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## Extremists in Our Midst

Confronting Terror

*Abdul Haqq Baker*



*New Security Challenges Series*

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# Extremists in Our Midst

## Confronting Terror

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*In memory of Sirat and Ayesha Abdul Malik who helped many to appreciate the duality of their identities as British Muslim converts, and Adam Lambert who is sorely missed and will always be remembered by the STREET*

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# Foreword

The 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks unleashed a combination of fear, outrage, and concern from citizens and policymakers alike. Many asked, 'Why do they hate us?', 'Can Muslims be loyal citizens?', 'Is multiculturalism a failed policy', 'How do we fight a war against global terrorism?'. The US and UK among others were quick to introduce anti-terrorism legislation; organisations such as government tended to focus on fighting terrorists abroad and the threat from home-grown terrorism.

After 9/11, I received a call from a congressional staffer on the Hill. A group of members of Congress wanted to meet with Muslim leaders but were concerned that they be 'moderate Muslims'. I was asked if I could come up with a list of such leaders and then meet with the staffer to discuss (vet) my candidates. Obviously, this request raised many questions for me. I wondered, 'Why is the term "moderate" rather than "mainstream" Muslim used?' and 'When they speak of Jewish and Christian leaders, do they ask for moderate Jews or Christians?'. I thought to myself, 'Treating Jews or Christians in this way would create a public outcry!'. Most important, I wondered what asking about 'moderate Muslims' says about our governments' failure over the years to get to know and work with the mainstream in Muslim communities, its leaders and institutions as fellow citizen partners rather than suspects. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair commented at a conference he hosted in London shortly before he stepped down that, in its zeal, his government focused so much on extremism that it did not sufficiently seek out and work with the Muslim community itself.

The legacy of the 9/11 and post 9/11 terrorist attacks has been exploited by media commentators, hard-line Christian Zionists and far-right political candidates whose fear-mongering targets Islam and Muslims. Islamophobia is fast becoming for Muslims what anti-Semitism is for Jews. Rooted in hostility and intolerance towards religious and cultural beliefs and a religious or racial group, it threatens the democratic fabric of American and European societies. Like anti-Semites and racists, Islamophobes are the first to protest that their stereotyping and scapegoating of these 'others' as a threat, incapable of integration or loyalty, are not Islamophobic. Yet, examples illustrate that the

social cancer of Islamophobia is spreading across Europe and the United States, threatening and infringing upon the constitutional rights of their Muslim citizens and resulting in an increase in discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes.

Ironically, failure to distinguish between a very small but dangerous and deadly minority of extremists and the vast majority of Muslims contradicts hard data from major polls by Gallup, PEW and many others that demonstrate the extent to which the majorities of European and American Muslims, who span the spectrum from conservative and fundamentalist to secular reformers, are in fact part of the mainstream mosaic in their societies, concerned about and contributing to the peace and security of their societies as witnessed by grassroots community-led initiatives that have addressed and are still addressing violent extremism.

Abdul Haqq Baker's *Extremists in Our Midst: Confronting Terror* tells an extraordinary story of one such community and effectively responds to those who continue to ask: 'Why aren't Muslims in our country addressing and combating religious extremism and terrorism?'. This first-class study by an insider practitioner of a British Muslim convert community in countering extremism offers an extraordinarily important counter-intuitive response that challenges conventional wisdom in addressing the question of whether British Muslim converts are more susceptible to violent extremism, or whether they are the most effective members of the Muslim community in countering it. To rephrase the question slightly, are British Muslim converts best placed by virtue of their identity/ies to act as effective conduits between the majority (host) society and immigrant, second/third generation Muslim communities in understanding and effectively leading the fight against violent extremism in the UK today?

Equally importantly, this book challenges a popular stereotype of Salafi Islam, prevalent among many experts and many Muslims and non-Muslims alike, who fail to distinguish between mainstream and violent Salafism, equating all Salafis with violent Jihadists.

