

Religion, Identity and Radicalisation:

The Experiences of Young British Muslims of the Crises in Syria

Dr Imran Awan

Associate Professor in Criminology

Birmingham City University, imran.awan@bcu.ac.uk

Abstract

The current rise in the numbers of young British Muslims travelling from the UK to Syria has raised a number of questions about the UK Government's counter-terrorism strategy and policy. Within the current discourse on radicalisation and Syria, listening to the voices of young British Muslims is crucial, if the UK Government, the police and other key stakeholders are serious about preventing the escalation of young people going out to fight in Syria. This article makes an important contribution to helping us better understand young British Muslims' perceptions of the crisis in Syria and offers policy makers some thoughts on how best to engage young people in the debate on Syria without demonising them or stereotyping them as 'suspects'.

Key Words:

Syria; British Muslims; radicalisation; violent extremism; counter-terrorism; young British Muslims

Introduction

The former British Prime Minister, David Cameron, argued in a speech in Birmingham (in the UK) that we must try to understand the root causes of why so many young people are going out to fight in places like Syria. He stated: “It begins – it must begin – by understanding the threat we face and why we face it. What we are fighting, in Islamist extremism, is an ideology. It is an extreme doctrine” (Cameron, 2015). At the time of writing, there are estimated to be at least 700-800 Britons who have travelled to Syria to fight against President Assad’s forces (Whitehead, 2014). For example, Talha Asmal, a 17-year-old A-Level student, became the youngest ever suicide bomber from Britain, after he was killed when he and three other bombers detonated truck bombs attacking an oil refinery in Iraq. Following the news of his death, his family said: “He was ordered to his death by so-called Isis handlers and leaders too cowardly to do their own dirty work” (Malik and Siddique, 2015).

Recent evidence has shown that a number of these individuals travelling to Syria to join Isis are in fact young British Muslims (International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, 2013). This article attempts to reach a better understanding of the perception of young British Muslims in relation to the current discourse on Syria. In doing so, it utilises a qualitative case study with 50 interviews held with young British Muslims across the UK. All the young people were aged between 14 and 25 and they came from within different areas of the locations listed (discussed in more detail below). The study found that there are both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that lead people towards a path of radicalisation. They include: anger; frustration; perceived injustice; exclusion; issues of belonging and identity (Awan, 2012; Amghar, 2007; Bartlett and

Miller, 2012; Bayat and Herrera, 2010; Silke, 2008; Tufail and Poynting, 2013; Ryan, 2014).

Home-Grown Extremism and the UK Policy Response

Radicalisation is a complex process and has been defined by the UK Government as “the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism” (HM Government, 2011: 108). Radicalisation therefore involves individuals who may have been influenced by a culture of violent activities who hope to express their feelings with acts of violence which can often be linked to terrorist attacks. This may lead to a change in a person’s behaviour, beliefs, attitudes and activities (Silke, 2008). De-radicalisation, on the other hand, involves methods and techniques used to reverse the radicalisation process through softer forms of social control. As this study will show, radicalisation may in some cases start with individuals who are searching for an identity. This forms part of the social identity theory that is based upon an assertion that radicalisation develops when people are, first, confused about their identities and, second, search for a meaning for their role within society or in a community (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010).

Tajfel and Billig (1974) argue that this sense of social isolation leads to a perception of discrimination and prejudice, which in turn leads to individuals’ reactions being shaped from a belief that violence is a legitimate response to what are deemed to be ‘oppressive’ foreign policies, counter-terrorism legislation and Islamophobia (Allen 2010; Hillyard 1993). For Tufyal Choudhury (2007), this is also based on societal characteristics that view radicalisation through individuals’ intimate interactions with extremists, who often influence these individuals to commit acts of terrorism. He argues that the radicalisation process starts with a perception of inequality within

society that is often based on a lack of trust in UK politics, security and law enforcement agencies (Choudhury, 2007: 6).

This study provides insights into how young people view radicalisation as they approach it from a position of social isolation, which leads to alienation, grievance and violence (Campbell and Connelly, 2008). As a result, the study's findings suggest that societal causal factors influence how people view the process whereby violent actors use a variety of recruitment tactics, such as personal meetings, social activism and online indoctrination (Wiktorowicz, 2005). It is clear that socio-economic and cultural factors also play a role in determining who becomes radicalised (Silke 2005; Glees and Pope, 2005). Therefore, one of the important aspects of radicalisation for young people is the process from naive and vulnerable individuals to would-be terrorists. Broader research indicates that causal factors of radicalisation such as deprivation, foreign policy, self-identity issues, lack of integration and a sense of grievance impact upon the way people turn to terrorism (Hoffman, 2006). In Britain, the rising tide of people going to fight in Syria has caused real concern for young British Muslims, their families, communities, policy makers and the police who are attempting to curb this increase.

In doing so, the British Government has enacted counter-terrorism laws and given the police broader powers to help tackle the phenomenon (Bakker et al., 2013; Beski-Chafiq, et al., 2010; Bhatti, 2011; Billaud, 2015; Borum, 2011). For example, the previous Home Secretary announced recently that those travelling to Syria could expect lengthy sentences on their return and in some cases they would have their passports confiscated and be stripped of their nationality (BBC News, 2014). In one case, Majida Sarwar, from Birmingham (UK), went to the police when she realised her son, Yusuf Sarwar had left for Syria in May 2013. Sarwar had left a note for his

mother admitting that he had gone to Syria to help “the oppressed and to fight the enemies of Allah there”. After he returned in January 2014, he was arrested and detained in Belmarsh high security prison and sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment (McVeigh, 2014). In 2013, the former Home Secretary, Theresa May, had drawn attention to 20 dual-nationals who were receiving ‘deprivation of citizenship orders’. The Home Office stated:

The government will take all necessary steps to protect the public.

