimes not always disposed to include women. Therefore, women, like Imams, have an equal experience of powerlessness and a lack of co-production in the fight to counter extremism.

Fatima and Laylah both emphasised that actions taken by their particular mosque to counter misinterpretation of Islamic faith included women and were founded in a practical exemplar role that focused on health, education, and social welfare, catering to different groups within the local

---

<sup>656</sup> Interview with Imam Bashir, January 21st, 2023.

<sup>657</sup> Nayyar, Anita. 'My British Mosque Research Report.' *Open My Mosque Campaign*. Published by Together We Thrive Network campaign in association with SOAS 180 Degree Consulting. 4th March 2024, p3. <https://togetherwethrive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/OMM-Research-Full-Report-Online-version.pdf>. Accessed 3rd May 2024.

<sup>658</sup>Ibid p4. The report also fed back that 59% said they themselves or a woman they know had experienced unfair treatment in a mosque, including physical intimidation, sexism and being denied entry, on one or more occasions.

<sup>659</sup> Mehmood Naqshbandi, *Muslims In Britain, UK Mosque Statistics / Masjid Statistic as of 2024* Data listed in the MuslimsInBritain.org Directory of Masjids/Mosques. [www.MuslimsInBritain.org](http://www.MuslimsInBritain.org). Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2024.

<sup>660</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

community. All the services of their mosque were designed to demystify Islam and break down barriers of misunderstanding and resonated ‘deeply the Islamic principle of *Khidma* (service)’ and Laylah went on to quote the Quranic verse ‘O mankind, indeed we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another’ (Quran 49:13).<sup>661</sup> Fatima and Laylah both took part in offering a variety of classes, included a ‘Tajweed’ sessions (recital of Quran) solely for women, Arabic classes and Islamic studies and history and culture workshops for those new to faith. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the practice and offer of mosques do not follow one agreed programme and therefore the examples given by Fatima and Laylah cannot be seen to be fully representative for all mosques in the London area or the rest of the UK.

Effective engagement with young people and women, in particular, was questioned by several interviewees. The lack of engagement was seen as a significant source of risk, particularly for people who are in the process of discovering or affirming their faith identity. Without proper guidance and support, they may be more vulnerable to being drawn into online groups that promote extremist ideologies, leaving a gap where answers were sought in spaces where radical narratives may exist. Imam Khabir observed ‘young girls are not engaged at all’ and ‘the mosque is not a place for women, for many mosques are male only.’<sup>662</sup> Imam Hasnain and Imam Khabir, who had both worked as youth workers before being Imams, went further to observe a ‘vacuum’ in which mosque support was limited and therefore ‘troubled people with addictions’ or mental health issues sometimes joined ‘non-mainstream alternative communities,’ increasing the risk of ‘radicalisation.’<sup>663</sup> Whilst identifying this ‘vacuum’ existed in mosques, both affirmed this did not prevent them offering strong counternarratives on a one to one basis, such as offering theological guidance to individuals and families on a pastoral level to help people avoid extremist groups or practice. Therefore there was a contrast between the level or one to one countering of extremist narratives presented by participants that did not match the overall macro practices of mosques being commented on.

---

<sup>661</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>662</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>663</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, and Interview with Imam Hasnain, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

This need for Imams who can connect with young people and have skills to engage to counter extremist ideology was a point of issue with no one solution. The concept of 'normative' Islamic belief in the words of Imam Khabir and three others I interviewed was based on the foundations of Sunni Islam and not only a counter to violent ideologies but something that they perceived to supersede any divisions within Islamic faith practice. This narrative also reflects the findings of Sandberg and Colvin in Norway in their study of 'epistemic injustice' felt by young Muslims who rejected not only extremism but also prejudice against Muslims.<sup>664</sup> Joesse et al in the study of Muslim Somali Canadians call this the 'storied rejection' of extremism that supports the view that 'the most powerful counternarratives that work against radicalisation will already be in place within communities.'<sup>665</sup> The cultural tendency to see all Muslims as vulnerable to violent radicalisation in the UK, in effect silences and denies the voice of the majority of Muslims who are acting to resist extremist violent narratives. All the faith leaders I interviewed distanced themselves from violent ideology but at the same time felt under attack by Islamophobic discourse that misconstrued faith expression and sidelined their voice. Aislinn O'Donnell, has likened this dynamic to 'constructing a set of implicitly racialised, colonial frameworks that constitute Muslims as a suspect community.'<sup>666</sup> She goes on to argue that Prevent UK Government policy has been used as a public tool to securitise and police Muslim communities in the UK.<sup>667</sup> The philosopher, Miranda Fricker has gone as far as to say this approach to Muslims has therefore caused 'cultural anxiety' around 'Islamic extremism' that incites an atmosphere of distrust of Muslims as a whole by mainstream communities.<sup>668</sup> Fatima communicated that from her view the 'distrust of Muslims killed the voice of faith networks' and that this was further exacerbated by media distortions of events that provided negative 'stereotypes' about faith,

---

<sup>664</sup> Sandberg, Sveinung, Colvin, Sarah. 'ISIS is not Islam: Epistemic Injustice, Everyday Religion, and Young Muslims Narrative Resistance.' In the *British Journal of Criminology*, 2020, Vol.60 (6), p.1585-1605 and

Joesse, P., Bucerius, S. M. and Thompson, S. K. 'Narratives and Counternarratives: Somali-Canadians on Recruitment as Foreign Fighters to Al-Shabaab.' In the *British Journal of Criminology*, 55 2015, pp811–32.

<sup>665</sup> Joesse, P., Bucerius, S. M., & Thompson, S. K., 'Narratives and counternarratives: Somali Canadians on recruitment as foreign fighters to Al-Shabaab.' In the *British Journal of Criminology*, 2015 55(4), p814.

<sup>666</sup> O'Donnell, A. 'Contagious Ideas: Vulnerability, Epistemic Injustice and Counter-Terrorism in Education.' In *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 50 2018 pp981-97.

<sup>667</sup> O'Donnell, A., 'Securitisation, Counterterrorism and the Silencing of Dis-sent: The Educational Implications of Prevent.' In *British Journal of Educational Studies* 64, no. 1 2016, pp53–76.

<sup>668</sup> Fricker, M. (2007), *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press, p44.

such as the misconceptualisation of 'Jihad.'<sup>669</sup> The term Jihad for Fatima has therefore been broadly misappropriated under the banner of military and violent struggle by groups such as Daesh but been an enabler for the media to attack Islamic faith, rather than recognising its 'broader interpretation within the scope of faith communities.'<sup>670</sup>

In this context, I would argue that the dominant mainstream narrative of extremist threats to UK society and radicalised individuals creates a limited space for mosque faith leaders and other moderate voices that represent the majority of Muslims. Interviewees, such as Laylah felt that their ability to protest or disagree with world events where Muslims were being persecuted was open to 'misinterpretation and even seen as support of extremist groups' by Prevent and other government agencies.<sup>671</sup> Laylah framed this with a protest experience she had attended near Downing Street in London where she had protested against injustices against Muslims in places such as Palestine. She said she had engaged in 'peaceful protest' but felt that the police presence made her feel like a 'potential risk or threat' even though she was present with people from her mosque who 'respected the police presence.'<sup>672</sup> One can see in this situation the categorisation of extremism was seen to be so fluid and subjective that people of faith joining peaceful civic objections felt at risk of being unfairly treated or misjudged by agencies like Prevent or directly by the police. This fear of being inappropriately labelled 'extremist' was also felt by a number of faith leaders in their own mosque context. Imam Kardi stated they would not speak about politics at Friday homily before checking with mosque committees. He gave written homilies in English and Arabic that were 'read and approved' with his mosque committee each week before he could announce them in public.<sup>673</sup> This control and media sensitivity for larger mosques with national reputations showed an awareness of external political optics on all Mosque activity. Therefore, fear and distrust of being wrongly profiled as a potential violent extremist by Prevent or at risk of radicalisation was very real for many I interviewed. This thesis acknowledges this assessment that Prevent affiliated agencies have at times incorrectly and wrongly associated Islamic faith

---

<sup>669</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>670</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>671</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>672</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>673</sup> Interview with Imam Kardi, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

groups with extremist violent ideologies.<sup>674</sup> A climate of distrust has therefore silenced the voices of individuals who may have nebulous association via social media with groups who have been categorised as extremist. This includes disregarding genuine instances of public protest, political resistance and credible faith leaders through the silencing of legitimate dissent or criticism of Prevent policy.

#### **8.4 Faith development in the face of global online extremism**

The impact of the internet was referred to by five of the people interviewed as a challenge in terms of preventing young Muslims receiving teaching from unchecked sources that may be harmful. Imran believed that most acts of violence in the UK were by lone actors who had been ‘manipulated and groomed online.’<sup>675</sup> The internet has served as an easy-to-use propaganda platform, making extremist groups’ messages instantly available to a potential audience of millions. It can be argued that extremist and militant interpretations of Islam via the web have inspired a disposition towards the use of violence against perceived enemies, but not on a mass scale.<sup>676</sup> By projecting emotive images of war and injustices taking place against Muslims across the world, groups such as Daesh have used online media to recruit individuals to fight wars in different countries. There is a considerable body of documented evidence to suggest online grooming of young people played a large part in the recruitment drive for Daesh to persuade men and women to travel via Turkey in considerable numbers to join the movement.<sup>677</sup> One such study is that of Leah Windsor, in her paper on *Female Internet Recruitment to Participation in ISIS Activities*, who charts the ‘radicalisation’ and changed language of women through social media entries in the journey to joining ‘ISIS.’<sup>678</sup> There are no conclusive studies that chart the numbers of young women groomed by groups such as Daesh but the numbers as compared to

---

<sup>674</sup> The case of Lewisham Imam, Shakeel Begs, written about in Chapter five of this thesis, exemplifies this occurrence. In his case the high court (with Prevent support) assigned him to be extremist though previous social media posts, so he lost his libel case against the BBC. However, Imam Begs remains lead Imam for Lewisham Islamic Centre and has received trusted support from Lewisham community police.

<sup>675</sup> Interview with Imam Imran, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>676</sup> Loza, Wagdy, Wendy, ‘The Psychology of Extremism and Terrorism: A Middle Eastern Perspective.’ In *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Volume 12 2007, pp141–155.

<sup>677</sup> Khalil, Sardarnia and Safizadeh, Rasoul. ‘The Internet and Its Potentials for Networking and Identity Seeking: A Study on ISIS.’ In *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2019-11, Vol.31 (6), pp.1266-1283.

<sup>678</sup> Windsor, Leah. ‘The Language of Radicalization: Female Internet Recruitment to participation in ISIS Activities.’ In *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2020-04, Vol.32 (3), pp.506-538.

the percentage of the population were extremely small. Through anti-terrorist legislation the UK Government has also gone on to withdraw citizenship from a number of those that travelled to join Daesh that in effect make these individuals stateless, as shown in the case of Shamima Begum, already discussed in an earlier chapter.

Imam Omar said he had a specific 'youth department' and online presence he helped to deliver at his mosque and he referred all young people he believed were mentally unwell and more susceptible to potential online abuse to the MindWise website for advice and local primary care services.<sup>679</sup> This active community approach by Omar was unique amongst the faith leaders I interviewed as it presented a fully inclusive approach to all services and solutions offered outside of the mosques setting.<sup>680</sup> Imam Kardi was committed to engaging online in his pastoral outreach to people who attended his mosque in Leeds, England and wider parts of the UK, and beyond, as a strong medium to counter extremist views and convey 'correct' teaching:

For those who radicalise people we help people to understand the context so that people are not taken back, you know, by people who prey on them online and for the first time they hear something, and they are mentally prepared and are able to challenge someone who might approach them online with the intention of radicalising them. So, this is what's happening now in the mosque where I am in terms of focus groups and also meeting people to talk online on Zoom. Because we have lots of events in mosques as well, I think in the last decade or so many of those events actually in a subtle way talk about some of these issues and highlight the true image of Islam. Also, some of these narratives are now challenged with counternarratives to the radicalised.

Whilst participants identified online propaganda as a vehicle of potential harm and miscommunication, such as enticing young people to former Daesh strongholds in Syria or Libya, faith leaders interviewed used online mediums to counter violent narratives. Imam Kardi, Hasnain and Ahmed referred to websites they used to report Islamophobic attacks and counter violent ideological world views; including Alhuda Online, askimam.org, Sunnipath.com, al-

---

<sup>679</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>680</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

islam.com, Islamonline.net and TellMAMA.com.<sup>681</sup> Another example of using online resources was the significant importance of *Fatwas* (religious edicts) and discourses about all aspects of Muslim life via websites, such as central-mosque.com; and ukim.org as trusted sources. Imam Kardi said the need to meet online had gathered pace during the Covid pandemic and he continued to meet people using Microsoft Teams and Zoom as an outreach tool. He also used media channels online to speak in public. The story here of faith leadership authority being necessary as the primary way to form people, as well as something young people struggle with in their attempt to seek guidance and faith formation was articulated in the words of Laylah. Laylah was clear it was theologically incorrect to base interpretation of 'faith to commit extremist acts' and stated that:

Without guidance Muslims may interpret online sources in an incorrect direction. They may understand the sources based on their own logic and for their own benefit. For example, if you are ill, you will go to a doctor, or if your car is broken, you will go to a mechanic. Similarly, if you have a problem in understanding a Quran for example, you should go to a qualified scholar and ask. If you take a strong medicine without consulting a doctor, you may kill yourself. It is the same for religion, and you may put your faith in danger of extremism by not having enough proficiency.<sup>682</sup>

What Laylah was communicating was that faith leaders were credible sources of counternarratives to extremism who can fulfil this role of trusted actors that have greater validity for their receivers. Furthermore, faith leaders are independent of the UK Prevent framework that, as shown, has been questioned by certain British Muslim faith leaders and groups since the early part of its inception. This connects with Braddock and Horgan's argument that a counternarrative's content is ignored or deemed illegitimate if the message recipient does not consider its source to be 'legitimate and trustworthy.'<sup>683</sup> A key underlying necessity from faith

---

<sup>681</sup> The sites AlHuda Online, Fatwas by Mufti Ebrahim Desai - Askimam, sunnipath.com, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community - Al Islam Online - Official Website and Home - IslamOnline were mentioned in Interviews with Imam Khabir, Imam Imran and Imam Kardi. Accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2023.

<sup>682</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>683</sup> Braddock, Kurt; Horgan, John, 'Towards a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counternarratives to Reduce Support for Terrorism.' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Taylor & Francis Journal, 2016, Vol.39 (5), pp.381-404.

leaders in this thesis was the importance of cultivating trust between faith members and those perceived as the source of the counternarrative messages. Therefore, on this level faith leaders were seen to be transformative on many levels by playing a significant role in assisting individuals to abandon violent beliefs, attitudes, or behaviour, or prevent individuals from engaging in the first place.

The discourse of a lone minority of vulnerable people being misguided and more susceptible to radicalisation came up in several interviews. It was used as an example counternarrative to mainstream media Islamophobic narratives that portrayed faith as a contributory factor to violence and not representative of the majority Muslims faith. The socio-economic and psychosocial parts of vulnerabilities to being 'radicalised' were identified as factors that went beyond the life of families or mosque faith formation. Various studies of returning Daesh operatives have shown similar vulnerabilities. A study of two hundred and twenty interview samples by Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg found that among the men, the most commonly present vulnerabilities were poverty, unemployment and a criminal history.<sup>684</sup> Speckhard and Eilenberg's research presents critical influences outside of the faith setting as defining factors as to why certain individuals were more vulnerable to attraction to violent ideologies. Imam Khabir, Imam Hasnain and Imam Ahmad, who had all worked as prison chaplains, identified criminal background as a key potential influencing factor to commit acts of violence. Khabir cited this was often informed by incorrect faith understanding for those returning to Islam and something that they had attempted to help individuals with when previously working in criminal justice settings.<sup>685</sup>

There were a number of interviewees who indicated they were able to work positively and closely with mosque committees in planning and organising their mosques and felt empowered. Imam Adem said he had received recognition from two related north London Turkish affiliated mosque committees for providing the best mosque *madrassa* (institute of Islamic education) in his area.

---

<sup>684</sup> Speckhard, Anne; Ellenberg, Molly D, 'ISIS in Their Own Words: Recruitment History, Motivations for Joining, Travel, Experiences in ISIS, and Disillusionment over Time – Analysis of 220 In-depth Interviews of ISIS Returnees, Defectors and Prisoners.' In *Journal of Strategic Security*, 2020-04, Vol.13 No 1 pp. 82-127.

