THE EMERGENCE OF SALAFISM IN THE UK

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In the name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

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Although the history of contemporary Salafism in the UK can be traced back to the late 1980s in one form or another, its emergence as a 'revivalist sect' was taken to new heights with the entry of *Salafi Publications* (SPubs) onto the religious landscape in the mid to late 1990s. Nearly thirty years on in 2022, SPubs has attracted tens of thousands of adherents to Salafism's Creed and Methodology just in the UK alone, and become a 'blueprint' for a transnational network of similar organisations with devout followers (of the Salafi Methodology) in communities all over the (English-speaking) world. Arguably the first publishing house in the Western world to produce consistent authentic Islamic material in the English language, SPubs, which is based in the post-industrial and post-secular city of Birmingham (UK), has played a pivotal role in the renewal of orthodox Islam in the English-speaking world, North and South.

However, whilst SPubs has become an epicenter for a grassroots Islamic revival in the West, a detailed study of British Salafism's history shows that its origins were humble and began life when a small group of highly motivated individuals studying at British universities in the late 1980s through to the mid 1990s, decided to establish a cooperative body (working predominantly on university campuses) under the title OASIS *(Organisation of Associated Sunni Islamic Societies)* in 1996.[1] Like myself, OASIS's founders Abu Khadeejah Abdul-Wāhid, Abu ʿIyād Amjad Rafiq and Faisal Malik,[2]

[1] Abdul-Wāhid 2013.

[2] Faisal Malik—an Essex University PhD science student, would later go on to lecture as part of the *Quran and Sunnah Society* (QSS) whilst studying at Manchester University alongside Abu Khadeejah. Soon afterwards, he moved on to focus on his profession as a teacher, and is no longer active in national *daʿwah*.

were the descendants of first-generation migrants who had settled in Britain following the post-World War II labour shortages, and typical of those young second-generation British Muslims who had come of age and were beginning to enter colleges and universities as a means of upward social mobility. The founders of OASIS were also typical of those young British Muslims who faced the challenge of how to adapt the fundamentals of a Muslim heritage to a secular society and its increasingly progressive politics.[3]

As the protests ensuing the publication of Salman Rushdie's (1988) *Satanic Verses*[4] aptly showed, the 1980s and 1990s were indeed 'a confusing time to be a young Muslim in Britain'.[5] This is because the Rushdie furor exposed not only the disconnect between British-born Muslims and the *imams* imported from the subcontinent who knew little of the early Islamic Creed and Jurisprudence (let alone the English language and non-Muslim culture), but it also exposed the 'fractured intellectual tradition of a religion transported from several different countries' into Britain.[6] Significantly, the Rushdie Affair went on to serve as a catalyst for the renewal of an Islamic identity for many British-born youth experiencing an identity crisis. In a post-Cold War era, this heightened sense of Islamic identity was then further intensified against the backdrop of a political landscape that was gradually also being transformed by the Gulf War (1990–1991), as well as the Bosnian War (1992–1995)[7]—events which would turn Islam into a public identity marker.[8]

Consequently, UK college and university campus Islamic Societies (*ISocs*) became an ideal space to explore and develop a new kind of

[3] Leiken 2012:153-154.
[4] A book that was viewed by Muslims throughout the world to be blasphemous and deliberately antagonistic towards Muslims, filled with insults against the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his wives.
[5] Leiken 2012:153-154.
[6] Ibid:153.
[7] Inge 2016:26; Leiken 2012:153; Tyrer 2014:304, cited in Peter and Ortega 2014.
[8] Inge 2016:26.

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Islam during this period and would go on to play a significant role in creating fertile ground for Islamic activism. For instance, the 1993 massacre in Srebrenica cited as *the* 'event that sparked second-generation radicalism'[9]—which two decades later, three key western powers [Britain, the US and France] were found to be complicit in,[10] contributed significantly to the mobilisation of disaffected young British Muslims who were ready to reject a religio-ethnic identity in the search for an alternative. I can recall how a one-off event—a private on-campus screening of a video called *The Killing Fields of Bosnia*, had a profound and lasting effect on those of us who were also noticing the rise of Islamophobia being shaped by the 'new right' Conservative rule.[11]

This video, which was distastefully sensationalised by political agitators at the time, followed the tragic fate of 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys who were supposedly under the 'protection' of the United Nations, caused us to ponder seriously our future as British Muslims in a Europe that 'stood idly by during the massacre of Bosnian Muslims'.[12] Further, the fact that the genocide was a mere 24 hour drive away did indeed deepen a sense of collective Islamic identity within us,[13] as well as trigger feelings of helplessness, guilt and hypocrisy. This was something I felt quite starkly when vacationing at the end of my undergraduate degree with Greek friends in their homeland in the summer of 1993, since had we not driven past road signs for Bosnia, I would not have realised just how close I was to where the ethnic cleansing of fellow Muslims was taking place.

