

CONVERTS TO ISLAM AND HOME GROWN JIHADISM

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By Dr Julia Rushchenko

Cover Images: Left: <https://www.theapricity.com/forum/showthread.php?103486-Classify-Syrian-terrorist-MMA-fighter-amp-German-rapper-Deso-Dogg>;
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Denis Cuspert (the German national who was killed in a U.S. air strike in Syria) is on the cover page. The first picture depicts him as a rapper in Berlin known as Deso Dogg. The second picture portrays him as a (most likely) already radicalised individual who had converted to Islam and joined one of the Salafi groups.

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Executive Summary

- Similar to all religious groups, the Muslim community contains within it a proportion of believers who were not raised within the faith, but converted to it a later stage in their lives. Like the vast majority of Muslims, these converts are peaceful and law-abiding.
- However, though the process of conversion to Islam is not indicative of radicalisation, when taken together with other aggravating factors such as a criminal record, stigmatisation, paternal absence, identity conflict, and exposure to the messages of radical preachers, it is an indicator of vulnerability to extremist ideology. Converts are often more malleable and vulnerable to radical rhetoric, often combining enthusiasm to change the world with a vacuum of knowledge about different interpretations of Islam.
- The participation of converts to Islam has become one of the distinctive features of home-grown jihadism in Europe. Indeed, converts are over-represented among foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, and have been responsible for a range of major terrorist attacks.
- Notably, ultra-conservative Salafi groups have proven more adept at proselytising activities. In addition, the Islamic State (IS) has worked to ensure that its message is capable of being embraced by followers from a diverse array of backgrounds. This helps to explain the tendency of some converts to favour the ultra-conservative version of Islam, gravitate towards religious and social conservatism, and occasionally, engage in acts of terrorism.
- For some, the attraction of Islamist ideology is similar to the appeal of criminal networks, except that the motivations of participation are not linked to profit. Instead, socio-psychological factors of power, dominance, acceptance and belonging are dominant. The idea of jihad can attract individuals with a criminal past, by serving as a means of demonstrating rebellion and “repenting for sins”. The nexus between gangs, petty crime and conversions to Islam should be studied in more depth.
- While this report focuses on the converts to Islam, more attention should be paid to “born-again Muslims” who go through the process of rediscovering their faith and could also be drawn into extremism.
- Likewise, incarcerated people share a set of grievances and often exhibit other vulnerabilities mentioned in this report, and could be an easy target for Islamist recruitment and indoctrination. Therefore, more attention should be paid to conversions to Islam that take place in the context of prisons and probation services, with a particular focus on juvenile offenders.
- One of the key findings of this report is that the appeal of radical Islamist ideology can extend well beyond communities historically associated with Islam. This should be taken into consideration when devising counter-radicalisation programmes and reviewing the Prevent strategy.

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1. Understanding the Process of Conversion

1.1 Introduction

Converts to Islam represent a small percentage of the Muslim community in Western countries. Like the majority of Muslims around the world, most converts are peaceful and law-abiding. Yet when it comes to those individuals who engage in Islamist extremism in Europe, and perpetrate religiously motivated violence, available data suggests that converts are considerably over-represented. Between 1998 and 2015, 16% of Islamist terrorist offences carried out in the United Kingdom were committed by converts.¹² In 2015, the Economist noted that while converts in the United Kingdom make up less than 4% of Muslims, they constitute 12% of home-grown jihadists.³ In addition, converts are also over-represented among European recruits who join ISIS.⁴

Are these figures coincidental, or is there a correlation between the act of conversion and radicalisation? While there have recently been some attempts⁵ to explain the issue of converts' over-representation among radicalised individuals, and their engagement in both non-violent and violent extremism, a comprehensive analysis of how and why converts turn to extremism is lacking.

The lack of data largely explains why experts in radicalisation mostly focus on 'heritage Muslims' (individuals who are born and raised with Islam as their religion), and very often overlook converts. Yet there is substantial evidence (detailed in Chapter 3) that overseas terrorist groups have increasingly been focusing on foreign audiences, especially recent converts, to attract more followers or recruits. Therefore, this report aims to explore the dynamic of conversion to Islam, and links with 'home-grown' jihadism in Western countries.

1.2. The Stresses and Strains of Conversion

Conversion represents the adoption of another religious identity, and the internalisation of new teachings and values. However, this process is neither instant nor linear.⁶ In contrast, it is often a continuing process that encompasses an individual's re-evaluation of events and their meanings over a sustained period of time. The process of conversion comprises both behavioural and cognitive changes, in turn triggering new social practices. Accordingly, conversion has a dual trajectory in sociological terms: conversion to a new faith, but also accommodation to a new culture.⁷

Notably, Islam is characterised by the shortest conversion ceremony when compared to other religions, requiring only a recitation of the testimony of faith (*shahada*). Another facet of the relative simplicity of conversion to Islam is the fact that many versions of Islam offer a strict and straightforward list of what is prohibited and what is allowed, offering clarity and guidance that is not true in the case of other religions.

¹² Stuart, H., 'Islamist Terrorism: Analysis of Offences and Attacks in the UK (1998–2015)', The Henry Jackson Society (2017), available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Islamist-Terrorism-preview-1.pdf>, last visited: 4 September 2017.

³ This means 39 converts.

⁴ 'Converts to Islam are likelier to radicalise than native Muslims', *The Economist*, 1 April 2017, available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21719833-britain-converts-make-up-less-4-muslims-12-home-grown-jihadists-converts>, last visited: 4 September 2017.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Uhlmann, M., 'European Converts to Terrorism' *Middle East Quarterly* 15.3 (2007), p. 33; Van San, M., 'Lost Souls Searching for Answers? Belgian and Dutch Converts Joining the Islamic State', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9.5 (2015); Mullins, S., 'Re-Examining the Involvement of Converts in Islamist Terrorism: A Comparison of the U.S. and the U.K.', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9.6 (2015).

⁷ Inge, A., *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 7.

⁸ Suleiman, Y., 'Narratives of Conversion to Islam in Britain: Female Perspectives', University of Cambridge (2013), available at: http://www.cis.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/narratives_of_conversion_report.pdf, last visited: 4 September 2017.

From the point of view of social acceptance and group membership, conversion to Islam offers both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, certain strains of Islam as an ideology, including its more conservative interpretations such as Salafism, can provide an empowering identity to young people who feel alienated, rootless or disaffected.⁸ On the other, some ideas associated with Islam are viewed by Western societies as being detached from the rational modernity. Academics such as Kevin Brice refer to what they describe as “double marginality”, with converts to Islam choosing not only to join a religious minority, but also one that has come under increased scrutiny and suspicion after the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks.⁹ Indeed, many families view the conversion of their children as a negative phenomenon, on the basis that by doing so, they embrace the status of a “minority within a minority”, opening themselves up to judgemental behaviour from society at large in response to their conversion.¹⁰ A study published by Cambridge’s Centre of Islamic Studies in 2016, emphasised that these attitudes can sometimes reinforce feelings of isolation and dislocation felt by many new converts in Britain.¹¹

Converts are often portrayed as being more vulnerable to fundamentalist ideas, often combining wild enthusiasm with a lack of knowledge about their new religion, making them susceptible to radicals and terrorist recruiters. Several theories have been suggested to explain converts’ vulnerability and their disproportionate level of involvement in Islamist extremism. Most notably, these include: 1) converts’ lack of knowledge of Islam, which would explain their “zeal” and the desire to show dedication;¹² 2) the tendency of converts to come from troubled backgrounds, often blighted by physical abuse, drug addiction, criminal activity,¹³ or behavioural issues in childhood.¹⁴ Sam Mullins, from the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, notes that American converts in the post-9/11 period were more likely to suffer from mental health issues than the non-convert population.¹⁵

These explanations could explain why, in statistical terms, converts tend to be more fanatical with regard to interpretations of Islam than heritage Muslims. There is a perception that converts will never be truly accepted by the Muslim community, and may therefore need to demonstrate religious zeal in order to prove themselves, increase the potential for radicalisation. Terrorism experts also argue that the “outbidding spiral” prompts converts to move from organisations deemed not “radical enough” towards Islamist militancy. The process of outbidding takes place when members of a group compete against each other, with every person seeking to do more than the others in order to prove their belonging to the group.¹⁶

Although the sociological and psychological explanations of conversion do not constitute the main objective of this study, any assessment of this issue requires delving into existing research on converts’ motivations and backgrounds.

⁸ Inge, A., *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion*, p. 20.

⁹ Brice, K., 2010. ‘A Minority within a Minority: A Report on Converts to Islam in the United Kingdom’, Faith Matters (2010), available at: <http://faith-matters.org/images/stories/fm-reports/a-minority-within-a-minority-a-report-on-converts-to-islam-in-the-uk.pdf>, last visited: 4 September 2017, p. 1.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Suleiman, Y., ‘Narratives of Conversion to Islam in Britain: Male Perspectives’, University of Cambridge (2016), available at: <http://www.cis.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Narratives-of-Conversion-Report-1.pdf>, last visited: 4 September 2017; Zebiri, K., *British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2008).

¹² Uhlmann, M., ‘European Converts to Terrorism’, p. 33.

¹³ The issue of conversion and criminal record was mentioned when the CONTEST strategy was revised in 2011, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf, last visited: 4 September 2017, p. 87.

¹⁴ Van San, M., ‘Lost Souls Searching for Answers? Belgian and Dutch Converts Joining the Islamic State’.

¹⁵ Mullins, S., ‘Re-Examining the Involvement of Converts in Islamist Terrorism: A Comparison of the U.S. and the U.K.’

¹⁶ Bloom, M., *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Columbia, 2005).

1.3. Terminology

The term “converts” in this study contrasts with “heritage Muslims”. However, a plethora of terms are used to refer to people who make a conscious decision to embrace a new set of practices that are fundamentally different from previous beliefs, including “converts”, “reverts”, “new Muslims” and “neophytes”. The academic Yasir Suleiman suggests that the term “revert” is favoured by some because it reflects a return to the natural state of *fitra* (an Arabic concept which denotes a pure and God-given state of being).¹⁷ In the Russian political and religious context the term “neophytes” is preferred. While acknowledging the differences in terminology, the term “convert” is used throughout this report to denote the concept of moving from another faith or atheism to Islam.

Another important term to define is Salafism and its distinction from Wahhabism. Salafism is a philosophical worldview that seeks to follow the practices of the first three generations of Muslims, who are known as “*al salaf al salih*”, or “pious predecessors”. Salafism aims to draw Muslims back to a “pure” and “authentic” Islam that replicates the model of the Prophet Muhammad. Movements within Salafism differ over their views on political participation and the modern nation-state. Quintan Wiktorowicz offers the following typology of Salafi groups: 1) the purists (individuals who emphasise non-violent methods of education and propagation); 2) the politico (groups that advocate application of the Salafi creed to the political arena and); 3) the jihadi (groups that adopt a more militant ideology).¹⁸ The most popular interpretation of Salafism is derived from the teachings of the religious leader and theologian Muhammad ibn Abd-Wahhab and is often called “Wahhabism”. However, “Wahhabism” is regarded as a pejorative term by many of his followers and is a contested term in Saudi Arabia.

1.4. Structure of the Report

The report is divided into seven sections. The first section offers an introduction to the topic, identifies research problems and states the aims of the report. The second section discusses the methodology of the study. The third section considers the role played by converts in armed conflicts abroad as foreign fighters. The fourth section compares conversions to Islam in three countries: the United Kingdom, Germany and Russia. The fifth section examines case studies of converts involved in terrorist plots or extremism, and offers ten case studies. The sixth section discusses the report’s findings and suggests possible gaps and policy implications with regard to counter-radicalisation. Finally, the seventh section summarises and concludes, and outlines the implications for public policy.

¹⁷ Suleiman, Y., ‘Narratives of Conversion to Islam in Britain: Female Perspectives’, University of Cambridge (2013), p. 21.

¹⁸ Wiktorowicz, Q., ‘Anatomy of the Salafi movement’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29.207-239 (2006), available at: http://archives.cerium.ca/IMG/pdf/WIKTOROWICZ_2006_Anatomy_of_the_Salafi_Movement.pdf, last visited: 4 September 2017.

2. Methodology

The findings of this report were mostly derived from desk-based analysis of open intelligence sources, and academic studies conducted in a number of countries, including EU states, Russia and the United States. Additionally, expert interviews with academics and practitioners were conducted to clarify the main concepts. Because many EU countries do not collect statistical data on conversions to Islam and links to home-grown jihadism, a qualitative methodology based on analysis of a small sample of individual profiles was chosen as the main method of empirical enquiry. Examining case studies of converts to Islam involved in extremism and convicted for terrorism-related offences helped to clarify the links between conversions and radicalisation. The data collected for each case contributed to generating conclusions regarding current trends.

Ten individuals who had converted to Islam prior to committing terrorism-related offences were profiled for this study. The profiled individuals were citizens of the United Kingdom, Germany and Russia, and the historical overview focuses on the local context of these three countries. The case studies focus upon the perpetrators' biographies, as it is crucial to situate their crimes within the context of their families and life choices. Although the report does mention other converts who were accused of involvement in non-violent extremism, it focuses on the issue of violent extremism.

The individuals were profiled according to three aspects: 1) their personal background; 2) their previous radical views/political activity, and; 3) their pathways of conversion to Islam. The following demographic and sociological components were considered: gender, nationality, ancestry, family circumstances, education, and international experience. In addition, an examination was made of whether the converts had known links to proscribed organisations, or were known to authorities prior to their conversion. Finally, the assessment focuses on the individuals' experiences of converting to Islam, considering their ages at the time of conversion, the circumstances of their conversion, and the period of time between conversion and committing a terrorist attack or joining a terrorist group.

3. Background: Foreign Fighters and Converts

The issue of converts to Islam has become a matter of security concern with regard to the foreign fighters' phenomenon in Syria and Iraq. Foreign fighters are non-citizens of conflict states who, for a variety of different reasons, join insurgencies during civil conflicts abroad, either in fighting or non-fighting capacities. The academics Stern and Berger,¹⁹ attempting to explain the success of ISIS messaging in the West, point out that ISIS propaganda is disproportionately slanted toward foreign fighters, both in its content and its target audience. Important ISIS messages are commonly released simultaneously in English, French and German, then later translated into other languages, such as Russian, Indonesian and Urdu. Speaking about the social portrait of a typical foreign fighter, both they²⁰ and The Soufan Group, a company that provides strategic security intelligence services to governments and multinational organisations,²¹ agree that converts are disproportionately represented among Western recruits.

At the same time, there is no clarity with regard to precise numbers and the extent of converts' involvement in Syria and Iraq. Research conducted by The Soufan Group suggests that on average, 6% of foreign fighters from EU countries are converts.²² At the same time, a recent report by the International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT) which looked at foreign fighters from several European countries, concluded that between 6% and 23% of those who had travelled to Syria and Iraq could have been converts to Islam.²³ This range is insufficient to determine the exact percentage of converts among European individuals travelling to Syria and Iraq, but it does suggest that converts play an important role in the phenomenon of home-grown jihadism.

Over-representation of converts among foreign fighters is evident when looking at EU countries and the United States. France has so far witnessed the most alarming tendency with regard to the flow of foreign fighters to Syria. Around 1,800 French citizens or residents were affiliated with ISIS as of 2015.²⁴ Most of the French volunteers had no cultural or ethnic links to Syria, and 23% were converts (20% for men and 25% for women).²⁵ Similar figures could be found elsewhere in the European Union. In Italy, 29% of fighters were converts.²⁶ In a Danish dataset of 77 foreign fighter cases, at least 11 were identified to be converts.²⁷ According to a recent report by the George Washington University, which analysed the profiles of the 71 individuals charged in the United States for ISIS-related activities, those assessed constituted an incredibly heterogeneous group with regard to their ethnic origin, socio-economic and educational statuses. At the same time, around 40% of ISIS recruits in the United States are converts.²⁸

¹⁹ Stern, J. and John M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015).