Too often popular discourse speaks of so-called 'moderate' Muslims over and against Salafi Muslims, simply equating Salafism with religious extremism and terrorism. Thus, for many Western secularists, moderate Muslims are those who advocate secular liberalism. Conservative or traditionalist Muslims are regarded as fundamentalists: theologically closed-minded, suspicious, or extreme. Liberal or self-styled progressive Muslims often fall into a similar trap, appropriating the term 'moderate' solely for themselves and using the term Salafi and 'fundamentalist' to

dismiss or ridicule those espousing more conservative and theological positions.

In a world that continues to be threatened by foreign and domestic acts of terrorism, and in which Western governments and societies are challenged to counter the growth of extremism and 'home-grown' terrorists, *Extremists in Our Midst: Confronting Terror* is a 'must read.'

JOHN L. ESPOSITO  
University Professor and Founding Director  
Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding  
Georgetown University  
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# Preface

This empirical study is aimed at examining and evaluating a convert community's approach in countering the effects of extremist and terrorist propaganda in the UK. Failure to avert terrorist attacks in London on 7 July 2005, and the subsequent attempt a fortnight later, have led to the government and its agencies seeking alternative strategies to combat what has now been established as a legitimate home-grown threat of terrorism among British Muslim citizens. Legislation subsequently introduced after 11 September 2001 failed to acknowledge or, indeed, recognise the threat of terrorism from British Muslims and instead targeted, primarily, Muslim asylum seekers/immigrants. This approach, together with the government's foreign policy on Iraq and support for the US-led 'War on Terror' confirmed emphasis on a restrictive 'top down' approach to tackling extremism, failing to recognise significant and timely contributions that could be made from marginal grassroots communities.

Not until the events of 7 July has the British Muslim convert community within the UK been under so much scrutiny, as being especially susceptible to extremist teachings which allegedly lead to terrorist activities. As focus increasingly centres on community-led initiatives, due to the above mentioned factors, it has become necessary to research and analyse the effectiveness of the British Muslim convert community in countering extremism against the prevalent backdrop of violent extremist propaganda. The Salafist ideology is examined and discussed in light of existing academic and journalistic debates which posit it among the contributory causes of violent extremism. Adherents of Salafism, Salafis consider their practices mainstream, away from the extreme spectrums of both liberalism and terrorism. They have been, up until recently, marginalised among both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, resulting in various inaccuracies being attributed to the movement, ideologically, historically and politically; leading to conclusions that extremist 'violent Jihadis' (takfeeris) are of identical schools of thought, but at the other end of the same spectrum, so to speak. The study seeks to determine, first hand, factors which influence and affect the Islamic

education and development of British Muslim converts within the UK including the cultural and social motivators, as well as existing tensions that may exist between them and established Muslim communities. Additional factors which serve as catalysts in propelling a small number of them towards extremism will also be examined.



# Acknowledgements

I must begin by thanking members of the Brixton Mosque convert community for the trust they afforded me to conduct research relating to their religious beliefs and practices. The challenges faced by British converts coming from a predominantly grassroots background led me to embark on studying a small but increasingly significant section of Muslims whose profile continues to attract attention since the events of 7/7. Their position among wider British society and the more culturally embedded Muslim communities is unique when considering the UK's present socio-political climate in light of its foreign policy and support for the US-led 'war on terror'. In fact, this work would not have been possible without the contribution and support of these converts which includes family and friends. I am therefore indebted to a number of these individuals and feel it prudent to refer specifically to some of them. My family deserve special mention for their academic contribution, support and patience during the time it has taken to complete this book.

Abu Murad and Abu Kais (Tamim) are acknowledged for their support of the Brixton community during its formative years and for recognising its need to become more established. The community's ambition to have its own place of worship became a reality through the charitable donations of the Megrissi family which enabled the purchase of the mosque premises in 1998. I must thank all of the above mentioned for their commitment and contributions towards the community's development at that time.

