The Politics of Islam, or the Politics of Muslims? The Roots of Political Activism Among British Muslims.

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Before any meaningful discussion of the revival of political Islam or the actions of Muslims can take place it is important to state what exactly is meant in this paper by Islam, Muslim and indeed the oft used term Islamist. These terms are often banded about with little more than a footnote in consideration for their meanings and occasionally even used synonymously or interchangeably.

An exacerbation of the problem is that there is no single word in English that translates the word Islam exactly. So to start with the simplest literal Arabic definitions can be translated to denote that Islam means “peace and security” and Muslim means “one who submits”(to the will of God). Thus the definition in this paper is that Muslim is simply the actor, one who has submitted to some perception of what the will of God is1. To be a Muslim is completely distinct from being Islamic (of Islam or, belonging to Islam).

Epistemologically, to use the term Islamic is in itself to suggest that there is only one “true” body of knowledge that can be called Islam. The logical conclusion of using the term Islamic in this way that it becomes a divisive term, anything which is Islamic belongs to Islam, and anything which is un-Islamic belongs to “the other”. If such an essentialist dichotomy is to be avoided then the term must be used in the context of the beliefs of the individual Muslim. The term Islamic in this paper is only used to elucidate a particular individual’s (or organization’s) view of Islam. The emphasis here is clearly on the individual Muslim.

1 It should be noted that this usually meant in the specific context of “as revealed through Muhammad”
Individuals construct notions of existence and identity (as well as all meaningful knowledge) through interaction with their social world (Crotty, 1998: 42). Recent proponents of this constructionist epistemology are in agreement that reality does exist, but humans engage with it to give it meaning (Fish, 1990; Lyotard, 1991; Humphery 1993). The implications of constructionism on the present argument are particularly in relation to what exactly Islam means.

Islam as a normative system of beliefs is simply one reality, which an individual engages with and gives meaning to through interpretations and subsequent actions. The fact that Islam is a mosaic and not a monolith is largely due to differing interpretations of what is Islamic over time (Gregorian, 2004), as well as interpretations and re-interpretations of Muslim history. As mentioned above, the definitive use of the term ‘Islamic’ suggests that there is only one “true” Islam. However, if the emphasis is put upon the individual Muslim with a belief system and added values the term cannot be used in this way as clearly there exists more than one interpretation of Islam (Sunni and Shi’ite being two major ones). Therefore there can never be only one “true” body of knowledge. A devout Sunni Muslim is as Muslim as a devout Shi’ite Muslim, although their perceptions and actions may differ widely. To reconcile the fact that there are different interpretations among Muslims, Azmeh (1996), and Ameli (2002: 131) use the term Islams as a plural of Islam, this can be misleading as it suggests completely separate entities. It can be argued however, that at that time the plurality of beliefs was not as clearly articulated and they were negating the Orientalist discourse on one-hand and Islamic extremists on the other. With each extremist group claiming the one authentic Islam, and Orientalists who view Islam as a defined entity.
This is not to say that those Muslims who believe there is only one Islam are misguided in any way. At a macro level it may even be useful to think of there as being only one Islam. In this sense Islam is what Sayyid (1997) calls the extremely abstract concept of the ‘master signifier’. This concept is too detailed to describe in this paper, but at a simple level it denotes the totality of a structure (Islam) and its most abstract level it is the principle of reading a community (1997: 47). At this level this is very similar to what Mandaville (2001) calls a totalising abstraction. I.e. Islam is “…a totalising abstraction through which meaning and discourse can be organised” (2001: 55). For the purposes of this paper, Islam is a discourse, which has a specific impact on individuals and a specific meaning within societies. Clearly it is being argued that Islam is not simply a religion but far more than that. Conceptually, it is an abstraction to which any Muslim can belong.

In the context of religious government the term ‘Islamist’ often appears within the literature. This is generally used to refer to the tendency of Islamic groups to establish a political system based on the laws of Islam. After using the term Islamism synonymously with political Islam, Woltering (2002) authoritatively states “For all their diversity, what Islamist groups have in common is the desire to Islamise society: their desire to change the very basics of the social fabric” (2002: 1133). Woltering further states “My contention is that those groups who have genuinely accepted the rules of the system they participate in should not be called Islamist because they no longer have the desire to overthrow the system” (2002: 1134). It appears from this analysis that an Islamist is simply a Muslim who seeks to overthrow the established political system and replace it with what he considers Islamic. The term revolutionary
Muslim or even the generic term fundamentalist2 would do in this case. This
definition, and indeed the term ‘Islamism’, offers little in the way of any useful
contribution to the analysis of Muslim groups. The problem if attempting to
operationalise this term is that most Islamic groups weather taking part in a political
system through established means such as parliamentary democracy or alternatively
through direct action and political protest are ultimately attempting to establish a
political system based on Islam. The question faced by most Islamic groups is rarely
about the goal, but rather the strategy that is to be adopted in getting there.