Citizenship is a privilege, not a right, and the Home Secretary will remove British citizenship from individuals where she feels it is conducive to the public good to do so. (Ross and Galey, 2015)

At the same time, concerns have been raised by those who argue that these measures impinge upon people’s civil liberties (Kundnani, 2014; Vertigans, 2010; Cheong and Halverson, 2010; Cottee and Hayward, 2011; Doosje, et al; 2013). For example, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 has allowed for the temporary seizure of passports and, through the use of Temporary Exclusion Orders, can prevent the return of any British citizens who are suspected of committing terrorism-related offences abroad. The UK Government counter-terrorism policy is enshrined in its CONTEST and Prevent strategy. The focus of CONTEST is to reduce the risk of international terrorism to the United Kingdom, while the Prevent Strategy's main aim and goal is to stop and prevent people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism, using softer forms of community engagement to help achieve this aim (Awan and Blakemore, 2013). The Prevent programme and ‘Channel’ interventions are used as initiatives that address those most vulnerable to the ideology of extremism and terrorism or those at risk of radicalisation, by putting them through de-radicalisation programmes. It has become a mandatory duty for

public sector agencies to look out for signs of extremism and potential vulnerability to radicalisation. In London alone, a total of 1,069 people have been referred to the Channel programme since 2012 (Woods, 2015). Guru (2015: 41) states: “Work with younger children, through Channel, adopts a more psychological perspective based on human development, life-course approaches and psychometric tests, screening and profiling.”

According to the London Assembly, since September 2014, 400 Channel referrals had been made for teenagers and children under 18 and 450, including 300 under-18s, as part of the “Prevent Case Management” process (Woods, 2015). Further measures to govern what people can access online have been introduced by the Government as it attempts to manage the illegal material available through the work of the Counter-Terrorism Internet Referral Unit. Alongside these statistics have been a growing number of cases of young British Muslims caught travelling to Syria to join groups such as Isis. For example, the case of three young girls from Bethnal Green, London, caused significant concerns about their motives and what inspired them to leave their home and travel to Syria (Dodd and Gani, 2015). Therefore, the main reason for interviewing young British Muslims for this study was to gather their perceptions and understanding of the process that leads to radicalisation in light of the current crisis in Syria. This is important because there is a wide body of literature that examines counter-terrorism impacts but very little empirical evidence related to young British Muslims. The article examines below in more detail the role young British Muslims have played in this crisis.

Young British Muslims, Citizenship and Rehabilitation

Apart from the issues concerning how to prevent people from going to fight in Syria, there is also increasing concern about what to do with returnee fighters (Guru, 2015). The desire for many of these individuals to return offers an opportunity for rehabilitation and many of these individuals could provide a counter-narrative that might be used in discussion of the dangers of joining Isis and helping prevent future generations from taking that route. Previous studies conducted with Muslim communities include those by Choudhury and Fenwick (2011), who examined the impact of counter-terrorism measures across Britain, including in Birmingham, London, Glasgow and Leicester. Their study, which used a series of focus groups, found that Muslims felt they were a suspect community. After the 7/7 terrorist attacks in Britain in 2005, the UK Government had to act in a way that would challenge modern terrorism and its sophisticated terrorist networks, and at the same time remain proportionate and fair. However, many British Muslims have consequently become the victims of hard-line government policy, and so view counter-terrorism measures with a sense of suspicion, fear and apprehension. For example, the Muslim Council of Britain (2015) found that young Muslims felt they were being victimised by law enforcement agencies and were uneasy overall about counter-terrorism legislation. Moreover, the study by Hickman et al. (2011) showed that Muslim communities overall were suspicious and in fear of counter-terrorism policies and agencies, which had resulted in their feeling stigmatised. Indeed, Choudhury and Fenwick's (2011) study into counter-terrorism policies also found that Muslim communities felt stigmatised and isolated because of the current anti-terror legislation and policies.

In the absence of a meaningful policy in this area, the UK risks abandoning these young people, who are then likely to resort to extreme and radical groups because they are able to offer them a greater sense of identity, belonging, unity and security (Dodd and Gani, 2015; Drissel, 2011; Harris and Roose, 2014; Hogg and Adelman, 2013). Coppock and McGovern (2015: 242) state:

As the object of the discursive construction not only of the 'Islamic terrorist other' but also of those supposedly susceptible to 'radicalisation', young British Muslims are therefore constituted as 'vulnerable' in politically powerful ways, as the 'would-be terrorist'. This is shaped not only by particular, ideologically charged and contentious ideas about how 'radicalisation' allegedly takes place but also by constructing both the 'Islamic' and 'child' selves of young British Muslims in very specific ways.

In Denmark, a country that has seen a huge increase in the number of foreign fighters travelling to join Isis, they have created a unique method of helping jihadists reintegrate back into society. The Denmark model includes practical help that involves medical assistance, counselling and helping returnees with job applications. This form of early collaboration between agencies and ex-foreign fighters is proving to be a success, as Steffen Nielsen from East Jutland Police who is engaged in the programme has noted:

Everybody is in agreement, early prevention of terrorism is needed. And so we start out with dialogue. We screen each fighter, we assess their needs. We engage with their families and friends, and their mosque, so that they have a well-functioning network around them. This can reduce the risk of them being further radicalised. (Soni, 2014)

This article argues that, if young returnees feel disillusioned, marginalised and alienated by state measures, we risk jeopardising any chances of meaningful engagement and opportunity for change. There follows an examination of the research project in more depth.

The Research Study

The interviews were conducted between 2015 and 2016 and each interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted within the context of the current discourse on young people and radicalisation threats within Syria. None of the individuals had been involved with any radicalisation programmes and at least 10 participants wanted further information about the meaning of radicalisation.

Interestingly, as the researcher began the interview process, five participants asked whether this study was a Home Office approved project. When it was explained that this was an independent small-scale academic study, they all agreed to take part. As noted above, the aim of this research project was to develop a better understanding of how young British Muslims feel about the current crisis in Syria. Specifically, the objectives were to explore the current policy that exists around young people fighting abroad, examine the nature of support available to them and gather the perceptions of young British Muslims in relation to such policies.

The study utilised a qualitative approach in gathering the perceptions of 50 young British Muslims through interviews. This foundation is informed by a focus upon the voices of the participants. The random sample included interviews with people based in areas where there is a record of people travelling from the UK to Syria and joining Isis (BBC News, 2015) and included 25 young British Muslim males and 25 young British Muslim females from various cities as follows: 10 from Birmingham; 10 from London; 10 from Bradford; 5 from Cardiff; 5 from Luton and 10 from Manchester.

