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What Went Wrong for Quilliam: An Investigative Analysis of the Quilliam Foundation and the Reasons Behind its Apparent Failure.

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Abstract

The thesis undertakes an investigative analysis of the Quilliam Foundation, the world’s first counter extremism think tank. A strong opponent of Islamist ideology in its battle against extremism, since its formation Quilliam has attracted growing criticism. The thesis traces the reasons behind this criticism in order to answer the question posed - what went wrong for Quilliam? Issues of unsound theory, the influencing of government, the support of the Prevent policy and a series of public relations disasters has caused Quilliam to alienate the very people it needs to work alongside. Its actions have caused it to be mistrusted and to be deemed out of touch with what it mean to be Muslim in modern Britain.
Introduction

The issue of extremism has never been more relevant than it is today. From the rise of far right neo-Nazi groups across mainland Europe\(^1\) to militant Islamists who have carried out deadly attacks on Western soil, the issue of extremism is no longer the ‘foreign problem’ it was once thought of as. Whilst the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 signalled for many the realities of Islamic extremism, these were acts carried out by foreign citizens who had been radicalised abroad and as such still remained somewhat separate from Western society. It was then, with disbelief that news of the London bombings of July 7th, 2005 emerged as the actions of British citizens who had been born and raised in the United Kingdom. It was at this moment that the realisation emerged that extremism was also a very British problem.

Since the events of July 7th, a plethora of organisations have appeared; each hoping in some way to present a coherent and workable solution to the problem of extremism. One of these organisations is the Quilliam Foundation, or Quilliam as it is now known. Founded in 2008 by Ed Husain, Maajid Nawaz and Rushed Zaman Ali, the Foundation has been afforded the unique title of being the world’s first counter extremism think tank. What made Quilliam stand out was the stories of its founding fathers; three former Islamist radicals, reformed and ready to challenge the very ideology they used to follow. Thus, they seemed to be the very solution to the extremist problem, uniquely placed to impart valuable information in order to counter the extremist threat lying in our midst. And so Quilliam was launched with much fanfare and media attention but it wasn’t long before grumblings began to emerge from those critical of the organisation.\(^2\)

My first introduction to Quilliam was a cursory glance at their website whilst preparing my Masters application. It looked, perhaps to my naive eye, to be an organisation which was doing all the right things and so I assumed it was one accepted and commended by both academics, politicians and by Muslim communities in Britain. Fast forward to November 2015 and my attendance at the Nohoudh Muslim Integration Conference: Engaging with the Discourse hosted by the School of Oriental and

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It was during this conference that my assumptions were drastically challenged, and initial grumblings of criticism against Quilliam quickly transformed into vocal and strident opposition. Further research was to confirm this reality and so sparked the question of this thesis: what went wrong for Quilliam? How did an organisation, which on the face of it showed so much promise, which ticked all the right boxes in being able to tackle Islamic extremism, come to be held with such a sense of mistrust and unease by not only the different Muslim communities that exist in Britain, but also by academics, journalists and politicians. In order to answer this question an investigative analysis of the Foundation and the criticism levelled at it will be undertaken.

In Chapter I, the Quilliam Foundation will be analysed in order to establish the Foundation’s motives and beliefs and in turn reveal its approach to the issue of countering extremism in Britain. Chapter II, will go right to the heart of problem in order to answer the question posed with three main areas being unveiled as the root causes of Quilliam’s rejection. Finally, before concluding and in light of the issues raised by the discussion, the questions of where do we go from here in response to the problem of extremism will be discussed in light of the lessons learned from the Quilliam experience.

Before commencing it first feels necessary to provide some definitions for terms used in this work, in order to avoid confusion. As this thesis is centred around the UK experience of counter-extremism and terrorism policies, it seems most appropriate to adopt the definitions of these terms as enshrined in UK law. In this piece, the term 'extremist' or 'extremism' is used to denote behaviour which goes against British values. Such values are freedoms of expression, belief, tolerance and mutual respect. ‘Radical belief’ is used to denote beliefs which whilst they may be extreme in nature but are essentially non-violent. Radicalisation is used to denote the process or change undertaken by an individual in their adoption of extreme ideas or beliefs. In trying to define these terms we highlight the problem inherent in any discussion of extremism and counter terrorism policy; who

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3 for further clarity on the content of Nohoudh Muslim Integration Conference information can be found at https://www.soas.ac.uk/soas-nohoudh-muslim-integration-conference/. A outline of the conference proceeding and videos of the topics discussed is featured.


decides what is or is not extreme? If it is secular society then where does religion fit it and in what form is it deemed acceptable? These are questions which shall be discussed in the body of the thesis.

CHAPTER 1
The Quilliam Foundation and Counter Extremism

In order to truly understand what went wrong for Quilliam, it is necessary to get to the root of what Quilliam really believes, what its motives are and how it seeks to achieve these according to their self-understanding. In reading about Quilliam it is easy to become swept up in the criticism and controversy surrounding the Foundation. A simple google search of the words ‘Quilliam Foundation’ and ‘criticism’ brings up a plethora of blogs and articles critical of the Foundation. However much of what is written fails to point out exactly what it is that has generated this distain which seems to be held across the board. It almost appears as if many who comment on the Foundation do so with little knowledge and entrenched opinions. This is not to say that the criticisms levelled at Quilliam are not accurate, but rather in order to properly answer the question posed it is necessary to first to go back to the beginning.

The Quillian Approach

The Quillian Foundation, or Quilliam as it is now known, was founded in 2008 under the headline of the world’s first counter extremism think tank. Its main objective is to challenge all forms of extremism, however its main focus to date has been in the arena of Islamic extremism. A unique selling point for the Foundation has been the unusual background of its founding fathers; three former Islamist extremists. The three founders, Ed Husain, Maajid Nawaz and Rashad Zaman Ali, are all former members of the non-violent Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, a pan-Islamic organisation which seeks to re-establish the Islamic Caliphate across the world through non-violent means. It is undeniably this factor which has heavily influenced Quilliam’s approach to counter extremism and what it sees as the most effective way of preventing radicalisation. To understand the Quilliam position it is

first important to outline its approach to radicalisation as this directly informs on how the issue of countering extremism is addressed.

The Quilliam model of radicalisation is known as the Transtheoretical Model of Change. Originally developed in 1977 by James Prochaska, to analyse behavioural changes in the area of health promotion, the model identifies the key stages through which an individual progresses when they change their behaviour. Quilliam’s founders have, however, sought to apply it to the field of radicalisation studies. On close inspection the Transtheoretical Model of Change differs little from what is seen as the currently held understanding of radicalisation in government policy making – that is, the conveyor belt theory of radicalisation. Both theories promote a similar belief; radicalisation is a process of change through which a person progressively moves. In Quilliam’s interpretation of the model an individual moves along an ascending path starting with pre-contemplation, moving to contemplation, preparation, action and then maintenance. The Quilliam model, it is asserted, is more flexible and avoids the pitfalls of the traditional conveyor belt theory which tends to be overly linear. By envisaging radicalisation as a series of ascending stages, the model is able to take into account for the fact that an individual may stop at a stage for an indeterminate amount of time, perhaps indefinitely, or move back or forwards along the path. However, what is key and critical to both forms of the model, is that one stage cannot be reached without first completing the stage prior to it; preparation cannot be achieved without first contemplation and prior to this pre-contemplation. The factor which makes a person move up or down this model is their commitment to the cause. It is therefore necessary to determine what drives this commitment in order to establish what in turn drives the radicalisation process.

Quilliam points to four contributory factors which make a person more likely to adopt an extremist ideology: exposure to the ideology, exposure to a group who can legitimise the ideology, a crisis of

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8 Russell and Theodosiou, "Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7," 16-17

9 Russell and Theodosiou, "Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7," 16-17

10 Russell and Theodosiou, "Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7," 17
identity and the holding of real or perceived grievances. Of these four factors, Quilliam holds ideology to play the key part and this ideology in Quilliam’s opinion is defined as Islamism. Before moving any further forward it is first important to clarify what is meant by Islamism in Quilliam’s understanding. The term is by all accounts a fairly new creation, first coming to light in French writing in 1883. Despite this, real recognition of the term was not achieved until after the 1979 Iranian Revolution when Ayatollah Khomeini created the Twentieth Century’s first Islamic government. Islamism manifests itself in a multitude of ways, and is a complex and often misused term. For the purposes of our study it seems proper to use Quilliam’s definition of Islamism as this appears to be in line with general scholarly consensus on the subject. Quilliam defines Islamism as:

‘…the belief that Islam is a political ideology, as well as a faith. It is a modernist claim that political sovereignty belongs to God, that Shari’ah should be used as state law, that Muslims form a political rather than a religious bloc around the world and that it is a religious duty for all Muslims to create a political entity that is governed as such.’

It is important to note that Islamism, the political ideology, is not the same as Islam, the faith. Following the faith of Islam does not mean that you also follow the tenets of the Islamist ideology. This is an important distinction to make, as many Muslim’s find the ideas of Islamism to be quite contrary to their religious beliefs.

Whilst Islamism, the political ideology, is to be distinguished from Islam, , bridges or links do exist between it and other forms of Islamic faith positions. Islamism is an ideology which seeks to derive legitimacy from a selective interpretation of the Islamic faith. Islamists do not form one cohesive bloc and instead can be divided into sub religious affiliations. Mehdi Mozaffari states that Islamism

11 Russell and Theodosiou, "Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7," 16- 20


13 Mozaffari, "What Is Islamism ? History and Definition of a Concept," 17 - 19

14 Mehdi Mozaffari, "What Is Islamism ? History and Definition of a Concept,"

can be divided into three main branches: Sunni, Shia and Wahhabi.\(^\text{16}\) (Whilst Wahhabism is also a Sunni sub-sect, he states that ‘it is so different from other Sunni sub-sects that it may be treated as an autonomous entity’\(^\text{17}\)). In this way each sub-sect seeks to derive legitimacy for its ideology from a selective interpretation of the branch of Islam to which it is affiliated. Whilst differences exist between each subset, Mozaffari states that these different forms of Islamism have much more in common that they do apart; their overall aim remains the same ‘they believe in the totalitarian character of Islam, and they strive towards the same ultimate goal, a global Umma.’\(^\text{18}\) They believe that Muslims should be united as one global community, irrespective of geography or culture, a global ‘Umma’. In essence Islamism is a spectrum, and like any political ideology, it is made up of a variety of different types of organisation. Quilliam categorises Islamism into four different types, each of which approaches the pursuit of its objectives in a different way. The first category is that of the political Islamist, or what Quilliam refers to as the ‘Entryist’\(^\text{19}\) In this form of Islamism, an organisation is engaged in the political system, seeking to establish its goals through mainstream political means. In Quilliam’s opinion it does so by weakening the system from within by targeting vulnerable institutions such as prisons and schools. Such organisations are non-violent in nature.