The danger when using an all-encompassing term like Islamism is that entities as
diverse as al-Qaeda and Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeni become banded together under
the banner of political Islam. This is because conceptually it is assumed that any
Muslim seeking to establish an Islamic state is an Islamist, the question is not how
this goal is to be achieved but rather that it is an ultimate goal. When analyzing
organised Islamic groups and theory the question of how goals are to be achieved is
what determines differences in the behavior of the actors (Muslims)3.

It is also worthy of note that it is often cited that ‘Islamist’ theory is confused in that it
is not clear which version of the Shari’a to adopt and that the Shari’a is not adequately
defined (2002: 1133). A statement like this, which ignores the plurality of political
Islam can only be made if the term Islamist, whilst being used synonymously with
political Islam, has some negative connotations. Negative connotations of the term
derive from the term ‘fundamentalism’ which refers to strict and literal

2 A fundamentalist, someone seeking a return to selected fundamentals of an ideology can belong to
any ideology, be it one geographically limited such as Hindu nationalism in India, or unlimited such as
Islamic fundamentalism
interpretations, and the French term ‘Islamicism’. Halliday (1994) uses the term Islamism and fundamentalism synonymously; both denote extreme forms of religious fanaticism. In media circles the (over) use of the term in relation to terrorism has potentially led to further negative connotations in the public psyche. There is currently no concept of ‘Westernism’ as a concept where the West4 seeks to enforce democracy (and consumerism). By using the term Islamism in this way as to encourage an essentialist understanding of Islam along political and non-political lines the use of an antithesis could be encouraged. If this is the case, then the term ‘Westernism’ would be the opposite of Islamism, in that it is the political effort to enforce a completely secular society. In a similar vein to the Islamists, it could be argued that democracy is a confused concept, and it is rarely clear which version of democracy to adopt5. If Islamism is widely used to classify those Muslims who are seeking to overthrow as opposed to those who are not it is too reductionist and dichotomous in its nature to be useful. If Islamism is generally defined as the attempt to form Islamic government it is too all encompassing to aid in meaningful analysis.

In the light of these definitions there are certain conceptual problems with using the terms Muslim and Islamic interchangeably. Islam is the only Abrahamic faith to have had a system of government led by its Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). Notions of Islamic, Muslim and majority Muslim countries have troubled recent authors in terms of their use. The contested use of these terms has become central to the debate on Islamic political identity (Ramadan, 1999; Shadid and Koningsveld, 1996; Tibi, 1998; Ghannouchi, 1993) as well as a host of other writers writing more generally about the

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3 For an excellent and articulate argument distancing Islam from fundamentlism and Islamism see Tibi (1998) which although slightly date by the events of 11th September 2001, maintains all its theoretical strength.

4 By the ‘West’ it is meant more that just the geographical region of Europe and North America but rather a concept.
political behavior of Minorities in the UK (Anwar, 1995; Samad 2004). This debate centers on the geo-political Islamic jurisprudence concepts of dar-al-Islam (the territory of Islam) and dar-al-Kufr (the territory of non-belief) a term derived from this dichotomy is dar-al-harb (the territory of war) and more recently dar-al-ahad (the territory of treaty) (Shadid and Koningsveld, 1996: 84-86). It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze these definitions in detail or offer new classifications. However, it is important to note that Shadid and Koningsveld mention that most Scholars in the western world regard these concepts as outmoded and irrelevant. This is primarily because they were constructed at a time when Muslims had a geographically defined concept of state and Islam and ‘the other’ was territorially classifiable and it was assumed by classic Sharia that Muslims live in a society whose laws are Islamically based (1996: 86). They cite Badawi’s statement that “Muslim theology offers, up to the present, no systematic formulations of being in a minority” (Badawi, 1981: 27) and Christie (1991) who says that the “simplest reason” for it being hard to find guidelines for Muslims in non-Muslim states is that “while much is said by Islamic law on the treatment of non-Muslim minorities within an Islamic state, there are no specific reciprocal guidelines for the behavior of Muslim minorities within a non-Muslim state” (Christie, 1991: 458).