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ 'Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq', The Soufan Group (2015), available at: http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf, last visited: 4 September 2017.

²² Barrett, R., 'Foreign Fighters in Syria', The Soufan Group (2014), available at: <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf>, last visited: 4 September 2017.

²³ Van Ginkel, B. and Eva Entenmann (eds.), 'The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union: Profiles, Threats & Policies', International Center for Counter Terrorism (2016), available at: https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf, last visited: 4 September 2017, p. 23.

²⁴ Pietrasanta, S., 'La déradicalisation, outil de lutte contre le terrorisme' [Deradicalisation, a tool to combat terrorism], Mission auprès du ministre de l'Intérieur (2015), available at: <http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/154000455.pdf>, last visited: 4 September 2017.

²⁵ Van Ginkel, B. and Eva Entenmann, 'The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union', International Center for Counter Terrorism (2016).

²⁶ Boncio, A., 'Italian Foreign Fighters: Numbers, Features and Case Studies', *International Security Observer*, 16 November 2015.

²⁷ 'GRAFIK: Her er de danske syrienkrigere', *DR*, 15 September 2016, available at <http://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/grafik-her-er-de-danske-syrienkrigere-0>, last visited: 4 September 2017.

²⁸ Vidino, L. and Seamus Hughes, 'ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa', The George Washington University (2015), available at: <https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/ISIS%20in%20America%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>, last visited: 4 September 2017.

What makes jihad advocated by ISIS and its splinter groups so appealing to converts? French terrorism expert Olivier Roy argues that, following the disintegration of international left-wing movements, ISIS now represents an appealing anti-world order philosophy. The global nature of radical Islam, in his opinion, explains the number of converts, something he estimates to be around 20–30% of those joining jihad.²⁹ These rebels find a “noble” cause in jihad, and are consequently recruited by radical organisations that have a strategic agenda. Roy views the phenomenon of foreign fighters as a relatively sudden turn to violence, and the result of a “generational revolt”, triggered by the fact that young followers of Islam have broken with the moderate religious interpretation of Islam. This view is contested by Gilles Kepel, who maintains that Islamist ideology is responsible for the violent radicalisation of young people, and that the allure of the Islamist beliefs is responsible for attracting many youngsters, including some converts. As Kepel points out, “The most important battle in the war for the Muslim minds during the next decades will be fought not in Palestine or Iraq but in the communities of believers on the outskirts of London, Paris, and other European cities, where Islam is already a growing part of the West”.³⁰

The fifth section of this report addresses this conundrum, examining the individual biographies of converts to Islam who have been involved in terrorism-related offences, and analysing their motivations to pledge allegiance to ISIS and other extremist organisations.

The cosmopolitan nature of the jihadi philosophy has already attracted a number of foreign fighters from many different backgrounds. At the same time, the profile of an individual travelling to Syria in 2014–2015 differed significantly from its counterpart in 2012–2013. While jihadi fighters in 2012 tended to participate in the conflict in an attempt to defeat Bashar el-Assad, nowadays they depart to Syria with an eschatological vision. To make the cause of jihad more attractive to the masses, ISIS welcomes people from all ethnic origins without any limits on membership, as long as they are committed to the cause. While Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, during his first recorded speech in June 2014, referred to the Muslim community as a whole, or *Ummah*,³¹ he also argued that the recently declared caliphate was meant to be a cosmopolitan space that would unite people from different geographical areas, as exemplified by the excerpt from his sermon:

It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers. It is a khilafah (a caliphate) that has gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, North African, American, French, German, and Australian.³²

He further reiterated the need for a “faithful brotherhood” as a means of bringing devoted Muslims together under the name of the caliphate. This description of the caliphate, which is intended to override cultural differences and emphasise the unity of the *Ummah*, is designed to be particularly appealing for converts, as well as individuals who have only recently started to “rediscover” their faith, sometimes known as “reverts”.

²⁹ Chotiner, I., ‘The Islamization of Radicalization’, *Slate*, 22 June 2016, available at: http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/interrogation/2016/06/olivier_roy_on_isis_brexit_orlando_and_the_islamization_of_radicalism.html, last visited: 4 September 2017.

³⁰ Kepel, G., *The War for the Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 8.

³¹ *Ummah* is an Arabic concept that denotes a supra-national Muslim community worldwide.

³² ‘What did Abu Bakr Baghdadi say?’, *Middle East Eye*, 5 July 2014, available at: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/what-did-baghdadi-say-320749010>, last visited: 4 September 2017.

4. Overview: Conversions to Islam in a Historical Perspective

4.1 United Kingdom

Since the 1990s a significant and increasing number of young people have embraced Islam. According to Kevin Brice from Swansea University, the overall number of converts to Islam in the UK rose from 60,000 in 2001, to 100,000 in 2010. However, he rightly warns against drawing any conclusions about the phenomenon of conversion becoming a mass tendency. Even at the highest estimate, converts to Islam in the UK remain a small minority group.³³ At present, approximately 5,000 British people convert to Islam every year, most of them women.³⁴ The challenge for existing scholarship on conversion to Islam in the UK is that it either overlooks the issue of radicalisation, or focuses on highly educated individuals, not representative of converts from a wider spectrum of social backgrounds.³⁵ Although the background of converts in the UK is similar to many other countries with regard to the motivations for conversion, there are some differences that are worth discussing in more depth.

For instance, conversion to Islam in the UK has been particularly popular among second, third and fourth generations of immigrants of the Afro-Caribbean Christian community. According to the academic Anabel Inge, two significant trends have contributed to rising interest in Islam, and particularly Salafism, during the last decade in the UK. The first trend was the heightened public profile of Islam and Muslims in the wake of the 9/11 attack, the war on terror and the London 7/7 bombings.³⁶ These events prompted many to examine the religion that had apparently inspired the atrocities in more detail. The second influential trend Inge identified was more localised in nature: a fashion for converting to Islam during the early to mid-2000s, predominantly among young people of Afro-Caribbean origin in south London. During this time period, a significant number of teenagers from mostly Afro-Caribbean backgrounds converted, or became more interested in Islam. Moreover, members of some minority communities, such as Somalis, have been turning to highly conservative forms of Islam, such as Salafism, as documented by Inge in her ethnographic study on experiences of British Salafi women.³⁷ London-based mosques, particularly the Brixton Mosque, played a pivotal role in this process.³⁸ Indeed, the Brixton Mosque in Lambeth became well known for its success in attracting Afro-Caribbean converts. In fact, mosque records indicate that it oversaw more than 1,500 conversions of young people between 1997 and 2001 alone.³⁹

A pronounced increase in conversions at this time seems to have originated in the early 1990s.⁴⁰ It was primarily manifested in sociocultural patterns such as an increased propensity to wear Islamic clothing. However, Inge argues that, in south London, the “fashion” for conversions peaked around 2003–2004 and was linked to organised crime in the south of London.⁴¹ Some gang members in Brixton began viewing their Islamic identity as an intimidating weapon that could

³³ Brice, K., ‘A Minority within a Minority: A Report on Converts to Islam in the United Kingdom’, p. 1.

³⁴ Mistiaen, V., ‘Converting to Islam: British women on prayer, peace and prejudice’, *The Guardian*, 11 October 2013, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/11/islam-converts-british-women-prejudice>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

³⁵ The studies conducted by the University of Cambridge on female (2013) and male (2015) converts to Islam analyses the informants.

³⁶ Inge, A., *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion*, pp. 69-71.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Brice, K., ‘A Minority within a Minority: A Report on Converts to Islam in the United Kingdom’, p. 1.

³⁹ Inge, A., *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion*, p. 33. Between May and June 2004, Brixton Mosque oversaw at least 300 conversions, according to mosque leaders (*ibid.*, p. 72).

⁴⁰ Reddie, R., *Black Muslims in Britain: Why Are a Growing Number of Young Black People Converting to Islam?* (Oxford: Lion, 2009), p. 194.

⁴¹ Inge, A., *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion*, p. 71.

help facilitate their criminal activities, a phenomenon similar to “ethnic reputation manipulation” previously documented by criminologists as a strategy used by organised crime groups worldwide.⁴² Gangs dominated by Muslim converts emerged at that time, and became known as the “Muslim Boys”. Their reputation was reinforced by street clashes with the police in the 1990s in which they demonstrated defiance and rebellion in the face of perceived injustice. The Muslim Boys have been linked to dozens of murders, shootings and other serious offences in south London.⁴³ They were also involved in robbing local drug dealers and had access to automatic and semi-automatic weapons. According to the Metropolitan Police, the core group was made up of only 20–25 members, although other gangs have taken up their name to gain credibility.⁴⁴

Some of these gangs became notorious for instigating “conversions” at gunpoint. As a reaction to the link between organised crime and conversions, the leaders of the Brixton Mosque⁴⁵ condemned the gang culture, and stopped offering so-called “walk-in” conversions.⁴⁶ Moreover, community leaders were compelled to intervene and stop practicing “walk-in” conversions in 2004 when a local man named Adrian Marriott was shot after refusing to convert.⁴⁷ Toaha Qureshi, who chaired the Lambeth Muslim Forum, expressed a concern over gangs “camouflaging themselves in the banner of Islam” and suggested that people wishing to convert to Islam should be questioned about their motivation and undergo rigorous tests.⁴⁸

Some of these gang members had been influenced by extremist preachers or had been radicalised in prison. In fact, most of the original group of the Muslim Boys converted while in prison, many at the Feltham Young Offenders Institute.⁴⁹ Jihadi preachers such as Abdullah el-Faisal, a Jamaican-born convert, claimed it was justifiable to commit violent crimes against non-believers while pursuing jihad. He was a mentor of one of the 7/7 bombers, Germaine Lindsay, and influenced Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who tried to detonate plastic explosives on a flight *en route* from Amsterdam to Detroit in 2009.⁵⁰ El-Faisal grew up in Jamaica as a Christian and converted to Islam at the age of 16. He then studied Islam in Saudi Arabia before moving to London, where he became a popular preacher among English-speaking converts. In the 1990s, el-Faisal’s sermons at the Brixton Mosque were often taped and shared among converts to Islam, and recordings of his sermons were found at Germaine Lindsay’s house.⁵¹ El Faisal’s views changed during the early 1990s, and the Brixton Mosque banned him from the premises when it became clear that his ideology had taken a violent turn.⁵² El-Faisal was later jailed and deported to Jamaica in 2007, after serving four years of a nine-year prison sentence for inciting racial hatred and encouraging murders of Christians, Hindus and Jews.⁵³

⁴² Bovenkerk, F., Dina Siegel, Damian Zaitch, ‘Organized crime and ethnic reputation manipulation’, *Crime, Law and Social Change* 39 1 (2003), available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1022499504945>, last visited: 5 September 2017, pp. 23-38; Githens-Mazer, J., ‘Why Woolwich Matters: The South London Angle’, *RUSI*, 31 May 2013, available at: <https://rusi.org/commentary/why-woolwich-matters-south-london-angle>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁴³ Cowan, R., ‘Criminal gangs use Islam to intimidate victims’, *The Guardian*, 7 March 2005, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/mar/07/terrorism.ukcrime>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁴⁴ ‘Special investigation: Are “Muslim Boys” using profits of crime to fund terrorist attacks?’, *Independent*, 13 August 2005, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/special-investigation-are-muslim-boys-using-profits-of-crime-to-fund-terrorist-attacks-305781.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁴⁵ See Quintan Wiktorowicz’s typology of Salafi groups quoted in “Findings”.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴⁸ Cowan, R., ‘Criminal gangs use Islam to intimidate victims’, *The Guardian*, 7 March 2005.

⁴⁹ ‘Special investigation: Are “Muslim Boys” using profits of crime to fund terrorist attacks?’, *Independent*, 13 August 2005.

⁵⁰ ‘Profile: Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab’, *BBC News*, 12 October 2011, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-11545509>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁵¹ Griffin, D. and Todd Schwarzschild, ‘Shakedown by Jamaica’s radical sheik’, *CNN*, 2 September 2010, available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/09/01/jamaica.radical.sheik/index.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁵² Inge, A., *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion*, pp. 35-36.

⁵³ Johnston, P., ‘July 7 preacher Abdullah el-Faisal deported’, *The Telegraph*, 25 May 2007, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1552580/July-7-preacher-Abdullah-El-Faisal-deported.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

However, conversions to Islam among the Afro-Caribbean community are not limited to participation in gangs. Dr Abdul Haqq Baker, who was a chairman of the Brixton Mosque between 1994–2009, argues that conversions linked to criminality were a minor element among all the conversions carried out by the Mosque. As a convert himself, Dr Baker interprets converts' potential gravitation towards radical ideas through the prism of a "vacuum" of knowledge that many experience after embracing a new religion. This "vacuum" could potentially be filled by extremist groups.⁵⁴

What explains the particular appeal of Islam among the Afro-Caribbean community in the UK? According to Dr William Henry who has written extensively on race, ethnicity and the Jamaican community in London, racism and imperialism discourses play a major role in this development.⁵⁵ Dr Henry suggests that in order to understand the peculiar fashion of conversions to Islam among the Afro-Caribbean community, one has to take a note of a general trend of how the community adopts new religious movements, which tends to absorb new religious identities quickly.

4.2 Russia

In Russia, the issue of Muslim conversion tends to be treated as a matter of national security. At least three of 32 terrorists who seized hostages in the Beslan school in Russia in September 2004 were converted ethnic Russians. Among the converts was the group's alleged leader, Vladimir Khodov.⁵⁶ Another famous convert, Aleksandr Tikhomirov (Said Buryatsky), was central to the activities of the Caucasus Emirate, an Islamist insurgency based in Russia's North Caucasus region, between May 2008 until March 2010, when he was killed by Russian special forces. Vitaly Razdobudko and his wife Marina, both converts, committed a suicide attack against a police checkpoint in Dagestan in 2011.⁵⁷ In December 2016, Varvara Karaulova, a philosophy student from Moscow, and a recent convert, was prosecuted for trying to enter Syria after she married an ISIS fighter in an online ceremony.⁵⁸

On the one hand, the recent involvement of Russian converts to Islam in the military conflicts in the North Caucasus and Syria exemplifies the threat posed with regard to violent radicalisation and terrorism. At the same time, even those Russian converts to Islam who pose no security threat tend to be ostracised, viewed as traitors who have forsaken Russian ethnic, cultural and religious identities. According to a recent survey regarding attitudes towards Russian Muslims, 44% of respondents described Russians who voluntarily converted to Islam as traitors.⁵⁹ Moreover, Russian media outlets have been instrumental in constructing a narrative of a "double betrayal", with the individuals who join Islamist terrorist organisations accused not only of giving up their religion, but also of fighting against the Russian government.⁶⁰ Prominent use of the term "ethnic Russian Muslims" underscores these characterisations, with the dominant discourse implying that no ethnic Russian can be born a Muslim.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Interview with Dr William Henry, 21 June 2017.

⁵⁶ Arasli, J.E., 'Violent Converts to Islam: Growing Cluster and Rising Trend', *Global Ecco*, available at: <https://globalecco.org/ctx-v1n1/violent-converts-to-islam>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁵⁷ 'Vitaly Razdobudko recorded himself before death', *Nord-Ost.org*, 26 February 2011, available at: http://www.nord-ost.org/today/vitaly-razdobudko-recorded-himself-before-death-2_en.html, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁵⁸ Titko, A., 2016. 'Sud Prigovoril Varvaru Karaulovu k 4,5 Godam Zaklycheniya za Popytku Sbezhat K IGIL' [Varvara Karaulova sentenced to four and a half years of imprisonment for an attempt to join ISIS], *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 22 December 2016, available at: <http://www.msk.kp.ru/daily/26623.4/3640796>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Nurutdinov, Inur Ildusovich, Safin, Rustem Ramilevic and Salagayev, Aleksandr Leonidovich 'Konstruirovaniye Obraza Vahhabizma v Pechatnykh SMP' [The Construction of Wahhabism's Image in Printed Mass Media], *Vestnik Ekonomiki, Prava i Sotsiologii* 2 (2012), p. 233.