The second category is the ‘Revolutionary Islamist’\(^\text{20}\) where organisations renounce violence but also refuse to engage in the political system. Instead they build support where they may be able to overthrow the current regime, such as by way of a military coup. The third category is the ‘Militant Islamist’\(^\text{21}\) These groups use violence in order to advance their goals, justifying their acts as necessary. Finally there exist members who will move between each of these groups, employing the tactics which best suit their needs.

Whilst militant Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS (Islamic State) pose an obvious threat through their commitment to violence, Quilliam is of the belief that non-violent Islamist organisations, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and The Muslim Brotherhood, are also dangerous. In essence Quilliam

\(^\text{16}\) Mozaffari, "What Is Islamism? History and Definition of a Concept, 25

\(^\text{17}\) Mozaffari, "What Is Islamism? History and Definition of a Concept, 25

\(^\text{18}\) Mozaffari, "What Is Islamism? History and Definition of a Concept, 27

\(^\text{19}\) Russell and Theodosiou,"Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7” 13

\(^\text{20}\) Russell and Theodosiou,"Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7” 13.

\(^\text{21}\) Russell and Theodosiou,"Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7,” 13
believes that the ideology that all Islamist organisations follow is the same and so the danger exists whether they implore violence or not. For Quilliam Islamist ideology creates the mood music from which violent extremist ideologies develop. It gives the moral oxygen to the beliefs of militant groups, legitimising their actions. For Quilliam Islamist ideology does this by creating a separatist identity in the minds of its followers:

‘It preaches that a Muslim’s identity, religion and even individual personality are all incomplete unless he or she is living under the Sharia in an Islamic state. Islamism also teaches that British Muslims should be loyal to other Muslims, whoever they are and wherever they might be, ahead of being loyal to their fellow citizens.’

Quilliam points to the example of the July 7th Bombers as an example of how this ideology operates in practice. In his video, prior to the bombing, Mohammed Siddique Khan, one of the 7/7 bombers, used words which are littered with this separatist ideology demonstrated through his distinct choice in vocabulary. The British government, its citizens and actions are identified with the term ‘your’ whereas he uses the term ‘my’ in reference to his Muslim brothers and sisters, regardless of their location in the world. In this way he identifies himself as being separate from his fellow British citizens, despite having been born and raised in the country. They are portrayed as the enemy and his loyalty instead belongs to his fellow Muslim brothers, a community which transcends national boundaries.

This separatist mentality is however not something that was unique to the 7/7 bombers nor to individuals who carry out violent attacks. It is easy to see how minority faiths groups, and not just Muslims in the UK, could hold similar opinions in relation to identity and belonging and yet never contemplate carrying out violent acts. It seems over simplistic to reduce the reasoning for violent extremist behaviour to this separatist ideology, and it is perhaps here where we begin to see cracks in Quilliam’s logic. Quilliam believes that Islamism, in creating this notion of a separate Muslim identity, is able to exploit the existing identity crisis felt by those who live in places where Islam is a

22 Russell and Theodosiou, “Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7,” 20.
23 Russell and Theodosiou, “Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7,” 20
24 Russell and Theodosiou, “Counter-Extremism: A Decade on from 7/7,” 20
minority faith. It presents the British-Muslim identity, which the majority of British Muslims accept so readily, as being mistaken, thus creating for some a sense of crisis. This crisis is then almost simultaneously solved by offering a ‘globalised and politicised Muslim identity’ to replace the British-Muslim identity. Quilliam sees Islamism as in essence the desire to live under a theocracy, with only those deemed able to interpret the Sharia as able to participate fully. This goes against the very tenets of democracy, limits freedom of belief and human rights.

For Quilliam a key part of the Islamist narrative is that in fostering an identity crisis it is more effectively able to exploit the grievances of individuals. Grievances, such as foreign policy decisions and the War on Terror, are commonly advocated as reasons for individuals turning to extremist ideologies. This, Quilliam asserts, is a fallacy and suggests that Islamists harness an individual’s existing grievances and use them to introduce their ideology. By introducing the message in a group setting, the message is legitimised and the person is given a sense of purpose, a way of redressing perceived wrongs and resolving crises of identity. It is the narrative spun by Islamists which is the driving factor in bringing individuals into the extremist fold and is, for Quilliam, the starting point of the radicalisation process which has the potential to lead to violent terrorist acts.

For Quilliam, it would appear as if actual grievances play very little importance in the radicalisation process and instead it views them as almost a diversion. However, it seems naive to dismiss the problems and concerns of a diverse group of communities as merely a distraction and in many ways only serves to further heighten the frustration that is felt. Social marginalisation, poverty, the war on terror, and racism are all issues faced by Muslim communities and for which it is easy to see how grievances can be held. In addition, it would seem that the Foundation has failed to see that Islamism in itself is in many ways a product of grievances, of discontent with the current geopolitical landscape.

Quilliam has released a number of publications which it believes demonstrate this narrative in action. Two of these publications shall be discussed: Women and the Caliphate and Radicalisation in...
British Prisons. These two publications demonstrate Quilliam’s belief that the Islamist narrative is used to target all sections of society. The first of these publications is an analysis of the official and unofficial propaganda of the Islamic State (IS) in order to demonstrate the pull factors associated with an Islamist narrative. Modern discourse has tended to focus on radicalisation in a gender binary where women have been given an almost passive role in the extremism discourse. However recent stories of young British women leaving to travel to Syria and Iraq, such as the Bethnal Green Three, has brought to the forefront the fact that extremism is by no means a ‘male’ issue. Quilliam demonstrates its understanding of the function of Islamist narrative in documenting how IS makes direct appeals to women to join ‘the Caliphate’. Four main pull factors are identified - empowerment, deliverance, participation and piety - again centring around the construction of a narrative which speaks to the grievances and identity crises of the individual. IS promises empowerment to those women who decide to join the Caliphate, it does this by presenting the choice to join the group as a woman taking control of her life and having the ability to redress perceived wrongs she has endured whilst living outside of the Caliphate. Secondly IS promises deliverance to women who decide to join the group. The Islamist narrative presents the grievances felt by those living in western society as being caused by a West in opposition to Islam mentality. Thirdly IS promises women who join the group the ability to participate. As has been stated, Quilliam believes that Islamist ideology exploits the existing identity crisis for those living outside of the Islamic Caliphate. By preaching an ideology which states that a Muslim’s identity is only fully developed by living under the Sharia, they create the idea that their identity is not complete. In offering ‘sanctuary’ under the Caliphate the group then offers a solution to this crisis and a specific role in which to fulfil identity. Purpose is key to the groups pull factor; it is not just men who have a part to play, women have a purpose within the caliphate, even if it is a strictly non-combatant one. Their role is portrayed as a pivotal support role and of utmost importance as being those who will raise the next generation.


31 Rafiq and Malik “Caliphettes” 4.

32 Rafiq and Malik “Caliphettes” 18.

33 Rafiq and Malik “Caliphettes” 22.

34 Rafiq and Malik “Caliphettes” 24
generation in the correct beliefs as expounded by IS. This too, Quilliam states, plays on the perceived grievances felt by some living in Western democracies, that is, the ills they face are linked specifically to the fact that they are living outside the Islamic state and as such the only answer to this problem is to join the group and work to restore the Caliphate. Finally, IS offers the promise of piety to women who join the group. Whilst these factors are not the only ones at play, Quilliam states these are the four key promises used by IS to persuade women to join the Caliphate, particularly in the case of those who travel from Western democracies. The key factor, Quilliam believes, is the use of the Islamist narrative, based on the ideology of Islamism, which exploits grievances and creates a crisis of identity. The narrative emphasises the idea of separation and the idea that the believers’ true potential is not achieved until they are living under the Sharia, within the boundaries of an Islamic State. In this way separation is used to exaggerate the grievances and identity crisis, and to present the only solution as the adoption and following of an Islamist ideology. Whilst the paper raises interesting question relating to women and the pull of the Caliphate, the Quilliam model of identity appears to be essentialist in nature, taking only religion into account. Identity is better understood as constructed, with a Muslim women’s identity encompassing more than her faith, instead it will be dependent on her environment, experiences and interaction with the world. By adopting an essentialist notion of identity, Quilliam fails to acknowledge the diverse nature of what it means to be a Muslim woman and the reality that a generic uniform reaction to IS propaganda cannot be predicted.

Quilliam’s second practical example is how Islamist narratives operate in the context of British prisons. This is a topic close to the heart of at least one of the founding members of the organisation. Maajid Nawaz himself was imprisoned in Egypt for his role in the Islamist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir. In the research analysis entitled Unlocking Al-Qaeda: Islamist extremism in British prisons, Quilliam researcher James Brandon outlines what he terms the push and pull factors used by Islamists to recruit from within British prisons. The publication demonstrates, in the author’s

35 Rafiq and Malik “Caliphettes” 30 - 34.

36 For a full discussion on Social theory and religion see James Beckford ‘Social Theory and Religion’ Cambridge University Press,(2003)


opinion, the dangers the Islamist narrative poses to modern British society through its operation in the penal system. Brandon points to a number of well known convicted terrorists, from Richard Reid the Shoe bomber to Mohammad al-Figari, a British born convert to Islam, who was convicted in 2008 under Terrorism Legislation for participating in terrorist training camps, all of whom Brandon argues were introduced to the Islamist ideology whilst in custody.39

The report identifies what it sees as the pull factors utilised by Islamists to proactively recruit individuals into their radical ideology. These pull factors are supplemented by what the report terms push factors, the initial factors which push an individual away from mainstream society. These are preyed upon by Islamists to justify and legitimise their belief system and draw a person into their fold.40 The analysis has led to the following conclusions on how the Islamist narrative is employed to recruit new people Extremists often target new arrivals to the prison, offering them friendship and the social and moral support needed to survive the prison experience. This initial introduction forms the beginning of a gradual process of radicalisation in which the individual is introduced slowly to the Islamist ideology in the form of advice or spiritual guidance offered by the extremist.41 At the same time, Quilliam states, extremist figures often adopt positions of leadership in response to alleged wrong doings by the authorities in charge. Quilliam points to figures such as Abu Hamza who whilst undergoing a prison sentence organised protests for the serving of Halal meals.42 Extremists use this leadership role in pursuing just or popular causes felt by Muslim detainees to attain authority and legitimacy in the eyes of their fellow inmates. Once their position is established they use their influence to bring fellow inmates into the radical ideology.