<sup>685</sup> Interview with Imam Khabir (Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022), Imam Hasnain (Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022) and Imam Ahmad (Oct. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

Adem's *madrassa* taught not only 'faith rules' but a 'sense of belonging', that he believed took a 'full part in the community to show how we oppose extremism.'<sup>686</sup> Both Adem and Omar repeated that they did this primarily through social action that responded to need, such as offering volunteers to clean up a small local park. Another example was given by Tanvir who worked with his mosque committee leadership to provide volunteers to a food bank and events at his mosque that were open to the whole community. Tanvir was keen to emphasise community affinity as a way of building connection and breaking down barriers to take a full part in British society. He quoted the following Quranic text, 'Kind speech and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury.'<sup>687</sup> There were also stories from interviewees of mosque committees responding when mosques were attacked after terrorist incidents to host events to and work with the police to build community cohesion. Fatima told the story of how the mosque where she had grown up in central Birmingham had responded to an unsuccessful arson attack after the killing of MP David Ames in 2021. This attack had required the whole community to assess how it related to neighbours and met the 'challenge of extremism by using community approaches' and a 'safe community space' where people were given the opportunity to meet the Imam and discuss the events in open forums.<sup>688</sup> Fatima believed mosques coming together in times of adversity could be used as places to not only 'end division by breaking down ignorance' with other communities but division 'within mosque membership' where intolerance of difference can be challenging.<sup>689</sup>

Imam Mohammed cited numerous occasions when his mosque committee had to make decisions with the police to safeguard mosque members under threat in London and had 'firsthand experience of extremism' against him and his mosque members.<sup>690</sup> Ahmadi British Muslims have been subject to various forms of religious persecution, discrimination and systematic oppression

---

<sup>686</sup> Interview with Imam Adem and Imam Omar, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>687</sup> Interview with Tanvir. Quoted from Quran, Surah 2.26.

<sup>688</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>689</sup> Interview with Fatima and Laylah, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>690</sup> Interview with Imam Mohammed, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

internationally and in the UK since the movement's inception.<sup>691</sup> Mohammed said this experience had led him to take an active part in the Ahmadi UK 'Champions of Peace' group. In this group he had organised inter-faith conferences and reached out online and at his mosque to young people to use faith teaching to 'get rid of bad knowledge of Jihad' and 'teach real spiritual knowledge' as part of UK society that guarded people against supporting or taking part in 'terrorist acts.'<sup>692</sup> Mohammed referred back to events such as 7/7 and the London Bridge attack as 'not Islamic.' His mosque made extra public announcements through their media centre to discredit misconceived Islamic ideologies, and to correct misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims as aggressively violent.<sup>693</sup> The counternarrative, espoused by Mohammed, like Adem, was closely connected to the conceptual theme of faith leaders advocating for the entire community to combat prejudice against Muslims and promote social responsibility that took great pride in being part of UK civic society. It was signified by a collective approach that was not only inclusive of all but rejected violence by working on every level with the police and all local services to support people in an integrated manner. This included supporting aspects of Prevent initiatives and fully working with police in safeguarding matters.

The social and cultural anthropologist, Mieke Groeninck's, Belgian study shows how Islamic faith leaders have been incorporated as 'non-state actors' in Belgium's deradicalisation policies since 2015. Groeninck argues that the theological counternarratives of faith leaders in Belgium are not merely 'docile' acceptors of being used by the state agencies but examples of 'border line' renegotiation of 'the horizons of expectations' by 'resignifying of elements of hegemonic secular discourse' from within another place and another tradition.<sup>694</sup> Thus, in this example faith leaders in Belgium are able to promote faith as remedial approach to 'radicalisation' with support of

---

<sup>691</sup> Adamson, I (2009), *The Guided One*, Farnham Islam International Publications, p101-102. Ahmadi Muslims are considered non-Muslims by many mainstream Sunni Muslims since they consider Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the movement in India, to be the promised Mahdi and Messiah awaited by the Muslims. This claim has always been a point of contention and considered blasphemous by mainstream normative Muslims. The consequence of this has seen numerous attacks in India, Pakistan, and the UK.

<sup>692</sup> Interview with Imam Mohammed, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>693</sup> Interview with Imam Mohammed, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>694</sup> Groeninck, Mieke, 'Difference and negotiation from the borders: Islamic religious actors providing theological counternarratives for deradicalisation in Belgium.' In *Religion, State & Society*, 2021-10, Vol.49 (4-5), pp.331-349. This Belgian initiative to invest in the preventive curative formulation of theological counternarratives was inspired by guidelines from the European Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) (2011).

government whilst not losing agency within their community by being perceived to be compliant or compromising faith. The concept of 'border line' narrative has its roots in decolonialisation of knowledge theory that is touched upon in Chapter Three of this thesis.<sup>695</sup> In this context faith leaders act as 'credible messengers' and 'key actors' and story tellers who are able to counter extremism by using their authority in the community to re-Islamise both men and women with theological teaching.<sup>696</sup> I would argue that the evidence collected from the sample of participants interviewed for this thesis concurs with Groeninck's view that faith leaders are credible voices who have the capacity to act as powerful catalysts for individual change. However, unlike the state faith arrangement Groeninck describes in Belgium, this thesis illustrates that a division exists where credible UK faith leader counternarratives are not always fully included in solutions to extremism by agencies such as Prevent.

## 8.5 Conclusion

In the last three chapters Faith leaders have evidenced how counternarratives to extremism existent within diverse sections of UK Muslim communities have grown in strength with each episode of violence over the last two decades. This research thesis has presented a clear number of counternarratives that have arisen in opposition to extremist ideology from different segments of Muslim faith leadership communities in the UK. Faith leaders have responded practically to violent events by rejecting the perpetrators and groups who support these actions. This includes, in some instances going as far as to refuse to oversee the funeral rites of terrorists and issuing clear statements that the acts carried out are in contradiction to Islamic faith teaching.<sup>697</sup> However, this is not always acknowledged or fully recognised by state agencies such as Prevent

---

<sup>695</sup>Ibid, p343. Groeninck links the theory of the 'Decolonisation of knowledge' to the evolution through debates within and among scholars of the so-called 'decolonial turn' of the twentieth century pioneered by seminal thinkers like Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Enrique Dussel, Edward Said, Talal Asad, Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Homi Bhabha, and Stuart Hall.

<sup>696</sup>Ibid, p334.

<sup>697</sup> Sherwood, Harriet. 'Imams refuse funeral prayers for indefensible London Bridge attackers.' *The Guardian newspaper*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2017. Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/05/imams-refuse-funeral-prayers-to-indefensible-london-bridge-attackers>. A total of 130 Imams led by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) issued a statement through the UK press to condemn the attacks and make clear that what had happened was a 'perversion' of Islam that had been undertaken by people who have 'previously led a life of delinquency. It is often the case that the path towards extremism is outside of the mosque and at the margins of society,' Harun Khan (Chief Secretary of the MCB).

or within mainstream narratives of Muslims in the UK. It has required a deeper moment of self-reflection and awareness by faith leaders with regard to their vital role in educating and building resilience to ideological violent groups within communities. The sample of people interviewed were strongly conscious of the need to counter Islamophobic misunderstanding of faith from government and media sources as well as maintain the right to fight for epistemic justice for Muslims in the UK and different parts of the world. This included establishing new pathways of engagement within younger generations using online and face to face meetings at mosques and teaching 'normative' Islamic practice. The combination of practical community-based action, co-operation with the police and support for Prevent government sponsored initiatives, when needed, was also very manifest. However, overall suspicion of Prevent policy and the impact it had on communities was also apparent in the majority of the stories shared by interviewees who believed Islamic faith leadership in the UK was not involved closely enough to inform solutions to preventing radicalisation. However, this did not stop UK faith community leaders I met from forming their own unique approaches to supporting people who may be vulnerable to extremist interpretation of Islamic faith and there were many positive stories of engagement with individuals.

The other clear insight from interviews was that when challenging ideological misinterpretations of Islamic faith teaching, faith leaders were not attempting to focus on deconstructing the world views of individuals to deradicalise them but showing how to reason and be open to complex and diverse interpretations within the Islamic faith. The term deradicalise was not often used as a term to describe the changed world views of individuals they helped. This exploration of faith also enabled individuals to be more tolerant of difference and engage with mainstream agencies such as the police in community interventions. It can be posited that internal diversity, tensions and contradictions are part of the landscape of Islamic tradition in the UK and not a new phenomenon. Within the UK there are a multitude of diverse narratives about belief and practice that are a testament to this fact.<sup>698</sup> What was illustrated in each interview was the discursive and pluralistic nature of Islamic faith counternarratives, that offered remedial and curative

---

<sup>698</sup>Ahmed, S. (2016) *What Is Islam? the Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, pp201-211.

restoration to individuals vulnerable to extremist ideologies. Many believed religious authority had a credible voice that was capable of defeating misappropriation of faith narratives to justify violent terrorist acts. This credible faith leadership voice was also capable of claiming back some of the power that had not been recognised or fully included in the formation of UK Prevent policy. Thus, rather than being in opposition the voice of faith leaders in the UK can be complementary to Prevent.

Faith leadership teaching and counternarratives in the UK can be seen to be faced with other challenges. This includes how to find new ways of engaging with disaffected youth, how to be more inclusive of women in the ways mosques are set up and how to include an Islamic presence that can be included into new mainstream solutions or countermeasures to extremist ideology and violence in the UK. Imams interviewed for this thesis recognised the challenges faced in terms of the disconnect with youth and need to engage and facilitate female faith inclusion in places of worship. It should be noted that whilst Islamic counternarratives are not solely the responsibility of a mosque committees or Imams at a local or national level, they remain at the frontline of important first-hand grassroots community interventions and solutions. The fact that there is no singular one representative Muslim leadership voice in the UK is therefore not a weakness but a strength in terms of the diversity of faith practice that opposes violent ideologies in many different forms. Neither is theological teaching the only way to counter extremism but has an important contributing role to play in the future facilitation of Muslim communities' engagement and integration into workable solutions to extremist ideologies. There was a strong search among many of the interviewees for justice for Muslim communities perceived to being persecuted and victims of violence. This included an awareness of the wider geo-political decisions and military interventions of the UK Government, identified as a contributing factor in influencing the level of potential violent terrorist attacks arising. In the next concluding chapter I will be discussing the outcomes derived from this research more broadly and the faith counternarratives themes that have arisen.

## **Chapter 9:**

### **Conclusion: Extreme times**

---

#### **9.1 Introduction**

In this concluding chapter I will be discussing the outcomes derived from this thesis more broadly and how this research has answered the question of how Muslim faith leadership contribute counternarratives that oppose extremist violent ideologies in the UK. This thesis has demonstrated how British Muslim faith leadership voices from diverse Islamic traditions are asserting counternarratives in various forms, following similar themes. It has done so not only through presenting the voices of faith leaders but by providing examples of how lived Islamic faith practices has combatted extremism by complementing and, at times, challenging the efficacy of existing government policies, such as Prevent.

The research sample size of thirteen interviewed is relatively small and therefore an acute awareness of falling into the potential error of selection bias and response bias from a narrow demographic of UK Muslim Imams was maintained throughout. As well as reflection on, cultural difference and the power dynamics played out between interviewees and me that shaped the nature of who I met and the data collected. However, as outlined in the methodology and findings chapters, the decision to focus on a purposive sample of in-depth case study interviews has enabled a nuanced and detailed exploration of the lives and perspectives of selected faith leaders in the UK, thus gaining insights that larger quantitative studies may overlook or fully represent. This thesis has not sought to explain how people are radicalised or offer definitive solutions to preventing attraction to extremist Islamic ideologies. Neither has it produced generalisable research outcomes that represent all Muslim faith leader voices in the UK. It has presented qualitative counternarratives drawn from a diverse sample of individuals and the communities they represent. This sensitivity of the topic area and considerations during ethics approval also reduced the scope of interviewees to focus primarily on Muslim faith leader counternarratives.

## 9.2 A question of faith

The research of this thesis has employed rich in-depth interviews with a sample of British Muslim faith leaders to analyse counternarratives to extremism in the UK context. The faith counternarrative voices presented here reveal a deliberate move away from any association with violent ideological groups that are perceived to have tarnished the reputation of Islam or misrepresented Islamic faith identity in the UK by contributing to fuelling Islamophobic discourse. This study has shown a strong rejection of extremist ideologies by faith leaders who have condemned violence and extremist groups, such as Daesh and Al- Qaeda. In synopsis the central question of this thesis have been answered through presenting the following types of distinctive faith leader counternarratives themes:

- **Community leadership as a key counternarrative theme:** This thesis has focused on British Muslim faith leaders as an important force in offering counternarratives to extremism. Faith leaders presented themselves as credible and trustworthy sources of counternarratives that achieve the goals of Prevent, whilst garnering more sizable inclusive support from within UK Muslim communities. However, as shown faith leaders position in countering extremism was sometimes limited or challenged by social, cultural and political factors within their different Islamic communities.
- **Faith instruction counternarrative theme:** Faith leaders frequently came back to providing instruction in the normative tenets of orthodox Islam during the faith formation of young people and converts as a powerful way of building resilience against extremist ideologies. The faith instruction narratives of interviewees were grounded in the shared reality and values of the mosque communities they served and were equally able to expose the incongruities and contradictions of extremist narratives. This approach also served to strengthen the connection with individuals returning to the faith who may have previously been influenced by violent ideologies furthered online by groups such as Daesh.

- **Lived faith experience and acts of social responsibility counternarrative:** Many participants quoted lived Islamic faith practice in the community as one the greatest preventative measures to extremism. Such engagement was seen to not only challenge Islamophobic prejudices that stem from misunderstandings of Muslim faith identity but also promote a deeper affiliation with wider communities. This theme was connected to the creation of stronger British Islamic identity to prevent attraction to extremist discourse and combat misinterpretation of Muslims as a ‘suspect’ community.
- **Prevent and police intervention and other counter-terrorist initiatives theme:** Positive engagement with anti-terrorist counter measures implemented by Prevent funded agencies and the police to take practical steps to deter individuals within faith settings from supporting extremist groups or ideologies. Only a few participants called on working with Prevent in extreme circumstances as the majority preferred working directly with local community police.
- **Pastoral outreach counternarrative:** As faith leaders the importance of facilitating better support for vulnerable individuals, due to poor mental health or lack of education was emphasised by all. Imams understood they had a role in supporting people but also knew the value of external professional interventions when needed to support recovery. This included tailoring relevant counternarratives to address the extremist preoccupations and other needs of individuals who presented at their places of worship.

A common re-occurring theme from faith leaders interviewed was the belief that the majority of those radicalised by extremist ideologies are vulnerable individuals who need to be helped with tailored pastoral care. Both Imam Ahmad and Naisnain, who had experience of working as prison chaplains, referenced ‘one to one’ support as a critical role of faith leaders helping individuals and their families if ‘misguided’ or ‘ill informed’ in faith. This included those with mental health challenges, young people forming their faith, women and young men groomed online, those who are educationally limited or recent converts or returnees to faith seeking a pure idealised form of Islamic expression devoid of culture. The participants admitted a frequent disconnection between Imams and young people and women, which was perceived to have created a ‘space

for radicalisation' to take place and at times impacted on Imams ability to respond to challenges from extremists. As seen in the case of the Manchester Bombing Enquiry outlined in Chapter Four. In this context the thesis illustrates that while faith allegiance could be seen to have been misused by some violent extremist groups to exploit individuals' faith this could not be proven to be the prime predictor for inspiring terrorist acts. The faith leaders interviewed all stated that providing theological arguments and engaging in intellectual faith debate and instruction with young or vulnerable people, in particular, can counter attraction to extremism. Mentoring individuals and groups was also seen as a way of enabling the development of a historically informed understanding of the diversity of faith that could oppose purist Salafi and Wahhabi interpretations of Islam. This, in turn, was believed to create greater tolerance and acceptance of theological and cultural differences. A clear boundary was established by faith leader interviewees, who employed scripturally based counternarratives alongside examples drawn from lived experience to demonstrate how Muslim faith communities actively reject groups and individuals aligning themselves with Daesh and Al-Qaeda. They consistently asserted that such entities do not represent Islam, thereby reinforcing a theological and moral disassociation from extremist interpretations of faith.

This thesis has sought to distinctly add to the field of counternarrative studies, such as the seminal studies of Joosse on young Somali Muslims in Canada and a similar later study by Sandberg and Andersen in Norway, by uniquely presenting the counternarrative perspectives of a selection of UK Muslim faith leaders.<sup>699</sup> The UK Muslim faith leaders I met were firmly committed to creating a British Muslim identity with strong values and mission that was expressed passionately, with real emotion and authenticity. At the same time, and as discussed in previous chapters, there was hesitancy and distrust from some to talk about extremist ideologies that might associate themselves or their communities with violent narratives which several participants argued contributed to Islamophobic tropes in wider British society. The fact

---

<sup>699</sup> Joosse, P., Bucerius, S. M., & Thompson, S. K., 'Narratives and counternarratives: Somali Canadians on recruitment as foreign fighters to Al-Shabaab.' In the *British Journal of Criminology*, 2015 55(4), pp811-832.

Andersen Jan C, Sandberg Sveinung, 'Opposing Violent Extremism through Counternarratives: Four Forms of Narrative Resistance.' In *The Emerald Handbook of Narrative Criminology*, Jennifer Fleetwood; Lois Presser; Sveinung Sandberg; Thomas Ugelvik (Editors) (2019). Emerald Publishing Limited, pp.445-466.

that I was a non-Muslim researcher from a different background and culture may have also impacted on answers being censored, access to participants and the subjective nature of how this thesis was interpreted by respondents. To an extent, whilst the majority of participants expressed their views openly, some chose to limit their interview responses out of concern that doing so might inadvertently lend undue significance to extremist narratives they regarded as contrary to Islam.