Building further upon the definitions given earlier and this debate which European Muslims are currently engaged in about the role of classic Islamic jurisprudence in the geopolitical classification of the land in which they live, it is again clear that the terms Islamic and Muslim cannot be used interchangeably. In the light of the above arguments this becomes particularly true for the terms Muslim and Islamic government. So a Muslim government could more accurately be said to be the

5 E.g. presidential or parliamentary system or the multitude of variants between these.
government of Muslims, this could take any form ranging from Military despotism to a system based on a council of experienced Muslim clerics, as long as the executive is composed of Muslims. Implicitly it is being argued here that this government of Muslims may have no precedent in Islamic political theories or in Muslim history, this is to say that far from having any relationship with Islam at all, it need not even be religious in character. The term Islamic government on the other hand would be again to suggest that there is only one “true” form of government in Islam.

It has been demonstrated above that Islamic truth is constructed through an individual Muslim’s interaction with society, as this varies from person to person and group to group there can never be only one form of Islamic government. Historical experience also shows that the form of ‘Islamic’ government has been changing over time from one led by a Prophet to one led by rightly guided Caliphs, to essentially a system of hereditary kingship. This makes the static concept of a single Islamic government unworkable, as historically it has been evolutionary, dynamic, and even revolutionary. The question of how to achieve Islamic goals, whatever Islam may mean to individuals and organizations, is a far better guide to political behavior. The behavior of individual Muslims as to the rules regarding political participation, the formulation of an Islamic government or indeed subservience in political participation to an established secular government are the best indicators of the particular relationship between the individual Muslim and the state.

**Preserving the transnational character of British Muslims**

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6 As in when Muslims manage the affairs of the people (government here is the administrative branch of the state)
A discussion of the behavior of individuals cannot take place in a vacuum, it is important to invoke some notions of theory and context, which informs the actions of the individuals. In the specific context of Great Britain post colonial immigration (detailed later) have meant that the majority of Muslims hail from the Indian sub-continent, primarily from Pakistan as well as notable minorities from the Middle East and Africa (Modood et. al., 1997; peach, 2005). However to study only these communities in relation to the British State could produce misleading results if the context is not broadened. Many contemporary writers take the Rushdie affair7 as the starting point of organized Islamic political activity. They add to this more recent phenomena of visible Muslim political activity against events such as the first gulf wars and the invasion of Afghanistan (Birt, 2005; Werbner, 2002; Jacobson, 1998; Vertovec, 1998; Modood et. al. 1997; Lewis, 1994). It is argued here that all these Muslim protests are reactionary. In one case against the actions of an author, and in subsequent cases against governmental foreign policy. To study British Muslim activity from a purely reactionary starting point, could even lead to the conclusion that Political Islam in Britain is simply a reactionary religion and has no code of its own. Political reactions, despite being useful manifestation of political activity, do not compose of the normal interaction with state, which a citizen goes through as part of daily life. This is to say political protest is not the major determining factor in the relation between most individuals and the state.

A major methodological problem with more comprehensive literature on Muslims in Britain is the extrapolation of local results to the national level without regard for methodological accuracy (Lewis, 1994; Solomos et. al. 2003). Lewis (1994) in

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7 When the Author, Salman Rushdie’s book the Satanic Verses caused outrage among British Muslims for its (fictional) depictions of the Prophet Muhammad’s life.
particular, carried out an ethnographic study with one Mullah of Pakistani origin, as well as a local demographic study in Bradford. His results are extrapolated to the whole of Britain8, as if Muslims in Britain were all of the particular religious ethnic background, which Muslims in Bradford tend to be from9. Solomos et. al. (2003) attempt to overcome this obstacle by interviewing Muslims from two parts of England, one part of east London and a part of inner-city Birmingham. Although this is commendable, localized research such as this loses the vast richness of Islamic theory, its internationally inclusive character, and its dynamism. Additionally, patterns of post-colonial settlement mean that communities from the same areas in their country of origin tend to settle in the same areas in their host country (Anwar, 1979). Indeed neighbors from the same street in a village in Pakistan will be neighbors in the same street in a town in England (Nielsen, 1984). Localized research is likely to provide highly localized results that reflect more often than not only the religio-political background of the country of origin of that community. The implication of this on researching the Muslim community is that as it is impossible to survey every Muslim individually, if research is to adequately reflect political trends amongst in the UK it must be carried out at a ‘higher’ level. By working with elites and policy makers, by recognizing the theoretical underpinnings, which inform Muslim activity and taking them as a starting point, it is more likely that the transnational character of Islam can be more adequately reflected in research, and the future direction of the groups gleaned more accurately.

The Revival of Islamic Politics

8 He concludes that the character of the imported ulema (religious experts) is what will shape the future of British Islam. Whilst this may be true of the Mirpuri community in Bradford, it probably doesn’t reflect the national Muslim minority as places such as Birmingham with established Islamic academies do not commonly ‘import’ imams.

