SPIRITUAL WAYFARERS IN A SECULAR AGE: THE TABLIGHI JAMA’AT IN MODERN BRITAIN

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Abstract

The Tablighi Jama'at (TJ) is widely regarded as the largest movement of grassroots Islamic revival in the world yet remains significantly under-researched. This thesis examines the British branch of the movement based on sustained ethnographic fieldwork conducted over 18 months. Intensive participant observation was combined with 59 semi-structured interviews to present a detailed typology and topography of the movement's organisational structure in Britain. Further, the issue of intergenerational transmission is explored – based on an analysis of the cultural identity markers of language, clothing and food – with clear shifts identified between the first-generation 'Old Guard' and the British-born 'Avant-Garde.' The thesis argues that TJ should best be characterised as a movement in transition located within broader processes of indigenisation operative within British Islam more generally.

Theoretically, the thesis augments Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge with insights derived from Bhaskar's critical realism to propose the twin 'generative mechanisms' of secularity and spirituality from which empirically accessible social phenomena emerge. These are used to anatomise the process of 'intra-religious conversion' which emerges as a key motif of contemporary TJ experience. Turner's concept of liminality and Schutz's phenomenology of consciousness are further deployed to examine ritual and semantic dimensions of conversion that see the neophyte’s attachment to religion transition from a nominal to a passionate state. Generic theories in the sociology of religion are also consulted to explore issues of retention and post-conversion strategies of commitment-maintenance.

Finally, utilising insights from Peter Berger's vast oeuvre, the thesis explores the intersection of 'Islamic Revival' with secularisation theory in Europe. It argues that, in the context of contemporary 'Eurosecularity,' the willed and conscious exercise of agency in ways which publicly affirm faith is intrinsically imbued with a disconcerting 'debunking' potential for those who have unthinkingly imbibed into interior consciousness the taken-for-granted suppositions of a secular nomos.
Declarations

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Dedicated to the memory of my late father, Mohmedazam Ismail Timol (1932 – 2004), whose wise words and gentle counsel continue to illumine my path to this day.
Acknowledgements

لا يشكو الله من لا يشكو الناس

“He is not grateful to God, who does not thank people.”

Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Sunan Abi Dawud 4811)

Any piece of work, not least a PhD, stretching over four years inevitably incurs a number of debts. Here I attempt to recount the most salient.

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¹ See: http://www.yj-academic.com/programs-scholarships/cardiff-university-uk
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2 For instance, see: [http://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/12/02/where-are-the-muslim-voices-against-islamist-terror/](http://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/12/02/where-are-the-muslim-voices-against-islamist-terror/)
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Men with modern educations are content to sit at home, congratulating themselves on their broadmindedness and lack of fanaticism. As Nietzsche’s Zarathustra says of them, “For thus you speak: ‘Real are we entirely, and without belief or superstition.’ Thus you stick out your chests – but alas, they are hollow!”

There are many people in contemporary democratic societies, particularly among the young, who are not content to merely congratulate themselves on their broadmindedness, but who would like to “live within a horizon.” That is, they want to choose a belief and commitment to “values” deeper than mere liberalism itself, such as those offered by traditional religions...

Francis Fukuyama (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*, p.307
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 An Ethnographic Vignette

On the last weekend in March 2014, I spent two days out “in the path of Allah.” The phrase is a synonym for the time some Muslims spend out on tour with the Tablighi Jama’at (TJ). TJ is today widely regarded as the “largest living Islamic movement in the world” (Reetz 2008, pp.98-99) which, from humble beginnings, is now “said to be active in almost every country with a significant Sunni Muslim presence” (Sikand 2007, p.129). It originated under colonial rule in 1920s British India through the activities of a charismatic Sufi teacher called Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi. After his death, his son Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf assumed leadership of the movement expanding its operations globally. TJ first took root in Britain as part of the post-WWII immigration drive and quickly succeeded in setting up a robust infrastructure predominantly among the South Asian diasporic community. It continues to exercise an influence in the lives of a considerable number of British Muslims today who are the subject of this doctoral thesis. As part of my fieldwork then, I joined a weekend TJ tour at the end of March 2014. This entailed staying in the mosque of a neighbouring town with a group of 10 other male Muslims and participating with them in their programme of activities.

Our group was entirely British-born and quite young; the average age was 24 and seven members were students. Umar, a 36 year old builder originally from Bradford, joined us on the Saturday night for 24 hours; he had been unable to start out with us on the Friday evening due to work commitments. Soon after he arrived, our amir [group leader] conducted a late-night study circle with us in the main prayer hall situated on the ground floor of the mosque complex. The topic was death and he read aloud from the twelfth-century Muslim scholar Abu Hamid al-Ghazali’s graphic descriptions of the Muslim eschaton.4 After concluding around midnight, he encouraged us to offer our late-night supererogatory prayers [tahajjud] before retiring upstairs to our sleeping bags quickly in order to wake up on time for the dawn prayer [Fajr] at 6.10am. Most group members complied then slipped upstairs quietly, presumably to sleep, leaving me and Umar alone in the prayer hall.

3 Throughout this thesis, biographical details have been modified in non-essential ways to protect respondent anonymity.
4 The book he read from is part of the core TJ curriculum, Fadhail-e Sadaqat [Virtues of Charity], which cites copiously from al-Ghazali’s magnum opus Ihya Ulum al-Din [The Revival of the Religious Sciences]. Ghazali’s original volume has been translated into English by Winter (1989). In 8.3 I refer again to this incident in greater detail as part of my analysis of ‘death’ as a master signifier of TJ discourse.
A spontaneous informal interview ensued over the next two hours, which I frenetically jotted into my notebook. Umar, a British-born Pakistani with a chequered past, was evidently glad to have a sympathetic ear and poured out to me his struggles of attempting to live piously amid the exigencies of contemporary life. It became clear to me that he had only recently undergone an ‘intra-religious conversion’ experience; the beard on his face was less than a year old and his long-standing white-English girlfriend had converted to Islam just prior to that. Umar recounted to me in vivid detail the difficulties he had encountered when first beginning to offer his five daily prayers on time at work. Not only were all his colleagues in the builder’s yard non-Muslim but, during the short winter days, prayer times followed each other in quick succession: “When I told my boss my Creator has rights over me, he just laughed: ‘What the hell are you on about your Creator has rights over you?! You’re free to do what you like, pal!’ I felt like nutting him. Some of them are OK - they listen and you can have a conversation, but that particular boss was an arsehole.”

The mosque we were staying in was a small structure, an old converted parish church, situated adjacent to a number of shops, restaurants and bars. As we spoke, a bar close to the mosque began to empty of revellers and the sound of raucous shouts and laughter floated into the mosque. Immediately, the floorboards above the prayer hall began to creak noisily – evidently not everybody was asleep. Looking at the time, Umar suddenly remembered that the clocks had just jumped forward an hour due to British Summer Time: “It’s actually 3am now, not 2am!” Deciding to wind up our conversation we switched off the lights and both proceeded to offer our tahajjud prayers separately in the dark, the low hum of our Qur’anic recitations mixing eerily with the boisterous cries of the partygoers outside. I finished before Umar and visited the toilet before making my way upstairs; he met me on the stairs and we paused together for a moment to look out of the window on the landing. “I know that bar well,” Umar whispered to me so as not to disturb any sleeping members of the jama’at. “From those years I was away from Islam, I know loads of these places like the back of my hand.” Just then a smartly-dressed man from the opposite side of the road left the large group he had animatedly been chatting with and ambled across toward us; we watched with some bemusement as he unzipped his trousers and urinated casually on the mosque wall. I instinctively reached for the window to call out to him but was stopped by Umar’s gentle yet insistent hand: “There’s no point,” he said, “There’s absolutely no point in saying anything when he’s

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5 I also conducted, at a later date, a formal, recorded interview with Umar and provide more biographical detail in 9.2.3.

6 Umar’s insistence in offering his prayers in the religiously neutral, functionally differentiated public sphere of his workplace may be cited as an instance of the “deprivatization” of religion noted by José Casanova (1994, p.5): “By deprivatization I mean the fact that religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them.” See 10.1 and 11.2.3.2 for more on the conflation of the public and private spheres thus implicated.
He trailed off and we climbed the few remaining stairs to the room where the jama’at had laid out its sleeping bags on the carpeted floor. The bright glare of smartphone touchscreens emanated from the top-end of several indicating that some of the youngsters too were still awake, their excited whispers mingling with the snores of the older group members. The large fluorescent display of the digital wall clock informed me it was now 3.32am; I tiredly trundled over to my sleeping bag and within seconds was fast asleep - only to be awakened two hours later by the call of the muezzin, on the internal mosque microphone, summoning the faithful to the dawn prayer.

1.2 A Historical Sketch of TJ’s Origins

I have selected the above ethnographic vignette to commence my thesis because it captures nicely several key themes of my study. Firstly, it gives an insight into my methodology and the deeply immersive quality of my fieldwork. Secondly, it conveys a key motif of my thesis: that of the ‘intra-religious conversion’ experience reported by a great majority of my respondents and hints at the forms of social and familial rupture this can involve. By intra-religious conversion I refer to a marked transition from a nominal form of taken-for-granted Islam to one of passionate devotion; in this it resembles what has been termed the ‘born again’ or ‘neo-orthodox’ phenomena. Lastly, the above vignette provides a rich description of the juxtaposing of the sacred and secular so central to the theoretical architecture of this thesis.
Before unpacking these issues in greater detail, I will first furnish important historical context.\(^7\) In 1867, ten years after the crushing British suppression of the ‘Indian Mutiny,’ two distinguished Islamic scholars trained in the reformist tradition of Shah Walliullah Dehlawi (1703-1762) – Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi (1833-1877) and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1825-1905) – founded what was to become a hugely influential seminary in a town called Deoband, northeast of Delhi.\(^8\) Both shared a spiritual allegiance to the Sufi master Hajji Imdadullah Makki (1817-1899) and the latter, Gangohi, functioned as his spiritual successor \(khalifah\).\(^9\) The founder of TJ, Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi, was born in 1885 to a Muzaffarnagar family long-famed for its religious knowledge and piety and which traced its ancestry back to the first caliph of Islam Abu Bakr al-Sideeq (573-634). In 1897, Ilyas took up residence in Gangohi’s hometown and the latter, sensing in the young Ilyas a certain spiritual precociousness, initiated him into the Sabiriyya Chishtiyya Order of Sufism despite his young age. After completing his education at Deoband in 1910, Ilyas lectured at its sister institute, the Mazahir-ul-Ulum in Saharanpur, for seven years after which he moved to Basti Nizamuddin in Delhi to take up an imamate position previously held by his father and, more recently, his elder brother who had just died. It was from this small Banglawali Masjid [lit: the ‘Mosque of the Bungalow’] in Nizamuddin that, in the final months of 1925,\(^10\) Ilyas launched the programme of activities that would come to be known as the Tablighi Jama’at.

The immediate drivers were threefold. First, Ilyas had become somewhat disillusioned with the traditional methods of Deobandi reform in which he had been trained – relating to \(ta’lim\) [scriptural pedagogy] and \(tazkiyah\) [spiritual purification/Sufism] – seeing them as ineffective in bringing about large-scale reform by themselves. Second, a missionary branch of the Arya Samaj, an influential movement of Indian Hinduism, called \(shuddhi\) had begun to actively and successfully proselytise swaths of nominal and syncretistic Muslims in the Bharatpur and Alwar regions of Mewat near where Ilyas lived, requiring a response. Third, the loss of Mughal power and the threat to Islam

\(^{7}\) In presenting this brief historical sketch, I draw primarily on the following sources: Haq (1972); Masud (2000d); Nadwi (1983); and Sikand (2002).


\(^{9}\) See Ingram (2009) for a detailed examination of the ‘reformist Sufism’ espoused by Gangohi.

\(^{10}\) The precise launch date of TJ has been variously cited between 1925 and 1927 by most scholars. Perhaps one reason for this discrepancy is that Haq (1972, p.91) incorrectly dates Ilyas’ second Hajj, during which he reportedly experienced a mystical epiphany in which he received inspiration \(ilham\) to launch TJ (Nadwi 1983, p.33; Sikand 2002, pp.130-135), as commencing in April, 1926. This seems to be no more than a typographical error as it is clear that he otherwise relies heavily upon Nadwi’s biography for much of his source material and Nadwi (1983, pp.32-33) clearly records Ilyas’ second trip to the Hejaz as taking place between April to September 1925. Later scholars, relying perhaps exclusively on Haq’s account – which Masud (2000c, p.pviii) regards as probably “the first academic dissertation on Tablighi Jama’at” and which predates the English translation of Nadwi’s biography by nearly a decade – would have dated subsequent events a whole year later. Masud (2000a, pp.9-11) is the notable exception to this general consensus and regards the inception of TJ to have taken place specifically on 2 August 1934, the date of a major *panchayat* [village council] convened by Ilyas.
posed by British colonial forces – representing both Western secularism and Christian mission – served as an ever-present symbol of global Muslim decline further exacerbated by the 1924 dismantling of the Ottoman caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938). It is this final point that might be identified as the key catalyst for the birth of several subsequent reformist movements that would today be termed ‘Islamist’ – such as Syed Abul ‘Ala Maududi’s (1903 – 1979) Jama’at-i-Islami or Taqquddin al-Nabhani’s (1909 – 1977) Hizb-ut-Tahrir – in that they sought explicitly to recapture political power for Muslims. In stark contrast, Ilyas’ focus with TJ lay entirely in renewing grassroots Islamic faith and in consolidating Muslim identity through the practice of core rituals: “Never can government or any kind of political authority be the objective of Muslims. Walking in the path of the Prophet if we obtained political power then we should not shirk the responsibility but always remember that this is not our purpose” (statement of Ilyas cited in Haq (1972, p.137)).

To achieve his goal, Ilyas devised a simple yet novel method. The community he led as religious leader consisted of a hardy, unschooled peasant class called Meos who revered him, as they had done his father and elder brother, as their Sufi master. Ilyas convinced them to form small groups (of around 6-14) and – entirely at their own expense – tour the Mewat countryside for ever-increasing lengths of time, living in mosques and inviting their fellow Muslims to better practice their faith. The act of da’wa, he envisioned, would prove revolutionary in the life of the da’ee: by inviting others to faithfully serve God and follow His Prophet, the participant himself would be transformed. The method was remarkably successful and, within a few years, visible signs of a renewed Islamic consciousness spread throughout the region. Success was inevitably accompanied by institutionalisation: Ilyas commissioned his nephew, the famed hadith scholar and Sufi master in his own right Mawlana Muhammad Zakariyya Kandhalawi (1898-1982), to pen several detailed tracts of religious instruction for groups to study while out on tour and himself devised a six-point

11 The anomalous nature of the TJ reformist vision is also evident in Masud’s (2000c, pp.xxvi-xxix) analysis of ten contemporaneous Islamic da’wa movements. According to Metcalf (1994, p.706), TJ “is distinguishable because its behaviour is not typical of that imputed to Islamic movements today…the Tablighi Jama’at does indeed call our ‘common sense’ about Islamic movements into question.” See also the recent wide-ranging study edited by Peter and Ortega (2014).

12 The extensive national and international travel of TJ groups continues to be self-financed to this day. As evident from Appendix C3, one of the first things the amir of a newly formed jama’at will do is collect monetary contributions – the amount is decided through mashwera – from each member. This collective kitty – usually called ‘ijtima’ee money’ – is then used to finance necessary jama’at expenses for the duration of the tour. In the British context, the TJ headquarters in Dewsbury have fixed a rate of £8 per night which visiting TJ groups donate to mosques they stay in to cover basic utility costs. Additionally, phone-charging is usually charged at 50p and showers at £1. A weekend khuruj usually costs in the region of £10 per individual, while a 40 day khuruj within Britain costs up to £150 each. For international excursions, jama’at members pay the cost of their own airfare (or alternate transportation methods).

13 The compiled tracts are published in a single, weighty volume known as Fadhail-e A’mal [Virtues of Good Deeds] which is today ubiquitous in British Deobandi mosques (both in Urdu and English translation) and remains an important part of the core TJ curriculum - along with its sister volume, also authored by Muhammad Zakariyya, the Fadhail-e Sadaqat [Virtues of Charity].
programme designed to structure participants’ focus.14 In November 1941, Ilyas organised a three-day convocation [ijtima] in Nuh, Mewat that attracted 25,000 people: “the crowd was so large that rows were formed for prayers on the roads and streets, bringing the traffic to a standstill” (Haq 1972, p.131). Most significantly, some of the most highly-regarded ulema of the time – such as Mawlana Hussain Ahmed Madni (1879 – 1957) and Mufti Kifayatullah Dehlavi (1875 – 1952) – attended, lending their active support by leading prayer services and encouraging the gathered crowds to participate in Ilyas’ movement. By the time of his death in 1944, TJ, as it had come to be known,15 was firmly established as an independent movement of Islamic revival in British India – albeit one which maintained close ties with its Deobandi progenitor.

Upon his death, Ilyas’ son, Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf Kandhalawi (1917-1965), assumed leadership of the movement immediately setting his sights on global expansion. Following independence/partition in 1947, he established an important global TJ centre at Raiwind in West Pakistan and sometime later a third in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) at Dhaka. South Asian TJ delegations were subsequently dispatched to an astonishing range of countries covering, between 1951 and 1962, at least the following: Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Malaysia, Burma, Singapore, Indonesia, United States of America, Turkey, Japan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Rhodesia, South Africa, Mauritius, Reunion, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, France, Belgium, Nigeria and Britain (Gaborieau 2000, pp.128-130). Visiting TJ groups encouraged local Muslims to establish the same pattern of revival activities developed by Ilyas in Mewat, and both South Asian expatriate communities as well as natives were encouraged to journey to the movement’s headquarters for a four-month training in TJ methods. According to Gaborieau (2000, p.137), the first Arabs arrived at Nizamuddin in 1962 and were soon joined by Muslims from places as disparate as East Africa, Britain and Detroit. Yusuf, following in the footsteps of his father, also began to organise several-days long “mammoth public meetings” (Masud 2000a, p.17) – more popularly known as ijtima – in which tens of thousands of Muslims would convene to listen to exhortations delivered by TJ leaders. These ijtimas have today evolved into the gigantic

14 What have become popularly known as the ‘Six Points’ or the ‘Six Qualities of Tabligh’ briefly comprise: 1) Faith (Imaan) 2) Prayer (Salaat) 3) Acquisition of Knowledge (Ilm) and Remembrance of God (Dhikr) 4) Honouring others (Ikraam) 5) Sincere intentions (Ikhlaas) 6) Inviting to God (Da’wa). Reetz (2006a, pp.327-328) provides a succinct summary and for a comprehensive English-language exposition produced by an American TJ activist, see: http://www.nacleanenergy.com/uploads/author_22408_the-six-points-of-tabligh.pdf (accessed 20/10/2016).

15 It is remarkable that despite its global ubiquitousness, TJ was never officially given a title by its founder or subsequent amirs. The particular style of activism it encouraged assumed labels bestowed by others such as Nizam, Tanzim, Dini Da’wat or Bhopali Jama’at after the huge annual congregations which were held in the Indian city of Bhopal. Yet Ilyas himself, when asked to suggest a name for the movement, declined insisting that he was not starting a movement as such but simply reviving what should already be the core practice of every Muslim. However he added that if he was to give the movement a name it would be Tahrik-i-iman [The Movement of Faith Renewal]. Despite this, the range of activities inspired by Ilyas have popularly assumed the collective title of Tablighi Jama’at (see Haq 1972, pp.45-46).
several-million strong annual convocations held at Raiwind in Pakistan and Tongi in Bangladesh which have become a famous hallmark of TJ globally.16

Attendees at the 2014 ijtima held at Raiwind, Pakistan participate in the concluding prayer


According to Masud (2000a, p.17), “When Mawlana Yusuf died in 1965, the Jama’at had already spread to more than ninety countries.”17 He was succeeded by his childhood friend and Ilyas’grandnephew (Bijori 2002, pp.42-46), Mawlana Inamul-Hasan Kandhalawi (1918-1995) – popularly known as Hazratji – who remained the single head of worldwide TJ until his own death in 1995. During his tenure, Inamul-Hasan focussed on “systematic organisation [of TJ] on the international level” (Masud 2000a, p.20) and encouraged the setting up of TJ centres [maraakiz] across the globe to consolidate TJ activities in new countries. He also emphasised the establishment of Maqaami Kaam – daily TJ activities such as gasht or mashwera – in the local mosques of activists (for more on the "local mosque scheme" see 5.2.3 and Appendix C4). It was also during Inamul-Hasan’s

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16 Since the 1970s Indian TJ authorities toned down the size of these gatherings, historically convened in Bhopal, reportedly in response to communal tensions (Reetz 2003). Commentators never fail to mention that these gargantuan ijtima are the largest gathering of Muslims anywhere on the globe outside of the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. According to Siddiqi (2010), attendance at the ijtima functions as a surrogate pilgrimage for many impoverished Bangladeshis who never hope to visit the Hejaz.

17 This figure probably includes those countries to which TJ preaching parties were simply dispatched or travelled through without any significant take-up from local inhabitants. Haq (1972, p.186) includes an appendix which shows the spread of TJ to 34 countries by the time of his study.
governance, according to Sikand (2002, pp.158-159), that the Meo presence at the higher levels of leadership in the Banglawali Masjid began to be gradually displaced particularly by a cohort of Gujarati ulema, a nuance which will assume some significance when considering the ethnic composition of TJ adherence in Britain today.

Upon his death, Inamul-Hasan was succeeded by a triumvirate in which Mawlana Izharul-Hasan Kandhalawi (an uncle of Ilyas), Mawlana Zubayrul-Hasan Kandhalawi (son of Inamul-Hasan) and Mawlana Muhammad Sa’ad Kandhalawi (b.1965 - grandson of Yusuf, great-grandson of Ilyas)\textsuperscript{18} shared collective responsibility for global TJ affairs. After Izharul-Hasan’s death in 1996, global TJ operated under the dual leadership of Zubayrul-Hasan and Muhammad Sa’ad although, as Reetz (2006b, p.45) has pointed out, “The youthful radiance and pop star charisma of Maulana Sa’d” coupled with his direct descent line from Ilyas unofficially cast him into the role of popular leader. Zubayrul-Hasan’s death in March 2014 prompted a reconstitution of the global \textit{shura} which, according to my respondents, occurred in November 2015 at the annual Raiwind \textit{ijtima} where a total of 13 leading TJ figures were appointed – all notably from South Asia (five from India, five from Pakistan and three from Bangladesh).\textsuperscript{19} Prominent among them is the leader of TJ’s Pakistani chapter at Raiwind, the aged Amir Hajji Muhammad Abdul Wahhab (b.1923), who has consistently been ranked around 10\textsuperscript{th} in the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre’s compilation of the world’s 500 most influential Muslims (Schleifer 2015, pp.56-57). In addition, the charismatic Pakistani preacher Mawlana Tariq Jameel – although not a member of this \textit{shura} – is today probably global TJ’s most prominent spokesperson having achieved something akin to celebrity status;\textsuperscript{20} his visits to the UK invariably drawing eager crowds of several thousand enthusiasts (Reetz 2014b, p.32; Schleifer 2015, p.106).

\subsection{1.3 Organisation of Thesis: An Ethnography of TJ in Modern Britain}

The above historical sketch furnishes important context within which my own study can be situated. In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I present an overview of the way my thesis is organised, elucidate key research concerns and summarise my theoretical approach. Broadly speaking, my thesis operates on three levels: the \textit{micro}, \textit{meso} and \textit{macro}. The micro-level (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) is principally concerned with the empirical and seeks to relate new data generated by my

\textsuperscript{18} Gaborieau (2006, p.57) has pointed out how the highest level leadership within TJ has remained a strict “endogamous patri-lineage.” Both Pieri (2012b, pp.21-23) and Masud (2000a, p.20) incorrectly record Sa’ad as being the son of Yusuf, perhaps because Yusuf’s only son (and Sa’ad’s father) Mawlana Harun Kandhalawi died unexpectedly at a young age (Sikand 2002, p.157) thus escaping academic attention.

\textsuperscript{19} At the time of writing, there was some indication that Mawlana Sa’ad had rejected the new \textit{shura} - a situation that may lead, for the first time in its history, to a schism in TJ’s global leadership.

fieldwork to extant academic knowledge of TJ. The meso-level (Chapters 8, 9 and 10) attempts a preliminary analysis of this data to propose a theory of intra-religious conversion that accounts for the experiences of many respondents. The macro-level is more abstract and, after sketching out a set of theoretical foundations (Chapter 4), attempts to extrapolate the significance of this thesis in relation to the changing nature of the sacred and secular in contemporary Europe (Chapter 11).

Chapters 2 and 3 are essentially preliminary but perform important groundwork that allows later data and theory to be contextualised. Chapter 2 is a literature review which, building on the historical sketch outlined above, seeks mainly to chart TJ’s transmission into and development within Britain examining recent controversies such as the London ‘mega-mosque’ proposal. It also evaluates the extant academic and primary sources on TJ and identifies gaps that my own fieldwork hopes to fill. In particular, it closely examines the most influential study of TJ in Britain, conducted by Yoginder Sikand in the 1990s, and uses some of his conclusions to generate new research questions.

Chapter 3 is methodological and outlines my approach to such matters as data collection, ethics and access. Reflexivity and the essentially symbiotic relationship between self and field emerge as key themes here as I attend closely to the implications of my biography, positionality and identity for my research. I further describe how classical ethnographic techniques of qualitative interviewing and participant observation were deployed to generate a dataset exceeding 800,000 words which was analysed and coded iteratively to generate the findings that inform all subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4 operates at the level of ‘macro-theory’ and attempts to lay the theoretical foundations for the remainder of the thesis. Here, I describe how key insights from Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge are augmented by the ontological realism and epistemological relativism intrinsic to critical realism. In particular, I utilise Roy Bhaskar’s concept of the ‘generative mechanism’ to propose both spirituality and secularity as unseen structural matrixes that produce the social phenomena amenable to empirical capture and analysis. Further, I explicate the processes of primary and secondary socialisation through which systems of meaning are differentially internalised in subjective consciousness and examine the mechanisms through which TJ was objectivised in space and time.

My first findings chapter is Chapter 5 where I present an up-to-date picture of British TJ at both the institutional and individual levels by sketching a detailed topography and typology. The topography describes how international, national, regional and local dimensions of TJ interact while the typology elaborates, via a tiered hierarchy, varied individual responses to TJ from full-time devotion to antipathy. Chapters 6 and 7 explore intergenerational transmission in British TJ, chiefly building on Sikand’s conclusions and the research questions generated in Chapter 2. Specific markers of cultural
identity relating to language, dress and food are examined and a distinction between ‘Old Guard’ and ‘Avant-Garde’ proposed to argue that TJ should best be located within broader processes of indigenisation in British Islam.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 operate at the meso-level and seek to theorise a process of ‘intra-religious conversion’ using conceptual tools derived from the sociology of knowledge and religion. Berger and Luckmann’s concepts of primary and secondary socialisation are operationalised here in tandem with Turner’s concept of liminality and Schutz’s phenomenology of consciousness to anatomise, in meticulous detail, the contours along which ‘intra-religious conversion’ proceeds. A range of semantic and ritual mechanisms intrinsic to TJ’s core methodology are identified that together function to desocialise the individual from the structures of contemporary secularity and resocialise him into TJ’s spiritual praxis. Chapter 8 identifies a series of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that usually precipitate conversion, Chapter 9 explores ritual and phenomenological approaches to liminality and Chapter 10 examines strategies through which post-conversion commitment to TJ is maintained.

Chapter 11 operates at the macro-level of the thesis and seeks to answer Peter Berger’s insistent question: “‘So what?’...What is there of generalizable significance about the data?” (see Woodhead 2001, pp.6-7). It draws heavily on Berger’s theoretical contributions over the years to extrapolate the significance of intra-religious conversion, as a symbol of willed and conscious faith, for the ‘sacred canopy’ of secularity that today vaults over Europe. While Berger’s corpus is rich and varied – relating to the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Berger 1963; Pfadenhauer 2013), the sociology of religion (Berger 1967, 1999b, 2014; Berger et al. 2008) and the sociology of modernity (Berger 1976, 1997; Berger et al. 1974; Berger and Zijderveld 2009) – it is his particular vision of sociology as an unremitting machinery of debunking which strips from the ‘precarious’ constructions of social reality their taken-for-granted pretensions (Berger 1961) that I deploy. By proposing that the ‘sacred canopy’ of contemporary Europe is today comprised of a secular fabric, I argue that the willed and conscious exercise of agency in ways which publicly affirm faith debunks the cognitive and normative presuppositions that undergird its taken-for-granted status. Chapter 12 is a conclusion in which I summarise my findings, acknowledge limitations and speculate cautiously about the future of British TJ.

21 An overview of Berger’s vast oeuvre – the outcome of what he humorously terms “bibliorrhea” (p.75) – can be found in his intellectual autobiography (Berger 2011). In addition to his sociological works, Berger has also written extensively on the implications of sociology for theology attempting, in the capacity of lay theologian, to reconcile the ramifications of his sociological insights with his faith as a (very liberal) Lutheran Christian (Berger 1971, 1980, 1992; see Bernice Martin 2001 for a brilliant overview of this aspect of Berger’s work). This latter aspect of his corpus is relevant to my own positionality as an ‘indigenous ethnographer’ inhabiting the twin worlds of faith and “methodological atheism” (Berger 1967, p.100). There have also been a number of works published about Berger’s contributions to sociology from a range of perspectives. These include Wuthnow et al. (2010 [1984]), Hunter and Ainlay (1986), Woodhead et al. (2001), Pfadenhauer (2013) and Hjelm (forthcoming).
The ethnographic vignette with which I commenced this chapter can now be reconsidered. In light of the above, it becomes clear that the basic methodology of TJ – consisting of a series of mosque-based retreats [khuruj] – initiated in Mewat by Mawlana Ilyas nearly 100 years ago continues to operate robustly in modern Britain, though now attracting a drastically different demographic. The make-up of my jama’at, entirely British-born and relatively young, indicates that intergenerational transmission from the Old Guard to the Avant-Garde has succeeded in several ways. Further, the specific biographical narrative of Umar sharply captures the experience of intra-religious conversion so central to the analysis of my meso-level chapters. The physical location of the mosque – which produced the intermingling of prayer and partying – as well as Umar’s attempts to practice his faith at work, all demonstrate the juxtaposing of the sacred and the secular pivotal to Berger’s most recent theorising (2014; see Timol 2016b for a review). Finally, Umar’s critique of the secular – symbolised for him by the absence of the sacred in contemporary consciousness – coupled with his volitional and public exercise of agency in pursuit of religious fulfilment serves to undermine the taken-for-granted presuppositions of the secular ‘sacred canopy’ under which contemporary European life unfolds.
SECTION ONE:
PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS
Chapter 2

Literature Review: The Tablighi Jama’at in Modern Britain

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Is this the annual meeting in Bhopal? No, it is a meeting in Manchester in England! Most participants are bearded, some are clad in English dress. Some are officers, some are businessmen, and some are medical doctors, scientists and students. There are old men and children. Some were born in Britain. Some have come from Madina the Enlightened. Some have travelled by train, some by car and some by caravan. What are these preparations for? Why are they gathering? Why have they come to a mosque, leaving their homes? These are the people who have left their homes even in this environment. They have come to promote God’s authority. They have come to refresh their faith and share it with others. So where are those people today who used to say that it was not possible to preach in London, England?

(excerpt of a letter from Dr. Muhammad Rafiq Siddiqi, member of a Tablighi Jama’at delegation visiting England in 1962, sent to the Nizamuddin headquarters - cited in Masud (2000b, p.109))

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Despite its global ubiquitousness, TJ has paradoxically perhaps been the least researched major Islamic movement in the world. For Birt (2003, p.47), TJ “is the world’s largest but least understood Islamic movement, which has eluded academic interest because of its supposed disengagement with politics...and scholarly examination because of the difficulty in penetrating its oral culture and aversion to publicity.” While this may have been true for the major portion of TJ’s history, recent years have seen a number of studies examining TJ’s function in a disparate range of international settings. This chapter provides an overview of the extant English-language literature on TJ beginning with the primary sources that document the life of its founder. I then survey academic studies of the movement, juxtaposing the approaches of different scholars to try and inject a sense of synthesis into a heterogeneous field. The bulk of the chapter then chronicles TJ’s institutional development within Britain, noting its affiliation with the broader network of Deobandi mosques/seminaries, and identifies key contemporary debates. Finally, I interrogate the findings of Sikand’s seminal work on TJ in Britain and make the case for fresh, sustained qualitative fieldwork.
2.1 How has TJ been written about to date?

2.1.1 Primary Sources

The primary study of the life of TJ’s founder is the biography penned by Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (1914-1999), first published in Urdu in 1948 four years after Ilyas’s death.\(^1\) Nadwi’s (1983) main concern seems to be to establish the scholarly and saintly credentials of Ilyas and by implication the theological soundness of the reform movement he initiated; his biography is therefore hagiographical in tenor. Nevertheless, due to his close association with Ilyas\(^2\) and his meticulous collating of facts from close relatives and colleagues (p.viii), it remains a valuable source of primary material. Due to his own distinguished career as an international Islamic figure (Nadwi 2013), Nadwi’s resounding endorsement of Ilyas and his reformist endeavours facilitated the spread of TJ both at home and abroad, particularly in Arabic-speaking countries where Nadwi was especially well-received (Gaborieau 2000, pp.132-133). The first academic study of TJ was conducted by Haq (1972) – and reviewed by Metcalf (1977) – who seeks to situate the emergence of TJ within a centuries-old tradition of Indian Sufism. Haq relies heavily upon Nadwi – in fact large sections on the life of Ilyas have been reproduced almost verbatim – but it is important to point out that his work appeared over a decade before Nadwi’s English translation, meaning Anglophone readers would be accessing this material for the first time. Additionally, Haq conducts several interviews with TJ leaders and records the spread of TJ after Ilyas’ death to 34 countries (p.186). Yet his analysis remains limited to the singular influence of Ilyas and his assessment of TJ as a modern incarnation of ancient Sufism has subsequently been challenged (Gaborieau 2006; Masud 2000c, p.xl).

Ilyas’ letters (Troll 1985) and transcribed sayings (Nu’mani 1950) constitute further important sources of primary material. A sole tract, intended to address Muslim religious and political leaders at a 1944 national conference, has been attributed to Ilyas himself, and provides a clear overview of TJ’s vision and ethos (Kandhalawi 1944). The architecture of the tract is telling; along with copious citations from the Qur’an and Hadith, the only ulema to have been quoted are Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111), Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) and Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (1703-1762) revealing perhaps a desire to embed the theological foundations of TJ within what Ilyas would have seen as the normative contours of classical Islam as well as the best of the Indian reformist tradition; it is notable that no other sources are cited. The most detailed biography of Ilyas’ son and TJ’s second

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\(^1\) Though, understandably, most of the primary source materials on TJ were written in Urdu, I constrain myself in this thesis only to those works published in English (either directly or as translations of the Urdu originals).

\(^2\) Christian Troll (1985) records that Ilyas wrote Nadwi no less than 39 letters (of which Troll translates and annotates five); a striking fact when one considers that Nadwi was barely 30 years old at the time of Ilyas’ death.
global *amir*, Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf Kandhalawi, is authored by Hasani (1989), though this is still available only in Urdu; an alternate biography has been translated into English (Bijnori 2002) which provides much of the same material, particularly on the international spread of TJ, in condensed form. Khan’s (1999) brief treatise on TJ also captures important details of Yusuf’s life from the pen of another prominent Indian Muslim scholar. As with Nadwi’s biography of Ilyas though, these works are strongly hagiographical; while they offer the advantage of proximity in space and time they are not intended to engage in critical analysis. They are therefore best complemented with academic studies undertaken from a range of inter-disciplinary perspectives.

2.1.2 Academic Sources

Two studies published in close proximity have been particularly influential in shaping the academic discourse on TJ: Masud’s (2000d) edited collection and Sikand’s (2002) cross-country comparative survey, both of which have been reviewed by Birt (2001, 2003). Masud’s (2000b) primary contribution consists in providing a detailed overview of TJ’s historical and ideological development, based on an analysis of key texts and figures, before considering both intra and inter-sectarian critiques of the movement. His careful editorial organisation coherently explores TJ’s international presence with individual chapters examining country-specific case studies. Gaborieau’s (2000) contribution is essential here as, based on a variety of primary Urdu sources, it analyses the mechanics through which TJ embeds itself in new socio-cultural milieux; a skeleton which can now be fleshed out using empirical detail of recent studies. Azmi’s (2000, pp.236-237) incisive analysis of Canadian TJ’s engagement with modernity is also applicable in Western contexts more generally.

Sikand’s largely historical contribution provides a thorough analysis of the socio-economic conditions in which Ilyas’ nascent reform efforts took root, shifting our gaze away from the charismatic personality of the Sufi shaykh towards the important “social functions, both latent as well as manifest, that the movement plays in the lives of its participants” (2002, p.12). This concern is extrapolated into the international settings of Bangladesh and Britain, of which Sikand provides detailed case studies. Although a range of academic material explores TJ in Britain (Ansari 2004, pp.347-349; Birt and Gilliat-Ray 2010; Bowen 2014, pp.35-56 is an account by a BBC journalist relying on limited fieldwork; DeHanas and Pieri 2011; Faust 2000; Geaves 1996, pp.159-179; Gilliat-Ray 2006; 2010, pp.86-92; King 2002; Lewis 1994; Metcalf 1996b; Mogra 2014; Pieri 2012b), it is Sikand’s (1998a, b; 2002, pp.214-251) detailed history which remains the definitive account to date as

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Gaborieau (2000) relies heavily on these Urdu sources in sketching his chronology of TJ’s international spread.

Though Gaborieau’s identification of three strategic nodal centres in Delhi, London and the Hejaz has been challenged as “more opportunistic than anything else” (Birt 2001, p.374), his analysis remains valuable in light of Noor’s (2009, 2012) work in particular which I schematise and apply to British TJ in Timol (2015b).
evidenced by the extent to which subsequent researchers rely on it. Though Pieri (2012a, 2015) recently conducted fresh fieldwork, his approach differs markedly from Sikand’s in its strong focus on the socio-political implications of the proposed TJ ‘mega-mosque’ in London.

There are also a plethora of journal articles and standalone chapters on TJ which can loosely be arranged around several dominant themes. For country-specific studies of TJ in Australia see Ali (2006); Bangladesh see Siddiqi (2010, 2012) and Sikand (2002, pp.177-213); Belgium see Dassetto (2000); Canada see Azmi (2000) and Dickson (2009); Denmark see Pedersen (1999); France see Kepel (2000), Pedersen (1999) and Reetz (2014a); the Gambia see Janson (2005, 2008, 2014); Germany see Faust (2000, pp.150-160); India see Mayaram (1997); Indonesia see Amrullah (2011) and Nisa (2014); Kyrgyzstan see Balci (2015); Malaysia see Hasan (2009) and Nagata (1980, pp.421-423); Morocco see Tozy (2000); Pakistan see Gugler (2013) and Rana (2009); Philippines see Banlaoi (2009); South Africa see Ingram (2011), McDonald (2010), Moosa (2000) and Vahed (2003); Southern Africa see Haron (2009); Spain see Tarrés (2014); and Thailand see Horstmann (2007). The definitive study of TJ in Southeast Asia (covering southern Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia) is by Noor (2012). Metcalf (1996b) provides a general overview of TJ in America and Europe while I survey the literature on TJ in Britain later in this chapter.

TJ’s masturat [ladies] dimension has been examined by Amrullah (2011); De Feo (2012); Janson (2008); Metcalf (1995, 1998, 2000); Nisa (2014); Siddiqi (2012); Sikand (1999); and Winkelmann (2006). Sikand (2006) explores the extent to which TJ can be considered to be genuinely apolitical while Ahmad (1991), Troll (1994) and Gaborieau (2009) contrast key elements of TJ ideology with the more politically-oriented Jama’at-i Islami. Though Reetz (2006a, 2007, 2014a, b) has conducted fieldwork on TJ (and its Deobandi progenitor) in South Asia, Europe and the Far East, his primary contribution has been to sketch a detailed description of the movement’s modus operandi, including the ‘local mosque scheme’ (Reetz 2003, 2008). He has also shaped the debate about the extent to which TJ constitutes a Sufi movement proper, a complex topic that has variously been commented on by Ahmad (1995); Gaborieau (2006); Haq (1972); Hermansen (2008); Ingram (2011); Janson (2014, p.72); Mahmoud (2011); Metcalf (1994); Reetz (2006b); Sikand (2007); Timol (2015c); and Troll (1985). In addition to her work on the role of women in TJ, Metcalf – author of the seminal study of the theological academy at Deoband (1982) – has produced a steady stream of disparate

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5 To illustrate, Ansari’s (2004, pp.347-349) entire section on TJ in Britain is a condensed paraphrase of Sikand and he cites no other source. Gilliat-Ray (2010, pp.90-92) also relies heavily on Sikand. More recently, both Janson (2014, p.236) and Bowen (2014, p.47) cite Sikand when commenting on British TJ.

6 Additionally, for recent media reports of TJ activity in Israel, see Abrahamson (2015); the Middle East, see Luck (2015); and Central Asia and Russia, see Rotar (2013).

7 The ‘local mosque scheme’ refers to a series of daily, weekly and monthly activities conducted by committed TJ activists in their local mosques. Since my own fieldwork involved five months of participant observation in the TJ ‘local mosque scheme’ of a single British mosque, I explicitly build upon Reetz’s contributions in Chapter 5.
There have been several recent studies of TJ in a geographically disparate range of settings. Noor’s (2012) work charts the movement’s spread across Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore examining its discursive and ritual dimensions based on the author’s considerable fieldwork. Ali’s (2012) study of Australian TJ is again grounded in first-hand participant observation and interviews, seeking to situate the movement within the broader global trend of ‘Islamic Revivalism.’ Janson’s (2014) comprehensive ethnography of TJ in the Gambia is notable as the first fully-fledged study of the movement in Africa and for the micro-detail with which the masturat experience is captured (see Timol 2015a for a review). Finally, Balci’s (2015) explanation of the movement’s sudden popularity in Kyrgyzstan identifies historic links between Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent reactivated in the post-communist era as a key factor. Collectively, these studies indicate the extent to which TJ continues to animate significant sections of the global Muslim grassroots while managing to maintain a supra-national uniformity of method; the global headquarters continue to operate from South Asia where all neophytes attend, usually on a four-month khuruj, to receive training in basic TJ techniques. The movement’s cultural amorphousness is also implicated; while the core religious praxis remains unchanged, there is no doubt it has been appropriated and indigenised differently by a heterogeneous range of social actors. Finally, the methodology of these recent studies is also significant reflecting a shift from the more textual-based accounts of early scholars (for instance, see Sikand 1998a, pp.21-22) to a preference for qualitative fieldwork. In particular, given TJ’s self-preference for orthopraxy over orthodoxy, these studies collectively demonstrate the eminent suitability of ethnographic method in researching the lived experience of contemporary TJ.

TJ also appears, often on the periphery, in a number of diverse studies of Islam in the West which have seen a general sharp increase in the post-9/11 era. Roy (2004), in his study of Globalised Islam, classifies TJ as a ‘neo-fundamentalist’ movement which replicates, through processes of deculturation and de-territorialisation, the modalities of globalisation to generate individuated forms of religious praxis rooted in an idealised prophetic prototype. Given TJ’s emphasis on khuruj, Mandaville (2001) gives it considerable attention in his study of how Islamic consciousness evolves in the process of moving from traditional heartlands to diasporic, ‘translocal’ spaces. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2010, p.107) classifies TJ as one among several contemporary Islamic movements seeking to revive the ambience of a pre-modern Islamic Weltanschauung by attempting to complete “the process of decolonisation that took place half a century ago politically, but not culturally and socially.” His analysis therefore resembles that of Keppel (1997, p.164) for whom TJ “all over the world…[has] played a role of instigator, ‘relighting the flame of Islam’ from the embers buried under the ashes of Western materialism.”
Both Jackson and Winter hint at TJ’s Sufi undertones. Jackson (2005, p.50) identifies TJ as a channel through which many Blackamericans [sic] enter Islam characterising its overall ethos as “that of the travelling mendicant, emphasizing spiritual purification and the renunciation of worldly delights.” Winter (2014, p.312) describes TJ as a “brotherhood” with rehabilitative potential in helping recent convicts “transition to the world outside, in an environment in which prayer and fasting dominate, and access to temptation is severely curtailed.” Klausen (2007, pp.42-43) and Peter (2014) concur with this essentially introspective interpretation of TJ religiosity describing its key focus as being to reform the moral universe of the individual as the necessary prelude to and substratum of wider political reform: “In the view of Tablighi Jama’at...there can be no Islamic state until Muslims truly live as Muslims” (Peter 2014, p.4). In their wide-ranging analysis of the intersection of Sufism with modernity, van Bruinessen and Howell (2007, p.14), describe TJ as “a reformist movement of Sufi inspiration” which from “humble beginnings...has developed into the most truly transnational movement in Islam.” Jenkins (2007, p.78) notes the resemblance of TJ with movements of Christian revival, such as the Neocatechumenate, observing that both can offer “plausible responses to preserving faith in the fluid and dynamic societies of postmodern Europe.” These eclectic snippets from a diverse range of academic commentators on contemporary Islam indicate both the ongoing vitality of TJ in the global functioning of the umma and the increasing difficulty it faces in maintaining its classical stance of stoical avoidance when confronted with the incremental resources of an international body of legal, political and academic actors who pressingly seek to comprehend potential permutations in the relationship of Islam with modernity, particularly in the West.

This chapter so far has surveyed both the primary and academic English-language literature on TJ. I now turn to sketching a detailed chronology of the movement’s development within Britain, identifying key contemporary issues within which my research questions are situated.
2.2 A Chronological Overview of TJ in Britain

2.2.1 A Historical Précis: The Early Days

TJ’s arrival in Britain occurred within the context of mass South Asian immigration from former colonies following WWII. Though sporadic communities of Muslim seafarers, students and converts have been long resident in the UK, it was Britain’s demand for cheap unskilled/semi-skilled labour to help rebuild the post-war economy that became the catalyst for a lasting Muslim presence to be established (Ansari 2004; Gilham 2014; Gilliat-Ray 2010; Timol 2016a). Communities sprang up “in the industrial cities of London, the Midlands and the former textile towns of Yorkshire and Lancashire” (Peach 2005, p.19) as the British Commonwealth’s relaxed immigration laws allowed much needed manpower to be imported in large quantities (Kepel 1997, pp.97-125). Primarily single male Mirpuris and Punjabis from Pakistan, Sylhetis from what was to become Bangladesh and Gujaratis from India (and later East Africa) made the trip explaining why Britain’s post-war Muslim presence had a strong South Asian ambience. The 1960s tightening of immigration laws caused wives and children to join their estranged husbands and the ‘myth of return’ gradually evaporated (Anwar 1979). At this point, newly settled communities of ethnically conspicuous Muslims began to grapple with the complex issues intrinsic to rooting themselves in British soil and preserving their religious/cultural heritage for future generations (Cressey 2006; Hellyer 2009, pp.143-175; Lewis 1994, 2007; Werbner 2002a, b).

Naturally, many took recourse to forms of Islam they were familiar with in their countries of origin and these were replicated, often wholesale, in the British context (Geaves 1996). The dislocation of migration also brought otherwise disparate groups together, at least initially, as they recognised the utility of putting their differences aside to focus on collective survival (Geaves 1996, p.159) and, in any case, many lay worshippers were simply unaware of the intricate theological wrangling that characterised much of the subcontinent’s polemical disputes (Sikand 1998b, p.179). It is in this context that TJ took root in Britain, either as a form of Islam the immigrant was already familiar with, or as a newly discovered defence mechanism that functioned effectively to preserve essential religious practices in the face of an otherwise culturally hostile environment.

The first recorded TJ activity in Britain took place as early as January, 1946 in London (Gaborieau 2000, p.128; Metcalf 1996b, p.111), from a pre-partition India, perhaps signalling in the mind of early global leaders the psychological and symbolic import of carrying TJ’s da’wa directly to the colonial homeland. Following a post-partition hiatus in international TJ activity, a stream of South

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8 There is a typographical error in Sikand’s (1998b, p.174) journal article with regards to the year which I reproduce here verbatim: “Yusuf’s first appeal in this regard is said to have been made at a large tablighi ijtema held at the town of Moradabad in northern India in January 1945. Accordingly, a year later, on 20
Asian jama'ats were dispatched to the UK as evidenced by the letters they sent back to the then global amir Mawlana Yusuf which were subsequently compiled by his biographers (Bijnori 2002; Gaborieau 2000, p.128). On 4-6 August 1962, a TJ convocation (ijtima) was organised in Manchester. Though much smaller in scale than its South Asian counterparts, proceedings ran along the same lines and Muslims from as far afield as Leeds, Birmingham, London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Bradford, Saudi Arabia and British Guyana were in attendance with preaching groups subsequently dispatched to Coventry (Bijnori 2002, pp.196-200; Masud 2000b, pp.108-110). It was through drawing upon the movement’s growing transnational presence then that TJ first began to establish a presence for itself in Britain. There is also evidence to suggest that, especially in the early days of migration, its particular mode of operation – with prolonged mosque-based retreats – played a socially utilitarian role for newly arrived immigrants struggling to adapt to their new setting. In particular, Sikand’s (1998b, p.180) study found that, insulated from the exigencies of a culturally hostile environment, early TJ participants were able to generate a veritable ‘home away from home’ while on a retreat by recreating South Asian norms of food, language and clothing in a religiously inspired comfort zone.

As the communities of newly settled Muslims began to contemplate their long-term future in the UK, a process of mosque-building and institutional development gained momentum. Hellyer (2009, p.149) points out that “In 1963, there were only 13 mosques registered in the UK; this number grew to 49 in 1970, 99 in 1975, 203 in 1980, and 338 in 1985” while Lewis (1994, p.56) further observes that “The investment needed for a mosque, and an imam to lead prayers and teach children, both reflected and precipitated community formation.” TJ, due to the fact that its distinct style of activism is intrinsically mosque-based, has been particularly associated with the rapid proliferation of British mosques in the latter decades of the twentieth century (Sikand 1998b, p.177). In this respect, Dickson – analysing the contribution of TJ to the process of identity and urban community formation in the Canadian diaspora context – observes:

January 1945...” Both Ansari (2004, p.348) and Gilliat-Ray (2012, p.90), relying on Sikand, replicate this error in their works. However, cross-referencing this date with the other sources cited above – not least Sikand’s (2002, p.217) own chapter on British TJ in his book – confirms that the correct year is 1946 and not 1945. Pieri (2012a, p.157), utilising a fresh source of data – the evidence tendered by a London TJ leader as part of the 2011 Public Inquiry into Enforcement Action at the Abbey Mills Riverine Centre – places the date in 1944, though I feel further verification is needed before this date can be accepted as definitive. It seems that the nature of the activity carried out in London on 20 January, 1946 was simply a gasht and not a dedicated khuruj which happened only after partition. Dr Zakir Hussain, later President of India, chanced to be in London for an educational conference and, due to his Delhi connections with Ilyas, participated in the gasht greatly enhancing its prestige due to his “own personal reputation and fame in intellectual circles” (Sikand 1998b, p.175). Metcalf adds “because of Dr. Zakir’s high rank and his worldwide reputation, people paid attention to him” (cited in Metcalf 1996b, pp.112-113) providing a good example of how TJ plugs into existing structures of social, educational and cultural capital to cultivate acceptability amongst new populations, something I identify as a key ‘modality of expansion’ in Timol (2015b).
Although the *Tablighi Jama‘at’s* focus is primarily individual, it functions to create social, religious networks within urban spaces that reinforce an individual’s religious self within a communal context. The *Jama‘at* creates a social milieu for the individual in its mosque-centered spirituality. The mosque forms a physical, spiritual, and social center for active *tabligh* participants. Weekly *tabligh* meetings take place in the local mosque, and the home visits conducted from the mosque are meant to draw further participants back to the mosque...*tabligh* participants are [also] encouraged to commit three days a month and forty days a year in the *tablighi* path. This longer-term activity is also centered in the mosque, as individuals engaged in the work of *tabligh* stay overnight in the mosque in whatever city they carry out their activities in...This functions to inculcate in *tablighi* participants...a cognitive map of their city that includes the mosque at the center, with the various homes of Muslims involved in and visited during *tabligh* outreach as peripheral sites of Islamic activity and hence identity and community. (Dickson 2009, p.109)

In addition, TJ’s historical emergence from the Deobandi reformist paradigm gave it access to the well-established religious resources of *ta’lim* (scriptural pedagogy) and *tazkiyah* (*reformist Sufism*) which had been developed by its founders a century earlier – in a situation redolent with social parallel – as they struggled to preserve their identity as a Muslim minority in a Hindu-majority India ruled by the British. Thus, in the British diaspora, “*Tabligh has worked...closely with the Deoband ‘ulama in building the core institutions of Islamization: the mosque, the madrasa and the daytime school*” (Birt 2003, p.49). Given these subcontinental influences in the institutionalisation of British Islam, it was perhaps inevitable that sectarian antagonism began slowly to be reproduced. As both Geaves (1996) and Khan (2006) have shown, diasporic mosques and Islamic institutes increasingly began to identify themselves with inherited sectarian orientations whose boundaries were often sharply defined vis-à-vis their rivals. In this more heightened atmosphere, TJ found itself constrained to operate within the remit of Deobandi-affiliated mosques and became synonymous, for its detractors at least, with its Deobandi progenitor – notwithstanding the subtle intra-sectarian tensions that, to this day, can be detected between TJ *Maraakiz*, Deobandi Dar al-Ulums and

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9 I use this term to distinguish it from the more populist modes of Sufism associated with, for example, the Barelwi school (Sanyal 2010). Though there has been a relative lacuna in the academic study of what may be termed ‘Deobandi Sufism’ – with the puritanical aspects of the Deobandi ethos frequently conflated, too facilely it seems, with anti-Sufi Salafi or Wahhabi doctrine – recent years have seen a more nuanced appreciation of the ongoing role ‘scriptural Sufism’ continues to play in Deobandi communities both at home and in the diaspora. In this regard, interested readers may peruse the excellent unpublished dissertation of Bashir (2010) or the works of Geaves (2015); Ingram (2009, 2011); or Metcalf (1982, pp.138-197). It is also worth pointing out that diasporic Deobandi publishing houses have in recent years begun to produce a number of primary texts in high-quality English translation that shed light on the contours of Deobandi Sufism as envisaged by some of the *maslak’s* seminal figures; see, for example, al-Iskandari and Gangohi (2014); Kandhelvi (2011); Khan (2005); Thanawi (2010); or Uthmani (2004).
Deobandi Sufi shuyukh. Given the numerical preponderance of rural Pakistani Muslims in the early immigration drive – from regions such as Mirpur in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, the North-Western Frontier Province or Jhelum in Punjab – who had long been associated with forms of Islam centred around tomb rituals and the cult of saints (Metcalf 1982, pp.296-314), TJ began to find itself cut off from significant swaths of the diaspora population; a situation that was accentuated as Barelwi Sufi pirs began to immigrate or frequently visit to guide their diasporic flocks (Khan 2006). It is in the context of such sectarianism, which allied naturally with the intra-ethnic differentiation of early South Asian immigrants, that Britain’s Gujarati Muslim community emerged predominantly, though by no means exclusively, as champions of Deobandi orthodoxy and the TJ.

Birt and Lewis (2012, p.17), Geaves (1996, p.162), Gilliat-Ray (2010, p.87), King (2002, p.296) and Sikand (1998, pp.181-183) all reflect upon the reasons why Gujaratis have been so effective in institutionalising Deobandi Islam in the diaspora. Central to their analysis is the argument that having long lived as a religious minority in a variety of regional contexts – both in India and East Africa – they have developed an almost innate ability to construct the tools of religious survival in alien environments. With specific reference to TJ, they comment that their entrepreneurial adventurism has resulted in international business and family links in far-flung places cultivating a universalistic vision of the world that fits well with TJ’s networks of transnational activism. To this can be added another factor based on Sikand’s (2002, pp.158-159) observation of a significant cohort of Gujarati ulema’s ascendency to the highest levels of leadership within the international TJ headquarters at Nizamuddin. The impact of this on the Gujarati masses, both at home and abroad, is to psychologically indigenise TJ as a familiar form of home-grown Islam further facilitating their participation in its activities.

### 2.2.2 Coming Home to Roost: The Rise of Deobandi Institutions

Perhaps the Deobandis’ greatest achievement in the diaspora has been the establishment of Dar al-Ulums – theological seminaries founded and run along the same lines as their South Asian

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10 See Masud (2000b, pp.91-92, 100-102) and (Sikand 2002, pp.102-108) for Deobandi critiques of TJ either by unimpressed ulema or ex-TJ members. In the British context, I explore this in a little more detail in 5.2.6 of this thesis.

11 For a good example see Lewis’ (1994, pp.81-89) case study of “Pir Maroof and Barelwi Initiatives” in Bradford. Gugler (2011, 2013) records how in September 1981, as a direct response to the inroads Pakistani TJ was making into Barelwi communities, a council of Barelwi scholars launched a rival movement in Karachi called Dawat-e Islami (DI) under the leadership of Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas Qadiri Attar (b.1950). Khan’s (2006, pp.175-183) study highlights how DI became active in the UK in the mid-90s organising weekend tours to British Barelwi mosques along lines that derive their inspiration directly from TJ methods. Geaves (1996, p.159) also points out that “… it is generally true to say that the Deobandi/Barelwi division is along an urban/rural divide.”

12 This ‘entrepreneurial adventurism’ was recently the subject of an article in The Economist (Anon. 2015).

13 Such figures include Mawlana Umar Palanpuri, Mawlana Sulaiman Jhanji, Mawlana Ahmad Godhra, Mawlana Ahmad Lath and Mawlana Ibrahim Dewla.
antecedents – which train imams and jurists on foreign soil. While the social relevance and cultural efficacy of their syllabi and alumni continue to be debated (Birt 2005, 2006; Birt and Lewis 2012; Cheruvallil-Contractor and Scott-Baumann 2015; Geaves 2008, 2011, 2012; Gilliat-Ray 2006; Lewis 1994, 2004, 2007, 2014, 2015a; Mahmood 2012; Moosa 2015; Mukadam and Scott-Baumann 2010; Sahin 2005, 2013), there is no doubt that their existence constitutes an important source of religious capital for Britain’s Muslim communities. They also maintain significant channels of communication with the ‘mother institutes’ in the countries of origin through which religious, economic, intellectual and human capital flow back and forth (Geaves 2012).

The first and most influential of the British Dar al-Ulums was established at Holcombe near Bury in 1975 by the Gujarati Shaykh Yusuf Motala (b.1946), then a young protégé and Sufi disciple of TJ founder Ilyas’ nephew, the famed hadith scholar Mawlana Muhammad Zakariyya Kandhalawi, who directed him to Britain in 1968, the same year he graduated as an alim from the Mazahir ul-Ulum seminary in Saharanpur where Ilyas had taught several decades earlier (see 1.2). Motala has since gone on to become, in the words of one young imam, “the Pope of the Deobandis in Britain” and his institute “either directly or indirectly informs the ethos and curriculum of half of Britain’s Deobandi seminaries” (Birt and Lewis 2012, p.6). Further the fact that Muhammad Zakariyya twice personally visited the Darul Uloom al-Arabiya al-Islamiya late in his life gives it an added prestige:

Because this luminary inaugurated its Hadith studies programme with his first visit and gave his last lecture in Hadith on his second, this amounts to the claim that Bury is a direct heir of the Saharanpuri tradition...It is this pietist, anti-political and Sufi-orientated strand of the Deoband school that has predominated in the United Kingdom due to the influence of Muhammad Zakariyya upon the ‘mother madrasa’ of the United Kingdom and upon Tablighi revivalism in general. (Birt and Lewis 2012, p.6)

Soon after, a second Dar al-Ulum was set up in Dewsbury in 1982 – the Jamiat Talimul Islam Institute of Islamic Education – as an adjunct to the new European TJ headquarters that had previously been functioning from a house-mosque in the Yorkshire town (Geaves 1996, p.168). Hafiz Muhammad Patel (1926-2016), a first-generation Gujarati migrant, was the key driver behind its establishment; according to one of Sikand’s (2002, p.225) respondents, Patel had met TJ’s global amir Mawlana Yusuf whilst on pilgrimage at Mecca who was “so impressed by his sincerity in the cause of Islam that he took him in front of the Ka’ba and there ‘offered supplications to Allah to make him the instrument for winning the whole of Britain to Islam.’”

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14 There are striking parallels to be drawn between the institutionalisation of Deobandi Islam in the British diaspora and the situations in Canada and South Africa, both countries also with influential Gujarati Muslim communities. For studies of the former see Azmi (2000) and Dickson (2009); and the latter see Ingram (2011), McDonald (2010), Moosa (2000) and Vahed (2003).
Though not trained as an *alim*, Patel was known for his piety and, in 1963, the largely Gujarati Muslim community of Dewsbury invited him to become their imam and offer guidance in spiritual matters. In addition to the Dar al-Ulum at Bury, Mawlana Zakariyya also visited the Dewsbury complex in 1979 during its construction stage making “special supplications for its future success as the centre of *tabligh* activity in the West” (Sikand 1998a, p.268). It is important to note that the TJ Markaz, modelled upon its antecedent at the Banglawali Masjid in Nizamuddin, both predated and generated through its activism the adjacent Dar al-Ulum, modelled upon the archetypes of the theological academies at Deoband and Saharanpur; whereas the seminary at Bury was linked chiefly to the Mazahir-ul-Ulum where Mawlana Zakariyya had taught Motala. This difference is reflected in subtle nuances in emphasis which Lewis (1994, p.92) captures well:

The main difference between Bury and Dewsbury is that study is subordinate to revivalism at Dewsbury, where students are expected to spend a week-end of every month, some of their holidays and a year at the end of their studies, engaged in such activities. In Bury, they are free to join Tablighi Jama’at groups during their holidays...The priority for Bury is education, and the seminary is part of a larger world of Islamic scholarship than Dewsbury.

If we couple this with Motala’s continued functioning as a Sufi *shaykh* – one of Mawlana Zakariyya’s most celebrated *khalifas* – we are able situate the ethos of Bury within the classical pre-Ilyas

*Source:* [http://saagartimes.blogspot.co.uk/2016/02/who-was-hafiz-patel.html](http://saagartimes.blogspot.co.uk/2016/02/who-was-hafiz-patel.html) (accessed 24 July 2016)
Deobandi reformist paradigm of *ta’leem* and *tazkiya* (Metcalf 1982, pp.138-197). Dewsbury, on the other hand, is rooted in the post-Ilyas model with its heavy leaning towards *da’wa*. Both institutes, due to their historical precedence and international links, continue to enjoy pre-eminence in the world of British Dar al-Ulums of which now, according to Birt and Lewis (2012, p.2), there exist at least 25. Additionally, Lewis (1994, p.92) notes that “The main mechanism for recruitment for both centres is the informal Tablighi Jama’at networks, nationally and internationally” while for Geaves (1996, p.170), through sustaining links with mosques around the country, the “*Tabligh-i Jamaat* and the *dar al-Ulums* are forging and maintaining the *Deobandi* network in Britain.” King aptly summarises:

Structurally, then, Deoband and Tabligh coexist, feeding and reinforcing each other. The Deobandi mosques form the static network of a system which also involves Tablighi Jamaat as a mobile element. The Deobandi mosques provide a haven for Tablighi preachers and other travellers engaged in *khuruj*, while they also encourage their own members to leave their local areas in order to preach, either for short periods, or for spells of months or even years which may involve foreign travel, to India or to other Muslim countries, or to countries with minority Muslim populations. (King 2002, pp.296-297)

Allied with the proliferation of Dar al-Ulums across Britain, recent decades have also seen the establishment of five regional TJ headquarters in Leicester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Birmingham and London (Pieri 2012b, p.30), each of which reports to the Dewsbury national centre which in turn reports to the global headquarters at Nizamuddin (see Chapter 5). Yet their function, in comparison to that of the Dar al-Ulums, has received virtually no academic attention, with the sole exception of London Markaz to which I now turn.