When considering the motivations for conversion to Islam among ethnic Russians, researchers tend to highlight the following factors: a secular upbringing; a personal rejection of Orthodox Christianity, often due to stigmatising actions involving the Orthodox clergy; the poor standard of missionary work undertaken by the Russian Orthodox church; acts of youth rebellion (since Islam is viewed as a defiant religion); and locale, with particular emphasis placed on regions inhabited by significant numbers of Muslims, such as Tatarstan and Dagestan.⁶¹

Converts motivated by ideology (unlike converts motivated by family circumstances or career) are viewed as being those the most susceptible to potential radicalisation. The following factors influence individuals' decisions to convert because of ideology: 1) disillusionment with Orthodox Christianity and perception of Islam as more rational from a theological perspective; 2) conversion because of a cultural and linguistic passion; 3) conversion because of political considerations, and; 4) embracing Islam in the prison setting by convicts as a means of acquiring a new sense of belonging.⁶²

Significant qualitative studies have recently been conducted in Russia with regard to converts' involvement in terrorism, organised crime (such as drug trafficking, arms trade and fraud) and other illicit activities. Research undertaken by Silantiev (et al.), based on interviews with 100 converts from 35 regions in Russia who had joined violent and non-violent extremist organisations between the period 1995 to 2015, concluded that the most common reason why the converts engage in extremism and terrorist activities is the influence of individuals outside the family circle. These included friends, flatmates, fellow converts, imams and recruiters from Chechen militant groups.⁶³ The influence of relatives was the second most important factor. The authors of the study noted that those converting to Islam, and who accepted radical interpretations of the faith, tended to seek to convert relatives, and to break all ties with them in the event of failure. The third most important factor was anti-government feeling. The authors identified a number of individuals who moved from fascist or communist organisations to Muslim ones, a paradoxical decision explained by the desire to fight the state. Finally, the fourth most important factor was love – seeking to share the same religion as one's partner – which was far more frequent among women than men. However, the authors identified several men who had joined terrorist organisations because of romantic sentiments. Other factors that contributed to the decisions to join extremist organisations included time spent in captivity, spiritual search, internet-based propaganda and profit-oriented motives. Radicalisation in the prison context was also a matter of concern, with 8% of respondents claiming to have been influenced by their cellmates.⁶⁴

Although these observations share similarities with the motivations of converts lured by extremism in the West, the Russian context differs in comparison to Western Europe and North America, when considered from the point of view of social media influence. While it is a well-known fact that online platforms facilitate radicalisation in the West,⁶⁵ Silantiev et al. point out that in the Russian context the role of the internet has been exaggerated, with most extremists tending to look for potential recruits offline. This conclusion contrasts with the ongoing debate in the United Kingdom, with regard to countering online extremism, as a means of tackling terrorism in the

⁶¹ Suleimanov, R., 'Russkie Mustulmane. Russkaya Narodnaya Liniya' [Russian Muslims. Russian People's Line], 3 March 2016.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Silantiev R., V. Maltsev and A. Savvin, 'Osnovnye Prichiny Vovlecheniya Novooobrazchennykh Musul'man Rossii v Ekstremistskuyu i Terroristicheskuyu Deyatel'nost.' [The Main Reasons for Muslim Converts' Involvement in Extremism and Terrorism in Russia]. *Islam v Rossii* 7.2, pp. 39-45.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ The Henry Jackson Society's report shows that more than two-thirds of those involved in Islamist terrorism offences in the UK were known to have consumed extremist or instructional material – almost exclusively online. See: Stuart, H., 'Islamist Terrorism: Analysis of Offences and Attacks in the UK (1998–2015)', The Henry Jackson Society (2017).

aftermath of the Westminster, Manchester, London Bridge and Parsons Green attacks.⁶⁶ The differences with regard to social media engagement could be explained by a different level of internet penetration in Russia in comparison to the United Kingdom (73.3% and 92.6% respectively in 2016).⁶⁷ Similar to the prominence of gangs in south London mentioned earlier, research led by Silantiev has shown that more than a thousand converts were involved in either violent extremism or criminal activities. Three examples of terrorist units and organised criminal gangs consisting of Russian converts were identified: the Ulyanovsk Jamaat,⁶⁸ the Primorsky Partisans⁶⁹ and the Novosibirsk Jamaat.⁷⁰ The Russian Institute of Strategic Research raises a similar concern about radicalised converts being involved in organised crime and terrorism.⁷¹ Statistically, among individuals involved in terrorism in Russia, the number who are converts to Islam outnumbers those who are heritage Muslims.⁷² In addition, in 2015, more than 40 converts joined the ranks of IS, or were prosecuted for involvement in other terrorist organisations banned in Russia, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, Nurjular and the Caucasus Emirate.⁷³

4.3 Germany

Conversions to Islam have taken place in Germany since the days of the Weimar Republic. However, the most active rate of conversions tended to be among upper-class Germans. Now, most German converts to Islam belong to the middle and working classes. Many are from the former East Germany, representing a generation that grew up in an atheist environment, and which had less contact with Muslim immigrants than their Western counterparts.⁷⁴ For example, Linda Wenzel, a 16-year-old German convert who fled her parents' home to join ISIS and was arrested by Iraqi forces in Mosul, grew up in a town that lies between Dresden and the Polish border.⁷⁵ After falling in love with a Muslim man she had met online, she was smuggled into Iraq from Turkey.

A few decades ago, Islam in Germany was a product of Orientalism.⁷⁶ According to Edward Said, a cultural critic and a professor at Columbia University, the German perception of the Middle East was detached from actual politics, unlike its equivalents in France or the UK:

The German Orient was almost exclusively a scholarly, or at least a classical, Orient: it was made the subject of lyrics, fantasies, and even novels, but it was never actual, the way Egypt and Syria were actual for Chateaubriand, Lane, Lamartine, Burton, Disraeli, or Nerval.⁷⁷

⁶⁶ Stone, J., 'Theresa May Says Internet Must Now Be Regulated Following London Bridge Terror Attack', *The Independent*, 4 June 2017, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-internet-regulated-london-bridge-terror-attack-google-facebook-whatsapp-borough-security-a7771896.html>, last visited: 30 August 2017.

⁶⁷ 'Internet Users by Country (2016)', available at: <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁶⁸ Ulyanovsky Jamaat is an Islamist organisation that carried out criminal activities in Russia between 2002 and 2003, making profits on racketeering, hostage-taking and robberies in order to fund purchase of weapons and ammunition for terrorism.

⁶⁹ The Primorsky Partisans is the unofficial name for a criminal organisation that was dismantled by Russian law enforcement officials in 2010. Its members were prosecuted for homicide, and participation in the arms trade.

⁷⁰ The Novosibirsk Jamaat is a criminal group known for training converts to Islam. It was created to fund terrorism through robberies and other serious crimes. Also see Silantiev R., V. Maltsev and A. Savvin, 'Osnovnye Prichiny Vovlecheniya Novoobrashchennykh Musul'man Rossii v Ekstremistskuyu i Terroristicheskuyu Deyatel'nost'. [The Main Reasons for Muslim Converts' Involvement in Extremism and Terrorism in Russia], pp. 39-45.

⁷¹ Ivanov V. Radikalny Islam Sredi Russkikh Povolzhya I Ego Posledstviya [Radical Islam Among the Russians of the Volga Region and Its Consequences]. 22 January 2014. Available: <https://riss.ru/analitics/4701/#.UuUTvNLHnUJ>, last visited: 2 October 2017.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ Silantiev, Roman Anatolyevich, Maltsev, Vladislav Vladimirovich, and Savvin, Aleksandr Viktorovich, 'Osnovnye Prichiny Vovlecheniya Novoobrashchennykh Musul'man Rossii v Ekstremistskuyu i Terroristicheskuyu Deyatel'nost'. [The Main Reasons for Muslim Converts' Involvement in Extremism and Terrorism in Russia], pp. 39-45.

⁷⁴ Özyürek, E., *Being German, Becoming Muslim: Race, Religion, and Conversion in the New Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁷⁵ Oltermann, P. and Fazel Hawramy, 'Suspected ISIS Fighter seized in Mosul may be missing German girl, 16', *The Guardian*, 19 July 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/19/isis-mosul-missing-german-girl-linda-wenzel>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁷⁶ Orientalism is a concept that denotes depictions of different aspects of Middle Eastern, South Asian and East Asian cultures by Western historians, artists and designers. Edward Said (1978) is quite critical about this concept and argues that Orientalism is a set of outsider-interpretations of the Middle East shaped by the Western imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries.

⁷⁷ Said, E. W., *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1979), pp. 17-19.

Contemporary debates on Islam have shifted from a romanticised Orientalist approach, to one focusing on more practical issues of integration, especially those related to belonging and identity, in keeping with the influx of Syrian refugees. According to the Germany EASY system, which records those who intend to apply for asylum, more than one million migrants and refugees arrived to Germany in 2015, with Syrians being the largest group of first time asylum applicants.⁷⁸

Since Germany does not register its citizens' religious affiliations, there is a dearth of relevant governmental statistics on this topic. Existing data on the number of converts is scarce and fragmented, and researchers rely on estimates derived from other research projects, simultaneously acknowledging that the quality of materials cannot always be verified.⁷⁹ The most credible estimates suggest that there are around 20,000 to 100,000 converts in Germany,⁸⁰ with around 4,000 Germans converting to Islam every year.⁸¹

In keeping with other European countries, a number of converts in Germany have been linked to the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. In 2017 a German convert to Islam, together with three other individuals, was found guilty of attempted murder for placing an explosive device at the main train station in the western city of Bonn in December 2012.⁸² In 2012, two German converts from Solingen, Robert Baum (23) and Christian Emde (28), were arrested entering the UK port of Dover, and charged with having material that could be used for terrorism purposes.⁸³ They were sentenced to 16 and 12 months of incarceration respectively.⁸⁴ Another 32-year-old German convert was arrested in Essen in June of 2017 for plotting a terrorist attack, having been on the radar of security services.⁸⁵ Fritz Gelowicz, a leader of the Sauerland cell⁸⁶ whose members attempted to construct an explosive device, was also a German convert to Islam, who embraced the religion at the age of 16.⁸⁷ One of his associates from the core Sauerland cell, Daniel Schneider, also converted to Islam at the age of 19 under the influence of an older Muslim friend.⁸⁸

As in the UK context, the spread of radical Islam in Germany has been facilitated by Salafi preachers, such as Pierre Vogel (or Abu Hamza Salahuddin), a German native and former professional boxer, born near Cologne in 1978. He converted to Islam in 2001 before studying in Saudi Arabia, and since 2006, has taught Islam in mosques, universities, and in online seminars.⁸⁹ He is a leading preacher of the Salafist group known as the "Einladung zum Paradies" ("Invitation

⁷⁸ 'Migration, Asylum and Refugees in Germany: Understanding the Data', Global Migration Data Analysis Centre 1 (2016), available at: <https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/country/docs/Germany/Germany-Data-Briefing-1Jan2016.pdf>, last accessed: 30 September 2017.

⁷⁹ The policy brief on convert radicalisation published by the International Center for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) in 2016 relies on data produced by the reputable Pew Research Center. At the same time, the authors acknowledge that when it comes to the estimates of the number of converts, the quality and sometimes impartiality of the sources cannot be ascertained.

⁸⁰ Langer, A., 'Konvertiten erfahren besonders viel Abneigung' [Converts are treated with a lot of repugnance], *Spiegel Online*, 14 September 2016, available at: <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/muslime-in-deutschland-konvertiten-erfahren-besonders-viel-abneigung-a-1111636.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁸¹ Bahmad, Y., 'Aus Christina Wurde Amina' [From Christina to Amina], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 January 2012, available at: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/jugend-schreibt/jugend-schreibt/konvertiten-aus-christina-wurde-amina-11600286-p2.html>, last visited: 30 September 2017.

⁸² Diehl, J., and Fidelius Schmid, 'Mutmassliche Terrorzelle in NRW. Gescheiterte Gotteskrieger' [Suspected Terrorist Cell in NRW: Failed Warriors of God], *Spiegel Online*, 24 March 2014, available at: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/geplante-anschlaege-in-nrw-das-sind-die-angeklagten-a-960398.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁸³ 'Two German Muslim converts admit terrorism offences', *BBC News*, 2 February 2012, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16861750>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁸⁴ Flade, F., 'Deutsch und Fanatisch - Wandel Eines Konvertiten' [German and Fanatical - The Converts' Transformation], *Welt*, 6 February 2012, available at: <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article13853400/Deutsch-und-fanatisch-Wandel-eines-Konvertiten.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁸⁵ 'Polizei Nimmt Mutmasslichen Islamisten in Essen Fest' [Police Arrest Suspected Islamists in Essen], *General-Anzeiger*, 26 May 2017, available at: <http://www.general-anzeiger-bonn.de/news/politik/deutschland/Polizei-nimmt-mutma%C3%9Flichen-Islamisten-in-Essen-fest-article3565309.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁸⁶ In 2007, German police arrested four men suspected of preparing one or more terrorist attacks in Germany. They have since become known as the 'Sauerlandgruppe' (Sauerland cell), a reference to the region in mid-western Germany where the four had been attempting to construct an explosive device in a holiday home.

⁸⁷ Eijkman, Q., 'The German Sauerland Cell Reconsidered', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 8. 4 (2014).

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Abu Hamza's Facebook page, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/PierreVogelOffiziell/about/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

to Paradise”), based in Germany, and which maintains offices in Moenchengladbach and Braunschweig. Since 2007 Pierre Vogel has been running an enterprise of his own under the name “Die Wahre Religion” (“The True Religion”),⁹⁰ focused on converting young Germans to Islam and preaching through video footage.⁹¹ According to his Facebook page, hundreds of Germans have converted to Islam following his sermons. Taking advantage of the power of social media, Pierre Vogel has his own YouTube channel.⁹² Although he formally rejects violence and terror, his binary division of the world into “Islamic” and “un-Islamic” behaviour, as exemplified by his videos, poses a threat to young individuals who might be influenced by this rhetoric. Indeed, the offices of the Salafist group where Vogel preaches were raided by German police in 2010.⁹³

Sven Lau is another influential convert with a similar background to Hamza’s. Until 2008, Lau was a firefighter in the city of Mönchengladbach in North Rhine-Westphalia. Lau set up a network called “Sharia Police” with other Salafists in Wuppertal in September of 2014. The group tried to keep Muslim youth from entering casinos, restaurants or clubs, something which prompted prosecutors to initiate legal proceedings against Lau for violating the right of assembly.⁹⁴ In July 2017, Lau was convicted and sentenced to five and a half years in jail for terrorism-related activities.⁹⁵ Following the announcement of Lau’s sentence, Vogel uploaded a YouTube video arguing that his friend and “Muslim brother” was innocent, and that the case against him had been fabricated.⁹⁶ Since 2012, Germany has seen at least five important court cases brought against Islamists who have travelled to Syria and Iraq, or supported terrorist organisations.⁹⁷

The appeal of the Salafi worldview has also been growing in Germany. According to reporting published by *Deutsche Welle*, there were roughly 7,900 Salafists in Germany as of 2014.⁹⁸ Although the vast majority do not believe in violence as a means of implementing their strict ideas, certain individuals from the Salafi circles contribute to this dynamic with their missionary work. Esra Özyürek, a political anthropologist who has conducted ethnographic research in Berlin mosques, suggests that ultra-conservative interpretations of religion such as Salafism could be particularly appealing to individuals who are new to Islam:

Salafis are really open to converts and really promote conversion. They have German language activities for newcomers. What I’ve seen is that people decide to convert to Islam, but at that time they don’t know there are different variations.⁹⁹

Indeed, Salafi groups tend to have the most developed websites, and publish a high number of translations of Islamic literature.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, Salafi preachers also exert considerable influence, using the German language to address their audiences, maintaining a visible presence online, and

⁹⁰ The organisation was banned by the German Interior Ministry in November 2016. More information is available from ‘Police make raids against suspected “IS” supporters across 10 states in Germany’, *Deutsche Welle*, 15 November 2016, available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/police-make-raids-against-suspected-is-supporters-across-10-states-in-germany/a-36395068>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁹¹ ‘Pierre Vogel – Abu Hamza Salahuddin’, *Global Jihad*, 2 February 2011, available at: <http://www.globaljihad.net/?p=4412>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁹² ‘Pierre Vogel: Abu Hamza Official Page’, *YouTube*, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/pierrevogelDE1>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁹³ ‘Pierre Vogel – Abu Hamza Salahuddin’, *Global Jihad*, 2 February 2011.