9 That of Sunni Muslim, Mirpuri Pakistani origin.
After the dismantling of the Ottoman Caliphate it is widely accepted that Islam was revitalized as a political ideology in three great ‘hubs’ of the world which have informed subsequent Islamic political action at every level. In the Middle East, in Egypt by Hassan-al Banna (1906-1949); on the Indian subcontinent by Abul-Ala-Mawdudi (1903-1979), and more recently amongst Shi’ite Muslims by Ali Shariati (1933-1977) in Iran (Esposito, 1991; Rahnema, 1994; Roy, 1994).

Mawdudi spent many spells in prison for his outspoken views, particularly on Pakistan’s foreign policy and at one stage was sentenced to death. Hassan-al-Banna was assassinated by the Egyptian secret police and Ali Shariati died in mysterious circumstances in London, official reports cite a heart attack as the cause of death. The fact that he was being shadowed by the Iranian State Intelligence and security organization (SAVAK), additionally, immense pressure having been put on his family in the build up to his death suggests a degree of state intervention, which may never truly be known.

The most directly relevant to British Politics is Mawdudi. This is not just because most Muslims in Britain hail from the Indian sub-continent. The writings of Mawdudi, inform the strategy and policy decisions of Britain’s largest Islamic pressure group the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB).

Mawdudi and the politics of Islamic democracy: the “theo-democracy”.

In the writing of Mawdudi, the special relationship between man and God is characterized by an interpretivist understanding of the faith. He encouraged the
interpretation of historical texts to mobilize inner faith for the purposes of political action (Nasr, 1994: 104). Mawdudi developed an Islamic ideology in contrast to Capitalism and Socialism as opposed to Christianity (Mawdudi, 1989). This particular stance gives practically all his writings a particular political reading which opposes both these ideologies and seeks to place Islam as a viable alternative according to which Muslims can arrange their lives. The background of colonial India in which he was writing and the dissolving of the Caliphate under the Turkish Secular regime in 1924 meant that most of his writing had an explicitly political stance. Nasr (1994) gives a useful insight into Mawdudi’s methodology “..he systematically mixed religion with politics, faith and social action, he streamlined the faith so it could accommodate its new found aim.” (1994: 7). To some extent it could be said that Mawdudi borrowed indiscriminately from the west for example “Mawdudi’s formulation was by no means rooted in traditional Islam. He adopted modern ideas and values, mechanisms, procedures and idioms, weaving them into the Islamic fabric, thus producing an internally consistent and yet hybrid ideological perspective.” (1994: 7-8). The notion that “Islam is in danger” or what Nasr (2000: 36) calls the “Andalus Syndrome”10 is at times apparent in Mawdudi’s work.11
Mawdudi is relatively un-ambiguous in his formulation of what the role of the individual is in relation to a state. “In Islam, the purpose of an individual’s life is the same as that of the community, namely the execution and enforcement of divine law and the acquisition of God’s pleasure” (1976: 42). He further articulates that it is the responsibility of the individual to develop his potential to its maximum so that it can best serve the (Islamic) community. Mawdudi sees man as the Caliph of God on earth,

10 Akbar Ahmed (1998) also argues that South Asian Muslims at the time of partition were fearful of extinction at the hands of the Hindu nationalists. Named after Andalus, this complex denotes fear of a Moorish fate.
11 His 1939 lecture on Islamic political theory started with a major rebuttal of the notion that political Islam can be bundled in with other political systems such as communism or dictatorship.
and this is best summed up in what he calls the foundation of democracy in Islam based upon the Quranic verse, “. Allah has promised to those among you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will assuredly make them to succeed (the present rulers) and grant them viceregency in the land just as He made those before them succeed” (Chapter 24: verse 55). His comment that the term Vicegerent (Caliph) is preferred by God above the term sovereign (equated to king) affirms that sovereignty belongs only to God. Mawdudi further explains the position of the individual vicegerent thus: “The Caliphate granted by god to the people is the popular viceregency and not a limited one. There is no reservation in favour of any family, class, or race. Every believer is a Caliph of God in his individual capacity. By virtue of this position he is individually responsible to God.” (1976: 38). His more detailed work on Ijtihad (REFERENCE) in Islam further clarifies this position that supreme legislative power belongs to God alone, and man’s capacity is simply one of interpreting and applying this law. Mawdudi’s political party, the Jamaat-e-Islami (Islamic Party) at various stages in its being has taken part in democratic elections, formed (and broken alliances) and even had special advisory status to the military government of General Zia in the early 1980’s (Nasr, 1994). It is clear from the behavior of his party, particularly under his leadership until 1972 that he advocates a pragmatic understanding of politics. Mawdudi advocated a top-down approach and was concerned more with the shape of a potential Islamic state as opposed to how it would be achieved (Mawdudi, 1955). According to this reading it is any individual’s responsibility to work for the creation of an Islamic state by any peaceful means necessary, if one doesn’t exist. Or alternatively to strive to root out corruption from a Muslim state and make it Islamic according to a thorough understanding of the Islamic texts. This understanding would be gained by a process of self-education and struggle, the Jihad-an-nafs (or inner Jihad).
Sheikh Hassan-al-Banna and the Islamic Brotherhood of Egypt.