### 2.2.3 Cultural Apartheid and the Controversy of the Olympics ‘Mega-Mosque’

In 2005, the hitherto quietist and apolitical TJ was catapulted into the international limelight when London TJ leaders announced plans to build a new regional headquarters on 18 acres of industrial wasteland in the vicinity of what was to become the 2012 Olympic Games site. Yet the sheer scale of the project – initially designed to be the largest mosque in Europe accommodating up to 70,000 worshippers and dwarfing iconic British Christian buildings such as Westminster Abbey or Liverpool Cathedral in the process – coupled with the heightened security concerns of a post-7/7 context sparked a furore of international controversy (Economist 2007; Perlez 2007). TJ’s lack of public

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15 An up-to-date survey would probably reveal that the actual number is greater than this, especially if numerous part-time institutes established in the last decade are included.
profile was painfully highlighted as London TJ leaders – clearly “inexperienced political actors” (DeHanas and Pieri 2011, p.811) – proved inept at dealing with the widespread attention their proposal attracted: for two years growing opposition to the project went virtually unchallenged. A hostile grassroots opposition campaign led by Councillor Alan Craig of Newham Concern\textsuperscript{16} asserted that TJ was a wholly inappropriate group to manage Europe’s largest mosque because its distinct style of activism sought to culturally insulate Muslims from the wider society: “...critics have insisted that whatever Tablighis may think they are doing, they have contributed to ethnic separatism that can be destructive of social goals” (Metcalf 1996b, p.120). This argument finds further support in the literature; Lockwood (2012) makes an impassioned local argument that the ‘cultural separatism’ evident in Savilletown, Dewsbury is implicitly fuelled by the activities of the national TJ headquarters there while Azmi, commenting on the situation in Canada, states:

> The Tablighi Jama’at has been almost unique in the Muslim community for inspiring in its followers isolationist attitudes which run against the grain of multicultural notions. This is reflected in that it alone, of all the major Islamic groupings in the Toronto area, has been able to inspire the formation of the rudiments of Muslim ghettos. (Azmi 2000, p.236)

Sikand is explicit in his assessment of the situation in Britain:

> The Tablighi ethos attracts those British Muslims who, in their social and economic dealings, have little interaction with non-Muslims and the wider British society...people who have little hope of rising up within the existing system, or quite simply people who wish to drop out of the system itself, seeking refuge and comfort in a culturally more familiar world. The Tablighi ethos works to minimise contacts with people of other faiths, withdrawing from the wider society to protect Islam from the threat of secularism and materialism. Excluded from the dominant British society in the midst of whom they live, they see that society as particularly ungodly and immoral and thus respond eagerly to Tablighi calls for social and cultural separatism and insularity. (Sikand 2002, pp.231-232)

While this certainly may have been true for first-generation migrants suffering from the uprooting dislocation of migration, it remains to be seen whether Sikand’s assessment applies to second and third generation British-born TJ activists with more linguistic and cultural familiarity with dominant discourses. The concomitant question raised by the above analyses concerns the extent to which TJ, wherever it sets up a strong base for itself, will inexorably generate a religious, social and cultural

\textsuperscript{16} www.megamosquenothanks.com (accessed 19/06/2013)
ghetto that stands apart from mainstream society. Answering this in the British context requires sustained qualitative fieldwork to explore how British-born TJ members experience and navigate their social reality of modern Britain.

Persistently negative media coverage allied with hostile opposition campaigns – such as a BNP-inspired e-petition on the 10 Downing Street website which collected 281,882 signatures against the mosque (BBC 2007) – eventually prodded TJ into action. Downscaled plans were announced in early 2007 – the mosque was now only to be 12,000 capacity – and, in an unprecedented move, London TJ leaders employed the services of a PR company, Indigo Public Affairs, to help frame the project in more nationally acceptable terms. For the first time in its history, TJ featured a website and a YouTube channel 17 which aimed to respond to critics while simultaneously beginning to articulate the discourse of social and community cohesion to convince naysayers that it was an essentially benign movement (Pieri 2012a, pp.214-263). Yet at this stage public sentiment had hardened and the ‘TJ Olympics Mega-Mosque’ controversy, as it came to be known, transmogrified into “a centrifuge of public anxieties on national identity, government negligence, and Islamic conspiracy” (DeHanas and Pieri 2011, p.811). TJ leaders in their “frankly…naïve” (cited in Birt and Gilliat-Ray 2010, p.147) desire to develop such a massive structure (reportedly costing up to £100m) had unwittingly struck the raw nerve of a post-7/7 nation grappling with its multicultural identity particularly in relation to the perceived risks associated with its Muslim minorities.

In this context, Pieri (2012a) 18 undertook doctoral research utilising classical ethnographic methods to explore the underlying issues of the controversy. After outlining the broader contextual issues at play, his primary contribution is to assert that confronted by the socio-political exigencies of the mosque proposal, an “instrumentally aware leadership” (Pieri 2012a, p.308) at TJ’s London branch was forced to adapt its conventional modus operandi in order to achieve its immediate objectives. An avowedly apolitical and other-worldly movement was “caught between here and eternity” (Pieri 2012a, p.173) as it came to terms with the realities of negotiating its ideals in a modern secular milieu. This conclusion, when contextualised within a broader consideration of how TJ has functioned in myriad international settings, is not particularly surprising. Kepel (2000) records how TJ operates as a registered body in France – Foi et Pratique – while Dassetto (2000) captures the efforts of TJ leaders in Belgium to become the representative national voice of Muslims there, displaying an unusual level of engagement with the wider society. Commenting on TJ in South Africa, Birt (2001, p.375) proposes that the “Tablighi Jama’at can be placed in many contexts and

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17 http://www.abbeymillsmosque.com/, http://riverinecentrenewham.co.uk/ and https://www.youtube.com/user/AbbeymillsMosque#p/u/4/z01c7lCaUn4 - both the websites and YouTube channel were short-lived and soon discontinued; I was unable to access live versions.

18 I wish to thank Dr. Zacharias Pieri for making his thesis available to me considerably in advance of its publication as a book (Pieri 2015).
succeed because of its sphinx-like agnosticism of politics and economics,” an analysis which suggests a remarkably fluid inward functionality camouflaged by the veneer of an ostensibly monolithic uniformity of method:

...in order to progress plans for building the proposed mosque, the Tablighi leadership in London have had to start interacting with the wider society, modifying the ways the movement operates. TJ’s other-worldly teaching is at odds with the practicalities of managing a project that demands a high level of professional engagement with officialdom, and community interaction. (Pieri 2012b, p.12)

TJ leaders acknowledge that without the correct paperwork, without public relations, without the goodwill and partnership of the local authority and community, their application is unlikely to succeed. It is necessary to play by the rules that have been established. (Pieri 2012a, p.313)

Rather than evincing a deep-rooted transformation in TJ policy then, I would posit that the recent changes enacted by London TJ leaders illustrate another instance of pragmatic situational agency to meet the challenges of local circumstances. Commenting more generally on the largely ambivalent attitude towards politics assumed by the Deobandi reformist project since its inception, Metcalf’s observations support this analysis:

What is perhaps most striking about the Deoband-type movements is the extent to which politics is an empty "box," filled expediently and pragmatically depending on what seems to work best in any given situation...virtually any strategy is accepted that allows the goal of encouraging what are defined as core, shari‘a- based individual practice, coupled with a range of mundane goals that may or may not be explicit...Indeed, these movements often work well in the context of secular regimes where they can pursue their emphasis on disseminating adherence to correct practice with relative freedom. (Metcalf 2002, p.3)

2.2.4 TJ as the “ante-chamber of terrorism”?19

In 2006 a spate of media articles exacerbated TJ’s negative image in the public domain by citing it on the margin of several high-profile terrorist incidents (Langley et al. 2006; Laville 2006; Lewis 2006; O’Neill and Boyes 2006; Sardar 2006). The immediate backdrop was the apparent participation in TJ by some responsible for the failed ‘pop bomb plot’ on transatlantic airliners with commentators also pointing out that two of the four 7/7 bombers had allegedly spent time worshipping in TJ mosques.

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19 This oft-repeated phrase was popularised by an article in the French newspaper Le Monde which attributed it to the French security services (see Pieri 2012b, p.61).
While there was no direct evidence of TJ endorsing any kind of terrorist activity, the implicit concern was that involvement in TJ might function as a ‘conveyor belt’ toward radicalisation: “An unquestioning mind, which is what the Tablighi tends to produce, can easily be redirected towards nefarious ends” (Sardar 2008, p.313). The heightened sensitivities led to international security agencies assessing the potential risks posed by TJ (Furnish 2010, 2012; Hedges 2008; Howenstein 2006), with the damning indictment of Alex Alexiev, Vice President for Research at the Centre for Security Policy, a Washington D.C. based think-tank, notably informing much of the subsequent discourse:

The West's misreading of Tablighi Jamaat actions and motives has serious implications for the war on terrorism. Tablighi Jamaat has always adopted an extreme interpretation of Sunni Islam, but in the past two decades, it has radicalized to the point where it is now a driving force of Islamic extremism and a major recruiting agency for terrorist causes worldwide. For a majority of young Muslim extremists, joining Tablighi Jamaat is the first step on the road to extremism...Tablighi Jamaat has long been directly involved in the sponsorship of terrorist groups...The estimated 15,000 Tablighi missionaries reportedly active in the United States present a serious national security problem. (Alexiev 2005)

Academics were quick to respond with Sikand (2005) stating that his doctoral familiarity with TJ “forced [him] to respond to Alexiev's arrogant display of sheer ignorance on the subject.” Metcalf (2009, p.242) noted that “Several highly publicized “terrorists” had participated in Tablighi activities, but, arguably, this is simply because the movement exists virtually everywhere.” Further, she clarified that TJ’s understanding of jihad “does not pertain to warfare or violence but instead to peaceful preaching, with its attendant efforts at self-control and self-improvement" highlighting the lack of evidence...

...that participation in the peaceful jihad of Tablighi Jama’at is a first stage toward militant jihad, or...the more extreme position that the Tablighi Jama’at serves as a cover for terrorists...It is, in contrast, clear that for millions of participants the injunction to disseminate individual moral reform is the movement’s only mission. (Metcalf 2009, p.242-243)

Nevertheless the narrative associating TJ with violent jihadism continues to be perpetuated with Burki (2013) providing the most recent example. Such analysis allows alarmist commentators, such as Melanie Phillips (2006, p.320), to popularise wholly unsubstantiated assertions about TJ being “the most significant recruiters for Al Qaeda in Europe.” While extant evidence strongly indicates that, at its core, TJ continues to function as an apolitical and quietist movement principally
concerned with individual and moral self-reform, fresh research on contemporary TJ is required to determine the extent to which participation in its activities operates as a gateway to terrorism.

### 2.2.5 TJ on the Modern British Muslim Scene

“I became a Tablighi for a few days during my youth. Indeed, most young Muslims in Britain have spent some time “going out on Tabligh”. It is difficult not to. The Tablighi are ubiquitous, do not give up easily and their simple message resonates with nascent minds. The secret of their success lies in direct, personal appeals and the emphasis on rituals. That is why they are most successful among the young.” (Sardar 2006)

The first chapter of Ziauddin Sardar’s (2004a) witty travelogue describe his experiences with TJ as a young man. While his depiction is clearly a humorous caricature, the real point it drives home is...

…the ubiquity of the movement: for a movement to be written about in a satirical fashion, as does Sardar in Desperately Seeking Paradise, it must first be something of a trope in South Asian Muslim life in Britain. The chapter reads as a “one of those” narratives that communal insiders can smile at, having had similar experiences. (Dickson 2009, p.100)

In his autobiography, Ed Husain also recounts his attempts to infiltrate TJ gatherings at the London Markaz while a member of the more politically oriented Hizb-ut-Tahrir:

The following week we returned with our megaphones and the Volkswagen Polo. We circled the Christian Street mosque attacking the Tablighi Jamat and their introvert, apolitical form of Islam.

‘Praying and fasting is not enough, O Muslims! What use are your prayers when the Jews slaughter your brothers in Palestine? Today it is more important to establish the Islamic state, the khilafah, to honour your faith. Wake up from your slumber! Bring back the army of khilafah...’

Oddly, for the first time, there were police sirens behind us...‘There have been complaints from the mosque,’ said the officer. ‘I suggest you don’t trouble the people inside. If they deem you to be a nuisance, then we will have to take things further.’ (Husain 2007, p.124)

Jenny Taylor has also demonstrated an enduring fascination with TJ (Lemanski 2012; Taylor 2009a, c, 2015) – visiting the Nizamuddin headquarters and interviewing the top level leadership there (Taylor 2009b) – culminating with the choice of TJ to constitute the subject matter of her organisation,
Lapido Media’s, first handbook (Barlow 2012; Pieri 2012b). The public furore evoked by the London ‘mega-mosque’ controversy and the attendant allegations of radicalisation prompted several prominent British Muslims to share their views on TJ. Sir Iqbal Sacranie OBE, former Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, Anas Tikriti, founder of the Cordoba Foundation and Lord Adam Patel, a member of the House of Lords, all spoke in favour of TJ defending it as a non-violent form of mainstream Islam. Conversely, Ghayasuddin Siddiqui, co-founder of the Muslim Institute, Haras Rafiq, co-founder of the Sufi Muslim Council and Asif Shakoor, leader of the Sunni Friends of Newham, all opposed TJ with the Sunni Friends of Newham collecting 2,500 predominantly Muslim signatures for a petition opposing the mosque (Pieri 2012a, p.282; 2012b, pp.59-64). Subcontinental Deobandi/Barelwi sectarian conflicts, then, could be sensed informing the ideological positions of British Muslims debating a contentious contemporary issue in the public space. Additionally, Tehmina Kazi, director of British Muslims for Secular Democracy, and Taj Hargey of the Muslim Educational Centre in Oxford – “both...known for their explicit support of Muslims integrating into the UK’s secular system of governance” took the stand at the 2011 Public Inquiry into Enforcement Action at the Abbey Mills Riverine Centre “as unsurprising opponents of TJ” (Pieri 2012a, pp.293-297).

Despite its quietist and unobtrusive style of activism, all this demonstrates the extent to which TJ has managed to entrench itself into the landscape of modern British Islam. Yet Sikand’s (1998a) dated doctoral study remains our most comprehensive source of academic knowledge on a complex socio-religious phenomenon that now taps into wider debates on British multiculturalism, post 9/11 and 7/7 securitisation of Muslim communities and issues of identity for diaspora-born Muslims. Given the time lapse since Sikand’s fieldwork, it is now possible to test many of his assertions in light of the trajectory TJ has taken in subsequent years. Additionally, a closer examination of his methodology and sources raises questions about the credibility of some of his conclusions. A thorough interrogation of Sikand’s work is therefore warranted to reveal the need for fresh qualitative research on TJ in Britain.

2.2.6 Interrogating Yoginder Sikand’s Study of TJ in Britain

A summary of Sikand’s findings

After sketching a history of British TJ, Sikand identifies the particular calibration of social variables that forms its core support base. Deobandi and Gujarati affiliations have already been mentioned; Sikand further asserts that TJ holds particular appeal for lower-middle class first-generation migrants:

A visit to any tablighi mosque in Britain would reveal two interesting facts about the sort of people who...can be found therein...Firstly, a greatly disproportionate number of
those present would be older generation Muslims, mostly with white beards. Secondly, the relatively younger Muslims present would generally seem to belong to lower and lower-middle class families, still deeply steeped in South Asian tradition...and, by and large, with low to medium levels of educational attainment. (Sikand 1998b, p.184)

Fresh fieldwork in TJ mosques will be necessary to determine whether these patterns of attendance persist today. Basing his analysis on the publications of Haji Ebrahim Yoosuf Bawa Rangooni, a Gloucester-based pamphleteer, Sikand then goes on to explicate “one strong strand in British tablighi opinion” on Muslim children studying at secular institutions:

“Save your progeny from the education of school and college...in the same way as you (would) save them from a lion or a wolf...To send them in the atmosphere of college...is as dangerous as throw(ing) them into hell with your own hands.” (Rangooni cited in Sikand 1998b, pp.185-186)

Consequently, Sikand concludes that “The Tablighi Jama’at has very little presence among Muslim students in British schools and colleges” (Farid Kassim cited in Sikand 1998b, pp.186) predicting that as increasing numbers of British-born Muslims inevitably participate in the dominant educational system, TJ’s support base will proportionately dwindle. Sikand’s reading of Rangooni as a TJ leader results in him relying heavily on his various publications, though elsewhere he briefly mentions a counter-narrative in the words of a Leicester-based Gujarati TJ businessman:

“It is wrong to say that the Tablighi Jama’at tells us to renounce the world and to shun secular education. Rather, it tells us to strive to excel in all fields, to reach right till the top in our professions and to acquire as much education, both secular and religious, as we can, so that, being in a position of authority and respect, we can preach Islam among the elite of society as well. (Sikand 2002, p.233)

Which strand of TJ thought has dominated in the British context? Is it true to say that TJ has little or no presence in British colleges and universities? To what extent was Sikand justified in relying so heavily on Rangooni as an authoritative representative of TJ opinion?20 Formulating responses to these questions requires fresh and sustained qualitative fieldwork with contemporary British TJ.

Sikand further asserts that, due to its avowedly apolitical and otherworldly nature, TJ fails to address the real-world needs of British-born Muslims in a modern society. Further, TJ’s overwhelming rootedness in South Asian cultural mores (that made it so attractive to the migrant generation)

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20 In stark contrast to Sikand, my own fieldwork found Rangooni to have been a vocal and hostile critic of British TJ. I unpack this in greater detail in 6.4.
serves only to alienate British-born youth seeking to negotiate a pan-Islamic identity at ease with their country of birth. Consequently, Sikand concludes pessimistically:

> Fewer and fewer younger generation British Muslims seem to be going in for the TJ, preferring, instead, to go either the secular way or else to join other, more activist, Islamic groups, such as the Salafiyya, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the Young Muslims instead. (Sikand 1998b, p.185)

2.2.6.2 Gauging subsequent developments within the UK

There is no doubt that, particularly in the 1990s, Islamic groups which Hamid (2015) has categorised as *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists* enjoyed growing popularity among second-generation Muslims; according to Husain (2007, p.100) “This was the mid-90s, and Islamism was in the ascendancy among Britain’s Muslims” (see also Birt 2009). Yet the subsequent trajectory of TJ, comparatively, has been severely under-researched. There seem to be three principal reasons for this. Firstly, social scientific researchers have long-struggled to circumvent the aversion to publicity that characterises the Deobandi school in general and TJ in particular. In this regard, the separate attempts at access made by Geaves (1996), Gilliat-Ray (2005) and Taylor (2009a) are telling. Secondly, TJ’s amorphous activist base, premised upon an oral culture that lacks registration or membership records, makes it difficult to quantify: “Since there are no formal criteria for membership, it is impossible to measure the spread of Tabligh activity with any precision. Even participation in missions is a limited measure of the movement’s influence...” (Metcalf 1996b, p.111). Thirdly, TJ’s quietist style of activism that deliberately avoids engagement with the media, politics or any kind of confrontational rhetoric – described by Noor (2012, p.59) as a policy of “Never stirring the hornets’ nest” – allows it to operate inconspicuously, generally beyond the radar of social, political and even academic commentators (the controversy surrounding the ‘mega-mosque’ being a striking anomaly then). It may therefore be plausibly argued that while other Islamic groupings have certainly been far ‘noisier’ on the landscape of British Islam over recent decades, TJ has characteristically – quietly and without fanfare – continued to animate significant sections of the Muslim grassroots (while its Deobandi cognate has concentrated primarily, it seems, on institution-building and imam-training). In this regard, both Pieri (2012a, pp.159-160) and Bowen (2014, p.41), based on their much more recent fieldwork, find, contrary to Sikand, that a process of intergenerational transmission has indeed occurred within

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21 According to Sikand (1998a, p.19), “field investigation of the movement is an even more daunting enterprise [than finding relevant literature], especially for the non-Muslim scholar. To really understand the TJ, its activists stress, simply reading about it is not enough. Rather, one must take time off and join a group of Tablighi activists travelling from place to place preaching their doctrines.” This hands-on approach of participant observation is precisely the one I adopted (see 3.2.1 for my experience of accessing TJ for fieldwork purposes).

22 See Metcalf (1996b, p.117) again: “Also important to Tabligh success both in old Muslim areas and in the diaspora is the relentless apoliticism of the Tabligh: it is thus inconspicuous and regarded as at least harmless and at most, by some regimes, as beneficial and stabilizing.”
British TJ: “Despite its low-tech and old-fashioned methods, the Tablighi Jamaat has proved highly successful in recruiting Muslims...It is certainly not hard to find young, British-born, middle-class followers...” (Bowen 2014, pp.40-41).

Another subtle nuance might be gleaned from the fact that Sikand’s fieldwork was conducted in the 1990s. The impact of such subsequent global events as 9/11, 7/7 or the Danish cartoon controversy have substantially altered the terrain in which Western diaspora Muslims live out their lives and the perceived ‘securitisation’ of British Muslim communities may well have modified their perspectives of overly politicised Islamic paradigms (Ajala 2014; Bonino 2016; Hussain and Bagguley 2012; Mythen 2012). Ed Husain’s (2007) autobiographical journey demonstrates a shift away from the brash confrontational style of groups such as the Hizb-ut-Tahrir toward more quietist and ostensibly Sufi-oriented forms of Islam. Situated within this broader socio-political context, TJ – particularly for those British Muslims with a predisposition to the Deobandi reformist paradigm – may well have received a fresh lease of life.

2.2.6.3 A note on Sikand’s methodology and sources

A closer examination of Sikand’s methodology and sources of data also raises questions about the credibility of his conclusions. It is usual for recent doctoral studies of TJ – such as those conducted by Pieri (2012a) or Ali (2006) – to include dedicated methodology chapters discussing ethnographic issues relating to participant observation, reflexivity, access, fieldnotes, site selection or the ethical dimensions of interpersonal engagement with respondents. By contrast – and despite the fact that qualitative fieldwork was carried out – Sikand is resoundingly silent.23 This is perhaps a result of the conventions of social scientific research at the time coupled with his emphasis on welding a socio-historical approach to purely qualitative fieldwork. Yet examining Sikand’s sources of data reveals a real risk of skewed findings. It seems Sikand spent a total of just over two months conducting fieldwork in the UK during which time little or no participant observation was carried out and interviews with only eight British TJ activists conducted; of these two are explicitly ex-members (Sikand 1998a, p.324) and only one - Muhammad Harun - seems to be British-born (Sikand 1998a, p.279). Further, Sikand’s (1998a, p.277) primary informant when considering the future of TJ in Britain is Farid Kassim whom he describes as “the official spokesman of the Islamist Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Britain.” Kassim’s opinions are repeatedly cited by Sikand (1998a, p.277, p.278, p.282, p.285, p.286, p.288) and he specifically mentions him in his acknowledgments: “In Britain, I must thank Farid Kassim of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir for giving me so much of his time...” (Sikand 1998a, p.6). Elsewhere, Sikand (2006, p.189) claims that Kassim had his “first exposure to Islamic reform and revival in the

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23 Sikand’s PhD thesis (1998a) contains virtually no details on methods deployed, whereas his book (Sikand 2002, p.11), based on the PhD, contains a single additional paragraph under the heading ‘Sources’ which briefly outlines methods of data capture.
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TJ” and thus himself constitutes an ex-member. To what extent is Sikand justified in relying so heavily upon Kassim? Ed Husain, drawing upon his personal association with Kassim, provides insights into his role within the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and his attitudes toward other Islamic groups:

Farid had been frequently interviewed by Channel 4 News and the BBC, cited regularly in British newspapers, and was the Hizb’s official spokesman...its most intellectual, high-profile, charismatic, controversial, media-savvy personality...

Farid abhorred with a passion the Muslim Brotherhood...Islamic Forum of Europe, the UK Islamic Mission, the Islamic Foundation...He used to compare them to an octopus which always survived the amputation of a limb. ‘The so-called Jamat-e-Islami and Muslim Brotherhood’, Farid used to say, ‘[are]...all shallow...It is only the Hizb that can overthrow these bastard regimes and install the caliphate...’ (Husain 2007, pp.94-96)

Farid encouraged us to speak as often as possible at Christian Street [the then TJ headquarters in London]. He had sharpened his own delivery there. Farid and his sidekick Zulfiqar would jump on a bench outside a mosque, or stand on a car bonnet wherever Muslims gathered. Farid would address the crowd with no preparation whatsoever [with a] spontaneous zealous public performance... (p.123)

Husain’s assessment is corroborated by Hamid (2015, p.42): “Farid Kassim...developed a reputation for being an aggressive proponent of HT’s ideas and spoke regularly at Muslim student societies and communities across the UK.” It seems startling that Sikand would base his assessment of the future of British TJ largely upon the subjective opinions provided by the spokesperson of a rival Islamic group well-known for its hostility to TJ. Perhaps this was the result of a lack of access; in this regard Sikand (2002, p.11) frankly acknowledges “Owing to practical difficulties of fieldwork, the sample of interviewees cannot be said to be strictly representative.” However the general lack of methodological reflection leaves us only to speculate about what the “practical difficulties of fieldwork” might have been. Herein lies the fundamental weakness of Sikand’s study: constructing a narrative based on a limited sample of data provided largely by immigrant TJ activists, ex-TJ members24 and the official spokesperson of a rival Islamic group gives us an excellent insight into why TJ may not appeal to British-born Muslims, but leaves a lacuna in terms of explaining why other

24 As already mentioned, Sikand also cites copiously from the publications of the Gloucester-based pamphleteer Haji Ebrahim Yoosuf Bawa Rangooni. In 6.4, I explain how my own fieldwork revealed Rangooni to have been a controversial ex-member of TJ yet, in his acknowledgments, Sikand states: “In Britain, I must thank Farid Kassim of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir for giving me so much of his time, and to Ebrahim Yusuf Rangooni for the valuable material that he made accessible to me.” In 6.4.3, I further draw upon Sanghera and Thapar-Bjørkert’s (2008) reflections on conducting politically sensitive fieldwork among British Pakistani Muslims in Bradford to examine the extent to which the fieldwork experience is critically impacted by so-called ‘gatekeepers’ who claim to represent the community under study.
British-born Muslims are in fact attracted to the movement. In this respect, Sikand’s sole informant who seems to be a British-born TJ activist provides tantalising insights:

For many young British Muslims themselves, participation in the TJ represents a quest for roots, identity and cultural authenticity. Dressed in strict conformity to the Prophet’s sunnat, immersed in meditation and prayer, and living like brothers with fellow-believers while on jama’at, ‘gives, for a few days at least, a taste of how the Companions of the Prophet lived’, says Muhammad Harun, a young Tablighi activist from Bradford. Harun speaks for several other young British Muslims active in the TJ when he says that what particularly attracted him to the movement was the fact that 'unlike other Islamic groups that simply talk and do nothing, or just fight political battles', Tablighi volunteers 'actually do practical work struggling in the path of Islam, spending days on end, without hope for any reward, preaching Islam.’” (Sikand 1998a: p279)

It is only sustained ethnographic fieldwork with contemporary British-born TJ activists, such as Muhammad Harun, that will provide the rich empirical data permitting a more nuanced appreciation of the movement in modern Britain - and it is precisely this which I propose to contribute. Although Pieri’s more recent fieldwork – consisting of participant observation and ‘deep hanging out’ at the London TJ centre’s weekly Thursday evening lecture programme from October 2009 to October 2010 – was largely focussed on the contentious politics of the ‘mega-mosque’ controversy, it nevertheless provides useful insights into TJ’s enduring appeal for British-born Muslims in a modern society:

It is TJ’s belief that it is necessary to take consumerism and what they call “creation” “out of our heart for creation stops us from reaching our potential. We are stunned by the way of the world and our heart deviates from the word of Allah”

...this was the key point made at the gathering on 22 October 2009...These words had a deep impact on those gathered; most were nodding their heads in agreement. It seemed that many present that evening were seeking out a spiritual dimension for their lives, and that the suggestion of unplugging from a fast-paced society with a heavy dependence on media and technology was ideal...

...TJ recognises that there is a deep spiritual yearning amongst many Muslims (not to mention the wider population) as well as a belief that for all the conveniences of modern technology, it has not done anything to improve the moral character of individuals. Participants reported that looking at society they see a rise in crime, in
drugs and alcohol abuse, and in TV shows that profit from the exploitation of peoples’ personal unfortunate circumstances. TJ’s message of abandoning worldly attachments, turning inwards to re-examine ones [sic] own life, and striving for salvation has been resonant amongst its members. (Pieri 2012a, pp.183-184)

2.2.6.4 Contextualising Sikand within subsequent international scholarship on TJ

Finally, a survey of the subsequent literature published on TJ since Sikand’s doctoral thesis permits a contextualisation of his findings, particularly relating to the purported inextricability of British TJ with South Asian cultural mores. Here Noor’s (2009) meticulous documenting of the modalities through which TJ spread across the Indonesian island of Java is especially relevant. According to Noor, TJ operated almost exclusively among the expatriate South Asian community resident on the island for the first few decades of its existence, primarily concentrating on establishing and consolidating the institutional robustness of its infrastructure among those with ancestral ties to the homeland. During this phase, it would have been accurate to describe TJ in Indonesia predominantly as an imported South Asian phenomenon. Yet, stimulated by several key catalysts, TJ eventually began to attract ever-increasing numbers of indigenous Indonesians from across the archipelago, leading Noor to conclude that:

What began as a South Asian movement with a distinctive South Asian flavour and feel to it has now transformed itself into a localised mode of normative religiosity that finds adherence and support from the local population of Java...Unencumbered by ethnic and cultural attachments or the need to retain its South Asian identity, the Tabligh has managed to spread itself from India to Europe, Africa, the Arab world and Asia while localising itself in each new context it finds itself in. (Noor 2009, p.48)

Noor’s findings clearly have broader import than the empirical Javanese context in which they were generated. In Timol (2015b, p.203), I utilise data from my fieldwork with British TJ to Bulgaria (see 3.3.1.2), to expand upon and schematise Noor’s findings in terms of the following generic model:
Applying this schema specifically to the situation of British TJ, I concluded:

My contention is that TJ in Britain currently operates at the advanced stage of Phase Five as evidenced by the robustness of its internal infrastructure and the frequency with which British TJ delegations are dispatched across Europe and to America, of which my fieldtrip to Bulgaria provides an example. Should my schema prove to be correct, we should see a transition into Phase Six in coming years and a concomitant indigenization of British TJ; a theme which my fieldwork continues to explore in more detail. (p.199)

What becomes clear from these findings is that TJ is not irredeemably tied to its South Asian cultural progenitor but rather, caterpillar-like, has a track-record of shedding a pupa of imported cultural norms and metamorphosing into a “localised mode of normative religiosity.” This conclusion finds support from studies of TJ in other international settings. For instance, according to Kepel (2000) and Dassetto (2000), TJ is popular chiefly among Muslims of North African descent in France and Belgium while Janson (2005, p.455) documents how, in the Gambia, it has been appropriated mainly by the “Mandinka, who form the largest ethnic group.” Situating Sikand’s study within this broader framework of scholarship on international TJ leads me to conclude that his findings captured a distinct stage in the evolution of British TJ identity; with my own fieldwork seeking to gauge the situation almost two decades on.
What are the contours along which indigenisation of TJ in Britain (Phase Six of the above schema) will proceed? These, I would contend, will involve the successful transmission of TJ both vertically to second and third generation British-born Muslims of South Asian descent, and horizontally to increasing numbers of non-South Asian Muslims resident in the UK.25 Despite the continued demographic preponderance of South Asians in the UK’s Muslim community (Ali 2015), the extant literature already indicates an increasingly diverse ethnic base of TJ activism. For instance, Pieri’s (2012a, pp.159-160) study cites the results of a survey carried out by the research and consultancy firm ECORYS at the London TJ headquarters – “the first and only official source of the composition of the attendees of the mosque” – which demonstrates “a strong trend to a youthful population (41% 20-29 years of age) and one that is ethnically mixed (Pakistani 35%, Bangladeshi 32%, Black African 17%, Indian 11%).” He concludes that “TJ cannot be viewed as still being the same organisation that it was in the 1980s and 1990s and that at least in London, the movement has managed to attract a wider following.”26

What are the underlying factors that have contributed to TJ’s continued popularity amongst British-born Muslims in London and elsewhere? Does it continue to attract only the same demographic of lower-middle class, poorly educated South Asians living on the margins of society that Sikand identified? And why, as King (2002, p.298) pertinently asks, “should this movement – begun in India in the 1920s – have such a strong appeal in modern circumstances and in diverse countries...?” Jenny Taylor (2009c) further emphasises the need to understand the appeal of TJ in modern Britain:

Where secular Britain fails is where Tablighi Jamaat wins. One Muslim responding to a blog post on my website about the Tablighi Jamaat says: "TJ is the best thing that ever happened to me." We need to understand why that should be so.

Providing an answer to these questions is precisely what I propose to contribute.

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26 As early as 1993, Geaves (1996, p.171) also noticed at the national TJ headquarters in Dewsbury the presence of “a few English converts to Islam in the congregation...[and] a few Africans [who] wore their own style of clothes” while according to Birt (2003, p.49) TJ “has succeeded in attracting adherents from many of Britain’s Muslim ethnic groups.”
2.3 Conclusion

After a broad survey of the extant primary and academic material on TJ, this chapter has predominantly charted its transmission into and development within Britain. Robinson (1988, pp.17-18) has pointed out the irony “that Islamic ideas, developed by movements which aimed to escape the consequences of British rule and Western civilisation, have since Independence been carried by these movements to the very heart of Britain and the West.” Allied with the post-colonial immigration drive from South Asia, TJ provides an apt illustration of this. 1946 saw the first recorded TJ tour in Britain and activist networks were gradually developed among lower-middle class South Asian migrants, particularly of Gujarati origin, leading to the opening of the European headquarters in Dewsbury in 1982. TJ also allied itself with the institutional infrastructure of Deobandi Islam relying upon its extensive network of mosques to conduct its activities.

Despite Robinson’s (1988, p.12) prediction that “In Britain we would expect the Tabligh...to be the Islamic group to be the least involved in controversy of any kind” it has nevertheless, in the hypersensitive post-7/7 national spotlight, found itself mired in controversy. On the one hand, it has been cited on the margins of several high-profile terrorist incidents while, on the other, proposed TJ plans to construct ‘the Olympics mega-mosque’ in London have attracted widespread publicity and opposition. Suggestions that its particular mode of activism engenders cultural isolationism and renders participants vulnerable to subsequent radicalisation, while present in the literature, require further investigation.

In their autobiographies, both Sardar (2004a) and Husain (2007) write about their experiences with TJ indicating its ubiquity on the British Muslim scene. The media attention it recently attracted also prompted a chorus of British Muslim voices to share their views on TJ. Yet the most significant academic study of TJ in Britain remains Sikand’s fieldwork conducted in the mid-1990s. Interrogating this study and situating it within a framework of subsequent international scholarship on TJ has raised questions about the legitimacy of some conclusions. Fresh, sustained qualitative fieldwork with British-born TJ activists is required to advance our knowledge of “an emerging religious and social force in British life that is barely known and subject to multiple misrepresentations” (Pieri 2012b, p.12).
Chapter 3

Methodology: Walking the Ethnographic Tightrope

I cannot imagine initiating a study in which I had no personal feelings, felt no interest or concern for the humans whose lives touched mine, or failed to find in those concerns a vital source of inspiration and energy.

Harry Wolcott (2005, p.158)

In this chapter, I describe my experiences of conducting ethnographic fieldwork with British TJ from both theoretical and practical perspectives. In doing so, I firmly locate my experience within that of ‘indigenous ethnography’ – a situation in which the researcher shares important biographical attributes with the researched – and elaborate the metaphor of ‘walking the ethnographic tightrope’ to illustrate the conflicting pressures this entails. First, I chart the general fracturing of the epistemological foundations of positivist social science and the concomitant emergence of ‘self’ in the ethnographic imaginary. I then draw upon the reflections of a broad range of indigenous ethnographers to situate my own fieldwork experiences. Finally, I describe the twin methods of participant observation and qualitative interviewing primarily deployed and reflect upon how data analysis proceeded to generate broader theoretical insights.
3.1 Pulling My Selves Together: Reflexivity and the Negotiation of Multiple Field Identities

3.1.1 Mapping the terrain: the emergence of self in qualitative enquiry

Selves are constructed and reconstructed in kaleidoscopic ways, and the patterns of social relationships are densely woven. Simple dichotomies will not suffice to capture them. Contemporary methodological reflection celebrates more than the one-dimensional field worker of older formulations. (Atkinson et al. 2003, p.18)

Ethnography, as a methodological approach for understanding the social world, has come a long way since Malinowski’s (1922) seminal excursions into the lives of the Trobriand Islanders. Not only the terrain in which fieldwork is conducted, but the shape, scope and structures of ethnographic enquiry have been subject to deep and lasting transformations. Denzin and Lincoln (2005b) influentially sketch a chronology based upon a series of key historical ‘moments’ which see the ethnographic enterprise drift from firm positivist and foundational moorings to a panoply of experimental forms predicated upon postmodernist and feminist paradigms. Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003), drawing somewhat upon this schema, distinguish between traditional ‘Old Guard’ and innovative ‘Avant-Garde’1 approaches to qualitative research, identifying 1985 as a watershed year. This corresponds to Denzin and Lincoln’s fourth moment of the crisis of representation in which the authority and legitimacy of the authorial self become fatally undermined. Their fifth and sixth moments – respectively periods of postmodern and post-experimental fermentation – are those that most clearly open up a space for Coffey’s Ethnographic Self to emerge:

It is clearly in the latter moments (perhaps moments four to six) of Denzin and Lincoln’s model that the researcher self is most indicated and implied. This is not to say that past generations of fieldworkers have not experienced and lived the field in emotional, personal and subjective ways. But recent developments...provide a more recognized and acceptable environment in which to engage with such issues. (Coffey 1999, p.10)

The early history of ethnography, with its “objective’, colonizing accounts of field experiences that were reflective of the positivist scientist paradigm” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005a, p.15), was conducive to the proliferation of texts that largely correlated with the realist tale in Van Maanen’s ([1988] 2011) three-fold classification of ethnographic genres. This style of monograph expresses a detached, anonymous authorial voice “who more or less disappears into the described world after a

1 I appropriate this terminology for quite different ends in Chapters 6-7.
brief, perfunctory, but mandatory appearance in a method footnote tucked away from the text” (Van Maanen [1988] 2011, p.64). The epistemological assumption was of a “privileged vantage point from which ordered reality could be perceived...in order to establish the privileged vantage point, marks of the observer were eliminated from the main body of the text. This was called ‘objectivity’” (Macdonald 2001, p.65). The profoundly personal and interpersonal nature of fieldwork, however, inevitably generated an attendant genre of subjective, autobiographical confessional tales (Van Maanen [1988] 2011), though these often languished unpublished as self-indulgent memoirs. Rabinow ([1977] 2007) and Bowen (1964) provide two notable exceptions to this generality and the stir caused by the posthumous publication of Malinowski’s diary (1967) was symptomatic of a deeper discomfort provoked by acknowledging the exigencies of self in the field (Geertz 1999).

The subsequent momentum of the postmodernist juggernaut (Lather 2001; Spencer 2001) – characterised by a “thoroughgoing skepticism” and a radical recasting of known certainties into a bricolage of unstable categories in which “one is tempted to suggest that heterodox positions are the new orthodoxy” (Atkinson et al. 2003, pp.11-12) – has fundamentally reconfigured the epistemological foundations of modern ethnographic output. Put differently, the epistemological soil and intellectual climate within which the ethnographic seed germinates have been radically altered; the shape, texture and flavour of the resultant fruit are thus tangibly different. In this broader ambience of intellectual ferment, the reflexive turn ushered in by Denzin and Lincoln’s crisis of representation helped integrate Van Maanen’s confessional tale into a more mainstream form of textual production. The self, now acknowledged in the field and empowered to articulate itself, enters into a tripartite dialogic encounter with literary text and social context:

Fieldwork constructs now are seen by many to emerge from a hermeneutic process; fieldwork is an interpretive act, not an observational or descriptive one...This process begins with the explicit examination of one’s own preconceptions, biases, and motives, moving forward in a dialectic fashion toward understanding by way of a continuous dialogue between the interpreter and interpreted... (Van Maanen [1988] 2011, p.93)

Denzin and Lincoln’s seventh moment is a methodologically contested present characterised by conflict, tension, uncertainty and hybridity. Importantly, they hint that recent trends in ethnographic theorising, such as the reflexive turn, are ushering in...

...the turn toward a rising tide of voices. These are the voices of the formerly disenfranchised, the voices of subalterns everywhere, the voices of indigenous and

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2 Sikand’s (1998a) study of TJ, as elaborated upon in 2.2.6.3, resembles this type of monograph.
postcolonial peoples, who are profoundly politically committed to determining their own destiny.” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005b, pp.1115-1116)

It is within this broader history of the development of qualitative research in Western nations that my own fieldwork on TJ in Britain can begin to be considered.

3.1.2 Anthropology at home: from ‘there’ to ‘here’

Different rules of the game for ethnography are now emerging in many parts of the world...A new figure has entered the scene, the “indigenous ethnographer”...Insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding. Their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways. (Clifford 1986, p.9)

The classical anthropological paradigm, popularised by the canonical works of such pioneers as Malinowski (1922), Mead (1928) and Radcliffe-Brown (1922), saw a heroic ethnographer embark on a lone voyage into a foreign land filled with exotic natives. Setting up home among them, the fieldworker hoped to deploy his analytic training to engender an understanding of native culture and meaning across the gulf of language, society and ethnicity. Classical anthropology was thus wedded implicitly to the colonial enterprise of Western nations and took shape at the anvil of an imperialistic ethnocentrism (Bishop 2005; Denzin and Lincoln 2005a; Tuhiaiwai Smith 2005; Vidich and Lyman 2000). The influence of the Chicago School, especially from the 1920s to the 1950s, bifurcated the anthropological gaze by bringing ethnographic techniques home to bear on detailed studies of urban American life (Deegan 2001); in doing so, the distinction between anthropology and sociology was also blurred (Van Maanen [1988] 2011, pp.13-44). Yet even when localised studies began to proliferate, they did not escape the tendency to concentrate on “small-scale communities, disadvantaged groups, and ethnic minorities within European and other Western societies” (Atkinson et al. 2003, p.35). Whyte’s ([1943] 1993) classic Street Corner Society or Duneier’s (1992) Slim’s Table, for instance, exemplify this: the ethnographer ‘at home’ was still, by and large, a ‘stranger.’

Powerful critiques of the colonial roots of early anthropology (Asad 1973; Marcus 2001; Said 1978; Spickard 2002; Tuhiaiwai Smith 1999) combined with globalisation and a more general fracturing of the epistemological foundations of qualitative research have allowed a growing niche of what has variously been termed insider, native or indigenous anthropology to emerge. This sub-tradition differs from the broader conception of anthropology at home on the fundamental basis that it involves researchers conducting fieldwork among communities of which they are also members; the ethnographer’s gaze turns inward upon itself. A substantial body of literature now encapsulates the efforts of historically marginalised Others (ethnic minorities, homosexuals, women) to articulate the
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voices of groups within their communities through the prism of ethnographic enquiry (Abbas 2010; Altorki and El-Solh 1988; Bishop 2005; Fahim 1982; Innes 2009; Jacobs-Huey 2002; Kanuha 2000; Kondo 1990; Narayan 1993; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Styles 1979; Tuhiwai Smith 2005). Additionally, the widespread application of organisational or occupational ethnography has seen members of professional vocations reflexively study them, sometimes covertly (Buckle and Dwyer 2009; Hockey 1986; Holdaway 1983; Messerschmidt 1981; Salisbury 1994; Young 1991).³

Some ethnographers have also capitalised on the opportunities for research presented by uncommon events in their own lives; a form of research explicitly advocated by Riemer (1977, p.467): “[researchers’] own unique biographies, life experiences, and situational familiarity…[can]…opportunistically serve as important sources for research ideas and data.” Spradley (1980, pp.74-84), for example, was called up as a member of a grand jury and conducted covert ethnographic fieldwork throughout his tenure in the courtroom. Delamont (1987) underwent an elective hysterectomy and ethnographically studied the experiences of women in her hospital ward. The boundaries between self and ethnography are further blurred (McLean and Leibing 2007) when some researchers invert the asymmetrical power dynamic of classical anthropology by making the self the explicit focus of study. While the subgenre of ‘auto-ethnography’ (Jones 2005; Reed-Danahay 1997, 2001) remains marginal, its very existence indicates that the pendulum of mainstream ethnographic practice has swung firmly in favour of a recognition of self. Historically discrete field journals or diaries⁴ chronicling the personal, emotive journey of the ethnographer now bleed into the finished monograph and the overall ethnographic experience is predicated upon a more reflexive awareness of self (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009; Cunliffe and Karunanayake 2013; Davies 2008; Etherington 2004; Fine 1994; Finlay 2002). In some instances, the pendulum has continued to swing far in the opposite direction: what has variously been termed value-laden research, standpoint feminism or interventionist ethnography explicitly asserts that only members of disenfranchised and marginalised communities are sufficiently qualified to empathically study them (Denzin et al. 2008; Innes 2009; Tuhiwai Smith 1999). For instance, some feminist writers, consciously eschewing a value-neutral approach, have adopted an overt research agenda which asserts that “only research on women that is intendedly for women will be consistent with the wider political needs of women” (Bryman 2008, pp.25-26). The cumulative impact of these various

³ Coffey (1999, pp.33-34) provides further examples of (ex-) nurses, midwives and teachers who have conducted ethnographic studies in their respective occupational settings.
⁴ For instance, Clifford Geertz (1999, p.50) highlights the storm caused in the anthropological teacup by the posthumous publication of Bronislaw Malinowski’s field dairy: “Most of the shock seems to have arisen from the mere discovery that Malinowski was not, to put it delicately, an unmitigated nice guy. He had rude things to say about the natives he was living with, and rude words to say it in…The myth of the chameleon fieldworker, perfectly self-tuned to his exotic surroundings, a walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience, and cosmopolitanism, was demolished by the man who had perhaps done most to create it.”
reconfigurations in Denzin and Lincoln’s *methodologically contested present* has been to accentuate...

...a fundamental shift in critical thought surrounding ethnography, difference, and strangeness. They have challenged the dualisms between observer and observed, between subject and object, between near and far, insider and outsider, familiar and strange...The fixed positions of insider and outsider have been transformed into a kaleidoscopic array of practices. (Atkinson et al. 2003, pp.42-43)

3.1.3 Inside out: methodological issues arising from indigenous research

*Strangeness provides too much novelty, familiarity too little. The intellectual trick for the ethnographer, in whatever setting, has conventionally been portrayed as the attempt to make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar.*

*(Atkinson et al. 2003, p.17)*

Any attempt to invert the classical anthropological paradigm by studying members of one’s own community generates a plethora of distinct methodological issues. These have been discussed in the various accounts of indigenous research cited above and here I summarise the most salient features. Exogenous ethnography relied upon ‘difference’ as the “intellectual and imaginative motor of anthropological understanding” (Atkinson et al. 2003, p.34); unfamiliarity with the field was considered a virtue imbuing the researcher with “epistemological virginity” (Coffey 1999, p.23). The indigenous researcher, however, has already been socialised in the habitus of her respondents thus commencing fieldwork as a ‘native’ (Altorki and El-Solh 1988). This situation confers both advantages and disadvantages. For instance, indigenous fieldworkers are likely to possess a deeper grasp of the social setting’s cultural nuances than the ‘outsider’:

Native anthropologists have intimate knowledge of daily routines that are exceedingly difficult for outsiders to observe. Details such as when people wash their hands, how they treat and feel about the body and its physiological functions, and how they cook everyday food, rather than special food cooked only on festive occasions, are not readily evident to outsiders. (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984, pp.584-585)

Not only would the indigenous researcher be less likely to cause offence in such situations but given contemporary pressures of funding and deadlines, indigenous research may well prove to be more
practical and economical. Conversely, overfamiliarity with the field can result in what Atkinson et al. (2003, p.26) term “observational ennui” as vividly articulated by Becker:

We may have understated...the difficulty of observing contemporary classrooms...it is...a matter of it all being so familiar...it takes a tremendous effort of will and imagination to stop seeing only the things that are conventionally “there” to be seen...it is like pulling teeth...to see or write anything beyond what “everyone” knows. (cited in Atkinson et al. 2003, p.27)

Strangeness is associated with emotional distance while familiarity with emotional attachment. The former, in the positivist paradigm of classical anthropology, has long been seen as a necessary virtue to help cultivate the desired stance of ‘objectivity.’ From this perspective, emotional entanglement with one’s respondents, as warned against by Miller (1952), is seen as a danger that compromises the intellectual integrity of the study – with the indigenous ethnographer particularly vulnerable. The case of Kanuha (2000), a native researcher of ethnic minority lesbians, is instructive here as the harrowing tales of discrimination recounted by her respondents prompted her gaze to wander repeatedly to her own painful experiences of harassment. Yet emotional entanglement is not the exclusive preserve of the indigenous ethnographer; according to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.88) Willis, in his study of working class male adolescents, became guilty of an unbridled advocacy of the subculture in question. What can be discerned here then is the continuous need to maintain equilibrium between emotional and conceptual relations of distance. While indigenous and exogenous researchers approach the field from palpably different starting points, I would contend that their ultimate aim is the same: to cultivate a delicately balanced poise on the tightrope between strangeness and familiarity that allows sufficient physical proximity to plumb the depths of the respondents’ subjective life-worlds yet which maintains sufficient critical distance to allow rigorous theoretical interrogation. The exogenous researcher focusses on the former; the indigenous the latter - each constructing a differing range of methodological apparatus to arrive at the same goal.

In some situations, indigenous researchers enjoy distinct advantages over non-natives: for Ohnuki-Tierney (1984, p.585) Western anthropologists in Japan “usually receive the red-carpet treatment” producing an artificial research environment where “host people ‘perform’ for them.” Crane and Weibel (2013) demonstrate how the exogenous ethnographer of religion must be prepared to endure, as occupational hazard, intense bouts of proselytization when anthropological curiosity is consistently misconstrued by zealous informants as spiritual hunger; Dickson’s (2009) experience in Ontario shows that TJ is no exception in this regard. By contrast, the indigenous ethnographer more readily blends into the field setting, minimising ‘reactivity’ and/or disruption to the natural flow of events. Further, access is usually made easier through existing rapport and biographical
connections. Particularly in diaspora communities, the indigenous researcher might enjoy distinct ethno-linguistic advantages over her non-native counterparts (Shah 2004); for Altorki and El-Solh (1988, p. 7), ethnic tongues, beyond mere communication, also function as a “means of building rapport and a symbol of closeness.” In her indigenous study of African American haircare, for example, Jacobs-Huey (2002, p. 794) describes how she “strategically employed African American Vernacular English” to access “highly intimate cultural spaces.” Nevertheless, her study simultaneously highlights the essentially symbiotic relationship between self and field by cautioning indigenous researchers to “be especially sensitive to the dangers of disclosing cultural secrets or airing what community members may consider ‘dirty laundry’” (Jacobs-Huey 2002, p. 797). While Coffey (1999) anatomises issues arising out of *The Ethnographic Self* in generic terms, the body of literature referenced here demonstrates that they particularly agitate the experience of indigenous ethnography. The crucial question this begs is: *to what extent can the indigenous ethnographer ever leave the field?* As Nelson eloquently puts it, “When she turns off the recorder and removes the cloak of the investigator, she goes home to a community she forever shares with her natives. Their fundamental beliefs as well as their struggles and triumphs are deeply woven into the fabric of her own existence” (cited in Jacobs-Huey 2002, p. 795).

To summarise, the enterprise of indigenous research is laden with both opportunities and challenges. While the climate of intellectual ferment that characterises the social sciences has opened up new horizons of possibility, putative ethnographers must simultaneously be wary of the pitfalls that litter the road. Both indigenous and exogenous researchers, due to their differential positionalities, may well generate distinct yet complementary insights that enhance the overarching ethnographic enterprise (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984, p. 585).
3.2 Walking the Ethnographic Tightrope: an Indigenous Study of TJ in Modern Britain

...reflexivity is not for the marginalia of ethnography. Acknowledging the fact that the ethnographer is the primary tool of research and an active participant in the ethnographic field also means that properly confronting the influence of the ethnographer on research and representation is an unavoidable precondition of a reliable ethnographic account.” (Madden 2010, p.23)

Having explored, in generic terms, the emergence of ‘self’ in qualitative enquiry and methodological issues intrinsic to indigenous ethnography, I now describe my own experiences of conducting fieldwork with British TJ. Given that “Fieldwork always starts from where we are. We do not come to a setting without an identity, constructed and shaped by complex social processes” (Coffey 1999, p.158), I first reflexively outline the ‘relevant’ constituent elements of my own identity to gauge their potential impact upon my research.

I am a 34 year old British male of South Asian ethnic origin, born in England to Muslim migrants who relocated in the 1960s from Gujarat, India. My primary language is English though I am able to speak Gujarati, Urdu and rudimentary Arabic also. I have a professional background in public sector communications and am involved in various social and inter-faith initiatives within and beyond the Muslim community. I live in Lancashire, in the North West of England, in close proximity to a Muslim community of predominantly Gujarati extraction and Deobandi affiliation. I was first introduced to TJ while studying at college for my A-Levels through striking up friendships with several young, British-born activists and gradually became more involved in the movement, participating in a 40 day khuruj to Scotland in 2000 aged 18. I subsequently grew a beard and began to offer my daily salaat punctually both of which have remained integral components of my identity ever since. While studying at university for an undergraduate degree in English Literature (2001-2004), I actively participated in TJ and, upon graduation, undertook the trademark four-month khuruj to South Asia along with three other British-born Muslims. During this trip, I spent two months each in India and

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Even in selecting the ‘relevant’ components of this biographical sketch, I must acknowledge that I cannot escape entirely the predilections of my personal subjectivities! In its extreme form this can lead to a self-referential solipsism that is characteristic of postmodernist paralysis: “Reflexive scholars...are like artists who paint themselves, their subjects, and sometimes even their audience into their own canvases, allowing the observer to see the artist painting the picture of the artist painting the picture of the viewer watching the artist paint a picture...Where does it stop you might ask. For the reflexive scholar, it never does” (McCutcheon 1999a, p.10). Geertz’s (1973, p.30) position seems more sensible to me: “I have never been impressed with the argument that, as complete objectivity is impossible in these matters (as, of course, it is), one might as well let one’s sentiments run loose. As Robert Solow has remarked, that is like saying that as a perfectly aseptic environment is impossible, one might as well conduct surgery in a sewer.”

Riyaz Timol
Pakistan staying at both the Nizamuddin and Raiwind headquarters for several weeks. The fact I had undertaken this four-month trip several years prior to commencing my PhD has been crucial in determining my field experiences allowing me to be perceived generally as a trusted ‘insider.’

Further, my pre-existing familiarity with TJ allowed me to capitalise on a strong network of personal contacts within local TJ hierarchies that considerably facilitated access. My decision to study TJ at doctoral level in 2012 was informed simultaneously by my own experience of the movement’s British branch, which the academic literature in my estimation failed to adequately reflect, the ease of access I presumed I would enjoy and a desire to comprehend better the intriguing intra-religious conversion experiences, driven by TJ, I had consistently witnessed around me over the years. Though my own participation in the movement has dwindled, to this day I maintain friendly ties with my local TJ chapter considering myself, like Moosa (2015), something of a ‘critical friend.’

This brief biographical sketch makes clear that I share many personal characteristics with my respondents locating my research firmly within the parameters of an indigenous study. The implications of this are captured by Flick (1998, p.60): “Where researchers locate themselves in this area of conflict between strangeness and familiarity will determine…which concrete methods are chosen and also which part of the field under study will be accessible and which inaccessible…” Accordingly, I now explicate my experiences in greater detail.

### 3.2.1 Negotiating access to the field

Gaining access to the field is an essential prerequisite of any qualitative study; without adequate access, ethnographic data simply cannot be generated (Cohen and Taylor 1977; Gilliat-Ray 2005; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, pp.41-62; Lee 2000, pp.119-141). Indigenous ethnography confers the advantage of capitalising on existing levels of trust and rapport; the personal dimension of the researcher-researched relationship can thus supersede the professional one in the crucial task of securing access:

> ...whether or not people have knowledge of social research, and whatever attitude they take towards it, they will often be more concerned with what kind of person the researcher is than with the research itself. They will try to gauge how far the ethnographer can be trusted... (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.65)

Similarly: “it is not uncommon for qualitative researchers to use their existing relationships and contacts for their research…it simplifies access if you draw upon your existing circle of contacts” (Silverman 2010, p.204). This was precisely the rationale I employed when negotiating access to the field.
TJ is a hierarchical movement operating on the basis of amirs appointed locally, regionally, nationally and globally (see Chapter 5); an awareness I had already developed through my pre-existing familiarity with the movement. I therefore considered carefully the extent to which I would need to engage with each of these leadership groups. As I envisaged my research to be limited chiefly to British TJ, I thought it unnecessary to consult global TJ authorities based at Nizamuddin, India. Conversely, engaging local, regional and national TJ authorities was essential I felt. Gaining access was a gradual, incremental process that took several months. I initiated the process through raising the idea of my research with a range of TJ activists I met after offering daily prayers at several Lancashire mosques. This elicited a mixed bag of responses:

- “I can see the need for this research but am sceptical as to whether the elders will approve it.”

- “You need to be careful that your work isn’t manipulated by hostile antagonists for their own ends. Publicising TJ activities to the wider public will just make it easier for them to make things difficult for us.”

- “I’m fed up of being maligned and misrepresented in the media and by others who have no idea what we’re about and why we do what we do. I think your research is an excellent way of setting the record straight and getting some accurate information out there.”

- “Well, somebody’s going to do this anyway and it’s best that you do it rather than anybody else.”

- “Speak to Hafiz Patel personally and get his blessings before doing anything.”

- “There’s no way that the elders will approve this as they don’t like to attract any attention to themselves. I think there’s more harm in it than benefit so best not to do it.”

- “We have so many fantastic success stories to tell and a wider audience should be aware of this work and what it’s all about. At the end of the day we’ve got nothing to hide so what’s the problem?”

Next, I identified and arranged to speak with several regional TJ leaders I thought might be amenable to my research proposal. Again some ambivalence was expressed but, crucially, one agreed to arrange for me to meet with members of the national TJ shura based at the Dewsbury headquarters. The lead-up to this meeting was a particularly nerve-wracking time. My existing
familiarity with local TJ meant it was quite possible for me to conduct covert fieldwork but the ethical conundrums this provokes – not to mention the objections of my University’s Ethics Committee – made me uneasy. I therefore resolved to be fully transparent from the outset and clearly disclose my researcher identity whenever conducting fieldwork. To this end, I felt it necessary to secure approval from the highest UK-based TJ authorities despite the very real risk that consent would be refused.

My meeting with the national TJ leadership took place at the Dewsbury headquarters and I was accompanied by the regional leader who had arranged the meeting. The meeting itself was brief and rushed due to the fact that an *ijtima* was underway in addition to the preparations for the funeral of a senior TJ leader’s wife whose death had just been announced. A single member of the national council functioned as my main interlocutor and, when explaining my research, my experience transpired to be reminiscent of Innes:

> I began to speak, but this same elder then said, "Wait a second. Who are you anyways? Where’re you from?"...I told the elder who I was, which led to a long discussion among the elders about my grandfather and grandmother...and how people in the room knew them or knew about them. With my insider status confirmed, the rest of the interview went smoothly, with the elders contributing a great deal to the various topics I raised. (Innes 2009, p.11)

It was here, I think, that my South Asian ancestral roots coupled with my existing familiarity with TJ bore evident fruit. The TJ elder, after asking about my family background, traced a relation unbeknown to me and, when learning I had already undertaken TJ’s signature four month *khuruj* to South Asia, expressed confidence that I would be able to accurately and empathically convey the TJ experience. After I finished explaining my proposal (mainly in Urdu), the TJ leader shrugged and, without explicitly approving the research, tacitly endorsed it by, interestingly, framing it within the indigenous concept of *karguzaari* – a TJ mechanism in which participants ‘feedback’ or ‘report’ on activities undertaken. He further counselled me to be entirely honest in everything I report, reiterating that ‘we have nothing to hide,’ and emphasised that my fieldwork should not disrupt the normal flow of TJ events. I also sensed that the broader post-9/11 and 7/7 socio-political climate, exacerbated by TJ’s negative media coverage, had perhaps worked in my favour by alerting the leadership to the utility of ethical and evidence-based research conducted, most importantly, by somebody they trusted. I was thus able, somewhat to my own surprise, to secure the consent I sought in that very first meeting.

Access is a perpetually negotiated phenomenon and securing consent from the top-level of British TJ was only the first of several stages I had to navigate: “Access may need to be secured through
gatekeepers, but it will have to be negotiated and renegotiated with people being studied; and this is true even where ethnographers are studying settings in which they are already participants” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.4). On the local level, I discussed my research in considerable detail with the TJ amir of the local mosque I had selected as my primary fieldwork site. Though not the closest mosque to my house, I was already aware it had a strong TJ presence which made it much more appropriate for fieldwork purposes (see Appendix C1 for a profile of Masjid Ta-Ha). Before approaching individual TJ activists directly, however, I felt it was crucial to first secure the approval of their amir. Due to my prior acquaintance with him, I occasionally sensed a (sometimes troubling) confluence of personal and professional interests – again a common experience reported by indigenous ethnographers. Having successfully won his approval, I then secured verbal or written consent, depending on the context, from rank and file TJ activists with whom I would regularly be working.

Much of my fieldwork involved participating in outgoing TJ tours (khuruj). Here, at the outset of any khuruj, I would first secure consent from the designated amir of the group (a different person each time) normally through a private conversation in which I would explain the nature of my research, reassure them that it had been approved by the national Dewsbury HQ and allay any concerns about my researcher presence disrupting the normal flow of activities during the tour. I would also explain that I would need to formally disclose my researcher identity to the group as a whole at the outset of the tour. This would usually take place in the first few hours when the amir, usually after concluding the opening ta’lim session on the Friday evening (for the most common weekend tours I participated in), would introduce me to the rest of the group and explain that I wanted to say a few words. I would then explain the objectives of my research, the nature of my fieldwork and request the verbal consent of the group (see Appendix C3 for an example of this). I also provided a printed information sheet (see Appendix B3) making it very clear that anybody could opt out for any reason whatsoever in which case I would not take notes about them. Most participants were curious asking many questions yet I experienced no real resistance. Several expressed concerns about anonymity but when allayed, they were more than happy to participate. Other, usually younger neophytes, were excited about participation and explicitly requested I mention their names as they wanted ‘a slice of the fame.’ My experience of conducting fieldwork with British TJ was thus overwhelmingly positive. I enjoyed full freedom in the field, was able to take notes and photographs with ease and even, on occasion, held extended discussions about aspects of my research. Prior to commencing

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6 As these requests were usually made jokingly, I have not acquiesced and all my respondents throughout this thesis have been anonymised.