I thank Muhammad al-Malkee, Taalib Alexander, Abdul Malik Edwards, Rasheed Amer, Abdul Haq Addae, Shaun (Musa) Danquah, Abu Hajirah and Sameer Koomson for their support and encouragement to complete this study. The 'light bulb moments' I experienced in my discussions with Sameer were truly inspirational and helped me to structure specific areas of my research. I cannot forget to mention Aslam and the entire Daniel family who have been on this journey with me since childhood. They continue to be my extended family that symbolise Strength within Strength. My colleagues and friends at STREET UK and ELS Jeddah are to be commended for continuing their excellent work while,

on occasions, I have been preoccupied with completing this study. Professor Stuart Croft, Doctors Basia Spalek, Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert are also acknowledged for their unfailing support and encouragement to complete this book. I have endeavoured, throughout this book, to highlight some of the challenges facing us today and the possible solutions which can contribute towards addressing them more effectively.

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# 1

## Introduction

### Overview

The rationale behind this book is to provide a practitioner's insider perspective on a convert community's approach to tackling violent extremism during the early 1990s and up until 2009. The significance of conducting this research can best be illustrated by reference to practitioner authors in another field of study, namely, education, and their attempts to gain credibility by articulating theoretical frameworks that inform successful and established practices. Whitehead and McNiff observe:

while practitioner research is generally held in high regard for its contributions to quality practice, it is not held in equal regard for its potential contributions to quality theory. Part of the reason is that its methods for assessing quality have not yet been fully worked out, and in some cases not even addressed.

(Whitehead and McNiff 2009: 1)

They further observe:

The new openness to practitioner research is therefore offset by caution that perhaps practitioners are still not capable of doing quality research or generating theory because they are not fully conversant with the appropriate methods for judging the quality of their work, and, given that the topic is seldom raised in the practitioner research literature, it would seem of low priority. So, if practitioners themselves do not take care in addressing these core issues, the wider

## 2 *Extremists in Our Midst*

educational research community could be forgiven also for not taking them seriously.

(Whitehead and McNiff, 2009)

The challenges faced by practitioners in the educational circles described here could easily be transferred to those facing practitioners in the counter terrorist field today. In fact, despite acknowledgement by governmental and other statutory bodies regarding the success of grassroots community-led initiatives in addressing violent extremism, a preference for academic research, mainly from outsider perspectives, still proliferates in the counter-terrorist arena, it being the preferred and safer option for government. Added to this somewhat inhibitory approach is the more recent statutory alignment to self-confessed alleged former extremists who have apparently renounced violent extremism and embraced a more liberal and secular variation of Islam.<sup>1</sup> Such affiliations ignore practitioner entities that have never espoused violent extremism and have been at the forefront of countering violent extremist propaganda and its protagonists since the early 1990s. The consistency of their counter extremist efforts has often been overlooked by the authorities who prefer alternative voices considered to provide a more palatable brand of Islam. In any event, Whitehead and McNiff's observations remain relevant to the ambit of this book. Academic research in this field, particularly from a *western Muslim convert's* perspective, is minimal and there is a need to introduce this dimension to existing discourses on the subject. The authors further acknowledge that:

Practitioners themselves need to define and articulate the standards of judgement they use to evaluate their own work, and make these standards of judgement available to the wider . . . research community.

(Whitehead and McNiff, 2009: 1)

This book examines British convert Muslims who faced violent extremist propaganda at a grassroots level during the early 1990s. It also discusses the effects of these Muslims being labelled as extremists because of their adherence to the orthodox Salafi (Salafist) branch of Islam. The book focuses on the following research question:

Are British Muslim converts more susceptible to violent extremism or, are they the most effective members of the Muslim community in countering it?

Or, to rephrase the question slightly:

Are British Muslim converts best placed by virtue of their identity/ies, to act as effective conduits between the majority (host) society and immigrant, second/third generation Muslim communities in understanding and effectively leading the fight against violent extremism in the UK today?