⁹⁴ ‘An Overview of Germany’s Islamist Scene’, *Deutsche Welle*, 18 November 2015, available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/an-overview-of-germanys-islamist-scene/a-18860746>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁹⁵ ‘Islamisten-Chef Lau Zu Haftstrafe Verurteilt’ [Islamist Leader Lau Received Jail Sentence], *Deutsche Welle*, 26 July 2017, available at: <http://www.dw.com/de/islamisten-chef-lau-zu-haftstrafe-verurteilt/a-39650918>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁹⁶ ‘Sven Lau Wurde Wegen Luegnern Verurteilt (Pierre Vogel)’ [Sven Lau Was Sentenced Because of Liars (Pierre Vogel)], *YouTube*, 26 July 2017, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQNdeJPR-XM>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁹⁷ Bleiker, C., ‘Five big German terror trials’, *Deutsche Welle*, 6 September 2016, available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/five-big-german-terror-trials/a-19529910>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

⁹⁸ ‘An Overview of Germany’s Islamist Scene’, *Deutsche Welle*, 18 November 2015.

⁹⁹ Müller-Kroll, M., ‘Life in Berlin: Esra Özyürek – Being German, Becoming Muslim’, *NPR Berlin*, 23 March 2015, available at: <http://www.nprberlin.de/post/life-berlin-esra-zy-rek-being-german-becoming-muslim#stream/0>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Sirin, V., ‘Radical Islam in Germany: The Convert as Missionary’, 11 July 2011, available at: <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/2253/radical-islam-germany>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

offering literature and seminars that target young people who are not yet followers of Salafism, in order to forge a sense of community.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ "Verfassungsschutzbericht. 2013. Vorabfassung. Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Inneres und Sport. Niedersachsen [Intelligence Services' Report. Foreword. Lower Saxony Ministry of Home Affairs and Sports], available at: http://www.verfassungsschutz.niedersachsen.de/aktuelles_service/meldungen/innenminister-pistorius-stellt-neuen-verfassungsschutzbericht-2013-vor-124756.html, last visited: 20 July 2017.

5. Case Studies

Although academic studies tend to criticise any portrayal of converts to Islam as a potential security threat and a “risk group”,¹⁰² there is significant evidence that converts are not only over-represented among radicalised foreign fighters residing in Western Europe and the United States, but that converts have been responsible for a series of major terrorist attacks. This section will focus on well-documented cases of converts’ involvement in terrorism, in order to highlight and understand some of the factors that prompted them to engage in violence.

5.1 British Case Studies

RICHARD REID

Alternative name: Abdul Raheem

Gender: Male

Nationality: British

Ancestry: Child of a bi-racial couple (a white mother and a Jamaican father)¹⁰³

Family: Only son of Lesley Hughes and Colvin (Robin) Reid. His parents divorced and he had little contact with his father¹⁰⁴

Education: Left school aged 16¹⁰⁵

International experience: Reid was widely travelled, having visited Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Pakistan, Belgium, the Netherlands and France. He is also known to have received explosives training in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁶

Age at the time of conversion: 21-22¹⁰⁷

Circumstances of conversion: Conversion in prison (Feltham Young Offenders Institution in West London)¹⁰⁸

Period between conversion and committing a terrorist attack/joining a terrorist group: Three to five years

Known links to proscribed organisations: Al-Qaeda¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Inge, A., *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion*; Langer, A., ‘Muslime in Deutschland: “Konvertiten erfahren besonders viel Abneigung” [Muslims in Germany: “Converts Experience Exclusion”]’, interview with Esra Ozyürek, *Spiegel Online*, 14 September 2016, available at: <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/muslime-in-deutschland-konvertiten-erfahren-besonders-viel-abneigung-a-1111636.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁰³ Herbert, P., ‘I knew exactly what I was doing’, *The Guardian*, 24 August 2006, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/aug/24/alqaida.terrorism>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Craig, O., ‘From tearaway to terrorist - The story of Richard Reid’, *The Telegraph*, 30 December 2001, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1366666/From-tearaway-to-terrorist-The-story-of-Richard-Reid.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Kelso, P., ‘Imam accuses jailers of racist witch hunt’, *The Guardian*, 29 December 2001, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/dec/29/september11.britainandseptember11>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Sherwell, P., ‘Failed “shoe bomber” Richard Reid describes “tactical regrets” that mass murder mission failed’, 3 February 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/11388442/Failed-shoe-bomber-Richard-Reid-describes-tactical-regrets-that-mass-murder-mission-failed.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

Known to the authorities prior to engagement in terrorism: Multiple non-extremism-related convictions for crimes against persons and property¹¹⁰

Status: Sentenced to life imprisonment and incarcerated in Florence, Colorado¹¹¹

Crime: On 22 December 2001, 28-year-old Richard Reid (Abdul Raheem), while aboard American Airlines Flight 63 from Paris to Miami, attempted to detonate a bomb hidden in a secret compartment of his shoe. Owing to rainy weather before departure as well as perspiration which caused the fuse to be too damp to ignite, the bomb did not detonate. During the attempted detonation, civilian passengers successfully subdued Reid. The airliner was diverted to Logan International Airport in Boston, Massachusetts, where Reid was arrested.

Background: Reid was born in on 12 August 1973 in Bromley, south-east London. When Reid turned 11, his parents divorced. This instantiated what had been an unstructured childhood; at the time of Reid's birth his father, Robin Reid, was in prison. Robin Reid admits that, having "seen the inside of most of London's prisons", he "was no great example to [his] son".¹¹² His father spent 18 years of his life in prisons.¹¹³

Reid was known to the police and accumulated at least ten convictions for various crimes, mostly involving theft.¹¹⁴ He was first convicted at the age of 19, having carried out a "vicious mugging" on a pensioner.¹¹⁵ However it was not until 1995 that Reid, having been incarcerated for another mugging, converted to Islam.¹¹⁶

Reid's father, Robin Reid, is reported to have had a seminal impact in Reid's conversion. In conversation with his son during a coincidental meeting in either 1990 or 1991 (following Reid's release from Feltham Young Offenders Institution), Robin Reid recalled how, as a victim of racism and disenchantment himself, Islam offered somewhat of a solace. Recognising his son's own experiences with racism, combined with minimal job prospects and a weak social life, Robin Reid suggested the conversion that would happen five years later.¹¹⁷ Robin Reid insisted that he "certainly [didn't] feel guilty for his suggestion", for his Islam "was about loving mankind".¹¹⁸

Having initially attended the Salafi Brixton Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre, where his militant views were challenged, Richard Reid joined the Finsbury Park Mosque, which was – at the time – associated with the notorious Abu Hamza al-Masri. Crossing paths with al-Qaeda-affiliated individuals such as Abu Qatada,¹¹⁹ Abu Hamza al-Masri,¹²⁰ Djamel Beghal¹²¹ (and possibly) Kamel Daoudi¹²² at Finsbury Park made this time in Reid's life a crucial contributor to his radicalisation.¹²³

¹¹⁰ Herbert, P., 'I knew exactly what I was doing', *The Guardian*, 24 August 2006.

¹¹¹ Younge, G. and Duncan Campbell, 'Shoe-bomber sentenced to life in prison', *The Guardian*, 31 January 2003, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/31/usa.uk>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹¹² Elliott, M., 'The Shoe Bomber's World', *Time*, 16 February 2002, available at: <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,203478-1,00.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹¹³ Craig, O., 'From tearaway to terrorist: The story of Richard Reid', *The Telegraph*, 30 December 2001.

¹¹⁴ 'Judge denies bail to accused shoe bomber', *CNN*, 28 December 2001, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20050319141213/http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/12/28/inv.reid/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹¹⁵ Craig, O., 'From tearaway to terrorist: The story of Richard Reid', *The Telegraph*, 30 December 2001.

¹¹⁶ Rik Coolsaet, R. (ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge: European and American Experience*, second edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

¹¹⁷ Craig, O., 'From tearaway to terrorist: The story of Richard Reid', *The Telegraph*, 30 December 2001.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Abu Qatada is a Jordanian Salafi cleric who was deported to Jordan in 2013 on charges of extremism and links with terrorist organisations.

¹²⁰ Abu Hamza al Masri is an Egyptian cleric who was the imam of Finsbury park mosque. In 2012 he was extradited from the United Kingdom to the United States to face terrorism charges.

¹²¹ Djamel Beghal is a French-Algerian who was convicted in 2005 by French authorities for planning terrorist attacks.

¹²² Kamel Daoudi is a French-Algerian convicted for plotting to blow up a US embassy in Paris in June 2001, who was later deported from the United Kingdom to France.

¹²³ Dean, N. and Nick Allen, 'Finsbury Park mosque's terrorist roll call', *The Independent*, 7 February 2006, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/incoming/finsbury-park-mosques-terrorist-roll-call-6109711.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

In 1998, Reid adopted the name Abdel Rahim.¹²⁴ In the ensuing years, Reid travelled across the Pakistan–Afghanistan border to receive terrorist training in Afghanistan.¹²⁵ He would return to Pakistan in November 2001. It was in Afghanistan that he was given a shoe bomb for use in the future attack.¹²⁶

GERMAINE LINDSAY

Alternative name(s): Abdullah Shaheed Jamal

Gender: Male

Nationality: British

Ancestry: Jamaican

Family: Divorced parents; married to Samantha Lewthwaite (also a convert to Islam, currently a fugitive) shortly after his mother moved to the USA; two children

Education: Left high school aged 16

International experience: Unspecified

Age at the time of conversion: 14 or 15

Circumstances of conversion: Was reportedly influenced by his mother who had converted to Islam¹²⁷

Period between conversion and committing a terrorist attack/joining a terrorist group: Five years

Known links to proscribed organisations: Al-Qaeda

Known to the authorities prior to engagement in terrorism: No, although MI5 admitted in the wake of the attack that they held Lindsay's phone number in their files¹²⁸

Status: Deceased

Crime: On 7 July 2005, 19-year-old Germaine Lindsay boarded a Piccadilly Line train in London, and detonated bomb near Russell Square, killing himself and 26 others, and injuring hundreds more. Lindsay's suicide mission was part of a larger coordinated round of attacks. Elsewhere, two bombs were detonated on the Circle Line, near Aldgate, while a fourth detonated on a double-decker bus in Tavistock Square. All four bombers died as a result of the attacks.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ 'Richard Reid, British terrorist', *Upclosed*, available at: <https://upclosed.com/people/richard-reid-4/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹²⁷ 'Germaine Lindsay', *Counter Extremism Project*, available at: <https://www.counterextremism.com/people/germaine-lindsay>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹²⁸ Batty, D., 'Two 7/7 Bombers Were Under Surveillance'. *The Guardian*, 11 May 2006, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/may/11/july7.uksecurity>, last visited: 30 September 2017.

¹²⁹ '7/7 London Bombings: Capital to Mark 10th Anniversary of Terror Attacks', *The Guardian*, 28 June 2015, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/28/77-london-bombings-10th-anniversary-terror-attacks>, last visited: 30 September 2017.

Background: Lindsay was born on 23 September 1985 in Jamaica. He moved with his mother to the UK at the age of one, and they settled in the Huddersfield suburb of Dalton, West Yorkshire.¹³⁰

Lindsay's father, Nigel Lindsay, had separated from Lindsay's mother and remained in Jamaica when the family moved to the UK, strengthening the role of maternal influences in his life.¹³¹ In approximately 2000, Lindsay converted to Islam, and it is understood that he converted at the same time as his mother.¹³² Shortly thereafter, Lindsay was reported to have distributed leaflets in support of Al-Qaeda at school.¹³³ In 2002, his mother moved to the USA, an experience Lindsay is said to have found "traumatic".¹³⁴

Lindsay met his wife-to-be, Samantha Lewthwaite (a Northern Irish woman who had converted to Islam at the age of 15), in an internet chat room and then at a demonstration against the war in Iraq in October 2002. The couple had two children.¹³⁵

In approximately 2003, Lindsay and Lewthwaite moved to Bradford. In the time that followed, Lindsay regularly attended Hamara Youth Centre in Leeds, where the three other 7/7 attackers are said to have befriended him.¹³⁶ In particular, late 2004 marked the beginning of Lindsay's relationship with Mohammed Sidique Khan, mastermind of the 7/7 attacks.¹³⁷

In the aftermath of the attack, ISC (the Cross-Party Intelligence and Security Committee) found "intelligence gaps" in security services monitoring potential threats to the UK.¹³⁸ A parliamentary committee acknowledged that two out of four suicide bombers (Mohammed Sidique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer) were under surveillance by British intelligence but were not fully investigated because the MI5 officers were diverted to another anti-terrorist operation.¹³⁹ Furthermore, MI5 also discovered Germaine Lindsay's phone number in their files.¹⁴⁰

Lewthwaite condemned her husband's actions in the wake of the 7/7 attack but then became a fugitive. She is now a senior member of Al-Shabaab, and is believed to be responsible for the deaths of at least 400 people.¹⁴¹ Given this, it is likely that Lindsay and Lewthwaite's marriage helped reinforce support for terrorism, though this remains speculation.

¹³⁰ Gillan, A., Ian Cobain and Hugh Muir, 'Jamaican-born convert to Islam "coordinated fellow bombers"', *The Guardian*, 16 July 2005, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jul/16/july7.uksecurity6>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹³¹ Nikkhah, R. and Tariq Tahir, 'He cut all contact with us, says bomber's family', *The Telegraph*, 17 July 2005, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1494185/He-cut-all-contact-with-us-says-bombers-family.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹³² Sapsted, D. and Duncan Gardham, 'Lost years of the "nice boy" who killed 25', *Daily Telegraph*, 16 July 2005, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1494120/Lost-years-of-the-nice-boy-who-killed-25.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹³³ 'Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005', House of Commons HC1087 (2006), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228837/1087.pdf, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ Williams, E.D., *The Puzzle of 7/7: An In-depth Analysis of the London Bombings and Government Sponsored Terrorism in the United Kingdom* (BookSurge Publishing, 2006).

¹³⁶ Sapsted, D. and Duncan Gardham, 'Lost years of the "nice boy" who killed 25', *Daily Telegraph*, 16 July 2005.

¹³⁷ 'Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005', House of Commons HC1087 (2006).