7 This freedom, it must be emphasised, was limited to the male experience (see 3.3.1.1 below) as my gender irrevocably rendered me an ‘outsider’ to the female experience of British TJ (nevertheless see Appendix C2 for insights gleaned about the masturat dimension of British TJ).
my 42 days fieldtrip to Bulgaria (see 3.3.1.2), I followed the same procedure as outlined above though, as the individual group members (and trip destination) were not confirmed until the last minute, I gathered the group and requested their consent on the night before departure at the Dewsbury HQ itself. Again, consent was forthcoming and my research persona was quickly normalised and, occasionally, even became the subject of good-natured jokes such as “Quick Riyaz, snap a pic of British TJ weeing in the bushes for your thesis!” (when a jama’at member, during a particularly long van journey, was forced to relieve himself in the Hungarian countryside). In short, just as I had presumed prior to commencing fieldwork, I had within the repertoire of my biographical experience all that was needed to gain access to the field and maintain the positive relations needed to generate my data once there. In this sense, my experience tallied with Whyte’s as recorded in the methodological appendix to his classic study of an American-Italian slum:

I found that my acceptance in the district depended on the personal relationships I developed far more than upon any explanations I might give. Whether it was a good thing to write a book about Cornerville depended entirely on people’s opinions of me personally. If I was all right, then my project was all right; if I was no good, then no amount of explanation could convince them that the book was a good idea. (Whyte [1943] 1993, p.300)

3.2.2 Seeing and being seen: the development of a field persona

Ethnographic textbooks describe the commonly traversed trajectory from strangeness to familiarity that the researcher experiences as she enters the field as a novice, often suffering the disconcertment of plans thrown into disarray and unexpected estrangement from one’s participants:

The shock comes from the sudden immersion in the lifeways of a group different from yourself. Suddenly you do not know the rules anymore. You do not know how to interpret the stream of motions and noises that surround you. You have no idea what is expected of you. Many of the assumptions that form the bedrock of your existence are mercilessly ripped out from under you. (Agar cited in Wolcott 2005, p.87)

However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.82) point out, this expected trajectory is problematized when research is undertaken in familiar settings where “it may not be possible to take on a novice role...The ‘acceptable incompetent’ is not...the only role that ethnographers may take on in the field.” Similarly, Coffey (1999, p.33) highlights “those who engage in fieldwork from an assumed position of ‘knowing’ – where the researcher already possesses some of the esoteric knowledge and an empathetic self.” Given my pre-existing familiarity with TJ, it was clearly this latter conception that allied more closely to my situation. In particular, the fact I had undertaken TJ’s trademark four-month khuruj to the South Asian headquarters earned for me the title of
puraana saathi – a TJ term used to refer to an ‘experienced worker.’ I argue in 5.2 that this four-month trip is the closest thing to membership within TJ circles and the familiarity with TJ mores this developed coupled with my private study and practice of Islam over the years meant it was impossible for me to commence fieldwork as a novice. As a result:

a) From the outset, I was regularly asked to conduct study circles, deliver speeches or lead prayers at mosques we visited. Twice, at the behest of local imams, I led the Friday prayer in Bulgarian mosques with several-hundred strong congregations.

b) I was once appointed the amir of a weekend TJ outing and, on several others, the amir asked me to deputise in his absence.

c) I was regularly expected to coach younger TJ neophytes in basic Islamic knowledge and specific TJ rituals.

Further, my “ascribed characteristics” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, pp.73-79) – including gender, age, religion and ethnicity – all served to minimise the distance between me and my participants. Additionally, I found that my existing persona rendered the need for a ‘personal front’ or ‘impression management’ – as expounded by the standard methods textbooks (Coffey 1999, pp.64-67; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, pp.66-68; Silverman 2010, p.206) – virtually redundant. For instance, much is made of dressing appropriately: “Your behavior and attire should not draw attention to you. Your goal is to learn what it takes to fit in” (Bogdewic 1992, p.52). However, as part of my normative practice of Islam, I already sport a beard, pray five times a day and often dress in traditional Islamic clothing such as a hat, turban or robe.8 There was therefore no need for me to contrive a fabricated field identity (and wrestle with the moral and ethical conundrums this can provoke); nor, unlike Dickson (2009) or Pieri (2012a), did I have to conspicuously sit aside during prayers. My fluency in English, Urdu, Gujarati and basic Arabic further allowed me to capture data from myriad audiences, particularly as the lingua franca of many Deobandi mosques continues to be Urdu, unlike, for example, Geaves (1996, p.5): “My lack of knowledge of Arabic and my very limited knowledge of Urdu denied me access to considerable information.” According to Coffey:

One of the strengths of ethnographic enquiry is the real involvement of the fieldworker in the setting under study. A weakness is not the possibility of total immersion, but a failure to acknowledge and critically (though not necessarily negatively) engage with the range of possibilities of position, place and identity. (Coffey 1999, p.36)

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8 See Zubair et al. (2012) for the conscious adoption of indigenous dress codes by a female Pakistani Muslim researcher in Britain.
Therefore my pre-existing familiarity needed to be mitigated by the conscious adoption of a self-reflexive approach. The practical manifestations of this took the following forms:

- I meticulously logged in my fieldnotes a field journal/diary in which personal tensions, private emotions and my evolving thought processes were expressed.
- I regularly held discussions with my supervisors on pertinent issues/dilemmas as they arose. Speaking to academic professionals away from the field would often help develop new insights and recalibrate my thinking.
- I participated in several academic conferences discussing reflexivity and positionality and sought peer-support through methods groups. In September 2014, I co-organised, along with my colleague Abdul-Azim Ahmed (conducting an indigenous ethnography of his local mosque) and the Muslims in Britain Research Network, a full-day conference at Cardiff University entitled *INSIDE OUT: Reflexivity and Methodology in Research with British Muslims*. 

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9 For instance I participated in a roundtable discussion entitled *Interrogating integrity? Insider and outsider social research with faith based groups* at the British Association for the Study of Religion’s 2014 Annual Conference and delivered a paper called *Walking the Ethnographic Tightrope: Fieldwork with the Tablighi Jama'at in Modern Britain* at Cardiff University also in 2014.

10 At the conference a range of Muslim and non-Muslim researchers delivered papers reflecting on their experiences of conducting fieldwork with British Muslims and Professor Ron Geaves delivered the keynote lecture entitled *The ‘death’ pangs of the insider/outsider dichotomy in the study of religion*: [http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/islamukcentre/community-engagement/mbrn-islam-uk-centre-conference/](http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/islamukcentre/community-engagement/mbrn-islam-uk-centre-conference/) (accessed 19/05/2016)
3.3 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

“Knowing what you want to find out leads inexorably to the question of how you will get that information” (Miles and Huberman 1984, p.42). Accordingly, in this section I expand on the two ethnographic techniques deployed to generate data: participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

3.3.1 Participant observation

3.3.1.1 Issues of ethics and gender

My proposed fieldwork was approved by Cardiff University’s School of History, Archaeology and Religion Ethics Committee in October 2013. According to Cardiff University’s Research Governance Framework, researchers “have a responsibility and a duty of accountability to society, to their profession, to the University and to the funders of the research, to accept full responsibility for the professionalism and integrity of all aspects of the conduct and publication of their research.”

Accordingly, I committed to transparently providing detailed information about the nature and objectives of my research in an easy-to-understand format and providing respondents with debriefing sheets should they wish to contact me or retrospectively withdraw consent. Additionally, I meticulously observed the relevant protocol relating to the secure storage and anonymisation of data to ensure the safety and well-being of research participants and took care not to interview anybody falling within the university’s purview of a ‘vulnerable group.’ Given the public nature of the mosque-based settings which constituted the mainstay of my field, it was however impossible to disclose my researcher identity to everybody I came into contact with or elicited data from. As a minimum, I therefore disclosed my researcher identity to fellow group members at the outset of a *khuruj* trip, as already outlined in 3.2.1, and, if during the course of my fieldwork I engaged in sustained interaction with anyone for research purposes, I similarly disclosed my researcher identity. In this sense, my experience resembled that described by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, pp.56-57): “research carried out without the knowledge of anyone in, or associated with, the setting is quite rare. Much more common is that some people are kept in the dark while others are taken into the researcher’s confidence, at least partly.” To protect respondent identity, I also changed names and other non-essential biographical details when reporting findings.

Given that TJ is a heavily gendered movement in which strict segregation between the sexes is maintained, my fieldwork was, however, entirely circumscribed to men. Although a vibrant strand of female TJ activism has been captured in the literature (see 2.1.2), this operates within a conservative interpretation of Islamic modesty making it extremely difficult for me, as a male, to access it. Textbooks on ethnographic method (Brewer 2000; Bryman 2008; Coffey 1999;

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Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Madden 2010; Silverman 2010) outline the importance that ‘ascribed characteristics’ such as gender can play in either hindering or facilitating access for the fieldworker. Altorki and El-Sohl’s (1988) edited collection of essays, in particular, highlight the gender-specific sensitivities which inhere in fieldwork conducted within the patriarchal structures of traditional Muslim societies. Fieldwork conducted to date on TJ’s masturat dimension has therefore been conducted by female researchers and, like other male researchers of TJ (for instance see Pieri 2012a, p.54), I was similarly obliged to limit my fieldwork to men.12 My inability to directly access the masturat highlights the complex nature of the so-called insider-outsider dichotomy; while my shared religion and ethnicity might well have positioned me as an ‘insider,’ my gender irrevocably cast me as an ‘outsider.’13 Such restrictions imposed by gender are noted by researchers conducting fieldwork among generic South Asian (and not specifically Muslim) communities in Britain. For instance, Kalra, a Sikh man who examined the impact of the declining manufacturing industry upon the NW South Asian labour market, observes:

...the most significant aspect of ‘disconnection’ was due to my identity as a male. It was very difficult to talk to middle-aged and older women...The importance of gender has previously been recognised by most male researchers of South Asian Muslim minorities...In this respect my experiences of fieldwork were no different from those outlined by these authors. (Kalra 2000, p.44)

3.3.1.2 Participant observation with the TJ

A cornerstone of ethnographic method, participant observation involves “a prolonged period of intense social interaction between the researcher and the subjects, in the milieu of the latter, during which time data, in the form of field notes, are unobtrusively and systematically collected” (Bogdan, cited in Bogdewic 1992, p.46). Unlike interviews, participant observation allows the collation of “naturally occurring data...that...may show us things we could never imagine” (Silverman 2010, pp.131-132) as intuited by Doc, Whyte’s key informant in Street Corner Society:

“Go easy on that ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘why,’ ‘when,’ ‘where’ stuff, Bill. You ask those questions, and people will clam up on you. If people accept you, you can just hang around, and you’ll learn the answers in the long run without even having to ask the questions.” (Whyte [1943] 1993, p.303)

12 I was nevertheless able to develop insights into the nature of female TJ activism which I summarise in Appendix C2.
13 See Inge (2017, p.55) for the inverse experience: “Indeed, once initial suspicions relating to my ‘non-Muslimness’ faded, I could embrace the advantages bestowed by my gender.” Elsewhere (p. 18), when considering issues of access for researchers of British Salafi communities, she sums up my dilemma perfectly: “Moreover, most UK researchers have been men, who could not gain full access to Salafi women’s gatherings nor – I suspect – persuade devout women to speak to them openly on personal matters.”
My actual fieldwork commenced in October 2013 with a pilot weekend *khuruj* outing before embarking on, in November 2013, a prolonged 42 day TJ road trip to Bulgaria.\(^{14}\) The choice of Bulgaria was made by the Dewsbury HQ and one of the key reasons I was permitted to join the *jama'at* was because I had previously undertaken the four-month journey to TJ’s South Asian headquarters in 2004. In the run-up to this *khuruj*, I simply volunteered myself as unobtrusively as possible along with two local British-born, Lancashire-based TJ activists with whom I had been conducting fieldwork at Masjid Ta-Ha and who had managed to secure the required holidays from their respective employers. Two other British-born activists – both complete strangers – were added by the Markaz to complete the small *jama'at* of 5 which was instructed to hire a van and travel by road (the *jama'at* was also very young, between 28 – 35 years old). The destination, and directive to travel by road, was entirely unexpected; I had been expecting to spend 40 days within the UK. I quickly consulted with my supervisors and agreed to ‘go with the flow’ but focus my ethnographic gaze largely upon the British members of the group. As it transpired, I was able to experience TJ in action within the entirely unfamiliar milieus of France, Belgium, Germany, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria (it took us six days to drive the nearly 2,000 miles from Dewsbury to Sofia staying at TJ centres or sympathetic mosques en route) – which turned out to be an excellent strategy for ‘making the familiar strange.’\(^{15}\) Upon return, I immediately commenced a micro-ethnography of daily TJ activities in Masjid Ta-Ha (see Appendix C1 for a profile of the mosque). This continued for five months during which period I participated in the daily *mashwera* after the Fajr prayer, and the evening *gasht* and *ta’lim*. I also joined seven monthly weekend TJ outings in total and participated in a WhatsApp group of local activists that provided valuable insights into the dynamics of ‘virtual’ TJ interaction as well as popular articles, video clips and ulema. In the summer of 2014, I joined another prolonged TJ *khuruj*, during Ramadan, this time for 20 days. While the members of my Bulgaria *jama'at* were all *puraana saathis* – albeit relatively young and British-born – the majority of the 14-strong group I joined in Ramadan 2014 were teenagers experimenting with the movement variously for between 10-40 days of their summer holidays; I was thus able to document the British TJ experience at both novice and expert ends of the spectrum. The 20 days were split into two separate 10 days *khurujs* to mosques in Bradford and Birmingham respectively, beginning and ending at the Dewsbury HQ where I documented, in meticulous detail, salient data relating to such matters as audience composition, the nature of interpersonal interactions and the content of speeches.

\(^{14}\) I describe this experience in more detail in Timol (2015b). Interestingly, David Martin, in the spring of 1967, spent three weeks studying religion in Bulgaria as part of a cultural exchange visit during which time he met with the Grand Mufti and attended Friday prayers in the Kardjali mosque (see Martin 1969, pp.131-152).

\(^{15}\) During prolonged tours, *jama'ats* move from mosque to mosque every few days; during this 42 day trip to Bulgaria we stayed in 17 different mosques – including the European TJ headquarters in Dewsbury where we started and finished the *khuruj*. 

59 Riyaz Timol
In total then, I spent just under 80 days in khuruj with 10 different jama’ats over 10 months. Such intensive immersion permits the necessary intimacy to “see things from the native’s point of view” (Geertz 1999): “The greater the personal involvement with the group and its members, the more the researcher is able to understand the meanings and actions they undertake” (May 2011, p.179). Similarly, such an approach allowed the observation of both ‘front’ and ‘backstage behaviour’ as distinguished by Goffman:

...there tends to be one informal or backstage language of behaviour, and another language of behaviour for occasions when a performance is being presented. The backstage language consists of reciprocal first-naming, co-operative decision-making, profanity...The frontstage behaviour language can be taken as the absence (and in some sense the opposite) of this. (Goffman, cited in May 2011, p.179)

Thus the jokes and banter TJ activists engage in while eating, travelling or preparing for sleep are just as important, from the ethnographer’s point of view, as the content of the sermons formally delivered after the prayers.

3.3.1.3 Inscribing my experience: fieldnotes

Fieldnotes describe places and people and events. They are also used as textual space for the recording of our emotions and personal experiences...fieldnotes are the textual place where we, at least privately acknowledge our presence and conscience. The self is part of the reality of fieldnotes. (Coffey 1999, pp.119-120)

Much of the day while on a TJ tour is taken up with ‘ijtimaee amal’ (‘collective activities’) in which every group member is expected to participate. These include the morning ta’lim session (lasting around two hours), formal preaching visits (gasht), delivery of bayaan, congregational salaat and even such mundane activities as eating or travelling. Additionally, each group member is expected to diligently perform a series of ‘infiradee amal’ (‘individual activities’), mostly consisting of different forms of worship or litanies.16 This busy schedule means that very little spare time remains. I therefore found it physically exhausting to continuously jot down and type up my fieldnotes every day; yet due to the exhortations in various methods textbooks I had perused, habituated myself to a strict discipline to ensure this was done in a timely fashion.

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16 These include the recitation of one-thirtieth portion of the Qur’an daily, morning and evening tasbihaat (remembrance of Allah by repeating words of praise and glorification on a rosary), supererogatory (nafl) prayers such as tahajjud and ishaq and finally dedicated time for supplication (du’aa). Of course, the extent to which group members actually perform these every day differs from individual to individual.
The actual method used was innovative due to the uncommon nature of my field site. The closed structure of a *khuruj* meant that I was constantly with fellow group members and obliged to jot and type up my notes in their presence – there was no ‘desk-time’ away from the field. I always carried a pocket-sized notebook in which I would constantly jot ‘scratchnotes’ throughout the day – usually in full view of mosque congregants and fellow group members. If inappropriate, I would instead remember events and phrases (sometimes using mnemonic techniques) and recall them when eventually able to make fieldnotes (Tjora 2006). Without fail, I would take out an hour or two every night to type up my jottings into expanded fieldnotes. I did not take a laptop with me on *khuruj* as it would have been obtrusive and unsecure. However, I took a 10-inch touchscreen tablet and an inexpensive wireless keyboard which connected with both my tablet and smartphone via Bluetooth. I was thus able to type much faster using the keyboard than the touchscreens on either device. Notepad jottings were typed up directly into the ‘Evernote app’ with a new entry for each day affording me password protection and allowing me to back-up in the cloud periodically, in case of equipment loss or damage. I was further able to organise and format text and, by typing up notes while in the field, saved valuable time later. When, for example, residing at the national TJ headquarters in Dewsbury, I felt it was simply inappropriate to begin typing in full view of several hundred other attendees and so restricted myself to handwritten notes on select occasions. While conducting five months of fieldwork at the local mosque level, I similarly jotted into my notebook but was able to return home to type up expanded accounts. I also took approximately 400 photographs in the field and sketched around 20 diagrams to spatially represent different field sites with each day of *khuruj* generating an average of circa 3,000 words of fieldnotes.

Especially for the indigenous ethnographer, the very act of notetaking assumes special significance. As fieldwork progresses, the intellectual and analytical work required of the fieldworker gradually drives a conceptual wedge between her and her research participants notwithstanding shared platforms of biographical or cultural identity: "Although the native and the researcher look alike, speak the same language, and share many of the same beliefs and customs, the researcher still approaches the natives to observe them" (Nelson, cited in Jacobs-Huey 2002, p.795). Emerson, Fretz and Shaw are particularly explicit on this point:

The ethnographer’s fieldnote writing practices – writing jottings on what others are doing in their presence, observing in order to write, writing extended fieldnotes outside the immediacy of the field setting – specifically create and sustain separation, marginality, and distance in the midst of personal and social proximity. Overtly writing jottings interactionally reminds others (and the ethnographer herself) that she has priorities and commitments that differ from their own. Observing in order to write generates moments when the fieldworker is visibly and self-consciously an outsider
pursuing tasks and purposes that differ from those of members. (Emerson et al. [1995] 2011, p.43)

I certainly found this to be the case as my little notebook and pen, constantly brandished in the field, and the tapping of my keyboard late into the night – signifying an attendant edifice of analytical apparatus – perpetually reinforced to me and my participants the social scientific dimension of my presence.

3.3.2 Ethnographic interviewing

3.3.2.1 Formal and informal interviews

While spontaneous conversations in the field (such as the one with Umar in 1.1) can generate rich data, qualitative studies often complement participant observation with formal interviews to elicit more specific data: “In the simple act of asking, the fieldworker makes a 180-degree shift from observer to interlocutor, intruding into the scene by imposing onto the agenda what he or she wants to know” (Wolcott 2005, p.95). As such, after a pilot exercise (Silverman 2010, pp.197-199), I conducted a total of 59 interviews of which 25 were formal and recorded, with signed consent forms (see Appendix B2), and 34 informal and jotted with verbal – though explicit – consent (Spradley 1979). The average length of the formal interviews was 2 hours and 16 minutes; they were conducted with a range of TJ leaders, activists and sympathisers/critics by pre-arranged appointment. The longest interview I conducted was with a regional TJ leader lasting 5 hours and 15 minutes over four separate sessions. Informal interviews, by contrast, were much shorter lasting usually 10-15 minutes each and were often conducted spontaneously with fellow members of a TJ group I was on khuruj with. In particular, I conducted many informal interviews with British-born youth during my 20 day TJ outing to Bradford and Birmingham in Ramadan 2014.

Interviewees were selected through a range of sampling strategies. Initially, especially in Lancashire, ‘convenience sampling’ helped identify participants from my own network of contacts within British TJ. This was combined with ‘purposive sampling’ to target mixed occupations, age ranges, ethnicities and levels of TJ experience. To conceptually map levels of TJ participation, I devised a ‘Tier Typology’ of TJ’s hierarchical structure (see 5.2) and, given the lacuna in the academic literature identified in Chapter 2, decided to conduct a majority of my formal interviews with ‘Tier 3’ British-born TJ activists. However, I also took care to interview regional leaders, neophytes, sympathisers and critics with personal TJ experience to obtain a broad range of perspectives that could be triangulated with other data. Interviews were initiated through approaching members of Masjid Ta-Ha’s masjid-waar-jama‘at with whom I had already been conducting fieldwork; as such they were amenable to the idea of my research and many readily agreed to be interviewed. Further, participating in monthly weekend khurujs across Lancashire allowed me to broaden my network of
contacts leading to additional interviews. However, as the demographic preponderance of Muslim communities in North West towns and cities such as Preston, Blackburn and Bolton is heavily Gujarati, I also took care to interview a cross-section of ethnic origins including Pakistani, Bangladeshi and non-South Asian (including converts to Islam) – though, as a qualitative study, my sample does not claim to be representative. My 20 day *khuruj* to Bradford and Birmingham in the summer of 2014 was especially helpful here as existing TJ activists I had interviewed in the North West contacted their TJ colleagues in Yorkshire and the Midlands explaining my research on my behalf. As such, several ‘gate-keepers’ emerged whom, after I had personally met and reassured them about the nature and requirements of my research, gladly identified further potential interviewees for me. ‘Snowball sampling’ therefore helped me interview white English, mixed race, North African, black African and Malaysian TJ activists from Birmingham, London, Dewsbury, Wolverhampton and Bradford among other places. Spending several days at the Dewsbury headquarters during this same summer 2014 peak period was also especially helpful as, through impromptu meetings, I was able to interview disparate Muslims from across the country who were visiting the national hub usually at the beginning or end of an extended *khuruj* outing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All interviews</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My sample: 59 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Aged 16-79, with an average age of 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 7 x regional TJ leaders, 21 x TJ activists and 31 x TJ sympathisers /critics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 45 South Asians (33 Gujarati), 4 mixed race, 3 North Africans, 3 white English, 3 Black African or Caribbean and 1 Bulgarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 39 resident in the North West, 6 in Yorkshire, 7 in the Midlands, 6 from London and 1 lives in Bulgaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 46 born in the UK (or arrived before the age of 7), 13 born abroad (of which 9 born in non-South Asian countries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 22 have undergraduate degrees (11 with additional PGR qualifications), 21 are students (14 at college, 3 at university; 3 full-time at Dar al-Ulums, 1 full-time at college and part-time at Dar al-Ulum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 52 are born Muslims, 7 converts to Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 27 have undertaken a 4 month foreign TJ tour, 24 regularly undertake the annual 40 day tours, 30 regularly participate in monthly weekend tours and 21 participate in daily TJ activities at their local mosque.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Formal, recorded interviews

My sample: 25 men

- Interview lengths between 48 minutes and 5h.15m, with an average length of 2h.16m
- 7 x regional TJ leaders, 12 x TJ activists and 6 x TJ sympathisers/critics
- Aged 22-79, with an average age of 40
- 18 South Asians (12 Gujarati), 3 North Africans, 2 white English, 2 mixed race
- 16 resident in the North West, 3 Yorkshire, 2 in the Midlands and 4 from London
- 18 born in the UK, 3 in South Asia, 3 in North Africa and 1 in Malawi
- 17 have undergraduate degrees, with 10 holding further postgraduate qualifications (usually an MA or PGCE)
- 21 born Muslims and 4 converts to Islam
- 18 have undertaken at least one 4 month foreign TJ tour (1 annually, 14 several), 16 regularly undertake the annual 40 day tours, 18 regularly participate in monthly weekend tours and 13 fairly regularly participate in daily TJ activities at their local mosque.

### Informal, jotted interviews

My sample: 34 men

- 9 x TJ activists, 25 x TJ sympathisers/critics
- Aged 16-76, with an average age of 25 (22 aged 16-25)
- 27 South Asians (21 Gujarati), 3 Black African or Caribbean, 2 mixed race, 1 white English and 1 Bulgarian
- 23 resident in the North West, 3 Yorkshire, 5 in the Midlands, 2 from London and 1 lives in Bulgaria
- 28 are UK-born (or arrived before the age of 7), 6 born abroad. 23 are 2nd generation (parents immigrated) and 5 are 3rd generation British-born Muslims (parents born in UK).
- 19 are students (15 are college students, 2 study full-time in Dar al-Ulums (another part-time with full-time college), and 2 are university students), 13 work (2 self-employed), 1 is unemployed and 1 retired.
- 31 born Muslims, 3 converts to Islam
- 25 have never undertaken a 4 month foreign TJ tour, 16 have never undertaken a 40 day tour abroad or locally, 18 irregularly participate in monthly weekend tours and 14 do not participate in any form of daily TJ activities at their local mosque.

Formal, recorded interviews were normally conducted either in my home, the home of my respondents or at a mosque (usually during a *khuruj* outing); more infrequently some took place in a café, takeaway or in a car during travel (I offered my respondents a range of sites allowing them to choose whichever they were most comfortable with). Several respondents requested that I first
email them more information, including a list of questions, after which they consented. As I was pre-acquainted with some early respondents, I sensed a shift in our relationship for the duration of the interview as we both assumed more professional, formal roles – again a common feature of indigenous ethnography. Many later respondents were complete strangers whose consent was usually secured through gatekeepers – though I had to work harder to allay any concerns and win trust (meeting some of these respondents while already participating in a TJ khuruj no doubt underscored my credibility). Interviews were usually scheduled around prayer times and I often offered one of the five daily prayers with my respondents before or after the interview. Sometimes, notably when the interview overran, we interrupted the interview to attend the mosque and offer the prayer in congregation, before returning to the interview site to continue. I was sometimes treated to plush meals when attending respondent homes – even as a complete stranger. Conversely, when respondents visited my home for an interview, I always offered them tea, biscuits and cake. One respondent grudgingly consented to an interview only after I agreed to proofread some of his business documents and help his son with his English homework. I would conclude my formal interviews by offering a bookmark as a small token of appreciation along with a debriefing sheet with both mine and my supervisors’ details should they want to subsequently get in touch or retrospectively withdraw consent (see Appendix B4).

Formal interviews followed a loose structure subject to modification as my ongoing analysis indicated specific lines of enquiry to pursue. For instance, after the first few interviews I printed out quotations from the extant academic literature which I would read aloud to respondents to gauge reactions and elicit thoughts. This semi-structured format allowed flexibility to explore nuances arising from the initial discussion (why?, how?, in what way?, etc.) with the discussion dwelling on specific areas as needed. In line with the requirements of my Ethics Committee, I took care not to interview children or vulnerable adults and meticulously observed the relevant protocol relating to the secure storage and anonymisation of data. Transcription was undertaken personally or subcontracted to a professional transcription company used regularly by Cardiff University researchers. I personally double-checked every transcript and ensured accuracy by cross-referencing with the original recordings, spending many hours correcting mistakes and transliterating non-English words/phrases. In total my fieldwork (both participant observation and interviews) lasted in the region of 18 months, generating over 800,000 words of data as represented visually on the next page.

Leaving the field was an ambivalent experience. On the one hand a sense of closure was achieved whenever I returned home from a khuruj outing or began to attend my local mosque, rather than

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17 See Appendix B5 for my interview schedule and B6 for a list of quotations I would eclectically read out from.
Masjid Ta-Ha where I had conducted fieldwork. This was accompanied by a huge sense of relief at being able to attend the mosque as an ordinary worshipper, without my notepad and pen and the attendant cognitive edifice signified. On the other, as several of my respondents were prior acquaintances, I continued to meet them in the post-fieldwork phase occasionally discussing progress on the thesis. Similarly I stayed in touch, via text message and email, with other respondents from around the country informing them – as promised – when written outputs from my research were published (such as Timol 2015). During the write-up phase, I would occasionally elicit feedback on draft sections/chapters from key respondents and bumping into others allowed me to sometimes test nascent ideas/interpretations to gauge responses. Existentially, and as meticulously mapped in 3.1.3, because my own identity continues to converge in several important ways with that of my respondents, the question of ‘leaving the field’ necessarily remains ambiguous as the ongoing impact of my research implicates the way I am perceived within a broad (South Asian) British Muslim community of which I remain a member.
EXTENT & SCOPE OF DATA CAPTURE

Riyaz Timol—an Ethnography of the Tablighi Jama'at in Modern Britain (2013-2015)

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

A 42 day TJ road trip to Bulgaria
(Nov-Dec 2013: 126,464 words)

A 20 day Ramadan TJ outing to Bradford and Birmingham
(July 2014: 13,283 + 13,735 = 27,018 words)

7 weekend TJ trips
(October 2013-June 2014: 68,947 words)

Extended TJ outings

Miscellaneous activities, events and reflections
(42,572 words)

Daily participation in TJ activities in the local mosque context
(Dec 2013-May 2014: 64,265 words)

INTERVIEWS (59 in total)

25 Formal Interviews
- Recorded with signed consent forms
- Average length = 2h 16mins
- 474,846 words of transcription

34 Informal Interviews
- Jotted in field with verbal consent
- Average length = 10 mins each
- Word count incorporated into fieldnotes

WORD COUNT SUBTOTAL = 329,266
plus circa 400 photographs and 20 diagrams

WORD COUNT SUBTOTAL = 474,846

WORD COUNT GRAND TOTAL = 804,112
3.3.3 Data analysis

My analysis proceeded largely along inductive lines in which “researchers immerse themselves in the social worlds of their research subjects. Only when they have been in a setting for a long time do they begin to develop theories” (Esterberg 2002, p.34). This ‘grounded approach’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967) allowed each data collation and analysis exercise to iteratively feed into the refining of subsequent stages of the research strategy. As I began to reflect upon my data, I also started to identify appropriate currents of thoughts within the sociology of religion that would help me relate my own research concerns to wider debates within the discipline.

The sheer volume of my data meant that both transcription and analysis took considerably longer than initially envisaged. From the outset, I organised the collated data into a cohesive and manageable whole by uniquely indexing each piece and allowing space for comments to be added. Meticulously and repeatedly sifting through my transcripts and field notes also helped me to become intimate with the data. Early on in my fieldwork year I devised a provisional coding frame with which I conducted preliminary analysis on fresh data as it emerged but coding only commenced in earnest once I had cross-referenced and double-checked all transcripts and fieldnotes to ensure accuracy. To this end, after completing a full-day training course at Cardiff University, I utilised the data analysis software NVivo. I followed a progressive system of coding (moving from open to focussed coding) to identify broad categories, discern patterns and begin linking ostensibly disparate segments of data (Miles and Huberman 1984). The act of coding is itself analytically charged and presupposes a level of intellectual engagement with the data: “codes represent the decisive link between the original ‘raw data,’ that is, the textual material such as interview transcripts or fieldnotes, on the one hand and the researcher’s theoretical concepts on the other” (Seidel and Kelle 1995, p.52). According to Tesch, qualitative data analysis necessitates processes of both decontextualisation and recontextualisation (see Coffey and Atkinson 1996, pp.30-31). The former refers to a systematic disaggregation of data from the primary context in which it was generated (the interview or field setting) while the latter refers to a methodical re-aggregation into new “pools of meaning.”

A single holistic yet complex coding frame was thus developed consisting of 12 primary nodes in which both my interview transcripts and fieldnotes were integrated. Examples of primary nodes include ‘Religious commitment prior to TJ,’ ‘Life as a TJ Activist’ and ‘Methodological.’ Each of these was broken down into a total of 122 sub-nodes that further broke down into 86 sub-sub-nodes and 31 sub-sub-sub-nodes. The final level of analysis contained three sub-sub-sub-sub-nodes. All of my voluminous dataset was thus integrated, funnel-like, into a massive family of 254 nodes, organised
systematically and arranged thematically to slot into an ever-widening range of what Coffey and Atkinson (1996, pp.42-43) term “superordinate categories.” To illustrate, I present two screen-prints from NVivo which also demonstrate how many of my codes were constructed using indigenous terms (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p.32):

As these are ‘parent nodes,’ data has not been categorised under them directly but rather under the more specific ‘child nodes’ they encompass.
Coding inevitably leads to interpretation and sutures organically with the broader theoretical concerns of the researcher. Viewing the dataset in a completely restructured format, categorised under a series of thematic headings, allows fresh insights to be developed and the original research questions to be re-approached. Patterns and relationships between the coded categories were further discerned that led to the construction of typologies. Computerised searches of key words/phrases as well as querying the data by specifying attributes also helped hitherto unconsidered themes to surface. As well as patterns, anomalies and irregularities were also identified and analysed to test emergent concepts and theoretical coherence. Subsequent interpretations were then refined in line with the iterative-inductive method, and the overarching grounded theory approach ensured that specific concepts and generalised conclusions were always derived from and substantiated by the data.
3.4 Conclusion

If I utilise here, in advance, concepts elaborated in the next chapter, it could be asserted that the classical trajectory of anthropological enquiry sees an alien ethnographer enter the generative habitus of another people to comprehend and relay it through a ‘secondary socialisation’ into their lifeworld. During the course of this immersion, however, the ethnographer must take care not to ally his perspectives too closely with that of his participants’ or risk ‘going native.’ The ‘primary socialisation’ of the indigenous researcher, on the other hand, has already generated a habitus which converges with that of the people she wishes to study. This, as I have argued in this chapter, is not inherently problematic but requires the cultivation of an analytical apparatus which renders the familiar as strange so as to allow the ethnographer to critically engage with the taken-for-granted realities of the setting. Drawing upon a broad repertoire of indigenous ethnographic experiences, I also described how I strategically gained access to British TJ to generate a large dataset through the twin methods of participant observation and qualitative interviewing. While salient findings are presented throughout the remainder of this thesis, in the next chapter I first explicate the basic theoretical premises that undergird all remaining chapters and which, in accordance with the ‘grounded theory’ approach just described, emerged from a thorough engagement with my data.
Chapter 4
Laying the Theoretical Foundations

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The search for truth, the truth about people, about human nature, about society, has been at the foundation of social science from the start.

Vivien Burr (2003, p.6)

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Social scientific research is ultimately geared towards uncovering the layers of reality within which people live out their lives. As these layers of reality are multiply construed, both by researchers and their participants, it follows that any such quest is imbued with epistemological and philosophical undercurrents: “…debate about method within the social sciences is umbilically linked to issues of philosophy, science and the nature of knowledge and explanation: method and methodology cannot be separated” (Brewer 2000, p.4). Any attempt to understand a particular social setting will therefore be grounded in the deeper theoretical assumptions of the researcher. Accordingly, in this chapter, I outline my basic theoretical approach.

4.1 Broad Theoretical Considerations

4.1.1 Social constructionism and critical realism: the dialectic of objective and subjective realities

The relationship between structure and agency, or society and self, has been central to the history of sociological theory and may be tersely summarised in the differing approaches of Durkheim and Weber (and their later developments in, for example, the works of Talcott Parsons and Alfred Schutz respectively). While Durkheim may be classified as a proponent of ‘structural functionalism,’ who stressed the overwhelming power of social structure in determining individual behaviour, Weber advanced the contrary notion of Verstehen rooted in an empathic understanding of human subjectivity and agency. Structural functionalism derives its impulse from a Comtean positivism that seeks to comprehend the social world on the basis of methodological principles originating in the
natural sciences (note Durkheim’s famous description of sociology as “the science of social facts”), while Weber’s approach has legitimated an ‘interpretivist’ epistemological paradigm deemed more appropriate for the study of sentient beings who act on the basis of meanings arising in subjective consciousness. This has led to functionalist approaches allying naturally with quantitative research methods, while interpretivist approaches have tended to inform the toolkit of the qualitative researcher - as best exemplified, perhaps, by the emergence of ‘symbolic interactionism’ as the theoretical mainstay of the famous ‘Chicago School’s’ voluminous ethnographic output (Deegan 2001). Attempts at synthesis between Durkheimian and Weberian approaches have long animated the sociological imagination with notable attempts including Giddens’ ‘theory of structuration’ and Bourdieu’s ‘theory of fields’ (Swingewood 2000). In this thesis however, I principally draw upon Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) influential treatise in the sociology of knowledge – listed by the International Sociological Association in 1998 as the fifth most important sociological book of the 20th century1 – to theorise the differential impact of structure and agency in the lives of my respondents.2

In The Social Construction of Reality, Berger and Luckmann develop the insights of their shared teacher Alfred Schutz to sketch out a comprehensive meta-theory that synthesises the differing approaches of functionalism and interpretivism. Habits and routine, they assert, are key building blocks which lead to the construction of an externalised social world as reality is objectified through the process of institutionalisation. This world is legitimated primarily through the residual power of language, and its related cognitive apparatus, but also by the elaboration of sophisticated ‘symbolic universes’3 which serve to infuse ritualised social actions with meaning. Full objectification occurs as the institutions sediment into tradition through the reification of specialised roles whose conceptual meanings transcend the human subjects that produced them, giving the appearance of an autonomous, external social reality:

The institutions, as historical and objective facticities, confront the individual as undeniable facts. The institutions are there, external to him, persistent in their reality,
whether he likes it or not. He cannot wish them away. They resist his attempts to change or evade them. They have coercive power over him...[yet]...It is important to keep in mind that the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity...it does not...acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.78)

Children born into any such society are primarily socialised through the powerful emotionally charged mediation of ‘significant others’ (usually parents) who also transmit, often unwittingly as it is embedded into the dominant language of discourse, the attendant legitimating apparatus of the social order. Secondary socialisation occurs through the more anonymous mediation of less significant others (such as teachers, neighbours or extended family) and, when projected into adulthood, makes possible the acquisition of knowledge for specialised roles and professions. Children therefore imbibe and appropriate elements of an external social order which they take entirely for granted yet which, in reality, is nothing but the product of selected human interaction in a particular socio-cultural moment: “...socialisation thus accomplishes what (in hindsight, of course) may be seen as the most important confidence trick that society plays on the individual – to make appear as necessity what is in fact a bundle of contingencies, and thus to make meaningful the accident of his birth” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.155).

Berger and Luckmann’s analysis has significantly influenced the development of the theoretical paradigm known as social constructionism4 which, according to Burr (2003, pp.2-9), consists of several cardinal tenets. These include a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, anti-essentialism, recognition of the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge, an intertwining of knowledge with human interaction and the importance of language as a pre-condition for thought. Emerging from an interpretivist epistemology, social constructionism asserts that an inherently precarious reality is produced by human actors through social interaction imbued with constellations of semiotic meaning. Such an emphasis on subjectivity allowed social constructionism to be appropriated by emergent post-structural and postmodernist strands of thought (in particular, the controversial semiotic philosophies of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) – “discourses form the objects of which they speak” – and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) – “there is nothing outside of the text”) which

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4 This is to be distinguished from ‘social constructivism’ which both Berger and Luckmann have explicitly distanced themselves from (Berger 2011; Luckmann 2001).
led to a convoluted obsession with the role that language plays in constructing reality’s and catalysed the development of multiple strands of conflicting constructionist positions into a “realism-relativism debate” (Burr 2003, p.88). Relativist social constructionist thought is heavily shot through with postmodernist overtones and posits that neither is there any immutable human essence within which a basic identity can inhere, nor is there an external, objective realm of ontological reality immune to postmodernist deconstruction: “There are no essences inside things or people that make them what they are” (Burr 2003, p.5) / “The absence of an ultimate truth seems to be the foundation upon which the theoretical framework of social constructionism is built” (p.81). Realist social constructionist thought, on the other hand, limits the influence of language in constructing social reality and allows the existence of a material world independent of human consciousness. Unlike the position of naïve realists, however, who are grounded in a more positivistic epistemology which is basically incompatible with key social constructionist tenets, “Social constructionists who disagree with at least some of the assumptions of a relativist position are more likely to refer to themselves as ‘critical realists’” (Burr 2003, p.95).

Developed primarily by Roy Bhaskar (1944-2014; Margaret Archer and Andrew Sayer are important contributors too), critical realism inherits an amenable middle ground between an intransigent positivist empiricism and an anti-essentialist postmodernist relativism (Porter 2002; Rees and Gatenby 2014; Tsang and Kwan 1999). Bhaskar distinguishes between transitive and intransitive objects of knowledge, positing that the former constitutes the world of relative and constructed social reality in ways which ally with Berger and Luckmann’s treatment, while the latter, in contrast to the radical ontological relativism of postmodernism, refers to dimensions of reality which exist independently of and autonomously to human consciousness: “The tides would still turn and metals conduct electricity in the way that they do, without a Newton or a Drude to produce our knowledge of them” (Bhaskar 1998, p.17). ‘Generative mechanisms’ which are real and produce tangible social phenomenon yet themselves “are not directly accessible to observation and are discernible only

5 Ernest Gellner’s (1992) sustained and piquant excoriation of both the density of postmodernist prose and the cultural relativism intrinsic to its epistemology is striking here. See also McCutcheon (1999a, pp.8-10) and the relevant chapters of that volume.

6 Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.67) adhere to this view: “Humanness is socio-culturally variable. In other words there is no human nature in the sense of a biologically fixed substratum determining the variability of socio-cultural formations. There is only human nature in the sense of anthropological constants...” However, Berger (2001, p.191) takes particular objection to the way in which certain postmodernist thinkers later developed these insights: “They propose that all interpretations are equally valid, and some of them propose that there is no reality at all outside the interpretations. Their former proposition is an invitation to solipsism, with coteries of interpreters imprisoned in quasi-Leibnizian monads between which communication is impossible – a recipe for the self-liquidation of science and, beyond that and far more dangerously, for a politics of fanaticism. Their latter proposition fits the clinical description of schizophrenia, whereby the individual is incapable of distinguishing between the real world and his own fantasies...”
through their effects” (Bryman 2008, p.590) are the interfaces which mediate between physical and metaphysical dimensions of reality. Fleetwood (2005, p.198) suggests that a critical realist theoretical orientation offers “a more fruitful alternative to...postmodernism” because it “overcomes the ambiguity associated with postmodernism that stems from the ‘ontological exaggeration’ of the role of language in determining reality” (cited in Bryman 2008, p.590). While I share the now widespread critique of a thoroughgoing postmodernist relativism (Berger and Zijderveld 2009; Brewer 2000; Eagleton 1996; Gellner 1992), I nevertheless acknowledge, with Silverman (2010, p.108), that “it is possible to learn from the important insights of...postmodernism without drowning in a whirlpool of intellectual nihilism.” With these remarks, I am now in a position to outline the basic contours of my own theoretical position.

4.1.2 Outlining the contours of my theoretical position

Unlike the overarching assumptions of Comtean positivism, I recognise the fundamental differences which distinguish the human creature from other life forms (Tallis 2011) thus necessitating a distinct epistemological and methodological approach. Human societies are largely constructs in which meanings are produced and negotiated through the ongoing interaction of social actors and the interpretivist approach to deciphering these – Verstehen – is empathic and one with which I can align. I also acknowledge the profundity of the social constructionist model – particularly as exemplified in Berger and Luckmann (1966) – and recognise the power that human practices, once objectified and institutionalised, have to socialise others. Yet I cannot accept every tenet of a social constructionist philosophy, particularly those which posit the lack of a basic human essence or a primordial nature which encompasses the world of phenomena. In this respect, and in explicit contrast to the postmodernist position, I find myself aligning with Bernstein’s definition of objectivity:

...the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness. (cited in May 2011, p.8)

7 This tension – between form and essence or between socialisation and ‘human nature’ – was intimated 900 years ago by the celebrated Muslim theologian al-Ghazali in his spiritual autobiography: “...the fetters of servile conformism fell away from me, and inherited beliefs lost their hold on me, when I was still quite young. For I saw that the children of Christians always grew up embracing Christianity, and the children of Jews always grew up adhering to Judaism, and the children of Muslims always grew up following the religion of Islam. I also heard the tradition related from the Apostle of God – God’s blessing and peace be upon him! – in which he said: “Every infant is born endowed with the fitra then his parents make him Jew or Christian or Magian.” Consequently, I felt an inner urge to seek the true meaning of the original fitra, and the true meanings of the beliefs arising through slavish aping of parents and teachers. I wanted to sift out these uncritical beliefs, the beginnings of which are suggestions imposed from without, since there are differences of opinion in the discernment of those that are true from those that are false” (McCarthy 2000, pp.19-20).
While remaining located within the broad ambit of social constructionist thought, the critical realist position seems to provide a coherent balance between the mechanistic laws of positivism and an engulfing vortex of relativistic nihilism. Both Burr (2003, p.96) and Bryman (2008, p.19), drawing on key critical realist practitioners, identify the distinction between *epistemological relativism* and *ontological realism* as central to their approach. Wilkinson’s work emerges as especially germane here as he argues innovatively for a natural congruence between Islamic metaphysics and critical realism:

...both the vision of reality described by the Qur’an, its ontology, and the means described for coming to know that reality, its epistemology, map onto a critical realist world-view in a way that facilitates the productive use of the philosophy of critical realism as a rich interpretative tool. (Wilkinson 2013, p.439)

...the Qur’an presents a vision of reality that is consistent with the original critical realist disambiguation of a realist ontology from a relativist epistemology...Creating and created reality exists objectively for all, but they are apprehended and experienced relatively, differently and unequally through...complex, intersecting prisms of individuality... (pp.440-441)

It may well be then that my own faith as a Muslim finds me gravitating to the critical realist position as it allows me to maintain theoretical rigour without denying non-empirical dimensions of reality. Further, the perspective of critical realism seems to converge in several important ways with the original intent with which *The Social Construction of Reality* was written. Here, Horrell’s analysis of why this text became an important influence on those New Testament scholars seeking to anatomise the social mechanics of early Christianity is relevant:

Berger [and Luckmann offer] a way of approaching the New Testament – or any other religious phenomena, for that matter – sociologically, but without reducing the significance of the religious content to mere epiphenomena, products of social or material determinants...The universe of meaning, humanly produced, is never explained away or reduced to a socio-economic basis, even though it is acknowledged to be enmeshed in and influenced by its material context. (Horrell 2001, p.147)

Berger, endorsing Horrell, adds:

I was puzzled for some time by the fact that an Islamic publishing house in Indonesia put out one translation after another of my principal books in sociology and religion, until I visited Indonesia and had some conversations about this. I then discovered that
here were Muslim intellectuals who liked my approach (despite its Christian character) for precisely the reasons for which, according to Horrell, New Testament scholars like it (Berger 2001, p.197).

Translated into Bhaskarian terms, Berger and Luckmann’s treatment does not preclude the existence of ‘intransitive objects of knowledge’ even if the social scientist must necessarily maintain a judicious silence about their ontological reality given their empirical inaccessibility. Berger’s concept of “methodological atheism” (1967, p.100) is relevant here though, with Smart (Hufford 1999, p.304; McCutcheon 1999c, p.216) and Porpora (2006), I prefer the term methodological agnosticism. The reason for this is clear: while methodological atheism implies an uncompromising form of bracketing in which “the reality of any supernatural object of religious experience is forever debarred from consideration within sociology,” methodological agnosticism, by contrast, “remains open to a consideration of supernatural realities [although] it neither asserts nor precludes them” (Porpora 2006, p.58; see also the relevant chapters in McCutcheon 1999b, pp.215-286). This latter stance permits a scientifically rigorous enterprise that simultaneously takes the subjective faith experiences of respondents seriously in authentically Weberian fashion. It also allies naturally with the critical realist distinction between ontological realism and epistemological relativism made earlier. In much the same vein as my Indonesian Muslim forbears then, I too find this approach of Berger and Luckmann appealing and seek to deploy it in this thesis through a critical realist framework.

4.1.3 Between the sacred and the secular: the generative mechanisms of a critical realist ethnography

The emergence of critical realism as a viable theoretical undergirding of ethnographic practice is suggested by Brewer (2000, p.7) who, in his attempt to rescue ethnography “from those postmodern critics who deconstruct it to the point where it dissolves into air, leaving everyone uncertain as to the value of the data collected by it,” presents it as one among several “post-postmodern” possibilities. More recently Davies (2008, p.26) adopts an explicitly critical realist approach in her guide to conducting Reflexive Ethnography seeing it as a “philosophical foundation for doing ethnographic research which embraces its intrinsic multi-layered reflexivity without turning inward to a complete self-absorption...” Critical realism’s conceptualisation of the relationship between

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8 See also Saliba (1995, p.106): “Sociologists study religion as objectively and impartially as possible. They tend to put all religions on the same level. They are not interested in establishing which religion is true or false, or in defending any one particular religious tradition. Besides, they make no moral judgments about religious behavior.” While accepting the broad thrust of this value-free, essentially Weberian approach to social science, I nevertheless acknowledge – as Chapter 3 should have made clear – that the pursuit of unimpeachable objectivity remains a cherished yet impossible-to-achieve ideal for social scientists who are themselves human actors and therefore subject to emotional, psychological and social processes of personal formation. Reflexivity therefore becomes an integral and essential component of contemporary fieldwork.
structure and agency aligns with Berger and Luckmann’s (1966; see also Berger 1963, pp.148-149) in several important ways; for instance according to Davies:

Society exists independently of our conceptions of it, in its causal properties, its ability to exert deterministic force on individuals; yet it is dependent on our actions, human activity, for its reproduction and can be transformed by this activity. It is both real and transcendent. (Davies 2008, p.19)\(^9\)

A key feature of critical realism posits that society is possessed of *ontological depth* premised upon Bhaskar’s conceptual distinctions between the *real*, *actual* and *empirical*. The *real* refers to a usually imperceptible dimension of reality that exists entirely independent of human consciousness and includes structural causal powers that may lie dormant but, when activated, produce ‘events.’ The *actual* refers to the domain in which such ‘events’ are manifested in a contingent space and time while the *empirical* refers to those segments of the actual accessible to human experience (see Sayer 2000, pp.11-12). Such a stratified ontology that moves from the abstract to the concrete is in stark contrast to the suppositions of ‘empirical realism’ which posit that nothing exists outside of our perception. The critical realist perspective, by contrast, might be illustrated through the analogy of an unseen causal ‘womb’ giving birth to concrete social phenomena of which a portion is susceptible to the ethnographer’s gaze. Bhaskar’s concept of ‘generative mechanisms’ outlined earlier is particularly germane here and the role of the ethnographer in such a framework is to intuit on the basis of what is observed, documented and dissected in the field, the *real* causal mechanisms through which the *empirical* came to fruition through the *actual*: “According to this a plausible case for the existence of unobservable entities can be made by reference to observable effects which can only be explained as the products of such entities” (Sayer 2000, p.12). Put differently, the empirically accessible manifestations of human agency can be traced back aetiologically to the empirically inaccessible causal mechanisms of social structure (with the stance of methodological agnosticism outlined earlier precluding any judgments about the existence or otherwise of unobservable entities that might inhabit a real supernatural domain).

According to Davies (2008, p.23), while much social scientific research is conducted – in practice – with a tacit, even unconscious, endorsement of such critical realist suppositions, it is rarely deployed as an explicit theoretical paradigm. While Brewer (2000, p.25) also cites Willis’ study of working-class children in a Birmingham school, it is usually Porter’s (1993) small-scale study of the relationship between white nurses and ethnic minority doctors in an Irish hospital that is showcased.

\(^9\) Nevertheless Bhaskar (1979) did spell out differences between his approach and that of Berger and Luckmann (also see Porter 1993, p.595), though I would maintain that for the purpose of this thesis these are inconsequential.
as an example of critical realist ethnography (Brewer 2000, p.51; Bryman 2008, p.591; Davies 2008, pp.23-24). Porter identifies the two ‘generative mechanisms’ of racism and professionalism as existing in an uneasy dialectic to produce the social phenomena he empirically observes. While the formal interaction between nurses and doctors is governed by the conventions of professional protocol, with the white nurses usually deferring to the greater authority of the ethnic minority doctors, racism often finds expression ‘offstage’ (Goffman 1990 [1959]) in private conversations among the nurses. The fact that racism is therefore “a tendency that is realised in certain circumstances, but exercised unrealised in others” (Porter 1993) indicates that its latent potential is mitigated by the conflicting structural force of professionalism that becomes dominant in the context of face-to-face interaction between doctors and nurses. The moderating impact of professionalism is further demonstrated by the way ethnic minority doctors sometimes overtly displayed their superior knowledge and qualifications to emphasise their credibility. The hazy and imprecise boundary between the generative mechanisms is demonstrated by the following incident captured in Porter’s fieldnotes:

**Transcript 7**

A staff nurse opens the door to enter a clinical room where she discovers a Palestinian doctor at prayer. After mumbling polite apologies, she retreats from the room. However, almost immediately the following interaction occurs.

*Staff Nurse*: That bloody Arab is praying again in the treatment room. How am I supposed to get my work done?

*Domestic Assistant*: Huh, if he wants to go down on his hands and knees every ten minutes, you’d think he’d stay in his own country and do it.

*Staff Nurse*: Arabs.

She moves off shaking her head. (Porter 1993, p.602)

Later, during a discussion “bewailing the infiltration of non-Christian religions, the nurse...explained her behaviour” as follows:

**Transcript 9**

*Staff Nurse 1*: Why didn’t you say something to him about it?

*Staff Nurse 2*: Well, it wouldn’t be proper. It would be a bit unprofessional...
Staff Nurse 1: It’s not exactly professional to get down on your knees in the middle of the clinical room...

Staff Nurse 2: Yea, but you couldn’t just say ‘Listen you, you’re not in Arab land now’. I suppose I could have told him that clinical areas have to be open to staff at all times. 
(Porter 1993, p.605)

The nurse’s final comment is notable for the way in which she switches to a ‘relevance structure’ of professionalism to legitimise her discontent illustrating the fluid interaction of the social phenomena produced by Porter’s generative mechanisms. Given that in a critical realist ethnography, "Scientific explanation consists in finding or imagining plausible generative mechanisms for the patterns amongst events” (Harré, cited in Tsang and Kwan 1999, p.762), I would like here to propose two alternative ‘generative mechanisms’ for my study of TJ in Britain: those of secularity and spirituality. In doing so, I draw upon perhaps the oldest conceptual dichotomy in the sociology of religion alternatively articulated as logos and mythos, reason and revelation (the reconciliation of which was a particular preoccupation of medieval Scholastics), sacred and profane, science and religion or this-worldly and other-worldly approaches to reality. While this set of polarities may appear deceptively simple, even platitudeinous, it has emerged from a rigorous theoretical interrogation of my dataset - though, in 11.1, I demonstrate how the blunt dichotomy implicated here actually collapses into an interpenetration of both secular and religious frames of reference.

To elaborate, by secularity I am referring to what Charles Taylor (2007) has recently termed ‘the immanent frame’ or, alternatively, what Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), one of the founders of international law, expressed when he proposed that this law should be formulated “etsi Deus non daretur...‘as if God did not exist’” (Berger 2014, p.52). Berger elaborates:

Modernity has indeed produced a secular discourse, which enables people to deal with many areas of life without reference to any religious definitions of reality...While, as far as I know, he did not have such a broad application in mind, Grotius’ principle can also be applied beyond the institution of law to the state as such and to entire sectors of society now dominated by the secular discourse... (Berger 2014, pp.51-53)

In his brilliant analysis of Postmodernism, Reason and Religion, Gellner (1992, p.84) also traces the gradual emergence, in European philosophical history, of a trans-historical and culture-transcending...
form of knowledge, referred to as “the Kantian or Enlightenment ethic of cognition,” that today forms the substratum of a global transformation in human modes of living:

Sketched out at first in the course of the Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth century, and worked out in detail in the eighteenth, the position which might be called Enlightenment Secular Fundamentalism has become the unwritten, but widely recognized code of cognitive conduct of many, though not all, scholars of scientific-industrial civilization. (p. 76)

We happen to live in a world in which one style of knowledge, though born of one culture, is being adapted by all of them, with enormous speed and eagerness, and is disrupting many of them, and is totally transforming the milieu in which men [sic] live. (p. 78)

Implicated here also is the rational-bureaucratic ethic advanced by Weber as a key feature of modernising societies (Morrison 1995) allied with the relegation of religion to a functionally differentiated private sphere of activity (Casanova 1994). Given that, according to the sociology of knowledge, every social reality has its correlate in human consciousness, Grotius’ dictum might be rephrased at the subjective level in terms of Nietzsche’s (1974 [1882], p.181) famous declaration: “God is dead…And we have killed him.” That this secular ethic is often taken-for-granted in modern European societies (see Woodhead 2016, pp. 258-259) and internalised in consciousness (interestingly, as I argue in Chapter 11, through the same set of social mechanisms that in another time would have consolidated the plausibility of religious constellations of meaning) is manifested, in Porter’s transcript, by the instinctive repugnance expressed by the nurse at the irruption of the sacred in what she intuitively perceived to be the religiously neutral public sphere of the workplace.\footnote{The extent to which her objection was to religion per se rather than to the foreignness associated with Islam could be tested by observing her reaction to, say, a Christian rite of worship performed in the workplace by an ethnically indigenous Irishman. It is worth recalling though that Porter classified her behaviour as arising from the generative mechanism of ‘racism.’} By contrast, the doctor’s prayer is a good example of an empirically accessible social phenomenon arising from the ‘generative mechanism’ of spirituality. By this term I intend an umbrella usage that encompasses all those dimensions of reality that are explicitly premised upon transcendent, metaphysical or religious frames of reference which, for the purposes of this thesis, will be mediated primarily through the religion of Islam and TJ praxis. While, as already stated, the objective of a critical realist ethnography (or social scientific research in general) is not to adjudicate the ultimate veracity of such beliefs, the subjective perception of such supernatural dimensions of existence in respondent consciousness can produce particular configurations of social phenomena.
that are susceptible to empirical investigation by the ethnographer; it is these I seek to capture. For instance, as I elaborate in Chapter 11, the presence of a hijab or a beard on a Muslim face – though they might well be the result of religious socialisation – nevertheless arise from transcendent apprehensions of reality. The generative mechanism of spirituality thus impacts the world of empirical phenomena in ways that are amenable to sociological analysis. The dichotomous nature of my generative mechanisms further indicates how they might mitigate and moderate each other, manifesting themselves in certain situations while remaining dormant in others. In sum, by adopting a critical realist approach to my study of British TJ and identifying the generative mechanisms of secularity and spirituality, I hope to elucidate the underlying causal structures that influence respondent agency:

A critical realist ethnography would aim not only to describe events but also to explain them, by identifying the influence of structural factors on human agency. Specifically, its objective would be to elucidate the specific, contingent manner in which a certain mix of causal powers has been formed and activated. (Rees and Gatenby 2014, pp.137-138)

The above discussion has been largely abstract: how exactly is Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge or the generative mechanisms of spirituality and secularity to be related to my study of TJ in Britain? In the remainder of this chapter, I begin to operationalise several key theoretical concepts. Section 4.2 applies Berger and Luckmann’s mechanics of socialisation to the generic situation of Muslims in Britain performing critical groundwork for the concept of ‘intra-religious conversion’ developed in Chapters 8-10. The generative mechanisms of spirituality and secularity, while discernible in the processes of ‘desocialisation’ and ‘resocialisation’ described in those chapters, are explicitly picked up again in Chapter 11. In 4.3, I sketch the social processes through which TJ was objectivated in space and time based on a reading of several historical sources. Taken together then, this chapter develops a theoretical infrastructure that permeates the remainder of this thesis.
4.2 Processes of Primary and Secondary Socialisation

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“The janissaries were always taken in childhood. It would have been far more difficult to devote themselves to their adopted empire, you see, if they had memories they could not forget.”

Mohsin Hamid (2007, p.172)\textsuperscript{12}

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4.2.1 Primary socialisation and Muslim nurture

Data generated from the 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey (HOCS) indicates that rates of religious transmission are higher among Muslims than any other UK religious group. Analysis of data collected across three generations (parents’ religious upbringing, parents’ current level of religious practice, children’s identification with a religion) demonstrates that rates of intergenerational religious attrition are highest amongst Christians, 38.3% of whom no longer identify with their ancestral religion by the third-generation. By contrast, 97.7% of third-generation Muslims continue to identify with Islam as do 88.9% of other UK religions’ third-generation. A detailed exploration of why and how this should be the case was undertaken by Scourfield et al. (2013) who conducted a qualitative study of 60 Muslim families with primary school age children (interviews conducted with 99 parents and 120 children) in Cardiff, UK. Though my own interview sample is based largely in the North West of England, I would contend that many of the mechanics through which successful Muslim intergenerational religious transmission occurs are widespread throughout UK Muslim communities. This is reinforced by a regional analysis of the HOCS data which found that “...religious transmission amongst Muslims was more likely if they lived in the West Midlands (92%) and the North West (90%)” (Scourfield et al. 2013, p.40) than elsewhere indicating that, with some caveats based on an awareness of local conditions, the findings of the Cardiff study can cautiously be generalised. In any case, it is useful for me to examine the findings of this qualitative study as part of my broader effort to construct a theoretical framework which seeks to explain why some Muslims may return back to the practice of their religion later on in life through the vehicle of TJ.

\textsuperscript{12} Unlike, for example, the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens’ classic The Christmas Carol, I would argue that the biographical tale of Changez – the Pakistani-American soliloquists of Mohsin Hamid’s brilliantly ambivalent novel The Reluctant Fundamentalist – categorically cannot be classified as an ‘intra-religious conversion’ experience in the sense used in this thesis. Rather, religion was conspicuous by its absence in his experience - other than as an understated facet of his ethnic heritage. Nevertheless, his story unfolds along a trajectory in which the explanatory power of the concepts of primary and secondary socialisation elaborated in this chapter can clearly be discerned.
Before I do that, I want to first examine how systems of meaning, self-conceptions of identity and modes of behaviour are internalised by children through ‘primary socialisation.’ In their influential treatise on the sociology of knowledge, Berger and Luckmann (1966) postulate a triangular dialectic in which human social experience is mediated with reference to three distinct processes. First, meanings are continually produced and externalised through a perpetual motor of inescapable human activity. Secondly, they are objectivated as they sediment into institutions and traditions which reify over time into entities sui generis – constellations of monolithic meaning that impose themselves upon groups of human actors; though, crucially, they remain dependent upon those same human actors for their ongoing production. Lastly, they are internalised through ongoing processes of socialisation in which the now taken-for-granted suppositions of the culture in question penetrate the subjective consciousness of new generations of children or newcomers to the social order who, in the case of thoroughly socialised individuals, can imagine no other way of being. This tripartite conceptualisation has its roots in the origins of sociology as such and attempts a synthesis between classical Durkheimian notions of the objective facticity of society and Weber’s contrary emphasis on Verstehen (Morrison 1995). Though the above theoretical system was developed in reference to a generic sociology of knowledge, Berger later applied it specifically to the phenomenon of religion, transforming the ‘symbolic universe’ advanced in his work with Luckmann into The Sacred Canopy (Berger 1967).

For the purposes of this section I will limit my focus to the third process above, namely that of internalisation through socialisation into a given Weltanschauung – though I return to the other moments subsequently. Definitions will be useful here. By socialisation, I refer to “...the comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or a sector of it. Primary socialization is the first socialization an individual undergoes in childhood, through which he becomes a member of society. Secondary socialization is any subsequent process that inducts an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.150). I accept the basic contours of each of these definitions and seek to operationalise them in this section with reference to the generic situation of Muslims in Britain.