However, the seeming 'radicalisation' of Muslim youth—either on, or off, college and university campuses cannot be attributed to demographic trends alone. Rather, as Scantelbury (2012) notes, British authorities had left the door 'wide open for an authority from the Muslim world... preferably an Arab', to take the place of failing *imams*

[9] Leiken 2012:158.
[10] Vulliamy 2015.
[11] Tyrer 2014:304, cited in Peter and Ortega 2014.
[12] Leiken 2012:159, 167.
[13] Leiken 2012:159.

imported from the Indian, Pakistan and Bangladesh—ones who could 'speak persuasively in English to a second generation already rejecting the institutions that their parents struggled to implant in Britain'.[14]

> During the early 1990s, London hosted and subsidized extremist preachers holding forth in mosques, cultural centers, bookstores, assemblies, and colloquia as well as in journals, magazines, and newspapers. Under what the extremists called 'a covenant of security', security officials allowed them to incite freely... if they refrained from terrorist acts inside Britain.[15]

Significantly, some of these so-called *imams*—who have also been dubbed the 'lords of Londonistan', were able to snare a number of alienated Muslim youth by falsely offering them 'modern solutions for post-migrant Muslim predicaments', whilst still managing to 'present themselves as bearers of Islamic authority'.[16] These 'lords' included Omar Bakri, Abu Qatada, Muhammad Sūrur Zain al-ʿAbidīn, Abu Musʿab al-Suri, Abu Hamza al-Masri, Abdullah el Faisal and Anwar al-Awlaki, some of whom also had connections to the GIA, al-Qaeda and subsequently ISIS.[17]

Meanwhile, as Muslim identity politics began to manifest itself in the assertive mobilisation and 'increasingly confident participation of Muslims in student politics,'[18] it was fortunate that jihadism was not the only movement on the campus scene. Another group that would become significant to the eventual formation of OASIS and was very influential in mobilising British Muslim youth was *Jamʿiat Ihyaa Minhaaj al-Sunnah* (JIMAS)—an Islamic youth movement founded in 1984 by Munawar Ali, a computer science graduate from London. The son of Bangladeshi immigrants, Munawar Ali—better known as Abu Muntasir, was influenced in his early years by the teachings of his

[14] Scantlebury (2012), cited in Leiken 2012:155.
[15] Leiken 2012:151.
[16] Leiken 2012:155.
[17] Abdul-Wāhid 2013a.
[18] Tyrer 2014:304, cited in Peter and Ortega 2014.

Deobandi father.[19] By the time he was a teenager, he began to search for a more authentic version of Islam—one that deferred less to traditional folk Islam and took only the Qur'an and Prophetic Narrations (*Sunnah*) as its primary sources of authority.[20] Within a few years Abu Muntasir would go on to tour mosques, Islamic centres and university Islamic societies around the country. Of them, the University of Essex *ISoc* in the 'squaddie' town of Colchester—Britain's oldest garrison town—would become a platform and regular pit-stop for JIMAS's circuits, most likely because of its proximity to his hometown of Ipswich, a factor which likely contributed to it becoming a springboard for Islamic *daʿwah* activity in years to come.

Although some studies have mistakenly heralded Abu Muntasir as the 'father of the Salafi Daʿwah in the UK',[21] what he should be credited with is helping with the *deculturisation* of Islam in the UK. As affirmed by Abu Muntasir himself, what led to JIMAS's success as an organisation was the fact that its membership consisted of 'modern young men with beards and modern young women in *hijāb* [who] were Western-educated but regarded themselves as more authentically Islamic than the older generation of Muslim immigrants'.[22] Even former JIMAS 'members' who later went on to form OASIS have acknowledged that Abu Muntasir was instrumental in the initial mobilisation of British youth towards a more authentic and decultured version of Islam at a grassroots level during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

However, whilst charisma and eloquence in the English language have been cited as Abu Muntasir's mainstay for inspiring a vibrant youth movement among a burgeoning second generation of British Muslims,[23] his *daʿwah* failed to strike a resounding chord with us all. For instance, in the Essex University ISoc's effort to proselytise

[19] Bowen 2014:60.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Hamid 2009:386, cited in Meijer 2009.
[22] Bowen 2014:60.
[23] Ibid.

Muslim youth on campus, I too was invited to attend lectures delivered by him in the early to mid-nineties—and on one occasion, we were also taken to meet his family at his home in Ipswich—but like my peers, felt an air of arrogance and pomposity from Abu Muntasir. Rather, it would not be until the mid-to-late nineties via the more relatable *daʿwah* activities of the head of the University of Essex ISoc, namely Amjad Rafiq, also known by his *kunya*, Abu Iyād (whose contribution to the Salafi *Daʿwah* is further discussed below), that I and others like me, would discover an 'authentic' interpretation of Islam, *Salafism*.