¹³⁸ Batty, D., 'Two 7/7 Bombers Were Under Surveillance', *The Guardian*, 11 May 2006, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/may/11/july7.uksecurity>, last visited: 30 September 2017.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ 'White Widow "has killed 400 people" as key figure in al-Shabaab', *The Telegraph*, 18 May 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocan/somalia/11611954/White-Widow-has-killed-400-people-as-key-figure-in-al-Shabaab.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

MICHAEL ADEBOLAJO

Alternative name(s): Mujahid Abu Hamza¹⁴²

Gender: Male

Nationality: British

Ancestry: Nigerian¹⁴³

Family: Has six children with three women; married twice¹⁴⁴

Education: Pursued a politics degree at Greenwich University but did not graduate¹⁴⁵

International experience: Unspecified

Known links to proscribed organisations: al-Muhajiroun/Muslims Against Crusades¹⁴⁶

Known to the authorities prior to engagement in terrorism: Adebolajo was arrested in Kenya as part of a group suspected of planning to travel to Somalia to join the Islamist militant group al-Shabaab in November 2010. He was then deported back to Britain.¹⁴⁷

Age at the time of conversion: 18¹⁴⁸

Circumstances of conversion: Converted during his first year at Greenwich University when dealing with the grief of his nephew passing away¹⁴⁹

Period between conversion and committing a terrorist attack/joining a terrorist group: Two to three years

Status: Imprisoned (whole-life sentence)¹⁵⁰

Crime: On 22 May 2013, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale hit Fusilier Lee Rigby of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers with a car. Then they dragged him to the road and killed him using knives and a meat cleaver.¹⁵¹

Background: Michael Adebolajo was born in King's College Hospital in London in 1984. He was raised in a family of Christian Nigerian immigrants in Romford along with three other siblings – all of whom were born in the UK.¹⁵² As a child, he attended church with his parents every Sunday, and his religious views were heavily influenced by a Jehovah's Witness who oversaw his classes.¹⁵³ He was brought up reading passages of the Bible by candlelight.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴² Casciani, D., 'Woolwich: How did Michael Adebolajo become a killer?', *BBC News*, 19 December 2013, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25424290>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Morgan, T. and Jonathan Reilly, 'Adebolajo's seedy texts to mum of two as he plotted Lee Rigby attack', *The Sun*, 22 December 2013, available at: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/444789/adebolajos-seedy-texts-to-mum-of-two-as-he-plotted-lee-rigby-attack/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Casciani, D., 'Woolwich: How did Michael Adebolajo become a killer?', *BBC News*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ 'Lee Rigby murder: Adebolajo and Adebowale jailed', *BBC News*, 26 February 2014, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26357007>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁵¹ 'Two guilty of Lee Rigby murder', *BBC News*, 19 December 2013, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25450555>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁵² Whitehead, T., 'Lee Rigby killers: from quiet Christians to Islamist murderers', *The Telegraph*, 15 November 2014, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/10528365/Lee-Rigby-killers-from-quiet-Christians-to-Islamist-murderers.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁵³ Casciani, D., 'Woolwich: How did Michael Adebolajo become a killer?', *BBC News*, 19 December 2013.

The death of Adebolajo's nephew was a major factor in triggering his conversion to Islam at the age of 18.¹⁵⁵ The time of Adebolajo's conversion coincided with protests against the Iraq War, a conflict that Adebolajo found deeply disturbing.¹⁵⁶

Adebolajo never completed his politics degree at the University of Greenwich and instead moved on to engaging in protests with al-Muhajiroun, a Salafi jihadist group proscribed in the United Kingdom as a terrorist organisation.¹⁵⁷ The former leader of al-Muhajiroun, Omar Bakri Mohammed, claimed that he was responsible for the conversion of Adebolajo.¹⁵⁸ After stopping his studies, Adebolajo became involved in drug dealing gangs.¹⁵⁹ Former friends said he was part of a group that stole mobile phones and threatened people with knives.¹⁶⁰ In 2006, Adebolajo was jailed for 51 days for assaulting two police officers, including punching one in the face, after supporting a protest intended to show solidarity with Mizanur Rahman.¹⁶¹ Rahman had been sentenced to four years in jail for inciting racial hatred by calling for "another 9/11" during a protest at the Danish Embassy over cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohamed.¹⁶² Adebolajo continued to support al-Muhajiroun as it became rebranded as Muslims Against Crusades, but he eventually split from the organisation.¹⁶³

In October 2010, Adebolajo sought out Sharia rule by attempting to move to al-Shabaab-controlled territory in Somalia. He attempted to enter the country through Kenya, but was detained by local police and deported back to London. MI5, aware of his return, questioned Adebolajo and his family.¹⁶⁴

After killing Rigby, Adebolajo claimed that killing the act was a military strike commanded by God, and that he himself was a soldier of Allah.¹⁶⁵

MICHAEL ADEBOWALE

Alternative names (s): Ismail Ibn Abdullah¹⁶⁶

Gender: Male

Nationality: British

Ancestry: Nigerian¹⁶⁷

Family: Raised by a single mother; parents were separated¹⁶⁸

¹⁵⁴ Peachey, P., Jonathan Brown and Kim Sengupta, 'Lee Rigby murder: How killers Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale became ultra-violent radicals', *The Independent*, 19 December 2013, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/lee-rigby-murder-how-killers-michael-adebolajo-and-michael-adebowale-became-ultra-violent-radicals-9015743.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁵⁵ Casciani, D., 'Woolwich: How did Michael Adebolajo become a killer?', *BBC News*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Al-Muhajiroun was proscribed in the United Kingdom as a terrorist organisation under the UK Terrorism Act 2000. The group operated since 1986 until the British government announced its ban in 2005. In 2008 the organisation re-launched itself in the UK under the name "Islam4UK". The following banned organisations are believed to be al-Muhajiroun's aliases: Need4Khilafah, the Shariah Project, and the Islamic Dawah Association.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Whitehead, T., 'Lee Rigby killers: from quiet Christians to Islamist murderers', *The Telegraph*, 15 November 2014.

¹⁶⁰ Peachey, P., Jonathan Brown and Kim Sengupta, 'Lee Rigby murder: How killers Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale became ultra-violent radicals', *The Independent*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁶¹ Casciani, D., 'Woolwich: How did Michael Adebolajo become a killer?', *BBC News*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁶² Peachey, P., Jonathan Brown and Kim Sengupta, 'Lee Rigby murder: How killers Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale became ultra-violent radicals', *The Independent*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁶³ Casciani, D., 'Woolwich: How did Michael Adebolajo become a killer?' *BBC News*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Taylor, M., 'Lee Rigby killer's brother says Adebolajo sympathises with family', *The Guardian*, 26 March 2014, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/mar/26/lee-rigby-killer-brother-adebolajo-sympathy-family>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁶⁶ Casciani, D., 'Woolwich: How did Michael Adebolajo become a killer?', *BBC News*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Peachey, P., Jonathan Brown and Kim Sengupta, 'Lee Rigby murder: How killers Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale became ultra-violent radicals', *The Independent*, 19 December 2013.

Education: Unspecified

International experience: Unspecified

Known links to proscribed organisations: al-Muhajiroun¹⁶⁹

Known to the authorities prior to engagement in terrorism: Known to authorities for drugs and gang-related crimes¹⁷⁰

Age at the time of conversion: 17¹⁷¹

Circumstances of conversion: Believed to have been radicalised while in a young offender's institution for possession with intent to sell drugs¹⁷²

Period between conversion and committing a terrorist attack/joining a terrorist group: Four years¹⁷³

Status: Imprisoned (45-year minimum)¹⁷⁴

Crime: On 22 May 2013, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale hit Fusilier Lee Rigby of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers with a car.¹⁷⁵ [For more details please see the "Michael Adebolajo" profile above].

Background: Michael Adebowale was born in Eltham and was a student of Kidbrooke School in Greenwich.¹⁷⁶ His mother was a probation officer and his father worked at the Nigerian High Commission in London. His parents separated shortly after his birth and his mother raised him single-handedly.¹⁷⁷

Adebowale had a troubled childhood – he went missing from home on several occasions.¹⁷⁸ As a child he saw images of 9/11 on the television and he would later tell psychiatrists that he had been affected by this narrative from a young age.¹⁷⁹ In his teens he became involved with the Woolwich Boys, a gang of predominantly Somali boys which provided Michael with a sense of belonging after his parents' divorce.¹⁸⁰

In his youth, a professional fighter and drug addict named Lee James attacked him and two other boys he was with. Adebowale was stabbed twice and saw his friend was murdered. This experience led to a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health problems, such as delusions and hearing voices.¹⁸¹ Adebowale's mental health declined dramatically following the attack and it was made worse by his frequent use of cannabis.¹⁸²

¹⁶⁹ Casciani, D., 'Woolwich: How did Michael Adebolajo become a killer?', *BBC News*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Whitehead, T., 'Lee Rigby killers: from quiet Christians to Islamist murderers', *The Telegraph*, 15 November 2014.

¹⁷² *ibid.*

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ 'Lee Rigby murder: Adebolajo and Adebowale jailed', *BBC News*, 26 February 2014, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26357007>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁷⁵ 'Two guilty of Lee Rigby murder', *BBC News*, 19 December 2013, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25450555>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Peachey, P., Jonathan Brown and Kim Sengupta, 'Lee Rigby murder: How killers Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale became ultra-violent radicals', *The Independent*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Whitehead, T., 'Lee Rigby killers: from quiet Christians to Islamist murderers', *The Telegraph*, 15 November 2014.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*

¹⁸² Whitehead, T., 'Lee Rigby killers: from quiet Christians to Islamist murderers', *The Telegraph*, 15 November 2014.

In addition to being involved with gangs in south-east London, Michael Adebowale dealt drugs.¹⁸³ A year after the stabbing incident, in 2008, Adebowale was jailed for drug dealing and incarcerated for eight months. He was held in a young offender's institution where he is believed to have been radicalised.¹⁸⁴

KHALID MASOOD

Alternative name(s): Adrian Elms, Adrian Ajao

Gender: Male

Nationality: British

Ancestry: Child of a bi-racial couple¹⁸⁵

Family: Three marriages; four children¹⁸⁶

Education: The University of Sussex, bachelor of economics from 1994 until 1997¹⁸⁷

International experience: Two periods spent teaching English in Saudi Arabia¹⁸⁸

Known links to proscribed organisations: Al-Muhajiroun¹⁸⁹

Known to the authorities prior to engagement in terrorism: Once investigated for involvement in extremism as a "peripheral" figure¹⁹⁰

Age at the time of conversion: 35-36¹⁹¹

Circumstances of conversion: Converted in prison¹⁹²

Period between conversion and committing a terrorist attack/joining a terrorist group: 16 years

Status: Deceased¹⁹³

Crime: Around 14:30 on the afternoon of 22 March 2017, 52-year-old Khalid Masood drove a car across Westminster Bridge towards Parliament, mowing down pedestrians as he went. Masood injured 50 people, including a group of French schoolchildren, and murdered four. When Masood stopped the car outside the Houses of Parliament, he stabbed an unarmed

¹⁸³ Casciani, D., 'Woolwich: How did Michael Adebolajo become a killer?', *BBC News*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Mendick, R. and Emily Allen, 'Khalid Masood: Everything we know about the London attacker', *The Telegraph*, 27 March 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/24/khalid-masood-everything-know-london-attacker/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Casciani, D., 'London Attack: Who Was Khalid Masood?', *BBC News*, 26 March 2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-39373766>, last visited: 30 August 2017.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Gilligan, A., 'Khalid Masood served as link man for radical mosque', *The Times*, 9 April 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/khalid-masood-served-as-link-man-for-radical-mosque-westminster-parliament-terror-attack-xkxv8p1h>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁹⁰ Dearden, L., 'Theresa May speech in full: Prime Minister says London terror attack suspect "tried to silence our democracy"', *Independent*, 23 March 2017, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/theresa-may-london-terror-attack-speech-in-full-suspect-british-born-silence-democracy-ni5-a7645491.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁹¹ Burke, J., 'The mystery of Khalid Masood's journey into violence and terror', *The Guardian*, 25 March 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/25/the-mystery-of-khalid-masoods-journey-into-violence-and-terror>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁹² Dixon, H., Robert Mendick, Martin Evans and Patrick Sawyer, 'How London terrorist Khalid Masood sought help over his urges to kill', *The Telegraph*, 25 March 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/24/london-attacker-khalid-masood-hard-drinking-drug-taking-village/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

¹⁹³ Mendick, R. and Emily Allen, 'Khalid Masood: Everything we know about the London attacker', *The Telegraph*, 27 March 2017.

member of the parliamentary police, PC Keith Palmer, in the chest, mortally wounding him. Masood was then shot dead.

Background: Masood was born Adrian Russell Elms in 1966 to a teenage mother and was brought up in Rye, a seaside town in East Sussex, and later in Tunbridge Wells, Kent. When his mother remarried he became Adrian Russell Ajao, and he took on the name Khalid Masood when he converted to Islam.¹⁹⁴

Masood was known to police at the time of his attack, having had a range of previous convictions for assault, including violent knife crime, possession of offensive weapons, and public order offences. He was first convicted at the age of 18, in November of 1983. In July 2000, while Masood was living in Northiam, a quiet village in Sussex, he attacked the owner of a café, slashing his face with a knife and causing a serious wound. Imprisoned for two years until 2002, Masood converted to Islam while in jail and started using his new Muslim name. In 2003, Masood was again accused of stabbing a man in the nose in Eastbourne, leaving him needing cosmetic surgery. He was sent back to jail for another six months for possession of an offensive weapon.¹⁹⁵

In 2000, Masood separated from his first wife, whom he had met when they both worked at Aaron Chemicals. Masood had two children with her. In 2004, he married a Muslim woman, a relative of whom later claimed that Ajao had been “very violent and controlling” towards her.¹⁹⁶ The same year he gained a TESOL certificate, allowing him to teach English to foreigners. By 2005, Masood was in Saudi Arabia, working in Yanbu, teaching workers at the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) in Jeddah. Masood returned to Britain in the spring of 2009, and, after a five-month gap, joined a TEFL college in Luton as a senior English teacher.¹⁹⁷ He was then living with a new partner with whom he later moved to East London.¹⁹⁸

Masood was never convicted for terrorism-related offences. However, Prime Minister Theresa May said that Masood was “once investigated in relation to concerns about violent extremism”.¹⁹⁹ Between 2011 and 2013, Masood lived in Luton. While some believe he was radicalised during one of his stints in prison or during his stay in Saudi Arabia, an alternative hypothesis is that Masood was radicalised while in Luton²⁰⁰ which was at the time a base for al-Muhajiroun, the extremist organisation led by Anjem Choudary, who is now in prison in the UK for inviting support for IS.

SALLY JONES

Alternative name(s): Umm Hussain al-Britani, White Widow

Gender: Female

Nationality: British

Ancestry: English

Family: Single mother of two sons; widow of Junaid Hussain, a British-born ISIS propagandist and a hacker who is believed to have been killed in a US drone strike²⁰¹

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Dixon, H., Robert Mendick, Martin Evans and Patrick Sawyer, ‘How London terrorist Khalid Masood sought help over his urges to kill’, *The Telegraph*, 25 March 2017.

¹⁹⁷ Mendick, R. and Emily Allen, ‘Khalid Masood: Everything we know about the London attacker’, *The Telegraph*, 27 March 2017.

¹⁹⁸ Casciani, D., ‘London Attack: Who Was Khalid Masood?’, *BBC News*, 26 March 2017.

¹⁹⁹ Dearden, L., Theresa May speech in full: Prime Minister says London terror attack suspect “tried to silence our democracy”, *Independent*, 23 March 2017.

²⁰⁰ Gilligan, A., ‘Khalid Masood served as link man for radical mosque’, *The Times*, 9 April 2017.

²⁰¹ ‘Sally Jones’, *Counter Extremism Project*, available at: <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/sally-jones>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

Education: Unspecified

International experience: Time spent in Syria.