Primary socialisation is the key process through which a child attains a self-conception of identity and learns to behave in the world. It massively and decisively determines the development of subjective consciousness since it is administered through the highly charged emotional mediation of ‘significant others’ – usually parents, or other caregivers, who normally and necessarily develop
powerful bonds of intimacy with the growing child. In the crucial and formative early years, the child progressively appropriates into the domain of interior consciousness the sedimented traditions and configurations of meanings taken-for-granted by those closest to it. As such it steadily begins to reproduce the values it imbibes. There is a sense of haphazardness here (the child would think and behave differently had it been raised by significantly different others) as also inevitability:

Every individual is born into an objective social structure within which he encounters the significant others who are in charge of his socialization. These significant others are imposed upon him. Their definitions of his situation are posited for him as objective reality...

Since the child has no choice in the selection of his significant others, his identification with them is quasi-automatic. For the same reason, his internalization of their particular reality is quasi-inevitable. The child does not internalize the world of his significant others as one of many possible worlds. He internalizes it as the world, the only existent and only conceivable world, the world tout court. It is for this reason that the world internalized in primary socialization is so much more firmly entrenched in consciousness than worlds internalized in secondary socializations. However much the original sense of inevitability may be weakened in subsequent disenchantments, the recollection of a never-to-be-repeated certainty – the certainty of the first dawn of reality – still adheres to the first world of childhood. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.151, pp.154-155)

It is for this reason that religious identities firmly transmitted to children by significant others during this formative period have a high probability of persisting throughout the individual’s life. I return here to Scourfield et al’s study of Muslim nurture in Cardiff. They identify four key mechanisms through which religious identity is appropriated by Muslim children in modern Britain. First, cognitive transmission – based on Whitehouse’s (2004) doctrinal mode of religiosity – appertains particularly to the ritualistic nature of mainstream Sunni Islamic praxis (the five daily prayers or frequent recitations of prophetic litanies being two examples). Second, embodiment and habitus – rooted in the differing conceptions of Bourdieu and Mahmood (who, unlike Bourdieu, hearkens back to an earlier conceptualisation of habitus as ethical cultivation based on Aristotle) – refers to the

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13 Berger and Luckmann’s theoretical system relies here on the work of George Herbert Mead ([1935] 2015) from whom they derive their concepts of primary and secondary socialisation as well as significant and generalised others. Mead, it will be noted, was the principal formulator of ‘symbolic interactionism’ which has functioned as the theoretical mainstay of ethnographic practice at the influential Chicago School for much of the twentieth century. Other influences on Berger and Luckmann include Piaget, Cooley and Freud.
way inward dispositions are nurtured through a range of micro-level socialisations including childhood religious ceremonies, parental choices relating to naming and dress or the display of material religion in the fabric of the home. Third, minority defence refers to the conflation of religious and ethnic minority identities vis-à-vis a majority culture that is sometimes perceived as hostile or discriminatory (whether due to racism or Islamophobia). Lastly, religious organisations and congregations play a key role in providing a broader network of social confirmation for core ethno-religious values imbibed in the home. In practice, these four mechanisms overlap in the child’s lived experience to produce a deeply rooted religious (and ethnic cultural) identity:

(Scourfield et al. 2013, p.205)

Successful socialisation could be said to occur when the child perceives as essential to its own subjective identity those core values which constitute the meaning-system of the group in which it was raised: “He now has not only an identity vis-à-vis this or that significant other, but an identity in general, which is subjectively apprehended as remaining the same no matter what others, significant or not, are encountered” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.153). This latter point is important as it introduces the idea that primary socialisation is not conclusive and the individual, as he progresses through life, will become attached to new significant others and encounter a range of alternate meaning-systems that may well contradict or undermine the substantive content internalised in that admittedly powerful and nostalgic “first dawn of reality.”

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14 It is worth pointing out here, in passing, that the radical ‘New Atheism’ of recent years considers any form of pre-pubescent religious instruction to be child abuse. For instance: “How could any decent person think it right to label four-year-old children with the cosmic and theological opinions of their parents?...Our society, including the non-religious sector, has accepted the preposterous idea that it is normal and right to
4.2.2 Secondary socialisation and the contemporary British collective conscience

In relatively simple, pre-modern societies (the tribe or village - akin to Durkheim’s concept of ‘mechanical solidarity’ or Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft*) it can be surmised that a basic correspondence existed between the core content of the values internalised during primary socialisation and those of the necessarily limited wider society. The more complex, differentiated scenario of advanced or post-industrial societies (akin to Durkheim’s notion of ‘organic solidarity,’ or Tönnies’ *Gesellschaft*) is different (Beckford 1989; Hall and Gieben 1992). From the outset, globalisation reaches into individual homes and collaborates with parents to inject into local meaning-systems the values of a ‘McWorld culture’ disseminated through the mass media of television and the internet (Barber 2011 [1995]; Berger 1997). The child, as she progresses through adolescence, is increasingly exposed to new social worlds outside the home. Peer groups congregate around shared constellations of meaning which may well fly in the face of parental expectations (“Don’t worry mum, we’re revising!” texts Jenny as her friend shoots heroin into her arm). The Durkheimian (1984 [1933]) division of labour integral to modern societies sets up multiple arenas of activity each of which requires specialised knowledge and training. Getting a new job thus demands successful socialisation into a new world with its attendant uniform, protocol and lingo. Over the course of a lifetime, an individual may thus be re-socialised numerous times – yet each of these experiences of secondary socialisation build upon, rather than displace or obviate, the foundational experience of primary socialisation: “The ‘sub-worlds’ internalized in secondary socialization are generally partial realities in contrast to the ‘base-world’ acquired in primary socialization’ (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.158). Put differently, a range of software packages can be downloaded onto the hardware machinery of a single computer.

While the sub-worlds of office, college and heroin den may differ qualitatively in nature, each operates within the parameters of a ‘symbolic universe’ – defined as “…bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality…” or “…the matrix of all socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings…” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.113, p.114) – which supplies the materials for a broad social indoctrinate tiny children in the religion of their parents...” (Dawkins 2006, pp.380-381). Or: "The obsession with children, and with rigid control over their upbringing, has been part of every system of absolute authority...If religious instruction were not allowed until the child had attained the age of reason, we would be living in a quite different world" (Hitchens 2007, p.376). These excerpts seem to miss the point that socialisation cannot take place in a vacuum but is necessarily freighted with the cultural and cognitive assumptions of the significant others. After all, would Dawkins and Hitchens themselves very carefully resist the temptation of extolling the virtues of atheism to their own pre-pubescent children or indulging in their usually caustic denigrations of religion within their young and impressionable earshot?
consensus in relation to their activities. In its most basic function as a nomic legitimation of diverse human activity, the symbolic universe supplies the reservoir of meanings by which a promotion is celebrated, a flunked exam rued and an addict decried as a reckless reprobate. Durkheim’s concept of the ‘collective conscience’ is relevant here. Defined as “...a body of beliefs, practices and collective sentiments which are...diffused throughout the society, define social purposes, give meaning to action and generally structure the pattern of social life” (Morrison 1995, p.131), Durkheim characterises the collective conscience as a homogenising force that provides the basic animus of a society through four interrelated elements. First, the volume of the collective conscience refers to its pervasiveness and its ability to envelop individual members. Second, its intensity refers to its ability to penetrate individual consciousness shaping thought and behaviour. Third, its determinateness refers to its firmness and durability measured by its ability to absorb transgressions or incipient rumblings of change. Lastly, its content can be either religious or secular, the former deriving its authority from ecclesiastical authorities or scripture and the latter from political, economic or scientific social apparatus sanctioned through a restitutive system of law (see Morrison 1995, pp.131-133). In societies of ‘mechanical solidarity,’ the collective conscience was strong, pervasive and religious in character functioning as the ‘social glue’ that bound people together. In modern societies of ‘organic solidarity,’ however, “The collective conscience becomes a diffuse, abstract ‘cult of the individual’ that, as a civil religion, supplies ultimate principles and justifications but cannot bear the whole weight of social cohesion” (Scott 2014, p.95). The reference to civil religion is apposite:

...in advanced industrial societies, which are increasingly secular in terms of institutional religions, civic [sic] religions (such as the celebration of the state or civil society) now serve the same functions of prescribing the overall values of society, providing social cohesion, and facilitating emotional expression. In other words, civil religions offer a ‘functional equivalent’ or ‘functional alternative’ to institutional religions, since they meet the same needs within the social system. (Scott 2014, p.78)

The social conditions of contemporary Britain clearly reflect such a differentiated, ‘weak’ collective conscience which, in practice, exhibits features of a civil religion particularly when juxtaposed to the decline of traditionally strong religious and national identities. With reference to religion, the cumulative impact of industrialisation and secularisation in weakening the historically Christian fabric of the nation have been well-documented (Brown and Woodhead 2016; Brown 2001; Bruce

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15 I acknowledge that the same concept is referred to as the ‘conscience collective’ and ‘collective consciousness’ also. Bohannan (1979) explores the convergences between Durkheim’s concept and that of ‘culture’ as used in the lexicon of the social and cultural anthropologist.
2002, 2003, 2011; McLeod 2000, 2007). According to Dobbelaere (1999, 2009), secularisation operates simultaneously on three levels – the societal or macro-level, the organisational or meso-level and the individual or micro-level – to respectively diminish the significance of religion socially, institutionally and within the realm of individual consciousness. While Anglicanism remains England’s official state religion, core processes of secularisation relating to structural and functional differentiation (the emergence of such domains as education, healthcare, the polity, welfare or law from the aegis of ecclesiastical control) have situated expressions of belief firmly within the locale of the private (Casanova 1994, pp.40-66; Wilson 1969, 1982, 1985). For Brown, the 1960s was the definitive decade in which religious observance saw a precipitous decline in Britain:

For over a thousand years, Christianity penetrated deeply into the lives of the [British] people, enduring Reformation, Enlightenment and the industrial revolution...Then, really quite suddenly in 1963, something very profound ruptured the character of the nation and its people, sending organised Christianity on a downward spiral to the margins of social significance. In unprecedented numbers, the British people since the 1960s have stopped going to church, have allowed their church membership to lapse, have stopped marrying in church and have neglected to baptise their children...Since then, a formerly religious people have entirely forsaken organised Christianity in a sudden plunge into a truly secular condition. (Brown 2001, p.1)

His general assessment is supported by a Church of England report (Collins-Mayo et al. 2010) into the faith of under-30s in Britain – ‘Generation Y’ – which revealed that “only one in two believes in God (lower than the national average), that levels of religious observance are very low, and that the overwhelming feeling is one of disinterest and disengagement” (Spencer 2010). More significantly, recent survey data indicates that those self-identifying as “nones” now outnumber self-professing Christians for the first time in British history (Woodhead 2016). While Grace Davie’s (1994, 2000, 2007) studies of religion in both Britain and Europe have popularised the terms ‘believing without belonging’ and ‘vicarious religion’ to mitigate prior unilinear conceptions of the secularisation process, her latest publication continues to demonstrate an unremitting decline in statistical indices of religious observance (Davie 2015, pp.41-67). Similarly, Voas’ (2009) analysis of survey data relating to 21 European countries led him to conclude that religion in this sector of the globe inspires only a “fuzzy fidelity” which singularly fails to arouse sufficient fervour to warrant the investment of significant mental, emotional or physical energy.

Yet it would be inaccurate to describe contemporary Britain as straightforwardly secular. Heelas and Woodhead’s (2005) study of religiosity in a typical English town without an immigrant faith
community – Kendal, only 43 miles from Masjid Ta-Ha my primary field-site in Preston (see Appendix C1) – found shifting modes of ‘spiritual’ expression. While traditional church life – described as ‘life-as’ religion deriving its impetus from a transcendent, external authority imposing itself upon the self – remains influential among a minority of the town’s population, alternative forms of experimental spirituality – termed ‘subjective-life’ forms hinging on an immanent sense of authority located in the self – have simultaneously begun to proliferate; a shift reflected in changing ‘associational territories’ from the traditional ‘congregational domain’ to an emergent ‘holistic milieu.’ While the claim of a ‘spiritual revolution’ advanced by the authors has been challenged (Bruce 2011, pp.107-111; Warner 2010, pp.97-100), the study seems to support the premise that the religious impulse when refracted through the prism of modernity, rather than atrophying under the pressure of a cold, scientific rationality, instead finds itself reincarnated in a host of novel and often unexpected forms (see also Ammerman 2007 and McGuire 2008). This assertion finds further support in Woodhead’s (2016) probing examination of the new cultural majority that self-identifies as ‘no religion’ in surveys. Rather than the “phalanx of doughty secularists which some versions of secularisation theory expected” (p.250), she instead finds, through the twin impacts of pluralism and liberalism she claims the churches have decisively failed to keep abreast of, a somnambulant drift into indifference:

> It’s not that religion or spirituality per se have become objectionable to ‘modern man’, as some older secularisation theorists and ‘enlightenment atheists’ liked to think, but that the particular kinds of religion on offer in late modern Britain have not offered the social, spiritual and moral goods which younger people affirm and desire. (Woodhead 2016, p.258)

Narratives of national identity are similarly in a state of flux and decline, with the strong pride of an imperial past giving way to more nebulous and fragmented notions of Britishness (Clarke 2004 [1996]; Evans 2011; Fox 2004; Paxman 2007 [1999]). An Ipsos MORI (2007, p.4) survey on British identity based on mixed-methods fieldwork with 16-21 year olds around the UK found “a fundamental lack of emotional resonance amongst young people with the concept of Britishness...For many young people Britain represents an old, hierarchical, traditional, political discourse that does not fit with the fresh, inventive, messy and often chaotic world of a teenager.” Globalisation, immigration and the increasing ‘technologisation’ of culture all play key roles here. In a book examining the intersection of market capitalism with British social and cultural heritage, Robins observes:
Older certainties and hierarchies of British identity have been called into question in a world of dissolving boundaries and disrupted continuities. In a country that is now a container of African and Asian cultures, the sense of what it is to be British can never again have the same confidence and surety. Other sources of identity are no less fragile...Is not the very category of identity itself problematical? Is it at all possible, in global times, to regain a coherent and integral sense of identity? Continuity and historicity of identity are challenged by the immediacy and intensity of global cultural confrontations. The comforts of Tradition are fundamentally challenged by the imperative to forge a new self-interpretation... (Robins 1991, p.40)

This “imperative to forge a new self-interpretation” indicates a key shift towards individualisation in modern societies, in which a “wider cultural ‘turn to the self’” combines with a consumerist “culture of choice” (Woodhead and Heelas 2000, p.345) to produce, in José Casanova’s (1994, p.53) terms, “the cult of the individual [which] has indeed become, as foreseen by Durkheim, the religion of modernity.”

The above attempt to adumbrate some of the contours of a contemporary British collective conscience is important as it represents the broader social milieu into which Scourfield et al’s Muslim child, having experienced a stronger-than-average programme of cultural and religious nurture, will progressively emerge. In essence, the individual’s experiences of both primary and secondary socialisation unavoidably take place within this broader social framework which to a lesser or greater extent influences them – particularly if, as a third-generation Muslim child, her parents were also born and raised in Britain. Yet it is important to point out here a decisive difference between the ‘softer’ experience of later secondary socialisation and the crucial experience of early primary socialisation; namely that of the affective intensity of the bonds which tie the child to her socialising personnel. In other words, the agent of socialisation in the former case is a ‘generalised other,’ an institutional functionary whose relationship with the subject of socialisation – unlike the highly charged emotional intensity of the ‘significant others’ – is relatively anonymous, formal and replaceable. Put simply, the baby latches onto her mother’s breast imbibing love – and, in time, a constellation of meanings – as well as milk.16 The teacher, on the other hand, offers a comparatively bland emotional experience delivered with less or more enthusiasm. For this reason, the effective internalisation of meanings during secondary socialisation are generally facilitated through either finely honed pedagogical techniques or a set of (artificial) stimuli designed to create commitment, even passion, within the individual (Berger and Luckmann 1966, pp.161-165).

16 Of course, this refers to an ‘ordinary,’ healthy situation. Cases in which the child is abused or neglected, while interesting sociologically, cannot be pursued here.
Despite this, systems of meaning administered during secondary socialisation have far less emotional resonance than those internalised during primary socialisation. As a result, “…the reality accent of knowledge internalized in secondary socialization is more easily bracketed (that is, the subjective sense that these internalizations are real is more fugitive).” Put differently, “The child lives willy-nilly in the world as defined by his parents, but he can cheerfully leave the world of arithmetic behind him as soon as he leaves the classroom” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.162).

In practice, this functions through a conceptual bifurcation of self in the realm of consciousness. The British-born Muslim, as she progresses through school, college, university or work, is able to differentiate between her “total self” – that is her self-as-such – and her “role-specific partial self,” that is her self-as-assumed (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.162). The former has already crystallised in consciousness as a result of the comparatively intense ethno-religious socialisation she experienced during childhood while the latter represents a panoply of less intense possibilities usually, but not always, premised on knowledge-specific roles. Our British-born Muslim may thus progress from being a British Pakistani university student to becoming a British Pakistani doctor to eventually deciding to become a British Pakistani homemaker after having children. Yet none of these secondary roles (of student, doctor or homemaker) necessitates a repealing of her primary identity as British Pakistani Muslim. As homemaker, of course, she will now become a central agent, a significant other, in the primary socialisation of her own children and the meaning-systems they internalise will be mediated by her own experiences of both primary and secondary socialisation. The wider collective conscience of British society continues to inform all of these experiences as a kind of background chorus across the various sub-worlds and generations yet, in line with the key principles of Berger and Luckmann’s tripartite paradigm, it remains simultaneously and continually produced by human activity in toto. In situations in which the collective conscience is weak though – such as Durkheim’s society of organic solidarity or, more recently, Bauman’s (2012 [2000]) society of Liquid Modernity – its homogenising capacity is diminished as pockets of counter-cultural meaning are able to establish themselves and fulfil the basic, essential function of

17 George Herbert Mead’s distinction between ‘I’ and ‘Me’ is relevant here (Davies 2008, pp.24-26; Swingewood 2000, pp.59-60).
18 This primary identification as Muslim is based upon a state of recent research which finds an explicitly religious identity supplanted by ethnic or national affinities particularly in younger, British-born Muslim self-consciousness; see, for example, (Abbas 2005; Field 2011; Lewis 2007; Mondal 2008). Scourfield et al. (2013) invoke Herberg’s (1955) ‘third generation migrant thesis’ to explain similar findings in their study. Of course, self-identification as Muslim will be accompanied by a range of differing practices. So our British Pakistani doctor may or may not don the hijab, pray regularly or fast in Ramadan, yet still consider her primary identity to be Muslim.
19 “What was some time ago dubbed…‘post-modernity’, and what I’ve chosen to call, more to the point, ‘liquid modernity’, is the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty” (Bauman 2012 [2000], p.viii)
anomalistic primary socialisation with relative ease. In this regard, the Ipsos MORI (2007, p.7) survey cited earlier notes that “...it is this fuzzy quality of Britishness that has so far allowed it to encompass the national and ethnic identities by default rather than design.” Consequently – and this is the essential point here – the meanings internalised during later secondary socialisation, lacking a compelling emotional context and being obliged to graft themselves upon an already extant primary conception of self, are “…less deeply rooted in consciousness and thus more susceptible to displacement” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.167). Put more explicitly, “It takes severe biographical shocks to disintegrate the massive reality internalized in early childhood; much less to destroy the realities internalized later” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.162) – points of crucial importance when considering the processes of ‘desocialisation’ and ‘resocialisation’ explicated in Chapters 8-10.

This, of course, is not the entire picture. The lived experiences of British Muslim communities are intrinsically heterogeneous and it is likely that a range of possibilities will coalesce to determine individual biographies. For instance, it is quite possible that many British-born Muslims’ experiences of primary socialisation have been predominantly secular; they therefore lack a firm religious identity from the outset and find that their meaning-systems correspond comfortably with the broader social ambience in which their secondary socialisations occur. There is also some evidence to indicate that those whose experience of religious socialisation in childhood is negative, painful or abusive end up leaving the faith (Cottee 2015; Hirsi Ali 2008; Pauha and Aghaee 2013). Emotional attachments can be cultivated with new significant others later in life who may administer very different meaning-systems through regular and intimate contact (an atheist boyfriend, say). The opinions held by a large number of generalised others with whom one has regular social interaction may over time percolate into consciousness, displacing the content deposited by a single significant other decades ago (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.171). Should our British Pakistani doctor embark upon a career change once her children reach school-going age and train as a molecular biologist, it is quite possible that her specialist knowledge of evolution may precipitate an emotional and cognitive crisis as she reconsiders the content of the religious dogma internalised in her youth (see Shaha 2014 for an account of this kind). All of this implies, as Berger (1980) cogently argues, that a key motif of modernity is *The Heretical Imperative*. In other words, the massive disintegration of monolithic meaning systems into a plurality of conflicting alternatives forces us to choose: “Indeed, one crisp description of modernisation is that it is a huge shift from destiny to choice in the human condition” (Berger 2014, p.49). The cognitive dissonance generated when disparate systems of meaning simultaneously impinge upon subjective consciousness can give rise to intense anxiety

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20 Jenkins (2007) explores the possibility of a secularised European Muslim consciousness in some detail; see also Orenstein and Weismann (2016).
(Berger and Zijderveld 2009). Strategies of alleviation are broad-ranging but in this thesis I maintain focus upon a single trajectory that characterised the experiences of my respondents: that of *intra-religious conversion*. 
4.3 The Objectivation of TJ in Space and Time

TJ is a movement of Islamic revival and thus premised explicitly upon religious principles. Its orthopraxic methodology seeks to deepen Muslim religiosity through a systematic programme of activities which have become central to its identity. Committed TJ activists (of whom there are thousands in the UK) devote time to the movement according to a set pattern of activism structured around daily, weekly, monthly and annual participation. This involves acts of individual worship (tilaawat, tasbeehat, tahajjud or duaa), assemblies of religious learning (ta’lim or bayaanat) and – the emblematic motif of the movement – setting out on tours to proselytise other Muslims (khuruj and gasht). Additionally, TJ activists explicitly adopt overt markers of Muslim identity with males invariably growing beards and donning turbans/hats and robes (see 7.2), while females usually adopt the niqab (see Appendix C2). Adhering to the full schedule of TJ activities thus requires a significant level of commitment to a set of values which appears alien to the collective conscience of mainstream British society.²¹ In Chapters 8-10, I examine the mechanics through which British-born Muslims convert to the movement after having undergone significant secondary socialisation into disparate arenas of mainstream British life. But here – moving away from the preceding sections’ focus on internalisation – I indicate the processes through which TJ became externalised and objectivated historically in terms of Berger and Luckmann’s tripartite conceptual model that constitutes the theoretical mainstay of this thesis.

For Berger and Luckmann, choice is the essential motor of human activity that permits a range of responses to any given situation. Yet, over time, habituated actions congeal into routine, which when reciprocally typified as ‘roles’ constitute the basic building blocks of institutionalisation (Berger and Luckmann 1966, pp.70-109). A good example of how this played out in the historical institutionalisation of TJ methodology can be gauged from the following excerpt from the autobiography of Mawlana Zakariyya Kandhalawi, the renowned hadith scholar and nephew of TJ’s founder:

When in the evolutionary stage of [my uncle’s] movement something regarding Tableegh was brought before him, he would without hesitation say: “No decision can be taken upon this until it has been discussed with Sheikhul Hadith [an honorific title of Mawlana Zakariyya].

²¹ “…it must be argued, surely, that the religiously active of whatever Christian denomination have more in common with each other than any of them do with the majority of the population – a statement that should perhaps be extended to the other faith-populations as well. Here, in short, are the individuals in British society who take faith seriously” (Davie 2015, p.63).
Every time I went to Delhi I became aware of many queries which he had placed aside for my sanction, approval and verdict. Once my uncle told me: “Some of our friends are of the opinion that when our jamaats proceed on ghusht [proselytising tours], they should carry a short banner (flag) with them. What do you think?” I replied: “Most definitely not.” He asked: “And why not?” I said: “Your jamaats are going out to call people to Salaah and gather the people in the Musjid. And according to the clear texts (of Quran and Hadith) the use of a banner for Salaah is rejected.” He replied: “May Allah reward you well. The issue is put off.” (Khandelwi 1982, pp.152-153)

This shows the element of choice present in early TJ praxis which gradually diminished as the methodology, over time and probably through a process of trial and error, congealed into a fixed format. Similarly, contemporary TJ’s rigid ‘6 points’ – condensed and simplified today into a series of easily memorisable formulae – derive from a broader 15 point plan presented by TJ founder, Ilyas, to a 1934 public meeting of local dignitaries (Masud 2000a, pp.10-11). Without belabouring this point further, what can be discerned here then is a historical process through which an incipient impulse for religious renewal reified over time into an institutional infrastructure that today appears as objective facticity imposing itself as taken-for-granted reality upon the subjective consciousness of contemporary TJ activists:

Institutions always have a history, of which they are the products. It is impossible to understand an institution adequately without an understanding of the historical process in which it was produced. Institutions also, by the very fact of their existence, control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct, which channel it in one direction as against the many other directions that would theoretically be possible. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.72)

Transposed into Britain in the years following WWII, the key challenge facing TJ leaders was to generate in space and time and maintain as plausible to consciousness a sub-universe of meaning that lacked any social support. In this, TJ leaders were not alone; any group of migrants wanting to cling onto their imported beliefs – whether Hindu, Sikh or Rastafarian – would have found themselves facing similar challenges. Berger’s concept of “plausibility structures” is extremely germane here. Given its centrality to my analysis, a comprehensive definition is warranted:

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22 Weber’s concept of the ‘routinisation of charisma’ is also relevant here which, interestingly, was the theoretical frame through which Berger analysed the historical emergence of Bahaism for his doctoral dissertation (Berger 2011, pp.33-38).
Worlds are socially constructed and socially maintained. Their continuing reality, both objective (as common, taken-for-granted facticity) and subjective (as facticity imposing itself on individual consciousness), depends upon specific social processes, namely those processes that ongoingly reconstruct and maintain the particular worlds in question. Conversely, the interruption of these processes threatens the (objective and subjective) reality of the worlds in question. Thus each world requires a social “base” for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings. This “base” may be called its plausibility structure. (Berger 1967, p.45)

In other words, the latent potential of TJ’s symbolic universe – finely honed into a comprehensive methodology in India – required instantiation in space and time through tangible social processes brought to life by the concrete actions of human actors. As dedicated personnel were permanently dispatched from the South Asian headquarters to achieve this very purpose, augmented by regular teams of visiting TJ delegations, the movement’s reality-defining potential began to actualise. A key point to note here is that the primary socialisation of early British TJ activists did not take place in Britain; they were products of a very different society in which the sacred (whether Hindu, Muslim or other) was weaved into the fabric of everyday life. Studies of early Muslim settlement in Britain illustrate how many of the new arrivals were perturbed by the very different culture they found themselves in, experiencing fundamental differences of language, food, dress and climate not to mention overt incidents of discrimination or racism (Ansari 2004; Gilliat-Ray 2010; Kalra 2000; Lewis 1994; Werbner 2002b). Given that the substantive contents of both primary and a range of secondary socialisations had already crystallised in consciousness before encountering the new reality, coupled with the emotional distance many would no doubt have felt from mainstream British culture, it is unlikely that the collective conscience of British society would have impinged in any significant way upon their already congealed subjective perspectives. What was required though was “a social base,” a sub-society of like-minded individuals all likely to have in common experiences relating to the dislocation of migration and cultural memories of the place of origin who collectively set about, through concrete words and deeds, generating a plausibility structure within which the essential social confirmation needed to sustain an alternate view of reality could be provided: “All socially meaningful definitions of reality must be objectivated by social processes. Consequently, sub-universes require sub-societies as their objectivating base, and counter-definitions of reality require counter-societies” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.145). It is for this reason that the historical development of TJ in Britain is intertwined with immigration and its attendant South Asian cultural mores – such as popular cuisine and the prevalence of the Urdu language – which, based on the pre-
immigration socialisation experiences of early TJ activists, would have appeared inseparable in their subjective consciousness.

The situation, of course, is different for their offspring - the subject of this study. Their primary socialisation, as explicated in detail above, takes place in a vastly different socio-cultural milieu and their secondary socialisations induce them, with varying degrees of assimilation, into the British collective conscience (which in turn, with varying degrees of success, is internalised by them). As we saw in 2.2.6, this disparity in social experience led Sikand to assert the essential incommensurability of contemporary British Muslim experience with TJ’s South Asian cultural and historical roots, predicting TJ would become a moribund force in future British Muslim communities. Yet one of the key findings of this thesis has been the continued appeal of TJ to a significant demographic of second and third-generation British-born Muslims raised in the UK. How exactly was this achieved and to what extent have British TJ leaders been able to objectivate their symbolic universe in institutional constructs that appear plausible to the subjective consciousness of British-born activists? In Chapter 6, I unpack processes of intergenerational transmission in detail but, before that, I first sketch in the next chapter a detailed overview of contemporary TJ’s institutional infrastructure in the UK.
SECTION TWO:
EMPIRICAL FINDINGS
Chapter 5

An Anatomy of British TJ

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If you suffer from listlessness, make a list.

Abdal Hakim Murad (2012, p.130)

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In this chapter I describe how TJ functions as an international movement of Islamic revival in contemporary Britain. In this, my work builds largely upon Reetz’s (2003, 2008) analysis of TJ’s internal dynamics based upon his fieldwork in South Asia which I seek to flesh out with empirical detail derived from the European context. Accordingly, I first outline a *topography* of the British branch of the movement, identifying key sites of activity and explaining how they relate to each other and to the movement’s international headquarters. I then delineate a *typology* of the movement in terms of a hierarchy of tiered activism ranging from full-time national leaders to hostile critics. In both these aspects, I seek to demonstrate how TJ operates on the interface of the local and global through the structures of organisation intrinsic to its *modus operandi* (see also Janson 2014, pp.69-98) and explicate how the movement functions at both the institutional and individual levels. The chapter is therefore highly descriptive in nature and relies upon several sources. First, I draw upon my pre-existing familiarity with TJ as an indigenous ethnographer. Second, I seek to synthesise and present coherently disparate data generated throughout my period of fieldwork. Third, while drafting this chapter, I arranged two informal interviews with regional TJ leaders to clarify particular points of relevance. Lastly, I provided a draft of this chapter to a regional TJ leader requesting his feedback to ensure its accuracy. The chapter should also be read in tandem with Appendix C which provides additional details on:

- C1 – A profile of Masjid Ta-Ha, my principal fieldwork site for five months
- C2 – An overview of insights gleaned about the *masturat*, or female, dimension of British TJ
- C3 – Reconstructed from my fieldnotes, a detailed description of 24 hours on a *khuruj* outing
- C4 – Reconstructed from my fieldnotes, a detailed description of a day of ‘Local Work’ at Masjid Ta-Ha.

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1 As described in more detail in this chapter, list-making is a quintessential TJ activity.
5.1 A Topography of British TJ

5.1.1 Dewsbury as a central hub

The legal entity under which TJ operates in Britain is the ‘Anjuman-e-Islahul Muslimeen of United Kingdom’ [The Society for the Reformation of Muslims in the United Kingdom] which has been a registered charity since 25 June 1975. The principal aims of this charity, in its own words, are:

- To make provisions for the religious education of Muslim adults and children.
- To arrange and hold religious gatherings
- To establish mosque and religious education schools.
- To attempt to create understanding of the Muslim religious issues amongst the government institutions.
- To make arrangements for groups of persons to visit mosques in the United Kingdom and overseas for the purpose of religious learning and spiritual self-rectification.\(^2\)

The charity is registered at the national TJ headquarters located in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire in an imposing mosque complex that dominates the skyline. The existing structure (which also houses a boarding school/Dar al-Ulum) was built in 1982 and was intended, with the approval of international TJ authorities, to be the base of the movement’s activities in ‘the West’.\(^3\) The amir of the Dewsbury headquarters, as described in Chapter 2, was – until his death in February 2016 aged 90 – Hafiz Muhammad Patel, a dynamic Gujarati who devotedly orchestrated TJ’s Western activities since migrating to England in the 1950s.\(^4\) I was able to meet Hafiz Patel (as he is invariably referred to) several times during the course of my fieldwork and witnessed first-hand the reverence in which he was held; many regarded him a kaamil wali [fully accomplished saint] and he functioned as a Sufi


\(^3\) By ‘the West’ is meant a broad geographical purview that initially covered Europe and North America but was later expanded to include South America also (though I was unable to ascertain the present precise geographical delineations).

\(^4\) Hafiz Patel died on 18 February 2016, his funeral attracting “at least 5,000” mourners from various countries (see Bowen 2016; Shaw 2016; Timol 2016b), by which time most of this thesis had been drafted. At the time of writing it was therefore not clear how his death would impact TJ’s organisational hierarchy in Britain (see also Pieri 2016), though subsequent conversations I had with key informants indicated that the remainder of the national shura would collectively manage TJ affairs in his absence and another spiritual figurehead is unlikely to be appointed (see also 12.2: ‘The Future of British TJ’).
shaykh for a sizeable number of British TJ activists who had taken the formal Sufi pledge of allegiance (bay’ah) with him.⁵

"With one of my favorite elders. Hafiz Patel sahib of Dewsbury UK. Raiwind ijtema 2014. Myself Saeed Yusaf n Sohail”

Tweeted by the popular Pakistani popstar-turned-preacher Junaid Jamshed on 19 November 2014 (Hafiz Patel is in the wheelchair). Also visible in the photo are Pakistani cricketing heroes Saeed Anwar and Mohammad Yousuf (formerly Yousuf Youhana) – all of whom became dedicated TJ activists through the influence of Mawlana Tariq Jameel, a charismatic international TJ preacher (Pieri 2015, p.59; Schleifer 2015, p.106). The photo was taken during the 2014 annual TJ convocation (ijtima) held at Raiwind, near Lahore.

Source: https://twitter.com/junaidjamshedpk/status/535185271126757376 (accessed 13 February 2016)

⁵ According to several of my respondents, Hafiz Patel had been given permission (ijaza) to initiate disciples into a Sufi order by at least four different shaykhs. According to one respondent, he was initially offered this ijaza by the famed hadith scholar and Sufi master Mawlana Zakariyya Kandhalawi (who died in 1982) but refused, seeing it as a distraction from his single-minded dedication to TJ. Later he saw the benefit of assuming this role to help inject additional spirituality into the growing number of British TJ activists and/or to prevent their defection from TJ to more explicitly Sufi-oriented forms of Islamic practice. Consequently he began initiating disciples from the late 90s / early 00s.
According to Abubakr, a senior TJ leader I interviewed for over 5 hours, the decision to locate the movement’s national base at Dewsbury was essentially fortuitous:

So what happened was Hafiz sahib and Ishaq Patel⁶ - two of the...founders of Tabligh in this country they got a job in Courtaulds...a factory in Preston...then because of the incident in Courtaulds [they were refused time off to offer their Friday prayers] they left and went to Nuneaton. There was no Markaz established in Dewsbury at that time and even though there was a community of Muslims there, Gujarati Muslims, they didn’t have an alim, they didn’t have a hafiz. But they’d heard about Hafiz Patel so they said this person in Nuneaton why don’t we bring him over? So they actually sort of head-hunted him to come to Dewsbury and that’s how it all [began]...He was the imam there and then established the Markaz there, so that’s how Dewsbury became a foundation...Allah’s will that it happened in Dewsbury.⁷

Additionally, Dewsbury’s location at the geographic centre of the UK may have been a contributory factor in order to facilitate the frequent travel that TJ activists make to the national headquarters from around the country. The importance of the Dewsbury headquarters as a centralised hub that co-ordinates international TJ activities in the West can be gauged by the fact that every outgoing TJ tour that exceeds 10 days in length must start and finish its journey in Dewsbury, irrespective of where in the UK the group derives from. For example, a group of Scottish youngsters who decide to

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⁶ This seems to be the same Ishaq Patel reluctantly interviewed by Ron Geaves (1996, pp.171-177) during his visit to the Dewsbury HQ in 1993.
⁷ Sikand (1998b, p.180) has essentially the same account though he has no mention of the stint in Preston and has Hafiz Patel moving to Dewsbury from Coventry rather than Nuneaton.
spend their summer holidays on a 40 day TJ *khuruj* would, as the first step, make their way to Dewsbury Markaz where an *amir* would be appointed and the destination of their tour decided upon. They might spend the first two days at the headquarters where they would be expected to participate in the prayers and speeches delivered throughout the day before being dispatched, for example, to London for the next 37 days. Their first point of landing in London would be the regional TJ markaz located in West Ham where they might spend a day; regional TJ leaders there would assess the group and accordingly decide, through the core TJ act of *mashwera* (consultation), the specific boroughs and mosques they should visit for the remainder of their tour. The bulk of the 40 day trip would then be spent travelling through a range of London mosques in which the group would stay for no more than 2-3 days each (so, between 12-15 mosques in total) and, upon completion, they would return to the Dewsbury HQ again for the final 24 hours. During this final day, an appointed spokesperson (again decided internally in the *jama’at* through *mashwera* and appointed by the *amir*) would feedback (*karguzari*) the group’s experiences to the assembled audience at Dewsbury and, before departing back home, the Dewsbury elders would offer parting advice to the group about establishing TJ activities in their local Scottish mosques and encourage them to return annually for their *chillah*. Should the outgoing group arriving at Dewsbury comprise of more experienced, dedicated members (usually, who have already undertaken the signature four month *khuruj* to South Asia) rather than young neophytes, then it is quite possible that they would be dispatched to an international, rather than national, destination, quite literally anywhere in the world. Again, any *incoming* TJ group formed in a markaz elsewhere in the world and dispatched to the UK would first make a beeline for the Dewsbury headquarters straight from the airport where the elders, after due processes of *mashwera*, would decide where in the UK to send them for the duration of their tour. We thus see how TJ’s national headquarters in Dewsbury is a central transit point both for incoming and outgoing *jama’ats* and it is quite usual, when visiting the HQ, to meet groups that have just arrived from or are about to depart to far-flung corners of the world.
5.1.2 TJ and the local mosques

While the Dewsbury HQ functions as a central hub, its national activity depends upon a network of regional maraakiz and mosques scattered across the country. Sikand (1998a), in his study of the British branch of TJ, made no mention of the five regional headquarters that have operated for some time now in Glasgow, Blackburn, Leicester, Birmingham and London; these are briefly highlighted by Pieri in his much later study (Pieri 2012b, p.30). A key distinction should be made here: the maraakiz are exclusively the preserve of TJ in that they are administered by TJ authorities and permit only TJ activities and speeches on their premises; the mosques, by contrast, are managed by local committees and permit a range of activities including, though not restricted to, TJ. However, not every mosque in the UK allows TJ activities. According to the website meticulously maintained by Mehmood Naqshbandi, there are a total of 1804 active mosques and Islamic prayer premises in the UK of which he classifies 779 (43.2%) as affiliated with the orientation of Deobandi Islam. It is safe

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8 My fieldwork also uncovered the existence of what I have termed “semi-markazes.” These currently operate in Bristol, Cardiff, Newcastle and Dublin and differ from a full markaz in two important respects: A) they are based in an ordinary mosque (albeit with a strong TJ presence) and not premises exclusively managed by TJ, and B) local TJ leaders convene weekly only for the ‘Tuesday evening mashwera’ (see 5.1.4 below); they are not considered strong enough yet to hold the weekly Thursday night open programme – though, no doubt, the medium-long term goal would be to strengthen the local TJ infrastructure enough to manage this also in dedicated premises thus establishing another fully-fledged regional markaz.

to assume that TJ can operate without any resistance in the great majority of these mosques; in fact it will actively be supported in many by a variety of imams, committee members and regular worshippers (see also King (2002)). During the course of my fieldwork, I visited several British Deobandi mosques that had been architecturally designed to accommodate visiting TJ groups. Specific design features included a dedicated ‘jama’at sleeping room’ (with its own central heating controls) located next to a state-of-the-art kitchen to facilitate jama’at cooking. From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, this anchoring of TJ into the physical architecture of the mosque is a good example of its objectivation into a Durkheimian facticity that implicitly presses upon the subjective consciousness of worshippers.

By contrast, due to sectarian differences, TJ will effectively be barred from operating in the majority of Barelwi (447 mosques; 24.8%) and Salafi-inspired (155; 8.6%) mosques – though this is not always
the case. According to Mogra (2014, p.189) TJ has, in some UK cities, achieved limited success in accessing mosques of Barelwi and Ahl-e-Hadith orientation as well as those founded by non-South Asian Muslims who “tend to be sympathetic towards TJ especially for bringing change among some wayward youths.” Nevertheless, I think it would be safe to assume that TJ is completely barred from operating in at least a third of the UK’s mosques.

5.1.3 The regional maraakiz: local, regional and national divisions of TJ

In Appendix C1 I outline a profile of Masjid Ta-Ha in Lancashire, my principal fieldwork site for five months. Each regional TJ headquarters (markaz) is connected to a network of mosques such as Masjid Ta-Ha within which it is able to operate to constitute a halqa – translated as area or region – which it is responsible for. The UK, for TJ purposes, is therefore divided currently into six halqas – including, of course, the Yorkshire halqa which doubles up as the national HQ too; Masjid Ta-Ha is thus linked to the regional markaz at Blackburn. It may be instructive at this point to sketch a parallel with what is termed the ‘episcopal polity’ of traditional Christianity. It is usual for the Church to map the country along local and regional lines to facilitate administrative and ministering.

Sign on the noticeboard in a British Barelwi mosque

(see also Ahmad (1991, p.523) for more on Barelwi opposition to TJ in the Pakistani context: “Tablighi Jamaat assemblies are completely banned in the mosques controlled by the Barelvi ulama and their followers.”)

Source: author’s photo

5 For instance, while conducting fieldwork in Birmingham during the summer of 2014, I spent a night with a visiting TJ group from Medina, Saudi Arabia that was staying in an Arab Salafi mosque. I was told that the regional TJ authorities, based at the Birmingham Markaz, make a point of sending only Arab TJ groups to mosques of this kind as the usual groups of South Asian ethnic origin are more readily objected to. The cosmopolitan Al-Rahma mosque in Liverpool may be cited as another example. Founded (and still managed) primarily by Muslims of Yemeni and Somali extraction, it can in no way be considered Deobandi, yet it has a long history of allowing TJ groups to visit and stay, permitting them to deliver their talks after the daily prayers. This brings into question Pieri’s (2012b, p.9) assertion that “All TJ mosques are Deobandi but not all Deobandi mosques are TJ.”

11 Such an arrangement does not exist in the ‘congregational polity’ of many post-Reformation denominations. As an aside, it is striking that Janson’s (2014) description of the organisational structure of Gambian TJ almost perfectly mirrors my description of British TJ – from the central role of the markaz to the sub-division of TJ activities into halqas and local mosques – indicating that TJ has managed to spread its activities across vast geographical expanses whilst maintaining a supranational uniformity of method.
functions. Broadly speaking, the *parish* comprises the smallest unit of ecclesiastical organisation and roughly equates to the catchment area surrounding a local mosque. Just as numerous parishes taken together constitute a *diocese*, presided over by a bishop who is properly based in a cathedral, so do numerous mosques taken together constitute a *halqa*, networked, in TJ terms, to the regional *markaz*. Similarly, just as the jurisdiction of a particular diocese roughly follows civil boundaries, so does each *halqa* roughly comprise an amalgamation of a number of British counties. Each *markaz*, given its size and relationship to the individual mosques in its ‘diocese’ can be equated analogously to a cathedral – though it is administered not by a single bishop but a council of elders appointed (not elected) by the Dewsbury HQ. From my interviews with several TJ leaders, it seems that a new regional headquarters can only be established following approval from the movement’s international centre in Nizamuddin – with Dewsbury, of course, functioning as a conduit. In this, it may be useful to elaborate the parallel further with reference to Roman Catholicism which, incidentally, is numerically far closer to the British Muslim population than the dominant Church of England. While the latter operates currently in 41 dioceses – subsumed further into two *ecclesiastical provinces*, York (12 dioceses) and Canterbury (29 dioceses), each with their own Archbishop – the former operates in five ecclesiastical provinces containing a total of 22 dioceses.

Of all Roman Catholic cathedrals in England and Wales, it is the one at Westminster that occupies a special place as the ‘mother church;’ this resembles the special position occupied by Dewsbury Markaz for British TJ (and if we insist on pursing the parallel even further then it could be suggested that the elderly, semi-retired Archbishop Emeritus Cormac Murphy-O’Connor somewhat equates to (the now deceased) Hafiz Patel!). Similarly, just as British Roman Catholicism derives its ultimate authority and directives from the Vatican, so do the top-level hierarchy of British TJ refer back periodically for guidance and advice to the Nizamuddin headquarters in India where the “theoretical, spiritual, and symbolic head of the movement” (Reetz 2008, p.109) resides.

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12 With the Diocese in Europe the total is 42; see [https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/dioceses.aspx](https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/dioceses.aspx) (accessed 13 February 2016).
13 See [http://catholicfaith.org.uk/Home/Ask-Find/Find-a-church](http://catholicfaith.org.uk/Home/Ask-Find/Find-a-church) (accessed 15 February 2016)
14 It may be useful to briefly comment here on the controversial new TJ headquarters planned in London. Though I cannot extrapolate my findings adequately within the scope of this thesis, I did discuss the proposed plans at length with several senior respondents. I was unequivocally informed that, despite its proposed size, the London ‘mega-mosque’ was never meant to replace Dewsbury as the national hub of TJ, but simply to rehouse the existing *regional* markaz with better facilities. Further, although the New Delhi authorities had apparently initially approved the plans, I was told Hafiz Patel remained personally opposed to them preferring to divide London for TJ purposes into four mini- *halqas*, each with its own small-scale markaz. In this he would be following the precedent of other metropolises, such as Mumbai or Karachi, in which TJ has long operated. I intend to author a detailed standalone journal article on this topic in due course.
15 The reference is to Mawlana Muhammad Sa’ad Kandhalawi, great-grandson of TJ’s founder, though the influence of the Raiwind headquarters – and its aged leader Hajji Abdul Wahhab (b.1923) – is also considerable, particularly among the Pakistani diaspora (see 1.2).
KEY
N = NATIONAL TJ HEADQUARTERS: DEWSBURY MARKAZ
R1 = REGIONAL TJ HEADQUARTERS: GLASGOW MARKAZ
R2 = REGIONAL TJ HEADQUARTERS: BLACKBURN MARKAZ
R3 = REGIONAL TJ HEADQUARTERS: BIRMINGHAM MARKAZ
R4 = REGIONAL TJ HEADQUARTERS: LEICESTER MARKAZ
R5 = REGIONAL TJ HEADQUARTERS: LONDON MARKAZ
S1 = NEWCASTLE SEMI-MARKAZ
S2 = BRISTOL SEMI-MARKAZ
S3 = CARDIFF SEMI-MARKAZ
S4 = DUBLIN SEMI-MARKAZ
M = LOCAL MOSQUE (DEPICTED SYMBOLICALLY, NOT NUMERICALLY OR GEOGRAPHICALLY)

= LINE OF INFLUENCE FROM INTERNATIONAL TO NATIONAL MARKAZ
= LINE OF INFLUENCE FROM NATIONAL TO REGIONAL MARKAZ
= LINE OF INFLUENCE FROM REGIONAL MARKAZ TO LOCAL MOSQUE
It is important to specify here the nature of the influence depicted by the arrows in the above diagram. While the national centre exerts considerable influence on the regional ones (but by no means absolute as demonstrated by Pieri (2015) in his study of the relative autonomy exercised by regional London TJ leaders in their bid to secure planning permission for the controversial ‘mega-mosque’), the regional centres exercise far less influence on the local mosques. The nature of this influence is restricted to the coterie of TJ activists that gather regularly in each mosque with a TJ presence (see Appendix C4) and relates in no way to the day-to-day administration of the mosque (whether it is Deobandi or non-Deobandi). This administration is managed by the mosque committee which operates independently of the regional markaz and makes decisions relating to, say, the appointment of imams or the curriculum of the evening madrassa with complete autonomy. Only in mosques with a strong TJ presence might the council of elders at the markaz be consulted (often in a private capacity) on such issues, as might the senior ulema of the Dar al-Ulums due to their popular perception as fonts of piety and wisdom. From the perspective of the regional markaz then, it is sufficient for the local mosque to simply permit visiting TJ groups to stay on their premises and carry out their programme of activities while providing adequate kitchen, heating and shower facilities.

As already highlighted, many mosques also have a small presence of dedicated TJ activists who conduct their daily TJ activities on site (see 5.2.3 below and Appendix C4) and who maintain an ongoing link with the markaz. In practice, as TJ is a normative component of the Deobandi institutional infrastructure, TJ leaders, ulema and mosque committee members usually work in concert to facilitate each other’s activities within a single mosque setting in which it is broadly recognised that TJ is but one among a range of permitted religious offerings. This, however, does not always happen without friction. For instance, a local group of dedicated TJ activists may insist on separately conducting their daily ta’lim session after the Isha prayer at the same time that the imam is conducting his weekly circle on tafsir [Qur’anic commentary] reinforcing the idea that, in some settings, TJ assumes a distinct cliquish identity (see also 5.2.4.1 below). Alternatively, a member of a visiting TJ group might accidentally leave a burn mark on the mosque carpet as he irons his clothes; or a group of youngsters out on a weekend tour might, while playing indoor football at night with a bundle of rolled up socks, smash the expensive chandelier ornamenting the central prayer hall – both of which would, understandably, provoke the ire of the mosque’s management committee. Such incidents are not unknown and, in some cases, the regional markaz elders might be called upon to smooth local ruffled feathers to try and facilitate the ongoing visits of jama’ats.
5.1.4 The functioning of a regional markaz

Two key weekly activities distinguish a markaz from an ordinary mosque. The first is the ‘Tuesday evening mashwera’ which sees local TJ leaders from across the halqa gather to progress TJ goals. This weekly ‘synod’ attracts a fairly aged crowd of between 40-70 long-standing activists usually with several decades of TJ experience each;\(^{16}\) every (active TJ) mosque in the halqa is expected to send two or three TJ leaders to participate in the council. The second is the ‘Thursday night gathering’ which is an open invitation to all (male) Muslims across the halqa to attend for an hour-long lecture, usually delivered in Urdu but always with separate English (and, if necessary, Arabic) translation, followed by a tashkeel in which assembled audience members are encouraged to volunteer themselves to participate in TJ tours. During the course of my fieldwork, I attended numerous Thursday night gatherings at the Blackburn Markaz which invariably attracted a largely youthful crowd of 400-700 Muslims of mainly South Asian origin deriving from mosques across the halqa including Bolton, Preston, Liverpool, Nelson, Lancaster and, of course, Blackburn.\(^{17}\)

Following the lecture, many participants proceed downstairs to the bottom storey of the building where a communal meal is served - invariably accompanied by much good-natured camaraderie and jovial chatter as TJ activists from across the halqa (many of whom have spent time together on lengthy tours) catch up with each other and newcomers are gently socialised into the movement. The really dedicated (around 30-50) stay the night each week only returning home, or straight to their workplaces, after offering the Friday dawn prayer (fajr) in congregation at the markaz.

\(\footnote{16}\) That there are now a significant minority of younger, British-born activists attending this weekly meeting indicates successful intergenerational transmission – an issue I unpack in greater detail in the next chapter.

\(\footnote{17}\) The bulk of Pieri’s (2012a, p.39) participant observation consisted of attending the weekly Thursday night gatherings at London Markaz – “150 hours (roughly 55 separate sessions) over a period of 18 months were spent attending these talks, followed by further time socialising over a meal in the mosque afterwards” – where he observed that a more ethnically diverse crowd of up to 3000 would gather each week.

Blackburn Markaz

*(the number of cars indicating the amount of attendees the weekly programme attracts)*

*Source: author’s photo (March 2014)*
Regional markazes also manage weekend *khuruj* outings across the *halqa*. At the Tuesday evening *mashwera*, TJ leaders inform markaz elders of the number of *jama’ats* (including *masturat*) expected that coming weekend from their local mosque. Designated members of the markaz hierarchy then co-ordinate destinations for all the expected groups inserting them with a wipe-able marker pen onto a huge pre-prepared template displayed at the administrative hub. At the daily *mashwera* the next (Wednesday) morning at their local mosque (see 5.2.3 below), local TJ leaders usually relay this information to the remainder of the *masjid-waar-jama’at* – who, in turn, often disseminate the information to potential participants via WhatsApp or text message:

“*Salam. Jama’at will be going to Masjid Bilal in Bolton this weekend. Brothers are requested to be ready with their bedding, etc in Isha salaat on Friday which is at 7.40pm. Jazakallah*”

(an example of a text message sent out on Wednesday informing potential participants about the coming weekend’s *jama’at* – see Appendix C3 for a detailed description of 24 hours out on *khuruj* to Masjid Bilal.)
The above photo warrants some commentary. As can be seen:

- There are 35 men’s jama’ats (usually between 8 – 15 members each) expected that weekend and 4 ladies groups (usually comprising 4-6 couples each)
- Of the men’s jama’ats 5 are ready for the full 72 hours (Thursday to Sunday evening), while the majority are for the weekend only (Friday to Sunday evening); 1 is only for 24 hours
- Two weekday jama’ats are also ready (usually consisting of taxi drivers and restaurant workers who find it difficult to join the normal groups due to their occupational commitments over the weekend)
- All the above refer to the weekly 2-3 day TJ outings to be formed, organised and dispatched within the halqa. Additionally, three groups (under the heading ‘Other Jamaats’) are visiting mosques in Lancashire from outside the halqa. These comprise:

  1) A ‘mixed group’ (i.e. individual members hail from different parts of the UK) of 12 people that is probably out for 40 days in total and is spending 15 days in this halqa
2) A 10-strong group of ‘Dewsbury talaba’ (i.e. students of the Dewsbury Dar al-Ulum) that is visiting the halqa for 6 days
3) ‘V.Z. Jamat’ – i.e. a foreign TJ group from Venezuela visiting the halqa (via Dewsbury, of course) for 10 days and probably in the UK for 40 days in total.

Though the other regional markazes (situated in London, Glasgow, Leicester, Birmingham and Dewsbury) may not follow the same noticeboard system, it is probable that they will organise their weekly jama’ats along relatively similar lines.

5.1.5 On the interface of the local and global: TJ’s ‘glocal’ activism

Another key institutional activity of British TJ comprises the ‘mahina mashwera’ convened at the national Dewsbury headquarters every 4-6 weeks. It is a weekend-long council attended by several hundred leaders of TJ mosques across the country thus amalgamating nationally the same long-standing activists who attend the weekly Tuesday mashwera in their respective regional maraakiz. Attendees are expected to participate in the mahina mashwera in addition to their normal monthly weekend khuruj; regular attendance is thus a sign of the individual’s commitment to TJ underscoring his leadership status. Although I did not attend a mahina mashwera, I gauged that it proceeds along a set format in which a large number (around 20 or so) of umoors [agenda items] are discussed over the course of the weekend; it invariably concludes with a tearful supplication [du’aa] that would historically be offered by Hafiz Patel (unless he was away on foreign TJ travel). I was informed that the umoors derive from a higher level ‘European mashwera’ held at the global Nizamuddin headquarters every two years. Here national TJ leaders from across the continent (and other select countries) gather for several days to progress macro TJ goals which are then broken down and agreed at country level. The mahina mashwera is a key mechanism designed to facilitate the achievement of these national goals calibrated across a two year period (that is, between European mashweras). There is also an interim level in which, every three months, TJ leaders from across Europe gather for a weekend-long mashwera in different European countries selected on a rotation basis where they feedback on national activities and monitor the progress of the macro European goals decided at Nizamuddin. At the national level, following a given mahina mashwera, TJ activists from each ‘diocese’ gather at a pre-stipulated ‘parish’ mosque that is selected on a rotation basis. Here, the handful of local elders that attended the Dewsbury gathering relay a condensed version of the discussions to the much larger number of regionally gathered activists and the national umoors are thus broken down a level further. Ultimately, individual TJ activists return to their own mosques to implement the agreed outcomes at a micro-level.
The mechanics of TJ’s ‘glocal’ activism

Global Level: Nizamuddin Headquarters
Every two years TJ leaders from across Europe (and select other countries) attend TJ’s global headquarters to feedback on progress and agree a set of macro objectives for the coming two years.

Continental Level: Europe
Every quarter, national TJ leaders from across Europe meet at a different European country to feedback on national activity and progress goals.

National Level: Mahina Mashwera
Every 4–6 weeks, regional TJ leaders from across the UK meet at the Dewsbury HQ where national goals are broken down and delegated at regional level.

Regional Level: Markaz, Towns and Cities
Regional TJ leaders feedback from the Mahina Mashwera to rank and file local TJ activists and monitor regional progress at the weekly Tuesday evening mashwera.

Local Level: Individual Mosques
Macro goals are operationalised at a micro level through the daily mosque mashwera and gasht of local TJ activists.

The constant formation and dispatch of TJ groups, usually for periods of 4 months and 40 days, to destinations around the world.
It may be helpful to illustrate the staggered nature of this activism with an example. For instance, at the biennial European *mashwera*, the Nizamuddin headquarters may have requisitioned (*takaza*) from the Dewsbury HQ six 40 day *jama’ats* from the UK to tour a specified range of European countries every three months. At the *mahina mashwera* this would be one of the many *umoors* to be discussed and each of the regional *halqas* might take upon themselves the responsibility of contributing one *jama’at* each (thus making up the required total of six). At the regional follow-up, individual mosques might take upon themselves the responsibility of contributing one member each for the *jama’at* agreed at *halqa* level. Names of potential candidates would then be discussed and a list drawn up at the local mosque’s daily *mashwera*. Next, individuals would be visited and *tashkeeled* during the daily *gasht* rounds of each local ‘parish’ mosque (see 5.2.3 below for more detail). Progress would be monitored at a *halqa* level at the weekly Tuesday evening *mashweras* held at the regional maraakiz and, ideally, the assembled *jama’at* would make their way to Dewsbury within the stipulated timeframe ready to begin their 40 day tour. At the next European *mashwera* at Nizamuddin, the Dewsbury (and other national) authorities would be required to feedback [*karguzari*] on how well objectives were achieved over the preceding two years, problems might be brainstormed and fresh macro objectives set for the coming two years.

Reetz (2008, p.111), in his analysis of TJ’s ‘faith bureaucracy,’ comments upon this measured and calculated style of activism: “Thus a huge map of religious activity and performance is imagined of the country and the whole world. It is not unlike the target map of a huge global corporate enterprise, setting course on expansion.” Ali, a 37 year old English convert to Islam who has spent the last two decades as a dedicated TJ activist, expressed a similar sentiment when describing to me his first international TJ *khuruj* to the Raiwind headquarters in 1998:

It was really the next level and *masha’Allah...*the performance bar was increased you know, you saw people who were giving so many hours a day and they were very devoted to the teachings of Islam and yeah, it was a really good environment to be in...I mean basically the layout was almost like a business plan which is: this is what we want to achieve, these are the outcomes that we want to achieve, these are the kind of performance indicators, you know, it was like a very clear business plan. How people can benefit from the religion of Islam and how the Muslims can be a source of benefit for mankind and serve mankind and be a source of good for mankind. And again that resonated with me, and it seemed like a very clear game plan which I’ve heard lots of other groups...but I never saw a very practical, clear plan as this.
Finally, the annual *ijtimas* organised along national and regional lines should be mentioned. As described in 6.2, a huge ‘world *ijtima*’ was held in 1994 at Dewsbury that attracted, according to varying respondent reports, between 30,000-60,000 attendees. Subsequently, I was informed, the preference has been for smaller-scale *ijtimas* – not least to avoid attention in a post-9/11 and 7/7 context. Nevertheless, committed TJ activists can expect to attend two weekend-long *ijtimas* at the Dewsbury headquarters each year. The first is the ‘Four month-ers jore’ – usually graced by top-ranking TJ elders from the South Asian headquarters – that is designed to assemble all those British TJ activists who have undertaken the movement’s signature four month tour to South Asia. Several thousand male activists attend annually; bearing in mind that others may be out on foreign excursions while many more, no longer active in TJ, do not attend. The second annual *ijtima* is organised along regional lines; each *halqa* is invited to bring to Dewsbury male Muslims with even a vague affiliation with TJ for a dedicated weekend in which both newcomers and older activists are addressed by the Dewsbury elders, and a detailed *karguzari* [feedback] is taken about the *halqa*’s progress since the last *ijtima*. Mirroring their South Asian prototypes, both *ijtimas* conclude with a tearful, lengthy supplication which swells audience numbers and is often preceded by multiple *nikah* [marriage] ceremonies timed to partake of the *baraka* [blessings] that are felt to accompany the occasion. Annual gatherings for female TJ adepts are organised along local, rather than national lines, though I was informed that the Dewsbury HQ has purchased and modified a large adjacent

1 This low-key activism – which Noor (2012, pp.59-60) identifies as a policy of “Never stirring the hornets’ nest” – is an integral and recognisable dynamic of the TJ ethos that makes the grandiose ambition of the London ‘mega-mosque’ stand out all the more as a striking anomaly.

2 Issues of retention and attrition are explored in 10.2.1.
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house which is wired up to receive transmitted lectures delivered at the main premises and designed to accommodate female members of incoming/outgoing TJ masturat delegations under strict purdah conditions. Building work is currently underway to construct a new third storey at the Dewsbury HQ which is expected to last several years; meanwhile the ‘Four month-ers jore’ has been suspended and the regional ijtima are convened each year at the respective maraakiz where the Dewsbury elders visit to address regional audiences.
5.2 A Typology of British TJ

While the preceding section focused on the institutional infrastructure of British TJ, here I shift focus to the people that populate the various levels constructing a typology of tiered activism that pervades the movement’s internal dynamics. According to Mandaville (2001, p.146), “It is in groups such as the Tablighi Jama’at...that the umma, in the sense of a community of believers unhindered by geographical or national boundaries, finds its truest expression in Islam today.” While I accept that this ethos of radical egalitarianism constitutes an indubitable element of TJ’s normative praxis (as also attested to by Metcalf (1994)), I further argue, with Reetz (2003, 2008), that it simultaneously camouflages a structured hierarchy that is crucial to the basic functioning of the movement. In this section I seek to explicate the configuration of this hierarchy in some detail and in all subsequent chapters I deploy the tier system developed here as an integral component of my analysis.

The typology I propose is represented by a series of concentric circles, encompassing various levels of TJ activism, situated within Britain’s broader Muslim community. Such an arrangement has been intimated by others though not, to my knowledge, illustrated graphically. For instance, according to Metcalf:

Tabligh includes many levels of participation, from those who have virtually no other activity, to people engaged in household or paid employment who yet manage to meet the movement’s standards for participation in gatherings and travel, to those who join on an occasional mission, to those who may occasionally or regularly pray where Tablighis congregate and listen to their discussions. (Metcalf 1996b, p.111)

Or, alternatively, King observes:

Because of the ‘concentric’ organisation, where an inner group of full-time Tabligh personnel is surrounded by an outer ring of more experienced members and an outermost circle of more loosely attached collaborators, there is always both a level within the organisation where a member can feel comfortable and another activist who is known to him to whom he can turn for advice. (King 2002, p.299)
A Typology of British TJ

The dotted lines indicate two-way percolation between tiers.
It is also worth observing the resemblance that this concentric configuration has with Geaves’ (2000, pp.76-77) depiction of Sufi brotherhoods operative in the UK:

This becomes especially significant when we couple the Sufi roots of TJ’s ancestry with claims made by some activists that global TJ functions as something of a collective Shaykh for the umma at large.³ Geaves elaborates:

> Although only the first three inner circles would represent membership of the tariqa as defined by an oath of spiritual allegiance (bai‘at) to the shaykh, the outer circles would form a large amorphous allegiance based on status, emotional loyalty, or pragmatic need. This allegiance would differ from the two inner circles where the primary loyalty would be spiritual guidance.