The former founders of OASIS (and ex-JIMAS members) also recall that by 1995, Abu Muntasir and his JIMAS group had begun to display signs of diverging from the core principles of Salafism's creed, noting that 'any connection to Salafiyyah and assertion of a Salafi creed was largely academic (i.e., it never transcended above mere academic discussion).'[24] This crucial aspect of Abu Muntasir's religious outlook, that has also been described as nothing more than just a 'nominal type of Salafiyyah'—which in any case was heavily reliant on knowledge procured from the late Shaykh Abu Talhah Dawūd Burbank (whose contribution to the Salafi Daʿwah is further discussed below)—[25] eventually caused OASIS's founders to filter him out by establishing OASIS. [26] This left Abu Muntasir—along with his 'egotistic tendencies'[27]–to propound his increasingly dangerous ideas under the banner of JIMAS.[28] In doing so, British Salafis showed just how hard they were willing to fight to establish and maintain the credal consistency of their Daʿwah as that of the *Saved Sect* right from the very outset.

As firsthand accounts from Salafi *Duʿāt* (Callers) and Bowen's (2014)

[24] Abu Iyād recalls the history of JIMAS in his eulogy of Abu Talhah Dawūd Burbank (2011: Salafitalk.com).
[25] Ibid.
[26] Abdul-Wāhid 2013:1.
[27] Abdul-Wāhid 2013b.
[28] Abdul-Wāhid 2013:1.

study confirm, problems with Abu Muntasir first began when 'by the early 1990s leading Salafis around the world were competing for JIMAS's loyalty'; these Salafis all recognised that JIMAS was unlike any other Muslim youth movement or Islamic organisation at the time, as it 'was not the UK offshoot of a larger foreign network'.[29] The attention JIMAS received from all these foreign groups, however, coincided with what has been described as 'the period of turmoil' in contemporary Salafi 'daʿwah during the mid 90s onwards', since it was at this time that the Gulf War of 1990 caused hybrid versions of Salafism (which had entered Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s)[30] to emerge after being latent for nearly a decade.[31] Featuring no understanding of how to implement the correct methodologies of 'reform, correction, [and] daʿwah [in] returning the strength to Islam and its people', these hybrids that falsely ascribed themselves to Salafiyyah began to proliferate rapidly.[32] In reality, they were pushing the innovated practices of 20th-century ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb, Mawdudi and Hasan al-Banna, whose corruption 'continues to take hold in the minds of the people up until today'.[33]

Further, what caused these deviated religious methodologies to rise from their slumber in the 1990s was the Saudi Government's 'controversial decision to allow an infidel army'—US troops to set up military bases inside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)—in case they became Iraq's next target following the invasion of Kuwait in 1990.[34]

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[29] Bowen 2014:60.

[30] 'Sahwa Islāmiyya: Literally "Islamic awakening", movement that emerged from the 1970s in Saudi Arabia in opposition to the ruling family and to the constant compromise of the leading religious scholars. As a political and religious alternative to the state institutions, it sought to merge the political approach of the Muslim Brotherhood with the literalist doctrine' (Bonnefoy 2011: xv). However, the Salafis being researched reject that their doctrine is 'literalist', instead they assert that it is taken upon the understanding of the early pious generations (al-Salaf al-Sālih).

[31] Salafi Publications 2003:2-4.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Bowen 2014:63.

This decision, which was sanctioned by the senior scholars and the Grand Mufti, Shaykh ʿAbdul-ʿAzīz Ibn Bāz, infuriated Afghan war veteran Osama bin Laden, who was intent on being the one—along with his 'international brigade of mujahideen veterans'—to protect the Holy Land, but whose offer was refused:[35]

> Bin Laden was outraged, not just by the snub to his proposal to provide troops, but [also] by what he saw as a convenient misreading of Islamic principle by Bin Baz to suit the purposes of the Saudi royal family. In Bin Laden's view, the fact that the Saudi government, which had been charged with guarding the holiest sites in Islam, was unable to defend itself without infidel help was humiliating. Furthermore, by entering into an alliance with non-Muslim troops in a fight against other Muslims, Bin Laden believed that the Saudi Kingdom was in direct contravention of Islamic law.[36]

Not only did Bin Laden's views trigger dissent within the ranks of other Saudi scholars with the *Awakening Shaykhs*, Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah, who 'spoke out publicly against Bin Baz's ruling'[37]—it also caused confusion among the laity, since a vast number of groups who practiced divergent methodologies began to present themselves as *Salafi*. In the UK, Abu Muntasir was one such individual to be swayed by the *diluted* principles propounded by those who courted him, some of whom were labelled *Mumayyiʿah* and *Ikhwānī* (by the Salafi scholars): those who water down established Islamic Principles in order to justify cooperation with People of Innovation *(Ahl al-Bidʿah)* by putting credal differences to one side in the arena of Daʿwah .[38] He had made some contacts with the 'Quran wa Sunnah Society of North America (QSS); Salafi scholars from Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and with the emerging jihadi groups spawned by the veterans of the battle against the Soviets in Afghanistan'.[39] All these groups offered their opinions