Known links to proscribed organisations: ISIS²⁰²

Known to the authorities prior to engagement in terrorism: No

Age at the time of conversion: Around 43²⁰³

Circumstances of conversion: Met her husband Junaid Hussain online and moved to Syria²⁰⁴

Period between conversion and committing a terrorist attack/joining a terrorist group: The two processes took place simultaneously²⁰⁵

Status: Deceased²⁰⁶

Crime: Sally Jones (Umm Hussain al-Britani, White Widow) was a recruiter and propagandist for ISIS who issued terrorist threats against the United Kingdom and US military officials on social media platforms. Jones's online activity fell in line with her role as leader of the secretive "Anwar al-Awlaki" female battalion founded by her late husband and named after an American-Yemeni al-Qaeda leader killed by a drone strike in 2011. It is a unit composed solely of foreign fighters whose purpose is to plan and carry out suicide missions in the West. As the battalion's leader, Jones was responsible for training all European female recruits, or "muhajirat", in the use of weapons and tactics.²⁰⁷

Background: Sally Jones, originally from Chatham, Kent, and was a guitarist in a female rock band. A single mother of two sons, she lived on welfare and worked as a perfume salesperson for L'Oreal.²⁰⁸ Dissatisfied with her life, Jones started chatting online to 19-year-old computer hacker Junaid Hussain. According to leaked ISIS documents, Hussain crossed from Turkey into Syria in July 2013 through the Jarablus border crossing – the route used by most of the group's new recruits owing to its proximity to Raqqa.²⁰⁹ Jones followed six months later, during the Christmas school holidays, taking one of her sons with her. The couple married in a small Islamic ceremony in Idlib in the north of the country. At that time Jones formally converted to Islam and changed her name to Sakinah Hussain.

Jones was taken to the Tala'a camp south-west of the city, where she spent six weeks being tested for her loyalty to the group, and was taught the jihadists' interpretation of Sharia law.²¹⁰ Jones subsequently glorified the caliphate on social media using the pseudonym Umm Hussain al-Britani. In May of 2016, she issued threats against the United Kingdom, calling upon Muslim women to launch terrorist attacks in England, Scotland, and Wales during Ramadan. She also threatened US military personnel.²¹¹

²⁰² *ibid.*

²⁰³ *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Brown, G., 'Who is Sally Jones? Why the "White Widow" is one of the most wanted terrorists in the world', *Birmingham Mail*, 30 August 2017, available at: <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/sally-jones-isis-white-widow-12638205>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁰⁶ 'British White Widow terrorist Sally Jones 'killed in drone strike'', *The Telegraph*, 12 October 2017, available at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/11/britons-wanted-female-terrorist-white-widow-sally-jones-killed1/>

²⁰⁷ 'Sally Jones', *Counter Extremism Project*.

²⁰⁸ Brown, G., 'Who is Sally Jones? Why the "White Widow" is one of the most wanted terrorists in the world', *Birmingham Mail*, 30 August 2017.

²⁰⁹ Ensor, J., 'Revealed: ISIL bride Sally Jones's role in training female recruits for attacks on West', *The Telegraph*, 11 September 2016, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/11/revealed-isis-white-widow-sally-jones-role-in-training-female-r/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ 'Sally Jones', *Counter Extremism Project*.

Jones's husband, Hussain, one of the group's most competent hackers, and suspected of being responsible for some of the group's most high-profile cyberattacks, was killed in a drone strike in July 2015.²¹² Following his death, Raqqa-based sources reported that Jones had expressed a wish to return to the UK.²¹³ However in 2015, Jones was one of the four British citizens included in a UN sanctions list, which resulted in her assets being frozen, and a ban being placed upon her travel. In October of 2017, it was widely reported that Sally Jones had been killed along the Iraqi-Syrian border in June by a US drone strike²¹⁴.

5.2 Russian Case Studies

SAID BURYATSKY

Alternative name(s): Alexandr Tikhomirov, Abu Saad Said Al-Buryati

Gender: Male

Nationality: Russian

Ancestry: Russian mother and Buryat father²¹⁵

Family: Raised by a single mother and grandparents; married once. His wife and son were forced to relocate abroad when Buryatsky's involvement in extremism became known to the authorities²¹⁶

Education: Madrasas in Moscow and Orenburg; Al-Azhar University in Cairo²¹⁷

International experience: Time spent in Egypt and Kuwait²¹⁸

Known links to proscribed organisations: Emirate Caucasus²¹⁹

Known to the authorities prior to engagement in terrorism: Buryatsky was known to security services because of his proselytising activities with the armed resistance²²⁰

Age at the time of conversion: 17²²¹

Circumstances of conversion: Buryatsky's mother had converted two years prior. According to the investigative journalists, Buryatsky was under influence of his mother's Chechen partner.²²²

²¹² Ensor, J., 'Revealed: ISIL bride Sally Jones's role in training female recruits for attacks on West', *The Telegraph*, 11 September 2016.

²¹³ Kiley, S., 'IS recruiter Sally Jones "wants to return to Britain" from Raqqa', *Sky News*, 4 July 2017, available at: <http://news.sky.com/story/is-recruiter-sally-jones-wants-to-return-to-britain-from-raqqa-10935755>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²¹⁴ 'British White Widow terrorist Sally Jones 'killed in drone strike'', *The Telegraph*, 12 October 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/11/britons-wanted-female-terrorist-white-widow-sally-jones-killed/>

²¹⁵ Lipchinskaya, O., 'Said Buryatsky Mstil Russkim Za To, Chto Jego Prezirali v Shkole i Nazyvali Rohley' [Said Buryatsky took revenge against Russians because they used to bully him at school and call him a weakling], *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 10 March 2010, available at: <https://www.irk.kp.ru/daily/24453/616620/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*

²¹⁷ Bobrova, O., 'Said Buryatskiy, On zhe Aleksandr Tikhomirov' [Said Buryatsky, aka Aleksandr Tikhomirov], *Novaya Gazeta*, 4 March 2010, available at: <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2010/03/05/4415-said-buryatskiy-on-zhe-aleksandr-tikhomirov>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁹ Vatchagacv, M., 'Killing of Said Buryatsky Unlikely to Deter North Caucasus Insurgency', *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7.48 (2010), available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/killing-of-said-buryatsky-unlikely-to-deter-north-caucasus-insurgency-2/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²²⁰ *ibid.*

²²¹ Muslim, S., 'Pismo Materi Saida Buryatskogo Rossiyskim SMI' [Letter from Said Buryatsky's mother to Russian mass media], *Best Today*, 10 December 2010, available at: <http://besttoday.ru/posts/3941.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²²² Lipchinskaya, O., 'Said Buryatsky Mstil Russkim Za To, Chto Jego Prezirali v Shkole i Nazyvali Rohley' [Said Buryatsky took revenge against Russians because they used to bully him at school and call him a weakling], *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 10 March 2010.

Period between conversion and committing a terrorist attack/joining a terrorist group: Approximately nine years

Status: Deceased

Crime: Said Buryatsky (born Aleksandr Tikhomirov) was a chief ideologue of the Imirate Kavkaz (Caucasus Emirate), an Islamist insurgency based in Russia's North Caucasus region, between May 2008 and March 2010. He was eventually killed by Russian special forces in Ingushetia. He is one of a number of rebel figures to have been dubbed "Usama ben Laden Rossii" ("Russia's Osama bin Laden") by the Russian media.

Background: Buryatsky was born in Buryatia, a region in southern Siberia, in 1982. His father was a Buddhist and his mother an Orthodox Christian. His father passed away when Buryatsky was a toddler. Buryatsky converted to Islam at the age of 17, and took the name Abu Saad Said. There are two different narratives regarding his conversion. According to his mother, Buryatia converted to Islam at the age of 17 after reading the Qur'an in Russian. His mother later recalled him saying, "I understood what I want in life – I want to convert to Islam, study this religion and convey its message to all people".²²³ However, following an investigation into his life, local journalists argued that Buryatsky's mother had converted to Islam two years prior to Buryatsky's conversion and that it was she who had ultimately influenced her son's decision.²²⁴

According to people who knew him as a child, Buryatsky was frequently bullied in school, had no friends and eventually came under the influence of his mother's radical social circle.²²⁵ In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Buryatsky studied at *madrasas* in Moscow and Orenburg. He then began to record and distribute CDs with his narratives on theological and geopolitical topics, quickly making use of the development of the internet to spread his words. In doing so, he built up a significant following among young Russian Muslims.²²⁶ As he was able to express himself in both Russian and Arabic, Buryatsky's lectures and videos reached a wide audience.

Between 2002 and 2005, Buryatsky lived in Egypt, during which time he studied at the Al-Fajr Institute, affiliated to the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, and spent time in Kuwait. He was ultimately forced to leave Egypt owing to pressure from domestic security services determined to combat Islamism in the country.²²⁷ After returning to Russia in 2005, he became one of Russia's leading young Muslim preachers, working at the *Ummah* publishing house, which prints Islamic texts in Moscow, and at the Moscow Cathedral Mosque. Later, in 2006, Buryatsky travelled extensively throughout Central Asia, in particular Kazakhstan, preaching his militant understanding of Islam.

In May 2008, Buryatsky travelled to the North Caucasus and pledged allegiance to Doku Umarov, Emir of the Caucasus Emirate. He continued to use the internet for propaganda purposes, urging young Muslims to join Umarov's jihad against Russia.²²⁸ His joining the ranks of the militants marked the beginning of a new period in the North Caucasus resistance movement. It resulted in the movement's internationalisation, attracting young recruits from among those living thousands of miles away from the region, demonstrating that the views and ideas of the movement were capable of finding support among Russia's youth.²²⁹ Buryatsky wrote frequently on rebel websites, such as *Kavkazcenter.com* and *Hunafa.com*, and, in a series entitled "Vzglyad na

²²³ Muslim, S., 'Pismo Materi Saida Buryatskogo Rossiyskim SMI' [Letter from Said Buryatsky's mother to Russian mass media], *Best Today*, 10 December 2010.

²²⁴ Falkovsky, I., 'Puli i Bomby. Rossiyskie Terroristy 2000h' [Bullets and Bombs: Russian Terrorists of the 2000s], available at: <https://unotices.com/book.php?id=177802>, last visited: 20 August 2017.

²²⁵ *ibid.*

²²⁶ Bobrova, O., 'Said Buryatskiy, On zhe Aleksandr Tikhomirov' [Said Buryatsky, aka Aleksandr Tikhomirov], *Novaya Gazeta*, 5 March 2010.

²²⁷ *ibid.*

²²⁸ 'Buryatskoe Litsio Kavkazskogo Terrorisma' [The Buryat Face of the Caucasian Terrorism], *Lenta.ru*, 5 March 2010, available at: <https://lenta.ru/articles/2010/03/05/said/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²²⁹ Vatchagav, M., 'Killing of Said Buryatsky Unlikely to Deter North Caucasus Insurgency', *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7.48 (2010).

dzhikhad iznutri” (“An inside view of Jihad”), detailed the exploits of the North Caucasus insurgency in their battles against Russian forces.²³⁰

Said Buryatsky was ultimately killed by Russian special forces during a major anti-terrorism operation which lasted for two days in the region of Ingushetia in March of 2010.²³¹

VLADIMIR KHODOV

Alternative name(s): Abdullah

Gender: Male

Nationality: Russian

Ancestry: Russian

Family: Raised by single mother and stepfather; raised alongside one half-brother²³²

Education: Madrasa in Dagestan²³³

International experience: No

Known links to proscribed organisations: Chechen militant Islamist movement, Shamil Basayev²³⁴

Known to the authorities prior to engagement in terrorism: No

Age at the time of conversion: Approximately 22²³⁵

Circumstances of conversion: Reportedly influenced by his half-brother, Boris, who was convicted for murder and converted to Islam in jail²³⁶

Period between conversion and committing a terrorist attack/joining a terrorist group: Four to five years

Status: Deceased

Crime: Vladimir Khodov was one of the six leaders of the hostage-takers in the 2004 Beslan school hostage crisis. He was also a prime suspect of the murder of two people following the explosion of an artillery shell in Vladikavkaz.²³⁷

Background: Vladimir Khodov was born in 1976 in Berdyansk (Ukraine), to a single mother who worked as a nurse. When Vladimir was three years old, his mother married a North Ossetian

²³⁰ Buryatsky's works are still available on the website Kavkazcenter.com: <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/search/all/all/%D0%A1%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%B4%20%D0%91%D1%83%D1%80%D1%8F%D1%82%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²³¹ Vatchagayev, M., 'Killing of Said Buryatsky Unlikely to Deter North Caucasus Insurgency', Eurasia Daily Monitor 7.48 (2010).

²³² 'Khodov, Vladimir: Uchastnik Zahvata Shkoly v Beslane' [Vladimir Khodov: one of the Beslan hostage-takers], *Lenta.ru*, available at: <https://lenta.ru/lib/14163039/>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²³³ *ibid.*

²³⁴ *ibid.*

²³⁵ *ibid.*

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ Satter, D., 'Remembering Beslan', *Forbes*, 10 January 2009, available at: <https://www.forbes.com/2009/10/01/beslan-putin-politkovskaya-basayev-dzasokhov-chechen-opinions-contributors-david-satter.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

engineer, Anatoly Khodov, and the family moved to Elkhotovo, 40 km from Beslan. Anatoly adopted Vladimir, and in 1980 his half-brother Boris was born.²³⁸

In 1996, Boris was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment for a murder in Maykop, in the Russian Republic of Adygea. He converted to Islam while in jail and ultimately influenced Vladimir's decision to convert to Islam. In 1998, accused of rape, Vladimir Khodov moved back to Berdyansk to live with his grandfather. However, in 2000 he returned to Adygea and attended a *madrassa* in Cherkessia. After his return from prison, Vladimir's half-brother Boris was arrested again on charges of weapons' and drugs' possession, but was eventually released. Shortly afterwards, he abducted a woman, in an effort to force her to marry him. The incident resulted in Boris' death, when he was killed by the girl's brother. Vladimir insisted that Boris' funeral follow Muslim rituals.²³⁹

The incident expedited Vladimir Khodov's own involvement in radicalism and violence. He joined a militant Salafi organisation as a cook, and was later selected for the mission in Beslan. The Beslan school hostage crisis started on 1 September 2004 and lasted for three days. It resulted in the death of at least 385 people. The hostage-takers were described as a "martyr brigade" sent by the radical Chechen guerrilla commander Shamil Basayev, who demanded both Russian recognition of Chechnya's independence, and the withdrawal of Russian troops. On the third day of the siege, Russian security forces stormed the building with heavy weapons, and most of the hostage-takers, including Khodov, were killed.²⁴⁰

5.3 German Case Studies

DENIS CUSPERT

Alternative name(s): Deso Dogg (before Islam), Talha Al-Almani, Aboo Maleeq, Abu Malik

Gender: Male

Nationality: German

Ancestry: Child of a bi-racial couple: a German mother and a Ghanaian father²⁴¹

Family: Raised by mother and stepfather²⁴², and was briefly married to a FBI interpreter Daniela Green who secretly travelled to Syria to join him as a spouse²⁴³

Education: Unspecified

International experience: Time spent in Egypt and Syria²⁴⁴

Known links to proscribed organisations: ISIS²⁴⁵

²³⁸ Chernov, I., 'Bojevnik Khodov: Anatoly ili Vladimir? Ukrainets ili Osetin?' [Khodov as a Combatant: Anatoly or Vladimir? Ukrainian or Ossetian?], 13 September 2004, available at: <http://old.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/msg/2004/09/m34311.htm>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²³⁹ 'Khodov, Vladimir: Uchastnik Zahvata Shkoly v Beslane' [Vladimir Khodov: one of the Beslan hostage-takers], *Lenta.ru*.

²⁴⁰ Satter, D., 'Remembering Beslan', *Forbes*, 10 January 2009.