Muslims form 4.8% of the overall population in England and Wales (Census 2011). All the young people were aged 14-24 and came from different areas of the locations listed above. The ethnic background of participants also varied; the highest number were of Pakistani heritage (20), followed by Somalia (13); India (4); White British convert (7); Libya (3) and Egypt (3). Access was negotiated by liaising with community members and also through contacts suggested by community members. A snowball methodology was used from within the community to gain access, which meant visiting families, young people in the area, mosques, youth clubs and parents. Interviews allowed the authors to obtain an overview of opinions and experiences of young British Muslims with respect to the current crisis in Syria.

Almost 76% of Muslims live in Greater London, West Midlands, the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside. Overall, 35 Local Authority Districts have a 10% or above Muslim population. Interestingly, the Muslim population in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets rose from 71,000 in 2001 to 88,000 in 2011, 8.1% of all school-age children (aged 5-15) are from a Muslim background, and 46% of the Muslim population live in the most deprived areas of England (Census 2011). Of all of the cities and districts where the interviews were conducted, Bradford has the largest Muslim population (24.7%) (Census 2011). All data collection instruments used (e.g. interview questions and topic guides for participants) were framed and worded selectively. The questions were based on the topic of young British Muslims travelling to Syria, and were provided by the author, who also acted as moderator.

The questions were:

- Why do you think so many young Britons have travelled to fight in Syria?
- By what means are these people being radicalised?

- What is the appeal of Isis for those who have gone to join them or may be planning on doing so in the future?
- Why do we hear stories of so many young Muslim girls travelling to Syria?
- What would you recommend as the best ways to help prevent young people going to Syria?
- Should those who have gone be reintegrated back into society? If so, how?

Recordings of the interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed.

Participants of the interviews consented to being involved in a participant process that involved reading and clarifying a summary of the role of the interview before the process. Audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim and participants' names were all changed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Transcripts were read and annotated to develop themes, which are defined below. Clearly, a short qualitative study such as this, raises the issue of the need for further research with a larger sample size that would provide a more representative view of young British Muslims. However, this study aimed to provide a timely snapshot of young British Muslims' views on the current crisis in Syria and what they think has driven so many people to travel there to join Isis.

Each interviewee was debriefed and had to fill out a consent form and participant information sheet. This included information including the possible of a risk that any third party might be harmed physically or psychologically by their taking part in this research. Participation in the study was voluntary and individuals were only interviewed or took part in the data gathering exercises after they had given their informed consent. Every effort was made to negate the possibility of anxiety or disruption. The style of questions was non-threatening and non-coercive. This is a sensitive area and the ethical issues involved include: 1) Impartiality – all research

must be conducted in an ethical way, including respect for individuals, beneficence, and justice. It is essential that the researcher remain impartial throughout the study;

(2) Consent – the research must be conducted overtly, with the full co-operation of the police force and the research subjects, and with the latter being made aware of that fact (Informed Consent); (3) Privacy – in terms of ensuring all electronic data and hard data are stored appropriately; (4) Confidentiality – like privacy, this is incumbent upon the researcher and information should be treated with the utmost respect; (5) Discovery of criminality (or planned criminality) during the research and (6) Researcher safety.

These ethical issues were dealt with by planning, openness and transparency throughout the research. Gaining consent and building trust was important to ensure a stronger outcome for the research. Access needed to be given by various members in the community in order for the research to go ahead. It was anticipated that the use of information sheets explaining the purpose of the study and potential risks, and participants were invited to participate by signing a consent form. Information sheets were provided at various stages of the research and all measures were undertaken to keep the data retrieved secure. All the information and consent forms explained to research subjects that the data they provided would be kept confidential. If, during the course of the research, the research team uncovered any actual or planned criminal acts, it was noted that these would be disclosed to the relevant authorities. The fact that this disclosure took place at the outset of the study allowed for a more robust study.

Results and Discussion

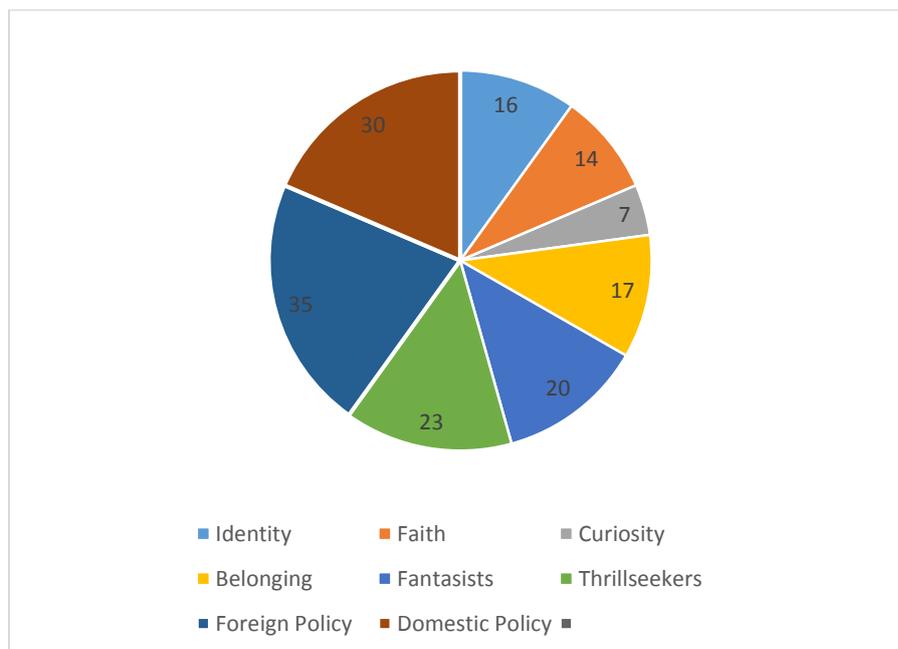
Social Media, Identity and Belonging

Those interviewed held a range of perspectives on the current crisis in Syria but

there was overwhelming evidence of significant concerns with respect to how the Internet is being used to radicalise young people. The study found that many participants felt that young British Muslims had a sense of lack of identity and belonging. In many cases, participants spoke about how young people were ‘confused’ and are searching for an identity. This article argues that, as a result, Isis are able to use a powerful marketing brand that transcends all boundaries and has created a central identity with which many of these young people have identified.