Again it can be seen that the Islamist narrative exploits pre-existing grievances and crises of identity to present Islamist ideology as the solution. Often inmates who arrive in prison possess a history of clashes with authority, and see the State as working against them. Islamists identify these pre-existing issues and exaggerate them, presenting them with a separatist ideology of the West versus Islam, and offer the Islamist ideology as the solution. In prison, in a highly segregated environment, racial and ethnic ties are exaggerated and communities are formed amongst ‘believers’. Radicalisa-

39 Brandon “Unlocking Al-Qaeda” at 11-17
40 Brandon “Unlocking Al-Qaeda” 56
41 Brandon “Unlocking Al-Qaeda” 27
42 Brandon “Unlocking Al-Qaeda” 26 - 29
tion is seen to accelerate in many cases due to the self imposed seclusion adopted, as there are no alternative narratives to be heard and so the Islamist ideology is easily adopted.

Finally, in some cases, whilst prison affords the first introduction to extremist ideology, it is not until an inmate is released that the radicalisation process fully takes hold. Quilliam reasons that the sense of identity created in prison is transferred outside the prison walls by the networks Islamist have both in and out of prison. A newly released prisoner is often at a particularly vulnerable point in their life. Quilliam’s founders reason that extremists exploit this by promising support, a pre-existing community and even a place to live and eat with people from within the Islamist network. As such the radicalisation extends beyond the prison cell and into the heart of British Muslim society.

**Quilliam’s Counter extremism Strategy**

As has been explained, central to Quilliam’s understanding of the process of radicalisation is narrative. In the case of Islamic radicalisation, it is the narrative advanced by Islamism. Quilliam’s central thesis is that Islamism should be challenged in all its forms. Non-violent extremist ideologies similar to those held by Islamist groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir are as dangerous as the violent al-Qaeda inspired terrorists. They advance a separatist mentality and provide the starting blocks for radicalisation towards violence. In addition they give credence to the beliefs that justify violence in the name of religion, even when individuals do not actually commit violent acts. Single issue movements such as Hamas are seen as equally dangerous by the Foundation, arguing that the group have radicalised the Palestinian people by their commitment to a one state solution. Quilliam’s opinion on the dangers of ‘non violent extremist ideologies’ would seem to extend to a number of other Islamic movements. The Foundation has raised concerns over the Deobandi movement, particularly in relation to the mosque and seminary environment. Its concerns relate to what it perceived as a highly conservative and isolated tendency among mosque leaders that did not support British values.44 The Foundation is also critical of the Jamaat-i-Islami movement, believing that as

43 Brandon “Unlocking Al-Qaeda” 14 - 17

an Islamist organisation it acts to create the mood music for radicalisation to violence. It is however more accepting of South Asian Sufism and recommended to Government that this would be a sector that it should seek to work with. This then begs the question what are the boundaries which separate what the Foundation deem an acceptable and unacceptable organisation or movement?

What the Foundation appears to be most critical of is the combination of socially conservative values and what it sees as a separatist mentality which it believes to be threatening to western democracy. In many ways it sees Islamic movements which are engaged in political discourse as dangerous and seems to find acceptability in a depoliticised and 'quieter' form of Islam.

For Quilliam the starting point for any counter extremism strategy should be to challenge the Islamist ideology. The best way to challenge is to advance an alternative counter narrative which reveals the fallacies of Islamism. Since its inception in 2008, Quilliam has attempted to strengthen its counter narrative, developing a department focused on the religious element of extremist ideologies. It is important to state that Quilliam itself is not a religious organisation. It is however an organisation which works with issues which have an undeniably religious context. As such, it has sought to strengthen its counter narrative by legitimising its alternative through theological discussion. The Foundation’s Islamic Studies department is headed up by Dr Usama Hasan, a former Imam who has contributed a number of publications to the role Islamic theology has to play in the counter extremism debate. As part of its counter narrative Quilliam presents what it sees as the theological fallacies of Islamism. The basis of its theological position can be gleaned from the publications available on the Foundation’s website. In these publications Dr Usama Hasan provides references from Qur’anic sources to demonstrate the theological inaccuracies of Islamism. Quilliam’s theological

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position is to assert that central to the Islamic faith is the concept of balance.\textsuperscript{49} Both the Quran and Muhammad warned of the dangers of extremist ideology.\textsuperscript{50} Instead a balance must be achieved. Quilliam also asserts that there can be no compulsion in religion, faith under coercion cannot be deemed a valid expression of faith.\textsuperscript{51} Dr Hasan points to the famous Islamic Theologian al-Ghazzali (dates?) who ’emphatically asserted that faith and non-faith involve active belief or unbelief rather than a passive state or coercion.\textsuperscript{52} It sees Islamists as ignoring this necessity for balance and the active choice of a believer and, instead using coercive and underhand tactics in the pursuit of their goals. From this theological position, Quilliam sees mainstream or moderate Islam as compatible with Western democracy and British values and calls on all sectors of the community and public bodies to work together to advance this idea. Islamist ideology entirely contradicts, in Quilliam’s worldview, the values of British society as it calls for its followers to live a life apart from their fellow citizens. It sees a need for the restoration of balance in both public and private expressions of faith.\textsuperscript{53}

Central to Quilliam’s counter extremism strategy, is challenging Islamists ideology. This is to be achieved, however, not through the banning of non-violent extremist organisations as this would be in opposition to the democratic values of British Society. The counter narrative should instead be advanced as an alternative. However, whilst Quilliam does not call for the organisations to be banned, it does believe that Islamist movements should not be given a platform on which to air their views. It is highly critical of what it sees as the liberal left defence of Islamists and rebukes them for providing a platform for them to express their ideologies. It sees such actions as short sighted and dangerous:

The far-left in their stated objective of standing up for social justice have rationalised working with, and legitimising, Islamist extremists – those who campaign for the removal of rights for “non-believers” under theocratic law. One example includes the far-left’s unity in campaigning against far-right fascism – even though the same “humanitarians” advocate a

\textsuperscript{49} Hasan ‘The Balance of Islam in Challenging Extremism’ 5 - 7
\textsuperscript{50} Hasan ‘The Balance of Islam in Challenging Extremism’ 9 - 11
\textsuperscript{51} Hasan, ”No Compulsion in Religion” 10
\textsuperscript{52} Hasan, ”No Compulsion in Religion” 11
\textsuperscript{53} Hasan ‘The Balance of Islam in Challenging Extremism’ 19
theocratic state that would penalise, or even kill, apostates and homosexuals. The far-left’s sheer paranoia of being seen not to side with the ‘oppressed minority’ has pushed them to the conclusion of siding with the theocratic Islamists who mimic the Nazi fascists in political ideology.54

This sentiment has also been shown in its approach to Islamist organisations appearing on University Campuses. It has been highly critical of some institutions who have allowed Islamists to speak on campus.55 The Foundation views University campuses as an incredibly vulnerable area and one in which Islamist organisations do not belong. In addition to this, in the past it has been highly critical of entities such as the Islam Channel56 for their willingness to give air time to Islamist preachers and for organisations such as The Muslim Council of Britain for having links to Islamist organisations.57 Whilst such organisations are not Islamist in nature, Quilliam sees their links to or openness to Islamist ideology as dangerous. Quilliam, it would seem is very particular over who should have a voice in the counter extremism debate, and it is perhaps here that we see their first rumblings of discontent with the Foundation.

A surface reading of Quilliam’s justifications for focusing counter extremism strategy on both violent and non violent forms of extremism seems on the basis of the evidence presented to be quite persuasive. So then why has the Foundation been so heavily criticised by so many different sections of Muslim society? In the next chapter of the thesis I hope to outline the areas of contention that exist between Quilliam and its critics.. Alternative and more compelling theories in the radicalisation discourse shall be highlighted to demonstrate the unease surrounding Quilliam's understanding of what causes radicalisation. In addition it will shown how the counter extremism narrative advocated by Quilliam has cascaded down into UK Counter extremism policy, and has led to discontent


and distrust felt toward the Foundation as they are seen as facilitating the securitisation and depoliticisation of British Muslims. Three incidents are used as case studies to demonstrate the effect of further alienating the communities Quilliam seeks to work with.

CHAPTER II
The Problems with Quilliam

Alternative Narratives in the Radicalisation Discourse

As has been discussed the Quilliam Foundation subscribes to the The Transtheoretical Model of Change, a version of the conveyor belt theory of radicalisation. Put simply radicalisation is an ascending path upon which an individual travels, starting with pre-contemplation and ending in the performance of violent acts and maintenance of the beliefs which inspire these actions. The key to this radicalisation process is, for Quilliam, exposure to the Islamist ideology, even in its non violent forms. This ideology gives the ‘moral oxygen’ for violent extreme beliefs. Islamist ideology is for them, anti-western, anti-democratic and goes against the values of British society. Thus for Quilliam, counter extremism must focus on extremism in both its violent and non-violent forms. It is the ideology and the narrative spun by those who follow this ideology which is the root cause of extremism.

Whilst, as will be shown, the conveyor belt theory of radicalisation has been adopted by Government as the official narrative in counter extremism policy, it is by no means agreed upon by the wider academic field. The theory chosen to inform policy making has a huge impact on how extremism is tackled. There is growing consensus among academics that traditional understandings of radicalisation do not fully explain why some individuals adopt extremist ideas.\textsuperscript{58}:

\begin{quote}
‘The role of extremist ideas in the radicalisation process remains a highly contentious issue in the academic field. While some consider non-violent extremist groups as gateways to
\end{quote}

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violent forms of extremism, others argue that such groups may constitute ‘a legal ‘safety
valve’ for extreme views.’

Quilliam’s reluctance to accept alternative theories of radicalisation, and its headstrong commitment
to challenging Islamist ideology, even in its non violent form, has attracted criticism. Some allege
that such approaches only serve to hinder counter extremism strategies, demonising members of the
community who might offer workable alternatives. In order to demonstrate the uncertainty which
exists within the field of the study of radicalisation and extremism, three recent contributions to the
field will be discussed. It is hoped that by demonstrating the difference in opinion, the reasons be-
hind the unease felt towards Quilliam can be understood.