In order to place the research question within an appropriate context, it is necessary to discuss the socio-political and socio-religious climates that have developed in the UK. These climates have arguably contributed to the marginalisation and criminalisation of certain sections of the Muslim population within the UK today. Such sections include adherents to the Salafi doctrine of Islam. The author wishes to demonstrate what a participant observer's insider perspective can contribute to academic literature in this field. A unique academic insight can be gained on a convert-led Muslim community in view of the author's position as community leader and chairman of the Brixton Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre between 1994 and 2009. This position provides an alternative perspective to existing research in this field, given the duality of roles as both author and practitioner. The inability of many authors to obtain sufficient primary empirical data from this particular, very insular section of the Muslim community leaves a significant knowledge gap which has failed to record the experience of British Salafi Muslims in addressing violent extremism. Academic research therefore needs to be conducted among the Salafi community itself and compared to existing research in similar, related fields. Presently, there exist few insider perspectives whereas an increasing plethora of outsider perspectives on Salafism and its adherents abound.<sup>2</sup> Relatively few of these perspectives provide accurate, primary research findings. In any event, these sources will be cited as a means of correlation or contrast, whatever the case may be in each instance (Wiktorowicz, 2006a: 207–39 and Olivetti, 2001). In the absence of a genuine insider perspective, external analyses, based largely on secondary data, are inevitably flawed. Despite the input of western Muslim academics on the subject, the author will suggest that they continue to provide an outsider perspective. The ideological differences and unswerving adherence to different schools of jurisprudence arguably influence non-Salafi academic findings. An example of this can be witnessed in the increasing contributions of Muslim academics from the Sufi tradition who have entered the arena to expound upon Salafism, often providing inconclusive data based on secondary sources of research without substantiation

from primary evidence.<sup>3</sup> This book endeavours to bridge the above mentioned knowledge gap by providing and examining primary data, and correlating it with existing secondary sources.

The book is likely to be of general interest in view of the current climate of concern surrounding Muslim communities in general and British Muslim youth specifically. Counter Intelligence agencies and other statutory bodies' assessment that extremist cells and sympathy for violent extremism have increased since the 7 July 2005 bombings, only serve to perpetuate public concern.<sup>4</sup> Societal concerns and sensitivities regarding the possibility of further 'home grown' terrorist attacks from British Muslims have been further exacerbated by continuing anti-Muslim sentiment and negative media portrayals of Islam and Muslims. This has, in turn, raised the issue of identity and what 'Britishness' entails within multi-cultural Britain today. The book aims to provide, on one hand, insight into a community of British Muslim converts who possessed intrinsic values of Britishness prior to conversion to Islam. On the other hand, it intends to explain the orthodoxy of Muslim converts' practice within the context of more mainstream practices in Islam. The objective in this instance is to provide an alternative insightful narrative from which a more comprehensive debate can develop regarding the extent of the societal contribution of British Muslim converts in countering the violent extremist phenomenon in Britain.

From a practitioner's perspective the research aims to provide a similar insight to that already mentioned above; however, additional empirical evidence will hopefully provide a wider platform upon which existing theoretical frameworks can be further examined and tested. Counter terrorist agencies and related bodies, such as the Metropolitan Police are expected to be interested in the approach adopted in this research primarily due to the fact that no research of this nature, i.e. a participatory observer perspective among an altogether insular Salafi community, has been conducted to date in the UK. The apparent inability in the past of such agencies to examine or even penetrate communities of this nature means that possibly, for the first time, they will have an academic insight, from a community practitioner (this being the author having a duality of roles) to inform their practitioner perspective. It has proved necessary to address some of the more predominant and prevalent discourses on radicalisation and Salafism in order to place the latter movement within a specific, discernable context. Therefore, it is not unusual for ensuing discussions to proceed along tangential avenues around radicalisation, usage of terminology, etc. before refocusing on the key research question. The distinctive themes of discourse

are interwoven and, in some instances, interchangeable throughout this book in an attempt to illustrate the complexities that surround research into violent extremism and Muslim communities in Britain today. They are by no means conclusive, however, and serve only to complement existing as well as emerging research on contemporary Salafism in the UK.