A number of the faith leaders interviewed questioned the use of the term radicalisation, as well as the use of the term extremism. Prevent was felt by the majority of participants interviewed to have used these terms as a divisive political tool to i) stigmatise Muslim groups and individuals ii) exclude and disenfranchise Muslim faith leaders from offering solutions to counter extremism and foster a more cohesive society iii) created a climate of suspicion in which credible faith voices have been disempowered rather than empowered. There are numerous studies concerning the radicalisation process an individual goes through and it is a word often used in connection with terrorism, which begins with the adoption of an extremist ideology.<sup>700</sup> Thus, making a direct link between extreme ideas and violent action. With Zin Derfoufi I would question the verity of making such direct connections as the majority of people who hold extreme ideas never resort to violence or acts of terrorism.<sup>701</sup> Furthermore, faith leaders who took part in this research thesis emphasised that vast majority of Muslims they support in their mosques oppose injustices taking place against Muslims peacefully, without resorting to violent terrorist acts.

Another re-occurring sub-theme repeated by faith leader interviewees was that they had faced significant and often overt discrimination, which has had a profound effect on their relationship with state agencies, such as Prevent, and impacted on their willingness to engage in joint efforts to combat extremism. Perceived injustices both domestically and abroad were quoted as spurring political and civil protests that have consistently eschewed violence as a form of protest.

---

<sup>700</sup> See Maher, Shiraz (2016) *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, London: Hurst. Cassam, Quassim (2022) *Extremism: A Philosophical Analysis*, London: Routledge. Robinson, Glenn E (2021), *Global Jihad: a brief history*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. Roy, Olivier, *Jihad and Death*, Olivier Roy [2017] London: Hurst.

<sup>701</sup> Derfoufi, Zin, 'Radicalizations Core.' In the *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence* Volume 34, 2022, Issue 6, pp1185-1206.

Throughout, participants cited examples of biased discriminatory media, political and legislative institutional representations of Islam and its followers, most notably in the form of media and political discourses. The perception of the securitised nature of Prevent also impacted on this thesis as some participants self-censored in regard to this subject. To counter this extra time and effort was required to build trust before and during interviews. Despite the use of what may be considered as simplistic language, many participants demonstrated a relatively sophisticated understanding of the interplay between such institutional constructions and public perceptions of Islam and its followers within the context of dominant societal power relations. There was general consensus across the sample regarding the role of the media in replicating dominant political discourses and its contribution to the creation of a climate of fear and mistrust, which some participants argued allowed the pursuit of British foreign policy interests in several Muslim countries and had the potential to alienate Muslim faith leaders and their communities.

Many research participants used Arabic religious terms, such as Kharijites, to identify those who promote extremist ideology as 'Other' and heretical Muslims. Extremists and those who joined extremist groups were frequently described in derogative fashion as having poor mental health or being in a state of sin or evil. This condemnation was repeatedly reinforced with quotations from the Quran and authoritative teachings of the Prophet. The faith leaders argued that extremist ideologies stemmed from a lack of theological knowledge and were rooted in political non-Muslim temporal secular sources, rather than authentic Islamic teachings. Thus, by disassociating ideologically extremist groups from what is perceived as normative mainstream Islamic practice, they effectively positioned such groups as marginalised 'Other' outside the bounds of what is considered acceptable to be Muslim. This clear demarcation reinforced the idea that extremist ideologies are not representative of 'true' Islam and underscored the need for faith leaders to assert their identity as British Muslims. Truthfulness in this sense was a matter of expressing what faith leaders interviewed perceived to be a deeper reality grounded in pre-existing accepted Islamic teaching. It also highlighted their efforts to defend Muslim communities against the perceived pervasive threat of Islamophobic discourse or unfounded attacks by Prevent duty reporting. Whilst this argument was prevalent, it was noticeable that the

condemnation of violent individuals did not always extend to addressing wider and more complex issues, such as how to reframe the martial history of Islam. A history that at times has been used as justification by groups and individuals to take up arms for what they perceive to be just wars. Nor did it sufficiently explore how to re-educate young people about these aspects of Islamic history in a way that discourages misused analogies with early versions of Islam by extremist actors.

This thesis has shown that women, and to some extent young people, attempting to learn more about their faith are equally marginalised and not always fully accommodated within the practices of some mainstream mosques. Several Imams noted that facilities for prayer and gatherings for women are limited in mosque spaces and therefore some individuals may be more inclined to meet in circles outside the mosque or look for guidance from external online sources rather than via Imams. This does not necessarily mean women are more likely to be radicalised or take part in ideologically extremist movements. However, the promise of agency and empowerment offered by violent extremist groups can be attractive and presents a challenge. A number of faith leaders interviewed proposed that addressing this challenge will require more work on inclusivity and equality in the daily life of faith, which can help to reject extremist ideologies and build community resilience around issues of gender equality and shared human rights. The theme of opposing purist interpretations of Islam which lead to inflexible positions on complex social issues and do not account for historical context or diversity within Islamic tradition was referred to by faith leaders, particularly from Berelvi traditions. Being provided with a connection to cultural inheritance, such as celebrating the Prophets birthday, was presented as a critical factor in faith formation and countering extremist ideologies.

Young people internationally are disproportionately affected by the impact of violent extremism across the world. A study carried out for the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism describes the typical profile of foreign fighters who travelled to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2016 as 'most likely to be male, young and disadvantaged economically, educationally...and from

a marginalized background, both socially and politically.<sup>702</sup> It is clear that there is no single socio-demographic profile or pathway that leads an individual to become involved in terrorism. It could be contended that the profile used by the United Nations (UN) study to describe individuals vulnerable to radicalisation can equally be applied to segments of young people in the UK who have supported groups such as Daesh. Factors such as social marginalisation, identity crises, perceived injustice, and a search for purpose mirror those described in UN frameworks, suggesting significant overlap in the drivers of radicalisation across different contexts. The faith leaders in this thesis reflected similar counternarrative measures to effectively counter violent extremism, including resolution dialogue with alienated groups, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as working with faith-based organisations and other religious leaders to counter the abuse of religion by violent extremists.<sup>703</sup> The research in this thesis shows that faith leader voices can play an even more vital role in advocating for more inclusive Islamic practice, thereby encouraging greater levels of tolerance of diverse world views that combat attraction to violent narratives. The field of radicalisation in the context of conversion experiences offers valuable lessons for others attracted to violent ideologies, as the rehabilitation methods recommended here may be applicable to other groups drawn to violent ideologies.

A number of faith leaders interviewed questioned the efficacy of Prevent policy and put forth salient arguments that faith leaders can offer credible voices that are better positioned within British Muslim communities to combat extremism. The counternarratives voices presented in this thesis were firmly built around promoting a way of life rooted in faith communities and practical preventative interventions. Prevention based firmly on practical acts, such as Imam Bashir offering services to the whole community and Imam Kardi hosting interfaith initiatives as a way of creating social capital and affiliation to the wider localised community and people of all faiths. The theme of faith leadership building affiliation to the local community through acts of social responsibility were exemplified in particular by the work of Imam Adem and Omar in north

---

<sup>702</sup> Trisko Darden, Jessica, 'Tackling Terrorists' Exploitation of Youth.' A report for the United Nations, 2019. Published online by the *American Enterprise Institute*. <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/report/tackling-terrorists-exploitation-of-youth/Tackling-Terrorists-Exploitation-of-Youth.pdf>. Accessed 24 November 2024.

<sup>703</sup> United Nations. 'Preventing Violent Extremism: Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity.' *United Nations Development Programme* Publication, New York, March 13-16, 2019.

London. This was based on practical charitable acts as a way of presenting a clear pathway for members of their mosque to connect with wider civic society, whilst maintaining open working arrangements with the police and all local agencies. Several Imams, including Bashir, Khabir and Omar, conversely expressed support for Prevent initiatives and conveyed a strong sense of civic commitment and pride in Muslim identity being compatible with British values. This included citing Quran scriptures to validate their position and giving examples of co-developing faith-based events open to all agencies. At the same time, this perspective stands in contrast to significant opposition to the UK Government's Prevent policy, including the views of other Imams interviewed and studies cited in this thesis, which indicate that segments of the UK Muslim faith leadership have lost confidence in Prevent being able to prevent extremists and rogue terrorists. It would also be true to state that areas of cognitive dissonance and internal conflict were faced by the faith leaders interviewed, as they sought to enable individuals to resist the appeal of extremist Islamist movements.

Islamic faith leaders, such as Ahmad and Kardi, put faith formation and education counternarratives at the forefront for young people and converts as a way of building resilience to extremist ideology. Imam Kardi in Leeds adopted a hybrid approach that was accessible to his target audience in English and used various mediums of communication. He combined both public and online engagement to counter violent or extremist ideologies that misrepresent Islamic teachings; using group meeting in mosques, media channels and online websites to condemn violent terrorist acts and reach people searching for faith guidance or support with other needs. By leveraging media channels, he effectively challenged mainstream narratives he deemed 'Islamophobic,' which conflated faith with violence. The lived experience of faith ministry and pastoral care was one of the most powerful counternarratives outlined by Imam Ahmad in Cambridge. He presented stories of offering tailored counternarratives to individuals within and beyond his chaplaincy role in prison through one-to-one teaching that educated and provided spiritual guidance and support in other areas, such as conflict resolution. This included teaching a more informed nuanced historical understanding of the rich diversity of Islamic faith expression, which opposed the binary thinking of extremist ideologies and enabled critical thinking and greater tolerance of difference. At the same time Imam Ahmad acknowledged

contemporary anger over injustices in places like Iraq and Palestine as a real phenomenon that has been wrongly conflated with faith narratives. For Ahmad, most of the people he ministered to who were at risk did not go on to engage in violent extremist activity. Building resilience through the social capital of belonging to a faith community that accepted and esteemed all people and their differences was a theme repeated by several faith leaders. He believed this was encouraged by actively finding a sense of belonging and service as British Muslims integrated within mainstream British society and government initiatives. Ahmad also showed how faith leaders are indirectly able to support Prevent Duty aims by building the promotion fundamental 'British values' defined in Prevent Duty guidance as 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths' and beliefs.<sup>704</sup>

Not one interview participant requested that Prevent be abolished or expressed that Islamic communities and nations were at war with Western countries. What was requested, once again, was improved ways of preventing extremist ideologies that included more faith leadership as part of future solutions. Yet, there was also an acute awareness of the geopolitical impact of attacks on Muslim-majority countries supported by the UK Government to the right to peacefully protest without being disempowered or 'wrongly labelled' extremist. Alongside geopolitical awareness was a commitment to an Islamic faith identity that protected the worldwide *ummah* but was also proud to be British Muslims. Their faith identities were intrinsically shaped within the British context, reflecting a hybrid sense of belonging to both their religious tradition and wider society. These identities were often tested, and in many cases strengthened, in the aftermath of terrorist incidents committed by Muslims. Such events forced participants to navigate heightened scrutiny, reaffirm their values, and actively distinguish their beliefs from the actions of extremists. In doing so, many deepened their commitment to a form of Islam that is compatible with civic responsibility and being British. Therefore the counternarratives and examples of communities resisting extremism made by faith leaders were not offered to negate Prevent but complement its goals by leveraging more sustainable support from within

---

<sup>704</sup> Home Office. 'Prevent Duty Guidance: for England and Wales.' London: Home Office UK.Gov. 2015.[https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Prevent\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_for\\_England\\_and\\_Wales.pdf](https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Prevent_Duty_Guidance_for_England_and_Wales.pdf). Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 202.

communities. It should be noted that there are no research findings that prove that the types of counternarratives from faith leaders presented in this thesis categorically prevent attraction to extremist ideologies in the UK context. However, what this thesis has evidenced is how diverse Muslim traditions in the UK are currently responding by embedding counternarratives within everyday faith practices and beliefs to inform dynamic prevention measures within communities.

As previously mentioned, some participants perceived Prevent as a 'toxic brand' that 'securitised Muslims' rather than included them in solutions to violent extremism. In this context, the Prevent strategy was even perceived by some as an Islamophobic 'Big Brother' style security surveillance operation, which has eroded rather than enhanced civic liberties and protections.<sup>705</sup> This perception has contributed to questioning among Muslim communities, raising concerns about the stigmatization of religious identity and the undermining of social cohesion. With Tahir Abbas, I would argue that Prevent has not empowered local solutions but fostered a securitised approach focused on 'radicalisation' always leading to violence and/or terrorism.<sup>706</sup> This securitisation approach therefore needs decoupling as it leads to a disconnection from citizenship that further alienates Muslim faith communities. This perception of securitisation and distrust also impacted on the interviews for this thesis as several participants either self-censored or limited answers to open semi-structured questions. The field of radicalisation in the context of conversion experiences offers valuable lessons for others attracted to violent ideologies, as the rehabilitation methods recommended here may be applicable to other groups drawn to violent, politicised ideologies.

There is little doubt that there remains a need for the UK Government efforts to prevent its citizens from becoming involved in terrorism. There are opportunities for a range of stakeholders to intervene in an individual's life prior to their engagement in a criminal, terrorism-related act. Allaying concerns about Prevent and building trust with any new policy will require full and wide

---

<sup>705</sup> Home Office. 'Radicalisation: the counternarrative and identifying the tipping point: HM Government response to the eight reports from the Home Affairs Select Committee Session.' London: Home Office policy paper UK.Gov. December 2017-17 HC 135.

<sup>706</sup> Abbas, Tahir, 'Dissent at Risk: UK's New Extremism Definition'. Article paper issued online by Tahir Abbas on 14th March 2024. <https://www.tahir-abbas.com/dissent-at-risk-uks-new-extremism-definition/>. Accessed 29 April 2024.

engagement with all sections of the Muslim community, including grassroots-level mosque faith leaders such as those interviewed for this thesis, and not just groups that already agree with government policy. What was clear from participants in this thesis is that the most powerful vehicle for countering extremism came from within the UK Muslim community, but these voices at times feel largely disenfranchised by secular state agencies such as Prevent. Several interviewees also noted that the management structures of mosques and their committees tend to suppress faith leaders by exerting control over their role and limiting the ability of Imams to address extremist ideologies. Although, many leaders interviewed felt in certain incidences compromised in the terms of their role all repeated a message they were in a unique position to question the sources of extremist ideological views, engage in faith education and foster a deeper narrative understanding of Islam that cognitively resonated with the British Muslim communities they served.

Despite government acknowledgements that community engagement and community-based counter-terrorism efforts are critical in stemming the tide of radicalisation and potential violence, the ability to engage effectively, promote trust, and support the role of organically driven community-based counter-terrorism initiatives remains a work in progress. In recent times this has culminated in the undertaking of the William Shawcross Prevent review, which was completed in March 2023 and has been discussed in earlier chapters of this thesis.<sup>707</sup> The mix of hard and soft power mechanisms is a complex one that is not easily achieved. Although security remains the ultimate goal of both government and communities, the manner in which that goal is achieved differs. In the context of the UK the government has largely sought security through legislation and policing, whereas faith leaders in this thesis seek security through faith and community based social justice mechanisms. Moreover, because of the complex challenge that combating extremist and violent ideologies poses, this thesis shows there is a place for a variety of non-government interventions that have the potential for making a valuable contribution to preventing of terrorist acts arising.

---

<sup>707</sup> Ibid, <https://www.tahir-abbas.com/dissent-at-risk-uks-new-extremism-definition/>.

### 9.3 The times are changing

In March 2024, an announcement was made by the UK Government of a new initiative to combat ‘extremism’ that set out to build on previous incarnations of Prevent strategy and anti-terrorism policy. It was said to be prompted by the need for better ‘community cohesion’ in response to the events of 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2023 attack on Israel, and a decision derived from the recommendation of the William Shawcross review of Prevent completed in February 2023. The UK Government at the time decided to implement all thirty-four recommendations of the William Shawcross Prevent review. This essentially adopted new guidance on Prevent and pivoted away from addressing support of terrorist violence alone but also non-violent ‘extremist ideologies.’<sup>708</sup> This was presented as a way of continuing to prevent violent terrorism by providing new due diligence checks on ‘civil society organisations’ to ensure that Prevent does not work with or fund groups that are perceived to support terrorism.<sup>709</sup> The then UK Government’s Secretary of State for levelling up, housing and communities, Michael Gove, defined extremism as the ‘promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred and intolerance’, that threatened the ‘freedom of others’ and ‘democratic rights.’<sup>710</sup> The withdrawal of support for ‘civic society’ groups was quoted to include ‘Islamist’ groups in the tradition of ‘Hassan Al-Banna and Maududi’ and was careful to emphasise protecting the majority of peaceful British Muslims who did not want to see Islam conflated with violent ideologies.<sup>711</sup>

This new UK Government definition of extremism has raised more concern among UK Muslim faith and civil liberties advocates who fear it will have an unintended consequence for free speech and democratic dissent.<sup>712</sup> It was also perceived that the definition’s vague and broad nature

---

<sup>708</sup> Cleverly, James. ‘Independent Review of Prevent: One Year on Progress Report.’ Hansard UK Parliament paper, Volume 745: debated on Tuesday 20 February 2024. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

<sup>709</sup> Seddon, Paul and Dominic Casciani. ‘Michael Gove names groups as he unveils extremism definition.’ *BBC news online*, 14th March 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68564577>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

<sup>710</sup> UK Parliament. ‘New Extremism Definition and Community Engagement Principles.’ An announcement statement made by Communities Minister, Michael Gove on 13th March 2024. UK Parliament online. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-03-14/hlws336>.

<sup>711</sup> Ibid.