The first contribution is a recent article by Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, published in
2015, which summarises the latest empirical literature on the subject of radicalisation. The article
seeks to provide an answer to the question of how and why homegrown radicalisation occurs in
some western nations. In their analysis of the recent literature on radicalisation, Hafez and Mullins
have come to the conclusion that the best way to conceptualise radicalisation is as a puzzle, com-
prising of four interlocking parts; grievances, networks, ideology and enabling environments and
support structures. The authors reject the traditional linear concept of radicalisation as a process,
consisting of steps and stages, instead they assert that the puzzle metaphor better represents the
concept of radicalisation. They posit that the puzzle analogy better represents the complexity of the
reality of radicalisation which is a multi-faceted and contextual in nature; there is no one pathway to
radicalisation. In addition it recognises the puzzling nature of the phenomena which so far has
western societies failing to find suitable explanations for individuals turning to extremist ideologies:

‘Put simply, we have the pieces of the puzzle, but we lack the representative image that
informs us how best to put them together….. Each piece of the puzzle can come in a

59 Claire, Arènes “Prevention of Terrorism in Britain: Fighting Violent or Non-violent Extremism? The Influence
of the Quilliam Foundation.” The Politics of Ethnic Diversity in the British Isles, ed. Romain Garbaye

60 Githens-Mazer and Lambert “Quilliam on Prevent: The Wrong Diagnosis”

61 Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, ”The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical
Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 38, no. 11 (2015): 958-75, doi:
10.108.0/1057610x.2015.1051375.

62 Hafez and Mullins ‘The Radicalization Puzzle’ 959.
Hafez and Mullins point to these four interconnected factors which appear in the majority of the biographies of the radicals studied, although the weight each factor has and the way in which they interact, varies from person to person. The article concludes that the dominant factor in the majority of cases of radicalisation was the network.\textsuperscript{64} Recruitment to radical groups tended to occur through family bonds or pre-existing relationships. The network itself afforded individuals with a purpose, attracting those who sought to rebalance power or redress perceived wrongs. In addition the network afforded a sense of collective identity to bring people together who possessed similar opinions or were from similar backgrounds. Importantly, it was this collective identity and the creation of strong bonds between members of the group which made exit from the group increasingly more difficult and increased the likelihood of a person remaining within a radical network. Grievance and ideology were what the authors described as ‘the landscape that frames the proximate causes of radicalisation’.\textsuperscript{65} Socio-economic factors, increased islamophobia and questionable foreign policy decisions by government were all indirect factors to radicalisation. They provided the mood music, and were used by radicals to justify their actions but were not predominantly reasons for someone adopting extremist views; these were factors which affected millions of Muslims across Europe and the West, however only a tiny percentage become radicalised, and as such it cannot be said to be a direct cause.\textsuperscript{66} Finally enabling environments and support structures, such as the internet and social media allowed for access to the ideology and publicity material of radical groups. In many cases it allowed an introduction to the ‘radical’ world.

The second contribution comes from a particularly vocal critic of the official narrative on radicalisation, Professor Arun Kundnani. Kundnani is visiting professor at of the University of New York and has authored a number of pieces on the issues of islamophobia, extremism and the War on Terror. In his publication \begin{it}A Decade Lost: Rethinking Radicalisation and Extremism (Kundnani 2009)\end{it} Professor Kundnani lays out what he sees as the evidence against the official narrative on radicali-

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Hafez and Mullins ‘The Radicalization Puzzle’ 959
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Hafez and Mullins ‘The Radicalization Puzzle’ 964-966.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Hafez and Mullins ‘The Radicalization Puzzle’ 962
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Hafez and Mullins ‘The Radicalization Puzzle’ 964
\end{itemize}
For Kundnani, the current narrative focuses almost entirely on the individual, their motivation and belief system, rather than encompassing the wider context which is pivotal in understanding the root causes of radicalisation. Kundnani’s starting point is a study conducted in 1981 by Martha Crenshaw into the causes of terrorism. Crenshaw concluded that the causes of terrorism could be reduced down to a three level system; the individual (motivation and belief system), the group (the decision making and strategy) and finally the wider social and political context. Since 9/11, Kundnani argues that a new terrorism thesis has been advanced which largely ignores levels two and three and instead reduces the causes of radicalisation to ideology and Islamist narrative. For Kundnani this is an overly simplistic way of looking at the issue, and ignores the complexity of the problem and the contextual nature in which radicalisation occurs. Supporting his argument, he points to the inaccuracy of the data used, and is particularly critical of the absence of control groups in some of the studies to determine whether the same ideology is held by those who hold violence to be abhorrent.

Kundnani offers an alternative position; pointing to the importance that political and social factors play in the radicalisation process. He points to the existing evidence, which demonstrates that religious ideology has little to do with radicalisation and instead is more to do with the social factors, such as kinship and group identity. In his opinion religious ideology is used to give credence to the actions of the group, creating a ‘veneer of legitimacy’ but it is not the dominant cause. Kundnani finds the dominant factor most significantly in the political context, the actions of government and particularly in foreign policy decisions. Kundnani provides evidence for his opinion by pointing to the example of Omar Bakri Muhammed, who justified his change in calling for violence from his followers on the British Government’s support of the War on Terror:

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69 Kundnani, “A Decade Lost” 14

70 Kundnani, “A Decade Lost” 19 -21

71 Kundnani, “A Decade Lost” 22-25.

72 Kundnani, “A Decade Lost: 23
'It would be overly reductionist to claim that this increase in the number of incidents of attempt terrorist violence is entirely due to the British government’s decision to participate in the Iraq war in 2003. But that decision created the political context within which, for a small number of radicals, violence against fellow citizens appeared legitimate.'

He reasons that when we look to the case of Bakri, there had been no change in ideology, rather a change in the political climate which enabled the group to establish legitimacy in acting violently towards their fellow citizens in Britain. Kundnani goes on to state that radicalisation to violence follows a historical pattern that can be seen in the actions of such groups as the IRA in 1960s. Radicalisation is a reaction to state sponsored violence, where a violent response is legitimised by the violence of the government. The new terrorism thesis advocated by those who adhere to the official narrative ignores this historical pattern and the connection between social and political factors and radicalisation. Kundnani advocates that when we look to the causes of radicalisation, the dominant one is the political context, arguing that ‘religious ideology provides a vocabulary….but politics provides the impetus.’ Thus counter extremism policy is useless unless these factors are recognised and positive actions are made to redress the wrongs which have been committed.

Finally and perhaps the most promising to date, is a research project produced by the think tank Demos. Their study *The Edge of Violence* (Demos 2009) involved case studies from five countries: Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Canada and the UK. The purpose of the study was to understand why some types of radical beliefs can turn violent and into what the study terms terrorist acts, whilst others do not and remain non-violently radical. The significance of the Demos study is that it uses new data, gathered by the authors, rather than secondary research. In order to answer the questions posed the authors created in depth profiles of both terrorists and non violent radicals, gathered from subjects across Europe and Canada. These profiles were then compared to a control

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73 Kundnani, “A Decade Lost: 24

74 Kundnani, “A Decade Lost: 25

75 Kundnani, “A Decade Lost” 25.


77 Bartlett et al, “The Edge of Violence” 8
sample of 70 individuals representing a cross section of members of Muslim communities in Canada. Alongside this, 75 interviews were conducted with a range of local and national experts, such as imams, security analysts and leaders of grass roots organisations. The study represents a significant contribution to the academic field by the introduction of new and highly valuable empirical data.

The primary findings of the report are that holding radical beliefs is not a necessary precursor to violent extremism:

‘Being radical is not always the first step on the path to violence. In fact, radicalisation that leads to violence can be distinguished by different indicators from those that indicate purely ‘religious’, non-violent radicalisation. Assuming that radical views constitute the base of the terrorist pyramid can allow for counter-radicalisation strategies against large numbers of people who object entirely to al-Qaeda’s methods.’

The Study goes on to state that whilst radical beliefs are not necessarily positive, and in some cases they can contribute to the radicalisation of a percentage of individuals, they should be ‘tackled as social problems, not a sub-set of the al-Qaeda threat.’

The conclusions drawn in terms of religion and ideology were that in general non violent extremists have a much broader and interpretative approach to their religion, whereas violent extremists often had a much shallower understanding. Ideology does, however have a part to play in terms of the establishment of an anti-western ‘us versus them’ narrative, and this was what separated those committed to violence from those who were not, more than their membership to a particular interpretation of Islam. However, ultimately what the study found was in general it is often hard to separate just how far religious ideology goes in inspiring or justifying acts of violence, and it is very much dependant on the individual or group in question. Many radicals and ordinary Muslims held similar views in relation to the application of the Sharia or the establishment of a Caliphate but

78 Bartlett et al, “The Edge of Violence” 49 - 55
81 Bartlett, et al “The Edge of Violence” 11
would condemn the use of violence. Demos’ findings are that radicalisation should been seen as a social epidemic; it is intrinsically linked to the peer group surrounding an individual. Radicalisation is often found to occur in group situations where peer pressure operates as a way for an individual to be accepted. This is usually facilitated by an individual having grown up or having been exposed to a culture of violence in the past.

The study contends that Islamist terrorism shares similar characteristics to other extremism existing in society: predominantly groups of angry young men. Radicalism becomes part and parcel of growing up, with many young people from a wide cross section of society acting in ways which go against the established narrative, for example in anti nuclear or animal rights movements and is a significant part of human development. Being radical and objecting to the government position should not be demonised. Instead dissent should be facilitated in ways which do not drive it underground and provide an environment for violent acts.

According to the study the most effective way of addressing radical ideas which seem dangerous to society at large is to approach them with open and honest debate. Having a liberal attitude to dissent and disagreement allows the Al Qaeda narrative which glamourises violence to be challenged with a counter narrative which reveals its fallacies. Counter narrative is extremely important, but it must be done in a way which facilitates debate and listens to the grievances of those who hold radical ideas.

Finally radicalisation to violence is not a linear process, it is a human behaviour which is notoriously difficult to predict and differs from person to person. Whilst differences exist between non violent and violent radicals, each person will respond differently when presented with the same information. In this way radicalisation to violence is not an easy problem to solve, as historical precedent shows it to be a consequence of the human condition. However it is one that can be managed.

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82 Bartlett, et al “The Edge of Violence” 11
83 Bartlett, et al “The Edge of Violence” 12 - 14
84 Bartlett, et al The Edge of Violence 13
85 Bartlett, et al The Edge of Violence 13
86 Bartlett, et al The Edge of Violence 14
87 Bartlett, et al The Edge of Violence 13
when approached in the correct way: it is society at large that must play the key role, producing a narrative that recognises that dissent is allowed and instead facilitates open and honest debate.