The initial part of this study (Chapter 2) will provide a historical prologue to the research question, illustrating the establishment and progress of, arguably, the first Salafi convert-led mosque in the UK and how issues of identity, both British and Muslim, contributed to the continuing evolution of a distinct convert identity. It provides a contextual backdrop against which the analyses/research chapters can be examined. The chapter also provides a distinctive narrative which highlights the issues that affected the community's struggle to thwart the increasing attempts of violent extremist propaganda that was threatening to effectively take control of the mosque.

Chapters 3 and 4 will encapsulate the literature review, highlighting academic, scientific and religious discourses surrounding identity and religious conversion. Chapter 3 focuses particularly on the issue of identity formation in the UK and how it is defined from multi-cultural or pluralistic perspectives. Chapter 4 examines theoretical aspects of religious conversion in order to identify potential circumstances and environments against which Muslim conversions have occurred in the UK during the past two decades (Kose, 1996 and Zebiri, 2008).

Chapter 5 introduces the methodological approaches applied in this study, discussing the research methods employed.

Chapter 6 focuses on three case studies of extremists who resided in the UK; Richard Reid, Zacarias Moussaoui and Abdullah el Faisal, all of whom were convicted of terrorist related offences and imprisoned. The fourth case study will examine Sean O'Reilly (a pseudonym); a convert initially invited to and attracted towards violent extremism but, upon encounter and engagement with Salafis, moved away from his former position and embraced Salafism. This particular case study will examine the reasons behind his gravitation from violent extremist narratives.

Chapter 7 introduces interviews conducted on the target group of British Salafi converts. Dissemination of the data extrapolated from these interviews will then take place so as to provide distinctive time lines/periods over which conversions took place. This will enable the opportunity to determine whether socio-political/religious events during specific periods (between the 1990s and 2008) affected the target group and their choice of Islamic practice. It will also provide an

illustrative narrative against which the previous case study chapter can be compared to establish whether similar drivers existed between the two research groups (i.e. interviewees and case studies) and whether their respective responses in dealing with these led to similar religious conclusions.

Chapter 8 (the conclusion) will address the research findings and place them within the context of the primary research question, querying whether the findings are conclusive and the extent to which additional research is required. These will also be compared and contrasted with the Brixton Mosque's account of community approaches towards tackling violent extremism during the 1990s, with particular focus on more recently established counter extremist intervention strategies and programmes. The chapter will, thereafter, discuss: i) implications for the government's Preventing Violent Extremism agenda, ii) the implications for the counter terrorist policing policy and iii) the implications for Muslim communities throughout the UK.

### **Statement of the problem**

Since the early 1990s, significant international events affecting the Muslim world have continued to politicise Muslim youth in Britain.<sup>5</sup> Various Islamic movements and groups, such as Hizbut Tahrir, Supporters of Sharia (SOS) and The Committee for Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR) emerged during this period to highlight and, in some cases, exploit the tensions prevalent in the Arab and Muslim world (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 9).<sup>6</sup> Such tensions were to be played out on British soil and proliferate throughout university Islamic societies across the country.<sup>7</sup> The most notable of groups was Hizbut Tahrir in view of their well organised media campaigns, intellectual appeal to undergraduate Muslims, and their spiritual guide and leader, Omar Bakri (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 3) however, it did not take the masses long to realise that this group was, by and large, centred largely around rhetoric. More serious and extreme ideologies were being expounded by individuals who appealed to a wider audience that included non-academic, street-wise youth, converts (some of whom came from a background of crime), and disillusioned second/third generation British Muslims. Abu Hamza al Misri, Abdullah el Faisal and Abu Qatadah were able to engage a captive audience with their extreme understanding of Islam, experience and studies abroad in the Muslim world.<sup>8</sup> The latter was to bear the brunt of their extremist rhetoric in the early to mid-1990s.<sup>9</sup> Islamic scholars were subsequently belittled and discredited by extremists' highlighting



of, and reference to, contentious legal rulings (Fatawa) that contributed to the dissension that ensued.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Salafi position**