²⁴¹ Hauser, C., 'Deso Dogg, Ex-Rapper Who Joined ISIS, Is Killed by U.S. Airstrike', *The New York Times*, 30 October 2015, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/31/world/europe/deso-dogg-denis-cuspert-ex-rapper-who-joined-isis-is-killed-by-us-airstrike.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁴² *ibid.*

²⁴³ Daniela Green is a Czech-German and a naturalised American citizen who now lives in the United States. She returned from Syria, cooperated with authorities, and received a two-year prison sentence. See: Die Deutsche FBI-Frau, Die Einen IS-Kämpfer Heiratete [German FBI Agent Who Married ISIS Fighter]. Spiegel Online, 11 June 2017, available at <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/lbi-uebersetzerin-daniela-green-heiratete-deutschen-is-kaempfer-denis-cuspert-a-1151453.html>, last visited: 30 September 2017

²⁴⁴ Krueger, K., 'In Allahs Gang', *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 29 October 2013, available at: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/rapper-denis-cuspert-in-allahs-gang-12635563.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

Known to the authorities prior to engagement in terrorism: Cuspert was known to the German authorities, but there was not enough evidence to prosecute Cuspert for inciting violence through his speeches²⁴⁶ In his youth Cuspert was repeatedly arrested for drug-related offences and served time in the Tegel prison.²⁴⁷

Age at the time of conversion: 35

Circumstances of conversion: Following a car accident, Cuspert declared his decision to convert to Islam²⁴⁸

Period between conversion and committing a terrorist attack/joining a terrorist group: Both processes took places simultaneously

Status: Deceased

Crime: Denis Cuspert worked as a recruiter for ISIS until he was killed by a US air strike in October 2015. He threatened the President of the United States and German citizens and encouraged other Western Muslims to carry out attacks on behalf of ISIS. He was designated as a terrorist by the US State Department.²⁴⁹

Background: Cuspert was born in Berlin (Kreuzberg) in 1975 to a German mother and a Ghanaian father who had been deported before Denis was born.²⁵⁰ His African-American stepfather, a former soldier, was very strict disciplinarian, and family conflicts contributed to Cuspert spending five years in a home for troubled children.²⁵¹

As a musician, Cuspert toured with the American performer DMX in 2006, but later abandoned rap music and became a well-known singer of *nasheeds* – Islamic devotional music – in German. Some of his *nasheeds* included praise of Osama bin Laden.²⁵² One of his first religious songs, released in 2011, was called “Wake up”.²⁵³ After that, he gave speeches across Germany, drawing people’s attention to his personal narrative of conversion, including his past membership of Berlin street gangs.²⁵⁴ He also joined a Salafi group, “Die Wahre Religion”, founded in 2005 by Palestinian-born Ibrahim Abou-Nagie. According to Cuspert, the legal code of Islam permits self-defence: “My duty is to use my voice for telling people the truth, and the truth is, jihad is a duty”.²⁵⁵

In 2011, suspecting Cuspert of planning to travel to Pakistan, German authorities demanded he surrender his passport. Cuspert²⁵⁶ At that time, German authorities did not have enough evidence to prosecute him for hate speech and glorification of terrorism. Instead, he was tried in Germany in August 2011 on charges of possessing illegal weapons. Prosecutors said he had held a gun in a

²⁴⁵ ‘IS Terrorist Denis Cuspert. Tot Oder Lebendig?’ [IS Terrorist Denis Cuspert. Dead or Alive?], *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 4 August 2016, available at: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/ist-is-terrorist-denis-cuspert-tot-oder-lebendig-14371800.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁴⁶ Krueger, K., ‘In Allahs Gang’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 29 October 2013.

²⁴⁷ Knight, B. Denis Cuspert – Berlin’s Own Criminal, Rapper, and Jihadist. Deutsche Welle. 30 October 2015, available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/denis-cuspert-berlins-own-criminal-rapper-and-jihadist/a-18817789>, last visited: 5 October 2017

²⁴⁸ Mekhennet, S., ‘German Officials Alarmed by Ex-Rapper’s New Message: Jihad’, *The New York Times*, 31 August 2011, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/01/world/europe/01jihadi.html?pagewanted=all>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁴⁹ Hauser, C., ‘Deso Dogg, Ex-Rapper Who Joined ISIS, Is Killed by U.S. Airstrike’, *The New York Times*, 30 October 2015.

²⁵⁰ Die Deutsche FBI-Frau, Die Einen IS-Kämpfer Heiratete [German FBI Agent Who Married ISIS Fighter]. Spiegel Online. 11 June 2017, available at: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/fbi-uebersetzerin-daniela-greene-heiratete-deutschen-is-kaempfer-denis-cuspert-a-1151453.html>, last visited: 30 September 2017

²⁵¹ *ibid.*

²⁵² *ibid.*

²⁵³ Burger, R., ‘Die Spur von “Millatu Ibrahim” [Tracking ‘Millatu Ibrahim’], *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 29 November 2015, available at: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/kampf-gegen-den-terror/islamismus-in-nordrhein-westfalen-die-spur-von-millatu-ibrahim-13937586.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁵⁴ Mekhennet, S., ‘German Officials Alarmed by Ex-Rapper’s New Message: Jihad’, *The New York Times*, 31 August 2011.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*

YouTube video, and that police had found ammunition during a search of his apartment. He was eventually ordered to pay a fine of 1,800 euros to avoid a prison sentence.²⁵⁷

Cuspert considered himself a victim of racism while growing up in Berlin.²⁵⁸ Even before converting to Islam and being radicalised, he found an outlet for his aggression and rebellion in rap music. According to his own description, “My songs were about the time in prison, racism, war”.²⁵⁹ However, after surviving a car accident, Cuspert started questioning his criminal lifestyle, turned to Islam and considered himself a “newborn” individual. In 2010, he ended his rap career to fully dedicate himself to the cause of jihad.²⁶⁰ He became one of the leaders of the militant Salafi organisation “Millatu Ibrahim” (later banned by the German government), together with the previously jailed Egyptian Austrian-born extremist Mohamed Mahmoud.²⁶¹ As one of the most vocal German-speaking ISIS propagandists, Cuspert’s speeches and songs have helped facilitate an influx of German-speaking foreign fighters into Syria.²⁶²

After leaving Germany on 21 June 2012, Denis Cuspert travelled to the Mersa Matruh area in Egypt to undergo training in firearms, at a camp for militants.²⁶³ Following his training, Cuspert travelled to Syria and was involved in with Syrian government forces in Aleppo.²⁶⁴ He continued to play an active role, fighting on behalf of ISIS.²⁶⁵ In October 2015, the US Department of Defense informed media outlets that Cuspert had been killed by a US strike near Raqqa, Syria.²⁶⁶

SVEN LAU

Alternative name(s): Abu Adam

Gender: Male

Nationality: German

Ancestry: German

Family: Two marriages; five children²⁶⁷

Education: Vocational college; graduated as an industrial mechanic²⁶⁸

International experience: Spent time in Egypt, and travelled to Syria on three separate occasions²⁶⁹

Known links to proscribed organisations: Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (JMA), al Nusra Front, ISIS (briefly)²⁷⁰

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*

²⁶⁰ ‘IS Terrorist Denis Cuspert. Tot Oder Lebendig?’ [IS Terrorist Denis Cuspert. Dead or Alive?], *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 4 August 2016.

²⁶¹ *ibid.*

²⁶² Burger, R., ‘Die Spur von “Millatu Ibrahim” [Tracking ‘Millatu Ibrahim’], *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 29 November 2015.

²⁶³ Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaeda and Associated Individuals and Entities. Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150529193743/http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQDi347E.shtml>, last visited: 5 October 2017

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶⁶ Cruickshank, P., ‘First on CNN: German rapper who joined ISIS killed in U.S. strike, official Says’, *CNN*, 30 October 2015, available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/10/29/politics/german-isis-rapper-killed-denis-cuspert/index.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁶⁷ Huggler, J., ‘Islamist preacher in Germany arrested over terror links’, *The Telegraph*, 15 December 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/12051721/Islamist-preacher-in-Germany-arrested-over-terror-links.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*

²⁶⁹ Drobinski, M., ‘Sven Lau - Kein Harmloser Prediger’, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, 26 July 2017, available at: <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/prozess-sven-lau-kein-harmloser-prediger-1.3604455>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁷⁰ ‘Germany Salafist “Sharia Police” preacher Sven Lau detained’, *Deutsche Welle*, 15 December 2015, available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/german-salafist-sharia-police-preacher-sven-lau-detained/a-18918127>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

Known to the authorities prior to engagement in terrorism: Previously arrested on suspicion of recruiting volunteers to travel to Syria²⁷¹

Age at the time of conversion: 18

Circumstances of conversion: Met a Turkish man while training as an apprentice mechanic²⁷²

Period between conversion and committing a terrorist attack/joining a terrorist group: Approximately 10 years

Status: Jailed²⁷³

Crime: As well as being considered one of the most famous German extremist preachers, Sven Lau has recruited volunteers and provided money and equipment for Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (JMA), a jihadist group with links to al-Qaeda.²⁷⁴

Background: Born into a Catholic family in the western German city of Mönchengladbach in 1980, Sven Lau converted to Islam at the age of 18 after he met a Turkish man whilst working as an apprentice mechanic. He worked as a fireman in the city from 2003 to 2008 before becoming a full-time Islamist preacher. From approximately 2005 he devoted himself to preaching Islam while also running a business selling Islamic clothes, literature and other accessories. Lau is a friend and an ally of the famous Salafi preacher (also a German convert to Islam) Pierre Vogel, also known as Abu Hamza Salahuddin. Both are known for their strong social media presence, including their own YouTube channels.²⁷⁵

Sven Lau was detained in December 2015 and sentenced to five and a half years in prison in July 2017 for supporting a terrorist group overseas.²⁷⁶ He was charged with facilitating the recruitment of young men for the Islamist organisation “Jamwa” and urging them to fight infidels in Syria. Indeed, Lau was a contact point for the German Salafists in the Düsseldorf region,²⁷⁷ and was providing financial and logistical support to Jamwa, which later split into two factions in late 2013, with Lau’s group pledging allegiance to ISIS. The other faction pledged allegiance to Al Nusra Front.²⁷⁸ The investigators relied on intercepted phone calls, internet chats, photos of Sven Lau in Syria with a Kalashnikov, and witness testimonies.²⁷⁹ The trial took place in the court in Düsseldorf, and was one of a series of trials of Islamists in Germany that involved Salafi converts to Islam.²⁸⁰

Pierre Vogel later denied Sven Lau’s culpability, arguing that he received a jail sentence because of “liars”.²⁸¹ Even before Sven Lau’s detention and prosecution, he had become known as the leader of the self-proclaimed “Sharia Police”, which attempted to enforce Islamic law on the streets of the city of Wuppertal.²⁸²

²⁷¹ *ibid.*

²⁷² Huggler, J., ‘Islamist preacher in Germany arrested over terror links’, *The Telegraph*, 15 December 2015.

²⁷³ ‘Islamisten-Chef Lau zu Haftstrafe verurteilt’ [Islamist Leader Lau Received Jail Sentence], *Deutsche Welle*, 26 July 2017, available at: <http://www.dw.com/de/islamisten-chef-lau-zu-haftstrafe-verurteilt/a-39650918>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁷⁴ *ibid.*

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Bleiker, C., ‘Five big German terror trials’, *Deutsche Welle*, 6 September 2016.

²⁷⁸ Hume, T., ‘Germany arrests Islamist preacher accused of supporting terror group’, *CNN*, 15 December 2015, available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/15/europe/germany-arrests-islamist-preacher/index.html>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁷⁹ ‘Islamisten-Chef Lau Zu Haftstrafe Verurteilt’ [Islamist Leader Lau Received Jail Sentence], *Deutsche Welle*, 26 July 2017.

²⁸⁰ Bleiker, C., ‘Five big German terror trials’, *Deutsche Welle*, 6 September 2016.

²⁸¹ ‘Sven Lau wurde wegen Luegnern verurteilt (Pierre Vogel)’ [Sven Lau was sentenced because of liars (Pierre Vogel)], *YouTube*, 26 July 2017, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQNdeJPR-XM>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁸² Hume, T., ‘Germany arrests Islamist preacher accused of supporting terror group’, *CNN*, 15 December 2017.

6. Findings

Although conversions to Islam in European countries might seem alarming to many, they are not indicative of the process of radicalisation per se. Many people embrace Islam because of: spiritual experiences (a desire to get closer to God); psychological reasons (a feeling of certainty exemplified by the Qur'an as a literal word of God, and teachings tied to "scriptural" proofs rather than opinions; a desire to acquire new membership of a bigger community); intellectual reasons (claims of scientific "miracles" mentioned in the Qur'an); and many other factors. Some people discover Islam because they are curious about other cultures and would like to become cultural "ambassadors", bridging civilisations.

At the same time, analysis of the case studies detailed within this report suggests that conversions to Islam were a response and an outcome of grappling with certain vulnerabilities anchored in the characters and social contexts of the individuals profiled. An important question to pose for both policy-makers and security practitioners is: "*Under what conditions do converts to Islam radicalise?*" This report reveals that there are certain vulnerabilities that precede or determine a conversion to Islam, and it is crucial to discuss and examine these vulnerabilities while analysing the issue of conversions in Europe as very often they become factors that determine initial gravitation and gradual adoption of radical Islamist ideology.

6.1 Vulnerabilities and Conversions to Islam

6.1.1 Family Environment

Numerous studies are dedicated to the question of how parents' involvement affects children's cognitive, emotional and social development. Longitudinal research concludes that losing a close father-child relationship between childhood and adolescence has significant negative implications for mental health.²⁸³ Over past decades, an increasing amount of attention has been paid to the link between juvenile delinquency and paternal deprivation. Social scientists have tried to determine whether delinquent activity among young people could be differentiated by the absence of a father figure at home, attributing it to a lack of social control. Many criminological and sociological studies²⁸⁴ suggest that the risk of antisocial behaviour increases when fathers are absent from the family home, and when non-resident fathers have no communication with children. Boys raised by unmarried mothers are considered to be at the greatest risk; men who are father-deprived early in life could engage in rigidly over-compensatory masculine behaviour later in life.²⁸⁵ According to the academics Furstenberg and Harris, adolescents who strongly identify with their fathers are 80% less likely to have been in jail.²⁸⁶

The findings confirm that all forms of paternal absence (including neglect or non-participation) matter for the potential appeal of violence, and hence radicalisation. Almost all male individuals analysed in this study were raised in circumstances where their biological fathers were physically absent and did not engage in their upbringing for many different reasons. Some had left the family (the cases of Denis Cuspert, Michael Adebolajo, Khaled Massoud, Said Burtyatsky, Vladimir

²⁸³ Foley, K.A. and Frank F. Furstenberg, 'Parental Involvement and Children's Health: A Longitudinal Study', available at: <https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/urbanpoverty/Urban%20Seminars/May1999/furstenberg.pdf>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁸⁴ Harper, C.C. and Sara S. McLanahan, 'Father Absence and Youth Incarceration', *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 14.3 (2004), available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2004.00079.x/abstract>, last visited: 5 September 2017; Allen, S. and Kerry Daly, 'The Effects of Father Involvement: A Summary of the Research Evidence', *Newsletter for Father Involvement Initiative - Ontario Network 1* (2002), available at: [http://ecdip.org/docs/pdf/IF%20Father%20Res%20Summary%20\(KD\).pdf](http://ecdip.org/docs/pdf/IF%20Father%20Res%20Summary%20(KD).pdf), last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁸⁵ Biller, H.B., *Fathers and Families. Paternal Factors in Child Development* (Westport, CT: Auburn House, 1993).

²⁸⁶ Furstenberg, F.F. and K.M. Harris, 'When and Why Fathers Matter: Impacts of Father Involvement on the Children of Adolescent Mothers' in *Unwed Fathers: Changing Roles and Emerging Policies*, edited by R. I. Lerman and T. J. Ooms (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), pp. 117-138.

Khodov and Germaine Lindsay) or had been imprisoned before the child was born (Richard Reid). In some cases, the father figure was substituted by a controlling, dominant stepfather (Denis Cuspert) or a mother's partner who may have been responsible for radicalisation (Said Buryatsky). The only person who grew up with the presence of both biological parents (Michael Adebolajo) fathered six children by three women, exhibiting a pattern of unstable and chaotic interpersonal relationships even after having converted to Islam.

While this study does not aim to control the issue of paternal absence statistically, that this similarity occurs across so many different socio-cultural contexts suggests that there may be correlation between the absence of a father figure at early age, and antisocial behaviour that manifests as petty crime or terrorism during adulthood. In this context, the findings confirm research evidence found in existing criminological and sociological scholarship, which links delinquent behaviour with the issue of fatherhood.