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Abdul-Wāhid 2019.
[39] Bowen 2014:60.

on the best way to resolve disputes on various topical issues, including the permissibility of democracy, living in non-Muslim lands and rebelling against unjust Muslim rulers, which subsequently led to division among the ranks, in the name of *Salafiyyah*.[40]

It was also during this period that works authored by Shaykh Dr Rabīʿ Ibn Hādī al-Madkhalī, one of the senior scholars of the Salafi Daʿwah in this age, became instrumental as a clarification of true Salafism to those people, movements, groups and organisations that had been affected by the *innovators*.[41] One of the first books of clarification that Shaykh Rabīʿ wrote in response to the misguidance spawned by the *daʿwah* of the *Ikhwānist* reform was *Methodology of the Prophets in Calling to Allah*, which Shaykh Abu Talhah Dawūd Burbank would soon translate into English (discussed below). Shaykh Rabīʿ, who was supported and commended by other senior scholars of *Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿah* in the Islamic world and from the sacred city of Madinah, aimed his refutation at the neo-Qutubists of Saudi Arabia: the likes of Salman al-ʿAwdah and Safar al-Hawāli.[42] Both were known as shaykhs who were propagating the political ideology of Sayyid Qutb among the youth, hailing him as an 'Imām of Guidance' on a par with other great revivers of Islam, such as Ibn ʿAbdul-Wahhāb and Ibn Taymiyyah.[43]

However, these neo-Qutubists went on to be labelled 'the *Khawārij* of the era' by the reviver (*mujaddid*) and learned scholar of *hadīth*, Shaykh Muhammad Nāsir al-Dīn al-Albānī in 1997 CE, and were strongly refuted by other great scholars including Shaykh Ibn Bāz, Shaykh ʿUthaymīn (رَحِمَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ) and Shaykh Al-Fawzān.[44] This would eventually lead to their imprisonment at the behest of the *Hay'at Kibār al-ʿUlamā* (Committee of Major Scholars), whose head was Shaykh Ibn Bāz (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ).[45] Despite the refutations and advice from the major scholars

[40] Ibid.
[41] Salafi Publications 2003.
[42] Bowen 2014:63.
[43] Salafi Publications 2003.
[44] See author's article: *What is Salafism?*
[45] Salafi Publications 2003:10.

in this affair, Abu Muntasir and many others who lacked a firm grounding in Sharīʿah knowledge and understanding of the true origins of such deviations, were still unable to detect the effects of such deviations upon them; before long, their lack of knowledge and understanding began to manifest itself 'in their speech and actions, their daʿwah, their *walā and barā* (loyalty and disownment), their company and associations'.[46]

In his first-hand account below, Shaykh Abu Khadeejah ʿAbdul-Wāhid (2013) recalls the time when Abu Muntasir openly professed his Qutubist views:

> Early in this year [1996], Abu Muntasir visited Shaykh Al-Albānī (*rahimahullāh*) in Jordan, he then went onto Alexandria in Egypt to visit Muhammad Ismaʿīl Muqaddam. On his return I met [him] in Manchester. He told me how unimpressed he was by Shaykh Al-Albānī (due to him not giving 'importance' to the political situation of the Muslims) ... He was very impressed with Muhammad Ismaʿīl in Egypt, as he was much more 'aware' of the plight of the Muslims worldwide and their political situation.[47]

Similarly, Salafi groups worldwide experienced intergroup conflict over theological differences and many found themselves tasked in their respective roles and locations in the battle against a Qutubist domination in the West. In the USA, one such individual was the late Shaykh Abu Uwais Abdullah Ahmed Ali (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ)—a pioneer of the Salafi Daʿwah in the region who is largely remembered for delivering 'a series of scathing lectures against the influences of the Qutubis, such as Ali Tamīmī' back in 1997 (discussed below).[48] Described by his peers as brave and courageous in facing the opposition from 'the *mukhālifīn* (opposers) such as the *hizbī* (partisan), *mubtadiʿ* (innovator), Abu Muslimah'. Fellow *duʿāt* also acknowledge that skirmishes fought by Abu Uwais were pivotal to the clarification, solidification, and

[46] Ibid: 8.
[47] Abdul-Wāhid 2013:1.
[48] Abdul-Wāhid 2013a: 2.

consolidation of the Salafi Daʿwah in the US at a time when issues of creed and methodology were vague.[49]

In Britain, however, this confusion eventually led to 'factionalism within JIMAS'.[50] Specifically, it was when Abu Muntasir decided to openly declare his organisation's allegiance to political activists and agitators among the *Awakening Shaykhs* such as ʿAbdul-Rahmān ʿAbdul-Khāliq in the Middle East and elsewhere—all of whom staunchly supported the *khārijite* ideology of the Egyptian extremist and *Ikhwānī* figurehead, Sayyid Qutb [one of the most cited figures in influencing the al-Qaida leader][51]—that a handful of JIMAS supporters decided to leave the organisation and form OASIS.[52] Although these OASIS *duʿāt* continued their struggle to convince Abu Muntasir to denounce his 'destructive *Qutubist-Jihadist* path' and join them in spreading [pure] Salafi Daʿwah,[53] he refused.[54] Below, Abu Khadeejah recounts a 'last-ditch attempt' by himself and four others to advise Abu Muntasir by visiting him in Ipswich in May of 1996—an occassion which I recall, since they all stopped by the University of Essex on their return from Ipswich, and word of what had taken place soon became privy to a few of us on campus.