Q. Why do you think so many young Britons have travelled to fight in Syria?

(Frequency of response)



As noted above, there were a range of opinion as to why the participants thought people were joining Isis, one of the key reasons being the UK’s foreign and domestic policy and others including issues of identity and belonging. These reasons are explored further under the respect themes. For example, Sarah Khan (Somalia, 15) asked: “What does it mean to be British or even Muslim today? I’m not sure and I

think those fighting for Isis also don't know." Indeed, some participants spoke about how Isis were using this to create a global 'ummah' and unity, which was seeking to help a lot of people find a comfortable space where they felt part of a brotherhood. Clearly, one of the pathways to radicalisation is found when individuals are searching for an identity and belonging. For example, Muhammed Khan (British Pakistani, 16) said: "Some of these people don't have anywhere where they believe is home. So they think yes let's jump to these guys (Isis) because they are bringing me to a global brotherhood." Fatima Ali (Pakistani, 18) added: "I was really surprised to hear about these young girls going to fight there. I mean what do they think they will achieve? I guess they think it's some sort of Muslim state they are going to."

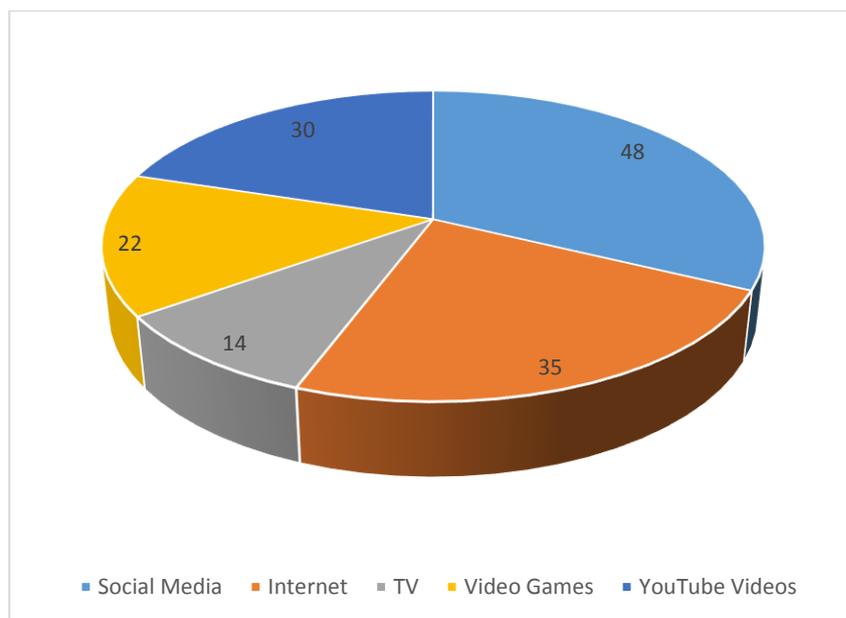
These views were echoed by at least 35 participants who said that they felt some of these young people who were lacking this sense of belonging were being enticed online by groomers who were able to use the Internet to radicalise them. Maryam Fazeen (Somalia, 19) said: "A lot of them have smart phones, iPads and computers now. So all they do is go online and some preacher then tells them to come and fight for Islam. But they don't realise they are getting themselves into real danger."

Mustafa Amin (Egyptian, 20) said: "Isis are really playing a powerful game online. Lots of young Muslims are using social media and Isis are definitely aware of this. Especially as a lot of 'em play video games at home and I would say get conditioned now to fight."

Social media platforms have a huge global reach and audience, with YouTube boasting more than 1 billion users each month. This amounts to 6 billion hours of video being watched each month, and 100 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every month (YouTube Statistics, 2014). Similarly, Twitter has on average 350,000

tweets being sent per minute and 500 million tweets per day (Twitter, 2014), whilst Facebook remains the largest social media network with 500 million active users and 55 million people sending updates (Fiegerman, 2014). Clearly, Isis have been using these platforms as magnets and they have attracted thousands of views, comments, forums and posts. For example, through the use of videos posted on YouTube, it began its one billion campaign, which called upon Muslims to join Isis. The videos attracted huge audiences and were accompanied with the words: 'Proudly support the Muslim cause' (Irshaid, 2014).

Q: By what means are young people likely to be radicalised? (frequency of response)



Khadija (Somalia, 16) said: "If people are watching these videos online then they are going to be radicalised because Isis are using the Internet to shout out to them that we (Muslims) are being oppressed." Similarly, Faris Ahmed (Libyan, 18) noted that: "Isis are using Twitter and Facebook to recruit young people. I always see it online and know its' happening." The Isis social media nerve centre is its Al Hayat Media

Centre (2014), which is sending many of these messages, showing the propaganda tools it is using. A number of these videos also depict Isis as fighters with a 'moral conscience' and show them helping protect civilians and some show Isis members visiting injured fighters in hospitals and offering children sweets. These videos also form part of a wider series called 'Mujatweets', which are produced in high quality HD and with powerful imagery. They are reinforced by online podcasts made by British Isis fighters on the ground, such as Abu Summayyah al-Britani (Lucas, 2014).

Furthermore, Sageman (2008) argues that terrorist groups use online chat rooms and forums as they are ideal places for people to join them and become radicalised in a virtual world of social movements, although Wiktorowicz (2005) argues that, rather than using online technologies, radicalisation may involve face-to-face meetings where radical groups work in partnerships by gathering intelligence on people they deem potential recruits for extremist groups.