Banna’s political thought and Mawdudi’s political ideas concurred almost at every level. This could largely be explained by the context in which they were writing which for them was the Post Caliphate world, and the struggle to re-establish the Muslim community as a political entity with its own social economic and political code. As opposed to Mawdudi and most Muslims, Banna famously rejected the idea of the ‘lesser’ and ‘greater’ jihad, saying that this concept was based on a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, the lineage of which was weak. He saw this concept as being devised to keep the Muslim masses away from mobilizing by making them concentrate on self-struggle as opposed to mass political struggle, he gave both equal importance (Esposito, 2002: 51). Although Banna and Mawdudi never met, it is often said that the missing link between the two is Sayed Qutb who worked closely alongside Banna in developing his system of Islamic living and actually met Mawdudi in Cairo (Sivan, 1990: 65). Mawdudi’s work was translated into Arabic in his effort to gain a wider recognition in the Arab Middle East, and it is likely to have influenced some of Banna’s writing. (Nasr, 2000).

Banna believed that anyone is a Muslim who professes belief in God and Muhammad’s prophecy, acts according to that belief and performs the religious duties (Commins, 1994: 134-135). The duty of the individual Muslim according to Banna is one of educating oneself and striving to adhere to the teachings of authentic Islam as was done at the time of the Prophet Muhammad by the first generation of Muslims (the ‘Salaf’). This duty is not only limited to the individual but the duty to spread the blessing of God’s message to others is also central to Banna’s ideology (Banna, 1965). Banna having been heavily influenced by Sufi Mysticism also advocated a
highly personal relation with God consisting of strict adherence to Islamic practices such as prayer and fasting, daily recitals of the Qur’an and collective worship within the family unit (Banna, 1950). Banna emphasized the role of ‘dhikr’ (thought of god)12 and recommended this practice in the morning before going to work or in the evening, to condition the human mind to be obedient to the will of God (1950: 6-12). Banna differed significantly from Mawdudi, in that he adopted a ‘bottom-up’ approach to the spread of Islam. Whilst the long term goal was to revive the Caliphate, through wider co-operation between Muslim nation states, the methodology was one of individual strength of belief which would condition an Islamic community and gradually transform the state (Banna, 1975). He saw this as the methodology adopted by the Prophet Muhammad, in conditioning his friends and spreading the message of God, until society reached a point where it welcomed Islam. The relation between the individual and the state can thus said to be one where the individual strives for personal perfection and propagates the message of Islam, with the ultimate goal of forming an Islamic state through it becoming the popular demand. Banna is very specific in his prescribed duties for members of the brotherhood and states that each member must recite a part of the Qur’an daily, memorize 40 hadith (Prophetic sayings), become accustomed with the life of Muhammad and the early companions and develop an understanding of the basics of Islamic law. He further states that members must regularly undergo physical examinations and maintain their health, as well as abstain from tobacco consumption. Each member must also build up a library of books and read in particular the literature of his activist group the ‘Ikhwan-al-Muslimun’ (Brotherhood of Muslims), Banna (1965).

12 As a form of meditation to cleanse the mind.
Banna was a charismatic personality and an activist in every sense; he organised the group, the full title of which is the ‘Jamaat-al-Ikhwan-al-Muslimun13’ (Society of the Brotherhood of Muslims) which under his leadership gained a wide following, but the loyal core of it did not actively take part in elections. This was based on the belief that active participation in democratic politics should only take place when society has been sufficiently educated along Islamic lines, thus affording pious Muslims the best chance of victory and the creation of a long lasting and stable state. After the assassination of Banna in 1949 the Ikhwan factioned into several groups, some preaching a more aggressive stance on Jihad than that propagated by Banna himself, and some taking part in parliamentary politics, with relatively little success.

Dr. Ali Shariati and the basis of the Iranian revolution

No discussion of Islamic political theorists could be complete without mentioning the philosophic genius whose writings influenced the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979. Although his work is not directly relevant to the case of Britain in that no active pressure group is based upon his teachings, he is revered among Shi’ite Muslims as the main ideologue for an Islamic political state. Both Mawdudi and Banna were Sunni Muslims as are the majority of Muslims in their respective countries, Pakistan and Egypt. Shariati is classed as Shi’ite although his universal style of writing meant that the Shah’s Pehlvi regime tried at times to label him both Wahhabi and Sunni. The clerics also labeled him a heretic on account of his use of sources regardless of the religious orientation of the author (Shariati, vol. 8).