Though there is no formal pledge of allegiance that TJ novitiates are required to take (though, in practice, some do complement their TJ activities by taking the traditional bay‘ah with a Sufi Shaykh), I would argue that the defining moment in a TJ activist’s career is the four-month tour he takes to the movement’s South Asian headquarters; it is this which distinguishes the puraana saathi most significantly from the sympathiser or occasional participant (though, as Geaves perceptively notes, there are both active and inactive murids – and puraana saathis also). Reaching this milestone entails a movement through the tiers that usually corresponds with an intra-religious conversion experience described in Chapters 8-10. Here though, I expand upon each of the circles in my diagram.

³ This view was captured in the preliminary analysis I conducted of contemporary TJ’s relationship with Sufism (Timol 2015c), and has also been indicated by Birt (2001, p.376): “As Tablighis say, ‘The movement is the shaykh, and tazkiya (self-rectification) comes from involvement in its programme.’” Some resonance may also be found with, for example, the advice given by the Moroccan Shaykh Si Fudul Al-Hawari Al-Sufi: “In this time it is very difficult to find a living shaykh, nearly impossible. Make the sacred law...your shaykh” (Sugich 2013, p.94).
5.2.1 TIER 1- The National Shura and other Full-Timers

The Charity Commission lists eight trustees of TJ’s registered entity in the UK who also constitute the National Shura [Council] thus representing the highest level of TJ authority in the country. The shura was appointed by Nizamuddin authorities several decades ago and presided over by Hafiz Patel – the spiritual figurehead and ultimate amir of TJ in ‘the West’ (Europe and the Americas) – until his recent death. All shura members are Urdu-speaking first-generation migrants, now heavily advanced in age. Five are of Indian (Gujarati) ethnicity, two Pakistani and one Bangladeshi; five reside in Dewsbury from where they manage TJ’s national affairs as a dedicated occupation. To be appointed to the National Shura presumes an exceptional level of TJ dedication - all members have been unflinchingly committed to TJ for most of their adult lives. However, they are respected not just for their religious devotion but also their business, professional or educational acumen; as pointed out elsewhere (Reetz 2003, 2008; Sikand 1998b), TJ’s leadership tends to hail from the middle/upper classes and is thus able to mobilise important resources for the movement. In sharp contrast to the Nizamuddin headquarters, which has always been shepherded by ulema, only one of the British Shura members is qualified as an alim (see 12.2.1 for potential implications of this).

The Tier 1 leadership functions as an interface between the international and regional levels of the movement, liaising with the global Nizamuddin headquarters and acting as a reference point for the regional maraakiz operating across the country. They also manage the regional TJ activities of the Yorkshire halqa though, in practice, this is often delegated to local leaders. Other than the eight formal shura members, I also classify as Tier 1 leaders the handful of elders considered muqim:

There is also a category of full-timers who are called muqim. They reside at the centres, the marakaz, although they have to look after their family and income, which they do in clearly defined terms like once per week or per month. They have almost fully renounced worldly life in favour of working for the message of Allah to be spread to the greatest effect. (Reetz 2006b, p.40)

They lead a life marked by asceticism and full-time devotion to the movement in prayer, preaching and organizational work, not unlike Hindu sanyasins at a temple or Christian monks in a monastery. (Reetz 2008, p.114)

In the Dewsbury headquarters, there are several elders of this type. Shamsi Sahib, Hafiz Patel’s devoted companion of many years, is a prime example as is the aged Harun Rashid. There are also a number of highly educated full-time devotees such as Dr Mazhar or Dr Mudasser who are regularly

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4 This number includes the now deceased Hafiz Patel.
called upon to deliver speeches. Some function as Sufi shaykhs in their own right, though this is generally kept low-key as the movement’s operational dynamic functions to absorb individual charisma into itself. Mawlana Abdus Samad, though not a shura member, is the administrative heartbeat of the Markaz and, during my period of fieldwork there, I observed that he would unfailingly spend upwards of 10 hours a day organising incoming and outgoing jama’ats and otherwise managing, diligently and without complaint, all manner of Markaz affairs.

5.2.2 TIER 2 – Regional Shuras and Amirs

The second tier of TJ leadership constitutes the regional shuras appointed by Tier 1. Their primary role is to manage each of the five maraakiz in London, Birmingham, Leicester, Blackburn and Glasgow and to oversee TJ activities across their respective halqas. As with Tier 1, it is only long-standing devotion to TJ (usually coupled with social/economic capital) that renders one eligible for selection. As part of my fieldwork, I interviewed two regional shura members; one is an Ofsted inspector/head-teacher of a Muslim school and the other a magistrate and wealthy entrepreneur:

Riyaz: So the Dewsbury shura is appointed by Nizamuddin, and then the Dewsbury shura appoint the regional shuras – is that how it works?

Abdul Wahid: Yeah.

Riyaz: And are there about 5 people in the regional shuras or more than that?

Abdul Wahid: In the regional shuras? Depends, all have different numbers, if you want to know about Lancashire, we have four from Blackburn...and then you have three from the other regions...And there were nine originally, two have passed away.

Riyaz: OK, what’s the criterion for selection to the shura?

Abdul Wahid: I don’t think there is any criterion; I don’t know how we were selected! But I think maybe a commitment, maybe able to manage people, to be calm [laughs] in many ways...
Tier 2 shura members would thus be the first point of contact for any TJ issues arising in the *halqa* that cannot be resolved at local (‘parish’) level before they are escalated to Tier 1 if necessary (who in turn would escalate to the global authorities at Nizamuddin if unable to resolve). They would be expected to manage the Tuesday evening *mashweras* that orchestrate TJ activity across the region and to attend diligently the *mahina mashwera* at the Dewsbury HQ every 4-6 weeks. They thus function as an interface between the local and national levels of the movement, liaising regularly with Tier 1 and managing the TJ activities of Tier 3. They tend to be over 50 years old and bilingual in both Urdu and English, though predominantly of immigrant stock. My fieldwork detected the first clutch of British-born TJ activists beginning to percolate upwards into this tier.

As with Tier 1, I also include in Tier 2 a small category of people not officially appointed to the regional shuras. These include, most significantly, the *amirs* of local mosques. Every mosque in the UK with an established TJ presence has an *amir* (or a micro-level shura in some cases) that is appointed by the regional markaz. Their role is to liaise with the mosque imams and committee members to ensure that day-to-day TJ activities are carried on smoothly and to manage the TJ activities of Tier 3 by channelling their (often youthful) energies effectively. They also function as an interface between the regional *shura* and Tier 3 and are expected to attend the weekly Tuesday evening *mashwera* at the regional markaz, as well as the *mahina mashwera* at Dewsbury. Additionally, there are a small number of senior, highly experienced TJ activists who may be classified as Tier 2, even if they have not been officially appointed to the regional shura or as *amir* of their local mosque.

Both of the above categories – Tier 1 and Tier 2 – have been depicted in my diagram with a solid circular line to indicate that entry into an official shura capacity, or as a local mosque *amir*, is by appointment only.

### 5.2.3 TIER 3 – TJ activists (and an overview of the Five A’amals)

Tier 3 comprises rank and file TJ activists numbering in their thousands across the country. While there is no formal criterion for membership, I classify here primarily those activists who have undertaken an extended *khuruj* outing *and* who are currently active in the movement through participation in the ‘local mosque scheme.’ According to Reetz:

> Since the 1980s Tablighi activists have devoted growing attention to a scheme that has slowly but steadily evolved over the past decades, the formation and operation of a local ‘mosque group’ (*masjidwar* jama’at) in addition to the travelling preaching group...it considers the local mosque as the basic unit of operation. It is meant to keep
the work of tabligh alive after returning from the preaching tours. The details of this scheme have been fixed in a rigid grid of demands that are made on its participants on a daily basis. (Reetz 2008, p.104)

In popular TJ parlance, this ‘local mosque scheme’ is termed the ‘Five A’amals’ or Maqaami Kaam which translate, simply, as the ‘Five [Good] Deeds’ or ‘Local Work.’ To my knowledge, this element of TJ praxis has yet to be captured in the academic literature; extant forays have been sporadic and, taken together, are far from comprehensive (Ali 2006; Dickson 2009; Noor 2012). The five months of intensive participant observation I conducted at Masjid Ta-Ha may then be considered the first significant ethnographic mapping of TJ at a local ‘parish’ level (see Appendix C4). Here, I present key findings.

On a daily basis, committed TJ activists:

1. Convene in their local mosque for 5-10 minutes after one of the daily prayers (usually, but not always, Fajr) to hold a mashwera. The amir of the mosque presides over the mashwera or, in his absence, a deputy. Feedback [karguzari] from yesterday’s mulaakats [visits; see below] is given and a plan sketched out for the coming day’s (evening) TJ activities.

2. Devote 2 ½ hours to the mosque usually, though not always, in the evening starting around 6.30pm. This time is primarily taken up making mulaakats [visits] to fellow Muslims in the community. To facilitate an effective rota of visits and to ensure comprehensive coverage of the whole locality, it is usual for a mosque with an active TJ presence to house a mini-administration hub that contains the following:
   - A list of every Muslim address within the catchment area of the mosque, further broken down into the names of every individual adult male inhabitant. This may be presented in tabular format with such additional information as, ‘Occupation,’ ‘Date last met’ and ‘Outcome of visit.’
   - The ‘parish’ area may itself – if so decided in the local mashwera – be divided into a number of mini-halqas comprising several streets each which are assigned to a sub-group of the masjid-waar-jama’at responsible for meeting each individual in their mini-halqa. Common tashkeels, after giving basic da’wa to those visited, include

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5 Siddiqi (2010, p. 135), describing his fieldwork in Bangladesh, says “I used to participate with the daily and weekly mosque based TJ activities such as weekly congregation known as gasht.” Yet his experiences of the ‘local mosque scheme’ have not been written up as a dedicated account.

6 Given that – based on my fieldwork experiences – most Tier 3 activists work full-time, they arrive to spend their 2 ½ hours at the mosque after having spent only a short while at home after work. In practice, many TJ adepts actually spend less than 2 ½ hours as they struggle to balance professional, domestic and TJ commitments (see 10.2).
attending the local mosque for *salaat*, attending the Thursday night programme at the regional markaz or participating in a weekend *khuruj*.

- A large A4 diary in which names of potential participants are listed for forthcoming TJ tours under the appropriate date. As each date is a full A4 page, a long list can be compiled, feedback from visits added next to each name and, finally, on the date of departure confirmed participants split into smaller lists under the heading of the car they will be travelling in (Car 1, Car 2, etc.). This diary is used virtually every day to plan for the coming weekend’s *jama’at* (Masjid Ta-Ha had an outgoing *jama’at* every weekend); it is also used to plan for longer *jama’ats* in advance, such as a Christmas 10 days *jama’at* or a summer 40 days *jama’at*. The dates of the annual *ijtimas* – once known – are also inputted in the diary as are the dates when a foreign TJ group might be scheduled to visit and stay at the mosque (additional details such as the rota system through which local families feed the *jama’at* would also be recorded in the diary).

3. The third daily activity of the ‘local mosque scheme’ is the ½ hour *ta’lim* conducted both at the mosque, with fellow TJ activists, and at home, with family, (though, in practice, it often lasts only 10-15 minutes). Lewis (1994, p.95) notes the long-standing tradition of the imam reading aloud from the *Fadhail A’amal* in Urdu after the Asar prayer in many British Deobandi mosques; it is now common for younger TJ activists to hold their own English *ta’lim* in many mosques after the Isha prayer. Many Tier 4 sympathisers participate in the *ta’lim* and it is a key forum for socialising new recruits. Who is selected to read (followed by a couple of minutes of ‘soft’ *da’wa*) will have been decided in advance in the daily *mashwera*; and choosing a youngster, for example, who has just returned from a weekend *khuruj* to ‘do’ the English *ta’lim* that week is a good way to consolidate his commitment and encourage his progress.

The above three *a’amals* are carried out every day by committed TJ activists. On a weekly basis, they:

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7 This was the system used in Masjid Ta-Ha, where I conducted fieldwork, though it might differ from mosque to mosque.
8 Youngsters who have been regular in their weekend *jama’at* over a number of months are seen as having good potential to *tashkeel* for these longer tours which are scheduled to coincide with their holiday periods.
9 In 8.2.2.1, I identify the shift in the relationship the individual has with his religion, from a passive consumer to an active purveyor – occasioned through an ‘activation of agency’ – as a key appeal of TJ.
4. Participate in the two gashts: one umoomi [own locality] and the other beruni [neighbouring locality]. Each takes place on a specified day (decided in the local mashwera) and consists of meeting fellow Muslims along preconfigured lines:

- The *umoomi gasht* is frequently referred to as the ‘backbone of the work of da’wa’ and represents the most important local activity; those TJ activists who struggle to meet the movement’s full schedule of demands will try, at the very least, to participate in it. It involves a fixed programme of activities spanning two consecutive prayers (for instance, Maghrib and Isha) consisting of an *elan*, *adab-e-gasht*, *bayaan* and *tashkeel*, with individual roles assigned to activists in the daily mashwera. The *gasht* itself covers a single local street on which all adult male Muslims are called upon to attend the mosque-based talk to be delivered after the next prayer (usually Isha in winter and Asar in summer).

- The *beruni gasht* involves visiting once a week, a ‘weaker’ neighbouring locality in which scattered Muslims live far from a mosque. Addresses are usually obtained by scouring local electoral registers for Muslim-sounding names and TJ activists often turn up unannounced on the doorsteps of unsuspecting strangers.\(^{10}\) Reactions are often mixed with not infrequent rebuffs. The objective is to gather the Muslims of that community for prayer in usually improvised premises which can become the foundation of a more permanent prayer space. Visitees are also invited to attend the Thursday night programme at the regional markaz and to participate in weekend TJ outings.

5. Finally, on a monthly basis, committed TJ activists are encouraged to participate in a *khuruj* to the mosque of a nearby town or city lasting 72 hours (from Thursday to Sunday evening). In practice, and as illustrated by the regional markaz noticeboard photograph in 5.4.1, the majority of monthly TJ outings across Britain are actually 48 hours in length (from Friday to Sunday evening) as the full ‘three days’ would entail taking leave from work on the Friday. Only a handful of the really dedicated do this, although the international and national markazes have been pushing – unsuccessfully it seems – for more compliance in recent years. The monthly weekend *khuruj* is a crucial component of TJ’s overarching modus operandi. It provides a short yet intense opportunity for new recruits to be socialised away

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\(^{10}\) See Noor (2009) for a vivid account of how the first Pathan *jama’at* to visit the Indonesian island of Java did just this; and also the opening chapter of Sardar (2004a) for an autobiographical satire of being visited by a member of a Pakistani *jama’at*.
This then constitutes an overview of the ‘Five A’amals’ that, in terms of an idealised vision, TJ seeks to establish in every mosque across Britain. However, as we have seen, TJ is unable to operate in many mosques where these A’amals are simply non-existent. In many others, they exist partially – for example, an English ta’lim takes place after Isha for around 10 minutes after which mulaakats happen for an hour; the mashwera after Fajr is convened intermittently; a weekly umoomi gasht happens, but the beruni gasht is sporadic; and a single weekend jama’at goes out each month. In a small number of British mosques, each of the Five A’amals are firmly established and meticulously adhered to by a solid base of Tier 3 activists; about one such Lancashire mosque I was reliably informed that it unfailingly generates thirteen weekend jama’ats every month!

Given the mosque-based setting of the Maqaami Kaam, it regularly exposes ordinary worshipers to some form of TJ activity. Participation in the Local Work also usually precedes the commitment of a longer khuruj. While the expectation from the markazes is that any Muslim who has undertaken the signature 4 months tour to South Asia will participate fully in each of the Five A’amals, in practice this is of course far from the case. For the purposes of my typology then, a Tier 3 activist may be defined as anybody who has:

- Undertaken the four month khuruj to South Asia\(^\text{11}\) and who participates frequently (though not meticulously) in some of the Five A’amals – most significantly including the weekly umoomi gasht and monthly weekend TJ outing.
- Or, a TJ activist of increasing experience who, though he may not (yet) have undertaken the key four month khuruj to South Asia, has participated in at least one local chillah and who participates frequently (though not meticulously) in some of the Five A’amals.

An amalgamation of Tier 3 activists in a single mosque setting constitutes a masjid-waar-jama’at presided over by the local mosque amir. Those mosques with a strong TJ presence may have upwards of 30 members in their masjid-waar-jama’at who participate together regularly in the Five A’amals. Weak mosques may have only a handful who struggle to maintain any kind of consistency. Most British mosques with a TJ presence (several hundred) are probably somewhere in between. Further, while Tier 1 and Tier 2 leaders are predominantly middle-aged or elderly first generation migrants (with white beards), Tier 3 has a large proportion of British-born youth (with black beards).

\(^\text{11}\) During this trip they usually visit international TJ centres in at least two of the three ‘countries of origin’: India, Pakistan or Bangladesh.
– an issue I unpack in greater detail in 6.3. Finally, while the above all relates to the activities of male TJ adherents who constitute the movement’s largest demographic, I found the *masturat* dimension was frequently discussed in the local mosque context (for instance, on several occasions, I found myself participating in evening *gasht mulaakats* to prepare a weekend *masturat jama’at*). As a result, I was able to gain insights into the nature of female TJ activism, despite my lack of access, which were further corroborated through interviews. In Appendix C2 then, I succinctly summarise my findings about the *masturat*.

### 5.2.4 TIER 4 – TJ sympathisers

This category describes those British Muslims loosely associated with some kind of TJ activity, whether sometimes participating in the daily *ta’lim* at the local mosque or occasionally going out on a weekend *khuruj*. They may have spent more or less periods of time on TJ tours at some point in their lives but their present relationship with the movement is essentially casual and non-committal. They broadly identify with the movement’s goals and ideals, agreeing that “it’s a good thing,” but may have either specific gripes or, more often, admit to personal weakness (“Yes, I should be doing it but…”) that prevent further involvement. This category includes many Deobandi ulema as well as laity and equates roughly to the “large amorphous allegiance based on status, emotional loyalty, or pragmatic need” referenced above by Geaves (2000, p.77) in his analysis of Sufi brotherhoods in Britain.

Tier 4 sympathisers may offer to feed visiting TJ groups or help transport them from one mosque to another; similarly they might arrange for their son or daughter’s *nikah* to be held at the regional markaz’s Thursday night gathering or at the annual *ijtima* in Dewsbury to partake of the blessings deemed to accompany such occasions. They might also attend the final lengthy *duaa* of the *ijtima*, though not the *ijtima* itself. Crisis events in their lives may propel them to go out on a weekend *jama’at* in which they can spend dedicated time supplicating Allah and affective ties with existing Tier 3 activists, who may be friends or family members, might gradually socialise them further into the movement. TJ for many such sympathisers constitutes a taken-for-granted component of their religious world view implicitly shaping their experience of the faith through its normative presence in the mosques they habitually attend. Many non-Deobandi and non-South Asian Muslims who do not explicitly identify with groups ideologically opposed to TJ (see Tier 6 below) and have had some kind of exposure to TJ would also belong to this category. This last point was powerfully driven home to

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12 While it is difficult to quantify how many Tier 3 activists are British-born, I found it useful as a broad indicator to simply gauge the number of black beards I observed at several Thursday night gatherings at the Blackburn Markaz as opposed to white beards; a guessestimate which indicated a youthful majority and which accords with the general findings of my fieldwork undertaken in TJ mosques and markazes across the country.
me during my 42 day road trip to Bulgaria when our small jama'at was consistently and movingly showered with food and other gifts by a very diverse panoply of Muslim communities we passed through (see 7.3.3).

5.2.4.1 Critical sympathisers

While many Tier 4 sympathisers identify broadly with TJ’s vision and ethos, some have gripes about specific issues. My interview with Adam, a 42 year old I.T. consultant originally from Peterborough, provides a good example of this. Adam has been elected as the president of his local mosque management committee and, while studying at university many years ago, participated in several weekend khuruj outings which cemented his shift away from the politicised rhetoric of Hizb-ut-Tahrir he said he had previously been drawn to. He never subsequently became involved in TJ and so his assessment of it today derives mainly from his observation of TJ in various UK mosques as well as his interaction with the local Tier 3 masjid-waar-jama’at of his own mosque.

Riyaz: So, based on your understanding of and your exposure to TJ, what would you say are the positive things?

Adam: I think they’re very committed. And I think they’re a universal movement. I think they focus on the religion and they don’t look at all the different opinions of the scholars, they just take everybody on board and go with it you know...And they promote some good messages, some positive messages about reformation and how we should...conduct our lives and they’re a movement that really focus on the basics, get back to basics, get back to grassroots...And I think they appeal to a lot of the young people as well. I think they do good work...they involve the youth who find it very attractive...You know, I see a lot of Tablighi doctors, engineers, you know the amount of professionals now that are in the Tabligh field is very, very interesting. It’s no longer like what it used to be in the 70s...And you see a lot of people reforming themselves, you know, former convicts, former drug-dealers or drug-users or what have you...I’ve seen them with my own eyes how they’ve reformed and how they’ve changed their character and how righteous they’ve become.

Riyaz: And what are the negative things? What are the things which put you off or are frustrating or could be done better?

Adam: I find TJ number one, too restrictive, OK. There are certain texts and that’s it. They won’t look at other texts...their message is only one. I think they’re not very contemporary in their approach. I think their views on women in the society that we
live in, I think it’s a bit of a dated or maybe a mixed message for women. I also find their system a bit ritualistic, sometimes in the mosque you get the feeling that if you’re not part of this movement you’re an outcast. And you get that sort of vibe sometimes...They are very rigid in their approach so, no, this is our work and that’s it, nothing else...They’re very narrow-minded in their approach sometimes. Their outreach work is zilch, is nearly, is zero really...and that’s what I find a bit of a weakness that the Tablighi Jama’at movement in Dewsbury even run a boarding school. How many of their graduates come out and go to school assemblies and give messages out, or you know give interviews in newspapers or do things with the wider community? Very few. And these are the things that I think...where they could have done other things given the size and the scale of the movement, the dedication of their volunteers, their network, you know, they’re virtually in every, a lot of the mosques nationwide, they’re probably the most united movement in the UK. They’re actually bigger than what people think. You know, there’s a Tablighi mosque in every town and city in the country. What they could have done in the wider society I think they could have really made a difference...These are niggles that I have about them...But I’m not against it. I’m...absolutely not against them at all you know...I mean, I’ll say it for the record I’m not anti-tablighi in any way at all, I just have a few things...I think they could do differently and better, but they haven’t.

5.2.5  TIER 5 – The broader Muslim community of Britain: indifferent
The nature of a typology premised upon a series of concentric circles requires that the outer rings be numerically greater than the inner ones. In this typology, Tiers 1 and 2 refer to a handful of individuals selected by appointment only. While Tier 3 is greater numerically than these first two, it constitutes no more than a recognisable and active minority within the broader Muslim population - as observed by Hamid more generally:

It is important also to note that despite evidence of increasing religiosity among British Muslim young people (Gilliat-Ray 2010; Lewis 2007) the majority remain only ‘cultural Muslims’, that is to say non-observant, practising their faith only very occasionally. This group represents around 75–80 per cent of Muslim communities in western societies (Ramadan 2010); the remaining 20 per cent or so may be involved in some form of structured religious activities, and within that group a smaller percentage are involved in committed religious activism. (Hamid 2011, p.250)
Tier 4 is a much more nebulous entity and, while difficult to quantify, I would tentatively offer that distinct swaths of the British Muslim population fall into it – particularly if we include the sub-category of ‘critical sympathisers.’ The greatest numerical category however is likely to be Tier 5: the broader Muslim community of Britain that has little or no affiliation with TJ. This might be due either to a lack of interest or a lack of exposure to TJ’s particular method of Islamic reform. With respect to the former, TJ is likely to interest only those Muslims predisposed to a religious sensibility; secularised or nominal believers would, by definition, find no appeal in its activities (though this might well change if the mechanics of an ‘intra-religious conversion’ experience are triggered - as demonstrated in Chapters 8-10). With regard to the latter, a key consideration is gender: given that the mosque is the primary arena of TJ activism and that many British mosques have either limited or no facilities for female attendance,\(^{13}\) many British Muslim women de facto find themselves with extremely limited access to TJ. The movement’s modus operandi further compounds this; unless a British Muslim woman has a male relative active in TJ, she would find it extremely difficult to participate in its full range of activities (see Appendix C2). It may be surmised then that a majority of Britain’s female Muslim population are indifferent to TJ having had very little exposure to it; though some may have formed either positive or negative opinions of it based upon either anecdotal or personal knowledge of (male) TJ experiences (Metcalf 2000) or through listening to the recorded/online lectures of popular TJ clerics such as Mawlana Tariq Jameel (Reetz 2014b, p.32) or Mawlana Suleman Khatani (Janson 2014, p.227).

British Muslims active in an alternative Islamic movement not explicitly opposed to TJ may also belong to this category. While vaguely aware of TJ, it might represent no more than a single element of a heterogeneous British Muslim landscape that forms the backdrop to their own activism. Others may have been exposed to TJ – perhaps by participating in a weekend \textit{khuruj} or having met a visiting \textit{jama'at}\(^{14}\) – but simply choose not to participate any further, considering themselves neither sympathetic nor hostile. From a Tier 3 perspective, the meticulous implementation of the daily \textit{gasht} system is designed to track down and induce (male) Tier 5 members to move upwards through the typology.

\(^{13}\) Naqshbandi (2015, p.4) finds – somewhat surprisingly – that 70% of British mosques have (some kind of limited) facilities for women, though the actual number that caters, for example, for female participation in the daily \textit{salaat} would be far less. Inge (2017, pp.36-37), in describing her primary fieldwork site, captures a key reason for this that can be extrapolated beyond the Salafi context: “The [mosque] premises...are divided into a male section and a female one, which is much smaller due to the Salafi teaching that congregational prayers are obligatory for men but optional for women.”

\(^{14}\) Note Sardar’s (2006) comments: “I became a Tablighi for a few days during my youth. Indeed, most young Muslims in Britain have spent some time ‘going out on Tabligh’. It is difficult not to. The Tablighi are ubiquitous, do not give up easily and their simple message resonates with nascent minds.”


5.2.6  TIER 6 – Active hostility toward TJ

This category encompasses those segments of the British Muslim population who are openly and vocally hostile to TJ. Reasons are typically ideological/sectarian; members of rival Islamic groups may ‘nihilate’ aspects of TJ’s praxis as part of their own activism (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The historical Deobandi-Barelwi conflict, transposed into a diasporic context, comes into play here as many British Barelwis remain ideologically opposed to TJ seeing it as inextricably bound with its Deobandi progenitor (Qadri 1987 is a good example of an extended Barelwi broadside against TJ). Similarly, many strands of the Salafiyyah oppose TJ condemning various rites as innovations [bid’ah] or of a weak foundation [da’eef] in normative Islam. Ed Husain’s (2007, pp.121-125) autobiography provides a good insight into how politically oriented groups, such as the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, may attack what they perceive to be the disengaged, apolitical quietism of TJ while Ahmad (1991) recounts some of the key criticisms of TJ made by the Jama’at-e-Islami. Some modernist Muslim thinkers also take issue with TJ’s ostensibly anachronistic conservatism; Dr Taj Hargey, for example, recently accused TJ of perpetuating a “Neanderthal version of Islam” unwelcome in the UK (Mbubaegbu 2012).

There is also a small presence within the Deobandi community itself that could be classified as belonging to this category. This includes a minority of ulema who feel TJ has overstepped the boundaries circumscribing the public preaching activities of unqualified laity (see the questions consistently posed in Azmi (2010)); and the ultra-orthodox Majlis-ul-Ulama of South Africa have frequently castigated TJ for insisting that women as well as men should engage in khuruj. Other ulema, while sometimes expressing reservations about particular aspects of TJ – such as an almost monomaniacal insistence on da’wa to the exclusion of other forms of religious and spiritual development – nevertheless sympathise with its general aims and ideals; they cannot therefore be categorised here as ‘hostile critics’ but the Tier 4 appellation of ‘critical sympathisers’ appears more accurate (the British Deobandi Mufti Muhammad ibn Adam al-Kawthari’s article The Blessed Effort of Jama’ah al-Tabligh & the Wrong Practices Adopted by some within the Work is a good example of this type of constructive criticism). Disillusioned former activists also constitute a small yet vocal minority openly hostile to TJ; Mehboob Kantharia, a Leicester-based Gujarati businessman, was once

16 Masud (2000b, pp.90-107) provides a comprehensive overview of the various critiques of TJ made by a host of rival Islamic reform movements in South Asia.
– according to Bowen (2014, pp.45-48) – “part of the Tablighi Jamaat ‘inner circle’ in the UK.” Now, however, he considers TJ to be “the most dangerous movement for the Muslims worldwide” and “is part of a discreet group of like-minded former followers who talk regularly and exchange emails.”

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a detailed description of how TJ operates in contemporary Britain at both the institutional and individual levels. What emerges is a picture of a movement that has successfully transplanted itself into a very different socio-cultural milieu from the one it was first conceived. While Sikand’s 1990s study of British TJ found it held considerable appeal for first-generation migrants seeking to assuage the dislocation intrinsic to the migration process, the appeal of TJ to British-born youth remains, in the academic literature at least, a far more ambiguous matter. In the next two chapters I specifically examine the issue of intergenerational transmission in British TJ exploring how the institutional infrastructure established by the first-generation is being appropriated by their British-born offspring.
Everywhere, cultural identities are emerging which are not fixed, but poised, in transition, between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalized world. It may be tempting to think of identity in the age of globalization as destined to end up in one place or another: either returning to its “roots” or disappearing through assimilation and homogenization. But this may be a false dilemma.

For there is another possibility: that of “Translation.” This describes those identity formations which cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and which are composed of people who have been dispersed forever from their homelands. Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusion of a return to the past. They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely...They are the products of the new diasporas created by the post-colonial migrations. They must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them. Cultures of hybridity are one of the distinctly novel types of identity produced in the era of late-modernity, and there are more and more examples of them to be discovered.

Stuart Hall (1992, p.629)
In this set of two chapters I examine the issue of intergenerational transmission in British TJ. In this my work engages with the research questions raised in 2.2.6, building on Sikand’s 1990s study. In particular, I examine his analysis of TJ’s social support structure and his predictions about TJ’s future in light of fresh empirical data generated by my own fieldwork. I identify a successful vertical transmission of TJ within particular segments of the British Muslim population and highlight specific identity markers relating to food, dress and language that allow me to posit a conceptual distinction based on the ‘Old Guard’ and the ‘Avant-Garde.’

Old Guard TJ activists relate to first-generation Urdu-speaking migrants steeped heavily in South Asian cultural mores. Avant-Garde TJ activists, by contrast, are British-born English-speakers far more comfortable with the broader social setting in which their religiosity is actualised. This conceptual distinction draws upon a sizeable body of scholarship on the evolution of Western Muslim identities more generally which I seek to deploy here to demonstrate how processes of indigenisation have set in within British TJ. I argue, in conclusion, that contemporary British TJ should best be characterised as a movement in transition.

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1 I must confess a rather unusual provenance to this nomenclature. It derives from Atkinson et al. (2003)’s survey of qualitative research methods in which they distinguish between ‘Old Guard’ and ‘Avant Garde’ modes of enquiry, identifying 1985 as a watershed year (see 3.1.1). I have appropriated and modified their distinction for quite different ends and, if pressed, would postulate 1994 as a watershed year for British TJ for reasons outlined in 6.2 below. As with all Weberian ‘ideal types’ I hasten to add that this classification only roughly approximates to social reality and cannot be said to be perfectly and universally valid. Further, my usage of the term ‘Avant-Garde’ should not be confused with the radical experimental styles of the cultural art movement.
Chapter 6

Black Beards, White Beards and 40 Shades of Grey: Intergenerational Transmission in British TJ

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Did you hear the one about the Tablighi policeman who caught a fella speeding? He gave him six points...

(joke told to the author by an ‘Avant-Garde’ respondent; see also Appendix D for English-language poems written by contemporary TJ activists)

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Sikand’s study of TJ in Britain concluded with the following unoptimistic paragraph:

From its phase of consolidation in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, the TJ seems, with the emergence of a new generation of British-born Muslims, to have entered a phase of gradual decline. Many young British Muslims today would seem to find the Tablighi expression of Islam outmoded, if not ‘un-Islamic’ itself. By making no significant modifications in its methods and approach to suit the exigencies of the British context, the TJ seems to have little hope for any very significant breakthroughs in Britain in the years to come. (Sikand 1998a, p.297)

In this section, I examine these assertions in light of the new empirical data generated by my fieldwork. In particular, I ask whether a process of intergenerational transmission has occurred within British TJ and, if so, what segments of the second and third generation British-born Muslim population continue to be drawn to the movement.
6.1 The Broader ‘Turn to Islam’ Among British-born Youth in the 1990s

The existing literature records how the 1990s were generally a time of ferment and turmoil in British Muslim communities as the first British-born generation came of age against a backdrop of global events affecting Muslim identity including the Rushdie affair, the Gulf War, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina and conflicts involving Muslims in Chechnya and Kosovo (Birt 2009; Hamid 2009, 2011; Husain 2007). According to Hamid:

The 90s were the defining era for second-generation Islamic revival and activism; indeed this decade was perhaps the most intense for its identity politics. Membership of a jama’a (association) provided strong friendship networks that are a by-product of group identity, and are especially important for Muslim youth keen to escape racism and feel part of something bigger than themselves. These informal networks provided opportunities to develop an Islamic identity and create communities of shared meaning and alternative religious practice structured by intergenerational change and rebellion against the Islam of their parents. (Hamid 2009, p.359)

Hamid’s analysis is supported by Abubakr, a 58 year old Tier 2 TJ leader I interviewed for over 5 hours. Abubakr arrived in the UK in 1963 aged 8 and was thus able to pick up the English language as well as a state education with relative ease. Yet his primary socialisation in India coupled with his long-standing devotion to TJ since 1982 allowed him to function as something of an interface between the Old Guard and Avant-Garde generations. He was thus in an excellent position to comment on the evolving nature of TJ participation through the 80s and 90s:

The early 90s was, sort of, a golden era for Tabligh in the sense that the influx and influence of the young people took a new turn. Well, there were no real youngsters prior to that but the 1994 World ijtima definitely helped and then I think there was just a general sort of spiritual revival among the young people in the 90s...There were also a lot of youngsters who took up studying knowledge and went to Dar al-Ulum and others took bay’ah with a Shaykh. But particularly Tabligh, so those who couldn’t maybe go to Dar al-Ulum or tasawwuf wasn’t their way for whatever reason then Tabligh was for more or less everybody really. So I think because of the tide...in each town and city there were some good youngsters that cropped up and they influenced a lot of other youngsters...they could relate to their age group better than the elder generation. But it was a combined effort, you know, the experience of the elders and the enthusiasm of the youngsters, they were coming in with a lot of zeal and the elders guided them.
Abubakr’s outlining of the options available to British-born Muslim youth seeking deeper religious experience in the 90s was circumscribed by the Deobandi institutional infrastructure familiar to him: Dar al-Ulum, *tasawwuf* or TJ. It is clear from his account that all these options enjoyed popularity, a fact about which there seems to be a lacuna in the existing literature:

> In the early 1990s, Muslim youth who wanted to take their religion seriously could choose between three main contenders. Besides JIMAS [a key Salafi organisation], the significant players in the field of Islamic activism were the Young Muslims (YM) and pan-Islamist movement Hizb ut-Tahrir...Towards the mid-1990s the Islamic scene in Britain was dominated by the struggle between the Salafis and HT for hegemony in the field of Islamic activism. (Hamid 2009, pp.359-360)

In 2.2.6.2, I analysed potential reasons for this lacuna identifying both the difficulty of accessing TJ’s oral culture and it’s essentially quietist, non-confrontational mode of operation that allows it to expand its activities beyond the radar of many conventional monitors. What becomes clear from my interviews though is that the broader 1990s ‘turn to Islam’ captured in the academic literature was premised for many second-generation British-born Muslims – particularly those belonging to predominantly Deobandi communities – upon an increasing involvement with TJ. In this respect – and as indicated by Abubakr – a landmark event that to this day functions in the memory of my respondents as a key catalyst for the transmission of TJ to British-born generations was the mammoth 1994 ‘World *Ijtima*’ convened in Dewsbury.
6.2 The Significance of the 1994 ‘World Ijtima’

Section 1.2 sketched how the organisation of gargantuan *ijtima* emerged as an integral component of normative TJ praxis in South Asia. Outside of South Asia also, this technique has been replicated to draw huge crowds: Amrullah (2011, p.139), for example, records how the 2009 annual *ijtima* in Indonesia attracted 800,000 Muslims including the country’s vice-president Jusuf Kalla. In the UK, Sikand’s (1998b, p.178) history highlights the salience of early *ijtimas* convened in the 60s in London and Manchester while Sardar (2004a, pp.11-12), in his witty travelogue, recounts his attendance at a Sheffield *ijtima* in 1972.\(^2\) My fieldwork uncovered another *ijtima* organised in Belgium in 1982, attendance at which was a pivotal turning point in the life of Abubakr quoted above.\(^3\) Yet the most significant *ijtima* convened to date on British soil remains the huge gathering held at Dewsbury in 1994. The reason this event was called a ‘World’ *ijtima*, according to my respondents, was threefold. First, all the top-ranking TJ elders from the various South Asian headquarters — including the then global amir Hazratji — attended delivering the various speeches. Second, an open invitation to attend was issued to TJ activists (male and female) from around the world. Lastly, one of the key

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\(^2\) The British Sufi academic Abdal Hakim Murad also recounts his experience of attending a TJ *ijtima*, and meeting TJ’s global amir Hazratji, in Detroit soon after converting to Islam (see [http://yttoons.com/watch/ZLWhnUZJN0/abd-al-hakim-murad-on-tablighi-jamaat](http://yttoons.com/watch/ZLWhnUZJN0/abd-al-hakim-murad-on-tablighi-jamaat) - accessed 22 March 2016).

\(^3\) Metcalf (1996b, p.115) mentions this *ijtima*. 

objectives was to dispatch from the *ijtima* TJ delegations to every\(^4\) country in the world (which, according to several of my respondents, was apparently achieved).

A great majority of my respondents, actively committed to TJ to this day, vividly and fondly recall attending this landmark event in the history of British TJ. In their accounts, estimates of audience size vary between 30,000–60,000 and several relate the usual swelling of crowds for the concluding *du’aa*. It seems that the second-generation involvement in TJ began prior to the *ijtima* itself through participation in local TJ activities; here several respondents highlighted the important role played by overseas Malaysian students studying at British universities in the late 80s/early 90s many of whom, already committed to TJ, introduced the South Asian British-born generation to the movement. The event of the *ijtima*, however, consolidated the fledgling commitment of such neophytes and exposed them definitively to TJ’s international dimensions. For example, Luqman, who was the *amir* of my 42 days fieldtrip *khuruj* to Bulgaria in 2013, recounted to me his experience of attending this *ijtima* as a 16 year old school-leaver:

In June 1994, I went out for 20 days [on a UK-based *khuruj*] from the World *Ijtima* that took place in Dewsbury and there was, well I’d never seen so many people in my life and I was very, very taken aback. They had big massive tents on the football grounds at the back of Markaz and just this sea of humanity and tents galore. And that was the first time ever that I discovered that TJ activities are not just in the UK but, to my surprise, I found out...that TJ groups went to hundreds of countries and there were names of countries that I had never heard of before and I remember sitting there thinking I would love to do the same as well, to go to these countries for the sake of Deen.

Muaaz is a 41 year old second-generation Tier 3 activist from London hailing from a family with strong Jama’at-e-Islami affiliations in Bangladesh. He was also the *amir* of the two TJ groups I joined during the summer of 2014 to Bradford and Birmingham for 10 days each. During interview, he recalled how, much to the chagrin of his parents, he spent his first 40 days on a UK-based TJ tour in 1989 aged only 16.\(^5\) By the time of the 1994 *ijtima*, he had therefore already accumulated the experience of several annual *chillahs*:

Yeah, I was very excited, it was a big gathering and it had a huge impact on every level of the work in this country that *World Ijtima* did. And I believe a *jama’at* actually went

\(^4\) I presume this refers to every country with a sizeable Muslim population.

\(^5\) See 8.2.2.1 for more on Muaaz’s conversion to TJ. Incidentally, Muaaz also recounted to me how both his parents eventually converted to TJ considerably impacting his wider family.
to every country in the world from England that year. A lot of second-generation Muslims came into Tabligh in those early 90s in the run up to the World Ijtima.

For Hanzalah, a 47 year old British-born Tier 2 leader from Leicester (the only British-born Tier 2 leader I interviewed), attendance at the 1994 World Ijtima – and specifically meeting Hazratji, TJ’s global amir – was an emotionally charged, life-defining moment in his TJ career:

Hanzalah: So then January, February, March, April and May, five months, I did three days [weekend khuruj] every month. The reason I know it was five months is in June, it was the World Ijtima, 1994. So prior to the ijtima, there was a great deal of effort across the UK through visiting jama’ats and so on. And from the ijtima I went to India for my first chillah.

Riyaz: Ah, OK. Were you with other guys from Leicester?

Hanzalah: There was, let me get this right now. I think there was 19 from Leicester and 16 from Birmingham. There were 35 of us on the plane, if I’m not mistaken.

Riyaz: Would you say the majority of these guys were British-born, English-speaking?

Hanzalah: Yeah, yeah – absolutely. I mean the likes of [long stream of names]. There might have been about four or five elders who were obviously non-UK born. But of that 35, I would say maybe 28, 30 were all pretty much UK-born, I would say the average age was maybe mid-20s. And I would say a good 75-80% of that crowd are still steadfast in the work [of TJ] till today, a good 20-25 years on.

During the World Ijtima, Hanzalah was asked if he would like to take a Sufi pledge of allegiance [bay’ah] with Hazratji. Being new to the practice of Islam, he was unsure what this would entail and so quickly consulted with a couple of local elders he trusted before deciding to take the plunge. His account of the experience 20 years later is still palpably emotive:

So we sort of swore allegiance, as they say, with Hazratji, but that time for me was beautiful because where that bunch of flowers is sat there on the table, that was how close I was to Hazratji. He was sat on the bed. We were sat all along the floor and we got his rope that was passed around so we all held it and he was the most amazing individual I have seen in my whole life. I don’t think I have ever and will ever see radiance like I saw on his face...It was unbelievable, absolutely unbelievable. For me,
that was the highlight and for me that was the culmination of saying, you know what? I’m glad I’m going for 40 days and I’m glad I’m associated with this effort because I would never, ever have seen a spiritual person represent the spirit of my religion the way this person personified it...And for me, that was like wow, if this is what this effort is all about, then I really want a big piece of it, not even a small piece. I really wanna try and be that person.6

Raees, a 34 year old Tier 3 science teacher from Blackburn, became progressively involved in TJ over a several year period in the mid-late 90s. Due to his relatively young age, he missed attendance at the World Ijtima but felt he was carried along on the ‘wind of change’ that arose consequently:

I was there [in TJ] because my mates were there, you know, and it was very much a social thing. And at the time, I mean, the period of 95, 96, there was a huge, sort of, it seemed everyone was almost taking up Tabligh at that time and everyone was interested in the effort. And there was a huge wind of change and people were just going out [in khuruj] because other people were going and because an environment was created. So it was mainly on the back of that really.

The above extracts form only a small, albeit representative, selection from my dataset. What becomes clear is that the 1990s was a key decade of intergenerational transmission for British TJ with the 1994 World Ijtima playing a specific and crucial role. Though this fits well with the broader second-generation ‘turn to Islam’ identified earlier, it is absent from both the general literature on Muslims in Britain as well as Sikand’s specific study. Possible reasons for the former lacuna have already been cited and it is possible that Sikand, during his brief period of UK fieldwork, missed this nascent phenomenon. Consequently, it might be asserted that his study provides us with a snapshot in time – the concerns and issues principally facing the Old Guard – while the story of British TJ has in fact been a moving picture. Further, conversion to TJ seems most likely for those with an existing predisposition to the movement. This actually seems to be the case as a majority of my second-generation respondents belong to Gujarati Deobandi communities in the North West – though it is simultaneously a mistake I feel to restrict British TJ to that community alone. In sum: the 1994 World Ijtima was a landmark event for British Muslims with even a nominal affiliation to the broader Deobandi ethos – Tiers 1, 2, 3 and 4 – but for most of Tiers 5 and 6 it might well have passed unnoticed. Nevertheless, its role as a catalyst in facilitating intergenerational transmission from the Old Guard to the Avant-Garde should be duly recognised.

6 Hanzalah subsequently experienced a powerful intra-religious conversion experience which I capture in 9.2.1.
A plan of the layout for the 1994 ‘World Ijtima,’ provided to me by a respondent, which shows the huge tents to be erected on the playing fields behind the Markaz / Dar al-Ulum complex.
6.3 An Analysis of my Interview Sample

As described in 3.3.2, I conducted a total of 59 interviews both formal (25) and informal (34). Many of the latter were with youthful Tier 4 sympathisers experimenting with the movement – 19/34 were students and 22/34 were aged between 16-25. In this section, I analyse the biographical traits of my sample.⁷

**FORMAL INTERVIEWS (25 men)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Number of interviewees</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
<th>British-born</th>
<th>Percentage British-born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11/12</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
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**INFORMAL INTERVIEWS (33 men)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
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<th>Average Age</th>
<th>British-born</th>
<th>Percentage British-born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6/9</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22/24</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁷ As one informal respondent was a Bulgarian national I interviewed during my fieldwork in that country, I discount him for the purposes of this analysis.
While, as a qualitative study, this analysis cannot claim to be strictly representative, it nevertheless becomes immediately clear that the upper echelons of TJ’s organisational hierarchy continue to be dominated by the ‘Old Guard’ while the rank and file of the movement is now predominantly British-born. This finding was corroborated by a consistent range of field experiences accumulated over 18 months – not least the observation outlined at the end of 5.2.3 that the number of black beards in TJ gatherings now clearly outnumber white beards. Additionally, the *masjid-waar-jama’at* with which I conducted five months of fieldwork comprised approximately 20 members of which 15 were British-born Tier 3 activists. The fact that there are now a not insignificant number of British-born grey beards – usually with several decades of dedicated TJ experience – indicates an upward percolation of the ‘Avant-Garde’ through the tiered hierarchy. The relative agedness of Tier 1 and 2 leaders (the average age of the Tier 1 hierarchy is easily 65+) further indicates that, over time, they will gradually be replaced by British-born activists. This is a dynamic that Lewis observes with reference to the demographics of British Muslim communities in general:

> It is clear to me that a significant inter-generational shift in leadership is occurring. This should not be a cause for surprise when we realise that of the 50 per cent of the

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8 Janson (2014, p.81), interestingly, uses the *length* of her interlocutors’ beards to judge the duration of their involvement with TJ: “The beard forms part of the Tablighi uniform. From the moment he enters the Jama’at, the Tablighi stops shaving. Thus the beard is not only a symbol of piety, but also an indicator of the duration of Tablighi membership.” I, however, did not apply this reasoning to British TJ as A) some people’s beards simply grow less than others, and B) many British TJ activists avail of the juristic [*fiqh*] licence to trim facial hair that protrudes beyond a fist-length. Rather, I think it is reasonable to judge – at the present moment at least – that a majority of TJ activists with black beards are British-born, while those with white beards are first-generation migrants. Shades of grey may belong to either camp and, accordingly, I divide them 50/50. Of course, as immigration is an ongoing phenomenon there is also a significant minority of black-bearded British TJ activists born outside the UK.
community who are under 25 years old...most were born and educated in the UK. This is in contrast to some 85 per cent of the Muslim elite, active as MPs, councillors and leaders of Muslim associations, who were born outside Britain. (Lewis 2007, p.xv)

Further analysis of my interview sample relating to the year and age at which the first 40 day _khuruj_ (usually within the UK) and 4 month outing (to South Asia) occurred is revealing. Tiers 2 and 3, by definition, will have subsequently maintained a commitment to the movement’s normative praxis including, as a minimum, an annual _chillah_ which, at the point of interview, they were all still actively committed to. Tier 4 sympathisers, by contrast, are no longer active. The table below has been sorted according to the year the first 40 day _khuruj_ was undertaken and is restricted to British-born respondents only so as to provide a better gauge of intergenerational transmission.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>British-born?</th>
<th>Current Age</th>
<th>Age of 1st 40 days</th>
<th>Year of first 40 days</th>
<th>Age of 1st 4 months</th>
<th>Year of 1st 4 months</th>
<th>Length of Involvement (Years)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1994</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<td>1996</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
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<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What becomes clear is a constant stream of British-born Muslims in their late teens participating in 40 day TJ outings. This finding is again corroborated by independent sources of data. For instance, during my stay at the Dewsbury HQ during the 2014 summer holidays I found it was teeming with groups of youthful British-born Muslims from across the UK, many of whom were out on a 40 day *khuruj*. While speaking with a key Tier 2 administrator at the markaz, I learnt that the mosques in three of the six TJ regions were operating at maximum capacity. In other words, every mosque in the Lancashire, Yorkshire and East Midlands *halqas* that allow TJ groups to stay was currently
hosting a visiting jama‘at; therefore the Dewsbury HQ was sending freshly formed jama‘ats only to the London, Scotland and West Midlands regions – which were also coming close to full capacity. Similarly, on my return to Dewsbury Markaz from Bulgaria in late December 2013, I again found it was full of youthful British-born Muslims mainly out on a 10 day khuruj. On both occasions, the massive upper storey of the complex had been opened to accommodate the large number of visitors and I was told that the peak periods of activity coincide with the holiday periods of students: Christmas, Easter and summer.

The upper storey of the large TJ complex in Dewsbury strewn, in Ziauddin Sardar’s (2004a, p.2) words, with a plethora of “contended logs” taking their sunnah siesta nap during the peak summer holiday period in 2014.

Source: author’s photo.

It seems axiomatic that the bulk of youth participating in these TJ outings will not progress to become dedicated Tier 3 activists. A good number may remain lifelong Tier 4 sympathisers, retaining fond memories of their youthful time ‘out on jama‘at,’ while others may become
indifferent to the movement (Tier 5) as they proceed through the various stages of their adult lives.\(^9\) A small number may become hostile Tier 6 critics. A crucial point to note here is the difficulty of mapping the impact of a (lengthy) TJ tour on the subsequent life trajectory of an individual who may never participate in the movement again. For instance, a teenage student may participate in a chillah during his summer holidays as a result of which he grows a beard and remains committed to his daily salaat throughout the rest of his life – though he never participates again in another TJ activity. The implicit role of TJ in generating a broader Islamic ambience is evident here; a point clearly exemplified during an interview with Nurul, a 25 year old British-born Bangladeshi from Bradford who participated in a single 40 day khuruj aged 16:

> When I look back on it, Alhamdulillah...I found it very spiritually fulfilling. You know, getting away from the environment, spending time away, it gave you time to reflect...it gave me that, look, you know, it’s not about making money, it’s not about, they always talk about in TJ what is success? And the notions of success, like, who’s version of success? And the narrative that TJ was offering was, you know, taking it back to the Prophet (s), and the Prophet (s) was a man who lived in poverty, and that was a source of pride for him. So it was good...and that’s had an impact on me, so like, when I look for a job, money is not that important. I know that money does not equal happiness, money does not equal success, you know. And so that’s had a massive impact on me, even until today. Like I won’t take a job, or even, because I’m working on this charity, it’s not, the pay is not great, but it’s more fulfilling spiritually, socially, you know, all of that thing. Because one of the things that TJ drilled into me, that life is short, mortality is imminent, you know, and you’ve got to make your decisions wisely. And when I look at a lot of other people, even my own friends, I see that they’re living life, but that concept, that bigger picture is not there. And that’s something that TJ drilled into me, yes.

Unlike Nurul, however, a minority of youth do go on to become dedicated Tier 3 activists. The usual trajectory I could discern here, as exemplified in many of my formal interviewees’ biographical experiences, is that students are asked to participate, as a minimum, in annual chillahs during their summer holidays and monthly weekend khuruj from their local mosques. Many more will also participate in the daily gasht though TJ elders have since the 1990s, I was told, formally exempted students from participating in the Maqaami Kaam so as to prevent any adverse impact on their

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\(^9\) According to Hamid (2015, p.104): “Many British Muslim activists remain loyal to the first Islamic trend that they encountered, even if they are no longer active in them, and will often retain an emotional or intellectual attachment to them.”
TJ students are typically recognisable on college and university campuses by their beards, turbans and flowing robes and many will also establish the *ta’lim*, and even *gasht*, in the multi-faith prayer facilities at their place of study (where they may face stiff competition from rival Islamic movements as recounted in several respondent accounts). Upon graduation from university, active TJ students usually embark immediately on the signature four month *khuruj* to South Asia after which they find full-time employment and seek to get married. By this time, they will have accumulated several years of dedicated TJ experience, having already undertaken numerous *chillahs* during their annual summer holidays, and it is usual for older, more experienced TJ activists – such as the local mosque *amir* – to help guide them through crucial life decisions relating to employment, marriage or the balancing of domestic, professional and religious commitments. Having thus settled into married life with a full-time job, this ‘ideal TJ career trajectory’ would then see the individual continue to participate in the Five A’amals – along with the *masturat* dimension now, of course – and annual *chillahs* for the rest of his life. Though later in life it is not uncommon to see a decrease in commitment to the movement’s set of rigorous demands (see 10.2), the bulk of British-born Tier 3 activists I interviewed – many of whom now have their own teenage children – had followed this exact trajectory and many younger students I spoke to envisioned the same path for themselves. The graph below maps the experiences of those British-born Tier 2 leaders and Tier 3 activists still strongly committed to the movement at the point of interview in 2014:

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10 A common TJ adage in this regard is: “*Pharaayi ki zamaanai mai oos ko chairo mat aur choothi ki zamaanai mai oos ko choro mat*” which roughly translates as “Don’t touch them [students] during term-time and don’t leave them alone during their holidays!” This policy probably arose to counter the concern of parents that participation in TJ would deleteriously impact on their children’s studies.

11 See also Inge (2017, pp.80-81).

12 For instance, it is usual for dedicated Tier 3 activists to make *mashwera* with local TJ elders with regards to such issues as buying a house, identifying a suitable marriage partner (who is often from another TJ family or an *alimah* - female graduate of a British Dar al-Ulum) or even which course to study at university.
What becomes clear is that the signature four month *khuruj* takes places mostly in the early-mid 20s, unlike the late teens of the first 40 day outing. This accords with the general policy of TJ elders who usually insist that a neophyte undertakes at least one or two UK-based chillahs, coupled with prolonged periods of local work, before permitting the grand four month *khuruj* to South Asia. What they seek by this, it seems, is a gradual and long-term commitment to the movement that endures over an individual lifespan rather than a stopgap solution to an immediate problem. Though peaks and troughs in activism are to be expected, my data strongly affirms that a core cohort of British-born Tier 3 activists have successfully maintained a serious commitment to TJ’s normative praxis over several decades.13

I conclude this section with an interesting aside: only six of my total interview sample were *third-generation* British-born Muslims (i.e. their parents were born or raised in Britain) all of whom were young Tier 4 sympathisers experimenting with the movement. In contrast, all my dedicated Tier 3 activists who were not converts to Islam (17/21) were *second-generation*, British-born children of migrants. This finding seems to emphatically refute Herberg’s (1955) classic thesis of ‘third

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13 This contrasts with the ‘burnout’ frequently observed in participants of rival Islamic movements (Hamid 2015). Nevertheless, I think it is simultaneously accurate to observe that there are far more ‘inactive’ than ‘active’ puraana saathis in the UK (and probably globally), a fact that can be illustrated simply by comparing the list of 4-monthers in a particular TJ mosque with the number of regular participants in its masjid-waar-jama’at. I examine issues of retention and reasons for attrition further in 10.2.1. It may also be deduced from the above graph that the number of British-born Muslims undertaking their first four months *khuruj* to South Asia reached something of a plateau after a mid-late 1990s peak, though my sample is not sufficiently representative to confirm this.
generation return’ based on his application of ‘Hansen’s Law’ (Bender and Kagiwada 1968; Hansen 1938) to the situation of immigrant religion in mid-century America. Unlike Gilliat (1994) and Geaves (2007) then, my study rather seems to support Voas and Fleischmann’s findings about the intergenerational transmission of religion among Western-born Muslims more generally:

The Muslim second generation is thus confounding “Hansen’s Law” that children of immigrants distance themselves from the parental culture and religion, only for their children to reclaim it. Although there are generational cycles at work, some of the pressures are currently strengthening rather than weakening religious involvement in the second generation. (Voas and Fleischmann 2012, p.538)

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14 Geaves is actually quite ambivalent in his assessment of Herberg’s thesis in relation to second-generation South Asian Muslims. My study, however, does not refute that aspect of Herberg’s thesis which asserts that immigrant religious identity tends to be stronger than the mainstream due to its functional utility in helping newcomers manage the dislocation of migration.
6.4 TJ and Secular Education: an Appraisal

The above analysis brings into sharp focus several key assertions made by Sikand in his 1990s study. Most significant among these is his categorical assertion that TJ is intrinsically inimical to secular education encouraging adherents, as a matter of course, to shun British colleges and universities (see 2.2.6.1). In this section I examine these claims in greater detail in light of the empirical data generated by my study.

6.4.1 The influence of Sikand’s narrative

Sikand, while acknowledging that TJ has no “definitive official stand...on the issue of secular education” (Sikand 1998b, p.185),15 nevertheless takes recourse to the writings of a Gloucester-based pamphleteer called Haji Ebrahim Yoosuf Bawa Rangooni. Sikand clearly regards Rangooni as a Tier 2 (perhaps even a Tier 1) British TJ leader interpreting his writings as representative of TJ thought. It is worth quoting Sikand at length here:

Ebrahim Rangooni, a leading advocate of the Tablighi cause in Britain, with close links with both British as well as Indian TJ leaders...warns that British Muslim children must not be sent to non-Muslim institutions because of the grave 'dangers' of learning from the 'enemies of Allah' and the fearful consequences of Muslim children befriending non-Muslim classmates at such schools. 'Save your progeny from the education of [the British] school and college', Rangooni cautions British Muslim parents, 'in the same way as you [would] save them from a lion or a wolf.' 'To send them in the atmosphere of college,' he adds, 'is as dangerous as throw[ing] them into hell with your own hands.' This is because, 'it is almost impossible for the children to save their religion in the atmosphere of college'...Elsewhere, Rangooni writes that English schools are 'accursed' because they 'turn humans into animals' and Muslim children into 'infidels, polytheists [and] renegades', making them 'immoral, mannerless [and] disobedient'...

Despite Rangooni's desperate pleas, few young British Muslims, most of whom study in precisely the sort of non-Islamic schools that he comes down so heavily upon, would seem to be in favour of the completely separate educational institutions that Rangooni

15 In this TJ seems to be adhering to its usual habit of maintaining a ‘judicious silence’ on issues that fall outside its remit.
16 It is worth locating Rangooni’s invectives within the broader dynamics of identity negotiation and anxiety that characterise the process of migration/resettlement as brilliantly expounded by Herberg: “The church and religion were for the parents the one element of real continuity between the old life and the new. It was for most of them a matter of deepest concern that their children remain true to the faith. In their anxiety, perhaps not only for their children but also for themselves, they tended even to make their pattern of religion more rigid than it had been before the great migration; ‘what could be taken for granted at home had zealously to be fought for here” (Herberg 1955, p.31).
calls for...Not surprisingly, then, as Farid Kassim\textsuperscript{17} notes, ‘The Tablighi Jama'at has very little presence among Muslim students in British schools and colleges’.

The absence of any significant fieldwork on British TJ since Sikand\textsuperscript{18} means that his conclusions are still frequently cited. For instance, Bowen, in her recent account of denominational factions within British Islam, directly quotes Rangooni (via Sikand) to suggest that TJ’s “UK mission [seeks] not just to impart religious knowledge but a sense of paranoia and even disgust of non-Muslim society” (Bowen 2014, p.47; see also p.193). Similarly, Janson in her 2014 monograph on Gambian TJ cites both Sikand and Rangooni. Her analysis of the social demographic attracted to TJ in the Gambia reveals a growing popularity since the mid-90s principally among secular-educated, English-speaking youth and women. This finding puzzles her somewhat as it appears to contrast starkly with the movement’s policy in Britain:

Sikand quotes Ebrahim Rangooni, a leading advocate of the Tablighi cause in Britain...who warns that Tablighi children should not be sent to non-Muslim training institutions because of the grave dangers of learning from the ‘enemies of Allah’...Despite this warning, the survey that I conducted during my field research showed that Tablighis are found particularly at...Western-style educational institutions [which] follow a secular curriculum and English is their language of instruction. (Janson 2014, p.236)

This discrepancy she identifies can be resolved by examining more closely Rangooni’s role within British TJ.

\textbf{6.4.2 TJ, secular education and the role of Rangooni}

Even before commencing fieldwork, my own involvement in TJ as a British-born university student from 2001-2004 (see 3.2) alerted me to potential discrepancies between the social reality of contemporary TJ and Sikand’s findings – particularly with respect to secular education. I thus entered the field with what Malinowski (1922, p.9) terms a ‘foreshadowed problem’ (“Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker...”). Accordingly, I included in my interview schedule several questions relating to my respondents’ experiences at college/university and asked whether they intended to (or already

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{17} I have already pointed out, in 2.2.6.3, the problematic nature of Sikand’s reliance on Kassim to derive conclusions about British TJ.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{18} Notwithstanding Pieri (2012a) whose Ph.D. focussed chiefly on the politics of the ‘London mega-mosque controversy’ and therefore is not directly relevant here.
do) send their own children to secular institutions of higher learning. Additionally, I often read out excerpts from both Sikand and Rangooni to gauge respondent reactions (see Appendices B5/B6).

Most Tier 3 activists, due to their relatively younger age, had never heard of Rangooni and were unfamiliar with his writings. Yet they unanimously and unequivocally expressed forceful disagreement with the content of his material when presented to them. For the sake of brevity I present here only a single excerpt as a representative sample; though in Appendix E I collate a much wider range of interviewee responses. Mustafa – a highly qualified 38 year old Tier 3 structural engineer from Bolton – spent his graduate and postgraduate years, as a committed TJ activist, living away from home studying at a distant university. During the course of a lengthy discussion on TJ’s attitude to secular education he commented:

> From day one as a student I was totally and entirely encouraged to be very, very committed to my studies. I was encouraged to try as hard as I possibly could and to be the best at my studies and I have never received any message other than that, contrary to that and nowhere in all of my Tablighi experiences was ever a view put forward from a person of influence to try to dissuade myself or anyone else not to take part in university activities. So that’s why I very strongly reject everything he said, because everything he said is totally opposite to everything I’ve experienced….And actually I’m quite baffled by that view because so many of the Tablighi, well let’s look at the TJ hierarchy, people of influence in Tabligh, the TJ participants and you will find a huge amount of them to be professionals, to be highly educated, to be graduates. Here in my local mosque there’s, let’s see, an architect, a solicitor, a doctor, several teachers, two engineers, all of them born here, all been through the educational system, all done four months and all active in TJ.