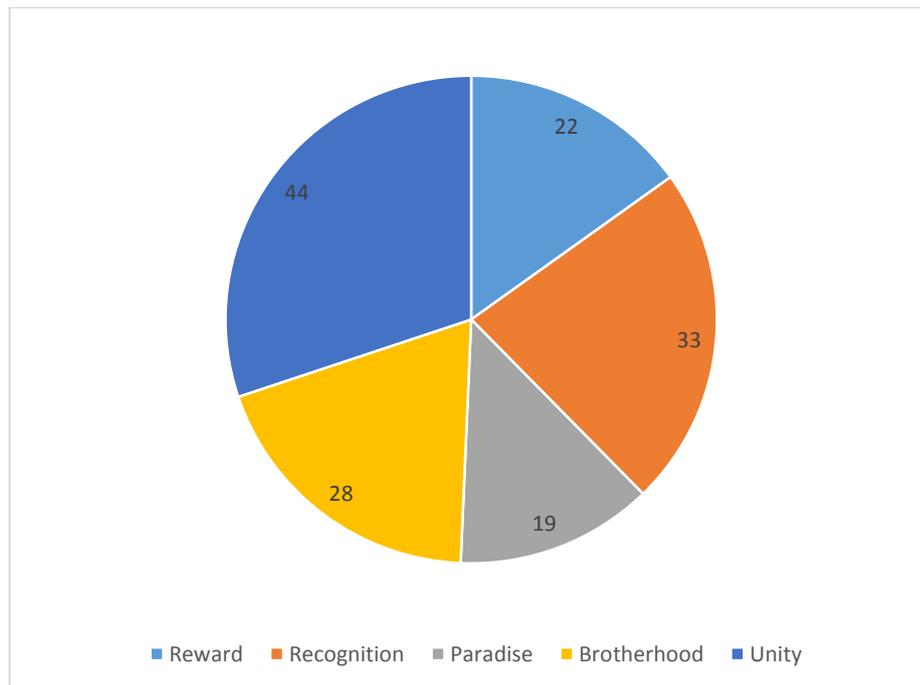
Hussein Ali (Pakistani, 21) said: "The Internet is the biggest way Isis have been radicalising people. Because it's so easy and free to do, they know no one can catch them and young people are always online." Khalid Anas (Egypt, 15) also said: "A lot of my friends are on Facebook and a lot of them are watching stuff online that are extreme." Furthermore, Isis had released a free to download app, 'The Dawn of Glad Tidings', that kept users updated with the latest news from the organisation. The app was promoted online and was available on the google android system, before it was detected and suspended. The app once downloaded allowed users to see and monitor tweets, links, hashtags, images, videos and comments posted on their specific accounts. Most of the content was regulated by Isis's social media arm (Chasmar, 2014).

Thrill-seekers, Fantasists and Faith

The study found a range of opinions of young British Muslims who felt that some young people were simply going to fight in Syria because they were 'bored'. Others expressed the view that they were looking for an adrenaline rush and wanted to pursue the chance to fulfil that desire. Harris Hussein (Pakistani, 18) said: "Some of these young people are going to Syria just because they are bored. They want some excitement in their lives and are pushing those boundaries." Sidrah Farah (Somalia, 20) argued a similar point. She said: "What we are seeing really is just some young frustrated teenagers who are looking for an escape. Some of them are not even religious but because Isis tells them it's about religion they all think this is jihad. But that isn't true." Interestingly, some participants argued that some young people simply did not have a choice because they were being regarded as a problem group. Khalid Farooq (Indian, 21) said: "These young people have been brainwashed into believing that everything there (Syria) is like some sort of paradise."

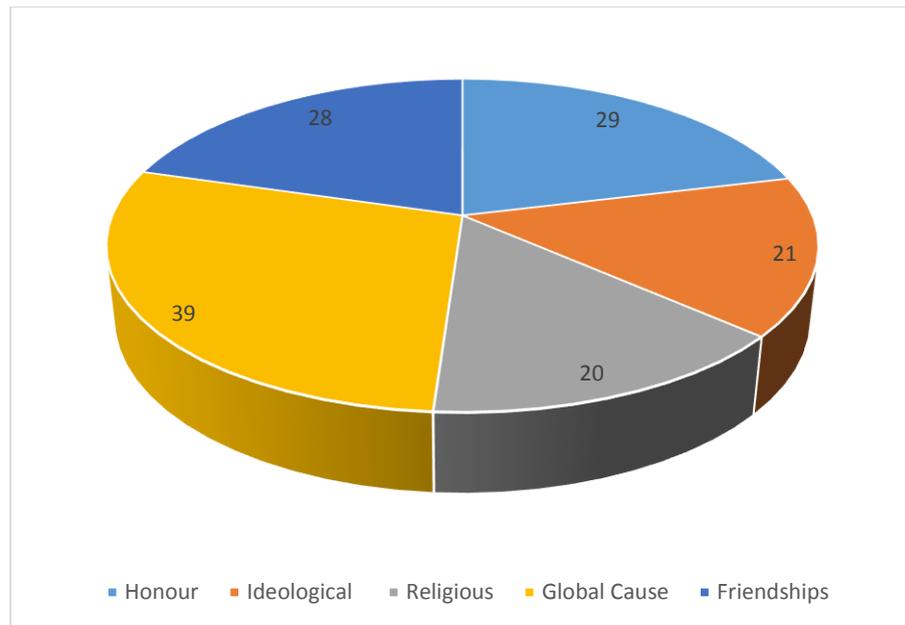
Notions of how young people may go to fight and want to seek paradise was a recurring theme for a number of participants. For example, Sabrina Kauser (Somalia, 17) said: "These people actually think they might go paradise and are really dumb! I mean have they ever read the Qu'ran? I actually think they are not Muslims." Isis have continuously invoked religion to argue that what they are doing is 'Islamic' and that they are part of a global 'Islamic state'. Such inferences have been drawn in the recent case of a family who travelled from Bradford to Syria because they felt that this was a religious 'obligation'.

Q: What is the appeal of Isis for those who have gone to join them or may be planning on doing so in the future? (Frequency of response)



The UK Government has attempted to dismiss suggestions of links between Islam and the actions of Isis, although they note that the religious ideology of young people needs to be debated and critiqued. Ali Khan (Pakistani, 18) said: “I am actually now worried if I can use the word Jihad. But these guys are not Muslims so I don’t know why everyone keeps saying it’s Islam and us (Muslims) as the problem.” Nafeeza Ali (Somalia, 17) said: “It keeps getting to me that it’s us Muslims and we are somehow the problem. I am a Muslim and I am proud. But that don’t make me a terrorist.”

*Q: Why do we hear stories of so many young Muslim girls travelling to Syria?
(Frequency of response)*



Samina Ali (Pakistani, 19) said: “These young people are simply in a dream world. They think everything is a game.” Muhammed Ali (Somalia, 19) said: “I think they are living in a fantasy. Somehow they will get into paradise because they are martyrs. They just don’t get it.” A number of participants highlighted the way the culture of gaming could also have had an impact upon these young people. Abdullah (Somalia, 16) said: “These people are getting an adrenaline rush because they are watching and partaking in fighting on the battlefield online. That makes them much more violent.” Sabah (Somalian, 21) said: “These individuals are talking about the moral duty to fight. Many of these individuals are also watching video games and playing violent ones that make them more radical.