As has been demonstrated there is significant debate surrounding the root causes of radicalisation and what makes some people adopt extreme and violent beliefs. The lack of consensus serves to explain where feelings of unease about Quilliam’s tactics and approach to counter extremism have developed amongst Muslim communities and academics. Quilliam appears to push to the side other theories of radicalisation in favour of what has been termed its ‘War on Islamism’. Recent studies would point away from the linear models used by Quilliam in trying to understand radicalisation and to construct counter extremism narratives. The evidence presented demonstrates the flaws in the Quilliam model and has brought into question how effective such linear approaches really are.  

In promoting their anti-Islamist narrative they have in essence, advocated excluding some groups from the conversation. Although stopping short of banning their activities they would happily not give them a platform. It is argued that in doing so groups who have the potential to tackle extremism and who are currently working at grass root level would be prevented from doing so. Its dismissive attitude to foreign policy concerns is a particularly contentious issue. The failure to recognise how global events impact the radicalisation discourse is seen among some Muslims only to fuel the fire for those who feel powerless to act to redress the perceived wrongs committed against them. In adopting such a headstrong attitude to the causes of radicalisation, the Foundation has alienated those who point to other causes. Ideology does have a role to play and the separatist mentality pushed by some Islamist organisations can have the effect of distancing and isolating individuals, making them easier targets for movements that advocate violence. However by adopting an almost exclusionary approach to the problem of radicalisation, dismissive of foreign policy concerns, socio-economic factors or the search for identity, it fails to recognise the wider context. As commentators have expressed, failing to recognise the role politics has to play in radicalisation to

88 Githens-Mazer and Lambert “Quilliam on Prevent: The Wrong Diagnosis”
violence not only denies the reality of the situation but it also acts in opposition to countering extremism in society.\textsuperscript{91}

The findings of the Demos study support Quilliam’s assertion of the importance of a counter narrative; however the counter narrative that the Foundation advocates is one which causes concern to some critics. It is suggested that the Foundation conflates all forms of political Islam with an extremist ideology, and thus a proxy to violence.\textsuperscript{92} The alternative narrative offered by Quilliam is a depoliticised version of Islam, that fits within the confines of British society. In focusing so strongly on the Islamist ideology, the Foundation is seen to be taking away those spaces where people can be radical in an open way, where issues can challenged and debated. Thus it could be accused of making political expressions of faith and dissent appear extremist. Commentators note that this is a dangerous path to follow. As Demos so succinctly put it, dissent is an inevitable part of growing up, the problem occurs when this dissent becomes violent. In order to prevent this, we need to allow young people and members of society to dissent, to hold radical views and to air these in open discussion and debate.

The purpose of this section was not to argue for or against the narrative as expressed by Quilliam and the British Government. Rather it was to demonstrate the lack of consensus present in the current understanding of the causes of radicalisation and in turn demonstrate the reasons for the feeling of unease and distrust felt by many towards the Foundation. Having outlined Quilliam’s approach to counter extremism and issues of radicalisation, it is now time to discuss the second major area of contention; Quilliam’s relationship with the UK Government.

The Quilliam Foundation and The British Government

From newspaper columns, to journal articles and television debates, a recurring criticism levied at Quilliam is the perception of its close relationship with the British government. At a time when more and more Muslim communities feel securitised by aspects of the current counter terrorism policy advocated by the British government, this perceived close relationship has had a profound effect on the confidence of others towards the think tank.


\textsuperscript{92} Kundnani, "Islamism and the Roots of Liberal Rage."
On researching the Quilliam Foundation and its relationship with the UK Government, one is struck by just how intertwined that relationship is. It is perhaps for this reason that there appears to be two strands of thought which have emerged and contributed to the Foundation's failure. On the one hand there are those who believe Quilliam to be a puppet of the Government, which is used to propagate a rhetoric designed to encourage citizens to accept the current UK counter extremism and terrorism policies. Conversely there is the opinion, which rejects this idea of Quilliam as a passive and controlled entity but one that has acted subversively to influence government. In advancing its theory of radicalisation it has persuaded the government to adopt counter extremism policies in line with flawed theory, which has in turn led to the creation of harmful and draconian policies.

Whilst it is not possible for both arguments to be factually correct, it seems to matter little. The conclusions arrived at are the same; Quilliam has acted, whether directly or indirectly to allow for the creation of counter extremism policies which its critics believe to have securitised British Muslim citizens and to have created suspect communities. These two strands of opinion shall be discussed in more detail in order to demonstrate how they have been arrived at.

The first of these two strands of opinion is that Quilliam is a puppet of the government. This is a view held by many bloggers, such as Dilly Hussain of 5 pillars\(^\text{93}\) and Tom Griffin of OpenDemocracy UK\(^\text{94}\) who comment on the Foundation. On a brief examination of the facts it can be seen how many have come to this conclusion. The Quilliam Foundation was brought into existence by funds made available by the UK Government under the first formulation of the CONTEST strategy in 2008. Under this policy, it was hoped that extremism would be tackled by partnering with Muslim organisations and community groups. Quilliam was one of a number of organisations which secured funding from the Home Office to establish its counter extremism think tank. The funding of Quilliam by the Home office continued up until 2011, and in total received over £2.1 million of government funds between 2008 -2011.\(^\text{95}\) Added to the issue of funding, Quilliam’s regular involvement in government consultations and its advancement of what is seen, on the face of it, to be the government counter extremism narrative made it seem to some to be in the pocket of the UK government. The increasingly harsh nature of counter extremism measures has led to what many feel is

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\(^{94}\) www.opendemocracy.net/uk/tom-griffin/problem-with-quilliam-foundation

\(^{95}\)
the securitisation of British Muslims. Despite the Muslim presence in Britain being an incredibly diverse one, encompassing differing strands of belief, socio economic positions and ethnicities, communities are apparently united in their condemnation of the draconian nature of the measures which have placed them under surveillance. Quilliam’s ready acceptance of these policies is seen as legitimising the securitisation of the British Muslim population. It’s reluctance to question Government policy, particularly foreign policy, which is a significant area of contention for many across Muslim communities and outside them, has attracted criticism and suspicion as to the independence of the Foundation.

For some academics Quilliam is seen as a specific creation of government as a way of influencing and controlling public opinion. Professor Rizwan Sabir and David Miller have contended that Quilliam is an example of British implementation of counter insurgency tactics as part of its counter terrorism strategy. 96 Counter insurgency is a military strategy utilised most often in cases of guerrilla warfare. In terms of the British use of the strategy the focus has been on intelligence gathering and communication activities. 97 In terms of the UK strategy the Pursue and Prevent strands of the CONTEST strategy represented the coercive and communication elements of counter insurgency strategy. 98 The authors look specifically to Quilliam as an example of the Prevent strategy being used as a counter insurgency tactic. An important part of counter insurgency doctrine relates to what is known as Key Leader Engagement (KLE). 99 This is a tactic used to manage the population at large and in Sabir and Miller’s opinion Quilliam is an example of a KLE which is used by the government to win over the general public. It contends that Quilliam is a ‘classic front group’ for government agenda, pointing to its sources of funding, its research and the fact that it seems to tow the government line. 100 In advocating for the necessity for a strong counter narrative to be advanced in place of the Islamist ideology, Quilliam can be seen to be fulfilling the communication element of counter extremism strategy. Quilliam is used to curb dissent by trying to convince the public to adopt its alternative narrative, which is in fact the government narrative in disguise.

96 Miller and Sabir, "Counterterrorism as Counterinsurgency in the UK "war on Terror." 12-32.
97 Miller and Sabir, "Counterterrorism as Counterinsurgency in the UK” 13.
98 Miller and Sabir, "Counterterrorism as Counterinsurgency in the UK” 26.
99 Miller and Sabir, "Counterterrorism as Counterinsurgency in the UK” 26 - 28.
100 Miller and Sabir,"Counterterrorism as Counterinsurgency in the UK” 26 - 28.
In addition to this, when the Foundation ceased to be funded by the Home Office in 2011, critics pointed to this as an example of the puppet like quality of the organisation. When controversy brought it into disrepute it was disregarded as no longer fulfilling its created purpose; to advance the government agenda in counter terrorism policy. Those who follow this strand of thought are left with the opinion that Quilliam’s role has been to facilitate the acceptance of government policies in the realm of counter extremism, by providing a Muslim voice to support policy. Quilliam is seen as weak, influenced, and without its own merit, nothing more than a puppet of government.

The second of these two strands of opinion, and the one to which the author would subscribe accuracy, is that it is in fact Quilliam which has influenced government. In order to demonstrate how this opinion has been reached it is important to trace the history of the relationship between Quilliam and the UK Government.

The rise of Quilliam mirrors to some extent the decline of the UK Government’s relationship with the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). Formerly a close ally, who worked closely with Government to coordinate a public response to the London Bombings, MCB fell out of favour in 2009 over then Deputy Secretary General Daud Abdullah's signing of the Istanbul Declaration. The Declaration in question was a statement of support for Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and was signed my Daud Abdullah in a personal capacity and not as representative of MCB. Hazel Blears, at the time Minister for Communities and Local government demanded he resign, claiming that the signing of the agreement was tantamount to support for violence against British troops. Daud Abdullah refused to resign from his position citing his democratic election to the post and his signing of the Declaration in an entirely personal capacity. The result was to effectively sever ties between the MCB and the UK Government. It would seem that this gap was readily filled by the Quilliam Foundation, who began to gain traction with Government and policy makers. Contrary to popular belief Quilliam has not always enjoyed a seamless relationship with the establishment. From its formation in 2008 to the end of the the Labour government, Quilliam and Whitehall had somewhat different approaches to counter extremism policy. The Quilliam narrative has largely stayed the same since its inception - extremism in all its forms, both violent and non violent should be challenged, primarily objecting to the Islamist narrative. This approach, at least at first, was not the one taken by the UK government. In 2006 in response to the 7/7 London bombings the Countering In-

ternational Terrorism: the United Kingdom's Strategy was introduced, setting out the UK’s counter terrorism plan known as Operation Contest. This strategy had in fact been in operation since 2003, a response to the September 11 attacks. Prior to the 7/7 bombings, the Prevent branch of the strategy had been largely ignored. With 7/7 came the realisation that radicalisation was a problem existing at home and focus was shifted to preventative actions. These attacks were carried out by British citizens who had been born and raised in British society. It raised alarm bells to many within government that something had gone disastrously wrong. In the wake of the 7/7 attacks, the UK’s initial counter terrorism strategy focused on preventing violent extremism. This is apparent when one looks at the 2006 formulation of the CONTEST strategy. In this document the language refers solely to violent forms of extremism and radicalisation Claire Arènes argues that the reasoning behind this can be found in the original ‘national security agenda under which Prevent was formed: the priority of any counterterrorism plan is to reduce the number of violent attacks against the country’s safety.’ The decision to avoid including non-violent extremism in the initial strategy, had the practical effect of giving government institutions the flexibility to partner with organisations whose ideology, whilst extreme, was non violent in nature and who could provide valuable information and knowledge in the fight against terrorism. From the period of 2002 to 2006, the Muslims Contact Unit (MCU), part of the London Metropolitan Police Force was active in engaging with non-violent extremists. Robert Lambert, now professor at The University of St Andrews, headed up this unit and was involved in a number of operations whose focus was to counter the threat of violent extremism in London. The most notable success was the removal of the now jailed hate preacher Abu Hamza from the Finsbury Mosque. The rationale behind this approach was that non violent extremists could provide valuable information and knowledge to counter the threat of violent attacks on British soil. This was, however, a position completely at odds with the Quillian doctrine on counter extremism and the approach which has now dominated government policy.