13 Often abbreviated simply to the Ikhwan or brotherhood.
The principle difference between Sunni’s and Shi’ites relates to the historical position of Hazrat Ali, the prophet’s son in law and fourth Caliph, as well as a difference on the role of ‘Ijtehad’ (exertion of Islamic jurisprudence) in religion. Theologically the difference in how ‘Ijtehad’ has been applied over time is the key difference, in that in Shi’ite scholars constantly adapt and expand on previous rulings applying them to new times and situations which Muslims have not been faced with before. Sunnis on the other hand stopped practicing this principle of regeneration and renewal in the 10th Century (Kamali, 1989). This factor can be said to have rendered the Shi’ite ideology far more versatile in responding to the problems of the day than Sunni ideology. Recent scholars such as Ramadan (1999) are challenging this position among Sunni Muslims.

Shariati accepted a dialectical understanding of society (Shariati, 1979: 111-119) which is closer to communism than to capitalism, as such it could even be said that he saw capitalism as an antagonist and communism as a rival, although Islam definitely provided an alternative to both. Shariati mobilized students in particular with his three principles of Azadi, Barabari and Erfan (Freedom, equality and spirituality) (Shariati, vol. 1). Shariati did not formulate the specific rules that would govern an individual’s life in its daily course. He concentrated mostly on the dimensions of the personality of man in a more abstract and philosophical sense (Shariati, 1979: 55). It is clear from his writing though that he considers it essential to be aware of the human condition, to think freely and to spread this awareness amongst one’s fellow men (Shariati, 1980: 8-9). From this it can be gleaned that he saw the duty of an individual as essentially an activist, one seeking to instill a government of freedom and liberty which allowed the individual to enjoy the right to spirituality. He saw these concepts in opposition to the ‘Estabdad-e-Ruhani’ or clerical despotism he saw in place in Iran, which was, for
him, the worst form of despotic oppression (Shariati, vol. 20, 1981). It was over this issue of Islamic authority that he managed to mobilize the masses chanting his catchy slogans on the streets of Tehran.

One thing, which all three of these revivalists have in common, is their unflagging belief in the need for action. Be that from a top-down level with active participation in politics at all level in Mawdudi’s case, Banna’s model of educating the self and leading by good example, or Shariati’s mobilization of the masses approach. The need for the individual Muslim to recognize that his condition would be better under an ‘Islamic’ state and to work towards attaining this goal is a central tenet to all the writers work, the key difference is the methodology employed in achieving this. Whether the ideology synthesizes Islam with the western ideas of democracy as in Mawdudi’s case, reverts back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the ‘Salaf’ in Banna’s case, or incorporates elements of revolutionary Marxism as in Shariati’s case. The fact is that all three writers were modernist in the sense that they were attempting to revive the Islamic faith to make it relevant to the lives of modern Muslims. Despite being in remarkably similar social and political circumstances, the rich differences in their work highlight the healthy difference of opinion that exists between Islamic theorists. Blanket terms like ‘Islamism’ can lead back to the particularly dichotomous and dangerous view that all Islamic political theory and methodology is the same.

Muslims and the case of British pressure groups.14

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14 The Hizb-ut-Tahrir is omitted from the present analysis for a number of reasons. In terms of policy participation they are the antithesis to the MCB often referring to them as the ‘dogs of the British’, in a reference to British India. They denounce democracy as a system of Kufri (disbelief). It can be said with almost certainty that none of the three writers mentioned intended for their work to be interpreted according to their way. They borrow heavily from Banna’s personal awareness and struggle in terms of their personal struggle and the attempt to disseminate Islamic ideas. They see Mawdudi’s ultimate vision of an Islamic democracy with a Caliph as its head as their immediate goal, whilst advocating a
The Muslim community in Britain is remarkably young (Peach, 2005), indeed 50 percent of Muslims are less than 25 years of age (Samad, 2004: 6). Most Muslims are children of economic migrant workers from the Indian sub-continent (2004: 7). Additionally, post colonial immigration patterns of chain migration and kinship networks have meant that there are relatively large concentrations of Muslims around urban centers. The patterns of settlement along the lines of kinship networks means that particular ethnic groups tend to be concentrated in certain areas notably Bangladeshi Muslims in the East-end of London and Mirpuri Muslims (of Pakistani origin) in Bradford (2004: 4-5). The net effect of this phenomenon is that there is a young visible minority of Muslims heavily concentrated in certain areas. I would argue that the community of young Muslims is very malleable and Muslim organizations are still at a stage of vying for position as to who is truly representative of the Muslim sentiment.