Tier 2 leaders, by contrast (as outlined in 6.3), are older and mainly first-generation migrants. They were therefore more likely to be acquainted with Rangooni – also a first-generation migrant – and his role within British TJ throughout the 70s/80s/90s. This indeed transpired to be the case and my

19 It was striking that every single respondent, without exception, expressed strong disagreement with the content of Rangooni’s writings. See Appendix E for examples.
20 The words of Adam, the Tier 4 ‘critical sympathiser’ quoted in 5.2.4.1, should be recalled here: “They [TJ] involve the youth who find it very attractive...You know, I see a lot of Tablighi doctors, engineers, you know the amount of professionals now that are in the Tabligh field is very, very interesting.” Nevertheless – as Adam also points out – there is also a strong British-born TJ demographic comprising of working class youth, sometimes from criminal backgrounds, particularly in regions of inner city socio-economic deprivation - as exemplified most, in this thesis, by the figure of Umar (see 1.1 and 9.2.3). The trajectory traversed by such youth is nicely exemplified by Khaled Siddiq’s rap, On Deen: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBOlORojK0.
interviews uncovered four Tier 2 leaders who had had personal dealings with him. The consistent motif that emerged here, as well as being unequivocal, was rather surprising: in stark contrast to the TJ spokesperson depicted by Sikand, Rangooni was actually a vocal and hostile critic of the movement’s British branch. From my Tier 2 respondents, I learned that Rangooni hailed from Burma where he had enjoyed some prominence as a TJ leader. However, almost immediately after migrating to the UK (in 1972 according to Sikand (1998b, p.185)), he apparently fell out with the already established British TJ hierarchy whom he subsequently lambasted frequently and vociferously in his copious writings. Abubakr, the senior TJ leader quoted earlier, told me he was thoroughly acquainted with the figure of Rangooni having “lived through his era” adding “he was very, very critical of Tabligh, he used to print literature and send for fatwas against TJ from Dar al-Ulums in the subcontinent. He’d attack the masturat movement, that was a regular attack…” Abdul Wahid, another regional TJ leader, recalled meeting Rangooni while visiting Gloucester as the amir of a TJ group in the 80s during which time he “was an outspoken critic and was finding faults in the work.” Similarly Karim, a prominent Tier 2 TJ leader, described to me in vivid detail a personal altercation he had had with Rangooni while Fahd, a regional shura member, bluntly told me:

That guy was a total extremist. I can give you quotes after quotes. I can give you lots of his magazines. It would take me a while to find them, but his magazines were against the shura of TJ. Specifically personal attacks directed at Hafiz Patel sahib, Ishaq Patel sahib and others too. To say that he was part of Tabligh and to quote him as a Tablighi is totally incorrect.

6.4.3 Conclusion: is TJ inimical to secular education?

The above data raises questions about Sikand’s positioning of Rangooni as a representative of British TJ thought. In his thesis, Sikand sought to present a cross-comparative analysis of TJ’s operation in three countries – India, Bangladesh and Britain – conducting interviews in each of them (though no participant observation it seems). However, as a result of this broad international scope, Sikand seems to have spent only around two months conducting fieldwork in the UK. Sanghera and Thapar-Bjørkert’s (2008) reflections on conducting politically sensitive fieldwork among British Pakistani Muslims in Bradford revolves around the extent to which the fieldworker’s access to research participants is crucially enabled or constrained by the positioning of gatekeepers. Especially in contested research sites where access is far from easy, the fieldworker is obliged to engage in an unequal power dynamic with usually articulate and vocal gatekeepers who purport to

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21 In late 1995, as deduced from the dates of the interviews he conducted in various countries (Sikand 1998a, pp.323-325).
represent their communities: “The research process was influenced not only by the respondents, but also by the presence of gatekeepers who could facilitate, constrain or transform the research process and the production of data” (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjørkert 2008, p.558). Investing time in building trust and rapport to penetrate the actual Verstehen of ordinary community members thus emerges as an indispensable method in the toolkit of the qualitative fieldworker: “The researcher found that he had to go through two or three tiers of gatekeepers within groups and organizations in order to gain access to young people for interview, which proved to be a lengthy process” (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjørkert 2008, p.549). Such investment is necessary to mitigate the risk of the fieldwork being reduced to a “dialogical process in which the research [is] structured by both the gatekeeper and the researcher” (p. 558).

During his brief stint of fieldwork in the UK, it is clear that Sikand engaged disproportionately with the views of both Rangooni and Farid Kassim (see 2.2.6.3), each of whom can certainly be described as vocal gatekeepers of different factions within the British Muslim community, to form an opinion on TJ in general and its stance toward secular education in particular: “In Britain, I must thank Farid Kassim of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir for giving me so much of his time, and to Ebrahim Yusuf Rangooni for the valuable material that he made accessible to me” (Sikand 1998a, p.6). Yet to what extent do the opinions of these two figures – both of whom can be categorised as Tier 6 critics (see 5.2.6) – accurately capture the lived reality of the British TJ experience? This seems to be a crucial underlying reason for the discrepancy between contemporary TJ and Sikand’s conclusions. For instance, an analysis of my dataset makes clear that a significant cohort of British-born TJ activists successfully completed their higher secular education and today work in professional occupations while having maintained a serious commitment to TJ religiosity throughout. Further, it is clear that the encouragement and advice received from Tier 1 and 2 elders unanimously facilitated this experience (a recurrent TJ catchphrase I heard in this regard was “to be number one in your studies

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22 Similarly, Gilliat-Ray (2005, p.29), reflecting upon her failed attempt to access Deobandi Dar al-Ulums in the UK, expressed hope that funding bodies would “appreciate the need to support researchers to undertake the vital, but difficult to justify, task of simply ‘hanging around’ and ‘loitering’ in order to build the kind of relationships which might build up trust and facilitate access.” During two years and four months of fieldwork with Salafi women in London, Inge (2017, pp.45-46) recalls how “In addition to attending organised lessons and events, I hung around parks, restaurants, banquet halls, shops, and homes. I shared meals, picked up children from school, danced at wedding parties, popped into local fried-chicken shops, shopped for wedding dresses, and joined in picnics. By these means, I gained a first hand, intimate understanding of the culture...” Likewise, Janson’s (2014, pp.27-28) dogged persistence in researching TJ in the Gambia over several years earned her the nickname of the ‘Iron Lady’: “It required time and effort to inspire confidence in my female interlocutors so that they were willing to talk about their lives as Tablighi women.”

23 Given Sikand’s positioning of Rangooni as a TJ leader, it may be surmised that the material Rangooni provided him did not include the tracts he authored in criticism of British TJ methods and leadership.

24 Both Pieri (2012a, pp.159-160) and Bowen (2014, p.41) also concluded that Sikand’s predictions about the future of British TJ turned out to be essentially incorrect.
and number one in Tabligh.”) Out of the 21 Tier 3 activists I interviewed, 14 held undergraduate degrees and 5 further held postgraduate qualifications – usually either a MA or a PGCE. Out of the 24 Tier 4 sympathisers I interviewed, 3 had undergraduate degrees along with a further postgraduate qualification while 19 were students (14 at college, 2 at university; 2 at Dar al-Ulums, 1 full-time college/part-time Dar al-Ulum). Like Janson’s findings in the Gambia then, my study has overwhelmingly revealed that TJ exercises significant appeal among secular-educated, English-speaking youth. The slight puzzlement expressed by Janson when juxtaposing her findings with the ostensibly hostile attitude of British TJ toward secular education can now be resolved: such hostility – as embodied in the figure of Rangooni – is more of a chimera than empirical reality.

25 It is worth correlating these findings with yet another study undertaken completely independently. Amrullah’s (2011, p.138) ethnographic fieldwork examined the lives of 86 female TJ participants in Indonesia, of whom she classifies 57 as “urban well-educated upper class women.” Of these, 13 hold postgraduate qualifications whilst 44 have received undergraduate degrees “in such professions as accounting, medicine, law, public relations, and private business” (pp. 144-145). Nine of her participants were graduates of foreign universities, two were bank managers and many others were lawyers.
Conclusion: Between the Old Guard and the Avant-Garde

This chapter began by demonstrating how the broader ‘turn to Islam’ among British-born youth in the 1990s was premised for many of my respondents upon a deeper involvement with TJ – a fact about which there remains a significant lacuna in the extant academic literature. It further highlighted the crucial role played by the 1994 World Ijtima in catalysing intergenerational transmission from the Old Guard to the Avant-Garde. Next, I analysed the biographical traits of my respondents to substantiate the continued appeal of TJ to British-born youth – particularly to those of South Asian ethnic origin and with a predisposition (through prior processes of primary socialisation) to the Deobandi reformist paradigm. Finally, I examined Sikand’s claims – based on his reading of Rangooni – that TJ is inherently hostile to secular state education concluding that his assertions find little empirical validation in the lived experiences of my respondents. In this section, I begin to situate the emergent Avant-Garde identity of my second-generation respondents within a broader corpus of scholarship on Western Muslim identities.

There is a huge amount of scholarly literature on the issue of Islamic identity construction among Western-born Muslims which I cannot hope to adequately review here (Ahmed and Ezzedidine 2009; Ajala 2014; Ali 2008; Bonino 2015; Fridolfsson and Elander 2012; Hopkins and Gale 2009; Imtiaz 2011; Mythen 2012; Sartawi and Sammut 2012; Sedgwick 2015). Nevertheless, I will hazard to offer several overarching assertions. First, the transition from Old Guard to Avant-Garde identities may usefully be contextualised by a four-fold typology, proposed by Edward Said in an essay entitled ‘Travelling Theory,’ that examines how ideas respond to unfamiliar socio-cultural settings:

First, there is a point of origin...a set of initial circumstances in which the idea came to birth...Second, there is a distance traversed...Third, there is a set of conditions – of acceptance or...resistances – which then confronts the transplanted theory or idea...Fourth, the now full (or partly) accommodated...idea is to some extent transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place. (Said 1983, pp.226-227, italics mine).

How is this to be applied to the experiences of second-generation Muslims raised in Britain? Duderija (2007, 2008, 2014), in a broad-ranging review of the field, finds that the exigencies of the immigration process generally leads to a reinvigoration of religious consciousness among the first-generation as their freshly uprooted status allows the continuity of a religious identity to function as an anchor in the new society; as we have seen, Sikand identifies this as a key appeal of TJ for the Old Guard. Among the second-generation though, the literature generally discerns a decoupling of
religious and ethnic identities as the diaspora-born offspring find themselves in a kind of double liminality between the taken-for-granted certainty of their parents and the potentially conflictual assumptions of the wider, indigenous society. As a result (and, again, unlike Herberg’s (1955) thesis of ‘third-generation return’), Duderija notes an increasing salience of specifically religious identities among the second-generation but expressed in new and novel ways: “…the processes of immigration, and the resultant threats and challenges to ethnic and cultural identity, have resulted in the creation of a unique, hybrid group of second generation Muslims” (Duderija 2007, pp.150-151). While he argues for the recognition of the role ‘hermeneutics’ play in the construction of Western-born Muslim identity, his binary formulation of the character such identities assume in the diaspora context – premised upon opposing poles that see the second-generation gravitate either toward an individualised faith identity (the ‘Protestization’ of faith termed a ‘Progressive Muslim identity’) or the search for a pure, authentic, de-territorialised Islam (termed a ‘Neo-traditional Salafi identity’) – fails, as we shall see, to adequately reflect the nuances of the Avant-Garde identity discerned by my fieldwork.

Geaves, at the end of his biography of the quixotic Victorian Abdullah Quilliam, considers his legacy for contemporary generations of British-born Muslims. In doing so, he reproduces from his earlier career a pictorial model of British Muslim identity premised upon a tripartite conceptualisation of ethnicity, nationality and religion:

*Ethnicity, nationality and religion in the construction of British Muslim identity* (Geaves 2010, p.301)
More recently, Mustafa (2015), echoing Geaves, also examines the interplay of *ethnicity, religion* and *nationality* in the identities of her second-generation respondents to propose a four-fold typology distinguished by differential weightings. While Geaves’ model seems to give equal weighting to each of these constitutive components, I think it might usefully be triangulated with the concepts of primary and secondary socialisation elucidated in Chapter 4 to better gauge how the identity construction process might be refracted in individual experience. It may plausibly be argued here that key elements of an *ethno-religious* identity are administered to British-born Muslims during their childhood primary socialisation – indeed, as was asserted in 4.3, ethnic and religious identities often appear inseparable in the consciousness of first-generation migrants who constitute the ‘socialising personnel’/‘significant others’ of the British-born generation. By contrast, Geaves’ third component of *nationality* is appropriated most significantly during secondary socialisations into heterogeneous spheres of the wider collective conscience. This might be rephrased differently in terms of the ‘generative mechanisms’ of *spirituality* and *secularity* identified in 4.1.3: while the configurations of (ethno-religious) meanings internalised into consciousness during primary socialisation emanate chiefly from the imported minority matrix of spirituality, those encountered during secondary socialisation emerge chiefly from the dominant societal matrix of secularity. This is important when considering the twin processes of desocialisation and resocialisation mapped in Chapters 8-10: because processes of secondary socialisation lack the compelling emotionally charged intimacy of primary socialisation, the meaning systems administered through them are generally internalised into consciousness far less deeply (Berger and Luckmann 1966, pp.161-165).

As a result, they are more susceptible to displacement should the neophyte – triggered by any number of precipitating ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors (see 8.2.1) – undergo an intra-religious conversion experience. Nevertheless, as Chapter 11 further argues, the lived experiences of TJ activists simultaneously depend upon the broader socio-cultural milieu in which their religiosity is actualised; as a result, key shifts in identity between the Old Guard and Avant-Garde should, in theory, be discernible through an examination of specific cultural identity markers. Accordingly, in the next chapter, I turn my attention to the *language, dress* and *food* of contemporary British TJ.

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26 The complexity of the Avant-Garde TJ identity identified by my fieldwork is revealed by the fact that it draws simultaneously from three of Mustafa’s four categories: i) ‘Multicultural Identity’ (as implicated by the cosmopolitanism of the Avant-Garde’s frequent international travel – see 7.3.3), ii) ‘Dual Identity’ – “those who identified themselves in the main as ‘British Muslims’ but also identified with aspects of their ethnic background” (p. 59), and iii) ‘Primarily Muslim Identity’ – “…this group of respondents is very clear that being Muslim comes first” (p. 75).

27 This includes those ‘superstitious’ elements of the ethnic culture that may well conflict with the ‘scriptural orthodoxy’ of religion.
Chapter 7

Language, Clothing and Food as Markers of Avant-Garde Identity

“One of the main things was the fact...you had British-born, English-speaking guys leading the effort. So, you know, all the conversations were in English. The ta’lim was in English. The programmes were in English, so immediately, you know, you feel much more comfortable. The food was more in line with what we were used to. Aksy was there so, you know, he was making all sorts of stuff like, breakfast was wow, you know, never had a breakfast like this at home, never mind! So I think it was the whole set-up, it was like someone had just dragged it from a prehistoric era into the modern world.”

Hanzalah, today a Tier 2 Avant-Garde TJ leader, describing one of his first experiences on a TJ khuruj over 20 years ago

The relationship between religion and culture has long been debated and theorised and the recent turn in the social sciences toward the study of ‘everyday religion’ has shifted scholarly attention from the normative strictures of religious texts to the lived experiences of practitioners (Ammerman 2007; Geertz 1973; Jeldtoft et al. 2014; McGuire 2008). For Auffarth and Mohr:

Religion is no longer present as ‘bookish knowledge’ in isolation from other ‘knowledge’...It is present in the context of its cultural carriers and vehicles – in their language, food and clothing. Nor does it disappear again: it abides and changes in its foreign environment, alters that environment while forming a visible distinction between its own members and other persons. (2006, p.xii, italics mine)

Old Guard manifestations of TJ, in the decades immediately following migration, were tightly bound up with cultural expressions of South Asian language, clothing and food:

Few British Muslim youth would probably find in the average tablighi Maulana, who hardly knows any English, dressed in his shalwar-kamiz or lungi, shunning all contact
with the outside world, a role model to follow. On the other hand, you have the smart English-speaking professionals—doctors, lawyers and so on—in Islamic groups such as the Young Muslims or the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, debating with Europeans and championing the cause of Islam. These are the sort of people young Muslims in Britain would now look up to for inspiration. (Philip Lewis cited in Sikand 1998b, p.190)

Even the food that was served at tablighi meetings was, by and large, South Asian—consisting, almost invariably, of spicy rice, meat curry and thick rotis or unleavened bread. The TJ, then, was, in some sense, a home away from home for newly arrived South Asian Muslim migrants, aliens in a hostile land. (Sikand 1998b, p.180)

In this chapter I examine, in turn, the language, clothing and food of contemporary British TJ activists to identify clear shifts in identity from the Old Guard to the Avant-Garde.
7.1 Language: You Are What You Speak

7.1.1 The gradual ascendency of English in British TJ

Applying Geaves’ tripartite conceptualisation of *ethnicity, nationality* and *religion* to the cultural identity marker of language highlights several distinctions. *Ethnicity* is manifested in local dialects imported from countries of origin – Sylheti, Pashtu, Gujarati, Somali or Kurdish for example – often internalised in childhood primary socialisation as ‘mother tongues.’ The *national* language, by contrast, refers to the dominant societal lingua franca – English – learnt in secondary socialisation, if not primary. Finally, the chief language of what Geaves terms ‘Quranic Islam’ is, of course, Arabic, though this is usually mediatised for South Asian Muslims through the auxiliary religious lingua franca of Urdu\(^1\) - rote Arabic being taught in the madrassa solely for liturgical purposes. That most second-generation British-born Muslims are multilingual to some degree in all these languages is usually taken to be axiomatic (Lewis 2007, p.43) but what I wish to argue here is that shifts in the particular weighting attributed to each language signals a clear transition from Old Guard to Avant-Garde modes of identity.

To illustrate: a typical member of the Old Guard TJ might have spoken Sylheti or Gujarati in the home, Urdu at the mosque and a broken, and highly accented, English at the supermarket checkout. By contrast, his Avant-Garde counterpart principally articulates in fluent English in all three locations – the most significant exceptions perhaps being when conversing with his (grand) parents in a (halting) ethnic tongue or other first-generation elders at the mosque in either the ethnic tongue or (halting) Urdu. My extensive interaction with British TJ over 18 months of fieldwork unequivocally found that English has substantially superseded for the Avant-Garde ethnic tongues internalised in childhood. This reflects a wider shift among second-generation Muslims as wonderfully illustrated during a weekend *khuruj* I joined in October 2013. The *amir* of the group, along with another elder, was a white-bearded member of the Old Guard – albeit one who spoke fluent English – while the bulk of the participants consisted of (clean-shaven) British-born teenagers. Acting as a buffer zone between these two groups were several black-bearded Avant-Garde Tier 3 activists. During the morning *ta’lim*, following the usual *tajweed halaqa* in which correct pronunciation of Qur’anic Arabic is taught, the *amir* explained: “We should take out special time to learn *tajweed* because we often make mistakes without realising. That’s because Arabic is not our mother tongue. Our mother

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\(^1\) For the gradual ascension of Urdu into the language of the Muslim elite in nineteenth-century India see Metcalf (1982, pp.206-210). According to Lewis (2007, p.42), “Urdu is...the vehicle for the teaching of Islam in most of the mosques in Britain that serve the British Pakistani community.” Elsewhere Lewis (1994, pp.203-204) writes that “the Urdu language [is] important both as a means of communication across the generations in families, a lingua franca for many Muslims from South Asia, and a storehouse of Islamic literature and Muslim culture.”
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tongue is...” Here he paused expectantly; in my fieldnotes I recorded: “Immediately the youngsters said in chorus ‘English!’ at exactly the same moment he said ‘Gujarati’ - a beautiful symbol of the generational gap I thought.” This transition from ethnic tongues to the national language is an unsurprising feature of the general stock of academic knowledge on immigrant communities and their offspring. For instance, Alba in his study of North Africans in France, Turks in Germany and Mexicans in the U.S. found:

Proficiency in the mainstream language is close to universal in the second generation of all three groups, which is educated typically in the public schools of the receiving society. Some loss of the mother tongue is also common, especially since members of the second generation frequently prefer to speak the mainstream language...In the U.S. but also in France, the second generation pattern of ‘responding to their parents in the dominant language while understanding what the parents say in the mother tongue’ is well known... (Alba 2005, p.36)

This transition in language-usage has been accompanied by a transition in attitudes. The Old Guard, for various reasons, might well express a certain disdain for English – either, perhaps, to disguise a lack of proficiency, because of an emotional attachment to the mother tongue or, as Sikand finds, because they see it as an inextricable symbol of the secular society they wish to save themselves from. The Avant-Garde, by contrast, speak English as a taken-for-granted component of their normative social reality. The resulting tension that might arise was, again, wonderfully illustrated by the events immediately following the above ta’lim incident. The Old Guard amir, upon hearing the response of the youngsters, proceeded to criticise the English language declaring it inferior to Urdu: “English is a poor language. For example, it has only one word for “uncle” whereas in our languages we have many words which show us exactly the type of relationship [whether maternal/paternal, etc.]” Also sat listening in the ta’lim was Nasir, a long-standing Avant-Garde Tier 3 activist of Bangladeshi ancestry. After the ta’lim, I spoke to him alone asking his thoughts on the amir’s comments:

Nasir: Well that uncle example - what’s the Arabic word for snow?

Riyaz: Thalj

Nasir: Yes and what about frost, ice, sleet, etc.?

Riyaz: I don’t know.
Nasir: It’s *thalj* for them all because snow is a concept not important to the Arabs and understandably so because of their climate. Whatever concept is important to a people they’ll have many words for it. For example Bengalis, we have many words for rice - Gujaratis just say *chaawal*. But for us, when its growing in the field it’s called..., when its picked it’s called..., when in the house it’s called..., when cooked it’s called..., when served it’s called... - all different words [which I wasn’t able to capture]. That’s because we’re rice people. Family and tribal connections are important to South Asians and so they have many words for uncle, it doesn’t reflect the poverty of the English language. All languages are equal and signs of Allah: *wakhtilaafu alsinatikum* [Qur’anic verse: “and the diversity of your tongues”]. This isn't TJ but Asian dogma, true TJ is to source everything in the Quran and *sunnah*. I said exactly this whole thing to Amir Sahib last month [with a gesture of exasperation] but he’s still said it again...

That the Sikand-esque attitude of the Old Guard is still alive and well was further demonstrated during another weekend *khuruj* to Blackburn a few months later. This *jama'at* again consisted mainly of British-born teenagers – one of whom was the son of an English convert mother and a British-born Gujarati father. After the Saturday morning Fajr prayer, a Blackburn Old Guard elder sat with the group enquiring about their family backgrounds in Gujarati. A pained look crossed his face as he realised that this particular youngster was unable to understand any Gujarati whatsoever; he proceeded, in heavily accented English, to stress the importance of knowing the mother tongue highlighting also the deficiencies of English. After listening respectfully, the youngster explained – to no avail – that he really didn’t mind not being able to speak Gujarati. Only when the *amir* – a British-born Avant-Garde activist – arrived on the scene and intervened, saying the youngsters look exhausted and need sleep, did the mini-tirade end. A few moments later by the sleeping bags, he gathered the youngsters and explained:

> Look these guys are Old School and stuck in their ways. They mean well but were raised differently to us. Don't worry about Gujarati – I mean, even my kids can hardly speak it! It's not that important to be honest and we don’t come out in *jama'at* to learn a language. You're here to perfect your *imaan* and that’s what matters.

The loss of ethnic tongues was a question I raised also in interviews. Participant responses revealed ambivalent attitudes among second-generation Tier 3 activists to this shift, expressing a nostalgic attachment to the mother tongue combined with a sense of resignation to the inevitability of its loss (see also Mustafa 2015, pp.63-64). Most strikingly though, there was a marked difference in attitude
between two Tier 2 leaders I interviewed – one Old Guard and the other Avant-Garde. In each case I asked the same question:

Riyaz: Many third-generation British-born Muslims can no longer speak their languages of ethnic origin such as Gujarati, Punjabi or Sylheti. What are your thoughts regarding this?

Tier 2 Old Guard: I think to understand our roots and keep our identity it’s important that our parents and families speak the native language in the home. English they’re going to learn anyway, you know, at school and outside. But our elders say to keep one’s identity you need to do three things – one is to keep hold of your mother tongue…

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Tier 2 Avant-Garde: Evolution. It’s gonna happen, it’s part of life, and the thing is it doesn’t move away from the spirituality, because the spirituality of the effort of da’wa [TJ] isn’t linked to a language. It’s linked to Imaan.

7.1.2 TJ as a movement in transition

In 6.3 I asserted that, though the organisational hierarchy of British TJ continues to be dominated by the Old Guard, the rank and file of the movement now consists largely of the Avant-Garde. This changing dynamic may well cause tension, as intimated by Nasir’s exasperation above, but more clearly exemplified during my interview with Mustafa:

Riyaz: What’s the most frustrating thing about TJ for you?

Mustafa: [pause] The hierarchy’s unwillingness to adapt.

Riyaz: Can you elaborate on that?

Mustafa: Well I mean, for example, Urdu-based talks. I think it’s putting themselves and...the work [TJ] at a huge disadvantage when they persist in delivering talks and the medium of ijtimas in Urdu. And I understand that to a certain level it’s got to be done because that generation is still there who communicate in Urdu but I think the moment you do that then immediately you disengage with a huge swatch of the youth and even though you might provide translation, it’s never the same. And actually, I would be reluctant to invite someone, you know, a non-Muslim or a non-Urdu
speaking person to an ijtima...because I know that the way that its relayed and the way that its put forward is inadequate. It’s not good enough.

After some discussion about TJ’s relationship with South Asian culture, Mustafa further asserted:

Yeah well, what I’d like to say is that actually, this whole issue about language and these South Asian mores, I think that might relate to things like ijtimas and gatherings where you’ve got the whole hierarchy but very much so in individual jama’ats with youth, that’s no longer an issue because everything, absolutely everything is English-medium related. Even if you have elders in the jama’at, it’s still English-medium related because the whole force and the whole critical mass is on the English side. So I do see, because obviously what’s happening in Blackburn Markaz around holiday times, their talks will be in English and I don’t see any other way except over the next few years that gradually English will become the prominent and predominant language of TJ in England. It will happen but it might be a while yet before it happens but it will shift in that way and I think that TJ will form itself and will contort itself to apply to all the relevant issues that pertain to Britain and British culture and British identity. And I think that happens in every country, that the principles are the same and the activities are the same but it then morphs into that particular culture. And I think although it’s rigid in certain senses, at the end of the day you have the participants themselves who are the core of it, who determine what goes on and eventually the framework and the primary structure will stay in place but aspects of it will morph.

Here, Mustafa clearly identifies a process of indigenisation within British TJ which he sees as both inevitable and a function of the movement’s global modus operandi. This resonates with Noor’s analysis of TJ’s spread across Java:

What began as a South Asian movement with a distinctive South Asian flavour and feel to it has now transformed itself into a localized mode of normative religiosity that finds adherence and support from the local population of Java...Unencumbered by ethnic and cultural attachments or the need to retain its South Asian identity, the Tabligh has managed to spread itself from India to Europe, Africa, the Arab world and Asia while localizing itself in each new context it finds itself in. (Noor 2009, p.48)

Further, Mustafa noted a subtle shift toward English in key TJ events, such as the Thursday night programme. This was corroborated during my stay at Dewsbury Markaz in the peak 2014 Ramadan/summer period when every single talk, strikingly, was delivered in English – albeit by aged
Tier 1 elders with strong accents. Abdul Muqit, a Tier 1 elder, would often begin by asking “Do you understand my English, youngsters? My Bangla English?” before delivering his lecture with an excellent vocabulary but heavy accent. Further, given that this period coincided with the FIFA World Cup in Brazil, the references to football were numerous and palpable. I also noticed several Tier 2 regional leaders from across the UK voluntarily staying at the Markaz for the whole of Ramadan to help manage the large number of jama’ats passing through daily. Some of these elders, I noticed, were of East African origin. Consequently, they would have been fluent in English prior to migration (see Lewis 2007, p.24) making them well-suited linguistically to accommodate the largely youthful crowds. In conclusion, while individual Old Guard members might perpetuate a disdain for English, its salience has begun to percolate (somewhat belatedly in comparison to other revivalist movements it seems (Hamid 2015)) upwards into TJ’s institutional hierarchy in Britain.

7.2.3 The turn to Arabic among the Avant-Garde

The importance of Urdu for TJ self-identity has been significant historically. As the primary medium through which all the founders, and subsequent global leaders, communicate it has been indelibly stamped onto the movement’s international profile. Given the South Asian preponderance of early Muslim immigration into Britain, it is unsurprising that – as Sikand rightly highlights – Old Guard TJ, up until the early 1990s, was heavily steeped in South Asian cultural mores including the Urdu language. Shifts among the Avant-Garde can be discerned in the fact that most of my British-born respondents could not speak Urdu at the outset of their involvement with TJ. Given their rudimentary fluency in their ethnic tongues though, many found they could quickly pick it up, relishing the acquisition of a new language. Nevertheless, while Urdu continues to be the primary religious lingua franca of the Old Guard and while a significant proportion of the Avant-Garde are able to communicate with varying levels of proficiency in it, my fieldwork uncovered a key shift.

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2 The only exception was when Hafiz Patel would be brought to the front in his wheelchair to lead a daily supplication [dua] before sunset which he would usually preface with a brief Urdu talk translated, from the front, into English. Even here, the frequency with which he peppered his talks with English words and phrases was noteworthy evincing, it seemed, a desire to reach out and connect with his youthful audience.

3 For instance, Dr Mazhar, a senior Tier 1 leader, began his talk by asking those youths who had inadvertently moved slightly behind him to shift around to the front, declaring them to be “offside.” On another occasion he exhorted his youthful audience: “Everyday is a World Cup final for us in which we’re competing against Shaytan – don’t let him win!” Shamsi Sahib on another occasion explained a hadith which states that, in anticipation of Ramadan, Paradise begins to be decorated months in advance by drawing a parallel with the state of the global Muslim ummah: “Because the football’s empty from inside it gets kicked around by 22 men. It’s the same with us. If you fill the football with sand, nobody would kick the football – they’d all go home. TJ’s about filling ourselves up spiritually.”

4 I pick up this issue again in 11.1.1.

5 Even prominent non-South Asian TJ leaders – such as Shaykh Yunus, the Tunisian amir of France – are said to be fluent in Urdu.
toward Arabic as a *spoken language* among the Avant-Garde. This was clearly demonstrated in several ways. Most significantly, both of my British-born Avant-Garde *amirs* during my extended *khuruj* outings – respectively to Bulgaria for 42 days (Luqman) and Birmingham/Bradford for 20 days (Muaaz) – each spoke fluent Arabic having learnt it privately (though neither are ulema). During the course of a weekend TJ outing, the Avant-Garde *amir* exhorted his teenage audience thus:

> If we assume that the Arabic language isn’t for us but only *alims* then we’ll never progress. But if we think to ourselves that Allah revealed the Qur’an for me too then start and attempt to engage with the meanings of the book then slowly Allah will help us get to our goal.

On another occasion, a different Avant-Garde *amir* of a weekend *khuruj*, after the morning *tajweed* circle, encouraged his young audience to also learn the meanings of the text – a considerable shift in emphasis I noted (this incident is recounted in Appendix C3). Many Tier 3 Avant-Garde activists I interviewed had either learnt Arabic already or were in the process of learning it:

Riyaz: Why did you decide to learn Arabic?

Tier 3 Avant-Garde: Because it’s always been, I think TJ engenders in a person a fervour for knowledge as well as for spirituality...So every time you come back from a *jama’at* trip there will always be this fervour to increase your knowledge. So the intention to learn Arabic has been there from day one because it’s so intrinsic as part of the Islamic religion. Now the opportunity to do that, having made a number of attempts over the years, only happened when the means became available, meaning a course that effectively and adequately, I was able to learn from it and the time became available. So I was able to commit 1 ½ years to learning Arabic grammar from an easily accessible, at my own pace, on demand teacher – via the internet. I think that in itself is interesting, the medium through which people learn things now.

I also witnessed, during the course of several weekend TJ outings, Tier 3 activists either learning Arabic themselves or else tutoring Tier 4 neophytes on the side-lines of the *khuruj*’s main activities. In the local mosque context, I observed on several occasions an aged Tier 2 Old Guard leader – seemingly affected by the enthusiasm of the numerically greater Avant-Garde – sitting humbly to learn Arabic at the feet of a 17 year old neophyte proficient through his Arabian ancestry. Further, during my *khuruj* to Bulgaria, our *amir* frequently delivered Arabic-language talks which local imams would translate into Bulgarian. When feeding back our experiences [*kaarguzari*] at the Dewsbury
HQ, a Tier 1 Old Guard leader instructed the whole jama'at to learn Arabic upon returning home joking that he would test the progress of individual group members.

This ‘turn to Arabic’ seems to be motivated by three key factors – firstly, an impulse to authenticate TJ methodology in the minds of the Avant-Garde through direct engagement with primary Islamic sources (sometimes in response to the critiques of rival Islamic movements such as the Salafiyyah). Secondly, some Avant-Garde TJ activists expressed a desire to enrich the spiritual experience of the prayer and hadith-reading through a deeper understanding of relevant Arabic terminology: “A very frequent refrain I make is that if the ordinary Muslim on the street could understand all the Arabic he recites on a daily basis, his internal spiritual state would be on a higher level.” The third motivation is practical relating to British TJ groups’ ability to work effectively among non-South Asian Muslim communities both within and outside the UK (particularly Europe). According to Ali, the Tier 3 convert to Islam quoted in 5.1.5:

I think outside of the South Asian community nobody will take you seriously if you can’t speak basic Arabic [laughs]. If you’ve got an interest in doing this work outside the South Asian community, even if those people don’t speak Arabic themselves it’s better...to be conversant with the Arabic language, otherwise they’re going to treat you with some suspicion...

Recalling Geaves’ tripartite model of British Muslim identity, Arabic-language is a symbol of Qur’anic Islam. Consequently, the Avant-Garde ‘turn to Arabic’ supports several studies of diaspora-Muslim identity evolution which find ethnic culture supplanted by religion (Gilliat-Ray 1998; Hamid 2011; Jacobson 1997; Parekh 2008; Schmidt 2004; Voas and Fleischmann 2012). For Mandaville:

The younger generation of diasporic South Asian Muslims...often questions the Islam of its parents, regarding the latter as tainted with the ‘local culture’ of the subcontinent and therefore not ‘true’ Islam. This has in many cases prompted a return by the younger generation to another point of origin, Muhammad’s Medina, which it regards as a source of ‘pure’ Islam. (Mandaville 2001, p.90)

Yet in seeking this new ‘point of origin’ the Avant-Garde cannot simply disavow their ethnic and cultural ancestry. I think it might therefore be accurate to describe the cultural reality of contemporary British TJ as a confluence of the ideals represented simultaneously by C7th Medina,
C20th Delhi and C21st London, a conclusion which my analysis of the dress and food of the Avant-Garde further substantiates. ⁶

⁶ Note how the three geographical locations represent, respectively, the three constituent components of Geaves’ tripartite model: religion, ethnicity and nationality. Further moderating the claims of, say, Duderija (2014) or Roy (2004), Inge’s (2017, p.201) recent study among Salafi women in London also finds that – despite the idealised vision of a de-territorialised, a-cultural Islam posited by Salafism – in practice, many of the women she interviewed were also unable to simply disavow their ethnic heritage. For instance, Amina, an Eritrean, reflected: “I can’t see [myself] marrying any other cultural background guy. I don’t know, I just, within myself, I love my culture as much as I love my din – of course, my din comes before my culture, but to me, I just – I wanna sit there with my mother-in-law and, you know, do the traditional stuff.”
7.2 Clothing: You Are What You Wear

7.2.1 The centrality of the beard and *libaas* to TJ identity

Participation in TJ impacts an individual’s external appearance; it would be inconceivable to imagine a Tier 3 male activist with a beard trimmed shorter than a fist-length. The trajectory of a neophyte’s deepening commitment to TJ can thus be mapped with reference to the length and type of beard he has, as illustrated nicely by Yahya:

First of all I didn’t have a beard at all. Then I went for three days [weekend *khuruj*] and I grew a goatee. Then I sat in *i‘itikaaf* [ritual seclusion at the mosque during the last 10 days of Ramadan] and I came back with, my manager called it the Full Monty [laughs]. Oh my god it’s a Full Monty now! And it was just a small beard, but full. And then I came back from four months [*khuruj*] and it was a very full beard with all the regalia as well [laughs]. It was quite frightening to walk into the office like that, actually. It was nerve-wracking because I thought, oh my God, what are they going to say?

The centrality of the beard to TJ identity is further illustrated by Abdur Rahman who, in 2008, became involved in TJ during the final year of an undergraduate degree (see 8.2.1). He described his upbringing as very secular; his best friends were non-Muslim with whom he’d planned a summer internship to Disneyland, Florida:

Disney, they do this thing where they offer internships, so my friend actually went for it. The reason I couldn’t...was because at that time I’d just started growing a beard and Disney have this thing called the Disney look. So it’s, sort of, no short back and sides, you know, the basic haircut...No piercings, the only facial hair you’re allowed is a thinly trimmed moustache and that’s because Disney himself had a thinly trimmed moustache. And it was really, really difficult because at that time I’d literally just started growing my beard and so when I went for the interview I knew that question was gonna come and it came right at the end. And it was like, I’ll be honest with you, it was really difficult for me to make that decision. And I said no, sorry, I can’t, you know, I can’t really take it off. So my friend James, he went for the full summer holidays [but I didn’t]. It would have been brilliant.

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7 The rationale for this derives from classical interpretations of Islamic doctrine. For instance, several well-known hadith encourage growing the beard such as: “Ibn Umar relates ‘The Messenger of God, may God bless him and give him peace, directed us to trim the moustache and let the beard grow’” (related in Bukhari and Muslim). The stipulation of a fist-length is a Hanafi juristic ruling derived by subsequent scholars (see also the discussion in Al-Qaradawi 2003, pp.79-82).
Classical TJ discourse further emphasises dressing in overt symbols of Muslim faith such as long, flowing robes and a hat, often with a turban. The rationale behind this seems essentially devotional; traditional Muslim dress is seen to be closer to the *sunnah* and a core raison d’être of TJ is to encourage a practical observance of the *sunnah* in everything the Muslim does. TJ’s encouragement to emulate the Prophet in the most minute acts of daily life has been captured consistently in the academic literature; Noor (2012) refers to it as ‘cultural mimesis’ while Gugler (2011) terms it the *imitatio Muhammadi.*

My findings supported this broad academic consensus:

Riyaz: Was it important for you to externally assert your new-found Muslim identity through your dress?

Yahya: It was internalised that that is what a Muslim is like; that’s what he wears and it’s a two-way thing. For some the dress is a manifestation of their inner purity and for some the dress is something that will literally, sort of, effect inner purity. So it’s a two-way thing.⁹

Riyaz: Ok, and to this day you’ve kept...

Yahya: I’ve kept the *libaas* [Islamic dress], yes [21 years after first getting involved in TJ].

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Riyaz: How important are external markers of Islamic identity to you, by which I mean the turban, the dress, the beard - being a visible Muslim all the time?

Muaaz: *Sunnat-ul Aadat* [habitual practices of the Prophet], I think they are very important. That’s the whole point of Tabligh. *Ihya-us sunnah* [revival of the *sunnah*]. If there is no real obstacle, hindrance, then that’s what Tabligh’s all about.

Establishing a distinctive religious identity through dress, as clearly encouraged by TJ, is not restricted to TJ. In her study of a Manchester-based Sufi group, Werbner (2007, p.209) similarly found British-born disciples of the Shaykh expressing their new-found religiosity through traditional robes and beards, despite being “for young men, an embarrassing deviation from the British norm.”

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⁸ See also: Janson (2014, particularly pp. 131-160); Metcalf (1993); and Pieri (2015, pp.137-140).

⁹ According to Pieri (2015, p.139): “Clothing becomes an external indicator of an individual’s religious zeal. It also acts as armor to protect that individual, serve as a reminder that they are Muslims, and that they should behave as Muslims at all times. For TJ, Muslims have to make an effort to be outwardly Muslim ‘because that reflects on the inwardsness of the Muslim.’”
Mahmood (2005), in her landmark study of Egypt’s female piety movement, also found her interlocutors reformulating their conceptions of selfhood through the adoption of alternate dress codes deemed to exude modesty and propriety. Mirroring Yahya’s experiences above, Schmidt, in her study of young Muslims in Denmark, Sweden and America, found that a change in sartorial practice, though often premised upon an intensely private religious experience, inevitably has social repercussions:

When a Muslim woman chooses to don the hijab she knows that her garment sends a strong signal. She visibly interprets faith and religious identity in her personal way, and transmits the signal to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. But in spite of her awareness of how she is seen in the eyes of the human other, her main argument will be that her aspiration is to please Allah. (Schmidt 2004, p.33)\(^\text{10}\)

7.2.2 Shifting attitudes among the Avant-Garde

Drawing on Barth’s seminal work in the anthropology of ethnicity, and its subsequent development by others,\(^\text{11}\) Furseth (2014) identifies four types of ‘symbolic boundary’ in her study of the hijab among young Muslim women in Oslo. Religious boundaries were the most common: “All the women I interviewed emphasised that they wear the hijab for religious reasons...The women use

\(^{10}\) This very public expression of private religious conviction through specific forms of sartorial practice contributes to what Jeldtoft (2014) has termed ‘The Hypervisibility of Islam’ in Europe – an issue I unpack in greater detail in Chapter 11.

\(^{11}\) Barth postulated that ethnic groups are not culturally bounded entities perpetuated \textit{in toto} but rather are determined through an ongoing interactional relationship with others: “The critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the \textit{ethnic boundary} that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (Barth 1998 [1969], p.15, italics mine). This concept of the ‘ethnic boundary’ has been developed and applied to myriad situations by subsequent scholars, not least Lamont who distinguishes between ‘symbolic’ and ‘social’ boundaries in her analysis of the mechanics through which social or racial inequalities are produced and perpetuated (Lamont and Fournier 1992; Lamont and Molnár 2002, see in particular pp. 168-169).
dress style to present themselves in public as Muslim women...[drawing]...boundaries between themselves and a non-Muslim majority” (pp.217-218). Moral boundaries are closely bound up with religious origin and relate to the conscious cultivation of an ethical self. Cultural boundaries stem from the ethnic origin of individual women with shifting sartorial preferences representing a turn towards more cosmopolitan notions of Muslim selfhood in the Norwegian context. Lastly, generational boundaries are closely bound up with cultural capturing changing hijab styles between first-generation migrants and their Norwegian offspring. Furseth also identifies the emergence of innovative, contemporary Muslim fashion styles which “...presents Islam as a religion where there is space for the subjective self to be creative and experimental when it comes to the feminine body” (p.225).

For perhaps understandable reasons, the majority of academic studies of Muslim sartorial practices relate to the female experience (Furseth 2014, p.210; Lewis 2013; Tarlo 2010); male Muslim dress codes are thus significantly under-researched. Yet my fieldwork with the male Avant-Garde of British TJ indicates that Furseth’s schema can be usefully applied to them. As has already been seen, there is no doubt that the expression of an explicitly religious identity is a primary motivation for growing the beard and donning flowing robes. But there is some evidence that the cultivation of an internal moral compass allows traditional religious strictures to be interpreted in new ways. Mustafa, the Tier 3 structural engineer cited earlier, elaborated upon an evolution in his thinking:

I guess my view as to what Islamic dress is has changed. So I guess even what might before have been seen that only this is Islamic dress [pointing to his robe], I think it’s the principle of what Islamic dress is, that it fulfils the principles of modesty and of covering yourself appropriately and so I guess so long as that criterion is fulfilled, then I would be happy not to wear this kind of dress.

Hussein, a Tier 3 university student, articulated this more expressly:

Oh, there’s flexibility. I don’t believe that, you know, until you wear jabbah you won’t follow in 100% Deen. If you have a beard and you have some form of internal understanding of Islam, then you can wear anything that you want, you know, at least if you just cover your central satar,¹² that’s it...This is what I don’t like, is rigidity in clothing. There’s no such thing as you have to wear the jabbah, we have to wear the kurta.

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¹² Satar refers to the area between the navel and knees that men are obliged to publicly cover in classical Islamic jurisprudence.
In this, his ideas plainly contradict Yahya’s and Muaaz’s above indicating a spectrum of views within even the Avant-Garde. Furseth’s third symbolic boundary is cultural reflecting sartorial preferences that privilege a cosmopolitan conception of Muslim selfhood over one mediated by country of origin. This manifests also in the British TJ Avant-Garde. South Asian ethnic dress codes differ depending on country of origin: the *shalwar kameez* is emblematic of traditional Pakistani dress, *kafni patloon/kurta* typical of Gujaratis and the lungi very common among Bangladeshis. Each of these was imported into Britain by first-generation migrants and perpetuated among the Old Guard:

*Tablighi* tended to see, and this is true even today, Western dress as somehow outside the bonds of Islamic modesty. Consequently, TJ activists generally wore (and still wear) traditional South Asian attire—baggy trousers or *shalwars* or *lungis*, a long, wide cloth wrapped around the waist, knee-length shirts or *kurtas* or *kameez*... (Sikand 1998b, p.180)

Just as ethnic tongues have largely been supplanted by English (and, to a lesser extent, Arabic), applying Geaves’ tripartite model of Muslim identity (see 6.5) to Avant-Garde dress reveals a similar shift from *ethnicity* to both *nationality* and *religion*. For instance, during fieldwork in Masjid Ta-Ha, I frequently saw Tier 3 activists attend the daily *mashwera* after Fajr (around 7.30am in winter) dressed in formal office wear (or, in the case of one activist, a Royal Mail uniform) as they departed for work straight from the mosque. Similarly, I often saw Tier 3 activists attend the mosque for afternoon prayers dressed in suit and tie. Some evenings, I met Tier 3 activists at the mosque in sportswear as they offered their *salaat* immediately before or after a football match. Though this indicates an openness towards different modes of attire, there is no doubt that the normative dress of Tier 3 activists remain traditional, flowing robes accompanied by a hat and, often, turban. This becomes clear from the account of Abdur Rahman, whose thwarted attempt to apply for a summer internship at Disneyland, Florida we encountered earlier. He subsequently spent two years on a postgraduate placement in Beijing learning Mandarin Chinese just prior to which, upon returning from his first 40 day *khuruj* to Scotland in 2010, he was offered a pre-sessional post teaching English to Chinese students at his local university:

Riyaz: So did you teach at uni dressed like this?

Abdur Rahman: Yeah, yeah – I did yeah. And looking back at it I shouldn’t have done because I think they were just a bit too embarrassed to say anything...I used to wear a turban and a *jabbah* and...I felt comfortable, I felt really good and because obviously we talk about *da’wa*, *da’wa*, *da’wa* and...we talk about the way you dress is
also a form of invitation toward others [so] I did it with that intention. I felt, okay let me go like this and if they ask questions...then it’s a perfect opportunity for me to talk about my religion and stuff.

Yet the type of ‘Islamic dress’ appropriated by the Avant-Garde indicates a clear shift from the Old Guard. Rather than the specifically *ethnic* dress of their parents, my British-born respondents could be seen eclectically selecting from a much more cosmopolitan range of sartorial options wearing, for example, light cotton robes from Oman, formal collared gowns from Saudi Arabia or hooded jellabiya from Morocco. Like the ‘turn to Arabic’ identified earlier then, this subtle shift further indicates the supplanting of ethnic identities by more global notions of Muslim selfhood mediated by the British context:

Young Muslims argue that the migration process itself had added to the ‘purification’ of Islam. As Muslims originating from other parts of the world get to know each other, they see what they all have in common. Islam, it is argued, is a means to transcend ethnicity, geography, social class and even time itself. (Schmidt 2004, p.37)

The fourth symbolic boundary identified by Furseth is *generational* and closely bound up with the *cultural* boundary just considered. Here she identifies shifts between Islamic sartorial preferences of diaspora-born Muslims and their immigrant parents (“aunty type of hijab”) which broadly supports my distinction between the Old Guard and the Avant-Garde. Particularly salient here was her detection of an emerging Islamic fashion scene exemplified by the internet portal *The Hijablog* (see also Lewis 2015b). My own fieldwork has similarly uncovered a burgeoning Islamic fashion industry among young males. New types of Islamic robes are being manufactured by British Muslim designers to cater for a niche diaspora market seeking a fusion of traditional Islamic dress codes with contemporary fashion styles. The collections of Lawung 13 and Al Faizan 14 were both popular among my British-born respondents indicating a clear *generational* shift between the Old Guard and the Avant-Garde. It is also interesting that the Pakistani popstar Junaid Jamshed, after quitting his singing career following his conversion to TJ, launched an international Islamic clothing brand with several UK retail outlets. 15 I was also told the story of a British-born Tier 3 activist with a particularly avid passion for jeans who, upon undergoing a dramatic intra-religious conversion experience, returned from his signature four month *khuruj* to India with several bespoke robes crafted out of *denim*. Such eclectic sartorial preferences indicate the essentially fluid nature of identity and the symbiotic relationship of the human subject with the cultural environment (Abd-allah 2004):

Symbolic boundaries are conceptual maps that people draw between themselves and others, but they are not entirely individual. People use the general cultural repertoires that are available to them in their context and symbolic boundaries exist at the intersubjective level. (Furseth 2014, p.212)

According to Alba (2005), symbolic boundaries posited by such identity markers as dress represent “sociologically complex fault lines” and such transformations as take place among the second-generation represent a movement away from what he terms a ‘bright’ boundary to a ‘blurred’ boundary. Given that human culture does not subsist in discrete, self-contained bubbles but is rather mediated through porous, multi-faceted interactional processes, I would maintain that such hybridisation of identity as evident among the Avant-Garde is an inevitable consequence of the indigenisation of TJ in a new social setting. Yet as an organisation premised fundamentally upon the act of da’wa, I would simultaneously maintain that the opportunity for ‘witnessing’ provided by the overt act of donning recognisably Islamic attire – a sentiment expressed by Abdur Rahman above – is unlikely to fade from TJ consciousness. In this, devoted TJ activists somewhat resemble consecrated members of the Catholic Church who, in the 1996 Post-Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata, were addressed by Pope John Paul II thus:

The Church must always seek to make her presence visible in everyday life, especially in contemporary culture, which is often very secularized and yet sensitive to the language of signs. In this regard the Church has a right to expect a significant contribution from consecrated persons, called as they are in every situation to bear clear witness that they belong to Christ. Since the habit is a sign of consecration, poverty and membership in a particular Religious family, I join the Fathers of the Synod in strongly recommending to men and women religious that they wear their proper habit, suitably adapted to the conditions of time and place. Where valid reasons of their apostolate call for it, Religious, in conformity with the norms of their Institute, may also dress in a simple and modest manner, with an appropriate symbol, in such a way that their consecration is recognizable. (Paul II 1996)

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16 See Noor (2009) and Timol (2015b) for more on the indigenisation of TJ in new social settings. Hybridisation of identity exemplified by dress was also detected in Janson’s fieldwork in the Gambia - according to one respondent: “Joining tabligh doesn’t prevent one from looking good” (Janson 2014, p.136).
7.3 Food: You Are What You Eat

7.3.1 Delineating a ‘sociology of the palate’

The final marker of cultural identity I wish to examine is that of food. Bourdieu (1984) in his famous work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* essentially posits that society is premised upon an ongoing class struggle in which dominant groups valorise central components of their cultural canon to circumscribe privileges arising from their greater “cultural capital.” They thus perpetrate an act of “symbolic violence” on the lower classes by limiting the social opportunities available to them through delegitimising their cultural dispositions, or habitus. If we unmoor his usage of the term ‘taste’ from its social anchoring – “the ability to make discerning judgments about aesthetic, artistic and intellectual matters” – and instead reify it literally – “the sensation that results when taste buds in the tongue and throat convey information about the chemical composition of a soluble stimulus”17 – then we may posit something akin to a ‘sociology of the palate.’ This is significant when considering the broader social context of the shift from the Old Guard to the Avant-Garde; first-generation migrants literally ‘taste’ food differently to their diaspora-born offspring.

Hughes interprets Bourdieu as follows:

Taste, he claims, is not—as we would think—an innate disposition, but something constructed by one’s social group. People from different classes, for example, are habituated to like certain foods and not others. This social construction of taste and related judgments (what smells good or bad, concepts of beauty) further aids the construction of social identity and group belonging. (Hughes 2013, p.8)

Although Bourdieu applies his schema primarily to distinctions arising out of the class differential, it is certainly relevant when considering the socialisation of the gustatory glands of immigrant groups and their offspring. The distinctions that can thus arise in the new context are vividly described in the recollection of Alom Shaha, a Bangladeshi-born ex-Muslim who came to England as a young child in the 1970s:

I quickly grew accustomed to my new world, and close to the top of the list of new things I loved were the free meals that all of us immigrants were entitled to at our South London primary school. Before this, we had not eaten anything except traditional Bangladeshi food — mostly rice and curry. Chicken pies, roast beef, and baked beans were as exotic to us as samosas and onion bhajis were to English children back then...Some Bangladeshi children struggled to appreciate the strange and unusual

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17 These definitions derive from the online version of the dictionaries provided by Wordweb and Collins.
flavours of British cuisine; but for many of us, the food tasted wondrous, and we lapped it all up. (Shaha 2014, Location 149)

This ‘sociology of the palate,’ premised upon a distinction between the Old Guard and the Avant-Garde, became increasingly evident to me as I collected data through my fieldwork. When preparing to depart for our 42 day road trip to Bulgaria, our entirely second-generation, British-born group concurred among themselves that “One of the reasons the [Tier 1] elders are sending us to Bulgaria without any [Old Guard] white-bearded elders is because of the physical demands of the trip. We’ll make do with sandwiches and noodles when we’re travelling but if we had elders in our jama’at, they’d need their oily curries.” As it transpired we often ate jam and butter, tuna, egg and mayonnaise, crisps and salad, or simple cheese sandwiches while travelling and, after a long day in the van, would frequently make noodles when arriving at our destination mosque as a quick and easy meal. The implication in the comment is that our Avant-Garde palates would be more amenable to these types of quick-and-easy ‘Western’ foods than Old Guard palates which had been primarily conditioned in a very different South Asian cultural milieu. Even the type of tea that was drunk accentuated this distinction. What is commonly termed “Indian tea” refers to equal amounts of milk and water boiled on a stove together with a teabag whereas “English tea” refers to water boiled in a kettle that is later added to a teabag with a splash of milk. Prior to our departure for Bulgaria, we invested in a portable kettle and “English tea” became the instinctive beverage of choice throughout the trip. This was probably due to the relative ease with which it could be made but also because it was agreeable to the Avant-Garde palate. By contrast, during ordinary weekend TJ outings in the UK, it is almost certain that exclusively “Indian tea” will be served (to the whole jama’at, including youngsters) and I once heard a member of the Old Guard express disdain toward “English tea” dismissing it as no more than ‘weak, flavoured water.’

Further, during the course of the same weekend khuruj described in 7.1.1, Nasir, the experienced Avant-Garde activist cited there, cooked a bona fide Italian spaghetti Bolognese proudly declaring that not a single Asian spice had been used. The majority of the jama’at consisted of British-born youth who devoured the meal with relish; however the two Old Guard members, including the amir, requested that yesterday’s leftover chicken curry and rice be warmed up which they ate instead.

Again, reverting back to Geaves’ tripartite conceptualisation of British Muslim identity, the religious component of the ‘sociology of the palate’ can be discerned not only in the TJ predilection for sunnah foods, such as olives and vinegar, but more importantly in the way that food is consumed by contemporary TJ activists – both on khuruj and at home – in strict accordance with the sunnah. So, for instance, food is generally consumed while sitting on the floor and strictly by hand with the head covered, water drunk in three sips, and the relevant prayers offered before and after eating. These considerations, however, appear to be common to both the Old Guard and the Avant-Garde.
though sharing the same tablecloth [dastarkhan] as the rest of the group. It also became evident that the Avant-Garde palate, unlike the Old Guard’s, has a penchant for takeaways: despite the discouragement of formal TJ discourse, takeaway food has become a de facto component of British TJ. During each of the seven weekend outings I participated in, it was customary to have a takeaway on the Saturday evening – usually under the pretext of “keeping the youngster’s happy.” It is also common for the masjid-waar-jama’at of a local mosque to treat a visiting jama’at to a takeaway; some mosques have a policy of feeding every visiting group at least once (and foreign jama’ats usually never have to cook). On these occasions, Avant-Garde Tier 3 activists usually enjoy the pizzas, burgers or chips that arrive just as much as the (usually younger) Tier 4 neophytes, while members of the Old Guard may well opt to instead eat leftovers from the afternoon - depending on personal preference.

My interview with Hanzalah, now a Tier 2 Avant-Garde leader with over 20 years of devoted TJ activism, generated further interesting data. He recalled his first negative experiences of TJ in the late 80s participating in several weekend jama’ats comprised almost entirely of the Old Guard: “They were the first-generation as such, therefore the understanding of the challenges and issues that we see now – sex, drugs...rock and roll that sort of thing – weren’t prevalent then...at the time I thought of it like oh I don’t need this...it didn’t really appeal to me.” After a several year hiatus, Hanzalah participated in another weekend khuruj during the 1990s influx of the Avant-Garde resulting in a very different experience:

One of the main things was the fact...you had British-born, English-speaking guys leading the effort. So, you know, all the conversations were in English. The ta’lim was in English. The programmes were in English, so immediately, you know, you feel much more comfortable. The food was more in line with what we were used to. Aksy was there so, you know, he was making all sorts of stuff like, breakfast was wow, you know, never had a breakfast like this at home, never mind! So I think it was the whole set-up, it was like someone had just dragged it from a prehistoric era into the modern world.

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19 See also Janson (2014, p.209) for a description of tensions that arose based on the type of food to eat during her experience of masturat in the Gambia.
20 During my fieldwork, I once heard a Tier 2 elder discouraging takeaway food for three reasons: 1) the food may not be halal; 2) it is not cooked with dhikr; and 3) low standards of hygiene. These sentiments are often echoed in the formal speeches delivered at the markazes.
21 Hanzalah’s meeting with Hazratji in the 1994 World Ijtima is recounted in 6.2 and his intra-religious conversion experience in 9.2.1.
7.3.2 “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach”

Beyond indicating cultural identity, food plays another important role in TJ praxis: as an instrument for ‘winning the hearts’ of potential proselytes. The centrality of food in achieving this was made evident by the shopping we did in Dewsbury prior to departing for Bulgaria. Large stocks of raw ingredients, refreshments, chocolates and snacks were purchased with the explicit intention of feeding others throughout the 40 days khuruj. We had a constantly replenished ‘chocolate and sweet box’ that would be offered to anybody we met en route – whether Muslim or not – invariably resulting in smiles and banter. Upon arrival in a new mosque, we would express our good intentions simply by laying out a large dastarkhan laden with a variety of savoury snacks, such as nuts and crisps, for locals to eat. On other occasions, the jama’at would cook and serve a meal for the whole congregation usually attracting 40-50 people. Interestingly, the group’s ethnic heritage was implicated in the food offered as hospitality. The amir – despite being of mixed race ethnicity (white Irish and Gujarati) – would proudly announce to the locals that the jama’at was going to cook Hindi ta’am [Indian food] that usually transpired to be the famed Gujarati dish daar chaawal – spicy lentil curry served on rice. Similarly, when purchasing supplies in Dewsbury prior to departure, the jama’at procured several bags of an Indian savoury snack called Bombay Mix. Yet, when serving this, we quickly learnt that it was far too spicy for the Bulgarian palate; and – until the amir explicitly instructed against offering it to locals – several members of the jama’at watched with great mirth the animated reactions of surprised locals struggling to eat it.

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Feeding the locals in a Bulgarian mosque.

Source: author’s photo

A bowl of Bombay Mix.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombay_mix

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22 This is illustrated well through an old TJ adage: “Pehle dil lo, phir deen do / first win hearts, then give religion.” Alternatively, I heard a well-known hadith repeated on several occasions during fieldwork: “O people! Spread peace, feed others, and pray at night when people are sleeping; and you will enter Paradise in peace.”
Such culinary choices indicate a sense of unconscious affiliation, even pride, with aspects of the South Asian cultural ancestry group members shared. Perhaps this was accentuated by the fact the jama‘at was thrust into an entirely new socio-cultural setting which caused elements of their own identity to be foregrounded. As with language, and to a lesser extent clothing then, this reinforces the idea that although changing proclivities of the Avant-Garde palate clearly indicate reconfigured contours of cultural identity to the Old Guard, the Avant-Garde cannot – nor, it seems, do they particularly want to – simply disavow their cultural heritage. Rather, their lived experiences are mediated by a confluence of ethnic ancestry with the socio-cultural contexts in which their secondary socialisations occur. In contrast to a reductionist set of binaries which conceptualise identity in either/or terms then, the empirical reality of the Avant-Garde seems to be more accurately represented as a hybridised mélange or a disorderly bricolage of myriad identity markers manifested distinctly under the pressure of different situations (Mandaville 2001, pp.90-101). Ramadan articulates it thus:

I have long been repeating to Muslims and to my fellow-citizens that I am Swiss by nationality, Egyptian by memory, Muslim by religion, European by culture, universalistic by principle, Moroccan and Mauritian by adoption. This is no problem whatsoever: I live with those identities, and one or the other may take the lead depending on the context or occasion...Our identities are multiple and constantly on the move. (Ramadan 2010, p.38)

7.3.3 From Islamophobia to ‘Islamophilia’...

Finally, while TJ activists frequently feed people they meet as a ‘way into their hearts,’ they are simultaneously recipients of considerable largesse often dispensed spontaneously by complete strangers. The extent to which our small TJ group was consistently showered with food and other forms of hospitality from the moment we left Dewsbury until our return almost six weeks later was one of the most memorable and personally moving aspects of my fieldwork (Coffey 1999); an experience which repeated itself, to a lesser extent, when conducting fieldwork in the UK. Siddiqui’s (2015) recent book is particularly germane here in which she anatomises the scriptural and cultural mechanics through which an unrequited hospitality came to reside at the heart of classical Muslim civilisation; a palpable feature also of the growing genre of Islamic travel writing (Baring and Rogerson 2005; Taylor 2006; Wolfe 1997). As our small TJ group journeyed across Europe, receiving Muslims (usually Tier 4 sympathisers or Tier 5 ‘indifferents’ with no prior exposure to TJ) extended far more than the conventional hospitality expected of hosts, at times referring to us as duafoof-ur-Rahman [guests of the Most Merciful] – an appellation noteworthy because it is usually reserved for
pilgrims to the Hejaz. For instance, I distinctly recall a street vendor in Plovdiv spontaneously loading us with bags of fruit from his stall while repeating the Turkish word “Kardeş, kardeş” [brothers, brothers] as we passed by in our van. On another occasion, as members of the jama’at conducted gasht in the mountains of southern Bulgaria – conspicuous by their beards, robes and turbans – drivers would honk their horns and wave with huge smiles on their faces – a far cry from the abusive gestures personally experienced by the author in the UK! The jama’at was fed by locals in virtually all the countries it passed through and most memorably I vividly recall how, in one mosque, a range of villagers – evidently without co-ordinating among themselves – brought from their homes for our five-strong group enough food in a single day to suffice 50 people!23

A key point to make here is that the frequent international excursions of Tier 3 activists inevitably exposes them to myriad forms of cultural expression, not least embodied in the varieties of food they are presented with. Our khuruj to Bulgaria saw us sample cuisine originating from a diverse spectrum of (imported) cultures: in France, we enjoyed freshly-cooked Maghrebi food; in Belgium a French-Moroccan breakfast; in Austria a classical Afghani dish; in Germany traditional Turkish cuisine; and on various occasions in Bulgaria we were lavished with banitsa – a nationally popular cheesy pastry.