104 Arènes "Prevention of Terrorism in Britain: Fighting Violent or Non-violent Extremism? The Influence of the Quilliam Foundation" 63

105 Arènes “Prevention of Terrorism in Britain: Fighting Violent or Non-violent Extremism? The Influence of the Quilliam Foundation”63-64
Quilliam, in its launch paper, was critical of what it saw as partnerships which legitimised Islamist ideology.\textsuperscript{106} It pushed an agenda which sought to tackle all forms of extremism. This criticism of the Government would form a strong united voice amongst a number of neoconservative organisations and think tanks. In addition to Quilliam’s condemnation of government policy, The Policy Exchange and the Centre for Social Cohesion were vocal in what they saw as the platforming of Islamist narrative.\textsuperscript{107} In 2009 The Policy Exchange released their analysis of Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) entitled \textit{Choosing Our Friends Wisely: Criteria for Engagement with Muslim Groups} (Policy Exchange 2009). In this analysis they were highly critical of the government’s PVE initiative. Stating that whilst it was made with the best of intentions, it had failed to work and had in some cases resulted in public funds being utilised by extremist organisations to advance an anti western Islamist narrative, which was directly at odds with modern British values.\textsuperscript{108} The result of this criticism, undoubtedly heightened by global developments in the War on Terror, was for the Government to modify its counter extremism policy to explicitly include non-violent extremism. In 2011 the UK government published a revision of the CONTEST strategy. It marked a significant change in governmental tactics in dealing with counter terrorism. As can be seen from the document, the findings of Quilliam and other organisations, have lead to a rethinking of the policy: ‘We believe that Prevent work to date has not clearly recognised the way in which some terrorist ideologies draw on and make use of extremist ideas which are espoused and circulated by apparently non-violent organisations, very often operating within the law.’\textsuperscript{109} Whilst assuring that human rights legislation was not going to be changed in regards to the legality of the existence of non-violent extremism organisations, it made explicit mention of the need to challenge ‘extremist ideas that are conducive to terrorism and also part of a terrorist narrative,’ .\textsuperscript{110} In addition it states ‘…nor will we fund or work with extremist groups’. Turning to the Prevent publication, the strategy is to chal-


\textsuperscript{107} Arènes “Prevention of Terrorism in Britain: Fighting Violent or Non-violent Extremism? The Influence of the Quilliam Foundation” 66


\textsuperscript{110} HM Government. “CONTEST” 60.
lenge both violent and non-violent extremist behaviour. In addition there is clear indication of the adoption of the radicalisation narrative as espoused by the Quilliam Foundation. There is reference to Salafist theological traditions, and the Muslim Brotherhood, as being resources from which violent radicals draw their thinking.\(^\text{111}\)

Since 2011, Quilliam has ceased to be funded by the Home Office, a move which was originally agreed upon on the creation of the organisation - funding on a decreasing scale until alternative sources could be secured\(^\text{112}\), a fact skirted around by those who see this as the government disassociating itself from the Foundation.

Whilst the two strands of opinion on Quilliam’s relationship to government cannot both be factually correct, it seems irrelevant to the conclusions drawn. In both cases the perception remains that Quilliam is complicit in the establishment of the current counter extremism policy as enshrined in statute by the UK Government. These policies, in particular the PREVENT strategy, have been met with intense criticism from both within and without the UK’s Muslim communities\(^\text{113}\). Quilliam is seen as being complicit in the securitisation of British Muslims, of creating a climate of fear and indirectly facilitating the rise of islamophobia in Britain.

### The Problem of Prevent

As has been discussed the UK counter extremism strategy has undergone significant change since its 2007 beginnings. The current strategy as we know it was published back in the 2011, and whilst having undergone revision remains largely the same. Known as CONTEST, the UK counter extremism policy is made of four parts, known as the three Ps - Protect, Prepare, Pursue, Prevent. The main focus of the policy over the last few years has been the Pursue and Prevent elements.


\(^{112}\) Arènes “Prevention of Terrorism in Britain: Fighting Violent or Non-violent Extremism? The Influence of the Quilliam Foundation”

most contested element of the strategy and the one to which we shall turn our attention is the Prevent element.

The aim of the Prevent strategy, as defined by the legislation is to ‘reduce the threat to the UK from terrorism by stopping people becoming terrorist or supporting terrorism’. In essence it is a pre-emptive strategy consisting of three main objectives; ‘to respond to the ideology challenge of terrorism, to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism, and to work with sectors/institutions where there is a risk of radicalisation’. Under section 26(1) of the Counter Terrorism Act 2015, a duty is placed upon public institutions, including local authorities, education institutions and the NHS, to ‘have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’. In practice this means that institutions are under an obligation to report to the relevant authority those persons whom they suspect may be at risk of radicalisation or extremism. Such a duty then raises the question of what is meant by 'extremism'. As has been noted, UK legislation defines extremism as behaviour which goes against British values, these values being freedom of expression, belief tolerance and mutual respect.

In order to determine what is or is not extremist behaviour a benchmark needs to be set. In the context of UK legislation that benchmark is secular humanism. However, undoubtedly there are those in secular society and among religious communities who are going to have different views on what is extreme. A conservative Christian is going to have very different opinions on issues such as same sex marriage and concepts of gender, than mainstream secular society. Whilst these views may seem extreme or outmoded in the eyes of some elements of the media and secular society they will not appear so to that person or the religious community to which they belong. This problem of freedom of belief in the context of religious faith has been seen recently in the UK courts in the example of the Northern Irish Baking firm, Ashers, who refused to make a cake with the slogan, ‘We Support Gay Rights’, as they stated it went against their religious beliefs. For many, such a belief

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would be seen as ‘extreme’ and contrary to the British values mentioned but to the couple who held these views, they were not extreme but instead were their religious beliefs based on Biblical teachings. As such, the question is raised as to where religion is accommodated when the benchmark being used is secular humanism and in what form is religion deemed to be acceptable. The problematic nature of trying to define extremism reveals the tension that exists when freedom of belief is applied to religious faith. It is easy to see how a particular religious belief could be held to be extreme when the benchmark is secular humanism. It is perhaps then not surprising to hear that the Prevent strategy has come under intense criticism from both the Muslim and non Muslim communities. For many it is Orwellian in nature, perhaps reminiscent of the film Minority Report where the mere thought of committing a crime is punished. Primarily its critics see it as a securitisation of the British Muslim community, a spying exercise which is more of a hindrance to the battle against radicalisation than an effective solution to the problem.

A significant part of the Prevent strategy is early intervention to combat the risk of radicalisation of vulnerable individuals and this is done through what is known as the Channel Programme. Channel is a multi agency process which seeks to identify those vulnerable to radicalisation and provide them with the support and guidance to help them make better informed decisions. Under the Channel guidance, vulnerability to radicalisation is assessed by reference to three factors: engagement with a group, cause of ideology, intent to cause harm and capability to cause harm. Whilst ‘intent and capability to cause harm’ is fairly self explanatory in their relation to radicalisation, it is the engagement with a group, cause or ideology, that has been of the most concern to those critical of the strategy, perhaps due to the width of its reach. Under the Channel guidance, engagement can be discerned from such factors as a change in dress, the possession of material or symbols associated with extremism, a change of friendship group and interaction with others that suggest an identification with a group.

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with an ideology or cause. The vagueness of the guidance and its recognition that there is no one
identifier of radicalisation, is what critics point to as the weakness of the policy. Critics of the policy
suggest it means that discussion of the Islamic faith is polarised between the extremist forms and
the depoliticised and passive forms. A binary is created, when this in practice does not exist.

If we are to take one example of the Prevent duty, it is easy to unravel the unease with which the
strategy is greeted. As has been stated, Prevent places a duty on all public sector employees, how-
ever the most controversial is the duty of Prevent in schools. The Prevent duty was met with strong
opposition, with The National Union of Teachers calling for the duty to be scrapped. Under the
Prevent duty teachers have a legal obligation to report any child they believe is at risk of radicalisa-
tion. But what makes a child at risk of radicalisation and what is merely a children acting rebel-
lessly during their formative years? For teachers who have no specialist knowledge of religion or
ethnic minorities this is a question which poses real difficulties and it is easy to see how mistakes
can be made. In order to aid teachers in their duty, the Department of Children, Schools and Fami-
lies has issued guidance in the form Learning to be Safe Together: A Toolkit to Help Schools Con-
tribute to the Prevention of Violent Extremism (2008). Interestingly this publication explicitly
refers to the Quilliam Foundation and it appears to have adopted the Foundation’s recommendations
in identifying indicators of extremism. There is very little in the way of guidance as to what should
point to a child at risk of radicalisation, and as such it is again under the Prevent factors outlined
above that guidance must be taken. The feeling from teachers themselves is that the result of the
guidance and subsequent training is that Muslim students are disproportionally targeted under the
strategy. Concern has also been expressed by parents in that they are at risk of losing their chil-
dren under the government initiative for holding conservative views which may be deemed ‘ex-
treme’ or adopting religious dress or having an interest in politics.

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121 HM Government “Channel Guidance”

10.1177/0306396808096393 52 - 56.

123 Richard Adams, "Teachers Back Motion Calling for Prevent Strategy to Be Scrapped," The Guardian,
nut-back-motion-calling-prevent-strategy-radicalisation-scrapped.

