

Banned radical Muslim groups know little about world affairs, research says

April 6 2016, by Tony Trueman

A unique inside look at the banned radical Islam group Islam4UK found that its members had little interest in world affairs or the politics of the Middle East and Pakistan.

Instead, the motivation that led some of them to commit serious terrorist criminal offences lay in their personal experiences of discrimination in the UK, the British Sociological Association's annual conference in Birmingham was told today [Wednesday 6 April 2016].

Dr Gavin Bailey, of Manchester Metropolitan University, studied a local branch of the [group](#), also known as al-Muhajiroun, based in a northern city before it was banned by the government. For six months he attended their weekly stalls and public meetings, talking often to its core activists.

"Unusually, my work was carried out at a point in the middle of radicalisation journey that ended with some of the group getting terrorism convictions," Dr Bailey said.

"Later a number of the group were charged with terrorism offences some of them eventually getting 16 years in jail or more for engaging in conduct in preparation for acts of terrorism."

The contradictory nature of a group that despised western culture but liked Ross Kemp's TV series, Gangs, was brought out by Dr Bailey.

Contrary to some research, he found that "most of their talk was about

British and local issues – mainly about how they were personally being treated by the state and society. In interviews, when I asked them about their path to activism, the group almost never talked about world affairs or any politics with a big 'P'. When they did, it was simplistic good versus evil stuff, with the occasional conspiracy theory.

"Indeed, I got the impression that none of them had travelled much, if at all, outside the UK bar visiting where their families were from. Despite Pakistani heritage, they had no great knowledge of the history of Pakistan or India. The jihadis I spent time with often had very little interest in or knowledge about politics or world affairs."

The origin of their radicalism lay largely in their own lives and clashes with authority or others in the UK, he said. Examples given to him by the group members varied in seriousness, and included:

- one man who when studying for a law degree fell out with his course tutors when he challenged how an assignment was set
- another who refused to make a cake in his home economic class at school because he was fasting
- members who had racist abuse shouted at them from white people when they set up a stall selling leaflets and other material
- members who had been arrested and jailed for drug offences before they become radicalised.

Dr Bailey found the members had an ambivalent attitude to modern UK culture.

"Where the al-Muhajiroun group were talking about the state of the nation, they drew on the common stories about Britain being full of crime and 'dirtiness'. Their critique was also along the lines of capitalism making everyone greedy.

"But I noted how they remained engaged with mainstream culture, even while claiming that British culture was terribly corrupt and immoral.

"At one point one did tell me that in his vision of the sharia state, league football would be banned as it encourages nationalism, and that the local stadium could be used for public stoning and executions. However, another activist told me that he still supported Manchester United. At another point, they were talking to me about arranging a five-a-side game that I could take part in.

"On another occasion the Islamists' argument that music is forbidden did not stop one recognising the latest Lily Allen song when it was played on the radio. Their belief that mainstream media is an instrument of the government was not enough to deter one from watching Ross Kemp's Gangs on Sky television.

"The radical Islamist al-Muhajiroun-Islam4UK group were mostly British born-and-bred teens and 20-somethings, motivated by anger about their own experiences. Indeed, their reference points for the bad and the good remain firmly in British culture."

In January 2010 the group was banned by the government. Dr Bailey carried out his research in 2009.

Provided by British Sociological Association

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