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23 After the due process of mashwera, the jama’at decided to take the huge amounts of excess food with them to the next mosque where it was immediately served to the locals there.
Unexpected food in Bulgaria
Source: author’s photo

Turkish cuisine in Munich
Source: author’s photo

Banitsa - classical Bulgarian pastry
Source: author’s photo

An Afghani breakfast in Vienna
Source: author’s photo

Tuna sandwiches in Budapest
Source: author’s photo

Preparing breakfast in Brussels
Source: author’s photo
The international nature of TJ activism is implicated here and the broad repertoire of cultural experience inescapably drawn out by the movement’s normative modus operandi highlighted. The extent of this is further made apparent by my interviews; 8/25 formal interviewees attended Masjid Ta-Ha and, between them, had visited the following countries over the years for a minimum 40 day *khuruj* each: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Romania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Greece, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji Islands, Indonesia, Canada, America, Holland, Finland, France, Spain, Panama, Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago, Brazil, South Africa, Venezuela, Italy, The Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Bulgaria, Austria and Malta. That only 1/8 was a member of the Old Guard indicates further the diverse influences that together constitute the Avant-Garde’s cultural formation. In general terms then, the preceding seems to illustrate ways in which the contours of normative TJ identity are configured around a set of inherently cosmopolitan axes while, in specific terms, it suggests the continual diversification of the Avant-Garde palate.
7.4 Conclusion

7.4.1 The essential fluidity of TJ identity

This chapter has examined markers of Avant-Garde identity in relation to the *language, clothing* and *food* of contemporary TJ activists. My findings indicate that the lived experience of Avant-Garde TJ is being mediated with reference to a different set of socio-cultural markers than the Old Guard, suggesting successful intergenerational transmission. This should not surprise us because Avant-Garde TJ activists, as British-born Muslims, are subject to exactly the same processes of indigenisation – the heterogeneous pushing and pulling of myriad identity sources – as their non-TJ peers (see 6.5). Accordingly, Avant-Garde TJ activists, in the process of their identity construction, are drawing upon a broader repertoire of cultural resources than the Old Guard which crucially includes elements of the broader social context in which their secondary socialisations take place (Sardar 2004b). It might therefore be asserted that we are witnessing the process of TJ’s indigenisation in Britain.24 If this is the case, then what are the contours along which such indigenisation proceeds? In answering this, markers of cultural identity beyond language, clothing and food may fruitfully be examined. Most significantly, the proliferation of smartphones across Avant-Garde TJ became a salient component of my observations revealing a clear point of departure from the Old Guard.25 For instance, the *masjid-waar-jama'at* of Masjid Ta-Ha had set up a WhatsApp group, comprising around 15 exclusively Avant-Garde Tier 3 activists, for discussing local TJ issues and posting daily updates. Similarly, during the daily *mashweras*, I witnessed several Avant-Garde activists utilising the diary function on their phones to schedule their monthly *khuruj* outings, dates for future *ijtimas* or the *mahina mashwera* at Dewsbury or the forthcoming visit of a foreign TJ group. On one occasion, during the *mashwera*, the issue of visiting elderly Muslims who had recently been admitted to a distant care home was raised – yet nobody knew the address. An

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24 This was alluded to by Mustafa in 7.1.2 and is explored more fully in Timol (2015b).
25 While members of the Old Guard do own and use mobile phones/smartphones, they do so with far less frequency and proficiency than the Avant-Garde who seem, in contrast, to be subjects of the ‘thumb culture’ noted by Glotz et al. (2005). This is despite the fact that their usage is frequently lambasted from the markazes who see them as a distraction from the desired spiritual intensity of *khuruj*. For instance, when arriving at a new mosque in *khuruj*, I noticed how there was a rush – even among Tier 3 activists – to lay out sleeping bags near plug sockets to allow smartphones to be charged during the night (some particularly avid users I saw at the Dewsbury HQ even carried around with them extension leads so multiple devices could be charged at once!). The Old Guard hierarchy of Dewsbury Markaz have disabled all the plug sockets in the main prayer hall; as a result I noticed large numbers of youth congregating around operational plug sockets in the canteen area – hence missing the various lectures delivered in the mosque building. As an aside, during a *khuruj* outing, phone charging is generally charged at 50p each which is collected by the *amir* prior to departure and donated to the mosque (over and above the usual monetary contribution made by the *jama'at*). After drafting this section, I happened to meet a Tier 3 respondent I had interviewed nearly two years earlier; he informed me that the demand for electronic plug sockets has now been considerably reduced by the subsequent proliferation of portable ‘power-banks’ that can easily be taken along on a *khuruj* outing.
Avant-Garde activist instinctively Googled the address on his phone relaying his findings to the mashwera within seconds. Smartphones are also frequently used as a navigation tool – either to destination mosques during khuruj or to track down Muslim addresses on gasht. After a particularly busy gasht afternoon in which several newly-discovered Muslim houses had been visited, Hafiz Sulayman, a young Tier 3 activist, exclaimed: “May Allah reward the creators of Google. They’ve made it so much easier for us to do tabligh!”

The extent to which the cultural formation of Avant-Garde TJ identities are premised upon an inherently cosmopolitan set of axes was indicated in 7.3.3. My fieldwork also found signs of intellectual cosmopolitanism, indicated by the ‘turn to Arabic,’ but most significantly to be discerned in the figure of Luqman, the Avant-Garde amir of my 42 day khuruj to Bulgaria. On several occasions, I noticed him listening avidly to his MP4 player on headphones. Upon enquiry, he told me he was listening to the popular American Shaykh Hamza Yusuf who, it transpired, had significantly influenced Luqman’s understanding of Islam over the years. Luqman, it will be recalled from 6.2, became involved in TJ at the age of 16 and, in his own words, took to it “like a fish to water” having unfailingly undertaken annual chillahs over the next two decades to countries around the world. Yet, simultaneously, he described to me his journey of personal development in Islam through a cosmopolitan range of knowledge sources. This became evident during the course of our khuruj when he would frequently cite or read aloud from books he had brought along for personal study including al-Ghazali’s Beginning of Guidance, al-Bukhari’s Adab-al-Mufrad and the Shifa of Qadi Ayad. During the course of our long van trips to and from Bulgaria, our five-strong jama’at would, upon his instructions, memorise collectively in Arabic the creed [aqeedah] of al-Tahawi because “it is simply a commentary of the first point of TJ” and “helps us to give da’wa more confidently” from a broader knowledge-base; in this he appeared to be exercising his own agency in interpreting the authority invested in him as amir by the markaz in Dewsbury.

This seems to be the ineluctable impact of technological modernity on TJ globally, though not without resistance. For instance, Amrullah (2011, p.152), in her study of TJ women in Indonesia, points out how a newer breed of wealthy, bourgeoisie female activists “use modern technology like phones, mobile phones, and e-mail to smooth their efforts, while, on the other hand, many others try to distance themselves from modern technology.” Less resistance seems to have been experienced in the Gambia where “a cellphone to make appointments for missionary tourses with one’s peers has become a necessary element of the Tablighi profile” (Janson 2014, p.21).

I also found he was popular among a number of other British-born Tier 3 activists, several of whom, including Luqman, had travelled to various UK venues to attend his lectures. Janson (2014, p.244) finds that Hamza Yusuf is popular among Gambian TJ activists also, in addition to a range of other English-speaking scholars – notably (especially given the focus of the following chapters) all converts to Islam: “Since my interlocutors considered their process of becoming a Tablighi a conversion, they identified with these Muslim converts.” For more on Yusuf’s impact on the landscape of British Islamic activism see Hamid (2015) and Lewis (2007, pp.36-40).
Several months after the *khuruj*, I visited him at his home for an interview and noticed on a large bookcase, in addition to a sizeable number of Urdu and Arabic titles, the following English books (some of which had been recommended in lectures by Hamza Yusuf): Neil Postman’s *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Karen Armstrong’s *A History of God* and *The Battle for God*, Mortimer Adler’s *How to Read a Book* and Jerry Mander’s *In the Absence of the Sacred* and *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*. Next to the bookcase, on the central wall of his living room where a flat-screen television might well have been attached, was instead a large wipe-board on which several Arabic words were scribbled; he explained that he regularly teaches Arabic in his home to local Muslims. During the course of our interview he explained how, after graduating from university, he had longed to take a year out to study Arabic in Mauritania after being inspired by the example of Shaykh Hamza Yusuf. While his personal circumstances prevented him from doing this, Yahya – another Avant-Garde activist whose story is recounted in 9.2.2 – did spend under a year intensively studying Arabic in Mauritania, where he also linked up with local TJ activists and punctiliously undertook his annual *chillah*.

This is significant because in Hamid’s (2011, p.256) application of Ramadan’s six-fold typology of Islamic trends to the landscape of British Islam, he identifies what he terms the ‘Traditional Islam’ network represented by “charismatic American convert scholars such as Hamza Yusuf, Nuh Keller and Zaid Shakir and the British Abdal Hakim Murad” as belonging to the same broad theological trend as TJ and its Deobandi progenitor: that of ‘Scholastic Traditionalism.’ As a result – and unlike, for example, a member of the Salafiyah or the Hizb-ut-Tahir – there would be no major ideological obstacles preventing an Avant-Garde Tier 3 activist, such as Luqman, from drawing sustenance from diverse streams of Islamic scholarship that operate within the parameters of a shared basic approach to the Islamic sciences including the validity of the *madhhab* system and *tasawwuf*. While there are undoubtedly differences in emphasis, nuance and ambience based on the historical contingencies from which these differing strands of Islamic scholarship arose, the key point here is that the predilection of Avant-Garde TJ activists such as Luqman or Yahya for figures such as Shaykh Hamza Yusuf indicates, in Sahin’s (2005) terms, a shift from a ‘foreclosed’ to an ‘exploratory’ Islamic

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28 According to Hamid (2015, p.142), the “scholarly erudition” of leading figures in the ‘Traditional Islam’ network is “compelling...[and] prompted a number of young British Muslims to seek the guidance of a teacher, pledge allegiance to a Sufi shaykh, or to travel to Muslim countries for extended studies to emulate the charismatic example of Hamza Yusuf’s romantic narrative of personal transformation and learning.”

29 According to Janson (2014, p.76), Mauritania has an exceptionally strong TJ presence in the context of Francophone West Africa: “With the support of the leading ‘ulama, the movement was able to establish two big preaching centres in the capital Nouakchott.”

30 This assertion finds support in the fact that the recent venture of Abdal Hakim Murad, the Cambridge Muslim College (see [http://www.cambridgemuslimcollege.org](http://www.cambridgemuslimcollege.org) – accessed 09 April 2016), is explicitly geared towards training the graduates of British Dar al-Ulums.
identity that develops interactionally with the broader social setting in which their religiosity is actualised. That Luqman’s Avant-Garde identity simultaneously draws upon multiple sources of Islamic scholarship was illustrated to me when, at the completion of our interview (which lasted through the short summer night), we visited the mosque together in his gleaming new BMW\textsuperscript{31} to offer the Fajr prayer in congregation. As I looked through his CD collection, I noticed numerous lectures of prominent TJ scholars such as Mawlana Tariq Jameel (Luqman told me he is a huge fan of his and had had the honour of acting as his personal \textit{khadim} [attendant] during a UK visit) and Mawlana Sa’ad Kandhalawi (both in Urdu and Arabic) as well as a range of English-language lectures of Shaykh Hamza Yusuf. However, when he pressed the play button on his car stereo, I was startled to hear not the voice of any of these renowned Islamic personalities, but rather the female voice of the controversial Syrian-American Wafa Sultan, whose trenchant criticisms of Islam he laughingly translated for me from her flawless Arabic as we drove to the mosque. That this clear shift in TJ identity from the Old Guard to the Avant-Garde is simply a reflection of broader indigenisation processes at play within British Islam more generally is noted by Gilliat-Ray:

> There have also arisen marked differences in the conceptions of selfhood between the first generation of Muslim immigrants to Britain and the third generation born and raised in Britain. To deal with their situation positively, a growing number of young Muslims are drawing upon Islamic sources to find a religious identity centred on their faith, and based upon a fine balance between what is old and new, combining innovation and tradition. (Gilliat-Ray 1998, p.353)

\textsuperscript{31} Luqman is a computer programmer who works for a leading I.T. firm that provides him with a company car.
Other forms of intellectual mélange: Turkish translations of the TJ texts *Fadhail-e-Sadaqat* and *Muntakhab Ahadith*, along with an Urdu *Fadhail-e-A'amal* and a volume from the Turkish reformer Bediüzzaman Said Nursi’s (1877-1960) *Risale-i Nur* on the bookshelf of a Bulgarian mosque. For a comparative analysis of the respective reform endeavours of Ilyas and Nursi — including their “post-tariqa articulations of Sufi Islamic values and styles of networking” — see Hermansen (2008, p.77).

**Source:** author photo

There is also a sense in which Avant-Garde TJ identity may be transcending its Deobandi roots. This has clearly taken place internationally; for instance, Janson (2014) or Noor’s (2012) interlocutors in the Gambia and Far East Asia respectively — or, indeed, the North Africans I spoke to in France and Belgium or the Turks in Germany — though all devoted TJ activists, have no affiliation with, or even awareness of, the Deobandi reformist paradigm from which TJ emerged. However, given the South Asian demographic preponderance of the UK’s Muslim community coupled with British TJ’s de facto alliance with the Deobandi institutional infrastructure, the situation here is different. For instance, during the course of a weekend *khuruj* to Blackburn in June 2014, the evening *gasht* programme on the Saturday was rearranged to the afternoon so that the entire *jama’at* could attend the evening graduation ceremony [*Bukhari jalsa*] of young ulema at the local Dar al-Ulum – which was being graced by the presence of Sheikh-ul-Hadith Mawlana Yunus Jaunpuri, successor of Mawlana Zakariyya Kandhalawi at the revered Saharanpur institute in India. Nevertheless, though institutionally, British TJ has maintained strong ties with the broader Deobandi paradigm, my data

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32 Janson (2014, p.70) notes how new converts to TJ are generally “unaware that the Jama’at originated in India and assume it is a Gambian movement.” Recall Luqman’s surprise also, in 6.2, at witnessing the international nature of TJ activism at the 1994 World Ijtima: “And that was the first time ever that I discovered that TJ activities are not just in the UK but, to my surprise, I found out...that TJ groups went to hundreds of countries...”
indicated that at the level of individual consciousness, such affinity was far weaker or even entirely absent. For instance, a Tier 4 ‘critical sympathiser’ who had studied at a British Dar al-Ulum told me:

A lot of Tablighis won’t know anything about Deoband, they won’t know who the founder of Deoband was...they’ll only know Mawlama Ashraf Ali Thanawi because of Bihishti-Zewar, they’ll know Mawlama Ilyas rahmatullah-alayh because of Tablighi Jama’at, and they’ll know Mawlama Zakariyya because of Fadhaal-e-A’amaal. They won’t know Mawlama Qasim Nanaatawi, they won’t know Mufti Mahmud-al-Hasan Gangohi...They won’t know their scholarship, they won’t know their tafsir, they won’t know Mufti Shafi...they’re hardcore Tablighis [laughs], but they just know Deoband is a sacred place. 33

During my interviews, I expressly asked my respondents whether they considered themselves to be Deobandis. The majority of responses were negative, primarily because they preferred the perceived unity of a broad Muslim identity to the sectarianism of a parochial one. From a number of possible responses, I foreground Hanzalah’s, a Tier 2 Avant-Garde TJ leader, for its clarity:

I don’t consider myself to be a Deobandi, definitely not. What is a Deobandi? How can you consider yourself to be a Deobandi when you say I’m a Muslim?...If that’s the case then is Islam not an Arabic religion? Because the Prophet (s) was Arab, would you call it Arabic? I’m not Arabian, I’m not Middle Eastern [yet I’m Muslim]...It’s just the fact that Allah chose the ulema from that place...So if that alim, that group, if Mawlama Ilyas was from Norway or from Outer Mongolia, would you say TJ’s a Mongolian effort?

7.4.2 The changing face of British TJ

Rabinow ([1977] 2007) opens his Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco with a chapter entitled ‘Remnants of a Dying Colonialism’ in which Richard, a fifty-something French hotel owner in Sefrou, clings sentimentally to the last vestiges of imperialism while before his eyes scores of young French couples swiftly ascend up the social ladder in a rapidly changing Morocco. While it would be an exaggeration to analogue the distinction between the Old Guard and Avant-Garde of British TJ in this way, one of the key functions of this chapter has been to highlight the unmistakably changing ambience of the TJ grassroots since Sikand’s 1990s study. Put differently, while there is still a significant Old Guard demographic within British TJ that remains influential at the institutional level, the process of intergenerational transmission since the 1990s has seen TJ appropriated by an

33 For more on some of these figures and texts see Metcalf (1982, 1997) or Usmani (2013). The extent to which this perceived lack of Islamic knowledge impacts TJ activism is explored in 10.2.1.
increasingly populous Avant-Garde grassroots: while the core has remained fairly static, the periphery has changed. Accordingly, I would aver that contemporary British TJ should best be characterised as a movement in transition. That this is the case was wonderfully illustrated to me over two consecutive weekend TJ outings undertaken in different towns in Lancashire. During the first, in March 2014, we stayed at a small mosque that served a largely Bangladeshi community whose management were affiliated primarily, I was told, with the Jama’at-e-Islami. The elders of the mosque – all clean shaven and in Western clothing – tolerated visiting TJ groups but did not participate in any of their activities. By contrast, there was a vibrant TJ presence among the youth catalysed, most significantly, by an energetic university student who had just returned from his first chillah and was spending several hours every evening meeting his friends in gasht. While the elders looked askance at the youths’ fledgling enthusiasm for TJ, they received support, not only from visiting weekend jama’ats such as ours, but more significantly from the well-established Tier 3 Avant-Garde masjid-waar-jama’at of another mosque who visited them weekly as part of their beruni gasht34 and made a point of regularly sharing a takeaway after the weekly Thursday night programme at Blackburn Markaz.

The following month we stayed at a mosque serving a predominantly Pakistani Muslim community in Pendle; while much of the area had a nominal affiliation with the Barelwi outlook, the mosque, it seemed, was something of a Deobandi outpost. All the key figures in the mosque management committee, down to the imam, were staunch TJ supporters - many of them had spent four months on a TJ khuruj. Yet they were all unmistakably members of the Old Guard, speaking almost exclusively in Punjabi, white-bearded and dressed in the ethnic shalwar kameez and – as we found out when one of them kindly cooked for us – with a penchant for extremely oily curries. The youth of the locality, by contrast, were conspicuous by their absence. Due to the presence of our largely youthful, Avant-Garde jama’at, they decided in the mashwera to take us, during the gasht visits, to meet specifically those local youth who, at one time or another, had had some involvement in TJ. I was thus taken, with another member of our jama’at and a local Old Guard rehbar [guide], to the house of a British-born thirty-something website developer who had, we were informed, spent a chillah some years ago. He invited us into his house and the rehbar, after introducing us, excused himself due to a prior engagement. We were thus left alone to have an extended and frank conversation, over a shisha pipe, which proved very telling:

You need a support system, a team around you in TJ, especially when you come back from your first 40 days, otherwise you fall flat. I’m telling you from experience. And the

34 For more on beruni gasht, see 5.2.3.
problem with the elders here is that [puts on a mock migrant broken-English accent], “You see we been doing tabligh for thirty years! Thirty years! How can you tell us what to do?” And that’s why it’s just them for 30 years cos they don’t know how to reach out and connect with different people. I tried something new, within the framework - I’d get youngsters to come for a study circle and it kicked off well, we had 18-20 youngsters coming once a week to the mosque, and I told them this is something I want to try, and they’d come and we’d go through the basics of wudu and salaat and other things, and read some Fadhail-e-A’amal ta’lim, but eventually they pulled the plug – “You’re doing your own thing,” they said, “this isn’t the TJ we know” – and they clamped down so I said well if this is what TJ is, if this is how you want to play it then sorry it’s not for me, and I kind of pulled out then.

Most significantly, our conversation revealed a mutual contact – a dynamic Tier 3 Avant-Garde activist called Isa – who I formally interviewed some months later. As a young boy, Isa had been raised in the vicinity of the mosque we were currently staying in though - like Hanzalah’s early experiences of the Old Guard recounted in 7.3.1 – TJ had never appealed to him in his formative years. After experimenting with numerous Islamic groups on campus while studying at a distant university, and becoming a popular nightclub DJ, Isa eventually committed to TJ undertaking a six-month khuruj to Pakistan some years after graduation. Prior to this, he consistently participated in monthly weekend TJ outings for nearly two years with Avant-Garde TJ activists he had come into contact with from another town:

   The first time I went [in 3 days] Muhammad was the amir of the Jama’at, he put everyone to bed and said to me don’t go to sleep...Eleven-thirty he goes let’s jump in

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35 “Six months I went with the Salafis. Six months immediately after 2001 I actually went with the HTs...and I’ll come onto when Shaykh Hamza Yusuf was invited by a friend of mine who was a Sufi to Bradford to deliver a talk. I remember being part of the talk and absolutely loving Shaykh Hamza when he came down in 2003-2004 but I remember going out and seeing my old friends from HT outside with placards and microphones and vocally, they were very vocal and very bitter towards any one of us who had actually gone into that gathering. And so I kind of like found myself, these are the guys I once upon a time was clubbing with, once upon a time was praying side by side...and now I’m like on the receiving end of their microphone. So these are really interesting experiences that I had.” Interestingly, Isa’s pre-TJ activism covers the broad gamut of groups mapped in Hamid’s (2015) Sufis, Salafis and Islamists and the Hamza Yusuf lecture delivered in Bradford appears to be the same one attended by Philip Lewis (2007, pp. 39-40): “What was heartening was that such a large crowd of young people had come to hear him. This suggests a desire for an expansive understanding of Islam which can enable the young to be at ease with their multiple identities: British, Muslim, Pakistani. What was also significant was the presence outside the mosque of a radical Muslim group, so beloved of the national media, Hizb ut-Tahrir, distributing their literature who hardly numbered a dozen!”

36 He initially went with the intention of the trademark four-month khuruj but fell seriously ill for two months during which time he was barely able to rise from his sleeping bag. As a result, he approached Hafiz Patel personally at the annual Raiwind ijtima and obtained permission to extend his time by another two months to compensate.
the car. I said where are we going? He goes you’ll find out. They took me to a Shisha Bar, him and Asif, and sat me down for two hours and said who are you? That’s exactly what they said to me, who are you, yeah? Tell us your life. Tell us what you do...And they made me chill, they absolutely made me chill, yeah, and I was like, just puffed away, you know what I mean, and basically, I realised then that I’m dealing with people who have also been through a similar sort of thing. And that was great for me, because I just thought flipping all these Tablighis are born with beards, you know? They’re born saints, yeah, but then I realised, actually, hold on, Muhammad’s got a history and a half!

Have you interviewed Muhammad yet?

After undertaking the trademark *khuruj* to South Asia in 2006 (by which time he had moved back to his hometown), Isa, significantly, did not join the Old Guard TJ activists at his local mosque but rather travelled regularly to join Muhammad and the other Avant-Garde members he had previously connected with:

They came to this country from Pakistan so they couldn’t link; they can’t link to the British-born youngsters in this country so that’s the problem with my locality. Work is taking place, it’s not as active and, sort of, disciplined as other areas, but, and, and whatever is taking place is, kind of, alien to the young British Muslims in this country. There’s no attraction at all, if that makes sense, yeah? So I just walked past them, they just, they didn’t even, nobody even bothered to, you know, so after my four months, I went back, I would come in, clock in, say salaam to my mum, pack my bags and go further, another 25 miles, you know.

Like Isa, Luqman or Muhammad, the majority of my *amirs* during the nearly 80 days of *khuruj* I participated in as part of my fieldwork were British-born members of the Avant-Garde. Not only does this indicate the extent to which grassroots intergenerational transmission has occurred in British TJ, but more significantly that the experiences of the next generation of Muslim youth (like those who participated in my 20 day summer 2014 *khuruj* to Bradford and Birmingham) are now being mediated with reference to the Avant-Garde’s configurations of cultural norms: “What is crucial here is the rendering of Islam in an idiom comprehensible to those Muslims who have grown up in Western society and who possess certain Western norms in addition to Islam” (Mandaville 2001, p.124).37

37 For instance, on one weekend TJ outing, an Avant-Garde Tier 3 activist exclaimed to the youngsters in the group: “I can’t believe I’m out on *jama’at* this weekend when it’s the Merseyside derby!” Football, incidentally, (both playing and watching) is popular among the Avant-Garde but, unsurprisingly, not the Old
Though based on limited fieldwork, BBC journalist Innes Bowen’s chapter on British TJ intimated, in rudimentary form, the broad distinction between the Old Guard and Avant-Garde elaborated here in far greater detail:

Ordinary [TJ] members on the ground...interact with the wider society on a daily basis. Omar’s example shows it is possible to compartmentalise the ‘them and us’ message to live a life which is pious but nonetheless integrated: raising money for a children’s Christmas party, volunteering at the Olympics and sharing his exploits with an eclectic group of friends on Facebook.

The TJ elders might not be applying to Newham council for grants to run diversity street parties any time soon, but the likes of Omar might. (Bowen 2014, p.56)

Guard. On another weekend khuruj, a Tier 3 Avant-Garde activist, along with a small group of youthful neophytes, stayed awake till 2am on the Saturday night to watch a live boxing match on his smartphone. Jamal, a long-standing Tier 3 activist who is also a white convert to Islam, in response to my question ‘What do you see as the future of TJ in this country?’ expanded optimistically upon this general point: “I can definitely imagine that in 50 years time the Urdu-ness of the work is gone, I can imagine that. I mean, there are signs now its slowly happening, and of course the guys at the top are gonna be British-born, British-educated Muslims...I suppose when I think about it its going in a positive direction, I think it’s just naturally going to happen...because...these concerns [that were discussed during the course of the interview] they’re very real aren’t they? And I think this is something that is felt on a large-scale and is understood by a lot of people so we’re going to be telling the people under us, we’re going to be guiding them in a very different way to the way we were. I think probably the issue is with our generation, I think the generations to come are going to get a very different idea.” As an aside, another distinction between the Old Guard and the Avant-Garde that became evident from my fieldwork is that the latter, sometimes to the chagrin of the former, not infrequently undertake family holidays abroad (usually with their wife and children) in addition to their regular khuruj outings. This also indicates their increasing affluence and upwardly mobile social status – while many of the Old Guard, not being as proficient in English, tend(ed) to work in blue-collar occupations, the Avant-Garde are far more likely to be professionals “showing the younger generation that Islam can be compatible with success in the West” (Mandaville 2001, p. 125).
To conclude, the Avant-Garde generation of British TJ seem to be taking their place, along with their non-TJ practising Muslim peers from around the world, as part of the phenomenon Janmohamed (2016, pp.32-33) has recently described as Generation M: “...their faith affects everything, and they want the world to know it. This is what sets them apart from their non-Muslim peers...They are a tech-savvy, self-empowered, youthful group who believe that their identity encompasses both faith and modernity.”

38 In Chapter 11, I theorise the ‘epistemological versatility’ of this marriage of faith with modernity in some detail.
SECTION THREE:
THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS
In contemporary Islam, as in Christianity, there is a common type of born-again believer who suddenly crosses the boundary between a cultural or nominal religion to the status of ‘true believers’ [sic] or, more precisely, ‘absolute’ believer. A born-again believer is not simply a mosque-going Muslim or a churchgoing Christian. It is somebody whose faith suddenly becomes the central principle of their entire life.

Olivier Roy (2004, p.186)

Chapters 8-10 explicitly pick up from Chapter 4 and seek to build upon the theoretical foundations elaborated there. As such, they locate my study firmly within the disciplinary concerns of the sociology of religion. I take as axiomatic the power of socialisation to construct systems of meaning both within society and individual consciousness. In this, my analysis is heavily informed by the theoretical contributions of Berger and Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*. My central argument is that conversion to TJ represents for British-born Muslims a recommitment to those core ethno-religious values administered during the primary socialisation of their childhood and a concomitant shift away from more secular values internalised during later secondary socialisations into the wider British collective conscience. Committed TJ activists thus undergo a process of *intra-religious conversion* mediated through the vehicle of TJ praxis. In making this argument, I maintain the key sociological insight that meaning systems are contingent upon social interaction and in what follows I seek to explicate the ritual and semantic mechanisms through which TJ achieves the twin processes of desocialisation and resocialisation in neophyte consciousness. I also observe that my evidence base for intra-religious conversion intersects with a broad scholarly consensus of a global ‘Islamic Revival.’ Lastly, I identify the mechanics through which commitment to TJ is maintained in the midst of a society which exhibits massive psycho-social disconfirmations of the group’s reality.
Chapter 8
The Appeal of TJ in Contemporary Britain

I became a Tablighi for a few days during my youth. Indeed, most young Muslims in Britain have spent some time "going out on Tabligh". It is difficult not to. The Tablighi are ubiquitous, do not give up easily and their simple message resonates with nascent minds. The secret of their success lies in direct, personal appeals and the emphasis on rituals. That is why they are most successful among the young.

Ziauddin Sardar (2006)

8.1 Intra-religious Conversion and the Tablighi Jama'at

It is difficult to classify TJ comfortably within the classic church-sect typology proposed by Weber and Troeltsch nearly 100 years ago and later developed by Niebuhr (Dawson 2011; Zubaida 2011). This might highlight an issue intrinsic to the sociology of religion as such: its conceptual apparatuses were developed in relation to specific forms of religion and processes of secularisation prevalent in a particular socio-cultural moment of European history; as a result the extent to which these are able to engage meaningfully with the rapidly evolving landscape of contemporary religion (of which Islam has become an increasingly prominent element) without considerable modification is debateable.¹

¹ See, for instance, Dawson (2011, pp.525-526): “In provenance the categories [of church, sect, denomination or cult] are ethnocentric, and hence their application outside a Christian context is problematic. We need to develop new categories with an awareness of a plurality of religious, historical, and cultural conditions. But few of the scholars associated with the development of this typology ever envisioned its unalloyed application outside the Western context.” Grace Davie also advocates a thoroughgoing reappraisal of the theoretical foundations of the discipline; see, in particular, the final chapters of both Davie (2015) and Davie (2013, p.252): “There are many more books written about Muslims in Europe than there are about the mainstream churches, and events on the other side of the world frequently take precedence over those at home. Conversely – and herein lies the paradox – the theories of the sub-discipline remain relatively fixed. So much so that, in some cases at least, they have inhibited rather than enabled the imaginative response that is so evidently required.” The ‘Sociology of Islam’ is, incidentally, a burgeoning field of academic study that was perhaps given its definitive impetus by Bryan Turner (1974, 2003) and is currently being developed, most energetically, by Armando Salvatore (2016) - important contributions having also been made by Ernest Gellner among others.
Nevertheless, extant insights drawn from the discipline can certainly be useful in illuminating social processes that, in some cases at least, seem to be universal in their scope and applicability. In this chapter, I therefore draw upon conceptual resources deriving both from the sociology of knowledge and the sociology of religion to theorise how and why British-born youth might be drawn to TJ’s distinctive preaching-reform methodology after having undergone significant secondary socialisations in the wider British collective conscience. To reiterate, Chapters 8-10 explicitly build upon the theoretical foundations laid in Chapter 4.

A brief preamble on whether involvement in TJ can be classified as ‘conversion’ is warranted. While conversion has been a perennial concern of the sociology of religion, its operative definitions have generally been applied to the appeal of sects, cults or various types of New Religious Movements (NRM) (Aldridge 2013; Barker 1984; Beckford 1975; Dawson 2003a; Hamilton 2001; Saliba 1995). In particular, Lofland and Stark (1965) and Lewis Rambo’s (1993; Rambo and Farhadian 2014) attempts to theorise the conversion process have been influential in this regard. While conversion to Islam has been studied from both historical (Ansari 2004; Clark 1986; Geaves 2010; Gilham 2014) and sociological perspectives (Brice 2011; Kose 2010 [1996]; Moosavi 2012; Zebiri 2007), these have all related to the phenomenon of non-Muslims entering the faith. The phenomenon of *intra-religious conversion* therefore remains under-theorised, particularly in relation to Islam. This is despite the fact that a broad scholarly consensus on worldwide Islamic resurgence (Berger 1999b; Esposito 1983; Gellner 1992; Hefner 2009; Huntington 1996; Mahmood 2005; Sutton and Vertigans 2005; Voll 1982) intrinsically postulates intra-religious conversion as an emerging facet of contemporary Muslim life:

> The Islamic upsurge...is an impressive revival of emphatically religious commitments. And it is of vast geographical scope...becoming very visible in the burgeoning Muslim communities in Europe and...in North America. Everywhere it is bringing about a restoration, not only of Islamic beliefs but of distinctly Islamic life-styles, which in many ways directly contradict modern ideas... (Berger 1999a, p. 7)\(^2\)

Notable exceptions to this general dearth are provided by Inge’s (2015, 2017) recent study of Salafism among young Muslim women in London and Gilliat-Ray (1999).\(^3\) These indicate the role

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\(^2\) See also the quote from Olivier Roy at the outset of this set of chapters (p. 199). Nevertheless, despite this broad scholarly consensus, I think it is important to not lose sight of the fact that the “Revival” is certainly not unilateral. For more information, see 11.2.1.

\(^3\) For instance: “Most of the born-Muslims I interviewed grew up with only a rudimentary understanding of prayer, the Qur’an, and the importance of the hijab...When they became Salafis, they needed to study the fundamental principles of Islam...had to adopt a stricter form of dress and sacrifice many former habits and pleasures, as well as future opportunities” (Inge 2017, p.7).
revivalist movements may play in facilitating an individual’s journey toward more intense religious observance: “Some intra-faith converts make a renewed commitment to their faith by joining a specific group within their tradition that might be very different to their previously uncommitted denominational or sectarian association” (Gilliat-Ray 1999, p.319, italics mine). The term ‘intra-religious conversion’ may therefore be used to refer both to an individual’s switching between sectarian groupings within Islam (for example, from Sufi to Salafi) or alternatively to nominal expressions of faith giving way to committed devotion (for example, a lax Muslim beginning to pray daily and fast in Ramadan). It is primarily the latter meaning I focus on here but specifically in relation to experiences mediated through TJ; therefore, in some cases, the boundary between these distinctions may well be blurred.

“The central meaning of conversion...is change,” asserts Rambo (1993, pp.2-3) and includes within the purview of his definition “change...from one orientation to another within a single faith system” which could include both types of intra-religious conversion identified above. McGuire (1987, p.64), in her detailed typology of types of conversion, includes consolidation, in which “the new meaning system and self represent a consolidation of previous identities,” and reaffirmation which “involve[s] no change in one’s religious affiliation, yet exhibit[s] real changes in the individual’s personal meaning system and sense of identity.” Both understandings are crucial to my analysis which posits that an individual’s commitment to TJ later in life involves both a consolidation and a reaffirmation of those core ethno-religious values internalised during their formative primary socialisation. The extent to which such an experience can be judged a conversion is, according to McGuire, dependent on “the degree of transformation that takes place.” Here it is important to acknowledge that not everybody who engages with TJ undergoes a ‘conversion’ experience. There are shades of affiliation and spectrums of intensity and the tiered hierarchy delineated in 5.2 appears useful here. Clearly, Tier 4 sympathisers – while joining an occasional weekend khuruj or sitting in the local mosque ta’lim – do not undergo drastic personal transformations (though these activities may well stimulate, as we shall see, a more intense conversion experience). Rather it is Tier 3 activists, most of whom have undertaken the signature four month khuruj to South Asia, that undergo a conversion in the sense I refer to:

Conversion means a transformation of one’s self concurrent with a transformation of one’s basic meaning system. It changes the sense of who one is and how one belongs in the social situation. Conversion transforms the way the individual perceives the rest of society and his or her personal place in it, altering one’s view of the world. (McGuire 1987, pp.63-64)
This description captures well the experiences of my Tier 3 respondents leading me to conclude that remaining within the orbit of a single faith tradition does not obviate the powerful and drastic changes to internal consciousness that usually characterise conversion. I therefore feel justified in classifying my respondents’ experiences as intra-religious conversions.  

Moosa, based on his study of TJ in South Africa, reaches the same conclusion:

Observation of Tabligh workers has shown that they display all the characteristics of “conversion”...the adherents adopt a new discourse steeped in Islamic metaphor; they espouse an ideal and purist universe with its attendant discourse and paraphernalia. All events and happenings are causally attributed to God. The convert adopts a master attribute scheme which states that success can only be achieved if there is an unflinching commitment to the commands of Allah, meaning ritual piety and imitating the prophetic lifestyle... (Moosa 2000, p.214)

4 Inge (2017, pp.62-63) takes an identical approach: “Thus the women in my sample all consciously rerouted their religious identities at some point...Such was the transformative and all-encompassing nature of this process that even some of the women with Muslim backgrounds described it using conversionist language...I therefore treat the transformations of both the ‘total converts’ and the ‘born-Muslims’ as conversions.”

5 See also Chapter IV of Noor’s study of TJ in Southeast Asia - The Stories We Tell: The Conversion Narratives of the Tablighi Jama’at and the Internalisation of Tablighi Identity – which leads to the conclusion that “The conversion that the Tablighi Jama’at seeks to occasion is...a transformation on a deeper level that alters the subjectivity of the individual, rendering him a Tablighi subject who is meant to be different from his former pre-Tablighi self. The ideal, therefore, is to become a different sort of Muslim altogether...Tablighis aspire to a spiritual and moral rebirth.” (Noor 2012, pp.165-166)
PhD Thesis: Spiritual Wayfarers in a Secular Age

8.2 Why Do People Join TJ in 21st Century Britain?

8.2.1 ‘Push’ and ‘pull’ factors precipitating involvement

Studies of conversion to NRMS have generally developed two broad interpretive frameworks to explain their appeal. These encompass both internal psychological factors relating to the individual and external structural factors relating to social conditions - sometimes conceptualised as a series of interacting ‘push’ and ‘pull’ dynamics that collaborate to produce conversion (Dawson 2003a; Saliba 1995). From the broad range of literature on the topic, what has transpired to be one of the most influential theories of conversion “to a deviant perspective” was first proposed by Lofland and Stark in 1965. Representing a shift away from the prototypical Pauline flash of enlightenment, they instead suggested a series of seven stages premised upon both internal psychological and external social factors that together produce a transformation in the individual’s meaning-system. Although their model has subsequently been discussed and contested repeatedly through a range of empirical testings (Dawson 2003b), the two stages of affective ties and intensive interaction “seem to be indispensable prerequisites for conversion” (Greil and Rudy 1984, p.305) that are “universally or nearly universally applicable” (Hamilton 2001, p.264). This segues nicely into Berger and Luckmann’s (1966, pp.176-177) analysis of the process of ‘alternation’ in which they claim that a radical transformation of subjective consciousness can only be achieved through the establishment of powerful affective ties with new ‘significant others’ that replicate the emotional intensity of the individual’s primary socialisation (see 4.2.1). However, while this may be true in cases in which the substantive content of primary socialisation is being supplanted, I would argue that in cases of ‘intra-religious conversion’ such emotional intensity is not required. This is because the basic content of the religious resocialisation in question reinforces rather than displaces the content internalised during primary socialisation. In such a situation – and as will become evident notably from Umar’s narrative in 9.2.3 – the experience actually represents a return to one’s biographical roots rather than provoking an emotional Pandora’s box posited by the need to ‘nihilate’ the primary significant others of one’s childhood. Nevertheless, it seems entirely reasonable to maintain that the cultivation of affective ties between Tier 3 TJ activists and Tier 4 sympathisers (usually in the local

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6 In the Muslim tradition, the dramatic conversion of Umar ibn al-Khattab (c. 586-644) has sometimes been likened to Paul’s (c. 4-64) sudden transformation on the road to Damascus (see Hart (1991, pp.61-65; 271-275)): “…this Muslim Saul of Tarsus was felled not by a vision of Jesus, the Word, but by the beauty of the Qu’ran which reached through his passionate hatred and prejudice to an inner receptivity that he had not been aware of” (Armstrong 2001 [1991], p.128). Interestingly, Umar’s conversion is a common motif of TJ discourse and is one of the first stories neophytes are introduced to in the Fadhail-e-A’mal (Kaandhlawi 1997b, pp.28-31).

7 Alternation is a technical term coined by Peter Berger (1961, 1963). It refers to “The effects upon an individual’s identity as a result of his or her changing meaning systems” (see entry in Swatos Jr. 1998). While ‘alternation’ includes the experience of religious conversion, it is not limited to it.
mosque context) supplemented by intensive interaction between them (usually within the closed context of khuruj) are essential mechanisms through which an intra-religious conversion experience is precipitated. To gauge the empirical validity of this, I present some analysis of my dataset.

ALL INTERVIEWS (59 men – average age of 33)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Reason for first involvement</th>
<th>How many?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social activity / friends were going</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive interaction with local TJ activists / gasht visit</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of a family member</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal introspection / seeking</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive interaction with visiting TJ group (from the UK or abroad) / gasht visit</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major life event / personal crisis</td>
<td>6</td>
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FORMAL INTERVIEWEES (25 men – average age of 40)

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<th>Reason for first involvement</th>
<th>How many?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive interaction with visiting TJ group (from the UK or abroad) / gasht visit</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major life event / personal crisis</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal introspection / seeking</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of a family member</td>
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</tbody>
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INFORMAL INTERVIEWEES (34 men – average age of 25)

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<th>Reason for first involvement</th>
<th>How many?</th>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of a family member</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive interaction with local TJ activists / gasht visit</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
76% of my respondents (45/59) first became involved in TJ due to some form of social interaction – whether with local or visiting TJ activists, personal friend circles or family encouragement or pressure. Conversely, only 24% (14/59) were primarily motivated by an internal factor relating to, typically, an introspective search for meaning or a major life event/personal crisis (and even in these scenarios it was usually through fostering social ties with TJ activists that an involvement with TJ was facilitated). This finding therefore corroborates strongly the above-mentioned assertion that both affective ties and intensive interaction “seem to be indispensable prerequisites for conversion” (Greil and Rudy 1984, p.305).

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8 For instance, as will be recounted in 9.2.1, it was the birth of Hanzalah’s daughter that first oriented him to the practice of his religion. However, crucially, at the same time two of his friends had just returned from four-month tours to TJ’s South Asian headquarters drastically transformed and it was sustained social interaction with them that first inclined him to TJ. It was therefore the ‘push’ factor of his daughter’s birth combined with the ‘pull’ factor of his friends’ conversions that led to his own powerful conversion experience.
Further, given that the bulk of my informal interviews (22/34) were conducted with youthful neophytes experimenting with the movement in 2014, it is worth distinguishing their reasons for joining a TJ tour from those of the more established Tier 3 activists involved since the 90s. What becomes immediately apparent here is that the majority of youth out on a 10-40 day *khuruj* in the summer of 2014 were there due to the influence of either friends or family\(^9\) who encouraged/pressurised them (a total of 20/34 = 59%); relatively few enjoyed pre-existing affinities with TJ activists (8/34 = 24%). By contrast, for the majority of Tiers 2/3 continuously involved since at least the 90s, positive social interaction with existing TJ activists played a much more influential role (14/28 = 50%). This finding allows us to augment the assertion made in 6.3 that the majority of youthful neophytes spending time on *khuruj* will not become committed activists, with the additional observation: *unless they maintain sustained positive social interaction with Tier 3 activists.*

The importance of social interaction as a mechanism of actualising and consolidating the group’s symbolic universe in neophyte consciousness is underscored here: “For the individual, existing in a particular religious world implies existing in the particular social context within which that world can retain its plausibility” (Berger 1967, p.49). It is also striking that, unlike their Tier 2 forbears who mostly got involved in the 1980s, not a single Tier 3 activist I interviewed first became involved with TJ because of a *visiting* TJ group indicating the importance of the subsequently established local mosque schemes as a means of recruiting new members.

I now flesh out these statistics with biographical narratives of respondents. Fahd is today a Tier 2 regional leader who, as a fashionable and secular young man in 1989, felt sorry for a visiting *paidal jama’at*\(^10\) who seemed to him exceedingly simple yet pious. As a result, he agreed to guide them through the local countryside little realising that the few days he spent with them would be life-transforming: “I thought I was helping them, but didn’t realise I was being helped.” Abdul Latif is today the TJ *amir* of an Arab mosque in London. He first became involved in TJ in 2003 through the

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\(^9\) Family members who encouraged participation in TJ were usually parents (both mothers and fathers) or an elder sibling, but sometimes an uncle or cousin (see also Footnote 23 in 9.2.4)

\(^10\) Since its inception, TJ has maintained a strong tradition of sending walking groups from place to place as it is deemed closer to the practical example of the prophets (see Gaborieau (2000, p.128) and Haq (1972, p.114) for early instances of *paidal jama’ats*). This tradition has been perpetuated in Britain and, in particular, scattered Muslims living in rural areas are tracked down by roving TJ groups. My fieldwork found that, Hafiz Patel, in the years immediately preceding his death, heavily emphasised this aspect of TJ praxis as a result of which at least ten *paidal jama’ats* were dispatched across the UK in 2014-2015 for a period of four months each. I was able to interact with one of these groups at the regional Blackburn Markaz and learnt that TJ authorities in Dewsbury instructed them to say they were ‘peace-walkers’ on a spiritual pilgrimage when accosted by bemused rural non-Muslims or local police. Because they operate largely away from the dense centres of Muslim settlement, these groups not infrequently attract local media attention (for example see Anon. (2016) for a local report of a TJ group walking from Cardiff to Gloucester or Stoker (2015) for a fascinating account by a parish priest of unexpectedly encountering a Birmingham *paidal jama’at* at his local Scarborough pub and visiting them the next day in the vestry of the Methodist church they were staying at!
exemplary conduct, character, piety and knowledge of one of his teachers from Cairo’s famous al-Azhar university:

Alhamdulillah, he start taking to his house every Jumu’ah, make ikram, make hospitality, very, very generous person and he was speaking to us about Imaan, akhlaq and Rasulullah (s) and sahabah which was like, I have learnt this but now with muhabbat [love] I felt this going inside me. After a whole year of doing this every week, inviting us, meeting us and seeing his character and telling us come for salaat, after one year the Shaykh says...what do you think to go i’tikaaf in the masjid for a few days? He didn’t say the word khuruj or jama’at because this concept of Arab mentality is not there, so he says we’ll do i’tikaaf and from there build our Imaan more...And really, that was the day where I decided to change my life 180 degrees.

Abdul Latif subsequently undertook a 40 day khuruj in Egypt in 2005 and, in 2008, relocated to the UK where he has remained assiduously devoted to TJ, albeit in the very different demographic context of Britain’s South Asian Muslim majority. Hussein is now a Tier 3 university student who, though born to Gujarati Muslim parents in the UK, was an avid reader of Eastern philosophy in his teens and felt strongly inclined to Buddhism: “At that time I was just barely praying one namaz every three to four days. I was slowly shifting away from Islam altogether...more towards accepting Buddhism...because of its calm and serene nature.” Several of his friends went out for a 40 day khuruj in the summer of 2008 and he spontaneously decided to join them, without any prior knowledge of what was involved, for two weeks:

It was very interesting because it linked up quite well to the Buddhist beliefs I had at the time because the Buddhists used to go out, spend time outside their homeland and they would contemplate for many years, you know, in monasteries. So it was quite similar to that experience. So I think that coupled with the new understanding of my religion Islam really hit me hard...[And] it set me on a path that I have totally misunderstood Islam, and on every level. So that led me, the impact was that I need to learn a bit more about my Deen. Clearly, I've misunderstood and I need to understand it because I was at a crossroads then before I went out for those two weeks, either become Buddhist or stay on this religion.

For three respondents categorised under ‘Personal Crisis,’ it was the stress of exams that first propelled them toward the practice of Islam. For instance, Isma, who we encountered in 7.4.2, spent three years studying away from home at a UK university. After two and a half years of “clubbing,
music, girlfriends and just partying,“ the pressure of his final exams drove him to assiduously start offering his daily salat. At the mosque, overseas Tier 3 Malaysian students introduced him to TJ and, after graduation, he joined them on a life-changing 20 day khuruj.\textsuperscript{11} For others, it was the death of a loved one that precipitated their involvement in TJ. Shaykh Ihsaan is now an Islamic scholar who teaches Arabic at a UK Dar al-Ulum. While a semi-professional footballer in his native Morocco, his brother died unexpectedly. He immediately quit football and embarked on a four-month khuruj within Morocco committing himself to the study of Islam upon return.\textsuperscript{12} For Abdur Rahman, whose attempt to work as a Disney summer intern we encountered in 7.2.1, it was the separate deaths of a relative, grandparent and close friend (in a car accident) all in 2008 that triggered an introspective journey which led to TJ. During a raw and tearful interview he told me:

Because before that I’d never really experienced death, you know...and it just gave me another kick up the backside, it was a wakeup call. And I felt wow...that’s the reality of life really...in my house, the angel of death was there [laughs]. Yeah, and literally my whole life just stopped for about two weeks...and that really got me thinking...Then exactly one week later it was a three day Jama’at to Lancaster, and that was just, I think probably the best three days of my life actually. That really was. And we just, we talked in that Jama’at we talked about so much...there was four elders and four youngsters. And because, sort of, [the others] had recently experienced their family member passing away...and because I’d recently experienced that too...so we actually talked about it, you know, that life is short, you never know when you’re going to go basically and death is always around the corner and when you’ve actually experienced that yourself it has more of an effect. And honestly that was it. It was just, the masjid itself and the people in that masjid and the local people - it was just an amazing, amazing Jama’at. And I made up my mind that I was going for the 40 days.\textsuperscript{13}

8.2.2 What is the appeal of TJ to British-born Muslim youth?

Having examined ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that may precipitate involvement in TJ, I now identify specific reasons why TJ might appeal to British-born Muslims. It is significant here that, as part of their primary socialisation into Islam, nearly all my respondents attended a British maktab.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} As recounted in 7.4.2, Isa also experimented with a host of Islamic groups on campus during his time at university. For more on his experience, see Footnote 10 in 12.2.2.

\textsuperscript{12} According to several respondents, it was the death of his three-year old daughter that was the primary cause of famous Pakistani cricketer Saeed Anwar joining TJ.

\textsuperscript{13} See 8.3 for how death, as a key motif of TJ discourse, is intrinsically imbued with ‘desocialising’ potential.

\textsuperscript{14} Of course, this only applies to those respondents born into Muslim families and not converts. The maktab usually operates out of the local mosque and generally offers evening Islamic instruction for children from
However the experiences of most were predominantly negative\(^\text{15}\) for several reasons. First, a clear majority felt that the *maktab* almost exclusively focussed on the external rituals of Islam lacking an emotive, spiritual dimension. Second, the teaching styles were harsh and authoritarian, sometimes involving corporal punishment, compounded by Urdu-language instruction usually delivered by unqualified first-generation teachers.\(^\text{16}\) Consequently, many reported a post-*maktab* drift away from Islam and, when first experimenting with TJ usually in their teens, were pleasantly surprised by the alternate form of ‘gentler’ spirituality it offered. For instance, Hafiz Sulayman memorised the entire Qur’an at *maktab*:

> So all these years I’d learnt the Qur’an but I didn’t know the significance...[or have] any understanding that this is probably the biggest achievement of my life. So that *jama’at*, sort of, brought this to town, it hit me, hit me quite hard. That this religion is not just something that you go through the motions but it’s something which you have to fully enter into and something which will...change you in every way. So these 40 days were a real eye-opener, you know, and like the proverb goes the eye of the heart was opened.

Despite these predominantly negative experiences, I would nevertheless maintain that attendance at *maktab* achieved the important objective of consolidating a sense of Muslim identity in personal consciousness. This then functions as the crucial substratum of the intra-religious conversion experience later facilitated by TJ. Based on a deep and lengthy engagement with my dataset, I explicate in the remainder of this section three specific reasons why British-born Muslims might be attracted to TJ after drifting away from the practice of Islam in their post-*maktab* years.

### 8.2.2.1 A shift from passive consumers to active purveyors

First, and most significantly, I identify a shift in the relationship neophytes have with their religion from *passive consumers* to *active purveyors*.\(^\text{17}\) Prior to embarking on a TJ tour, it is quite possible that the post-*maktab* neophyte – particularly if he has no more than a lukewarm attachment to his religion – might service his religious requirements by offering (occasional) prayers or listening to ulema lectures at the local mosque or online – thus *passively consuming* the religious goods on offer. Upon embarking on *khuruj* this immediately changes. The neophyte – however inexperienced – is

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\(^\text{15}\) In this they resemble Inge’s (2017, pp.64-68) respondents.

\(^\text{16}\) Many respondents simultaneously acknowledged that the situation has now changed considerably for their own children (for instance, see the profile of Masjid Ta-Ha in Appendix C1).

\(^\text{17}\) There is some resonance here with Grace Davie’s (2002, p.148) analysis of evolving modes of religiosity in contemporary Europe, termed a shift from ‘obligation’ to ‘consumption’: “In other words, what until moderately recently was simply imposed (with all the negative connotations of this word), or inherited (a rather more positive spin) becomes instead a matter of personal choice.”
suddenly thrust into the position of a *da’ee* [inviter] and burdened with the task of *giving da’wa* in order to effect personal self-transformation. Even people out on their first weekend tour are given tasks to do – whether making an announcement [*elan*] after one of the daily prayers, helping make breakfast in the kitchen [*khidmat*] or contributing their opinion about how best to achieve *jama’at* objectives [*mashwera*]. As a result, the neophyte transitions to a position of *active purveyor* – a shift that can be experienced as profoundly empowering. This certainly seemed to be the case with Muaaz – the London-based *amir* of my 2014 summer *khuruj* to Bradford and Birmingham – who, as a 14 year old in 1987, had his first experience of TJ on a 10 day tour during his Christmas holidays:

> So my mum somehow persuaded my dad and I went off on 10 days. And even though I was a bright student in madrassa and I knew all my stuff without believing in most of it, I realised there’s lots of stuff that I just didn’t know, lots of spiritual stuff, lots of stuff that hits the heart and I felt so ignorant amongst the rest of the brothers in the *jama’at* and that was a humbling feeling. And I learnt my six points, one brother was appointed to teach me my six points and then he taught me how to give *da’wa* and I think that was the spark for me. Once I learnt how to give *da’wa* then I was moving strides forward and I knew my direction in life and I knew what’s what. So I came back from that 10 days and every moment I was giving *da’wa*, every free moment, in class, outside class, during break time. And I started going for my three days every month, and I started taking my friends with me...

The radically empowering function of *da’wa* is implicated here and may be conceptualised in terms of a shift from the passive moulding of the religious actor by pre-existing structures of religious authority to the active exercise of personal agency in ways that may well open up vistas of religious (and sometimes social) capital. Further, its use as a self-reflexive tool of personal transformation is recognised more generally in the study of religious movements:

> Research has shown...that when a person talks before a group there is more likelihood that the speaker’s beliefs will undergo some adjustment than when a person merely reads silently, unbound by any public statement. It is therefore understandable that religious leaders require new converts to communicate orally and publicly their new commitment or way of life. (Rambo 1993, p.139)

The following year Muaaz spent 20 days on *khuruj* followed by a full-blown *chillah* in the summer of 1989. By this time, his commitment to TJ – despite the opposition of his parents and wider family

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18 Since the early 00s, TJ authorities have only permitted 16+ year olds to participate in TJ tours.
whose ideological affiliation lay with the Bangladeshi branch of the Jama’at-e-Islami – had definitively cemented:

So we finished that chillah and the second chillah, the following year again, well, when I got back to Dewsbury, Mawlana Abdus Samad was very nice to me and he made me promise that when I come back the following year I’m going to bring a whole load of people from East London, [he said] tens of thousands of Muslims there, all we want is 10 guys. So Alhamdulillah, I lived up to that and I did bring maybe 10 guys...but they were only for 10 days. So I got to [Dewsbury] Markaz the following year and brought our whole jama’at into Room 5 [the administrative hub] and I didn’t understand what they were saying, they were speaking Urdu. And then the upshot of it was that I would be Amir Sahib! I was 17 years old and they said, well Tariq bin Ziyad was 17 years old and all of that. And I was like really nervous and then somebody took me to one side, one brother, who saw my nervousness and said don’t worry an angel will be with you and help you...

Muaaz thus transitioned, in the space of a few years, from a sceptical maktab student harbouring doubts about his faith into an active proselytiser who became an agent of significant change both in his immediate family and wider community.\(^\text{19}\) Here, I would maintain that the impact of TJ in fundamentally changing his relationship with his religion, from a passive consumer into an active purveyor, is instrumental to understanding its appeal. In this regard, Rodney Stark, in a fascinating attempt to construct a meta-theory that identifies the essential causal factors that underpin all successful religious movements, unequivocally states: “...each successful movement for which data exist finds important things for young people to do on behalf of their faith – ways in which youth can exhibit and build commitment. Hence, movements get more from their young people to the extent that they ask more of them” (Stark 2003, p.268, italics mine).

8.2.2.2 Collegiality and belonging

The second key attraction of TJ to British-born youth (and beyond) I have identified hinges on the powerful bonds of brotherhood (and, in all probability, sisterhood), fellowship and belonging it fosters among followers. TJ was sometimes described to me – both by practitioners and observers – as a “big, happy family” in which “anybody and everybody is welcome.” In particular, this was a strong attraction for Luqman – the amir of my 2013 khuruj to Bulgaria – who became involved in the mid-1990s as a teenager:

\(^{19}\) For more on Muaaz’s experience as a dedicated TJ activist at university, see Appendix E.
Riyaz: What would you say were the key aspects which attracted you?

Luqman: We had an extended family which had a massive part to play...we had a second family and for some it was a first family that consisted of about 22 people called a masjid-waar-jama'at. And in there were individuals born and bred in the UK who had spent four months in 1993...So these people comforted us, took care of us, helped us in our family issues and problems, fed us, took us out, went on excursions...and Allah used them to help us.20

This sense of collegiality may particularly be attractive to those from unstable or troubled backgrounds or those who, for other structural reasons, do not quite ‘fit’ into their local community. This seemed to be the case with Nurul, today a Tier 4 ‘critical sympathiser,’ who as a British-born Bangladeshi in Bradford described himself to me as a “minority within a minority.” As a teenager he became heavily involved in TJ for several years which helped him achieve local social ascendancy,21 though subsequently he felt he matured and outgrew the movement (see 10.2.1):

Riyaz: And what were your first experiences, can you remember?

Nurul: A jama'at from America came to my local masjid, and they tashkeeled me, and these lot were all proper cool dudes, and that's when, to be honest with you, I never really knew anyone, you know, in our Pakistani community, I used to be part of the Bengali community...and I think what it does is, people like myself who didn't feel part of any group, who didn't really fit into anything, you get a lot of odd-bods in Tabligh, you know, I think it's very appealing to them types of people...

That three days was life-changing, yeah, I started going three days straight after that every month and I started getting into gasht and everything. I got proper hard core for a few years man [laughs]. They used to call me Shaykh Nurul [laughs]...it was my way into the community really, because I got to know the lads...all of a sudden these were my brothers and I developed long friendships, sustained friendships...and it really established me, it put me on the map so to say.

20 Luqman’s experiences are echoed in Nagata’s (1980, p.422) analysis of TJ in Malaysia: “They also engender a strong sense of solidarity and camaraderie among participants, reinforced by the sharing of problems, overnight accommodation and meals - all in the mosque. Indeed, for some unmarried youth the retreat may serve as the functional equivalent of a youth club or “hang-out,” in which peer group culture finds a new and sanctified outlet, and through which otherwise aimless lives gain some structure.”

21 More generally, Sikand (2002) identifies social ascendancy as a key appeal of TJ to Mawlana Ilyas’ fledgling community in Mewat. During my fieldtrip to Bulgaria, I also sensed that participation in TJ for local Muslims there was a key means of tapping into transnational networks of Islamic resources both to the east (New Delhi, Lahore) and the West (Paris, Dewbsury).
Nurul’s observation that TJ attracts many “odd-bods” was confirmed during my 20 day *khuruj* to Bradford and Birmingham when I noticed, with some regularity, that socially marginalised or otherwise disenfranchised individuals – sometimes with mental health issues – would hover around the *jama’at* in different mosques we visited, sometimes sitting down uninvited to partake of the meal. Consequently Muaaz, the *amir* of our group, had on more than one occasion to tread a fine line between extending hospitality and ensuring that (especially the younger) members of the *jama’at* were not adversely affected. Generally speaking, this sense of fellowship fostered by TJ fits well with the instrumentality of *affective ties* and *intensive interaction* mentioned earlier; McGuire (1987, p.76), citing studies of fundamentalist and charismatic congregations, notes that “the provision of a sense of belonging is as important, if not more important, than the specific belief content of the group in maintaining high levels of member commitment...These commitment mechanisms make belonging to the group an emotionally satisfying experience.” Further, she highlights how hospitality and gifts are often used by recruiting movements who “shower the potential member with attention and affection” helping him enjoy “warm, affective relationships with the new group” (p. 70). In particular, TJ’s comparatively gentle and convivial approach to *da’wa* comes into play here which contrasts starkly with the harsh, condemnatory attitudes most often associated with the Salafiyyah (see Inge (2017, pp.83-85)) or the brash, confrontation style of groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Husain 2007).

There is also a sense in which a homogenisation of identity leads to what McGuire (1987, p.72, 76) terms a “we-feeling”: “Part of the resocialization itself is learning to act, look, and talk like other members of the group...The more alike members feel, the easier it is for the group to gain a sense of...”

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22 As we saw in 7.3.2, a key philosophy of TJ *da’wa* is captured in the proverb “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.”

23 See also Masud’s (2000a, pp.31-37) translated transcript of Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf Kandhalawi’s final public speech, delivered at Raiwind three days before his death, in which he emphasises the absolute centrality of love, unity and brotherhood for TJ’s vision of global Muslim reform. While the opportunity to develop long-lasting friendships and collegial bonds over the course of an extended *khuruj* is expressed well by Dr Uthman at the end of 9.2, I simultaneously elaborate, in 10.2, on the deleterious impact of quarrels that inevitably also occur.

24 Barker (1984), in her classic study of the Moonies, calls this “love-bombing.”

25 For instance, Metcalf (1994, p.712) records the following anecdote typical of the rhetorical universe of TJ folklore: “A Pakistani jama’at invited a habitual drinker to join them and were astonished when he agreed. What to do about the drink? They agreed on a compromise: he would entrust his bottle to the amir, the group’s leader, who would provide him a drink whenever he asked – the amir, for whom drink was virtually unthinkable. The story as told to me was that all went as expected, with the drink being regularly provided, until one night the drinker awoke to find all the Tablighis engaged in earnest supplication on his behalf. He said nothing, but never asked for the bottle again.” Despite the harsh condemnations captured by Inge, she simultaneously identifies a strong sense of sisterhood within the group as a key commitment-mechanism. See Hamid (2015) for recent evolutions of attitude, largely in response to the heightened concerns of a post-9/11 and 7/7 socio-political context, within both the Salafiyyah and Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Britain.
unity.” As we have already seen (7.2), the growth of the beard and adoption of recognisably Islamic attire are crucial symbolisations of intra-religious conversion. Additionally, there is a shared lexicon the converting neophyte gradually appropriates including such distinct TJ words as ajeeb, baishak, takaza, mashwera or karguzari. Sometimes this can involve a hybridisation of language – as evidenced in Nurul’s excerpt above: “they tashkeeled me” – a further sign of TJ’s indigenisation in Britain. Black leather socks have also become something of a symbol of TJ identity; upon arrival at a mosque in France en route to Bulgaria, I remarked that our group would be recognisable as members of a TJ delegation, not only because of our beards, robes and turbans, but most significantly due to the leather socks all five group members had donned. Within seconds, we were approached by a smiling worshipper of North African origin: “Jama’at Tabligh? Masha’Allah, welcome, welcome…”

This homogenisation of identity often develops symbiotically with the cultivation of intra- and inter-religious boundaries. As already alluded to, while formal TJ discourse encourages an inclusivist and non-sectarian approach to Muslim reform, I nevertheless did on occasion hear other Muslim groups disparagingly referred to by rank and file activists. For instance, Barelwis were once referred to laughingly as ‘green top milk’ – a reference to the distinct green turbans that often crown their impeccably white robes – while Salafis were criticised as promoters of ‘DIY Islam’ because of their formal rejection of the madhab system. The establishment and maintenance of such boundaries vis-à-vis rival groups – though arguably less pronounced in TJ than other Muslim trends – helps foster a sense of solidarity that enhances commitment and belonging: “members perceive their in-group as good or superior and the outside as evil or degraded” (McGuire 1987, p.75). This might be extended to the wider secular society; Fahd, after recounting a personal experience of racialised

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26 According to Metcalf (1994, p.713): “the injunction to follow Prophetic models of behavior means that members dress alike, have with them the same minimal possessions, and in some basic ways even act alike despite their varied backgrounds.”