6.1.2 Perceived Stigmatisation

In most cases, the individuals profiled were either bullied at school or clearly felt like “outsiders” among their social circle because of racial, socio-economic and/or ethnic differences. Said Buryatsky was perceived by his classmates as a “weakling” who could not stand up for himself and was the subject of constant bullying. Denis Cuspert claimed that he was a victim of racism while growing up in Berlin, and Khalid Masood maintained a similar narrative, having been raised as the only bi-racial child in his town in the UK. Many of the individuals profiled in this study were ethnically different or had a mixed family heritage (Nigerian, Buryat, Jamaican, Ghanaian, etc.) which led to stigmatisation, or were married to a Muslim partner.

6.1.3 International Experience

It is a common trend for recent converts to have studied Arabic and the Qur'an in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or Egypt. Taking into consideration the overall interest of many converts in the Arabic language, and in the historical and theological aspects of Islam, their endeavours to learn more about the origins of the religion or to study the language of the Qur'an is not surprising. Other key pursuits included explosives or military training in Afghanistan or Pakistan (Said Buryatsky, Richard Reid) or trips to Syria (Denis Cuspert, Sven Lau, Sally Jones). Such trips are likely to have served as a means of further radicalisation, especially if supplemented by the foreign policy anti-Western narrative voiced by many Islamist organisations.

6.1.4 Previous Convictions and History of Violence

Although this aspect was initially not included, collecting data on the profiled individuals demonstrated that most of the converts in this study had previously been incarcerated or had been known to the police for petty crime. Denis Cuspert, known as Deso Dogg, sought to position himself as a “Gangsta-Rapper” from Berlin before joining jihad. Michael Adebowale was involved with the Woolwich Boys, a gang of mostly Somali youngsters. Similarly, Michael Adebolajo dealt drugs with local gangs. Richard Reid committed his first crime (the “vicious mugging” of an elderly lady) as a teenager, which was followed by a string of convictions. Khaled Masood also had a range of convictions for assaults, including violent knife crimes, possession of offensive weapons and public order offences. Vladimir Khodov was once accused of rape. Those individuals without a criminal record were nevertheless known for other rebellious activities.

6.1.5 Previous Religious Experience

Almost all of the individuals profiled came from secular or non-practising backgrounds (except for Michael Adebolajo who was raised attending a church every Sunday and is understood to have been influenced by the Jehovah's Witnesses). Some of those profiled exhibited a profound interest in different religions and spiritual outlooks from an early age (Said Buryatsky), and experimented with different religions such as Buddhism and Christianity before embracing Islam. However, Buryatsky's story is unique, resembling Pierre Vogel's narrative.²⁸⁷ Both individuals could be described as intellectuals who learnt Arabic, studied the Qur'an in depth and became well-known charismatic leaders in their local contexts, acquiring many followers, including among recent converts. Their profiles are very different from jihadi recruits who join extremist organisations.

6.2 Experiences of Converting to Islam

With regard to the experiences of converting to Islam, this study examined the following aspects: age at the time of conversion, circumstances of conversion and period between conversion and committing a terrorist attack or joining a terrorist group.

6.2.1 Age at the Time of Conversion

Although teenagers and people under 25 years old are more likely to convert to Islam,²⁸⁸ there is still no common trajectory with regard to age at conversion. Some people convert as early as 15 years old (Germaine Lindsay), whereas others convert in their thirties (Khalid Masood, Denis Cuspert) or early forties (Sally Jones). Sally Jones was the only individual among the profiles analysed for this study who converted quite late. Most of the individuals embraced Islam between the ages of 15 and 25 and became radicalised shortly afterwards. This is the age when an individual often faces an identity crisis in adolescence that sometimes results in adopting a "negative" identity.²⁸⁹

6.2.2 Circumstances and reasons for conversion

Islam offers a very short ceremony of conversion, and straightforward religious guidance comprised of clear explanations about human behaviour, societal norms and justice. Furthermore, the Qur'an might be appealing to some as it contains many facts about the natural world, which, according to many converts and preachers, proves its divine nature.²⁹⁰ As evidenced by the collected case studies, social networks such as friends or parents are conducive to the process of conversion, as individuals do not operate in a social vacuum. Moreover, in many cases social networks and established relationships become key influencing factors of the decision to convert. This is especially true during the period of identity-seeking for individuals under 25 years of age. Vladimir Khodov converted after his brother had embraced Islam in jail; Sally Jones converted after she had met her future husband online; Sven Lau converted after he had become friends with a Turkish man on his study course; Said Buryatsky and Germaine Lindsay were reportedly influenced by their mothers' conversions. Pierre Vogel, a notorious German Salafi

²⁸⁷ 'My Way to Islam - Pierre Vogel/Abu Hamza - a German Muslim 1/2', *YouTube*, 21 January 2009, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3EgWeVv6sw>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁸⁸ 'CEP Analysis: Converts Who Became Foreign Fighters, Recruiters, and Domestic Terrorists', *Counter Extremism Project*, 27 March 2017, available at: <https://www.counterextremism.com/press/cep-analysis-converts-who-became-foreign-fighters-recruiters-and-domestic-terrorists>, last visited: 5 September 2017.

²⁸⁹ For more research on psychosocial development and formation of identity in adolescence, see: Erikson, E., *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).

²⁹⁰ *ibid*

preacher, also confessed that while growing up as a Protestant, he had a lot of friends from Muslim countries.²⁹¹

In addition to the influence of friends and family, another reason for the profiled individuals to convert was to acquire a sense of belonging. Because the Muslim *Ummah* is portrayed as a globalised community that offers a full symbolic membership without taking into account ethnic factors, embracing Islam appeals to second generation migrants in Europe who are frequently torn between two countries and struggle with a feeling of being perceived as outsiders. In the UK, as pointed out in section 3, conversions to Islam have become especially popular among the Afro-Caribbean community, which could be explained by perceived discrimination and racism.

Another reason to convert is to acquire a purpose in life, which is particularly relevant for those in prison settings where people share a set of grievances, experience loneliness and psychological stress. Richard Reid, Khalid Masood and Michael Adebawale all converted while serving their sentences in jail. All three had a violent past, characterised by criminal activities such as muggings, petty theft, interpersonal violence and short temper. Vladimir Khodov converted after his brother was sentenced for murder. Spiritual guidance that a conversion to Islam offers could be particularly appealing for incarcerated individuals.

Others experienced a traumatic episode, such as a near-fatal car accident or the death of a family member (Denis Cuspert, Michael Adebolajo), and turned to Islam, hoping it would be a tool to repent of “previous sins” or help them cope with their grief. Traumatic episodes such as the ones mentioned above (including a prison sentence of a close relative) generate a sense of identity crisis and can be viewed as a catalyst for a ‘cognitive opening’. Wiktorowicz argues that a cognitive opening shakes certitude in previously accepted beliefs and facilitates possible receptivity to accepting extremist ideology.²⁹² In many cases individuals can cope with a traumatic episode using their current belief systems. However, when these appear to be inadequate, individuals may be open to other views. A cognitive opening can spark a process of religion seeking, and exposure to radicals through movement outreach and social networks could facilitate radicalisation. Moreover, radical movements can foster a cognitive opening through outreach, and by initiating discussions about Islam.²⁹³

It has already been proven that Islamic activists operate in a world of educational social networks: radical and moderate fundamentalists alike devote time and energy to religious learning with the aim of persuading others to accept a particular understanding of Islam.²⁹⁴ Salafi organisations in a number of EU countries (such as Germany or the UK), unlike moderate Muslim communities, are particularly proactive with regard to embracing new followers. They quickly reach out to converts, or “born-again” Muslims, by using the local language, making available relevant literature, counselling and offering educational opportunities, such as conferences and workshops. Their fervour at proselytising activities could explain the tendency that some converts appear to favour the ultra-conservative version of Islam more commonly associated with extremism. Many of the converts examined in depth in this report (such as Sven Lau, Michael Adebolajo, Denis Cuspert, Germaine Lindsay and Richard Reid) were under the influence of radical sermons that might have encouraged them to pursue violent struggle.

²⁹¹ ‘My Way to Islam - Pierre Vogel/Abu Hamza - a German Muslim 1/2’, *YouTube*, 21 January 2009.

²⁹² Wiktorowicz, Q., *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Lanham, Boulder, Toronto, Oxford: Rowman Littlefield Publishers, 2005), p.5.

²⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 17.

Having said that, the involvement of Salafi groups in radicalisation of both converts and heritage Muslims is a contested debate that often lacks empirical support from both sides. On the one hand, as exemplified by this report, there is evidence that some extremists have been involved with non-violent Salafi groups at some point in their lives. On the other hand, correlation does not mean causation, and one has to acknowledge that some Salafi groups have been actively campaigning against terrorism for many years, and launched their own counter-radicalisation initiatives, some of which have been government-funded by the UK in the past.²⁹⁵ Individuals with extremist views, such as Richard Reid, Abdullah El-Faisal and Zacarias Moussaoui, were expelled from the mosques they attended when it was clear that they had started to gravitate towards pursuing political change through violence.²⁹⁶ Moreover, there is evidence that home-grown jihadists in Europe who later turn to violence or travel to join the caliphate, lack religious literacy and are quite ignorant about the main philosophical principles that underpin Islam.²⁹⁷

At the same time, Salafism in Europe is not a homogenous movement. As has been pointed out by Wiktorowicz, it can be divided into three factions which share the same creed but offer different solutions to contemporary problems.²⁹⁸ It is important to acknowledge the distinction between the “purist”, “politico” and “jihadi” Salafists and their different impact on the potential radicalisation of converts.²⁹⁹ While “politico” and “jihadi” Salafists are very likely to contribute to further radicalisation, “purist” Salafi groups tend to oppose any political change, and encourage both converts and heritage Muslims to “respect the laws of the land” and embrace the norms of civic responsibility.³⁰⁰

6.2.3 Time Span between Converting to Islam, and Radicalising or Becoming Involved with an Extremist Organisation

It has already been pointed out that conversion to Islam is not a linear process³⁰¹ involving certain stages that can be measured chronologically. It is also very difficult to track when initial “innocent” interest in radical movements shifts to the stage of accepting violent means of reaching a political goal. Indeed, judging from the case studies examined in this research, there is no common trend with regard to the time period following the initial conversion to the point of being radicalised or joining an extremist organisation. In some of the profiled cases it took up to 15 years (Khaled Masood and perhaps Sven Lau), whereas in other cases these two processes could well have taken place simultaneously (Sally Jones and Denis Cuspert). One could argue that this process is faster for individuals who frequently use social media and have opportunities to interact with others online.

²⁹⁵ The empirical studies of Baker (2011) address the efficacy of Salafi and Islamist counter-extremist activities. For more information, also see Inge (2016).

²⁹⁶ Interview with Dr Abdul Haqq Baker, 20 August 2017.

²⁹⁷ Batrawy, A., Paisley Dodds and Lori Hinnant, ‘Leaked ISIS Documents Reveal Recruits Have Poor Grasp of Islamic Faith’, *The Independent*, 16 August 2017, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-documents-leak-recruits-islam-sharia-religion-faith-syria-iraq-a7193086.html>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

²⁹⁸ See 1.2. ‘Terminology’.

²⁹⁹ This typology was introduced by Quintan Wiktorowicz in his book *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremists in the West* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

³⁰⁰ Baker, A. H., *Extremists in our Midst: Confronting Terror* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

³⁰¹ Inge, A., *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion*.

7. Conclusions

Initiatives of policymakers and politicians to stamp out radical Islamism in Europe (such as the Prevent work stream in the UK) have been focused on working with well-established Muslim communities or with recent immigrants. While acknowledging the importance of these endeavours in combatting radicalisation, this report demonstrates that the same violent ideology could be adopted by individuals from a wider range of backgrounds than those historically or geographically associated with Islam. Radicalisation of converts has already become one of the features of European home-grown jihadism. The analysis of the above profiles reveals certain vulnerabilities that policymakers should be taking into account while developing counter-radicalisation programmes.

Absent a father figure, conflicts with parents and a history of abuse in the family very often determine an inclination to further violence in adulthood. In addition to both direct and indirect family influences, a strong link between petty crime, a previous string of convictions in the family and the further appeal of Islamism, as exhibited by the above profiles, is quite alarming. ISIS and other extremist groups based on Islamist ideology can be compared to a gang – one that guarantees belonging, prestige and a sense of purpose. Excessive violence and rejection of socially accepted norms and values becomes viewed as a means of rebellion and defiance. The logic of the attraction of Islamist ideology is similar to the appeal of criminal networks, except that the motivations for participation are not linked to profit but to socio-psychological factors of power, dominance, acceptance and belonging that many of the individuals profiled in this study lacked while growing up.

Islamist extremism, Muslim gangs and aggressive encouragement of conversions to Islam in UK jails have previously been pointed to as a matter of concern.³⁰² Although structural strains cannot be considered as the only reason for radicalisation, incarcerated people share a set of grievances and often exhibit other vulnerabilities mentioned in this report, and could be an easy target for Islamist recruitment and indoctrination. Therefore, more attention should be paid to conversions to Islam that take place in the context of prisons and probation services, with a particular focus on juvenile offenders.

Individuals examined in this report represent cases of violent extremism among converts to Islam in Europe. At the same time, there are also examples of non-violent extremism among European converts, such as Pierre Vogel, whose online talks provide a basis for the segregation of Europe’s growing Muslim community and generate opposition to Western liberal values, especially among disaffected youths. It is important to monitor the Salafi media channels and educational venues because even if Salafi preachers do not directly advocate violence, their binary vision of the world provides an ideological foundation for those converts or “reverts” who later turn violent and aim to shred the social fabric of European societies.

In addition to converts, there are individuals from secular Muslim families who go through a similar process of “rediscovering” their faith. In fact, this process could also be deemed as a type

³⁰² ‘Policy Paper: Summary of the Main Findings of the Review of Islamist Extremism in Prisons, Probation and Youth Justice’, *Ministry of Justice: National Offender Management Service*, 22 August 2016, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/islamist-extremism-in-prisons-probation-and-youth-justice/summary-of-the-main-findings-of-the-review-of-islamist-extremism-in-prisons-probation-and-youth-justice>, last visited: 10 August 2017

of conversion, as many individuals born into non-practising families grow up unfamiliar with the fundamental premises of Islam and only learn about these principles later in life. Central Asian Muslims could be a telling example, as most grew up under a Soviet system that was officially atheist, and did not engage in religious practices (at least openly) until the 1990s. Conversion is mainly about the transformation of values and attitudes. The sociocultural change that follows the decision to “practise” Islam, particularly its conservative interpretations, could also be viewed in the framework of the process of conversion. While this report focuses on the converts to Islam in the way this term is traditionally understood in academic literature, more attention should be paid to the process of violent radicalisation and “born-again” Muslims.

Although conversion to Islam is not indicative of radicalisation, when combined with other aggravating factors such as precarious social and economic circumstances or criminal activity, it signals potential vulnerability to extremist ideology. The sheer diversity of cases and personal trajectories makes it difficult to devise strategies for working with converts to Islam. At the same time, understanding both the antecedents and the consequences of non-violent and violent radicalisation among converts (and how exactly the former stage transforms into the latter), as well as assessing the effectiveness of strategies to prevent or intervene in this process, should be one of the priorities of counter-terrorism efforts.

Current counter-radicalisation programmes such as Prevent have focused on working with Muslim communities while emphasising the importance of community resilience and addressing grievances that lead to radicalisation as the main objectives. However, this report suggests that the appeal of radical Islamism is not limited to certain communities, and a person’s individual vulnerabilities could be more conducive to violence than ethnic origins or social links with “at risk communities”. It is important to consider this aspect while reviewing the Prevent strategy and devising new counter-radicalisation programmes.

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