> As a last-ditch attempt [May 1996], five of us travelled to Ipswich to again try and convince Abu Muntasir Manawar Ali to give up his destructive Qutubist-Jihadist path ... We...set about advising him and discussing with him the error of his ways. He was adamant upon his ideology, and ... [his] support for al-Muntada al-Islamī (London), a group known for its allegiance to Muhammad Surūr (a political agitator and caller for revolt in the Muslim countries); support for Abdur-Rahmān Abdul-Khāliq, an Egyptian living in Kuwait, who speaks of *Tawheed al-Hākimiyyah* as a fourth distinct category of

[49] Abdul-Wāhid 2014.
[50] Bowen 2014:60.
[51] Robert Irwin 2001
[52] Abdul-Wāhid 2013.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Bowen 2014:78, 79.

> Tawheed, and praises the efforts of the political agitators; he spoke of his desire to co-operate with groups and parties who oppose the Salafi doctrine. All of this we recorded in these minutes that are still in my possession.[55]

Evidently, Abu Muntasir favoured the ideology of preachers such as Ali Tamīmī[56] who would eventually receive a life sentence for inciting his congregation in the United States to fight in Afghanistan on the side of the Taliban.[57] In fact, he went as far as inviting Ali Tamīmī to London to deliver a lecture to a large audience of youth, which Shaykh Abu Khadeejah Abdul-Wāhid describes as an attempt to 'hijack' the Salafi Daʿwah in the UK:

> Ali Tamīmī was invited by Abu Muntasir in the spring of 1996. He delivered a lecture in East London that really drew the line in the sand entitled: *A Word of Advice to the Salafis in the UK*. In this lecture he spoke of 'Tawheed al-Hākimiyyah' as a distinct fourth category of Tawheed (regarded by the Salafi scholars to be a doctrinal innovation), parliamentary elections, Jihad and political agitation.[58]

Moreover, although Abu Muntasir called others to jihad and has been portrayed as a 'godfather' of jihad—a title he willfully affirms in a BAFTA-nominated documentary[59]—his claims were more bravado than reality, as being seen as a fervent mercenary only enhanced his image as a repentant jihadist. In fact, former members of JIMAS clearly recall that while Abu Muntasir frequented various jihadi training camps—and photographs of him dressed in militant-looking apparel were taken to raise his 'jihadi' status in the UK, he never *actually* partook in any combat, rendering his claim to have 'spent time on the frontline against communists in the 1990s'[60] to be false. What is true,

[55] Abdul-Wāhid 2013:1.
[56] Abdul-Wāhid 2013a.
[57] Bowen 2014:78,79.
[58] Abdul-Wāhid 2013a.
[59] Khan 2015.
[60] Bowen 2014:61.

however, is that JIMAS's shift towards political activism and theatres of jihadist combat served as an impetus for the founders of OASIS to form a corrective counter-narrative and disseminate the Salafi Daʿwah in universities and Islamic centres across Britain.

This illustrates an important point: not all Muslims in Europe at this time were 'angry' and seeking recourse in the form of violence or revolution as suggested by Leiken (2012) in his book *Europe's Angry Muslims*. It also serves as a rebuttal of the claim made by a senior member of the JIMAS executive at the time, who believed that divisions occurred because 'JIMAS had become too successful and so large, that diverse currents which were pursuing their own interests would have broken away sooner or later'.[61] Moreover, it is evidence against claims that JIMAS was a 'Saudi-backed Salafist group',[62] and that violent extremism is somehow implicit in Salafism. This is because the Salafis who formed OASIS (and, later, Salafi Publications) clearly fought hard to resist the extremist ideologues of the era, despite concerted attempts on the part of those who claimed to be 'Salafis' [such as Abu Muntasir and his JIMAS followers] to indoctrinate the minds of many young people who were searching for a *pure* and *authentic* understanding of Islam, both pre- and post-9/11.