<sup>712</sup> Muslim Council of Britain. ‘Muslim Council of Britain Slams Government’s Flawed Extremism Strategy.’ *Muslim Council of Britain* press release, 13th March 2024. <https://mcb.org.uk/muslim-council-of-britain-slams-governments-flawed-extremism-strategy/>. Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

leaves room for interpretation and manipulation encompassing a wide range of views. By focusing on ideology rather than behaviour the government has blurred the subjective line between offensive speech and extremism. Tahir Abbas believes the new definition feeds into the 'fear of being labelled extremist' and fear of potential retribution that causes self-censorship. Therefore, individuals and groups may hesitate to speak out against injustice or express unpopular opinions, thereby 'eroding the very fabric of our democratic society.'<sup>713</sup> Tahir goes on to argue that rather than reducing 'extremism', the new definition will drive certain views underground and may make certain individuals more susceptible to 'radicalisation.' and being 'drawn to aggressive tactics or violent ideologies that operate in the shadows.'<sup>714</sup> As a result, open debate is stifled, preventing ideas from being challenged, exposed, and debunked in the public domain. Therefore, once again with Abbas I would argue that rather than marginalising or ostracising individuals with controversial views, it is essential to engage in informed constructive dialogue that tackles the root causes of their discontent.

Prior to the new ruling in March 2024, and as discussed in this thesis, Muslim groups in the UK began to question the intent behind the broader definition of extremism, suggesting it was being used to further empower government agencies to increase surveillance and scrutiny of what they deemed suspect. There is the example of Salman Butt, lead editor of the Islam 21C online web discussion group who began the process of taking the UK Government to court in 2015 to challenge the definition of 'extremism' under the Prevent strategy, which he and his law firm argued was ill defined.<sup>715</sup> The term 'extremist' had been applied to Butt when he was listed as a speaker who gave talks on campuses and was said to have views that 'violated British values,' such as democracy, free speech, equality and the rule of law.<sup>716</sup> Under the Prevent guidance Butt was seen to meet the definition of a 'non-violent extremist.' Salman Butt won his case against

---

<sup>713</sup> Abbas, Tahir, 'Dissent at Risk: UK's New Extremism Definition'. Article paper issued online by Tahir Abbas on 14th March 2024. <https://www.tahir-abbas.com/dissent-at-risk-uks-new-extremism-definition/>. Accessed 29 April 2024.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid. Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

<sup>715</sup> Bindman Solicitors. 'Dr Salman Butt secures apology, substantial libel damages and costs against the Secretary of State for the Home Department.' *Bindman Solicitor Report*, 15th November 2021. <https://www.bindmans.com/knowledge-hub/news/dr-salman-butt-secures-apology-substantial-libel-damages-and-costs-against-the-secretary-of-state-for-the-home-department/>. Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024.

<sup>716</sup> Ibid. Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

the Home Office and former Home Secretary, Priti Patel, six years later in 2021. He received an apology from the Home Secretary for falsely alleging that he was an 'extremist hate preacher.' In response Butt stated regarding the term 'extremism', 'more people are realising that it is a nebulous term used by the powerful to silence any thoughts, ideas or speech they do not like or cannot challenge without coercion.'<sup>717</sup> The Butt case demonstrates how the broad application of the definition of extremism has been at times politicised and is an example of a limited understanding of Islamic faith expression. Thus, it can be argued that there remains a need for a UK Government in the future to further assess how it can improve ways of challenging extremist ideologies in a fair and proportionate manner.

In agreement with Braddock and Horgan, this thesis argues that the effectiveness of a counternarrative is determined not only by its content but also by the credibility of both its source and its method of dissemination.<sup>718</sup> Messages perceived as inauthentic or coming from untrusted actors are far less likely to resonate, regardless of their rhetorical strength. Thus, the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the messenger are critical factors in countering extremist propaganda. Regardless of how a counternarrative is constructed or the extent to which it is factually accurate, its acceptance by those at risk of radicalisation will not be effective if the source is perceived as untrustworthy or lacking credibility. It is therefore important to deliver a counternarrative in such a way that audience members believe it to be delivered by a trustworthy source. Participants in this thesis have made a case for British Muslim faith leaders being in position to fulfil the role of credible messengers and important vehicles for disseminating trusted counternarratives within British Muslim communities. The messages they conveyed challenged the inherent flaws of extremist narratives and offered an alternative frameworks of faith, identity, belonging, and purpose. The effectiveness of counternarratives depends on multiple factors. The participants I interviewed articulated a series of compelling alternatives to extremist ideologies based on presenting Islam as a religion of peace that resonates positively within

---

<sup>717</sup> Islam Channel. 'Dr Salman Butt wins Government Apology for falsely labelling him Extremist.' *Islam Channel*, 6th December 2021. <https://islamchannel.tv/dr-salman-butt-wins-government-apology-for-falsely-labelling-him-extremist/>. Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

<sup>718</sup> Braddock, Kurt; Horgan, John, 'Towards a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counternarratives to Reduce Support for Terrorism,' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 2016-05, Vol.39 (5), pp.381-404.

Muslim communities. This goes beyond government policy that focuses on strengthening security as the overall priority and requires a deeper inclusion of faith community leaders in overall prevention measures. British faith leaders and the communities they represent continue to face significant challenges in ensuring their counternarratives to extremism are heard and taken seriously. These challenges are compounded by cases such as those of Salman Butt and Shakeel Begg (as discussed in an earlier chapter), whose reputations have been damaged through politicized media-driven narratives. Such portrayals risk undermining legitimate UK faith-based voices and discouraging community engagement, making it even harder for credible counternarratives to gain traction.

#### **9.4 New questions for future research in the field**

In his book, *Extremism: A Philosophical Analysis*, Quassim Cassam argues that different extremist narratives appeal to individuals by emphasising specific grievances, portraying those affected as victims, and identifying other people, groups, or institutions as responsible for those grievances.<sup>719</sup> Faith leader participant counternarratives in this thesis provided narrative depth that understood and addressed these grievances and were able to offer realistic alternatives to what Nagel calls ‘oversimplified narratives’ propagated by extremist organisations.<sup>720</sup> This entailed recognising the search for purity of faith by Muslims drawn to extremist ideologies, acknowledging perceptions of victimhood attributed to predominantly Western governments, and understanding how these factors contribute to the promotion of intolerance and violence. Muslim faith leaders in the UK, supported by wider ethnic and cultural networks of family and friends can be seen to act as powerful actors preventing attraction to extremist ideologies rather than being in opposition to government definitions of British values. In this area there are other academic disciplines, such as the psychology of religion, which have the potential to conduct future research not covered in this thesis. Such studies could broaden the view of counternarratives beyond faith leaders alone to examine how faith helps individuals rehabilitate

---

<sup>719</sup> Cassam, Quassim (2022) *Extremism: A Philosophical Analysis*, London: Routledge, p192.

<sup>720</sup> Nagel, T. (2016). ‘By any means or none.’ *London Review of Books*, 38, p19 and 20.

from the effects of involvement in extremist groups, as well as offer insights into their personal circumstances and the broader context of UK society of which they are part of.

There are also complex psychosocial and psychological dimensions to be considered in deradicalisation that are not addressed in existing counternarrative research. There have been extensive empirical based quantitative UK studies by social psychologists, such as Sara Savage, who have used behavioural science and conflict resolution methods for deradicalisation.<sup>721</sup> In contrast this thesis has sought to capture the nuanced faith based counternarrative views and lived experience of a diverse set of British Muslim faith leaders using qualitative methodology. Faith leaders who participated in this thesis faced the challenge of reconciling the perception of Islamic faith with their lived experiences of working at the grassroots level, to challenge both extremism and Islamophobic conceptualisations of Islam. What is shown in this research project is that narratives are compelling storylines that compete for the attention of individuals. Therefore, a space also remains for quantitative based studies of the contribution of faith leader counternarratives to preventing attraction to extremist ideologies in the UK context. In addition, more participatory research, where communities co-design and test counternarratives could help to address the credibility gap that counter-terrorism initiatives face.

## **9.5 Conclusion**

The counternarratives I have presented in this thesis have distinctively proved that British Muslim faith leaders possess both the credibility and the willingness to act as influential agents of counternarrative discourse within their communities. They offered scripturally grounded and culturally relevant frameworks to delegitimise extremist ideologies, which emphasised Quranic verses about mercy, compassion, and justice to undermine theological justifications for violence. Similarly, they drew on local stories of peaceful coexistence and community solidarity to counter the narrative of conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims. Their involvement in future efforts to prevent the appeal of violent ideologies holds significant potential to become an even more

---

<sup>721</sup> Liht, Jose and Savage, Sara. 'Preventing Violent Extremism through Value Complexity: Being Muslim Being British.' In *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, Number 4 2013, pp44-66.

powerful force if fully leveraged. The counternarratives of UK Muslim faith leaders are part of a broader effort to address the complex nature of radicalisation, which involves many intersecting factors. Faith voices will continue to play an integral part in ending incidents of ideologically inspired acts of violence in the UK. While government sources suggest that programmes like Prevent are effective, it is evident that these initiatives are limited in both scope and capacity. Thus, expanding the role of faith leaders in these programmes or within alternative initiatives could enhance their effectiveness by utilising the deep trust and influence these leaders hold within their communities. Their involvement will not only provide culturally and religiously informed interventions that can connect with the lived experience and values of Muslims but help bridge the gap between government efforts and community needs. At the same time this advances greater cooperation and understanding in the shared goal - espoused by Prevent strategy - of stopping radicalisation, reducing support for terrorism and discouraging people from becoming terrorists.<sup>722</sup> As a result, further work is needed to find solutions with the involvement of British Muslim faith leaders and the communities they are part of to augment existing capabilities in the UK.

Counternarratives from within the UK Muslim faith leader community do not negate the fact that some individuals will remain drawn to extremist ideologies due to varying circumstances. Neither is there a one size fits all counternarrative that can be successfully employed for people drawn to extremist ideologies. This attraction cannot be fully explained by the reasons given by participants, such as grievances with Western governments, vulnerability to extremist narratives (whether online or in person), structural socio-economic marginalization, environmental factors, or misconceptions of Islam stemming from a lack of education or poor formation when converting to Islam. The causes underlying individuals' attraction to extremist Islamic groups that advocate violence are often deeply complex. A range of psychological, social, political, and economic factors can contribute to a person's susceptibility to radicalisation. These may include struggles with identity formation, experiences of family trauma, and pervasive feelings of

---

<sup>722</sup> Home Office. 'Pursue Prevent Protect Prepare: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism.' London: Home Office: UK.Gov. Publications, 2009. There are later versions of Prevent, such as 2011, 2015 and 2018, but this earlier version stated goal remains essentially the same.

worthlessness or alienation. Consequently, state sponsored or faith-based counternarrative interventions may not always succeed in preventing unreceptive 'lone-wolf' terrorists who engage in unpredictable and arbitrary acts of violence. Nevertheless, when implemented in combination, such measures can play an important role in safeguarding individuals and communities.<sup>723</sup>

Finally, the findings of this thesis have demonstrated that counternarratives from Muslim faith leaders have a relevant part to play in challenging mainstream or Islamophobic narrative assumptions about the Islamic faith and creating a more tolerant cohesive society. Through the voices of faith leaders I have shown that different Muslim traditions in the UK are rising to the challenge of countering violent and extremist ideologies. They are achieving this in various ways, such as training more homegrown English-speaking Imams, encouraging more inclusion of women in places of prayer and building the resilience of young people through enhanced faith formation approaches that are more accessible. This research strengthens the case for considering the broader social context when responding to terrorist attacks, as well as including British Muslim faith leadership in new initiatives. Such an approach can offer a more effective strategy for addressing the root causes of radicalisation whilst promoting joined up cohesive collaboration with different communities. This will not only help to mitigate the appeal of extremist ideologies in the future but also empower British Muslim communities to ensure their voices are represented and play an active role in contributing to the development of new solutions.

---

<sup>723</sup> Spaaij, Ramón, 'The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism: An Assessment.' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism Journal*, 2010 Vol.33 (9), p.854-870.

## Appendix A:

### Consent Form

---



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

### Consent Form

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the project: **A call to Faith: How do Islamic faith communities contribute to counternarratives that oppose extremist violent ideologies in the UK?**

Main investigator and contact details: Thomas Gillespie, who can be contacted at the following email 186238@live.stmarys.ac.uk

Members of the research team: There are no other members of this project.

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research up to 1 month after an interview has taken place, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data, which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant: (print).....

Signed.....

Date:.....

-----  
If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: **A call to faith: How do Islamic faith communities contribute to counternarratives that oppose extremist violent ideologies in the UK?**

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Participation Information Sheet

---



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

## Participant Information Sheet

### **A call to faith: How do Islamic faith communities contribute to counternarratives that oppose extremist violent ideologies in the UK?**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for indicating that you are interested in taking part in this research. This Information Sheet will explain what is involved, but if you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me using the contact details below.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that faith-based community initiatives that adhere to Islamic theology can act as powerful agents of counternarratives to forms of extremist or potentially violent ideology.

This research is part of PhD studies that I am undertaking at St Marys University. The central aim of this doctoral research is to undertake exploration of the participation of UK Muslim faith leaders in counternarratives.

Please take time to discuss the information provided with friends and to ask questions of the researcher.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you decide to take part, I will arrange a time to interview you in person or online (e.g. via Zoom) at your convenience.

At the start of the interview, I will clarify my ethical standards and the condition in which confidentiality will be kept or broken should you or any other be at risk or involved in an illegal activity.

Your written consent will be obtained through the enclosed consent form. The interview will be digitally audio-recorded and last approximately 40 – 60 minutes.

[For online interviewing only: As Zoom automatically does a video- and audio recording, the video recording will be deleted straight after the interview and only the audio recording will be kept].

I will be asking you questions relating to your experiences and understanding of the topic of this research. I will also offer follow up interviews (should participants agree to meet) for further opportunities to explore thoughts, feelings and any nuances on answers to the primary interview questions.

Once the interview is complete, I will transcribe the digital recording. I will delete the audio files within 14 days of interviewees' approval of the transcripts. Anonymised transcripts can be kept up to 10 years.

The entire transcribed files will be password protected and stored on an external storage device that is encrypted. All electronic data will be stored on St Mary's University servers.

You will be allocated a pseudonym to protect your anonymity, and any identifying features in the data that will be deleted.

### **Your right to withdraw without prejudice**

You have every right to withdraw from the research within 1 month of participating in an interview, without prejudice. After that, it will be impossible to remove your data as it will be aggregated, making your data more difficult to identify.

The interview will be semi-structured. Please find a selection of sample questions below:

- How do the faith-based methods enable you to counter violent or extremist

ideology and provide alternatives for the people you support?

- What do you believe are the differences between faith-based programmes as compared to the UK Government sponsored Prevent programme?
- How could faith based deradicalisation initiatives or other emerging government programmes further improve and/or work better together?

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

By engaging this research may cast a light on personal issues you may be experiencing. I will share connections to services that can offer support and any other requested agencies if required. This will include access to local agencies in your area (dependent on need) and also national agencies and initiatives that can support, such as

<https://www.mcapn.co.uk/counselling-directory> - This directory provides links to counsellors with different specialisms in local areas.

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/> - Offering practical help on mental health and links to agencies that can support.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/self-care/> - Mind centres support individuals with a variety of needs and also offer online support.

<https://www.sakoon.co.uk/> - A Muslim counselling service that will provide access to counsellors in your area.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The experience will give you time to reflect on your experience and work, and to share your thoughts. You may gain insights that are beneficial to your own development for the betterment of the approach to helping people who have had similar to you in faith-based communities in the UK.

Overall, your participation may contribute to something greater at research and practice level, in informing work to assist a deeper understanding go the importance of faith communities' contribution to supporting individuals to overcome adversity and change their lives.

### **What if something goes wrong?**

I will do everything within my ability to ensure your safety and confidentiality. However, if you are not happy with any aspect of the research process, please raise it with me. If

you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this research, please contact Professor Peter Tyler, St Marys University:  
Email: [peter.tyler@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:peter.tyler@stmarys.ac.uk)

If you are still unhappy with things, you may then raise it with the Chair of St Mary's Ethics Committee Email: [matthew.james@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:matthew.james@stmarys.ac.uk)

### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential, and how will my data be stored?**

The fact that you are taking part in the research, and everything that you share, will remain confidential. In the absence of any negligence or other breach of duty by us, participation in the research is entirely at your risk. Nothing in this research shall have the effect of excluding or limiting any liability for death or personal injury caused by negligence or for fraud' (as advised by St Mary's Legal department). I will undertake transcription of the recorded interview. In line with GDPR regulations, a pseudonym or number will be used for the audio file, and no personal participant information that might lead to identification will be disclosed to any other agents. Neither will personal identifying information be disclosed in any publication (as well as to any third party) within legal limits.