Foreign and Domestic Policy and Reintegration

In his speech in Birmingham, the former British Prime Minister, David Cameron said: “Some argue it’s because of historic injustices and recent wars, or because of poverty and hardship. This argument, what I call the grievance justification, must be

challenged” (Cameron, 2015). However, a number of participants we spoke to discussed foreign policy as a key part of why they thought young British Muslims were fighting in Syria. For example, Mohammed Jabran (Indian, 16) said: “For me, it’s all about foreign policy. I actually know some of the boys that went from here and they were always talking about the problems in Palestine and the fact our government never helps them.” This was not a solitary opinion; Musa Malik (Convert, 19) said: “It’s sad, because I think people believe these guys just grew up and became terrorists. Trust me they didn’t. They have normal lives but because of what they see they think they need to do something because it’s morally correct.”

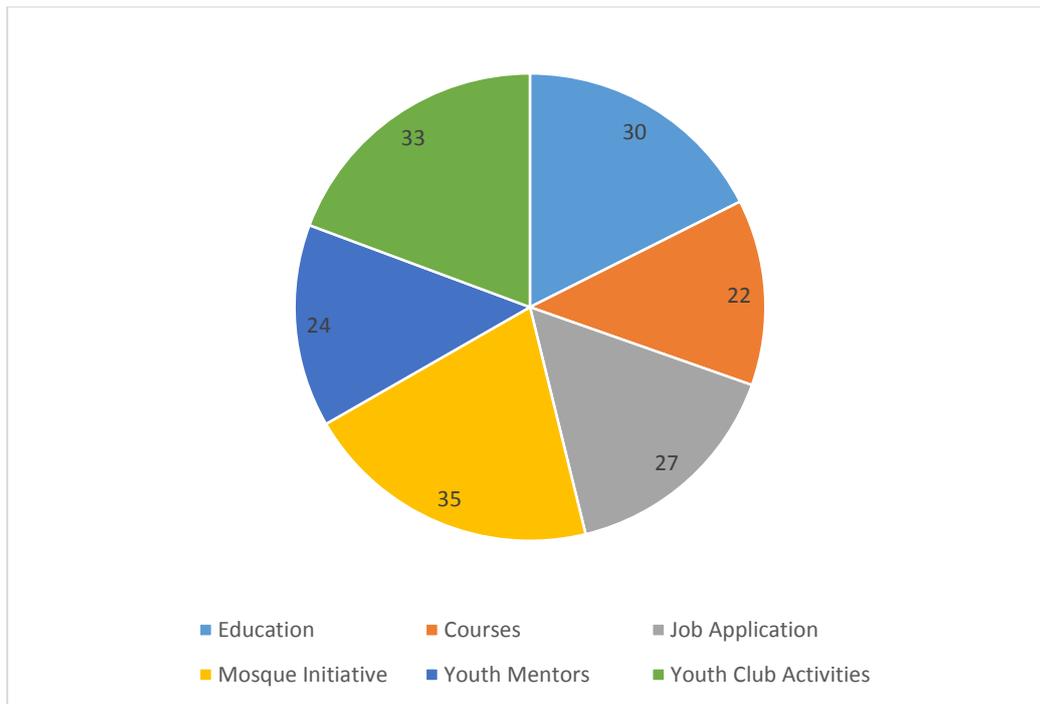
Indeed, Lady Eliza Manningham-Buller, the former head of MI5, has noted that the Iraq war had been a catalyst for recruiting terrorists: “It increased the terrorist threat by convincing more people of Osama Bin Laden's claim that Islam was under attack was correct” (Manningham-Buller, 2011). It does appear that many of the young British Muslims also felt there was a causal link between foreign and domestic policy and people travelling abroad to fight for Isis. Zulfikhar Ahmed (Convert, 18) said: “A lot of my friends talk about foreign policy because it matters to us. When we see pictures of dead Muslims being shot in places like Syria it makes you think and want to act and do something. Don’t get me wrong I don’t feel that passionate but I know people who are.” Muddassar Ali (Pakistani, 24) added: “I think the Government are completely bonkers. How can you say foreign and domestic policy doesn’t matter? Just look at the new Terrorism Act which means we are all looking for jihadists in our own homes. It’s shocking.”

The problem with current counter-terrorism policies is that they have the potential to profile Muslims as extremists and ‘suspects’ (Awan, 2012). As a result, some young

people have felt that they were viewed as a 'problem' group who pose a risk to society. Innes et al., (2011) also found that Muslims overall did trust their police forces when it came to delivering Prevent programmes, and that young British Muslims did not trust the police. The study used evidence and statistics from the British Crime Survey and found overall that young British Muslim men's attitudes towards the policing of Prevent were negative.

Many of the participants cited wider tactics and also face-to-face meetings as potential means of radicalisation. Hira Anam (Somalia, 18) said: "Some of these youngsters are getting into gangs and then they turn to violence. They will end up being expelled from school or college and follow a life of crime." Abbas (Convert, 17) said: "They meet up with people and talk to them in the mosque and other places. They ain't stupid cuz people know them as doing the right thing. They should be applauded." Most of these theories are used by policy makers to inform law enforcement agencies and practitioners as to what might lead to radicalisation, but they are subjective in nature and also fail to identify the actual 'root' causes that lead individuals to being vulnerable to radicalisation

Q: What would you recommend as the best ways to help prevent young people going to Syria? And should those who have gone, be reintegrated back into society? If so, how? (Frequency of response)



When asked what participants thought should happen to returnees, the overwhelming majority considered that they should be reintegrated into society and proposed rehabilitation methods to help achieve this. For example, Aqeel Khan (Pakistani, 19) said: “If these young people have gone but want to come back then we need to help them and give them a chance. I mean I would go as far as saying rehabilitate them. What’s wrong with that?” Similarly, Mohammed Amin (Egypt, 21) said: “The Government needs to think of some ways about how you help them. Otherwise they are gonna find another extremist group and join them.” In the UK, if returnees find themselves stripped of their legal rights and feel shunned by the state, there is a real risk, according to most participants, that they maybe (re)drawn to a pathway of violence. According to Rashad Asghar (Pakistan, 22): “When people feel isolated and angry because they are not being treated with respect and if they go out and fight and Syria and when they come back there is no help, then I promise you, you will see more terrorism because these young people will think why should I do

anything when my own Government don't care about me." Similarly, Said Ali (Pakistani, 15) said: "I know people and I mean some of my friends who were good but when they got arrested and stopped and searched they actually wanted to attack the police. I am saying this is the same issue here, because if you are serious about beating terrorism then you need young people and their voices otherwise what's the point." If the UK Government can provide an alternative to these young people, it is likely that counter-terrorism programmes can be a success (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2014). Indeed, such work is much needed and could help shape a policy and practice approach to returnees.