Salafi communities in the UK arguably became the sole voice to effectively counter the developing extremist rhetoric and propaganda, recognising the popularity and indeed, threat of an emerging '*takfeeri*' (excommunicating) ideology in Britain. Their effectiveness stemmed from recognition and familiarity of violent extremist roots, and the sources of Islamic legislature and texts that are often distorted in extremists' attempts to justify terrorism. The increased popularity and attention to the extremist narrative was fuelled primarily by the aforementioned conflicts involving Muslim countries and communities. The perceived double standards of the West in addressing these conflicts further exacerbated the progression of Muslim youth towards extreme radicalisation which would consequently make them vulnerable to violent extremism. Salafism came under immediate attack from the proponents of extremism and British Salafis were derided alongside religious clerics in the Muslim world.<sup>11</sup> The effectiveness of Salafis countering the arguments of *takfeeri* propaganda led to the extremists' uniting in their attacks against Salafism.<sup>12</sup> Hizbut Tahrir's opposition to Salafism, for example, was continually emphasised in universities throughout the UK (Husain, 2007).

Surprisingly, despite the availability of extremist material that points, unequivocally to its opposition and rejection of Salafism, academic, government and media perceptions hold the movement's ideology to be a contributory proponent or precursor to violent extremism. Difficulty has arisen, however, in the application of relatively new terminology to define what comprises various strands of Salafism. In using such terminologies it has increasingly been suggested that ideologies/movements that have historically been considered disparate in the Muslim world, are now being defined as one and the same in the contemporary era. For example, *Takfeeri* (violent extremist), *Ikhwani* (Muslim Brotherhood/Islamist) and Salafi ideologies and groups are now being considered as one and the same movement, but with differing political aspirations (Wiktorowicz, 2006b: 207–39). Little, if no, consideration appears to have been given to the possibility of marginalising and indeed criminalising the Salafi community. Failure to make informed and properly researched distinctions between the above mentioned ideologies has already contributed towards the movement's marginalisation.

Although similar in many respects, the three movements still differ in rudimentary aspects of their respective beliefs and practice. Another example of newly introduced terminologies which emanate largely from western academia and journalistic discourse can be seen in Stemmann's distinction between '*academic Salafism*' (*Salafiyyah al-ilmiyyah*) and '*jihadi*' or, '*Fighting*' Salafism or *Salafiyyah al-Jihadiyyah*, (Stemmann, 2006: 3). Pargeter observes:

rather than being an organization, Salafiyyah Jihadia is more akin to a current of thought... It is also a term used primarily by Moroccan and other security agencies to label their Islamists.

(Pargeter, 2008: 118–19)

She cites, as evidence to illustrate the coining of this new and somewhat alien terminology a prominent 'Salafist preacher', Ahmed Al-Rafiki, who explains Salafia Jihadia to be:

a media and security term because I don't know anybody who claims to represent that current. There is no organization or group that carries that name.

(Pargeter, 2008: 119)

Others have, unsurprisingly, rejected this new terminology, and few rebuttals of what is seen as disingenuous neo-classification of Muslims are as emphatic:

As for what is called salafiyyah jihadia, this is part of the imagination of the atheist media... we, Ahl Sunna wal Jama'a, are not salafiyyah jihadia. We pray, so why don't they call us salafiyyah praying, we go to pilgrimage and they don't call us salafiyyah pilgrimage?

(Pargeter, 2008: 119)

The introduction and subsequent use of new terminology to describe groups or phenomena as methods of denigration, etc. gathered momentum among the Muslim world during the mid- to late twentieth century. In acknowledgement of this existing method, McCants et al., recommended the following strategy as a means of reducing the popularity of Jihadis among Salafis:

Label the entire Jihadi Movement 'Qutbism' in recognition that the Jihadis cite Sayyid Qutb more than any modern author. Muslim opponents of the Jihadis (including mainstream Wahhabis) use this

term to describe them, a designation Jihadis hate since it implies that they follow a human and are members of a deviant sect. Adherents of the movement consider 'Qutbi' to be a negative label and would much rather be called Jihadi or Salafi.