The Muslim lobby in Britain is diverse in its composition, composing of large hierarchical Umbrella organizations such as the Muslim council of Britain (MCB) as well as small but effective groups such as the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC). The groups are too numerous to list, and it would be beyond the scope of this paper to attempt a typology. Suffice it to say that Muslim groups campaign on a wide range of issues using a wide range of strategies. Here the groups considered are the pseudo-Shariati revolution! When all this is intertwined with a very literal reading of the Qur’an deliberately decontextualising verses relating to Jihad, it leads to a violent, ideologically debased system of belief. It would be misleading to suggest that this is a manifestation of these three great writers work, who exercised methodological rigour and respected many classic traditions. See for example www.thesavedsect.com for an example of Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s weltanschaung.

15 The fact that there is such a large concentrations of young school-age Muslims in certain areas, places certain demands on the education system in particular, and can lead to friction with the wider community.
ones closest to the ideologies of Hassan-al-Banna and Abul-ala-Mawdudi. With a closer look at their strategy of how they aim to achieve their goals of safeguarding Muslim interests and spreading the Islamic message in society.

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) can be said to be the largest organized group representing Muslim interests (Radcliffe, 2003: Birt, 2005). With its origins in the aforementioned Rushdie affair of 1989 it actually came to being in its current form in 1997 after a call by the Home Secretary Michael Howard in 1994 for Muslims to form a unified body along the lines of the national Hindu council. The MCB currently has over 450 affiliate members ranging from individual mosques and religious schools, to organised national charities and pressure groups such as the Muslim association of Britain, and the UK Islamic Mission. Headed by the recently knighted Sir Iqbal Sacran (its secretary general,) it has quickly risen to prominence particularly in domestic politics. The first major campaign in which the group achieved success was the campaign to include the question of religion in the 2001 census. Prior to this the Muslim population was only based on estimates from the country of origin. But as Radcliffe (2003) states, despite the MCB’s regular access to ministers senior civil servants, it’s impact in the foreign policy domain, particularly in relation to the war in Iraq has been very small (2003: 376). The MCB works closely alongside the UK Islamic Mission (UKIM) which was set up in 1960. The UKIM is the original British ‘wing’ of the Jamaat-e-Islami (Islamic Party) of Pakistan. Although it replicates the Jamaat’s organizational structure from the local to the national level, it operates largely autonomously concentrating mainly on maintaining a network of Mosques and Islamic supplementary schools. The UKIM’s ‘dawa’ (propagation) wing concentrates

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16 There is no group which can be said to have close ideological links to the work of Ali Shariati. In my opinion, this is (unfortunately) because his work is as yet, not widely read by British Sunni Muslims.
on disseminating the writings of Mawdudi as well as, to a lesser extent, on welfare activities such as hospital and prison visits. The UKIM is a registered charity and as such, is bound by statutory obligation to refrain from mainstream political participation. The UKIM does however have a healthy representation on the MCB’s committees some of which it heads\textsuperscript{17}. The MCB maintains that the only way for Muslims to be better represented is to take part in politics at every level. At the 2004 general election, they ran a high profile campaign encouraging Muslims to vote, culminating in panel discussions on the Islam channel on the issue of whether it is permissible to vote or not. A voter reference card was produced to encourage voters to consider the questions that voters should ask their prospective parliamentary candidates\textsuperscript{18}.

The MCB don't seem publically willing to discuss their association with Mawdudi, and there is no substantial reference to his work in their publications. The MCB’s strongest connections are with members of the Islamic Foundation, Leicester which is the UKIM’s publishing wing, publishing all of Mawdudi’s available writings in English and mounting many translation projects. When the BBC ran a program highlighting these links\textsuperscript{19}, the MCB ran an e-mail campaign dismissing the program as propaganda and asking for it not to be aired in a press release\textsuperscript{20}. This is probably because of Mawdudi’s association with the concept of Islamic State, and the fear that the term ‘Islamist’ instills in the heart of policy makers. The MCB strive to be seen as balanced and representative.

\textsuperscript{17} www.mcb.org.uk/committee/21.php
\textsuperscript{18} Interestingly, perhaps the biggest populist election issue Iraq, was number 6 on their list of questions. See www. Mcb.org.uk/article_detail.php?article=announcement-434
\textsuperscript{19} BBC Panorama “A Question of Leadership” 21\textsuperscript{st} August 2005.
\textsuperscript{20} Interestingly all references to this have dissapeared from the MCB’s website.
In sum, the MCB are true to the roots of their political heritage. They actively promote taking part in politics at every level (as Mawdudi preached and practiced), they have a well-disciplined hierarchical structure (as the Jamaat-e-Islami did under Mawdudi), and they are willing to work alongside government. Additionally, they run media campaigns on many of the issues that particularly effect Muslims ranging from education to terrorism legislation. The unclear part of their political agenda is one related to the establishment of an Islamic state. Although there is no reason to believe that this may differ from that of Mawdudi’s, they strive to be seen as moderate Muslims, working inside the political system and therefore this aspect of their discourse is decidedly muted.