Conclusion

This study has shown that young people feel there is a wide range push and pull factors related to why young people have joined groups such as Isis. This study provides a short snapshot and overview of how some young British Muslims feel about the current crisis in Syria. Clearly, it is not an overall representation of Muslim voices and therefore cannot be used as a basis to argue that all Muslims feel this way. However, the study has found that young British Muslims feel they are being unfairly labelled as extremists and as a result feel stigmatised, alienated and marginalised. This can give rise to an 'Othering' process, which demonises young Muslims as violent extremists (Walklate and Mythen, 2014).

References

Al Hayat Media Centre (2014) "There's No Life without Jihad," *YouTube*, 19 June. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFItVWWBUYE> (accessed 20 May 2015).

Allen, Chris. *Islamophobia*. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

Amghar, S. (2007) "Salafism and Radicalisation of Young European Muslims," in S. Amghar, A. Boubekeur and M. Emerson (eds), *European Islam: Challenges for Public Policy and Society*, pp. 38–51. Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies.

Awan, Imran, "I'm a Muslim Not an Extremist: How the Prevent Strategy Has Constructed a 'Suspect' Community," *Politics & Policy*, 40: 6 (2012), pp. 1158–1185.

Awan, Imran, and Blakemore, Brain, *Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and Policing*. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

Bakker, Edwin, Christophe Paulussen, and Eva Entenmann, "Dealing with European Foreign Fighters in Syria: Governance Challenges & Legal Implications." International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) Research Paper, ICCT – The Hague, December 2013.

Bartlett, Jamie, and Miller, Carl. "The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24: 1 (2012), pp. 1–21.

Bayat, Asef, and Herrera, Linda. "Introduction: Being Young and Muslim in Neo-Liberal Times," in L. Herrera and A. Bayat (eds), *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 3–26.

BBC News "Powers to Stop British Jihadists Returning to UK – PM." (2014), Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-30041923> (accessed: 3 July 2015).

BBC News "Who Are Britain's Jihadists?" (2015) Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32026985> (accessed 5 August 2015).

Beski-Chafiq, Chahla. Birmant, Jane., Benmerzoug, Hichem., Taibi, Akim, and Goignard, Ariane. *Youth and Islamist Radicalisation*. Aarhus: Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation, 2010.

Bhatti, Ghazala. (2011) Outsiders or Insiders? Identity, Educational Success and Muslim Young Men in England," *Ethnography and Education*, 6: (1) (2011), pp. 81–96.

Billaud, Julie. "Snapshots of British Islam: Exploring Self, Identity, and the Good Ethical Life in the Global Megalopolis," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, (2015), 1–26. Available at: <http://jce.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/04/13/0891241615578904.full.pdf>

Borum, Randy. "Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4: (4), (2011), pp. 37–62.

Campbell, Colm, and Connolly, Ita. "A Model for the 'War Against Terrorism'? Military Intervention in Northern Ireland and the 1970 Falls Curfew," *Journal of Law and Society* 33: (3) (2008), pp.341-375.

Cameron, David. "Extremism: PM Speech." (2015) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/extremism-pm-speech> (accessed: 4 August 2015).

Census "Religion in England and Wales". (2011) Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religioninenglandandwales2011/2012-12-11> (accessed 26 January 2017).

Chasmar, Jessica. "ISIL Using Twitter App 'Dawn' to Keep Jihadists Updated," *Washington Times*, (2014). Available at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jun/18/isil-using-twitter-app-dawn-keep-jihadists-updated/> (accessed: 20 May 2015).

Cheong, Pauline, Cheong, and Halverson, Jeffry "Youths in Violent Extremist Discourse: Mediated Identifications and Interventions," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33: (12) (2010), pp.1104–1123.

Choudhury, Tufyal. "The Role of Muslim Identity Politics in Radicalisation" (a study in progress, London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007). Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/452628> (accessed 10 June 2015).

Choudhury, Tufyal and Fenwick, Helen. "The Impact of Counter-Terrorism Measures on Muslim Communities." Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report, 72. (2011) Available at: http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/counter-terrorism_research_report_72.pdf (accessed 26 January 2016).

Coppock, Vicki, and McGovern, Mark. "'Dangerous Minds'? Deconstructing Counter-Terrorism Discourse, Radicalisation and the 'Psychological Vulnerability' of Muslim Children and Young People in Britain," *Children & Society* 28 (3), (2015) pp. 242–256.

Cottee, Simon, and Hayward, Keith. "Terrorist (E)motives: The Existential Attractions of Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34:(12) (2011), pp. 963–986.

Dalgaard-Nielsen, Anja. "Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33 (9) (2010), pp. 797–814.

Dodd, Vikram, and Gani, Aisha. "Police Failed Us, Say Families of Girls Feared to Have Gone to Syria," *The Guardian*, (2015). Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/mar/06/syria-bound-girls-hid-police-letter-families> (accessed: 5 August 2015).

Doosje, Bertjan, Loseman, Annemarie, and van den Bos, Kees. "Determinants of Radicalization of Islamic Youth in the Netherlands: Personal Uncertainty, Perceived Injustice, and Perceived Group Threat," *Journal of Social Issues* 69 (3) (2013), pp. 586–604.

Drissel, David. "Pan-Islamist Networks of the Apocalypse: Mobilizing Diasporic Muslim Youth on Facebook," in R.G. Howard (ed.), *Network Apocalypse: Visions of the End in an Age of Internet Media*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011) pp. 145–182.

Fiegerman, Seth. "Facebook Messenger Now Has 500 Million Monthly Active Users." (2014) Available at: <http://mashable.com/2014/11/10/facebook-messenger-500-million/> (accessed: 22 March 2015).

Glees, Anthony, and Pope, Chris. *When Students Turn to Terror: Terrorist and Extremist Activity on British Campuses*. (London: Social Affairs Unit, 2005).

Guru, Surinder. "Social Work Conflict: British Jihadists and Syrian Returnees and Social Work," *Social Dialogue*, (2015) April, pp. 40–43.