124 Department for Children, Schools and Families. "Learning Together to Be Safe - A Toolkit to Help Schools

125 Adams, "Teachers Back Motion Calling for Prevent Strategy to Be Scrapped”

126 Khaleeli ‘ You worry they could take your kids: Is the Prevent strategy demonising Muslim School Children?’
In addition to this fear there have been alarming cases of the reporting of students whose behaviour has nothing to do with radicalisation. A recent example is a student at a school in Luton who was reported under the Prevent strategy for organising fundraising for Palestine at school. His interest in Palestine was deemed to amount to an indicator of a risk of radicalisation. This is not an isolated event and there have been a number of referrals to Channel for issues relating to political interests. This focus on politics as an indicator of radicalisation is a significant issue of contention as it is seen as depoliticising British Muslims. Partisan support for particular world views, for example, support for recognition of the state of Palestine, are being used as specific indicators of radicalisation. In this way the acceptability of religion is seen to be dependent on its ability to exist within a vacuum, unaffected by geopolitical events. Quilliam’s complicity in the creation of current counter extremism strategies has been a significant factor in its rejection by wide sections of the Muslim community and the Quilliam response to the Prevent strategy has only served to further this opinion. On 7th June 2011, the Foundation officially responded to the review of the Prevent strategy by the UK Government. The Foundation welcomed the changes which had been made, in particular the Government’s new commitment to challenging non-violent and violent extremism. Quilliam commended the Government on recognising the importance that ideology plays in the process of radicalisation, and the taking away of funding from Islamist organisations which are perceived as ‘extreme’. For many members of the Muslim community who find the policy to be islamophobic and to have securitised their existence, this has only sought to demonstrate Quilliam’s disconnect from the realities of life at grass roots level and an ideological secular response to religious faith. From the analysis undertaken it is clear that Quilliam’s close relationship with government has been a significant factor in its rejection, in particular from the Muslim communities it looks to engage. For some, Quilliam, is merely the puppet of government, a way for counter extremism policies to be presented as acceptable because they are advanced by those who are Muslims. More critically, some view the Foundation as acting subversively to influence government policy in order to address what is sees as the root cause of extremism, Islamism. The result of both of these views has been the same; Quilliam is perceived as being complicit in the establishment of draconian and repressive counter extremism policies that unfairly target Muslim communities. The Prevent policy and the


duty placed on public sector employees, particularly teachers and university lecturers, has created an air of suspicion.

The policy has created suspect communities and has promoted a culture of fear and distrust. Moreover Quilliam’s vocal approval of the Policy has only served to highlight what critics see as out of touch attitudes to the realities of life under Prevent.

**A Serious of Unfortunate Incidents**

As has been discussed, there appears to exist some intrinsic ideological differences between Quilliam, its critics and Muslim communities at large, which have formed the basis for feelings varying from unease to an intense dislike in regards to the Foundation. There have also, however, been a series of ‘unfortunate incidents’ which have caught the attention of the media and brought Quilliam into the limelight for all the wrong reasons. It is perhaps these incidents which have made more of an impact on its credibility with the ordinary public than anything else. Reference to these incidents is necessary to fully understand what went wrong for Quilliam. Three examples highlight the issue of negative public perception of Quilliam.

**(1) The ‘Terror List’**

On 4th of August 2010 The Guardian Newspaper reported on an apparent ‘terror list’ which formed part of a briefing compiled by Quilliam which was sent to the director general of the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT) a directorate of the Home Office. The list in question appears as an appendices to a strategic briefing compiled by Quilliam entitled ‘Preventing Terrorism: Where next for Britain?’ Appendix A of this document lays out a list of entities which Quilliam alleged were sympathetic to Islamism. Listed amongst these were The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the Islam Channel and Birmingham Central Mosque. It advised the Government to be wary of engagement with the groups listed, as association would empower aspects of Islamist ideology.

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which are the root cause of terrorism. The document goes on to list groups who have Wahhabi influences, such as the Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET), an organisation run largely by members of a Muslim community in London, which works with at-risk youth to divert them from involvement in antisocial behaviour, the London Central mosque and the World Association of Muslim Youth. Whilst recognising that some of these groups may have the ability to ‘reach a degree of reconciliation between conservative social values and a liberal secular space’, it warns that ultimately the Wahhabi ideology behind these groups threatens integration and national cohesion in Britain. While not directly linking any of these organisations to any extremist groups it is careful to point out that the same conservative attitudes are an ‘essential part of the Salafist-Jihad ideology which lies behind al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups’. Finally the briefing lists groups associated with traditional South Asian and Sufi approaches to Islam which it cites as organisations that could bring positive results when worked with. As has been previously mentioned the Foundation seems keen to encourage government to work with Sufi groups as opposed to other faith positions. The document however fails to demonstrate how Muslims from other faith traditions, are to be represented. Such an omission seems to play into the hands of those who see the Foundation as out of touch with the reality of being Muslim in Britain today, particularly the ethnic and cultural diversity that is present in British Muslim society. While the briefing does not explicitly direct the government against working with the organisations listed, it all but says that doing so would be counter productive to preventing extremism. The list is extensive representing a wide array of Muslim communities across Britain. The response to the document was as expected strongly critical. Condemnation of the Foundation’s actions came from both the community and political sphere. The Labour MP Keith Vaz stated that the actions of the Foundation were of concern as it was ‘very dangerous to be drawing up lists of this kind’. Robert Lambert, the former head of the Muslim Contact Unit, stated that it ‘demonises a whole range of groups that in my experience have made valuable contributions to counter-terrorism.’ A number of groups mentioned in the briefing came out to condemn Quilliam for its actions. Fatima Khan of the Muslim Safety Unit stated that it

131 Quilliam "Preventing Terrorism - Where Next for Britain" 59.
132 Quilliam "Preventing Terrorism - Where Next for Britain" 61.
133 Quilliam "Preventing Terrorism - Where Next for Britain” 59- 60.
134 Quilliam "Preventing Terrorism - Where Next for Britain.”61 - 62.
135 Dodd, "List Sent to Terror Chief “
136 Dodd, "List Sent to Terror Chief “
showed Quilliam’s desperation to secure government funding\textsuperscript{137}, whilst Inayat Bunglawala, chair of Muslims4Uk, described the list as a ‘Stasi Manual’ and called it appalling and self serving.\textsuperscript{138} Quilliam responded to the allegations, denying the existence of any ‘terror list’, arguing it was the exact opposite, yet these were groups which should remain legal but challenged in civic debate.\textsuperscript{139}

In whatever way the briefing was supposed to be received, it is difficult not to interpret it as a list of organisations which Quilliam feels that the government should avoid. The effect of this was to call for a number of organisations which represent large sections of the Muslim population in Britain to be frozen out of the conversation in regard to counter extremism. It is therefore apparent that Quilliam has by virtue of its action managed to alienate a wide array of actors, many of whom operate at grass roots levels in the communities the Government is trying to bring on board. It is seen by many as limiting the voice of Muslims by advocating for a specific de-politicised version of Islam\textsuperscript{140} and has left many disappointed concerning the Government's motives and vision for Muslim communities in Britain.

\textit{(2) Maajid Nawaz and the Twitter Storm}

Since the formation of Quilliam in 2008, it has been Maajid Nawaz who has emerged as the organisation’s most prominent and recognised figure. He is a regular on mainstream television in both the UK and US, and is often invited to discuss issues of Islamic extremism in the wake of atrocities such as the Paris attack.\textsuperscript{141} In addition he has a large twitter following, is a regular contributor to newspaper columns and radio shows, and even ran for public office as a Liberal Democrat candidate. In Quilliam publications and press releases Nawaz is a regular contributor, whether providing a foreword to a report or an opinion piece on the media treatment. Nawaz, a self described former radical, has even published an autobiography entitled \textit{Radical} (Nawaz 2012) documenting his own

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Dodd, "List Sent to Terror Chief"
\item Yvonne Ridley, "Blacklisted for Being Muslim: On Quilliam, the EDL and the Islamophobia Industry," Ceasefire Magazine, October 05, 2013, accessed September 29, 2016, \url{https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/blacklisted-muslim-quilliam-edl-islamophobia-industry/}.
\item Quilliam Foundation 'Setting the Record Straight' accessed September 29 2016, \url{http://www.quilliaminternational.com/wp-content/uploads/faqs/setting-the-record-straight.pdf}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
path into and exit from the Islamist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir. A cursory reading of Radical reveals a clear connection between Quilliam’s approach to countering extremism and the personal experience of one of its founders.\footnote{Maajid Nawaz, Radical: My Journey out of Islamist Extremism (London: Random House, 2012), Kindle Edition.} Nawaz’s actions and opinion have become intrinsically linked with the Foundation.

When Nawaz retweeted a picture of a t-shirt which had part of a controversial comic strip featuring Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad printed on it, the reaction was anything but beneficial for Nawaz and Quilliam. The incident itself followed Nawaz’s appearance on the BBC debate show The Big Question, during which two students were pictured wearing t-shirts with an image of Jesus saying ‘Hi Mo’ to a stick figure, intended to represent Muhammad. This image was taken from a larger comic strip which depicted Jesus and the Prophet engaging in sexual acts, watching pornography and using colourful language. After appearing on the BBC show Nawaz tweeted a picture of the T-shirt in question with the caption ‘This is not offensive and I'm sure God is greater than to feel threatened by it.’\footnote{Martin Asser ‘What the Muhammad cartoons portray’ BBC News January 2 2010. Accessed October 2 2017 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4693292.stm}

scope of this work, but what is undeniable, however, is the controversy which surrounds the issue; it evokes strong emotions and often combative responses which have resulted in violence from both far right and Islamic extremists. Criticism came from across the board in response to Nawaaz’s actions; The Liberal Democratic peer Lord Tony Greaves, deemed the behaviour ‘absolutely not acceptable’ and required a ‘fulsome apology’. In addition he stated that a liberal attitude did not give someone the right to offend another, but was rather about ‘tolerating the religious and ethical views of others and making a serious effort not to insult people’. In addition a letter signed by sixty Muslim organisations and individuals was sent to Nick Clegg intimating concern. A petition for Nawaz's removal as a Liberal Democrat Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Hampstead and Kilburn garnered 21,000 signatures. Nawaaz received threats to his life as a result of his actions.

Whilst the issue was never expressed as the direct opinion of the Quilliam Foundation, Nawaaz’s visibility as almost the public representative meant the organisation was drawn into the controversy. Many saw his action as a poorly chosen attempt to gain attention and publicity for himself and his organisation. For many it was an example of how out of touch the organisation and its leaders were with mainstream Muslim populations. It also played to those who saw Quilliam as taking funding away from organisations present at grass roots level and who were in touch with the concerns and issues at the heart of Muslim communities within Britain.