Thus, while other youth organisations, mosques and university Islamic societies welcomed extremists such as Ali Tamīmī, Anwar Awlakī, Idris Palmer, Omar Bakrī, Omar Abdur-Rahman, Muhammad al-Masʿarī, Muhammad Surūr and Faisal Abdullah—even after they had made their ideologies abundantly clear, OASIS was working hard to oppose them all.[63] For instance, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS),[64] a politically active student movement and influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was another

[61] Hamid, cited in Meijer 2009:394.
[62] Leiken 2012:158,159.
[63] Abdul-Wāhid 2013a: 3.
[64] See Abdul-Wāhid (2013) for a first-hand personal account of the Salafi Daʿwah that was spread with the dissolution of OASIS, and the formation of SPUBS.

prominent group that was very vocal on campuses throughout the UK at the time. Salafis determined that FOSIS was using a 'soft power' approach, under the guise of 'moderation', to coax the youth into the extremist ideologies of Qutb, Banna and Maududi.[65] Before long most JIMAS members realised what was taking place within the other Islamic groups and decided to affiliate themselves with OASIS instead. As a result, what began with mainly second-generation Muslim students searching for a shared and meaningful identity based upon the religion of their migrant parents, resulted in the religious revival in Britain that was beginning to identify strongly with Salafi scholars in Arab lands.

Additionally, crucial to Salafism's development as a revivalist group was the fact that it coincided with the study and return of several British students from the Islamic University of Madinah (IUM) in Saudi Arabia, such as Abu Talhah Burbank (discussed further below), Abu Hakim Bilal Davis as well as those who travelled to the great *Hadīth* scholar, Muqbil Ibn Hādī al-Wādiʿī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) in Yemen, such as Abu Abdullāh Bilāl Hussain, Abu Fudayl Abdur-Raqeeb Francis, Abu Tasneem Mousaf, and others. Devoted to the sole aim of reviving authentic Islam, these students of knowledge from diverse racial, social, and cultural backgrounds—some of whom were converts to Islam, would go on to play an important role in propagating and strengthening the Salafi Daʿwah in Birmingham and beyond. Their thorough understanding of Islam and the Sunnah and their firm commitment to the *ʿAqeedah* (the Creed of Islam) and *Manhaj* (Methodology) of the Salaf would serve as an excellent example and guidance to those 'lost' or upon deviated beliefs and practices. Consequently, they would also become a huge source of pride as leaders of their local Salafi communities—especially those members with whom they shared similar sociocultural traits and who 'belonged' to an otherwise disenfranchised community of (Muslim or non-Muslim heritage) post-colonial descendants.

Undeniably, among the most prominent of these British students to return from their studies in the Muslim lands was the late Shaykh Abu

[65] Ibid.

Talhah Dawūd Burbank (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ). An English convert to Islam who was originally from a small village in Leicestershire, Shaykh Abu Talhah was praised for being an individual who was 'meticulous in acting upon the Sunnah', and those who witnessed his efforts believed that he had been 'blessed with skills of translation' that had not been 'equaled (by anyone) in the West'.[66]

> He was a prolific translator, having translated scores of the Scholars' works. From them was *Al-Tawassul* of Shaykh al-Albānī (Allah's mercy be upon him) and thereby clarified the belief of Ahlus-Sunnah in opposition to the grave worshippers and Sūfīs. He translated *The Reality of Sūfism* of Shaykh Muhammad bin Rabī al-Madkhalī; he translated *The Explanation of the Three Principles* of Shaykh Ibn Uthaimīn (Allah's mercy be upon him); he translated *The Methodology of the Prophets in Calling to Allah* of Shaykh Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī; he translated the seminal work: The *Explanation of the Creed of Imām al-Barbahārī* (Allah's mercy be upon him), and many more besides.[67]

Further, Shaykh Abu Talhah Dawūd Burbank (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) was unquestioningly regarded to be 'from the founders' of Salafism in the UK, and 'a pillar of its early success',[68] as the following quote from Shaykh Abu Khadeejah's eulogy of him illustrates:

> In the depths of battles practically throughout the whole of the nineties he [Abu Talhah] stood firm against the people of misguidance and bidʿah, translating material in clarification of the *Haqq* (the Truth) and propagating the *Haqq*, without any compromising or fearing the blame of the blamers. He stood firm against the Sufīs, the Ashʿarīs, the Khawārij and the Shiʿah—he translated the works of the scholars both past and present, making clear the path of Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿah. He defended the honour of the scholars such as Shaykh Ibn Bāz, Shaykh Al-Albānī, Shaykh Muqbil bin Hādī and Shaykh

[66]Abu Khadeejah's eulology of Abu Talhah Dawūd Burbank (2011: Salafitalk.com).
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

> Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī when the partisans and the innovators in the West sought to dishonour and discredit them. He became a symbol and a sign of Salafiyyah in the West, and we do not praise anyone beyond Allah, the Most High.[69]

Another individual who also worked tirelessly to translate material directly from the Salafi scholars in the battle against the Qutubists was Shaykh Dr Abu ʿIyād Amjad Rafiq.[70] At the time, Abu ʿIyād was the head of the University of Essex ISoc whilst studying for his BSc and PhD in biochemistry and medicinal biochemistry which he obtained between 1990-1997. However, it was Shaykh Abu ʿIyād's zeal for the Religion combined with his prowess in both the Arabic language and his ability to harness digital spaces in the emerging internet revolution which became a major contributing factor towards both Salafism's early success in the UK, and as a global English-language Islamic revivalist group to date.[71] As most first-generation Salafis like myself who encountered the Salafi Da'wah during its fledgling years are able to testify, there is no doubt that Shaykh Abu ʿIyād's efforts gave strength to Salafism; not only by way of his own translations and knowledge-based articles, but also because he was in an ideal position to assist students returning from religious institutions, such as IUM or Shaykh Muqbil's camp in Yemen, to disseminate their knowledge via the various online portals that he had already set up.