(McCants et al., 2006: 10)

Figure 1.1 below presents an interesting depiction of where Salafis may be located among the wider Muslim community. It is more accurate, however, in its illustration of precisely where Jihadis (or more accurately, takfeeris/violent extremists) are likely to be positioned. The author suggests that the continuing usage of inaccurate terminologies and typologies to define and categorise Salafis and takfeeris as one and the same entity, serve only to isolate and stigmatise the former movement who have, thus far, proved among the more effective in countering the violent extremist ideology. Continuing negative portrayal of Salafis may in fact result in a return to their previous insularity/isolation from wider society which, in turn, may further marginalise them and lead to proliferating the threat of 'Jihadis' embedding themselves even further among the former's communities. It is important to note that the illustrations in Figure 1.1 are, to a greater extent, mutually exclusive in that each constituency does not necessarily encapsulate the positions and ideologies, etc. of the other. In other words, it should not be incorrectly understood from the diagram that all 'Jihadis', for example, are Salafis but not all Salafis are 'Jihadis', etc.

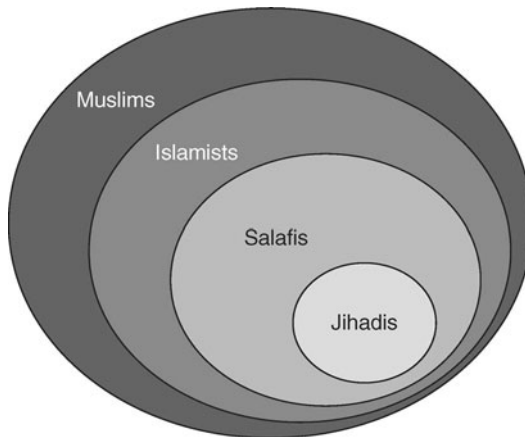


Figure 1.1 Jihadi constituencies

Source: McCants et al., 2006: 10)

Stemmann's research further emphasises the author's above-mentioned concern when discussing the impetus and process of extremist recruitment. Unfortunately, his classification of extremism, as it relates to Salafism, is that the ideology and movement are in fact precursors to violent extremism and, most notably, terrorism. Irrespective of this assumption, some of the transitional drivers towards extremism described by him correlate with takfeeri, violent extremist descriptors. He suggests the:

radicalization process begins with the emergence of anti-integration tendencies and the desire to disengage from the host society.

(Stemmann, 2006: 11–12)

This, he claims:

continues with hostility towards the host society, rejection of the principles and institutions of liberal democracy, and the growing acquisition of violent attitudes.

(Stemmann, 2006: 12)

Figure 1.1's depiction of the 'Islamist' *locality* among the wider Muslim community is, to a greater extent, accurate. However, the author suggests that it requires amendment if it is used to illustrate '*gravitation*' towards violent extremist ideology and thought. In other words, so far as politicisation and extremist philosophy are concerned, 'Islamists' would be positioned in the adjoining circle to the 'Jihadis' position with 'Salafis' occupying the penultimate 'outer circle' beside the 'Muslims' constituency. In effect, therefore, the Islamist and Salafi constituencies would be swapped. Further discussion on ideological positioning and the binary usage of Figure 1.1 takes place later in the book. However, in order to more accurately portray the UK context of both the ideological and gravitational positioning of some Muslim communities in Britain the author proposes additional theoretical frameworks (Figures 1.7 and 1.8 below). Behavioural traits which contribute to the extremist mosaic will be referred to briefly. In the meantime, perhaps the most telling aspect of Stemmann's conclusion is that the above mentioned descriptors he refers to make susceptible individuals potential targets for extremist recruitment. He discusses the transitional stages from Salafism to terrorist militancy as being an easy process 'given the radicalization that accompanies integration in the Salafi community' (2006: 11).