The transcript itself will be anonymised by use of a pseudonym or code. The data will be stored securely in locked premises and kept encrypted on a password-protected computer. Only my supervisor and myself will have access to the data. All primary data [which may be published] will be securely stored for 10 years in compliance with the St Mary University's Data Management Policy. The data will be destroyed (shredded or electronically deleted) after 10 years, in keeping with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (which was brought in under the DPA 2018). Participants should note that data collected from this project might be retained and published in an anonymised form. By agreeing to participate in this project, you are consenting to the retention and publication of data.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The completed research will be stored (bound and electronic) at St Marys University. The research may be disseminated in future publications and at conferences. Individuals who participate will not be identified in any subsequent report or publication

### **Whom may I contact for further information?**

If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact me, Thomas Gillespie.  
My contact details are [186238@live.stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:186238@live.stmarys.ac.uk)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

- Abbas, Tahir (2005) *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure*. London: Zed Books.
- Abbas, Tahir, 'Islamophobia in the United Kingdom: Historical and Contemporary Political and Media Discourses in the Framing of a 21st-Century Anti-Muslim Racism.' In *Islamophobia: The challenge of pluralism in the 21st Century (2011)*, edited by John L. Esposito and I. Kalin, Oxford University Press, pp. 145-168.
- Abbas, Tahir and Imran Awan. 'Limits of UK Counterterrorism Policy and its Implications for Islamophobia and Far Right Extremism.' In the *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 4 (3) (2015), pp16-29.
- Abbas, Tahir, 'The Nature and Extent of Countering Violent Extremism in the United Kingdom.' In *Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism (2019)*, Stéfanie Von Hlatky (ed.), McGill-Queen's University Press, pp127-141.
- Abbas, Tahir, 'Dissent at Risk: UK's New Extremism Definition.' Article paper issued online by Tahir Abbas on 14th March 2024. <https://www.tahir-abbas.com/dissent-at-risk-uks-new-extremism-definition/>.
- Abun-Nasr, Jamil M. 'Military Islam: A Historical Perspective.' In *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists and Industrialization*, Gellner, E. (Ed.) (1985), Berlin: Mouton Publishers, pp73-95.
- Abun-Nasr, Jamil M., 'Militant Islam: A Historical Perspective.' In *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists and Industrialization: The Southern Shore of the Mediterranean* (Edited) E. Gellner, (1985), Religion and Society, 25.
- Adair-Toteff, Christopher (2016), *Max Weber's Sociology of Religion*, Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck.
- Adamson, I (2009), *The Guided One*, Farnham Islam International Publications.
- Afriyie, F. A., 'A tale of two Jihads: Unravelling the Atrocities of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nasr al-Islam Wal Muslimin.' In the *Sahel Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, 12(23) (2023), pp p.244-271.
- Aggarwal, Neil Krishnan [2016] *The Taliban's Virtual Emirate*, Columbia University Press.
- Ahmad, K., 'Islam and political order.' In *Islam Today* 10(9-10), 1992, pp.17-22.
- Ahmed, S. (2016) *What Is Islam? the Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University.

Ahmed, N. 'The Charmed Life and Strange Sad Death of the Quilliam Foundation.' *Byline Times*, 11 May 2021. <https://bylinetimes.com/2021/05/11/the-charmed-life-and-strange-sad-death-of-the-quilliam-foundation/>.

Aljazeera: News Agencies. 'ISIL video shows Turkish soldiers burned alive.' In *Al Jazeera News online* 23 December 2016. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/23/isil-video-shows-turkish-soldiers-burned-alive>.

Al-Istrabadi, Feisal and Sumit Ganguly (2018) *The Future of ISIS Regional and International Implications*. Washington DC Brookings Institution Press.

Allan, Kenneth D. (2005). *Explorations in Classical Sociological Theory: Seeing the Social World*. Pine Forge Press.

All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, 'Islamophobia Defined: The Inquiry into a Working Definition of Islamophobia.' November 27th, 2018. APPG Report Publication. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>.

Al-Nabhani, Taqi al-Din (1998), *The Islamic State*. London: De-Luxe Printers.

Amnesty International. 'Pakistan: Attack on Ismaili Shi'a Muslims in Karachi is a product of a climate of impunity.' Amnesty News, May 13th, 2015. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/05/pakistan-attack-on-ismaili-shia-muslims-in-karachi-is-product-of-climate-of-impunity/>.

Amnesty International. 'Shawcross review of Prevent is deeply prejudiced and has no legitimacy.' Amnesty International press release, 8th February 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-shawcross-review-prevent-deeply-prejudiced-and-has-no-legitimacy>.

Amnesty International UK. 'This is the Thought Police: Prevent Duty and its chilling effect on human rights.' Report published by Amnesty International UK, November 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-shawcross-review-prevent-deeply-prejudiced-and-has-no-legitimacy>.

Aolain, Fionnuala Ni, 'Promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism,' Note article to UN General Assembly, 3 August 2021. <https://undocs.org/en/a/76/261>.

Andersen Jan C, Sandberg Sveinung, 'Opposing Violent Extremism through Counternarratives: Four Forms of Narrative Resistance.' In *The Emerald Handbook of Narrative Criminology*, Jennifer Fleetwood, Lois Presser, Sveinung Sandberg, Thomas Ugelvik (Editors) (2019) Emerald Publishing Limited.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony (2018) *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*, London: Profile Books.

Al-Ashanti, AbdulHaq and as-Salafi, Abu Ameenah AbdurRahman. (2009) *A Critical Study of the Multiple Identities and Disguises of 'al-Muhajiroun: Exposing the Antics of the Cult Followers of Omar Bakri Muhammad Fustuq*. London: Jamiah Media Press.

Asad, Talal (March 1986) *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. Occasional Paper Series 1-7. Washington: Georgetown University.

Atran, Scott, Robert Axelrod, Richard Davis and Baruch Fischhoff. 'Challenges in Researching Terrorism from the field.' In *Science*, 355, no.6323, 2017, pp278-297.

Awan, I. 'I am a Muslim not an extremist: How the Prevent strategy has constructed a 'suspect' community.' In *Politics & Policy*, 40(6), 2012, pp1158–1185.

Ayoob, Mohammed (2008). *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World*. University of Michigan Press.

Ayubi, Nazih [1991] *Political Islam*. London: Routledge.

Azani, Eitan and Koblentz-Stenzler, 'Muslim Converts Who Turn to Global Jihad: Radicalization Characteristics and Countermeasures.' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Taylor & Francis Journals, Vol.45 (2) (2022) pp. 173-199.

Azeena, Aaliyah, 'Apostasy and its Classification in Yusuf Al-Qaradawi' s View – Defining Apostasy.' Islamopedia Online, 20017. <https://www.islamopediaonline.org/apostasy-and-its-classification-in-yusuf-al-qardawis-view/>. Accessed 10th December 2021.

Balazard, H  l  ne and Timothy Peace, 'Confronting Islamophobia and its consequences in East London in a context of increased surveillance and stigmatisation.' In *Ethnicities, Sage Journals*, 2023, Vol. 23(1) pp88–109.

Barclay, Jack, 'Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET): A Case Study in Government-Community Partnership and Direct Intervention to Counter Violent Extremism.' *Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation Policy Brief* (December 2011). [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/144701/barclay\\_policybrief\\_1114.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/144701/barclay_policybrief_1114.pdf).

Barret, Richard (October 2017), *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*. Soufan Centre Publication.

Bartoszewicz, M.G. 'Controversies of Conversions: The Potential Terrorist Threat of European Converts to Islam.' In *Perspectives on Terrorism Journal* 7, n.3, 2013, pp 17-29.

Battle, Michael (2009). *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*. London: Pilgrim Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt [1991] *Intimations of Postmodernity*. London: Routledge.

Bauman, Z, 'Postmodern Religion.' in *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, Paul Heelas (Editor) (1998). London: Blackwell Publishers.

Bayram, Aydın Kandemir, Ahmet Mekin, 'The Attitude of Young Sunni Muslims in Britain Towards Religious Authority.' In *Atebe Journal for Religious Studies Türkiye*: Ankara Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi, Issue 8, 2022, pp.1-24.

BBC News Online. 'Government to ban Islam4UK under terror laws.' BBC News online, 12 January 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8453560.stm>.

BBC News, 'Baroness Warsi: Prevent scheme should be paused.' *BBC News online*, 26th March 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/UK-39399011/baroness-warsi-prevent-scheme-should-be-paused>. Accessed 10 September 2021.

BBC Northwest. 'Manchester Arena Inquiry: Mosque failed to act on extremism, families say.' *BBC Northwest News Online*, 4 November 2021. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-59404102>.

Behuria, Ashok K, 'Sects Within Sect: The Case of Deobandi-Barelvi Encounter in Pakistan.' In *Journal of Strategic Analysis*, 2008, Vol.32 (1), p.57-80.

*Belkeziz, Abdelilah (2009), The State in Contemporary Islamic Thought: A Historical Survey of the Major Muslim Political Thinkers of the Modern Era. London: I.B Tauris.*

*Benslama Fethi and Robert Bononno [2009], Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam. University of Minnesota Press.*

Benjamin, Simon, Daniel, Steven (2002), *The Age of Sacred Terror*. New York: Random House.

Bergema R. and van San M. 'Waves of the black banner: An exploratory study on the Dutch Jihadist foreign fighter contingent in Syria and Iraq.' In *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42, Issue 7 2017, pp636-661.

Bergen, Nicole, Labonté, Ronald (2020). "“Everything Is Perfect, and We Have No Problems”": Detecting and Limiting Social Desirability Bias in Qualitative Research.' In *Qualitative Health Research*, SAGE Publications, 2020-04, Vol.30 (5), p.783-792.

Bhabha, H. K. 'Of Mimicry and Man.' In *Tensions of Empire: Colonial cultures in a Bourgeois world* (1984). Cooper, F. & Stoler, A.L. (ed.), California: University of California Press.

Bindman Solicitors. 'Dr Salman Butt secures apology, substantial libel damages and costs against the Secretary of State for the Home Department.' *Bindman Solicitor Report*, 15th November

2021. <https://www.bindmans.com/knowledge-hub/news/dr-salman-butt-secures-apology-substantial-libel-damages-and-costs-against-the-secretary-of-state-for-the-home-department/>.

Bloom, Colin, 'Does Government do God: An independent review into how government engages with faith,' *The Bloom Review*, April 2023, London: Gov.UK.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64478b4f529eda00123b0397/The\\_Bloom\\_Review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64478b4f529eda00123b0397/The_Bloom_Review.pdf).

Bouattia, Malia. 'The Quilliam Foundation has closed but its toxic legacy remains.' In *Al-Jazeera*, 20 April 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/4/20/the-quilliam-foundation-has-closed-but-its-toxic-legacy-remains>.

Boucek, C., 'Saudi Arabia's Soft Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare.' Paper issued online by *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (2008).

<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2008/09/saudi-arabias-soft-counterterrorism-strategy-prevention-rehabilitation-and-aftercare?lang=en>.

Boucek, C. 'Counter Terrorism from within: Assessing Saudi Arabia's Religious Rehabilitation and Disengagement Programme.' In *The RUSI Journal*, 2008 Volume 153, pp60-65.

Braddock, Kurt; Horgan, John, 'Towards a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counternarratives to Reduce Support for Terrorism.' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Taylor & Francis Journal, 2016, Vol.39 (5), pp.381-404.

Braun, Virginia; Clarke, Victoria. 'Using thematic analysis in psychology.' In *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2006, 3 (2): pp77–101.

Braun, Virginia and Clarke, Victoria. 'Thematic analysis: Handbook of Research Methods.' In the *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*, (Editors) Pranee Liamputtong. Hoboken, New Jersey: Springerpp, (2019) pp843-860.

Brehm, J., and Rahn, W., 'Individual-level evidence for the causes and consequences of social capital.' In *American Journal of Political Science*, 41/3, 1997, pp999–1023.

Bowering, Gerhard, Patricia Crone, Wadad Kadi, Devin J. Stewart, Muhammad Qasim Zaman (associate editors), Mahan Mirza (assistant editor), (2012) *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, Princeton University Press.

Briggs, C. L. (1986) *Learning How to Ask: A sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Briggs, Rachel Catherine Fieschi, and Hannah Lownsborough (2006), *Bringing it Home: Community Based Approaches to Counterterrorism*. London: Demos.

Brown, S.D. & Stenner, P. (2009). *Psychology without Foundations: History, Philosophy and Psychosocial Theory*. London: Sage Publications.

Bunzel, Cole, 'The Kingdom and the Caliphate: Duel of the Islamic States.' Washington, D.C.: *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Paper* (2016).  
<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2016/02/the-kingdom-and-the-caliphate-duel-of-the-islamic-states?lang=en>.

Bunglawala, S., 'How do we prevent radicalisation?' *Theos Think Tank Brief*, 2014. Paper issued by Theos Think Tank at <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2014/09/24/how-do-we-prevent-radicalisation-by-shenazbunglawala>.

Burke, Jason (2004) 'Al Qaeda.' Article in *Foreign Policy Magazine*, issue 142, May – June 2004, pp.18-26.

Cage. 'Beyond Prevent: A Real Alternative To Securitised Policies Report.' London: Cage Publications, 16th January 2020.

Cameron, David, 'Speech against segregation.' Article in *The Independent newspaper*, 20th July 2015. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/david-cameron-we-must-end-muslim-segregation-to-tackle-scourge-of-extremism-10403087>.

Carter Centre. 'Overview of Daesh's Online Recruitment Propaganda Magazine, Dabiq.' The Carter Centre online, December 2015.  
[https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/countering-isis/dabiq-report-12-17-15.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/dabiq-report-12-17-15.pdf).

Casciani, Dominic 'Profile: Abu Hamza.' BBC News online, 9 January 2015.  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11701269>.

Casciani, Dominic, 'How Anjem Choudary's mouth was finally shut.' BBC online on the 16th of August 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-36979892>.

Casey, Louise, 'The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration.' An independent review published online Gov.Uk by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 5th December 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration>.

Cassam, Quassim (2022) *Extremism: A Philosophical Analysis*, London: Routledge.

Cavanaugh, William (2009) *Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Choudhury, Tufyal and Helen Fenwick (2011) The impact of counter-terrorism measures on Muslim communities. Equality and Human Right Commission Report.

Citizens UK. 'The Missing Muslims: Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All.' London: Citizens Commission on Islam, 2017. [https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Missing\\_Muslims\\_Report\\_execsummary.pdf](https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Missing_Muslims_Report_execsummary.pdf).

Cleverly, James and Tom Tugendhat. 'Hizb ut-Tahrir proscribed as terrorist organisation.' UK.Gov. News story, 19th January 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hizb-ut-tahrir-proscribed-as-terrorist-organisation>.

Cleverly, James. 'Independent Review of Prevent: One Year on Progress Report.' Hansard UK Parliament paper, Volume 745: debated on Tuesday 20 February 2024. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-20/debates/24022037000008/IndependentReviewOfPreventOneYearOnProgressReport>.

Cockburn, Patrick. 'Raqqa: Isis capital liberated by US-backed forces - but civilians face months of hardship with city left devastated.' The Independent newspaper, 17 October 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/raqqa-liberated-isis-defeat-latest-mine-clearance-sdf-camp-residents-medicine-aid-a8005881.html>.

Connor, Kylie, 'Islamism in the West: The Life-Span of the Al-Muhajiroun in the United Kingdom,' Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs Volume 25 (1) April 2005, pp117-133.

Conway, Maura, 'Determining the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Six Suggestions for Progressing Research.' In Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Volume 40 (1), 2017, pp: 77–98.

Coppock, Vicki and Mark McGovern, 'Dangerous Minds? Deconstructing Counter-Terrorism Discourse, Radicalisation and the Psychological Vulnerability of Muslim Children and Young People in Britain.' Article in Children & Society, Edge Hill University publication 28, 2014.

Crenshaw, Martha, 'The Causes of Terrorism.' In Comparative Politics Journal 13(4), 1981, p379–399.

Cusack, Carole, M. Upal and M. Afzal (eds.) (2021) Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements. In Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion. Vol. 21. Leiden and Boston.

Dalgaard-Nielsen, Anja and Patrick Schack, 'Community Resilience to Militant Islamism: Who and What? An Explorative Study of Resilience in Three Danish Communities. In Democracy and Security Vol. 12, No. 4, October-December 2016. Taylor and Francis publication, pp309-327.

Dawson, Lorne L. 'A Comparative Analysis of the Data on Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: Who Went and Why?' ICCT Research Paper, February 2021.

Day, Joel; Kleinmann, Scott, 'Combating the Cult of ISIS: A Social Approach to Countering Violent Extremism.' In *The Review of Faith & International Affairs Journal*, Arlington: Routledge, 2017-07, Vol.15 (3), pp.14-23.

Denscombe, Martyn (2017), *The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects*. London: Open University Press.

Denzin, N and Y. Lincoln (2011) *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publication.

Department for Communities and Local Government. 'Preventing violent extremism: Winning hearts and minds Action Plan.' Communities and Local Government Publications, April 2007. <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20120919122719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/320752.pdf>.

Derfoufi, Zin, 'Radicalisation's Core, Terrorism and Political Violence.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence*. ISSN 1556-1836, June 2020 Volume 34 (6), pp1-22.

Derfoufi, Zin. 'Government's Prevent Strategy is hindering environmental and anti-racism movements, as well as Muslim Groups, new research finds.' In *Rights and Security International*, March 23rd, 2022, <https://www.rightsandsecurity.org/government%20s-prevent-strategy-is-hindering-environmental-and-anti-racism-movements-as-well-as-muslim-groups-new-research-finds/>.

Dilthey, W. (2002) *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. Princeton University Press.

Dinesen, P. T., and Hooghe, M., 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do: The acculturation of generalized trust among immigrants in Western Europe.' In *International Migration Review*, 44/3 2010, pp697–727.

Dodd, Vikram. 'Anjem Choudary jailed for five-and-a-half years for urging support of Isis.' *The Guardian newspaper*, 16th September 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/06/anjem-choudary-jailed-for-five-years-and-six-months-for-urging-support-of-isis>.