The Muslim Association of Britain

The interest group that can claim direct descendancy to the Ikhwan-al-Muslimun is the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). Set up by Kemal Tawfik el Helbany (The Muslim Brotherhood’s European spokesman, based in London) in 1997, this group’s membership comprises largely of Arabs. It has approximately 1000 Muslims of Arab origin as members, as Arabs were largely neglected in the negotiations that led up to the creation of the MCB. The MAB’s structure is similar to that of the Ikhwan at every level, with a concentration on the activities and education of the youth (as the Ikhwan has). The group has “a close affiliation to the Muslim brotherhood and was set up to negate what was seen as the failure of the UKIM’s youth wing to mobilize youth after the death of the charismatic Khurram Murad in 1996” (Birt, 2005). The MAB is not as politically active in parliamentary politics as the MCB. It is an affiliate member of the MCB, but at times has a strained relationship with its umbrella group. This was particularly the case over the anti-war marches and the subsequent
involvement in the “Stop the War Coalition” (SWC). Whilst the MCB preferred a more behind the scenes approach meeting with ministers and civil servants in its usual style, the MAB went ahead and joined a broad based range of groups committed to direct action. Most notably the MAB formed an alliance with the Socialist Worker Party and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which mobilized over 2 million people to demonstrate against the invasion of Iraq. The MCB withdrew its support for the first Anti-War march to placate the government, but endorsed subsequent marches, despite the MAB being at the head of both (Birt, 2005: 96).

The MAB was set-up primarily to address the gap in propagation work related to “a comprehensive Islam related to all aspects of life. MAB tries to implement this through wisdom and good preaching, to make members more aware of the society in which they live.” (Samad, 2004: 14).

Although from this analysis, the MAB seem to be true to their ideological heritage of attempting to spread a comprehensive Islamic message across society through ‘good preaching’ in the style of Banna. In a characteristic maneuver21, the president of the MAB Dr Anas al-Tikriti22 stood as a candidate for the Respect party (an offshoot of the Stop the War Coalition) in the 2004 European Parliament Elections. This was due to the opportunity presenting itself, as opposed to being based on a long-term strategy or a firm ideology. He was forced to resign his post as party president in order to be able to stand. Because he stood in a largely personal capacity, he didn’t do particularly well, polling less than 1% of the vote.

21 Of splitting into offshoots along the lines of the Egyptian Ikhwan
22 He is also the son of Osama-al-Tikriti the Muslim Brotherhood president in Egypt.
Conclusions

At the present time it can be said that in the British case the politics of Muslims are on the whole supported by the theoretical stances of the writers mentioned. The principle differences between the groups seem to be in the choice of method in protecting Muslim rights. Is it to be a participation in all areas advocated by Mawdudi, or the abdication from parliamentary politics espoused by Banna? Whereas the MCB is keen to work alongside policy makers, the MAB have already formed a major alliance (the Stop the War Coalition23) with groups known for mass political protest and direct action. Similarly the MCB is already displaying signs of its heritage by almost splitting up over the war protests issue and having relatively little impact in the foreign policy arena (Radcliffe, 2003). This was a problem Mawdudi was also blighted with, being imprisoned over the foreign policy of Pakistan government in Kashmir. The MAB, despite its short history at the fore of British politics, has already been factionalized by the resignation of its leader to take part in parliamentary politics. This echoes the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt which split into factions soon after Banna’s death, some of which took up arms and some of which took part in parliamentary politics.

It is too early to fathom the long term strategy of these groups, as they are both relatively new in the policy arena. The ‘anti-war march’ episode of disagreement between the MCB and the MAB over which tactic to adopt in lobbying the government, is already evidence of the vying for position which is taking place between the two groups. The second Gulf War in Iraq, and the London Bombings

23 Composing of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) amongst others.
combined with the recent controversy over the publishing of cartoons of the prophet has led to considerable soul-searching among British Muslims vis a vis their identities and the particular relationship they have with the state in which they live. The young character of the Muslim population means that to a large extent it is still impressionable, and it remains to be seen as to what extent the work of these three great revivalists is modified further in the practices of British Muslims to create a notion of British Islam.
**Bibliography**


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