Hence, what began life as campus activity with Abu ʿIyād's creation of a University of Essex ISoc website—the contents of which he took with himself when he left Essex in 1997, would serve to broaden the scope of Salafism's reach way beyond just upwardly mobile university-educated, British-born Muslims, to include both Muslims and non-Muslims in communities all over Britain (and worldwide). In years to come, the oeuvre of both translators [Shaykh Abu Talhah Dawūd Burbank and Shaykh Dr Abu ʿIyād Amjad Rafiq] reached such levels

[69] Ibid.
[70] Abdul-Wāhid 2013a: 2.
[71] Shaykh Dr Abu Iyād Amjad Rafiq's contribution to the success of Salafi Publications as a global revivalist group will be discussed in future articles, (Allah willing).

that Salafis worldwide would hold in high esteem their daʿwah efforts in the West, hailing them to be from the best of the people to stand strong whilst tasked with spreading the Sunnah, seeking to rectify the English-speaking Ummah, and return it back to its original state of affairs.[72]

However, during Salafism's formative years specifically, it was both Abu Talhah's and Abu Iyād's translations of refutations (*rudūd*) of hybridised and hyphenated versions of Salafiyyah—refutations which were written by some senior Salafi scholars of the time, such as Shaykh Muqbil (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ), Shaykh al-Albānī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) and Shaykh Rabīʿ, which gave Salafis in the UK—as well as those in other parts of the English-speaking world, the clarification they so desperately needed to discern true Salafiyyah from hybridised versions ascribed to it. Consequently, the knowledge contained in books such as the *Explanation of the Creed* (Imām al-Barbahārī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ), which was published in 1995, came to be in such high demand that photocopies of Shaykh Abu Talhah Dawūd Burbank's handwritten translation of it were already in circulation as early as 1993.[73] Further, books such as *Usūlus-Sunnah* (Imām Ahmad ibn Hanbal (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ), the translation of which Shaykh Abu ʿIyād worked on in collaboration with Shaykh Abu Talhah whilst still a student at the University of Essex in late 1995/early 1996,[74] as well as Shaykh Abu Talhah's translation of the *Methodology of the Prophets* (Shaykh Rabīʿ Ibn Hādī al-Madkhalī)[75]—published between 1996 and 1998, were all instrumental in guiding British Salafis towards more informed religious choices based upon authentic sources that referred directly to the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Further, the roots of Islamic Da'wah activity in Birmingham—a city which arguably stands out as the heart and soul of Salafi Da'wah in Britain and the West, also played a pivotal role as a precursor to the establishment of SPubs. Significantly, the Da'wah efforts of two individuals—Shaykh Abu Hakeem Bilāl Davis and Shaykh Abu

[72] Abdul-Wāhid 2014.
[73] Abdul-Wāhid 2014.
[74] Translated by Abu ʿIyād Amjad Rafiq and Abu Talhah Dawūd Burbank.
[75] Translated by Abu Talhah Dawūd Burbank.

Khadeejah ʿAbdul-Wāhid, both of whom were born and raised in Birmingham, facilitated the birth of one of the oldest and largest Salafi communities in Britain. Well-known in Birmingham (and around Britain) by the mid-nineties for their lessons in the clarification and elucidation of the Salafi Methodology and Creed, both Abu Hakeem and Abu Khadeejah would be at the forefront of changing the face of Islamic Daw'ah in the UK in the decade to come.[76] Alongside Shaykh Abu Talhah (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ), they would teach regularly at various venues in the city such as the *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* mosques. Abu Hakeem and Abu Khadeejah would visit countless venues across the UK and abroad, and soon acquired a reputation for their precision in clarification of methodology, familiarising the listeners to the names of the Salafi scholars of the Muslim lands, quoting the speech of the Salaf and the later scholars of Sunnah and Hadīth, and for their 'fearless' refutation of the deviant ideologies that opposed the Salafi Creed and its principles. The efforts of these three duʿāt combined with others such as Shaykh Dr Abu ʿIyād Amjad Rafiq, brought many hundreds to the Salafi Daʿwah.[77] As Shaykh Abu Khadeejah states in his first-hand personal account of the Salafi Da'wah of 1996:

> The great strength of Salafiyyah we witness today was [not] due to the efforts of any single individual. Rather (after Allah's Bounty and Mercy upon us), it must be said that a body of close friends sharing a united Creed, coupled with a desire to spread the Truth came to together at a unique moment in history—as willed by Allah, and the Da'wah flourished, and all praise is due to Allah.[78]