Dodd, Vikram and Dan Sabbagh. 'Streatham Attacker was released amid fears he felt terrorism was justified.' *The Guardian newspaper*, 3rd of February 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/feb/03/streatham-attacker-was-under-full-surveillance-from-day-of-release>.

Donohue, John and John L. Esposito [eds.] [1982] *Islam in Transition*. Oxford: Oxford university Press.

Douglas, Heather, and Elliott, Kevin C., 'Addressing the Reproducibility Crisis: A Response to Hudson.' In *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 53 2022, pp201–209.

Droitcour, J., Caspar, R., Hubbard, M., Parsley, TL., Visscher, W., & Ezzati, TM. 'The item count technique as a method of indirect questioning: A review of its development and a case study application.' In *Measurement Errors in Surveys*, PP. Biemer, RM. Groves, LE. Lyberg, NA. Mathiowetz, & S. Sudman (Editors), (1991) John Wiley & Sons, pp185-210.

Dugan, Emily and Rajeev Syal. 'Public left at risk over UK counter-terrorism strategy, says Prevent review author.' *The Guardian Newspaper*, 22nd February 2023.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/22/public-left-at-risk-uk-counter-terrorism-strategy-william-shawcross-prevent-review-author>.

East London Mosque. 'East London Mosque Refutes Extremism Allegations.' *East London Mosque & London Muslim Centre news*, March 2014.  
<https://www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/news/east-london-mosque-refutes-extremism-allegations>.

Edwards, Rosalind; Holland, Janet (2013). *What is qualitative interviewing?* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Ekman, M., 'Online Islamophobia and the Politics of Fear: Manufacturing the Green Scare.' In *Ethnic and Racial Studies Journal*, 38(11), 2015, pp1-17.

Enayat, Hamid [1982] *Modern Islamic Political Thought*. London: Macmillan Education.

English, Richard, *Counter Terrorism and Peace in Northern Ireland* (9 May 2023). International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, ICCT Publication.

Esposito, John L., (1992) *The Islamic Threat*. Oxford University Press.

Esposito, John L (2003) *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Oxford University Press.

Esposito, John L. (2005) *Islam, the Straight Path*. Oxford University Press: New York.

Esposito, John. 'Out of the Cycle of Ignorance.' In *The Guardian newspaper* 7th July 20006.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jul/07/comment.terrorism1>.

Esposito, John L., and Ibrahim Kalin (2011), *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. 'The Impact of the 7 July 2005 London Bomb Attacks on the Muslim Communities in the EU.' European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia publication, November 2005.

[https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/197-London-Bomb-attacks-EN.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/197-London-Bomb-attacks-EN.pdf).

European Parliament. 'Foreign Fighters: Member States responses and EU action in an international context.' Briefing paper for European Parliament, February 2015.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-548980-Foreign-fighters-FINAL.pdf>.

Farouki Suha Taji (1996) *Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate*, London: Grey Seal Books.

Farouki Suha Taji, '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, October 2000 pp21-46.

Fenton, Siobhan. 'Anjem Choudary proposed converting Buckingham Palace into mosque.' Article in *The Independent newspaper*, 16th August 2016.

Fielding, Nick., 'Terror links of the Tottenham Ayatollah: Nick Fielding reveals the influence of a preacher once seen as a mere loudmouth.' Article in *The Sunday Times*, 24 July 2005.

Fleetwood, Jennifer, Lois Presser, Sveinung Sandberg, Thomas Ugelvik (Editors) (2019) *The Emerald Handbook of Narrative Criminology*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

Foucault, Michel. 'Truth and power.' In *The Foucault Reader*, P. Rabinow (Ed.) (1984). New York: Panthenon Books.

Foucault, Michel (2000) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge Classics.

Fredette, Jennifer (2014) *Constructing Muslims in France: Discourse, Public Identity, and the Politics of Citizenship*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press.

Freud, Sigmund, (1949) *The Ego, and the Id*, London: The Hogarth Press Ltd.

Freytas-Tamura, Kimiko de. 'Nation Appeals to Anti-Extremist Imams in Effort to Uproot Seeds of Radicalization,' *New York Times*, 25 Aug 2014.

Fricke, M. (2007), *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press.

Galam, Salim 'The September 11 Attack: A Percolation of Individual Passive Support.' In *The European Physical Journal B - Condensed Matter & Complex Systems* 26(3) 2002, pp.269–272.

Gardner, Frank. 'Inside Saudi Arabia's Rehab Centre for Jihadists.' *BBC News Online*.  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-40061550>.

Garfinkel, Renee, 'Personal Transformations: Moving from Violence to Peace.' *United States Institute of Peace Special Report* 186, April 2007.

Geelhoed, Fiore (2014) *Striving for Allah: Purification and Resistance among Fundamentalist Muslims in the Netherlands*, Den Haag: Eleven International Publishing.

Geelhoed, Fiore and Staring, Richard, 'What Do Overrepresented and Underrepresented Groups Tell Us About Risks for Involvement in Islamist Extremism?' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 2023-03, Vol. 3, pp.1-19.

Gencturk, Ahmet, 'Record number of Muslims elected to UK parliament despite rising Islamophobia.' In AA Europe. 10th July 2024. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/record-number-of-muslims-elected-to-uk-parliament-despite-rising-islamophobia/3270749>.

Gibson, Brian, 'In Bad Faith: The link between religious conversion and violent extremism.' In *The Journal of the NPS Center for Homeland Defense and Security: Homeland Security Affairs*, March 2018.

Gherardi, Silvia, and Barry Turner, 'Real Men Do Not Collect Soft Data.' In *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*, (Editors) A. Michael Huberman and Matthew B. Miles, (2002). London: Sage Publications.

Gillan, Audrey, Ian Cobain and Hugh Muir, 'Jamaican born convert to Islam coordinated fellow bombers.' *The Guardian newspaper*, 16 July 2005.

Githens-Meyer, Jonathan and Robert Lambert (2010). 'Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: A London Study.' University of Exeter: European Muslim Research Centre.

Given, Lisa M. (2008). *Otherness. The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Gove, Michael, *Celsius 7/7* (2006), London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson;

Geaves, Ron (1996). *Sectarian Influences Within Islam in Britain with Reference to the Concepts of 'Ummah' and 'Community'*. Leeds: Monograph Series Community Religions Project.

Gerth, H.H., & Mills, C.W. (Eds. & Trans.) (1946). *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Oxford University Press.

Gilliat-Ray, Sophie, Timol, Riyaz (2021), *Leadership, Authority and Representation in British Muslim Communities*. Basel, Switzerland MDPI - Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute.

Gilliat-Ray, Sophie, Hansjörg Schmid, Mansur Ali. 'Mapping Muslim Chaplaincy: An Analytic Review of Publications between 1989 and 2023.' In *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 14 2024 pp1–30.

Global Coalition against Daesh. Online homepage. <https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/>.

Greater London Authority. 'A Shared Endeavour: London Countering Violent Extremism.' Programme Report, Published by the Greater London Authority, 2019, p54-55. [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cve\\_strategy\\_20\\_8\\_19.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cve_strategy_20_8_19.pdf).

Grierson, Jamie, 'Hate Preaching and Anjem Choudary.' Article in *The Guardian* newspaper, 11th September 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/sep/11/hate-preacher-anjem-choudary-freed-weeks-threat-chaplain>.

Grierson, Jamie, 'Hundreds of Islamic Groups Boycott Prevent Review.' Article in *The Guardian newspaper* 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/17/hundreds-islamic-groups-boycott-prevent-review-william-shawcross-protest>.

Groeninck, Mieke, 'Difference and negotiation from the borders: Islamic religious actors providing theological counternarratives for deradicalisation in Belgium.' In *Religion, State & Society*, 2021-10, Vol.49 (4-5), pp.331-349.

Guerrin, Michel. 'Charlie Hebdo Murder.' Article in *Le Monde newspaper*, November 29th, 2015.

Halliday, Josh and Vikram Dodd. 'UK anti-radicalisation Prevent strategy a toxic brand.' Article in *The Guardian newspaper*, 9th March 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/mar/09/anti-radicalisation-prevent-strategy-a-toxic-brand>.

Hall, Stuart, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (2009) London: Routledge.

Hall, Jonathan. 'Terrorism in Prisons: Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation's Report and Government Response,' 27th April 2022. Ministry of Justice online Publication. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/terrorism-in-prisons-independent-reviewer-of-terrorism-legislations-report-and-government-response>.

Halverson, J. R, Goodall, H. L. and Corman, S. R. (2011), *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hamid, Sadek. 'Islamic Political Radicalism in Britain: the case of Hizb-ut-Tahrir.' In *Islamic Political Radicalism: A European Perspective*, Tahir Abbas (ed.) (2007). Edinburgh University Press. pp. 145–59.

Hamid, Sadek [2016], *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The contested ground of British Islamic Activism*. London: IB Taurus.

Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside, Charlie Winter (2020) *The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State Movement*, Oxford University Press.

Hashmi, Sohail H. and David Miller (2002), *Boundaries and Justice: diverse ethical perspectives*, Princetown University Press.

Haykel, Bernard, (2009) 'Al-Qaeda's Path and Creed.' In *Global Salafism (2009)*, Roel Maijer, London: Hurst.

Hegghammer, Thomas, 'Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism.' In *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, Meijer, R. (ed.). (2009) Columbia University Press.

Hellmuth, Dorle, 'Countering Jihadi Terrorists and Radicals the French Way.' In *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Vol. 38, no. 12 2015, pp 979-997.

High Court of Justice Bench Division. 'Between Shakeel Begg and British Broadcasting Corporation.' Case No: HQ14D04379, 28th October 2016. EWHC 2688 (QB) at the Royal Court of Justice.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. 'Counter-terrorism policing: An Inspection of the Policies contribution to the government's Prevent Programme.' *HMICFRS Publication Report*, 2019.

<https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/publications/counter-terrorism-policing-an-inspection-of-the-polices-contribution-to-the-governments-prevent-programme/>.

*Hizb ut-Tahrir*. 'The Method to Re-establish the Khilafah and Resume the Islamic Way of Life.' Pamphlet issued by Hizb ut-Tahrir in Britain, August 2000.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir. *America and Britain declare war against Islam and the Muslims*. Pamphlet issued by Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Britain, October 2001.

Holbrook, Donald, 'What Types of Media Do Terrorists Collect? An Analysis of Religious, Political, and Ideological Publications Found in Terrorism Investigations in the UK.' In *The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism publication*, no 11, 2017.

Holstein, James A. and Jaber F. Gubrium (2007) *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, New York: Guildford Press.

Home Office. 'Pursue Prevent Protect Prepare: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism.' London: Home Office: UK.Gov. Publications, 2009.

Home Office. 'Prevent Strategy.' London: Home Office: UK.Gov. publications, June 2011. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78966aed915d07d35b0dcc/prevent-strategy-review.pdf>.

Home Office. 'Channel: Protecting Vulnerable People from Being Drawn into Terrorism.' London: Home Office, Gov.UK publications, 2012. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651e71d9e4e658001459d997/14.320\\_HO\\_Channel\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_v3\\_Final\\_Web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651e71d9e4e658001459d997/14.320_HO_Channel_Duty_Guidance_v3_Final_Web.pdf).

Home Office, 'Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations.' Home Office: Gov.UK, 12 July 2013 Gov.uk. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2>.

Home Office. 'Prevent Duty Guidance: for England and Wales.' London: Home Office UK. Gov. 2015. [https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Prevent\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_for\\_England\\_and\\_Wales.pdf](https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Prevent_Duty_Guidance_for_England_and_Wales.pdf).

Home Office. 'Radicalisation: the counternarrative and identifying the tipping point: HM Government response to the eight reports from the Home Affairs Select Committee Session.' London: Home Office policy paper UK. Gov. December 2017-17 HC 135. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/radicalisation-the-counter-narrative-and-identifying-the-tipping-point-government-response>.

Home Office. CONTEST: The UK Government Strategy for Countering Terrorism. London Home Office. UK. Gov., 4 June 2018. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2018>.

Home Office. 'William Shawcross to lead independent review of Prevent.' London: Home Office Gov.UK News, 26th January 2021. <https://www.gov.UK/government/news/william-shawcross-to-lead-independent-review-of-prevent>.

Home Office. Channel and Prevent Multi-Agency Panel (PMAP) guidance. London: Home Office UK. Gov., 22nd February 2021. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/channel-and-prevent-multi-agency-panel-pmap-guidance>.

Home Office. 'The Independent Review of Prevent.' London: Home Office UK. Gov. publication, 8 February 2023. <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/09/07/independent-review-of-prevent-factsheet/>.

Home office. 'Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2022 to March 2023.' London: Home Office, UK. Gov publication. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/individuals-referred-to-prevent/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2022-to-march-2023#type-of-concern>.

Home Office: 'Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST), The four Ps: Pursue, Prevent, Protect, and Prepare.' London: Home Office, UK GOV. Home Office publication, 22 September 2023. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2023>.

Home Office. 'Prevent programme strengthened a year on from independent review.' London: Home Office: Gov.Uk publications, February 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prevent-programme-strengthened-a-year-on-from-independent-review>.

Home Office. 'Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations.' London Home Office: UK.Gov. Updated 26 April 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations--2/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations-accessible-version>.

Hoque, Ashraf (2019) *Being Young, Male and Muslim in Luton*. London: UCL Press.

Horgan, John, 'Disengagement or Deradicalisation: A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiation in need of evaluation.' In *Perspectives on Terrorism* Volume 2 No.4 2008, pp. 3-8.

Horgan, John, and Kurt Braddock, 'Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the effectiveness of De-Radicalization Programmes.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 22, No. 2, April 2010, pp. 267–291.

Horgan, John, 'Lessons learned since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001,' Paper delivered at START Symposium conference, 1 Sept. 2011. Washington DC.

Huberman, Michael A. and Matthew B. Miles (2002) *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*. London: Sage Publications.

Hughes, Aaron W. 'ISIS: What's a Poor Religionist to Do?' In *The Marginalia Review of Books*, Blog publication, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

Human Rights Watch. 'Tunisia: Scant Help to Bring Home ISIS Members' Children.' *Human Rights Watch online* news article, 12th February 2019.

Human Rights Watch. 'Bring Me Back to Canada: Plight of Canadians Held in Northeast Syria for Alleged ISIS Links.' *Human Rights Watch online news*, June 29th, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/06/29/bring-me-back-canada/plight-canadians-held-northeast-syria-alleged-isis-links>.

Husain, Ed. (2007) *The Islamist: why I joined radical Islam in Britain, what I saw inside and why I left*. London: Penguin.

Husain, Ed, 'You Ask The Questions.' In *The Independent* newspaper, 14 April 2008. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/ed-husain-you-ask-the-questions-808652.html>.

International Peace Institute. 'A New Approach: Deradicalization Programmes and Counterterrorism.' *International Peace Institute paper*, June 2010. [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/a\\_new\\_approach\\_epub.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/a_new_approach_epub.pdf).

Iqbal, Sajid and Calum McKay. 'Asad Shah Murder: Killer Tanveer Ahmed Releases Prison Message,' *BBC News*. January 31, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-38815366>. Accessed May 3, 2023.

Ishtiaq, Muhammad. 'PM urges nation to celebrate Mawlid Al-Nabi in 'unprecedented manner' this year.' In Arab News 17 October 202. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1949486/amp>.

Islam Against Extremism.com, 'How Do Muslims View Al-Qaeda and ISIS?' *Islam Against Extremism.com* April 2016. <http://www.islamagainstextremism.com/>.

Islam Against Extremism.com, 'Kharajites: Historical Roots of the Ideology of Extremism and Terrorism.' *Islam Against Extremism.com*, April 2017. <http://www.islamagainstextremism.com/articles/nercnev-the-kharijites-historical-roots-of-the-ideology-of-extremism-and-terrorism.cfm>.

Islam Against Extremism. 'Abu Qatada - A Misguided, Bloodthirsty Takfiri,' *Islam Against Extremism.com*, 2018. <http://www.islamagainstextremism.com/articles/bqael-abu-qatada---a-misguided-bloodthirsty-takfiri.cfm>

Islam Channel. "Dr Salman Butt wins Government Apology for falsely labelling him Extremist." *Islam Channel*, 6th December 2021. <https://islamchannel.tv/dr-salman-butt-wins-government-apology-for-falsely-labelling-him-extremist/>.

Jackson Preece, Jennifer, 'Cultural Diversity and Security after 9/11.' In *The Empire of Security and the Safety of the People*, William Bain (ed). (2006). London: Routledge.

Jarvis, Lee, Andrew Whiting, Stuart Macdonald (2024) *Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation and Prevent: A vernacular approach*. Manchester University Press.

Jenkins, John, Sir (2018) *Defining Islamophobia: A Policy Exchange Research Note*. London: Policy Exchange.

Jones, Abbie and Lauren Hirst, 'Mosque would have done anything to prevent Manchester Arena attack.' *BBC News Online*, 2nd March 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-64801301>.

Joose, P., Bucarius, S. M., & Thompson, S. K., 'Narratives and counternarratives: Somali Canadians on recruitment as foreign fighters to Al-Shabaab.' In the *British Journal of Criminology*, 2015 55(4), pp811-832.

Josselson, Ruth (2013) *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry*, London: The Guildford Press.