Harris, Anita, and Roose, Joshua. (2014) "DIY Citizenship amongst Young Muslims: Experiences of the 'Ordinary'," *Journal of Youth Studies* 17: (6), (2014), pp. 794–813.

Hogg, Michael, and Adelman, Janice. (2013) "Uncertainty–Identity Theory: Extreme Groups, Radical Behavior, and Authoritarian Leadership," *Journal of Social Issues* 69: (3), (2013), pp. 436–454.

Hickman, Mary, Lyn Thomas, Henri Nickels, and Sara Silvestri "Social Cohesion and the Notion of 'Suspect Communities': A Study of the Experiences and Impacts of Being 'Suspect' for Irish Communities and Muslim Communities in Britain." *Critical Studies in Terrorism* 5:(1) (2012), pp. 89–106.

Hillyard, Paddy. *Suspect Community: People's Experiences of the Prevention of Terrorism Acts in Britain*. (London: Pluto Press 1993).

HM Government "Prevent Strategy. Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty." (2011) Available at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/counter-terrorism/prevent/prevent-strategy/prevent-strategy-review?view=Binary> (accessed: 12 March 2015).

Hoffman. Bruce. *Inside Terrorism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

Innes, Martin, Colin Roberts, Helen Innes, Trudy Lowe, and Suraj Lakhani. *Assessing the Effects of Prevent Policing: A Report to the Association of Chief Police Officers*. (London: The Association of Chief Police Officers 2011).

International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation. "Up to 11,000 Foreign Fighters in Syria: Steep Rise among Western Europeans," *Insight* (2013). Available at:

<http://icsr.info/2013/12/icsr-insight-11000-foreign-fighters-syria-steep-rise-among-western-europeans/> (accessed: 19 May 2015).

Irshaid, Faisal. "How Isis Is Spreading Its Message Online," *BBC News*, (2014). Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27912569> (accessed: 12 May 2015).

Kundnani, Arun. *The Muslims Are Coming!: Islamophobia, Extremism and the Domestic War on Terror*, (London and New York: Verso 2014).

Lucas, Scott. "Syria Interview: Islamic State of Iraq's Abu Sumayyah al-Britani on Conflict and Caliphate." (2014) Available at: <http://eaworldview.com/2014/06/syria-interview-islamic-state-of-iraq-abu-sumayyah-al-britani-conflict-caliphate/> (accessed 22 May 2015).

Malik, Shiv, and Siddique, Haroon. "Britain's Youngest Suicide Bomber' Mourned by West Yorkshire Family," *The Guardian*, (2015). Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/14/west-yorkshire-teenager-talha-asma-britain-youngest-suicide-bomber> (accessed 4 August 2015).

Manningham-Buller, Eliza. (2011) "BBC Reith Lectures: Securing Freedom." (2011) Available at: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/radio4/transcripts/2011_reith3.pdf (accessed 4 August 2015).

McCauley, Clark, and Moskalenko, Sophia. "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways toward Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20 (3), (2008), pp. 415–433.

McCauley, Clark, and Moskalenko, Sophia. "Toward a Profile of Lone Wolf Terrorists: What Moves an Individual from Radical Opinion to Radical Action," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26 (1), (2014), pp. 69–85.

McVeigh, Tracy. "'Police Betrayed Me,' Says Mother of Imprisoned British Jihadi," *The Guardian*, (2014). Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/06/yusuf-sarwar-mother-british-jihadist-police-betray-syria> (accessed 2 June 2015).

Muslim Council of Britain. Response to the Counter-terrorism and Security Bill, (2015). Available at: <http://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Response-to-the-Counter-Terrorism-and-Security-Bill.pdf> (accessed 26/1/16).

Ross, Alice, and Galey, Patrick. "Making People Stateless Is 'Simply Wrong', Say MPs ahead of Lords Debate, *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, (2015). Available at: <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2014/03/17/making-people-stateless-is-simply-wrong-say-mps-ahead-of-lords-debate/> (accessed 26 July 2015).

Ryan, Louise. "'Islam Does Not Change': Young People Narrating Negotiations of Religion and Identity," *Journal of Youth Studies* 17:(4), (2014), pp. 446–460.

Sageman, Marc. *Leaderless Jihad*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

Silke, Andrew. "Fire of Iolous," in Bjorg, T. (ed.), *The Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Reality and Ways Forward*, (New York: Routledge, 2005) pp. 242–248.

Silke, Andrew. "Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalization," *European Journal of Criminology* 5: (1), (2008), pp. 99–123.

Soni, Darshna. "Can Returning Jihadis Be Reintegrated into Society?" *Channel 4 News*, (2014). Available at: <http://www.channel4.com/news/can-returning-jihadis-be-reintegrated-into-society> (accessed 4 August 2015).

Tajfel, Henri, and Billig, Michael. "Familiarity and Categorization in Intergroup Behaviour," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 10 (1974), pp. 159–170.

Tufail, Waqas, and Poynting, Scott. "A Common 'Outlawness': Criminalisation of Muslim Minorities in the UK and Australia," *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 2: (3) (2013), pp. 43–54.

Twitter. "Usage Statistics." (2014). Available at: <http://www.internetlivestats.com/twitter-statistics/> (accessed 4 August 2014).

Vertigans, Stephen. "British Muslims and the UK Government's 'War on Terror' Within: Evidence of a Clash of Civilizations or Emergent De-civilizing Processes?" *British Journal of Sociology* 61:(1) (2010), pp. 24–44.

Walklate, Sandra, and Mythen, Gabe. *Contradictions of Terrorism: Security, Risk, Resilience*. (London: Routledge, 2014).

Wiktorowicz, Quniton. *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*. (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

Whitehead, Tom. "Parents Urged to Inform on Would-be Jihadist Children," *The Telegraph*, (2014). Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/10925889/Parents-urged-to-inform-on-would-be-jihadist-children.html> (accessed 4 August 2015).

Woods, David. "3-year-old among Hundreds of Children Identified as Potential Extremists," *ITV News*, (2015). Available at: <http://www.itv.com/news/london/2015-07-27/3-year-old-among-hundreds-of-children-identified-as-potential-extremists/> (accessed 4 August 2015).

YouTube Statistics. "Viewership." (2014). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/en-GB/statistics.html> (accessed 20 December 2014).