The final incident which needs mentioning is Quilliam’s controversial and albeit brief relationship with the far right. On 8th October 2013, Quilliam announced that it had been working with Tommy Robinson the founder and leader of the English Defence League (EDL), a group known for its anti-Islamic views, and his deputy Kevin Carroll, in order to facilitate their departure from the organisation. Both Robinson and Carroll, the Foundation stated, had realised the error of their ways; recognising the danger of far-right extremism they hoped to follow a new path, away from the EDL and similar organisations. This announcement was followed shortly afterwards by a press conference organised by Quilliam, during which Robinson and Carroll officially announced their resignation from the EDL and ‘acknowledged the dangers of far-right extremism and the ongoing need to counter Islamist ideology not with violence but with better, democratic ideas.’

This unlikely partnership between Robinson, Carroll and Quilliam was met with scepticism with many seeing it as nothing more than a PR stunt. It wasn’t long before this scepticism became justified. In 2015, after Mr Robinson alleged that he had been paid by Quilliam to leave the EDL, the Foundation admitted that money had changed hands with Robinson during his departure from the EDL. It was quick to assert that it had not paid to neutralise Robinson, rather it had ‘remunerated [him], as an external actor, after invoicing us for costs associated with outreach’. Perhaps adding more salt to the wound Robinson has gone on to work with Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (Pegida), addressing a rally in the Netherlands during which he declared his

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154 Quilliam, "Quilliam Facilitates Tommy Robinson Leaving the English Defence League (2013)


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pride at having established the EDL. It would seem that very little has changed for Robinson and the affair has been nothing short of a disaster for Quilliam. It has brought Quilliam’s tactics on tackling extremism and their effectiveness into question; the approach it advocated for drawing someone away from extremism has in this case very publicly and rather embarrassingly failed.

Chapter III
What next for Counter Extremism

In light of the discussion outlined above, it is apparent that Quilliam has failed to gain support of both those within and without Britain’s Muslim communities. Before concluding, it therefore seems appropriate to ask the question: where does the nation go from here in regard to counter extremism policy? The analysis of Quilliam and the difficulties it has faced, provide a number of suggestions for how better to approach the issue of extremism.

The analysis of the different theories with regard to radicalisation discourse demonstrates the need for better and more informed research into the area. A common theme in the current literature is the lack of accurate data available in coming to evidence based conclusions on the causes of radicalisation. Studies into extremism and radicalisation are notoriously difficult, as it deals with the most unpredictable of subjects, human beings, however the Demos study has demonstrated that focus and well evidenced research can be achieved, if the time and effort is invested.

This analysis has demonstrated the need to adopt an open minded approach to the causes of radicalisation. It is suggested that the puzzle metaphor is a good example of how better to conceptualise it, as it takes into account the non-linear nature of the issue. In recognising the multi faceted nature of radicalisation, all aspects of the problem need to be addressed. Dismissing issues such as foreign policy concerns and grievance is only counter productive to the overall goal. It is important to recognise how important political and social factors have on an individual’s journey; racism, islam-
ophobia and poverty all have a part to play. Making positive steps to address these issues will only work to improve the situation.

The discussion would also suggest that there needs to be a clear separation from government institutions and the bodies who try to tackle extremism. For many who already hold grievances towards the government, a close association with government reduces the legitimacy of the association in the eyes of many individuals. Most of all a balance needs to be struck between intervention when people are at risk of radicalisation and a policy which results in effectively securitising the community. Intervention is of course necessary and channels need to exist for those who work in areas where vulnerability to radicalisation exist. However, there needs to be a proper separation of what is deemed extreme and dangerous and what is not. Greater recognition of the different viewpoints religious communities and secular society will have on what is deemed extreme is needed so as to better inform decision making and reporting. What is extreme to secular society is not necessarily going to be seen as extreme in the eyes of a religious community. This is perhaps the greatest hurdle which needs to be overcome, how to find a balance between these two, at times, opposing views. Currently an air of suspicion exists which is leading to dangerous outcomes, and this must be avoided at all costs. A policing duty placed on those outside the police force does not seem conducive to counter extremism work. It has only created suspect communities and increased what is felt by many to be the securitisation of their communities. Instead counter extremism work should focus on workable counter narratives, addressed at grass roots level by organisations who are better in touch with the factors that lead to radicalisation. These alternative narratives should not limit the political ambitions of young people but instead allow for open and honest discussion.

In addition it needs to be recognised that excluding organisations from the discussion because they possess an ideology which is deemed radical, even though non-violent, is not the best solution. In many cases radical organisations can be best placed to act as a safety valve for those who have such views, by allowing them to express themselves but in an environment which condemns violence. Most importantly of all what is pivotal is the support and backing of the community at large, without this any effort is doomed to fail. As has been demonstrated by past efforts such as the Muslim Contact Unit, some of the most valuable information in countering extremism comes from the community. This information will only be forth coming when the community is confident in the agencies that counter radicalisation.
Finally, it is important to be mindful of the sensitivities that surround the issues of religion particularly when it involves criticism. Whilst limiting freedom of speech is not advocated, it is necessary to exercise sensitivity when dealing with issues of a controversial nature. The infamous Rushdie Affair illustrates perhaps most effectively the sensitivity surrounding freedom of expression in relation to criticism of religion. This incident related to the publication of his work *The Satanic Verses*, a fictional work inspired by the life of Muhammad. The work caused outrage across the world due to its depiction of Islam as ‘a deceitful, ignorant, and sexually deviant religion.’ At the height of the tension caused by the publication, Ayatollah Khomeini the then Supreme Leader of Iran, issued a Fatwa calling for Rushdie and his publishers to be killed.

Central to the controversy was the issue of freedom of expression and whether there should be any limits, particularly when the exercise of this freedom has the effect of vilifying a minority faith group. Rushdie’s supporters were emphatic in their belief that there should be no limitation to freedom of expression, viewing it as the cornerstone of democracy. In their opinion free and open exchange of ideas and opinion is beneficial to all sector of society. However, as critics point out these exchanges of opinion were not between groups on an equal footing. Rushdie occupied a privileged position, whilst many of his critics in Britain, members of Muslim communities occupied positions at the bottom of the socio economic ladder. Whilst calls to violence are never to be legitimised many Muslim communities were calling simply for a balance to be made between freedom of expression and the recognition of religiously sensitive issues and deliberately provocative acts. For many the Rushdie affair demonstrated the fallacy that freedom of expression benefits all in western society: ‘What we still must learn from the Rushdie Affair is that freedom of expression, while in theory an extraordinary concept, rarely functions in practice in a way that is truly and equally inclusive of the diversity of voices and perspectives in Western societies.’

For Tariq Modood, Professor of Sociology, Politics and Public Policy at the University of Bristol, in cases such as the Rushdie affair and the case of the Danish cartoons it is not the works themselves that are the main issue, instead they are the triggers which bring to the forefront the real issues which exist problems of racism, securitisation and marginalisation which are all only reinforced by the use of

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160 Todd Green ‘The Satanic Verses 25 Years Later: Why the Rushdie Affair Still Matters’

161 Todd Green ‘The Satanic Verses 25 Years Later: Why the Rushdie Affair Still Matters’
humiliating and insensitive images.\textsuperscript{162} For Modood, if what we are trying to achieve in western society is a integrated multicultural society, then restraint must be exercised in using freedom of expression. In his opinion this is not to say that such expression should be banned, this would be undemocratic, rather he states that responsibility must be placed on individuals to recognise what is ‘lawful but not acceptable’.\textsuperscript{163} Debate is an important aspect of the counter narrative, but it must be done in a way which engages the participant not pushes them away. In approaching counter extremism strategy it must be recognised that the values we are seeking to protect for example tolerance, respect, human rights and freedoms, cannot be compromised in pursuing counter extremism policies, as to do so would be at risk of undermining the very things we are seeking to protect.


Concluding Remarks

At the outset of this thesis a question was posed: What went wrong for Quilliam? The short answer to the question is that the Foundation failed to gain credibility with the very communities it sought to work with. Whilst it did for a time hold favour with policy makers, it never gained the support of Muslim communities in Britain. It would also seem that its once close relationship with the Government has waned, and that politicians and policymakers have sought to distance themselves from the controversy surrounding the organisation.\textsuperscript{164} This analysis has demonstrated how the organisation’s commitment to a very specific and determined vision of what causes radicalisation has been instrumental in its failure. Its opinion that Islamist ideology lies at the heart of radicalisation is yet to be proven. There are many voices in opposition to this view and as has been demonstrated, a number of research studies have been undertaken which question the legitimacy of this theory. It would seem that to conceive of radicalisation as a linear process may be to misunderstand the phenomenon entirely. What can be said for certain is that until further research is conducted, adopting such a specific view risks hindering the battle against violent extremism. Leading on from this, it has been demonstrated how Quilliam’s relationship with the UK Government has further eroded its legitimacy. For some it is merely a puppet of government, for others a subversive organisation whose tentacles have reached into the very heart of government policy making. What can be said for certain is that this relationship with government has made Quilliam complicit in the creation of a counter extremism policy which is despised by many. The Prevent strategy has left communities feeling securitised and fearful. It has been linked to a rise in islamophobia and has created a general feeling of mistrust and alienation. The ambiguity surrounding what is meant by extremist behaviour only serves to further marginalise and has led to the misreporting of individuals who had no involvement in extremism. The issue serves to highlight the subjective nature of what is extreme; secular and religious society are always going to have very different opinions on this. Finally, Quilliam’s insensitive actions have for many been the final nail in the coffin. Its list of organisations which it deemed to be sympathetic to Islamist ideology was described as something out of a Stasi Manual and sought to demonise a number of prominent Muslim organisations. The Foundation’s relationship with far right extremists and its failure to deliver on its promise of de-radicalisation has been called into question by many, challenging the motives and abilities of the Foundation. Finally


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the actions of its members have failed to uphold the very values of tolerance that it seeks to protect. The tweeting of satirical religious cartoons was for many a direct provocation, intended to attract attention for an organisation who no longer enjoyed the limelight it once did.

In understanding what went wrong for Quilliam, it is hoped that lessons can be learned in order to approach the issue of countering extremism in a more fruitful way. The field of counter extremism is in desperate need of further empirical research to truly understand what makes someone adopt extremist beliefs which lead to violence. Arguably counter narrative is key to combatting extremism, but it cannot be a narrative that limits the political ambitions or diminishes legitimately held grievances: such narratives do not work. Instead policy needs to focus on engaging all members of the community, regardless of belief in order to establish workable solutions to the issue of extremism. In conclusion Quilliam has been a victim of its own actions and ideology and whilst it continues to operate, it does so against the back drop of having united people from across the religious, political and social spectrum, in their condemnation of the Foundation.
Bibliography