Karipek, Asena, 'Portrayals of Jihad: A Cause of Islamophobia.' In *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 2 Fall 2020, pp. 210-255.

Kelly, June. 'Lee Rigby murder: Adebolajo and Adebowale jailed.' *BBC News online*, 26 February 2014. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26357007>.

Kenney, Michael, John Horgan; Horne, Cale Horne, Peter Vining, Kathleen Carley, Michael Bigrigg, Mia Bloom and Kurt Braddock, 'Organisational adaptation in an activist network: Social networks, leadership, and change in Al-Muhajiroun.' In *Applied Ergonomics Journal*, 2013 09, Vol.44 (5), pp.739-747.

Kenney, Michael (2018) *The Islamic State in Britain: Radicalisation and Resilience in an Activist Network*, Cambridge University Press.

Kenney, Michael, 'What is to be done about Al-Muhajiroun? Containing the emigrants in a democratic society.' Paper published by the *Commission for Countering Extremism*, 7th October 2019. London: UK.

Kepel, Giles (2002) *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Kepel, Giles, 'Islamic Groups in Europe: Between Community Affirmation and Social Crisis.' In *Islam In Europe: The Politics of Religion and Community*, Steven Vertovec and Ceri Peach's (1997) London Springer.

Khalil, Sardarnia and Safizadeh, Rasoul, 'The Internet and Its Potentials for Networking and Identity Seeking: A Study on ISIS.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2019 11 Vol.31 (6), pp.1266-1283.

Khan, Sara with Tony McMahon (2016) *The Battle for British Islam: Reclaiming Muslim Identity from Extremism*. London: Saqi Books.

Khan, Sara and Mark Rowley, 'Operating with Impunity: Hateful extremism: The need for a legal framework.' Report by the *Commission for Countering Extremism*, 24 February 2021.

Khan, Maulana Wahiduddin and Farida Khanam (Translators), (2009) *The Quran*. Delhi: Goodword Books.

King, Michael and Donald M Taylor, 'The Radicalisation of Homegrown Jihadists: A Review of Theoretical Models and Social Psychological Evidence.' In *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no.4, 2011 pp602-622.

Kingsley, Patrick 'Call Islamic State QGIS Instead, Says Globally Influential Islamic authority.' In *The Guardian newspaper*, 27 August 2014. [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/27/islamic-state-isis-al-qaida-separatists-iraq-syria](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/27/islamic-state-isis-al-qaida-separatists-iraq-syria).

Klingenberg, maria and Sofia Sjö, 'Theorizing religious socialization: a critical assessment.' In *Religion*, Volume 49, no. 2 2019. Routledge Journal Publication, pp163-178.

Knupfer, Helena, Kaskelvičiute, Ruta, Matthes, Jörg, 'Silent Sympathy: News Attention, Subtle Support for Far-Right Extremism, and Negative Attitudes Toward Muslims.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence Journal*, 2023-12, pp.1-19.

Kundnani, Arun, 'In a Foreign Land: The Popular Racism.' In *Race and Class* Volume 43 2001 pp41– 60.

Kundnani, Arun, 'Spooked: How not to Prevent Terrorism.' *Paper for the Institute of Race Relations*, 2009. <https://irr.org.uk/article/spooked-how-not-to-prevent-violent-extremism/>.

Kundnani, Arun, 'Radicalisation: The Journey of a Concept.' In *Race and Class* Volume 54 (2), 2012 pp.3-25.

Kundnani, Arun (2014) *The Muslims are Coming: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*. London: Pluto Press.

Kurucan, Ahmet and Mustafa Kasim Erol (2011) *Dialogue in Islam: Qur'an- Sunnah- History*, London: The Dialogue Society.

Kurzman, Charles, 'Islamic Statements Against Terrorism.' *University of North Caroline at Chapel Hill Statement*, September 14th, 2001. <https://kurzman.unc.edu/islamic-statements-against-terrorism/>. Accessed 5th June 2024.

Lambert, Robert, 'Empowering Salafis and Islamists Against al-Qaeda: A London Counterterrorism Case Study.' In *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 1 January 2008 pp31-35.

Lambert, R., 'Salafi and Islamist Londoners: Stigmatised minority faith communities countering Al-Qaeda.' In *Crime Law Society Change*, 2008 50, pp73–89.

Lambert, R. (2011) *Countering Al-Qaeda in London*. London, Hurst.

Lang, Cady. 'The Complicated History of Frances Hijab Controversy.' *Time*, February 14th, 2021. Accessed 3rd November 2021. <https://time.com/6049226/france-hijab-ban/>.

Lewis, Philip, 'Imams, ulema and Sufis: providers of bridging social capital for British Pakistanis?' In *Contemporary South Asia* 15, 2006, pp273-87.

Lewis, Philip. 'Imams in Britain: Agents of De-Radicalisation.' In *Islamic Movements of Europe*. Edited by Frank Peter and Rafael Ortega (2014) London and New York: I.B. Tauris.

Liht, Jose and Savage, Sara. 'Preventing Violent Extremism through Value Complexity: Being Muslim Being British.' In *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, Number 4 2013, pp44-66.

Lister, M. and L. Jarvis, 'Disconnection and Resistance: Anti-Terrorism and Citizenship in the UK.' In *Citizenship Studies*, 17 (6-7) 2013, pp756-69.

Lowe, David, Robin Bennett (Edited) (2020) *Prevent Strategy: Helping the Vulnerable Being Drawn towards Terrorism or Another Layer of State Surveillance?* Routledge Advances in Sociology, London: Routledge.

- Loza, Wagdy, Wendy, 'The Psychology of Extremism and Terrorism: A Middle Eastern Perspective.' In *Aggression and Violent Behavior, Volume 12* 2007, pp141–155.
- Lyotard, Jean Francois [1984] *The Postmodern Condition*. Manchester University Press.
- Maher, Shiraz (2016) *Salafi–Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, London: Hurst.
- Mack, Gregory, 'Jurisprudence.' In *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Islamic Political Thought* (2012) Bowering, Gerhard, Patricia Crone, Wadad Kadi, Devin J. Stewart, Muhammad Qasim Zaman (associate editors), Mahan Mirza (assistant editor). Princeton University Press.
- Mahan Abedin, Mahan. 'Al-Muhajiroun in the UK: An Interview with Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed.' The Jamestown Foundation, 25th May 2005. <https://jamestown.org/interview/al-muhajiroun-in-the-uk-an-interview-with-sheikh-omar-bakri-mohammed/>.
- Makkah Mosque. 'Imams Online 5th Digital Summit.' *Makkah Mosque Publications* brief, 4th October 2019. <https://makkahmosque.co.uk/publication/5th-annual-digital-summit-in-partnership-with-twitter-uk/>.
- Malinowski, B. (1922), *Argonauts of the West Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Manchester Arena Inquiry, 'Opus 2 Court papers, Day 171, Volume 2. section 1. 2022.' In Home Office Gov.UK Publishing. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-\\_Part\\_i\\_Accessible\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-_Part_i_Accessible_.pdf)
- Manchester Arena Inquiry, 'Opus 2 Court papers, Day 172, Volume 2. Section 2. 2022.' In Home Office Gov.UK Publishing. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-\\_Part\\_i\\_Accessible\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d508e90e0705a935f36d/MAI-Vol2-_Part_i_Accessible_.pdf)
- Manchester Arena Inquiry. 'Opus 2 Court papers, Day 173, Volume 2, Section 33. 2022.' In Home Office Gov.UK Publishing, <https://www.gmp.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/images/greater-manchester/news/2022/november/mai-volume-2-large-format-ia-ib-ic-ii.pdf>.
- Manchester Arena Inquiry, 'Opus 2 Court papers 2022, Day 183, Section 13. Vol.2-11. 2022.' In Home Office Gov.UK Publishing. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d113e90e0705a7012946/\\_HC\\_757-II\\_-\\_Manchester\\_Arena\\_Inquiry\\_Report\\_\\_\\_Volume\\_2\\_\\_Volume\\_2-II\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363d113e90e0705a7012946/_HC_757-II_-_Manchester_Arena_Inquiry_Report___Volume_2__Volume_2-II_.pdf)
- Mosque Finder. *UK Mosque Directory online*. <https://www.mosquedirectory.co.uk>.
- Mason Jenifer, (2002) *Qualitative Research*, London: Sage Publications.

Maududi, Abu Ala, 'Political Theory of Islam.' In *Islam in Transition*. Donohue, John and John L. Esposito (eds.) (1982). Oxford university Press, pp252-253.

May, Tim (editor) (2002) *Qualitative Interviewing: Asking, Listening, and Interpreting*. Sage: London.

McGuire, M. B. (2008) *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Religion*. Oxford University Press.

Meer, Naser, Modood, Tariq, 'Islamophobia as the racialisation of Muslims.' In *The Routledge Handbook of Islamophobia*, Meer, Naser, Modood, Tariq (Editors) (2019). London: Routledge.

Mehmood Naqshbandi, Muslims In Britain, UK Mosque Statistics / Masjid Statistic as of 2024. Data listed in the MuslimsInBritain.org Directory of Masjids/Mosques.  
[www.MuslimsInBritain.org](http://www.MuslimsInBritain.org).

Meijer, Roel (2013). *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. Oxford University Press.

Merriam S. B. (2009) *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mend. 'MEND's response to the Second Reading House of Lords Briefing on the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill.' *Mend briefing online*, 9th October 2018, pp6 to 15.  
<https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/MENDs-Response-to-the-Second-Reading-House-of-Lords-Briefing-on-the-Counter-Terrorism-and-Border-Security-Bill-2017-2019.pdf>.

Mesner, William, *The Paranoid Process* [1994], London: Jason Aronson Books.

MI5. 'Countering Terrorism: Prevent Programme as Support.' Security Service MI5 online, 2024.  
<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/what-we-do/countering-terrorism>.

Ministry of Defence. 'Evidence of ISIL Funding' (SIF0006). UK Ministry of Defence written evidence paler. 26th April 2016.  
<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/67779/html/>.

Ministry of Justice. 'MAPPA Guidance.' Produced by the National MAPPA Team National Offender Management Service Offender Management and Public Protection Group. London: Ministry of Justice, 2012. <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/mappa/mappa-guidance-2012-part1.pdf>.

Mohammad, Omar Bakri (1999), *A Nation Without a Cause is Like a Body Without a Soul*, London: Al-Khilafah Publications.

Morey, Peter, and Amina Yaqin (2011) *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Morgan, Diane (2009). *Essential Islam: A comprehensive guide to belief and practice*. London: Bloomsbury Publications.

Murad, Abdul Hakim (2008) *Bombing without Moonlight*, Bristol: Amal Press.

Murray, Douglas, *Quilliam's toxic take on liberty*. In *The Guardian newspaper*, 23 October 2009.

Muslim Council of Britain. 'Over 130 Imams & Religious Leaders from diverse backgrounds refuse to perform the funeral prayer for London attackers in an unprecedented move.' Muslim Council of Britain Press release, 17th June 2017. <https://mcb.org.uk/over-130-imams-religious-leaders-from-diverse-backgrounds-refuse-to-perform-the-funeral-prayer-for-london-attackers-in-an-unprecedented-move/>.

Muslim Council of Britain. 'Our Shared British Future: Muslims and Integration in the UK.' *Muslim Council of Britain*, 10th March 2018. <https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MCB-Our-Shared-Future-online.pdf>.

Muslim Council of Britain 'MCB position on Counter-Terrorism policy and Prevent.' *Muslim Council of Britain*, March 2021. <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-position-on-counter-terrorism-policy-and-prevent/>. MCB on its anti-terrorist stance in <http://www.mcb.org.uk/againstterror/>.

Muslim Council of Britain. 'Six Step Guide to Keeping Mosques Safe & Secure.' *Muslim Council of Britain Press release*, 20th October 2021. <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-releases-6-step-guide-to-keeping-mosques-safe-secure/>.

Muslim Council of Britain. 'Briefing on Proposed Changes to Prevent following the Shawcross Review.' Muslim Council of Britain, February 2023. <https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MCB-Briefing-Proposed-Changes-to-Prevent-Following-Shawcross-Review-070223.pdf>.

Muslim Council of Britain. 'Muslim Council of Britain Slams Government's Flawed Extremism Strategy.' Muslim Council of Britain press release, 13th March 2024. <https://mcb.org.uk/muslim-council-of-britain-slams-governments-flawed-extremism-strategy/>.

Mustafa, Anisa. 'Active citizenship, dissent and power: the cultural politics of young adult British Muslims.' PhD thesis: Awarded by University of Nottingham. <https://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/30533/>.

Nagel, T. (2016). 'By any means or none.' *London Review of Books*.

Nannestad, P., Svendsen, G. T., Dinesen, P. T., and Sønderskov, K. M. 'Do institutions or culture determine the level of social trust? The natural experiment of migration from non-Western to Western countries.' In the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40/4 2014 pp544–565.

Nasr, Seyyed Vali Reza (1996). *Maududi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*. Oxford University Press.

Nayyar, Anita. 'My British Mosque Research Report.' *Open My Mosque Campaign*. Published by Together We Thrive network campaign in association with SOAS 180 Degree Consulting. 4th March 2024. <https://togetherwethrive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/OMM-Research-Full-Report-Online-version.pdf>.

Nielsen, Jorgen S. (2023), *Islamic studies in European Higher Education: navigating academic and confessional approaches*. Edinburgh University Press.

Nesser, P. (2015), *Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History*. London: Hurst.

Neumann, Peter, 'The UK's international counter-terrorism policy: Oral evidence,' HC 1832. UK Parliament House of Commons Committee Publication, Tuesday 12th September 2023. <https://committees.parliament.uk/event/19281>.

Nilsson, Marco, 'Foreign Fighters and the Radicalization of Local Jihad: Interview Evidence from Swedish Jihadists.' In *Conflict & Terrorism*, 19 Feb 2015, pp. 343-358.

Nilsson, Marco, 'Jihadship: From Radical Behaviour to Radical Beliefs.' In *Conflict & Terrorism Journal*, April 2018, pp181-197.

O'Donnell, A., 'Securitisation, Counterterrorism and the Silencing of Dis-sent: The Educational Implications of Prevent.' In *British Journal of Educational Studies* 64, no. 1 2016, pp53–76.

O'Donnell, A., 'Contagious Ideas: Vulnerability, Epistemic Injustice and Counter-Terrorism in Education.' In *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 50 2018 pp981-97.

Office for National Statistics. Religion, England, and Wales: Census 2021. Office for National Statistics Publication, 2021.

[https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion#:~:text=Religion%2C%20England%20and%20Wales%3A%20Census%202021&text=For%20the%20first%20time%20in,33.3%20million\)%20in%202011%3B](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion#:~:text=Religion%2C%20England%20and%20Wales%3A%20Census%202021&text=For%20the%20first%20time%20in,33.3%20million)%20in%202011%3B).

O'Neill, Sean. 'Sudesh Amman told inmates he wanted to murder an MP.' Article in *The Times newspaper*, 4th February 2020. <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/streatham-terror-attack-jihadist-told-inmates-he-wanted-to-murder-an-mp-5tg6xkc6s>.

O'Toole, T., Meer, N., DeHanas, D. N., Jones, S. H., & Modood, T. 'Governing through Prevent? Regulation and Contested Practice in State–Muslim Engagement.' In *Sociology*, Volume 50(1) 2016, pp160–177.

Osborne, P. and Jones, J., (July 2008) *Muslims Under Siege: Alienating Vulnerable Communities*. Democratic Audit, Human Rights Centre, University of Essex in association with Channel 4 Dispatches.

Ostřanský, Bronislav, (2020) *The Jihadist preachers of the end times: ISIS apocalyptic propaganda*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oweidat, Lana, 'Islamic Ethos: Examining Sources of Authority.' In *Humanities*, Vol. 8, Issue 4, 2019, pp1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h8040170>.

Ozer, Simon, 'Globalisation and Radicalisation: A Cross-National Study of Local Embeddedness and Reactions to Cultural Globalization in Regard to Violent Extremism.' In *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* Volume 76 Number 33, 2020, pp26-36.

Ozcan Keles and Ismail Mesut Sezgin, (2015) *A Hizmet Approach to rooting out Violent Radicalisation*. London: Hizmet Publications.

Pandya-Wood, Jason. 'Still no Place for Hate: Analysis of the findings of the Nottingham Citizen's Hate Crime Survey including recommendations.' Published 10 May 2018, Nottingham Trent University.

Partha Sarathi Basu (2021), *The Foundations of Research Methodology: A Guidebook of Research Techniques, Along with Measurement & Sampling*. Lambert Publishing Press.

Phillips, Melanie, (2006) *Londonistan: how Britain is creating a terror state within*. London: Gibson Square.

5PillarsUK.com. 'Scholars in the UK, India and Pakistan condemn Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri as "misguided".' *5 Pillars*, 5th July 2019. <https://5pillarsuk.com/2019/07/05/scholars-in-the-uk-india-and-pakistan-condemn-dr-tahir-ul-qadri-as-misguided/>.

Piven Jerry S., 'Terrorist Theology, Delusion and Apotheosis in death.' In *Terrorism, Political Violence and Extremism*, (ed.) Christopher E, Stout Praeger (Editors) (2023). London: Bloomsbury Academic Press.