Notably, the first ever OASIS-organised Salafi conference to take place in the UK in the post-JIMAS era was at the *Amanah Muath Trust* on

[76] A detailed discussion of Shaykh Abu Hakeem Bilal Davis's and Shaykh Abu Khadeejah's contribution to the success of SPubs to be presented in a forthcoming article entitled: 'Salafi Publications, a Grassroots Revival'.
[77] There were, of course, other known important translators and contributors of the time in Birmingham and other cities, such as Abu ʿUbaydah ʿAmar Bashir in East London. However, this research is focused on the emergence and rise of SPubs and Birmingham in specific.
[78] Abdul-Wāhid 2013.

Stratford Road in Birmingham in August 1996. Coincidentally, it was also the first ever major Islamic conference that I, and many young British Muslims like me, had ever attended. In the pre-internet era, a gathering such as this revealed just how many others in the UK were also in search of the *true* version of Islam, as prior to this conference many Salafi youth who were mainly university students, relied almost solely upon cassette recordings of lectures that had taken place on university campuses and centres across the country. At this conference, it was astounding to see a scattering of young British women fully dressed in head-to-toe *abayas* and niqabs, and young bearded men dressed in *thawbs* (above-the-ankle long shirt)—the attire of Arab women and men whom I had observed on my recent pilgrimage to Makkah and visit to Madinah.

The attendees' Sunnah-style dress and the fact that both males and females were adequately segregated and catered for, was to my mind, a promising sign of the group's authenticity and purity—very unlike a FOSIS event I had briefly attended a year or so earlier. OASIS founder Shaykh Abu Khadeejah recalls that there were approximately 2,500 people from all over the country at their first conference. More significantly, the event is remembered by many to have been the clincher in their deciding which way to go in their search of the correct path, free from the ideologies of other sects. This is because the gathering was suddenly transformed by the chance visit of three prominent shaykhs: Muhammad bin Hādi and Abdus-Salām Burjiss from the KSA, and Muhammad al-Anjarī from Kuwait. Their presence turned what began as an Islamic youth conference, into a scholarly gathering where the visiting shaykhs, who were considered greater in knowledge, experience, and wisdom, clarified the Sunnah and the methodology of the Salaf to those attendees in search of clarity and guidance.[79]

Two lectures that stood out which marked a significant turning point for Salafi daʿwah in the UK were: *Deviant Sects of the Twentieth Century* by Shaykh Muhammad bin Hādi, and *Who are the Salafis?* by Shaykh

[79] Abdul-Wāhid 2013.

Muhammad al-Anjarī. Both lectures prompted a barrage of questions from the audience on the issues of *ʿAqeedah* (Creed), *Tawheed* (Islamic monotheism) and the correct *Manhaj* in calling to Islam, as well as questions about the misguidance of *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* (the Muslim Brotherhood founded in Egypt). Attendees (including the shaykhs) noticed how these questions made some of the guests on the platform very uncomfortable. For example, they noted how Suhaib Hasan, a graduate of Madinah, caller to Islam in the UK, and a speaker at the conference, tried to conceal audience questions about the methodologies of other Islamic sects.[80] Despite Suhaib Hasan's attempts to have these issues sidestepped, they were, to his dismay, eventually addressed. This caused the OASIS-organised Salafi conference of 1996 to be remembered by Salafis as a landmark in the history of Salafi Daʿwah in the UK, since it had the effect of exposing the figureheads who were not proponents of the clarity that 'purist' Salafism was offering.[81]

However, OASIS's life would prove to be short-lived, as by the autumn of 1996, Abu Khadeejah recalls that its founders began to fear replicating the errors of JIMAS in trying to gather callers and students under one banner.[82] To avoid risking the Daʿwah once again, they made the crucial decision to dissolve OASIS. It was at this juncture that another major turning point in the discourse of Salafism in the UK and the West occurred, as former OASIS members Abu Khadeejah Abdul-Wāhid and Abu Iyād Amjad Rafiq along with British converts to Islam, Abu Talhah Dawūd Burbank and Abu Hakeem Bilal Davis, both of whom were students at the IUM at one time or another established a stronger more resilient Daʿwah. Together, they decided to establish a publishing house and focus on spreading the Salafi Daʿwah via translations of core Islamic texts from classical Arabic to English, disseminated in the form of articles, leaflets, books—and later in the internet era, online work. Their close friendship and efforts facilitated

[80] Ibid.

[81] For greater depth on the history of the Salafi Da'wah in Britain read: Meeting With Suhaib Hasan and 52 Brothers Involved in the Da'wah, (Abdul-Wāhid 2013b).

[82] Abdul-Wāhid 2013.

the spread of Salafism in the UK and the rest of the English-speaking world in a manner not previously seen. The name of this non-profit organisation was *Salafi Publications* (SPubs).

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