When considering Figure 1.1, and the positioning of 'Jihadi' constituencies, it is important to note that a more conclusive assessment would be that Stemmann's process becomes particularly poignant if Salafi communities resort, once again, to the insularity witnessed prior to 9/11 as a knee-jerk reaction to continuing inaccurate and often negative portrayals of their practice. To reiterate the earlier warning, 'Jihadis' could then embed themselves among Salafi communities to the extent that they recruit unsuspecting young Muslims who are unable to discern the finer aspects of ideology, methodology and practice, as was witnessed in the case of Richard Reid, aka the 'Shoe Bomber' during the late 1990s.

The author is well placed as a member of a Salafi community and is aware of the effects of extremist propaganda upon susceptible youth coming from backgrounds similar to that of Richard Reid. While in the process of learning the foundational aspects of Islam, Reid was violently radicalised towards extremism owing to his relative naivety and misplaced enthusiasm for his new found religion. After all, 'Recruits tend to have little knowledge of the Koran, and thus it is easy for the recruiter to mask the religious content of their core message; namely, that Islam is under threat from enemy action (2006: 12). This research will endeavour to establish the validity of such claims that Salafism contributes towards extremism and, therefore ultimately, terrorism.

Part of the remit of this ethnographic study is to examine the effect(s) of religious terminology used to define aspects of Islam, i.e. Jihad, and religious groups deemed to be part of the violent extremist phenomena. In this regard, the author's participative observant role will enable comparisons between an insider and outsider perspective of a British Salafi community and, in doing so, bring to the fore the research question concerning their susceptibility to, or effectiveness against, violent extremism. Acknowledgement is, however, given to the possibility of the subjective bias that can occur in studies of this nature and to mitigate such bias Chapter 5 addresses the methodological approaches applied in this instance. Subsidiary questions invariably emanate from the research question around the susceptibility of convert Muslims to violent extremism. Although raised in media circles, there appears to be little, if any, academic discourse on this topic (Pipes, 2005). Further questions are also raised addressing British and Muslim identities of converts and how both tackle areas of perceived conflict of the two constructs. The author suggests that the majority of converts in this study do not necessarily undergo or face the conflict experienced by second/third generation British Muslims so far as dual or multiple identity issues are

concerned. However, some converts from the older, African-Caribbean target group may have experienced racism from the host society during child/adulthood.<sup>13</sup> This resulted in them developing resilience to racism or subsequent stereotypical profiling. The younger target group are arguably more integrated and part of the fabric of multi-cultural Britain. It is, therefore, unlikely that they experienced the same degree of racism, if any, as their more senior peers.

### Framework of study

Figure 1.2 provides the framework around which this study will examine stages of the sample group’s pre- and post-conversion progression/regression in order to determine any pre-existing or post-related drivers that may have contributed to any identified susceptibility to violent extremism. In contrast, observations will also highlight the drivers that have prevented such susceptibility, possibly enabling individuals to be effective conduits against violent extremism.

This model has been adapted from Hudson’s work in a completely separate field from that which this study is addressing; namely, management. However, it is proposed by the author that it can be adapted as an effective process of charting stages of religious conversion (Hudson, 1995: 45).

### Founding (conversion) phase

This stage of conversion shall examine the influences/drivers that caused individuals to convert to Islam and compare these to other existing theoretical frameworks and models that cover the same phenomena (Roald, 2004). Discussion will then ensue around whether pre-conversion influences and perceptions continue to affect individual’s lives thereby impeding their assimilation to Islam or, on the other

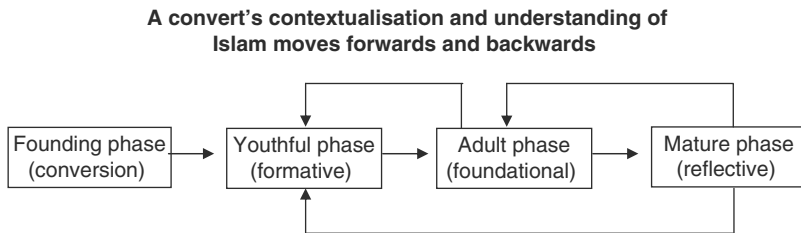


Figure 1.2 Proposed model for the life cycle of a convert’s post-conversion process