Poljarevic, Emin, 'Theology of Violence-oriented Takfirism as a Political Theory: The Case of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).' In *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Islamic Political Thought (2012)* Bowering, Gerhard, Patricia Crone, Wadad Kadi, Devin J. Stewart, Muhammad Qasim Zaman (associate editors), Mahan Mirza (assistant editor). Princeton University Press.

- Poole, E. (2002) *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Presser, Stanley; Stinson, Linda, 'Data Collection Mode and Social Desirability Bias in Self-Reported Religious Attendance.' In *American Sociological Review*. Volume 63 (1) 1998, pp137–145.
- Pukka News. 'Imam Launches Campaign opposing Isis Narrative.' Pukaa News, Leicester. 2016. <https://pukaarnews.com/community-campaign-opposes-isis-narrative/17664/>.
- Qadri, Tahir-ul, Muhammad (2011) *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings*. Minhaj-ul-Quran International (MQI) UK; 1st edition.
- Qadri, Tahir-ul, Muhammad (2015) *Islamic Curriculum on Peace and Counter-Terrorism (Clerics, Imams)*. London Minhaj Publications.com.
- Quilliam Foundation. 'A Muslim Think Tank to Counter Extremism.' Published on Quantara, 7th August, 2008) <https://qantara.de/en/article/quilliam-foundation-muslim-think-tank-counter-extremism>.
- Quran.com online. <https://quran.com/al-maidah/32>.
- Qureshi, Asim, 'Prevent: creating "radicals" to strengthen anti-Muslim narratives.' In *Critical Studies In Terrorism*, Volume 8 2015 pp181-191.
- Qutb, Sayyid (1954) *Islam, the religion of the future*. Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations.
- Ravagnani, Luisa. 'Challenges and Recommendations for Rehabilitation Work Islamist extremist converts.' Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) Paper written for the European Commission, December 2021. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-12/ran\\_challenges\\_recommendations\\_for\\_rehabilitation\\_work\\_122021\\_en.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-12/ran_challenges_recommendations_for_rehabilitation_work_122021_en.pdf).
- Raymond, Catherine Zara. 'Al-Muhajiroun and Islam4UK: The group behind the ban, Developments.' In *Radicalisation and Political Violence*, (May 2010), Prof. Harvey Rubin, Dr John Bew (Editors). Paper published by The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence.
- Reyes, Victoria, 'Ethnographic Toolkit: Strategic Positionality and Researchers' Visible and Invisible Tools.' In *Field Research Ethnography* Volume 21 (2) 2018, Sage Publications, pp.220-240.
- Richie, Jane, Jane Lewis, Rachel Ormiston, and Carol McNaughton-Nicholls (2013) *Qualitative Research Practice*, London: Sage.

Right Watch International. 'Government Conceded Permission for RWUK Judicial Review of Prevent Reviewer.' *Rights Watch International News online*, 4th December 2019. <https://www.rightsandsecurity.org/impact-post/government-concedes-permission-for-rwuk-judicial-review-of-prevent-reviewer/>.

Rinehart, James F., (2006) *Apocalyptic Faith and Political Violence: Prophets of Terror*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Robinson, Glenn E (2021), *Global Jihad: a brief history*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre. 'An Open Letter to Baghdadi.' Published by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, 14th September 2014. <https://rissc.jo/open-letter-to-al-baghdadi/>.

Roy, Olivier, (2004) *Globalised Islam*. London: Hurst & Co.

Roy, Olivier (2017) *Jihad and Death*. London: Hurst.

Runnymede Trust. 'Islamophobia: A Challenge for us All.' An official report published by the Runnymede Trust. 1997. <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/publications/islamophobia-a-challenge-for-us-all>.

Rushchanko, Julia (2017) *Converts to Islam and Homegrown Jihadism*. Centre on Radicalisation and Terrorism: Henry Jackson Society.

Ruthven, Malise, 'How to Understand ISIS,' review of 'The New Arab Wars' by Marc Lynch and 'ISIS: A History' by Fawaz Gerges. In *New York Review of Books* Number 63, 23 June 2016.

Sabbagh, Dan, 'An appeal was made but lost and Shamima Begum's case remains contested.' In *The Guardian newspaper*, 21 February 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/feb/26/shamima-begum-cannot-return-to-uk-to-fight-for-citizenship-court-rules>.

Said, Edward (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books (Random House).

Said, E. W. (1978) *Orientalism*. New York: New York Press.

Sandberg, Sveinung, Colvin, Sarah. 'ISIS is not Islam: Epistemic Injustice, Everyday Religion, and Young Muslims Narrative Resistance British.' In *Journal of Criminology*, (2020) Vol.60 (6), p.1585-1605.

Shanaah, Sadi (2019), '*Alienation or Cooperation? British Muslims Attitude to and Engagement in Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Extremism.*' PhD Thesis (2019) Warwick University Publications.

Sherwood, Harriet. 'Imams refuse funeral prayers for indefensible London Bridge attackers.' *The Guardian newspaper*, 5th June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/05/imams-refuse-funeral-prayers-to-indefensible-london-bridge-attackers>.

Schaack, Beth Van. 'The Iraq Investigative Team and Prospects for Justice for the Yazidi Genocide.' In the *Journal of International Criminal Justice*. Volume 16, 2018, pp113–139.

Scheuer, Michael (2002) *Through our enemies eyes: Osama bin Laden, radical Islam, and the future of America*, Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books.

Scheuer, Michael (2011) *Osama bin Laden*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schirmacher, Christine, 'Leaving Islam.' In *Handbook of Leaving Religion* by Enstedt, Daniel; Larsson, Göran; Mantsinen, Teemu T. (eds.) (2020) Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion. Vol. 18. Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers.

Schmidt, Frank L. and John E. Hunter (2015) *Methods of Meta-Analysis: Correcting Error and Bias in Research Findings*. London: SAGE Publications, Ltd.

Seddon, Paul and Dominic Casciani. 'Michael Gove names groups as he unveils extremism definition.' *BBC news online*, 14th March 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68564577>.

Shaukat, Warraich. *Haqiqah Magazine*, Issue 2 2015. <https://soundcloud.com/user-362346597/haqiqah-issue-2-editorial-shaukat-warraich>. Accessed 13th September 2023.

Shaw, Danny. 'London Bridge: Usman Khan completed untested rehabilitation scheme.' *BBC Online News*, 4 December 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-50653191>.

Shaw, Rhonda M., Julie Howe, Jonathan Beazer, and Toni Carr. 'Ethics and Positionality in Qualitative Research with Vulnerable and Marginal Groups.' In *Qualitative Research* Volume 20 Issue 3, 2019 pp277-293.

Sian, Katy, Ian Law, and Salman Sayyid. 'Debates on difference and Integration in education: Muslims in the UK.' Paper for *Centre for Racism and Ethnicity studies*, University of Leeds, 2011.

Siddique, Haroon, 'Mosques launch anti-radicalisation scheme as alternative to Prevent.' In *The Guardian newspaper*, 22nd March 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/22/mosques-launch-anti-radicalisation-scheme-as-alternative-to-prevent>.

Simone, Daniel, De. 'Sudesh Amman: Who was the Streatham Attacker.' In *BBC Online-news*, 3rd February 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51351885>.

Solórzano, Daniel G. Yosso, Tara J. 'Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research.' In *Qualitative Inquiry* 2002-02, Vol.8 (1), Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp23-44.

Sonn, Tamara (2004) *A Brief History of Islam*. Blackwell Publishing.

Spaaij, Ramón, 'The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism: An Assessment.' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism Journal*, 2010 Vol.33 (9), p.854-870.

Spalek, B. and McDonald, L., 'Terror crime prevention: constructing Muslim practices and beliefs as anti-social and extreme through CONTEST 2.' In *Social Policy and Society*, 9(1) 2009 pp123–132.

Spalek, Basia and Douglas Weeks, 'The Role of Communities in Counterterrorism: Analysing Policy and Exploring Psychotherapeutic Approaches within Community Settings.' In *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:12, 2017 pp 991-1003.

Speckhard, Anne; Ellenberg, Molly D, 'ISIS in Their Own Words: Recruitment History, Motivations for Joining, Travel, Experiences in ISIS, and Disillusionment over Time – Analysis of 220 In-depth Interviews of ISIS Returnees, Defectors and Prisoners.' In *Journal of Strategic Security*, 2020-04, Vol.13 No 1 pp. 82-127.

Stake R. E. (1995) *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sturge, Georgina. 'UK Prison Population Statistics.' House of Commons briefing paper, Number CBP-04334, 8 July 2024.

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04334/SN04334.pdf>

Suleman, Muhammad, 'Institutionalisation of Sufi Islam after 9/11 and the Rise of Barelvi Extremism in Pakistan.' In *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 10, No. 2 February 2018, pp. 6-10.

Sutton, Rupert, (2015) *Preventing Prevent: Challenges to Counter Radicalisation Policy on Campus*. London: The Henry Jackson Society.

Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff, 'Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the Imposter.' In *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, November 2014, Vol. 6, No. 10, pp4-7.

Tajfel, Henri [1974] *Social Identity and intergroup Behaviour*. Oxford University Press.

Tell MAMA. 'A Decade of Anti-Muslim Hate: Tell MAMA Report.' London: Tell MAMA Publication, 20th July 2023. <https://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/A-Decade-of-Anti-Muslim-Hate-TellMAMAReport.pdf>.

Thomas, Paul (2012) *Responding to the threat of violent extremism: failing to prevent*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Thomas, Paul. 'Changing experiences of responsabilisation and contestation within counter-terrorism policing and the Prevent counter-radicalisation programme: implications for policy and practice.' In *Policing and Society*, 27(5), 2017, pp535–550.

Threadgold, Steven (2018) *Youth, Class and Everyday Struggles*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Timol, Riyaz. 'Understanding British Imams.' Public lecture as part of a study undertaken for Cardiff University Centre for the Study of Islam (2023).  
<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/research/explore/find-a-project/view/understanding-british-imams>.

Toguşlu, Erkan and Johan Leman (2014) *Modern Islamic Thinking and Activism Dynamics in the West and in the Middle East*. Louvain, Belgium: Leuven University Press.

Townsend, Mark, 'After Paris, Luton wages its own battle for hearts and minds of homegrown radicals.' *The Guardian newspaper*, 28th Nov. 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/nov/28/why-luto-mosques-schools-battle-against-jihadi-propaganda>.

Trisko Darden, Jessica, 'Tackling Terrorists' Exploitation of Youth.' A report for the United Nations, 2019. Published online by the *American Enterprise Institute*.  
<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/report/tackling-terrorists-exploitation-of-youth/Tackling-Terrorists-Exploitation-of-Youth.pdf>.

UK Parliament. 'Counterterrorism and Border Security Bill.' UK Parliament: Hansard. Debated in House of Lords on Monday 17th December 2018. *UK Parliament online*  
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-12-17/debates/A45EE86B-0D09-472D-BF99-D64DDF9D5D20/Counter-TerrorismAndBorderSecurityBill>.

UK Parliamentary. 'Written evidence by the East London Mosque to a UK Parliamentary Committee,' PDF page, 2018. *UK Parliament online*  
<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/64507/pdf/#:~:text=Prevent%27s%20focus%20on%20ideology%20alone,push%20an%20individual%20towards%20radicalisation>.

UK Parliament. 'UK Parliament, Counter-Terrorism and Border Control Bill Signed into Law.' *UK Parliament News*, 12th February 2019. *UK Parliament online*.  
<https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2019/february/royal-assent--counter-terrorism-and-border-security-bill-signed-into-law/>.

UK Parliament, 'UK Nationals returning from Syria.' Volume 654, 18th February 2019, *UK Parliament online*. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-02-18/debates/69E286BB-03A2-4467-AB65-B3059436CD53/UKNationalsReturningFromSyria>.

UK Parliament. 'New Extremism Definition and Community Engagement Principles.' An announcement statement made by Communities Minister, Michael Gove on 13th March 2024. UK Parliament online. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-03-14/hlws336>.

United Nations. 'Preventing Violent Extremism: Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity.' United Nations Development Programme Publication, New York, March 13-16, 2019. [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP%20OGC\\_PVE%20report\\_Final\\_web.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP%20OGC_PVE%20report_Final_web.pdf).

United Nations. 'A/HRC/46/30: Countering Islamophobia / anti-Muslim hatred to eliminate discrimination and intolerance based on religion and belief - Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.' United Nations Report to the Human Rights Council, 46 th Session, 13th April 2021, pp4 and 5. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc4630-countering-islamophobiaanti-muslim-hatred-eliminate>.

Van Es, Margaretha A., 'The promise of the social contract: Muslim perspectives on the culturalization of citizenship and the demand to denounce violent extremism.' In *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Volume 42 Num.16, 2019, pp.141-158.

Van Es, Margaretha A., 'Norwegian Muslims denouncing terrorism: beyond 'moderate' versus radical?' In *Religion*, 2021-04, Vol.51 (2), pp.169-189.

Vatikiotis P. J. [1987] *Islam and the State*. London: Routledge.

Vermeulen, Floris, 'Suspect Communities—Targeting Violent Extremism at the Local Level: Policies of Engagement in Amsterdam, Berlin, and London.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26:2.,2014 pp286-306.

Vergani, M. (2018) *How Is Terrorism Changing Us? Threat Perception and Political Attitudes in the Age of Terror*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Vergani, M., Muhammad Iqbal, Ekin Ilbahar and Greg Barton, 'The Three Ps of Radicalisation: Push, Pull and Personal. A systematic Scoping Review of the Scientific Evidence and Radicalisation into Violent Extremism.' In *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Taylor & Francis Journals, 2020 vol. 43(10), pp. 854-864

Versi, M (2015) *Concerns on Prevent*. London: Muslim Council of Britain Publication.  
<https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/20150803-Case-studies-about-Prevent.pdf>.

Versi, Miqdaad, Assistant Secretary General MCB, *Concerns on Prevent Report* (July 2015). London: Muslim Council of Britain.

Yilmaz, I. 'Radical Muslim politics from comparative perspective: Theological deprivation as the major source of Hizb Ut-Tahrir's influence.' In *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika Cilt*, 6 (23) 2010, pp. 99-117.

Vinkenburg, Claartje J., 'Engaging Gatekeepers, Optimizing Decision Making, and Mitigating Bias: Design Specifications for Systemic Diversity Interventions.' In the *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 2017-06, Vol.53 (2), pp.212-234.

Wagemakers, Joas. 'The Citadel of Salafism.' In *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements*, Cusack, Carole M., Upal, M. Afzal (Editors.) (2021). Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion. Vol. 21. Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers.

Wallis, Holly and Jeremy Culley. 'Gove names groups as he outlines new extremism definition in Commons.' *BBC News Online*. 14th March 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/uk-politics-68560294>.

Warren, Jessica, 'Muslim cleric who condemned Islamic extremism at the Manchester Arena bombing inquiry is forced to flee the city after receiving death threats.' *Daily Mail newspaper*, 2nd May 2022. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10774427/Muslim-cleric-forced-flee-Manchester-condemned-Islamic-extremism-bombing-inquiry.html>.

Watson, Richard. 'Has Al-Muhajiroun been underestimated?' *BBC New online* 27 June 2017. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40355491>.

Watt, W. Montgomery (1985). *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Weaver, Matthew. 'Fishmongers' Hall terrorist Usman Khan was lawfully killed.' *The Guardian Newspaper*, 10th June 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jun/10/fishmongers-hall-terrorist-usman-khan-lawfully-killed-inquest-jury-finds>.

Weber, Max (1909) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, translated by E. Fischoff, edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich (1978), Berkeley: University of California Press.

Weiss, R. S. (1995). *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. Cambridge: The Free Press.

Wilson Centre. 'Muslims Against ISIS Part 1: Clerics & Scholars.' Paper published by the *Wilson Centre*, September 24, 2014. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/muslims-against-isis-part-1-clerics-scholars>.

Windsor, Leah, 'The Language of Radicalization: Female Internet Recruitment to participation in ISIS Activities.' In *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2020-04, Vol.32 (3), pp.506-538.

Winter, Tim, (2008) *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge University Press.

Wolff, Stefan (ed.) (2004). *Peace at Last: The Impact of the Good Friday Agreement on Northern Ireland*. Berghahn Books.

Wyatt, Caroline 'Imams try to 'reclaim the internet with Haqiqah magazine.' *BBC News online*, 27th March 2015. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32078681>.

Yaqoubi, Al, Shaykh Muhammad (2015) *Refuting ISIS: A Rebuttal of its Religious and Ideological Foundations*. Virginia: Sacred Knowledge Books.

Yavuz, Hakan. M and Bayram Balci (2018). *Turkey's July 15th Coup: What Happened and Why*. Utah Series in Middle East Studies. University of Utah Press.

Yousfi, El, Amin Anwar, 'Conflicting paradigms of religious and Bureaucratic Authority on British Mosques.' In *Religions*, 30th September 2019, Volume 10, pp2-13.

Zebiri, Kate. 'Seyyed vali Reza Nasr: Maududi and the making of Islamic revivalism.' *Review. Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, February 1998, Volume 61 (1) pp.167–168.

Zebiri, Kate, (2008) *British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives*, Oxford: One World Publications.

Zubaida, Sami [1989] *Islam, the people and the State*. London: Routledge.

Zuijdewijn, Roy van J.H. de and Bakker E., 'Twenty years of countering jihadism in Western Europe: from the shock of 9/11 to 'jihadism fatigue.' In *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 2023 18(4), pp421-434.