27 Also see here Mandaville’s (2001, pp.94-95) application of Ulf Hannerz’s concept of the ‘creolisation’ of language to diaspora Muslim communities in the West.

28 Leather socks are worn, particularly when travelling, as they obviate the need to wash the feet as part of the ritual ablution [wudu] that must precede the daily salat.
Islamophobia, concluded emphatically: “They made me into who I am today. They made me into a Tablighi” (see also Voas and Fleischmann 2012).

8.2.2.3 Certainty in a world of flux

Finally, I identify as a key appeal of TJ to British-born Muslims its ability to supply a deep-rooted sense of meaning, purpose and direction in a contemporary society characterised by the relativisation of values and individualisation of lifestyles (see 4.2.2). In this it is far from unique; the structural conditions of modernity have (paradoxically, from the perspective of classical ‘secularisation theory’) been identified as an underlying causal factor for the enduring popularity of any number of religious movements (Saliba 1995, pp.74-77). For Herberg:

Confronted with the depersonalizing pressures of contemporary life, modern man experiences a profound exigency to preserve some remnant of personality and inwardness against the erosions of a mass culture. Increasingly, he turns to religion to provide him an inexpungable citadel for the self in a world in which personal authenticity is threatened on every side; indeed, the quest for authenticity is itself substantially a religious quest…At its deepest level the turn to religion we are witnessing owes much of its force to the search for a new and more viable "philosophy" of existence amid the spiritual chaos of our age. (Herberg 1955, pp.76-77)²⁹

Berger (1980, p.19) echoes Herberg: “modern societies are characterized by unstable, incohesive, unreliable plausibility structures. Put differently, in the modern situation certainty is hard to come by.” Consequently, it might be asserted that relativism and doubt coagulate - as a correlate of broader structural change - in the subjective consciousness of individuals inhabiting societies that have dismantled, through processes of modernisation, the traditional legitimating apparatuses of classical meaning-systems. *Choice and freedom* thus emerge as key prerogatives of the postmodern condition; though, paradoxically, these may well be experienced not as liberation but burden: “Man is condemned to be free.”³⁰ In such a situation it is unsurprising that “any movement (and not only a religious one) that promises to provide or to renew certainty has a ready market” (Berger 1999a,

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²⁹ Herberg was writing in the context of the mid-20th century ‘upswing in religion’ experienced among significant segments of the American population. In a footnote, he further quotes Richard Niebuhr: “Present-day youth has to rest its large-scale security on deeper foundations and this is probably the source of much of its religious interest…Some of it is finding no greater security than an Epicurean philosophy of chance offers; but much of it is getting down to bedrock and finding a foundation on which life can rest unmoved, if not unshaken, in these stormy times” (p.84).

³⁰ This is a well-known maxim of the twentieth-century French existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre; see also Berger and Zijderveld (2009).
This may help explain the paradox highlighted by Berger in his 1999 recantation of the secularisation thesis:

By and large, religious communities have survived and even flourished to the degree that they have *not* tried to adapt themselves to the alleged requirements of a secularized world. To put it simply, experiments with secularized religion have generally failed; religious movements with beliefs and practices dripping with reactionary supernaturalism (the kind utterly beyond the pale at self-respecting faculty parties) have widely succeeded. (Berger 1999a, p.4)

TJ is precisely a movement “dripping with reactionary supernaturalism.” Its truth claims are unequivocal and derive their sustenance from the broader symbolic universe of Islam – albeit in truncated form. Along with the “idealised Prophetic type” captured by Noor (2012) and the foregrounding of death (see below), a third ‘master signifier’ of TJ discourse may well be *yaqeen* – absolute certainty or conviction. TJ seeks to cultivate in its adherents a sense of the incontrovertible reality of God and the ultimate meaningfulness of everything in existence – down to “the crawling of an ant on a black stone in a dark night” as an oft-repeated TJ cliché puts it. Further, as a proselytising movement, it sees its mission as ‘the salvation of the world’ expending huge amounts of energy to establish its meaning-system both in human society and consciousness. Yet its activities, significantly, remain circumscribed within Muslims; it has no official methodology or overt desire even, to convert non-believers. It therefore inherently relies upon an emotional attachment to core tenets of the Islamic faith that have been internalised to a lesser or greater degree by individuals it seeks to convert during the formative primary socialisation of their childhood. It is to explicating the mechanisms through which TJ seeks to reactivate the dormant faith of neophytes that I now turn.

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31 Raees’ comments are telling in this regard. When I asked him what the best thing he liked about TJ was, he replied after a long pause: “It’s a very simple aspect but obeying one person who’s in charge; listening to and following a decision which is made through consultation.” TJ could thus be said to liberate the postmodern participant from the anguish of choice, providing a ready-made package of certainty in a world of shifting and fluid norms. Additionally, the ‘rootlessness’ of the second-generation, as compellingly described by Herberg (1955), might provide another key to understanding its appeal: “The Jama’at’s success in Canadian (among other) urban contexts can hence be understood in terms of the movement’s alleviation of the problems of identity and community facing those living in modern urban spaces...the Tablighi Jama’at appeals to those Muslims in particular who are facing issues of identity, such as second generation youth and young adults, or new converts to the faith.” (Dickson 2009, p.111)
8.3 Till Death Do Us Apart: TJ and the Process of Desocialisation

How, in practice, does intra-religious conversion operate? I propose here a twin process of desocialisation and resocialisation, utilising insights principally from Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge. Based on his study of TJ in Southeast Asia, Noor (2012, p.21) observes that “a set of chosen signifiers in Islam’s vocabulary have been deliberately foregrounded and elevated to the status of master signifiers...that mark the contents and parameters of the Tablighis’ discourse.” Further, he identifies TJ’s construction of an “idealised Prophetic type that is meant to serve as the model for normative Muslim behaviour among the Tablighis themselves” as an integral component of TJ’s symbolic universe verbalised regularly through da’wa. In addition to this observation, I highlight here another ‘master signifier’ of TJ discourse which yields significant explanatory utility in mapping the process of desocialisation: that of death.

Central to Berger and Luckmann’s social theory is an understanding of society as an ongoing system of roles and institutions produced, sustained and internalised through perpetual human activity. When sedimented into tradition, these broad-ranging social forces collaborate to generate a massive Durkheimian facticity that presses upon subjective consciousness as immutable and inexorable reality (see 4.1). The social world thus assumes a ‘taken-for-granted’ aura in which its socialised subjects can imagine no other way of being; echoing Heidegger’s state of ‘inauthenticity’ or Sarte’s ‘bad faith,’ we become the masks we wear (Berger 1963). Yet marginal situations – such as nightmares, fantasy, illness, crisis or catastrophe – expose the precariousness of the taken-for-granted realities and their socially constructed nature. They are therefore pregnant with the possibility of ‘ecstasy’ used in the sense of ekstasis: “the act of standing or stepping outside…the taken-for-granted routines of society” (Berger 1963, p.157). Based on Heidegger, Berger advances the notion that death is the marginal situation par excellence:

The confrontation with death (be it through actually witnessing the death of others or anticipating one’s own death in the imagination) constitutes what is probably the most important marginal situation. Death radically challenges all socially objectivated definitions of reality – of the world, of others, of self. Death radically puts in question the taken-for-granted, “business-as-usual” attitude in which one exists in everyday life...

Witnessing the death of others (notably, of course, of significant others) and anticipating his own death, the individual is strongly propelled to question the ad hoc cognitive and normative operating procedures of his “normal” society. (Berger 1967, p.43, p.23)
This understanding is crucial to my analysis of the desocialising potential of TJ. TJ seizes death and elevates it to the status of ‘master signifier’ – a key motif of discourse which actualises the reality-defining potential of its symbolic universe through constantly finding expression in da’wa.\footnote{See 10.1 for the importance of language in actualising worlds of meaning in subjective consciousness.} The pervasiveness of death in normative TJ discourse was repeatedly driven home to me during my fieldwork. For instance, Ismail, a 45 year old Tier 3 second-generation civil servant, said during a weekend khuruj bayaan:

> Whichever religion you are, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist or Jew, nobody denies death. Even atheists don’t deny death. People disagree about many things but they’re all united when it comes to death. All of us must die. The Qur’an says *kullu nafsin dhaa-i-qatul mawt*, “every soul must taste death”…We all know our date of birth but nobody knows their date of death, yeah? It could come tomorrow. The most certain thing in life is death but the most uncertain thing in life is the time of death. And so that’s why we should heed the advice of our Prophet (s) who said that the most intelligent people are those who prepare for death before death comes to them.

In particular, *Fadhail-e-Sadaqat*, a core TJ text, is replete with stories and exhortations regarding death. During the course of the weekend khuruj mentioned in 1.1, the amir of our group, Yusuf – a 30 year old recently converted Tier 3 Avant-Garde council worker – gathered the mostly teenage members of our 11-strong jama’at late on Saturday night and read aloud, from *Fadhail-e-Sadaqat*, the following graphic description:

> Imam Ghazaali Rahmatullah alaihe [may God's mercy be upon him] says, “Death is a tremendous thing to fear, but most people are heedless of it. Many people do not even talk of death, owing to their absorption in worldly affairs. A few talk of death but their minds are occupied with other things and, therefore, it does them little good. It is important that, from time to time, one should concentrate upon death, to the exclusion of all other things and imagine that death is staring one in the face. One should think of one’s friends and relatives and recall to one’s mind how they were placed on the bier, carried to the grave and buried under mounds of earth. One should imagine their faces and think of their high ambitions and the changes that dust might have wrought in their handsome faces, and how their bodies might have decayed, how their children were orphaned, their wives were widowed, how their relatives were left to weep over their loss. One should think how their fortunes were distributed and how their clothes were left behind (never to be worn by them again)! One should, then, say to one-self, ‘I shall
have to suffer the same fate one of these days.’ How these people, who are lying in their graves, used to laugh and talk in meetings. How they indulged in lusts, but are now lying in the dust! They did not like to talk of death but have fallen a prey to it! They were intoxicated by their youthful vigour but are lying today in the graves, forsaken and uncared for!...They made ambitious plans and arrangements for many years to come, though death loomed over their heads; little did they know, on the last day of their life, that they were destined to spend that very night in the grave! The same is the case with me. Though I am busy making arrangements for years to come, I do not know what is going to happen tomorrow.” (Ihyaa)33 (Kaandhlawi 1997a, pp.575-576)

Following the reading, Yusuf exhorted his young – and now considerably sombre – audience to take life seriously by turning away from the temptations of ‘the world’ and engaging themselves, instead, in worship and da’wa through a commitment to TJ. The centrality of death as a key motif of TJ discourse should be clear from these excerpts.34 By integrating a strong awareness of the inevitability of death into its plausibility structure, Muslims exposed to the TJ message – whether through the ringing of the doorbell or by participating in an outing – are “strongly propelled to question the ad hoc cognitive and normative operating procedures of [their] ‘normal’ society” (Berger 1967, p.23) – the collective conscience; particularly if the emotional ties which bind them to this secondary reality are far weaker than those which bind them to the primary realities internalised in childhood (see Chapter 4). Put more explicitly, if language – as becomes evident in 10.1 – is the socialising instrument par excellence and TJ the mass da’wa movement par excellence then its incorporation of the marginal situation par excellence into the repertoire of its ‘master signifiers’ intrinsically imbues it with powerful desocialising potential. In other words, whatever the taken-for-granted suppositions of the society it happens to be operating in, by foregrounding the

33 The source text from which this quotation derives, and which – upon the direction of his Sufi shaykh – the amir had brought with him for private study during the course of his weekend khuruj, is Book XL of al-Ghazali’s Revival of the Religious Sciences available in English translation by Winter (1989). As an aside, there is some interesting resemblance here with Death’s Duel, the valedictory sermon delivered by John Donne during Lent, 1631: “we must all pass this...this death of corruption and putrefaction, of vermiculation and incineration, of dissolution and dispersal and from the grave...when my mouth shall be filled with dust, and the worm shall feed, and feed sweetly upon me, when the ambitious man shall have no satisfaction, if the poorest alive tread upon him, nor the poorest receive any contentment in being made equal to princes, for they shall be equal but in dust...” (Abrams and Greenblatt 2000, pp.1280-1281). It is also interesting to note that a strong engagement with the motif of death was a key factor in the intra-religious conversion experience of Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens’ classic tale A Christmas Carol.

34 This resonates with the frame ‘To Be a Good Muslim’ identified by Hamid (2015, pp.95-96) as a common discourse of Islamic reformist movements in Britain; see also the section ‘Salvation and the Hereafter’ in Pieri (2015, pp.140-144). Recall also the ‘push’ factor of death recounted in Abdur Rahman’s conversion narrative at the end of 8.2.1 above.
implacable, unremitting and omnipresent constant of death as a dominant motif of its constantly verbalised discourse, TJ strips its listeners of the comfort that their socially constructed nomos had been providing for them; in Bergerian terms it takes out of their hands the “shield against terror” which had hitherto protected them from the anomic chaos that otherwise reigns: “Seen in the perspective of society, every nomos is an area of meaning carved out of a vast mass of meaninglessness, a small clearing of lucidity in a formless, dark, always ominous jungle” (Berger 1967, pp.22-23). This drives home a central argument of The Sacred Canopy: that the ultimate efficacy of the socialising process lies in its ability to allow us to endure the exigencies of our existence. Yet TJ, through its insistent and explicit engagement with death, begins to untie the knots of socialisation which have solidified in consciousness over time; a process which is reminiscent, somewhat, of what Turner terms the liminal phase in rites de passage: “Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence” (Turner 2001 [1964], p.53). The power of this act to reconstitute personal identity in myriad ways is self-evident but my data indicates that intra-religious conversion surfaces as the dominant trajectory of my respondents. To explain why this should be so, I unpack in the next chapter the ritual and phenomenological dimensions of desocialisation and resocialisation.
Chapter 9
Ritual and Phenomenological Approaches to Liminality

My sister really enjoyed the jama’at and afterwards she came to me one day and she said, Yahya I don’t like going into town now and seeing the Muslims the way they are and I remember saying to her, Alhamdulillah, Allah’s opened up the eye of your heart. And she said I feel like wearing the hijab, but I’m at university and I don’t know what to do and my answer was, probably not very helpful, but I said well all I wanted to do was start a fight in you and I’ve done that so you can decide yourself now. I just wanted to start that battle inside you.

Yahya, Tier 3 Avant-Garde activist relating the intra-religious conversion experience of his sister

9.1 Between Desocialisation and Resocialisation: Khuruj, Liminality and Communitas

One of the key assertions of this thesis is that conversion to TJ represents for many British-born Muslims a return to those core ethno-religious values internalised during the primary socialisation of childhood and a concomitant shift away from more secular values internalised during later secondary socialisations into the British collective conscience. To substantiate this, I am meticulously tracing three stages in the intra-religious conversion process: firstly, that of desocialisation (which, as we have just seen, relies considerably - though not exclusively, I would add - on neophyte engagement with the ‘master signifier’ of death), secondly that of liminality (to be dealt with in this section) and finally that of resocialisation (see 10.1 in which I illustrate how TJ generates plausibility structures, by constantly verbalising core elements of its symbolic universe through da’wa, into which the post-liminal ritual subject is socialised). Central to my analysis in this section is the concept of liminality most associated with the work of Victor Turner (1969, 2001 [1964]). While much of the theoretical architecture of this thesis derives from Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge, I would maintain that by itself this is inadequate to capture the intra-religious conversion experience facilitated by TJ – principally because of its almost exclusive focus on language as an instrument of socialisation. As a result, non-linguistic dimensions of the
socialisation process are neglected. TJ, as a mass da’wa movement, certainly integrates the powerful socialising apparatus of language into its normative modus operandi (see 10.1) but nevertheless is not restricted to it. Rather, the very physical act of khuruj integrates into TJ’s normative praxis a range of ritual elements that collaborate with the desocialising potential of death to thrust the neophyte into a state of liminality that may well lead to intra-religious conversion. Consequently, Berger and Luckmann’s theorising in the sociology of knowledge can usefully be complemented by Turner’s work on liminality.

It is useful to recall here the twin ‘generative mechanisms’ of spirituality and secularity adumbrated in 4.1.3. If, as was suggested there, the prevalent secular discourse of modern societies might be exemplified in terms of Hugo Grotius’ operational principle of “etsi Deus non daretur...’as if God did not exist’” or the declaration of Neitzsche’s madman “God is dead...And we have killed him,” then the core matrix of TJ reality might alternatively be articulated by the recurring Qur’anic formula “Indeed, Allah has power over all things.” Juxtaposing these dichotomous phrases invokes a spectrum in which TJ, as sacred tradition, mirrors its polar opposite of a secularised sociality. In practice – and as demonstrated in 11.1 – I would maintain that the lived experiences of British-born TJ activists subsume within themselves any sharp dichotomy indicated by these apparent polarities; but, nevertheless, conceptualising this spectrum is useful in mapping the intra-religious conversion process. Turner relies on van Gennep who, in his seminal work on The Rites of Passage, similarly posits a blunt dichotomy between the sacred and the secular: “...the only clearly marked social division remaining in modern society is that which distinguishes between the secular and the religious worlds – between the profane and the sacred...So great is the incompatibility between the secular and the sacred worlds that a man cannot pass from one to the other without going through an intermediate stage” (van Gennep 1960 [1909], p.1). Traversing a trajectory of intra-religious conversion then, it is plausible that the TJ neophyte will find himself caught between worlds, in a kind of phenomenological limbo that sees him “juggle with the factors of existence” (Turner 2001 [1964], p.53). In this section, I explicate the ritual mechanisms through which this “intermediate stage” between desocialisation and resocialisation is brought about in neophyte consciousness.

Turner draws primarily upon his fieldwork among the Ndembu of Zambia to propose, following van Gennep, a threefold process that underpins every significant rite of passage. First, there is the stage

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1 This is in spite of the additional comments made by Berger (1967, p.40) in The Sacred Canopy: “Men forget. They must, therefore, be reminded over and over again. Indeed, it may be argued that one of the oldest and most important prerequisites for the establishment of culture is the institution of such ‘reminders,’ the terribleness of which for many centuries is perfectly logical in view of the ‘forgetfulness’ that they were designed to combat. Religious ritual has been a crucial instrument of this process of ‘reminding.’ Again and again it ‘makes present’ to those who participate in it the fundamental reality-definitions and their appropriate legitimations.”
of separation (also termed the pre-liminal stage) in which the individual – variously termed the ‘ritual subject,’ ‘transitional-being,’ ‘liminal persona,’ ‘initiate’ or ‘neophyte’ – becomes detached from his normal social context or set of cultural conditions. The second stage is that of marginality or transition (the liminal stage) in which the ritual subject exists in a state of ambivalent abeyance, de-socialised from the ordinary structures of mundane existence but not yet re-socialised into a new state or reality: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial” (Turner 1969, p.95). The third stage involves re-aggregation or reincorporation (also termed post-liminality) in which the reconstituted individual emerges again into the structures of the broader social system, ready to take up the amalgam of social roles expected of his newly-defined status “with more alert faculties perhaps and enhanced knowledge of how things work” (Turner 2001 [1964], p.53). Of these three stages, Turner focusses explicitly on the second – that of marginality, transition or liminality – to adumbrate the ways in which an ontological transformation of being is affected within the ritual subject. Here, I seek to apply Turner’s analytical framework to examine the ritual mechanisms through which conversion to TJ is achieved in modern Britain.

Firstly, Turner asserts that in the liminal period the ritual subject becomes structurally, if not physically, invisible as he enters the ambiguous space at the interstices of structure. In tribal societies, this invisibility is choreographed concurrently with two dominant symbols: that of birth (symbolised by the womb) and – interestingly, given our discussion in the foregoing section – that of death. The import is clear: the transitional being ‘disappears’ for some time from the structures of ordinary existence during which period he both dies to himself and is reborn. The death pertains to those elements of his previous biography – the configurations of social roles and statuses represented by the pre-liminal self – which atrophy under the pressure of ritually induced rebirth; over time, the chrysalis withers away to be reborn as butterfly:

The essential feature of these symbolizations is that the neophytes are neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another. Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories. (Turner 2001 [1964], p.48)

In practical terms, this invisibility is achieved through seclusion: “neophytes...are very commonly secluded, partially or completely, from the realm of culturally defined and ordered states and statuses...The neophytes are sometimes said to ‘be in another place’...removed to a sacred place of concealment...” (p.49). In TJ, this seclusion is achieved through the act of kthuruj in which participants physically extricate themselves from the structures of their day-to-day existence and enter, for the
duration of the tour, into a state of ritually induced liminality. Such moments, argues social anthropologist Kate Fox in a very different context, are redolent with ‘cultural remission’ which permit the liminal creature to experiment with new modes of living: “These are liminal periods – marginal, borderline intervals, segregated from everyday existence, allowing us, briefly, to explore alternative ways of being” (Fox 2004, pp.379-380). It is significant that the act of khuruj is equated with both birth and death in TJ discourse. During an evening gasht programme I participated in from Masjid Ta-Ha, a reluctant visitee was advised by local TJ activists in no uncertain terms: “Train yourself to leave your dunya [worldly affairs] behind temporarily before the Angel of Death forces you to leave it permanently. Tashkeel yourself [to go out in the Path of Allah] before the Angel of Death tashkeels you.” On another occasion, I was told the story of a highly dedicated Avant-Garde TJ activist who carried his burial shroud (kafn) with him during prolonged TJ outings as a symbol of his readiness to meet death at any moment. Conversely, I heard on several occasions TJ’s signature 4 month khuruj likened to the period of gestation in the womb:

The Prophet Muhammad (s) said that the foetus in the womb of the mother develops in stages of 40 days. That’s one of the reasons the number 40 is important in Islam...And the Prophet (s) said that after three periods of 40 days, which adds up to four months, 120 days – Allah SWT sends an angel who breathes the ruh [spirit] into the foetus. Similarly, if we go out for four months in the Path of Allah, then Allah will blow the spirit of imaan into our hearts and we’ll become spiritually alive.²

Turner (p.49) also points out how, during the liminal phase, neophytes are brought “…into close connection with deity or with superhuman power, with what is, in fact, often regarded as the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless.” This echoes Metcalf’s (1994, pp.718-719) analysis of khuruj: “Tabligh can be seen as a prolonged example of what students of religion call ‘ritual time,’ time that is bounded, extricated from the usual tangles of everyday life, time which one understands as a particularly intense opportunity for encountering the sacred.” Another feature of the liminal period identified by Turner (p.49) is that of sacred poverty; transitional creatures “…have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally

² For the significance of the number 40 in Sufi cosmology, see Winter (1989, p.xxvii). 40 is also a significant number in the Judeo-Christian heritage from which Islam claims ancestry; for instance, see Rick Warren’s (2002) best-selling Christian classic The Purpose Driven Life which is premised upon a 40-day spiritual journey. In his An Agenda to Change our Condition, the well-known American imam Hamza Yusuf (2001) also proposes a series of 40-day exercises designed to cultivate taqwa [God-consciousness] in the Muslim heart. In an early edition, he explicitly referenced TJ: “…given that it is an exercise in order to achieve an obligation and nothing less, it is not an innovation but is similar to using an alarm clock to wake one from sleep for prayer. This is also from where the Jam’aat Tabligh derive the khuruuj of forty days. A habit can be firmly established in forty days...”
from their fellows.” Both the radical egalitarianism of a TJ outing, also commented upon by Metcalf (1994, 1995), is evoked here as well as the relative simplicity in which TJ groups travel. For the duration of the \textit{khuruj}, structural markers of wealth are stripped away as participants dress alike in traditional robes and carry their own bedding along with a small bag containing essential clothes and toiletries. During the course of my 42 day outing to Bulgaria, one of the group members exhorted the rest of us: “Whilst we’re out in \textit{jama’at} we can try and live up to the hadith to ‘Be in the world like a stranger or a wayfarer.’ We all know what our lives are like back home – our fridges are crammed with food, and even our freezers are nowadays. Our wardrobes are packed with nice clothes, our beds have to have 1500 pocket sprung mattresses [laughs]. We live in luxury and comfort to be honest...but it’s all \textit{dunya} really. Coming here is a chance to leave it all for some time and try and live as we’re supposed to. And when we go back we should try and introduce \textit{saadghee} [simplicity] into our lives more as well.”

Turner (2001 [1964], p.49) further identifies the androgynous nature of the neophyte – who may be “symbolically represented as being neither male nor female...[or] alternatively symbolically assigned characteristics of both sexes” – as a key feature of liminality. Janson (2008, 2014), Metcalf (1995, 1998, 2000) and Siddiqi (2012) have all elaborated upon the partial reconfiguration of gender roles enacted among TJ activists in the traditional, patriarchal societies of the Gambia, Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively. In particular Janson, who participated in several \textit{masturat} outings, observes in a chapter tellingly titled \textit{Male Wives and Female Husbands}:

Male missionaries’ involvement in domestic work and childcare, their display of ‘feminine’ behaviour, and their adoption of ‘female’ dress code suggest that \textit{masturat} can be analysed in terms of what Turner (1969) calls anti-structural ‘liminality’, during which other rules and modes apply than those in daily life...As with neophytes in a rite of passage, missionaries become liminal beings during \textit{masturat}, detached from their family compound and \textit{dunya} issues and disassociated from status, property, and other insignia indicating rank. (Janson 2014, pp.216-217)

Again, during my fieldtrip to Bulgaria, I hand-washed, with other members of the group, the dirty clothes of the \textit{jama’at} and regularly helped to cook and serve food to others – tasks which in traditional, patriarchal societies have most commonly been associated with women. Turner (p.49) further elaborates on two additional features of the liminal period: “between instructors and neophytes there is often complete authority and complete submission; among neophytes there is often complete equality.” I will focus first on the former. The instructor in a TJ outing is, of course, the \textit{amir} – invested with authority by the markaz but, by extension, also the primary loci of Islam’s
symbolic universe. This is expressed in an oft-repeated TJ adage, “Whoever obeys the amir has obeyed the Prophet (s). And whoever obeys the Prophet has obeyed Allah,” which echoes Turner (2001 [1964], p.50): “the authority of the elders over the neophytes is not based on legal sanction; it is in a sense the personification of the self-evident authority of tradition. The authority of the elders is absolute, because it represents the absolute, the axiomatic values of society in which are expressed the ‘common good’ and the common interest.” The reverence in which TJ elders are held – and by extension their representation of the ‘common good’ among Tiers 3 and 4 – is reflected in the numerous marriage ceremonies they are requested to conduct at the close of ijtimas both in Britain and abroad. Further, obedience to the amir is an essential component of TJ participation: while on tour, young neophytes are encouraged to ask permission from their amir before leaving a gathering to use the toilet even or before leaving the mosque to visit a shop. During our week-long stay at the Dewsbury HQ prior to leaving for Bulgaria, obedience to the amir was repeatedly emphasised: “Imam Ghazali likens the spiritual aspirant to a corpse bathed prior to burial. It has no will of its own and turns however others turn it. Be like that in the hands of your amir in jama’at and your spiritual tarbiyah [rectification/progress] will happen.”

3 There are clear resonances here with the spiritual life in other religious traditions. For instance, Karen Armstrong, in her graphic memoir of life in a British Roman Catholic convent in the 1960s – just prior to the reforms instituted by the Second Vatican Council – recounts:

We were being trained in Ignatian obedience, which aims at breaking down the will and the judgment of a religious so that he unquestioningly accepts the will of God as it is presented to him through his superior...The superior represents God to a religious: his commands, his orders – “the least sign of his will,” as the rule says – are to be taken as a direct message from God. Ignatius says that “all should give themselves up entirely to their superior as a dead body allows itself to be treated in any manner whatever.” I had

3 These statements were spoken in Urdu and I have translated them here. This imperative of absolute obedience is qualified by the need to obey the amir in only those things deemed halal: “There is no obedience to a creature if it involves disobedience of the Creator” (hadith). This qualification is also acknowledged by Turner: “The essence of the complete obedience of the neophytes is to submit to the elders but only in so far as they are in charge, so to speak, of the common good and represent in their persons the total community” (Turner 2001 [1964], p.50). Additionally, the extent to which the role of the amir in TJ functions as a surrogate to the role of the Shaykh in classical Sufism is a fascinating issue I explore elsewhere (Timol 2015c). Finally – given the present socio-political climate (see 2.2.4) – there may be some scope to explore whether this imperative to obey can be exploited nefariously: “An unquestioning mind, which is what the Tablighi tends to produce, can easily be redirected towards violent ends” (Sardar 2008, p.313). However this falls outside the purview of this thesis (see 12.1.1.1).

4 This phrase equates perfectly with the Urdu terminology employed by classical TJ: “Amir ki mansha ko pehchaan-nao.”
I now examine Turner’s second feature of liminality identified above: that of complete equality among neophytes. This was previously touched upon when considering *sacred poverty*; but here I quote extensively from Metcalf’s detailed descriptions of the fundamentally equalising effect of a TJ tour:

Tabligh, as conceived by Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas...was meant to do nothing less than turn social hierarchy on its head...To have any sense of how radical were (and are) the bases of human relations within the Tabligh, one must recall the fundamental principles of Indo-Muslim society in which Tabligh took shape and continues to flourish. The society is defined above all by structures of subordination and hierarchy. From the earliest age both boys and girls learn the careful calibrations of age, gender, and birth, all displayed in a range of obligations, manifestations of deference, and expectations of respect in virtually every daily interaction...

The tour is the occasion for a radical break with all the enmeshments of intense face to face hierarchies of family and work. That break allows the far-reaching change that was Mawlana Ilyas’s goal, for he was explicit that it was the journeyer, not the audience, who would be most significantly changed...Everything in the tour is meant to inculcate humility...a range of practices fosters a levelling among the participants, a levelling modified only by degrees of fidelity and faith...

Among those on a tour, the elimination of hierarchic distinctions is relentless...[The *amir*] ideally should be distinguished by the quality of his *iman*, not by worldly rank: a peon can be an *amir*...There are echoes of Sufi notions in the conviction that the least likely person may be one of the spiritual elect. (Metcalf 2000, pp.46-49)

My own fieldwork confirms empirically many of Metcalf’s descriptions. For instance, while in Bulgaria, I was struck when Luqman, the *amir* of our group, began one night to spontaneously massage with olive oil, and much to his surprise and delight, the calloused feet of Hojja Ahmed – a middle-aged Bulgarian rustic who had joined our *jama'at*. Turner (2001 [1964], p.50) further posits that the radical egalitarianism of the liminal period gives rise to a feeling of intense *communitas* between neophytes: “The liminal group is a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions. This comradeship transcends distinctions of rank, age [and] kinship

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5 For more on Luqman see 7.4.1 and Hojja Ahmed see 10.1.
position...Deep friendships between novices are encouraged...all are supposed to be linked by special ties which persist after the rites are over, even into old age.” While Metcalf’s descriptions derive from South Asian TJ, my own fieldwork captured a more international flavour of this communitas. For instance, Dr Uthman, today a Tier 2 British TJ leader from Tunisia, described to me his experience of joining TJ as a trainee doctor freshly arrived in Britain in the early 90s. Initially, he felt TJ was a movement only for South Asians – given, as Sikand (1998b) notes, the predominance of the Urdu language and South Asian cultural mores. However, when he met fellow Arabic-speaking TJ activists in the UK, he felt compelled to give it a try:

So he explained to me and I responded. I went for three days and I liked it very much. In...the first jama'at I went to, there was younger, 16 years old, and elder 70 years old! All waking up very early to pray...and I saw this is real Islam, all ages are practising Deen. And we were from different nationalities...[but] at the end of the three days, we felt as if we knew each other all our life, not for three days. As if we had this connection, we had this friendship, we are real brothers throughout our life and this is the same experience that I had every time I went in any jama'at. Every jama’at I went in, the repeated, recurring theme of every jama'at is that you feel the brotherhood and the love and the affection between the brothers in the jama'at.

And one jama'at, we went to Malta for 40 days. We were only five people of four nationalities: Malaysian, American maybe embraced Islam more than 20 years ago, British and me Tunisian - at the time I didn’t have the British nationality...and the custom officer says what sort of group, how did you get together? She’s checking the passports as a group, five passports together. How did you get together? I say Islam united us. She say how did you, there's no common ground...But, at the end of the jama’at, we felt as if we are all brothers and we knew each other all our life and we still ask about one another. Whenever we meet in markaz or we happen to meet in any place we remember the days we spent together, the beautiful days we spent together.6

I have thus far recounted salient features of the liminal phase entered into by neophytes as identified by Turner and have demonstrated their relevance to the key TJ activity of khuruj. My primary argument is that the very physical act of khuruj, which requires the participant to extricate his whole self from the enmeshments of mundane life, fuses with the desocialising potential of death to generate a state of ritually induced liminality which, according to Turner, exists in the

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6 Dr Uthman’s descriptions fit well with the ‘collegiality and belonging’ I identify as a key attraction of TJ in 8.2.2.2.
interstices of structure. It is therefore pregnant with cultural possibility. Returning to the symbolisms of birth and death that characterise the liminal period, I would therefore aver that an extended TJ outing constitutes both a tomb in which former conceptions of self may definitively be interred and a womb from which a new self can emerge. Both possibilities inhere in the experience and the ensemble of rites which accompany the process thus function as both midwife and undertaker. Turner (2001 [1964], pp.50-51) cogently summarises: “The passivity of neophytes to their instructors, their malleability, which is increased by submission to ordeal, their reduction to a uniform condition, are signs of the process whereby they are ground down to be fashioned anew and endowed with new additional powers to cope with their new station in life.” Armstrong (1997 [1981], p.135), in a chapter aptly titled The Death I Have to Die, describes the training undertaken by nuns during the period of their postulants’hip with remarkably similar imagery: “She must be prepared in this period of intensive training to be pulverized, allowing her self-love and all her own will to crumble away by a slow process of attrition until there remains only a little heap of powder that God can refashion for His own purposes.” Similarly, Metcalf (1994) tellingly titled a description of TJ’s internal operational dynamics, Remaking Ourselves: Islamic Self-Fashioning in a Global Movement of Spiritual Renewal. The import is clear. Through systematic and disciplined participation in the elaborate rituals that constitute rites de passage, a new creature is formed: “The arcane knowledge or ‘gnosis’ obtained in the liminal period is felt to change the inmost nature of

7 My fieldwork found that, in particular, the disruption of sleeping patterns is a distinct ‘ordeal’ that neophytes must adapt to while on khuruj. Hussein, the teenage student at the crossroads of Buddhism and Islam (see 8.2.1), while recalling his first experience of khuruj described this vividly: “The sleeping pattern was so off that I, we, I didn’t even get a full night’s sleep for about two, three days; it literally felt like jet lag. Like, are these people running on a different time zone? That was my … I was just, you know, get up and just walk around for a little while, just sit there. Maybe go out, have a cigarette and then come back. Just pondering what’s happening in my life.” Sleeping patterns also became a major bone of contention between the youthful members of the jama’at I joined in the summer of 2014 and the amir, Muaz. While Muaz quoted al-Ghazali - “Sleep is an interruption to the purpose of life” - a youngster retorted with “Sleep deprivation is a form of torture condemned by Amnesty International!” Because it was Ramadan, we usually retired to bed after Fajr around 4.30am but the amir, at least initially, insisted on commencing the morning ta’lim session at 10.30am (with a couple of hours siesta scheduled after the Dhuhr prayer). As a result, he would religiously spend over half an hour each morning gently cajoling grouchy youth (and a grouchy fieldworker!) out of their sleeping bags. In addition to sleep, sharing food by hand from a single plate with other jama’at members while seated on the floor (as per TJ’s interpretation of the sunnah) and acclimatising themselves to the Asian hole-in-the-ground style toilets common in many British mosques are other unfamiliar ‘ordeals’ youthful neophytes are often obliged to navigate while on khuruj. 8 There are clear Sufi undertones to all this; in particular, the stages of fana [annihilation] and baqa [abidance] that the disciple must pass through in her quest for unyielding ma’arifa [gnosis] of God. In his explanation of these terms, Gai Eaton (1994, pp.233-234) tellingly deploys the imagery of death and birth: “Death precedes resurrection; the plant’s leaves wither, it dies and its seed is buried in the earth, until there comes about a new growth in the light of the sun. The Sufi is obliged to let go of everything and lose himself before he can hope to find himself in God and so achieve the condition known as baqa…That which subsists and endures is not the person we were – the person we valued above all else on earth – before we came this way.”
the neophyte, impressing him, as a seal impresses wax, with the characteristics of his new state. It is not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being” (Turner 2001 [1964], pp.51).
9.2 “All I wanted to do was start a fight in you”: The Internal Wrangling of TJ Consciousness

In this section, I integrate Turner’s work on liminality with Berger and Luckmann’s theorising in the sociology of knowledge to demonstrate how conversion, drawing upon both ritual and semantic dimensions of experience, operates in the realm of consciousness. The normative mechanics of TJ’s religious praxis are significant here. Through institutionalising *khuruj* – a series of *mosque-based retreats* – as an essential component of its methodology, it ensures, in addition to bringing about a ritually induced state of liminality, “an intense concentration of all significant interaction within the group that embodies the plausibility structure and particularly upon the personnel assigned the task of re-socialization” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.177). These personnel, who in TJ comprise the *amir* and other *puraana saathis*, are the equivalent of what Turner terms the ‘masters of ceremony’ responsible for overseeing the neophyte’s transitions through liminality. Similarly, just as the confrontation with death as a master signifier of TJ discourse intrinsically propels the neophyte “to question the *ad hoc* cognitive and normative operating procedures of his ‘normal’ society” (Berger 1967, p.23), so does the physical act of *khuruj* in and of itself undermine the taken-for-granted suppositions of that society:

“...neophytes are withdrawn from their structural positions and consequently from the values, norms, sentiments and techniques associated with those positions. They are also divested of their previous habits of thought, feeling, and action. During the liminal period, neophytes are alternatively forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them. *Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection. In it those ideas, sentiments and facts that had been hitherto for the neophyte bound up in configurations and accepted unthinkingly are, as it were, resolved into their constituents.*” (Turner 2001 [1964], p.53, italics mine)

This resonates with what was said in 8.3 about ecstasy, used not in a mystical sense, but in the sense of *ekstasis*: “the act of standing or stepping outside...the taken-for-granted routines of society” (Berger 1963, p.157). A third theoretical frame may usefully be added here, based on Alfred Schutz’s concept of ‘multiple realities’ and derived from his broader work in the phenomenology of

Or to put it more dramatically: “Only by stepping out of the taken-for-granted routines of society is it possible for us to confront the human condition without comforting mystifications...Society provides us with warm, reasonably comfortable caves, in which we can huddle with our fellows, beating on the drums that drown out the howling hyenas of the surrounding darkness. ‘Ecstasy’ is the act of stepping outside the caves, alone, to face the night” (Berger 1963, p.171). Of course, there is a strong case to be made that religion itself constitutes a “taken-for-granted routine of society” and hence a “comforting mystification” but in 11.2, I argue how pervasive processes of secularisation in Western Europe have led to a ‘sacred canopy’ of secularity under which religious Weltanschauung need to be consciously nurtured.
Schutz distinguishes between what he calls ‘the paramount reality’ – the world of everyday occurrences or the ‘okay world’ – and ‘finite provinces of meaning’ (Wuthnow et al. 2010 [1984], pp.31-32). The former may be equated with the collective conscience of a given society, externalised and objectivated to a status of taken-for-granted Durkheimian facticity through the unwitting collaboration of a broad range of social actors. The latter, however, represents a panoply of alternative realities that may fleetingly be experienced by denizens of the former:

Finite provinces of meaning are realities to which we emigrate from the paramount reality. They are finite because they are almost always temporary; we enter upon them leaving the paramount reality, they are real while they last, but they are left behind as we return to our everyday lives. Crossing in either direction, we step across a threshold. (Berger 2014, p.55)

Though Schutz’s usage of these terms was primarily conceptual, located within the asomatous realm of consciousness, I would argue that sensorial experiences are not precluded from their operational application. This is of particular relevance to khuruj which, through its practical modus operandi, constructs both physical and conceptual finite provinces of meaning accessible to neophytes. It is significant here that the very word khuruj is translated variously as “exit; egression, emergence; departure; exodus; emigration” (Cowan 1994, p.270). Members of a jama’at thus enter into a hermetically sealed bubble of alternative meaning, so to say, that, through the intensity of its social experience and the machinery of rituals integrated into its normative praxis, temporarily consumes their consciousness. Upon returning home, the neophyte of course enters back into the paramount reality – but with an awareness and distinct memory of the temporary experience of ‘alternation’ he has just been subject to. Systematic exposure to this alternative rendering of existence (say, through regular weekend khurujs) – particularly when fused with the desocialising potential of death and a ritually induced state of liminality – undermines the taken-for-granted ‘fictions’ of the paramount reality, loosening their grip on subjective consciousness. The TJ neophyte out on tour is thus able to glimpse – however fleetingly – an alternative way of being; the ritual and semantic mechanisms of the desocialising process collaborate to offer an ontological

10 See also the section entitled ‘Da’wa as Exit Counselling’ in Christian Suhr’s (2015) aptly titled chapter *Brainwashed at School? Deprogramming the Secular among Young Neo-Orthodox Muslims in Denmark*: “…the process of exit counselling can best be described as a form of ritual reconversion to the cult victim’s former belief system” (p. 263). According to Suhr’s young Danish Muslim respondents “the Danish school system has submitted them to indoctrination of a religious cult that calls itself secularism” (p. 265).
11 Those youngsters who – much to the chagrin of their ‘socialising personnel’ – sleep through the ta’lim or spend most of their time ‘playing with their phones’ while out on tour will, of course, have a far less intense experience and are thus far less likely to be converted.
12 For more on the ‘fictions’ that comprise social reality, see Berger (1961).
transformation of self which, if seized, becomes the foundation of a new life. In practice, this may function to produce an internal wrangling in consciousness as the conceptual bifurcation of self mentioned in 4.2.2 – self-as-is and self-as-socially-construed – struggles to reconcile ostensibly conflicting allegiances. The internal dissonance this results in may be graphically illustrated through foregrounding the conversion narratives of several respondents: Hanzalah a Tier 2 TJ leader, Yahya a Tier 3 activist (and his sister), and Umar a Tier 4 sympathiser. I now present each in turn.

9.2.1 Hanzalah: the mask-wearing deviant

Hanzalah, a 47 year old highly dedicated Tier 2 TJ leader from Leicester whom I interviewed for over three hours in his home, works as a senior manager for a national accountancy firm. He describes himself as among the first of the British-born generation of South Asian Muslims to acquire postgraduate education and subsequent highly-paid professional employment: “I remember when I went to uni, that was a wow, you’re going to uni!...And then I was part of that first group of youngsters who were moving into professionalism and that was in '89, '90.”13 Hanzalah described his relationship with Islam during his formative years as primarily ‘cultural’ – that is as a taken-for-granted element of his ethnic heritage. As a young adult he became decidedly secular and lax in his prayers, though not consciously or deliberately – “So basically I was one of those sort of Ramzan [Ramadan] Muslims, come Ramzan I’m in the mosque, and it would carry on for a while, and then it’d peter out as per normal” – until the birth of his first child in 1993 triggered a spiritual journey that eventually led to a conversion experience:

When my wife got pregnant I became a bit more spiritual because I just felt more responsibility and I need to have that connection with Allah to help my wife through the pregnancy...Then what happened was my daughter was born...and...I came home and I thought...it’s a big responsibility having a child.

Earlier that year, two of Hanzalah’s friends – described as dynamic, charismatic personalities and, significantly, like him, British-born, English-speaking, second-generation Muslims – had completed the signature four month *khuruj* to South Asia and returned dramatically transformed. They organised a TJ gathering at the local mosque to coincide with the December holidays and tirelessly encouraged their friends, family and local worshippers, including of course Hanzalah, to participate – a strategy that met with considerable success: “I think it was the first time that I can remember, that we had a Christmas *Jore* [TJ gathering], loads of people went in *jama’at*, I went as part of a 40-man

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13 The ability of immigrants’ children to achieve social ascendancy through education is also noted by Herberg (1955), particularly in relation to Jewish communities, in his classic study of mid-century American religion – see Chapter 2 in particular.
Hanzalah’s experience was overwhelmingly positive; upon return, he began to offer his daily salaat much more regularly and, buoyed by the enthusiasm of his newly-converted TJ associates, became progressively more involved in TJ himself. After participating in five consecutive monthly weekend TJ outings, he applied for holidays to undertake a 40-day khuruj: “So I went, asked at work, and within a week they said, yeah, it’s okay, as long as it’s a one-off, you know, seven weeks, not a problem.” As recounted in 6.2, the start of his chillah coincided with the 1994 World Ijtima convened in Dewsbury during which he spontaneously took a Sufi pledge of allegiance with Hazratji, TJ’s global amir, after which he travelled to the Indian subcontinent with a large number of fellow British-born Muslims. The physical hardships of this trip coupled with the length of time he had committed to separate from his wife and young daughter forced Hanzalah to engage in bouts of serious introspection. The following excerpt illustrates well the internal wrangling in consciousness brought about by systematic exposure to TJ’s alternative notions of selfhood which, taken to their consummation, precipitate a desocialisation from the taken-for-granted realities of the wider collective conscience:

But mentally I wanted it so badly, in a weird way I really enjoyed it, you know, the challenges that were put forward during that tashkeel [TJ outing]. I really enjoyed it, because I had got to that mentality now whereby if I want my reformation to happen, I need to break the U.K. born Hanzalah that is currently residing and living his life and I need to become the Hanzalah that Allah and His Prophet wants me to be.

And for me, the first challenge was to get my mind around the fact that who do I want to be? The person that, and I use the term loosely, that society is showing me that I should conform to, which is 2.4 children, job, wife, kids, house, couple of holidays a year, that sort of conformity? Or should I be an individual? Should I be just another statistic on the register of humans or should I be someone with an identity? So I’m not just a National Insurance number. I know who I truly am. I know what I want from life. I know what I’m capable of. I know who I represent. I know what I represent. I know who I’m trying to please, and I’m not trying to conform. I’m trying to embed a way of life for myself and become an example hopefully for wider society maybe and as a minimum my wife and kids. So I had to have that discussion with myself over and over again during that chillah, okay, look Huz, these hardships, you can walk away from it,

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14 This, of course, fits well with the broader process of intergenerational transmission in the early-mid 1990s between the Old Guard and Avant-Garde mapped in Chapter 6.
but then you’ll become just what you are, you know, a clock card number at work, a national insurance statistic in society, or you can be a bit different.\textsuperscript{15}

During his chillah Hanzalah grew a beard and, upon return, began to participate in daily TJ activities at his local mosque. The following year he participated in another 40-day khuruj, this time to Belgium, and, upon the advice of local TJ elders, also performed his first Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca with family. He also undertook several masturat outings with his wife who consequently experienced something of a conversion herself. Things came to a head though when, after consulting with his wife, he decided in December 1996 to undertake alone the grand four-month khuruj to South Asia: “She was pregnant at the time with our third child. But I would never have made that decision if she was not fully supportive, never.” Though his wife consented, Hanzala was unable to secure the required length of holidays from his employers. Worse, his parents – at whose house he still lived with his growing family – were adamantly opposed to the idea: “My dad went all the way to Dewsbury to have a go at Hafiz Patel but he just happened to be out of the country at the time...my father had said if you step foot out of the house going for four months having left your work, [then] your wife, your two kids will also follow suit and be thrown out the house. So I had made arrangements...” His father’s rage indicates that, not only was Hanzalah breaching some of the basic assumptions of the wider collective conscience, but also the conventionalised norms of the South Asian Muslim subculture to which he belonged. However, in spite of the obstacles, he adamantly persisted:

Hanzalah: For me it was a massive personal crossroads. I have now reached a junction at which point I can either take a right or a left, which means I’ve lost the direction that I want to go to. Or I can go through the junction and carry on straight. It may mean that I might have to break a few traffic lights, a few laws and regulations, a few established views of life, of deen and dunya. I’ve got to do it and it was for myself...

Riyaz: So you handed your notice in and you went?

\textsuperscript{15} Hanzalah’s sentiment expressed here resonates with Saliba’s (1995, p.75) analysis of the different psycho-social factors that may cause a young person to join a New Religious Movement: “The experience of a lost and vague identity is related to the fact that contemporary Western culture tends to treat people rather impersonally, as if they were numbers in a computer bank and not unique individuals of worth. One can easily end up feeling like a mere cog in a blundering, dehumanized social machine.” Nurul, whose story we first encountered in 6.3, described his first and only chillah (within the UK) to me in similar terms: “When I look back on it, Alhamdulillah...I found it very spiritually fulfilling. You know, getting away from the environment, spending time away, it gave you time to reflect. And as a young person you’re, sort of, thrown into this rat race of life, you know, you have to go to college, you have to go to uni, you have to build a career, you have to do so many things. And what TJ offered is an alternative, like a different perspective. And sometimes as human beings the way we live life, sometimes you think is this natural, or is this something that’s been forced upon us?”
Hanzalah: Yeah, I went.

Riyaz: And it was a massive leap of faith in a sense? It was all or nothing...

Hanzalah: For me, it was absolutely, it was the time where I said that so far Huzzy, you’ve said you believe in Allah because you’ve got all the comforts around you. All the means are there. All the [unclear] of society are there. You’ve got your car. You’ve got your money. You’ve got your job. You’ve got your wife. You’ve got your two kids. So with all of that, it’s easy to believe in Allah.

Riyaz: Really with that jump you just took an axe...

Hanzalah: Absolutely, I just said, you know what? I’m breaking all the shackles and I’m saying, Allah, I’m here. I’ve left everything. I’ve left my two kids. I’ve left my unborn baby in my wife’s stomach. I’ve left my wife. I’ve left my parents. I’ve left my job. I have broken society in every way, shape, or form. I am now here on my own with nothing but You to help me, support me, and become my family. And I wanted that very badly because I wanted to prove that the effort [TJ] was what I perceived the effort to be. That it was an effort which provides the blood flow to the body of Imaan and that body of Imaan is what I wanted to make my body. And that was for me a deciding factor in my life.

In line with extant analyses of the construction of TJ discourse (Metcalf 2009; Talib 2000), Hanzalah reported experiencing several miracles both during and after his four-month journey. Not only was he reconciled with his father (who did not evict his wife and children), but soon after returning home was offered his old job back: “My work people had rung up. They just said, we’d like you to come in...and the guy who wouldn’t give me the holidays said...I’ve spoken to H.R. and they’re getting all the paperwork ready to offer you your job back.” Today, Hanzalah still works for the same accountancy firm though he subsequently negotiated a part-year contract that allows him to spend several months each year on khuruj – “…since then I’ve done another 10 four-months” – and when I interviewed him in June 2014, he had just returned from a chillah to Argentina. He also now functions as the amir of his local mosque managing the daily TJ activities of a team of younger, largely third-generation, Tier 3 activists.

While most cases of conversion to TJ are not as drastic as Hanzalah’s – and do not involve leaving one’s employment (something TJ leaders usually advise against) – I have chosen to foreground his narrative as the extreme yields particular explanatory value. In this regard, his powerful experience of desocialisation followed by the continued juggling of devoted TJ activism with the demands of a
professional accountancy career (not to mention a growing family) over a span of twenty years can be analysed in several ways. First, it indicates a level of commitment that has stood the test of time (at least in his individual case) and does not suffer from the ‘burnout’ so endemic to passionate revivalist movements. Second, it represents the co-existence of religious and secular discourses which Berger (2014, p.xii) has recently theorised as the “prototypical cognitive balancing act of modernity.” In other words, at the office during the day Hanzalah ‘brackets’ his Tablighi self while at the mosque in the evening he brackets his accountant self – though inevitably, given both identities inhere in a single organism, there is some overlap: “The company’s very relaxed. I’m not too keen on wearing ties so they don’t have an issue with that whatsoever. But obviously, I can’t take my beard off and put it away for four or five days while I go on business.” Third, we may discern here an instance of what Goffman (1961, p.108, italics mine) has termed ‘role distance’ described as “a wedge between the individual and his role, between doing and being” – or alternatively as a situation in which “the actor has established an inner distance between his consciousness and his role-playing” (Berger 1963, p.156). If we return for a moment to the quotation cited from Turner (2001 [1964], p.53) at the outset of this section, once the “ideas, sentiments and facts that had been hitherto for the neophyte bound up in configurations and accepted unthinkingly are…resolved into their constituents” it is very difficult to view them reassembled again with the same innocent acquiescence to their social hegemony: the post-liminal eye sees differently to the pre-liminal one. What this implies is a distancing of social role from existential identity: Hanzalah’s brief yet powerfully charged episode of social recalcitrance served to brand his consciousness indelibly with an awareness of the ultimate ‘precariousness’ of the social fictions which together conspire to generate for him a role in society (Berger 1961). Put differently, though he returned to the stage of the Schutzian paramount reality upon which he was expected to act out his life, he did so with an awareness that the mask he dons only serves to obscure his true face (Goffman 1990 [1959]).

9.2.2 Yahya: the open rebel

I now turn to the conversion narrative of Yahya, a 44 year old Tier 3 self-employed businessman from Bolton who, like Hanzalah, is a second-generation British-born Muslim of Gujarati extraction.

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16 For more on this see Gilliat-Ray (2010, p.81) or Janson (2014, p.253). I examine the issue of istiqaamah in British TJ, or issues of retention and burnout, in 10.2.1.
17 The ‘epistemological versatility’ implicated here is unpacked in 11.1.2.
18 There is some resemblance here to Becker’s (1963, pp.20-21) notion of the ‘secret deviant.’
19 The idea that there exists a ‘true self’ beyond the social roles would be anathema to classical social constructionism. However, for our purposes here, Hanzalah’s apprehension of such a self is what is important. Exploring whether such a self exists ontologically (as, for example, embodied in the Muslim concept of the fitra) would require a shift in perspective from the ‘relevance structure’ of sociology to that of theology. While Berger himself has done this repeatedly throughout his career (see, for instance, Berger (1971; 1980)), such phenomenological dexterity lies outside the remit of this thesis. (See also Footnote 7 in 4.1.2 and Footnote 18 in 11.1.2 for more on the same theme).
With his large turban, beard and robe, Yahya cuts an imposing figure reminiscent of a medieval Sufi shaykh – though this image is jarred a little by the Amazon Kindle he carries around. During the course of our interview, which took place in a Blackburn mosque during a weekend khuruj, he described his upbringing to me as predominantly cultural rather than religious: “Most of my friends [at college] were Asian Muslims. So it was a strong Asian identity, not very religious, very secular...we were Asians and we were Indians and we were Muslims but we didn’t pray regularly [laughs], and we weren’t really practising.” As a young man, Yahya was part of a local youth group with which he travelled across Europe:

I’d been on a one week series of meetings on anti-Semitism and anti-racism and things like that in Strasbourg. It was paid for by the Government and the whole week, all we did was we partied at the Government’s expense...I thought flipping heck this is not right, this is people’s money and we’re partying with it in Europe but we were enjoying ourselves!

At the same time though, he participated in several weekend TJ outings and spent the last ten days of Ramadan in i’itikaaf [ritual seclusion] at the local mosque – all of which fired his latent desire to become a practising Muslim: “It was an urge inside me. It was actually an urge inside me wanting to become Deendaar [pious] and knowing that it’s right. I believe in it, but I’m not living according to it and so I’ve got to go with these guys and I’ve got to spend time in jama’at in order to create that ability in me so that I can actually become what I believe.” As with Hanzalah, consistently engaging with the ritual and semantic desocialising processes intrinsic to TJ’s finite province of meaning soon impelled Yahya to a critical internal crossroads: “They [the youth group] saw my ability with languages so they sent a letter with an invitation asking me to spend two weeks on a barge off the coast of Italy doing a course in Italian. There was lovely young women from all over Europe and it was really enticing and that was the point where I had to decide it’s either this or it’s that. And I didn’t reply to that invitation and instead I went for four months [khuruj]."

Yahya’s increasing involvement with TJ triggered a series of both internal and external transformations. As recounted in 7.2.1, he gradually grew a beard “with all the regalia as well” that provoked some surprise among his colleagues at the council offices where he worked. Over time though, as with Hanzalah, Yahya’s new-found commitment to TJ precipitated a deep-rooted transformation of consciousness that affected both his attitude to work and his relationship with his father:
Yahya: Five and a half years I worked there so I did four months [in khuruj] the first time and the year after in 1996 I did another four months and basically I decided to leave the council and start working for myself.

Riyaz: And do you think that decision was directly related to being involved in TJ?

Yahya: I had wanted to leave the council for a long time, but my dad wouldn’t let me. He said it was a good job with good prospects and I should keep it and he just wouldn’t let me leave it. And then after I did my four months I finally wore him down and he agreed one day. He said okay if you want to leave then it’s your decision and...

Riyaz: What motivated you to leave?

Yahya: The reasons were [pause] this can’t be life [laughs] being tied down to an office and just having to walk into there every morning and walk out of there every evening and my entire life and my entire survival depends upon that. No way, that’s not it! There’s got to be something more than that to life. And yes it really created a sort of empowerment in me, the four months, definitely. I had means now, I could make duaa, I could pray namaaz. I could see the effects of it and the people around me saw the effects of it as well. I’d take a job somewhere, work for a few months, go on a tashkeel, come back and within three days I’d be in another job and the longest that it took me to find a job is five days...

I remember speaking to the staff at Telewest once [where he worked subsequently], and they said oh you’re such a nice guy, why don’t you come out with us one night? We’d really like it if you would come with us as well. And I said, is that it? Go out on a weekend and get drunk? I said it’s not enough for me, I want more. I literally said that and they all just went into a sombre silence. It’s not enough, I want more than that! And they were all answerless, they just [unclear] in a sombre silence, and it’s a shame really because that’s all they’ve got. And then one girl, because I was so enthusiastic about the work there and I was always happy, she said to me in frustration, she said, it’s alright for you Yahya, you know, you’re leaving in a couple of months anyway. I says anybody could do that, you could all have that! Why do you want to be entrapped and enslaved by this, you know? They are, they’re enslaved by the makhloog [creation], and they have no sense of direction, but in themselves they’re nice people, bichara [poor things], they are.
A central motif of Peter Berger’s vast corpus is the vision of sociology as an unremitting machinery of *debunking* which strips from the precarious constructions of social reality their taken-for-granted pretensions. His complex theorising of the 1960s drew upon two currents of existential philosophy prevalent at the time: Jean-Paul Sarte’s concept of *mauvaise foi* or ‘bad faith’ and Martin Heidegger’s notion of *das Man*.

The former “is to pretend something is necessary that in fact is voluntary” which Berger (1963, pp.164-165) applies in some detail to the willing complicity of social actors to engage in systematic self-deception: “It can easily be seen that ‘bad faith’ covers society like a film of lies...Men [sic] are responsible for their actions. They are in ‘bad faith’ when they attribute to iron necessity what they themselves are choosing to do.” The ultimate culpability of bad faith is illustrated *par excellence* by the verdict delivered on Nazi war criminals at the Nuremberg trials. The concept of *das Man* refers to a “deliberately vague generality of human beings” – captured in the sentence “One does not do that” (Berger 1963, p.167, italics mine) – which Berger relates to Heidegger’s discussions of authentic and inauthentic living to anatomise the mechanics through which society functions as a “defence against terror”: “It is correct that society, in its aspect of *Man*, is a conspiracy to bring about inauthentic existence. The walls of society are a Potemkin village erected in front of the abyss of being...The *Man* enables us to live inauthentically by sealing up the metaphysical questions that our existence poses” (Berger 1963, pp.168-170).

How is this to be related to Yahya’s experiences? It is clear that the assertion he made to his colleague at the end of the above excerpt – “…anybody could do that, you could all have that!” – is a condemnation of the ‘bad faith’ he deems himself to have found liberation from. More overtly than Hanzalah, he refuses to play by the rules of the social game – both in his dress and his existential demeanour – and as such his ‘role distance’ is more pronounced - much to the consternation of those around him (“...they all just went into a sombre silence”). In this sense, both he and Hanzalah constitute *marginal figures* to the extent that they exhibit adherence to a form of cognitive deviance that finds little social support (Becker 1963). The existence of such marginal figures – much like the court jester in Shakespearean plays – can be profoundly disconcerting to those whose inner consciousness has been formed by *das Man* and who thus incarnate in their everyday speech and behaviour the normative values of the wider collective conscience. In this sense, the marginal figure represents a living embodiment of the ‘marginal situation’ (see 8.3); simply by beholding him the unthinking certainty with which the wider configuration of social values had been internalised into consciousness is undermined: “…the introduction of a dramatic character that does not fit into the scenario of the particular play seriously threatens the role-playing of those who do fit” (Berger 1963,

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20 Nearly fifty years later in his intellectual autobiography, Berger (2011, pp.72-76) affirmed that he still adheres to the basic sociological perspective sketched out in his earliest books.
The debunking capacity of such deviance – its ability to expose the essential fragility of the Potemkin village hitherto deemed an impenetrable fortress – may well cause it to be perceived as subversive or even threatening but, according to Max Weber, should this deviance find itself wedded to charisma the seeds of revolution may be sown. The prototype of the charismatic social deviant is the religious prophet 21 who inveighs against the established normative structures of his society – usually at great personal risk. Based on the pedagogical dialectic employed by Jesus in his famous Sermon on the Mount, Weber asserts: “From a substantive point of view, every charismatic authority would have to subscribe to the proposition, ‘It is written…but I say unto you...’” (Weber 1978 [1920], p.243). Yahya’s blunt reaction to his colleagues’ request to accompany them on a ‘night out’ – “Is that it? Go out on a weekend and get drunk?...It’s not enough, I want more than that!” – is somewhat reminiscent of this sharp critique.

Yahya’s desocialisation from the taken-for-granted configurations of his society’s Schutzian paramount reality sparked an intellectual, spiritual and geographical odyssey that saw him spend the next ten years travelling the world (“I was footloose and fancy free [unmarried] then...so could just go off gallivanting for about six to nine months on the trot”). As well as frequent and lengthy international TJ excursions, he learnt several new languages to slake his thirst for deeper Islamic knowledge and became deeply involved in what he perceived to be the spiritual core of TJ: Sufism. 22

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21 One may also think here of such high-profile criminal figures as Al Capone or the fictitious Hannibal Lecter though, unlike religious prophets, the transformation of social reality presumably did not figure prominently in their operational objectives. The iconoclastic role played by Henry Fonda in Sidney Lumet’s 12 Angry Men is another good example.

22 Though TJ certainly has a strong historical connection to Sufism, the extent to which contemporary TJ can be classified as a Sufi movement proper is more ambivalent (see relevant sections in 1.2 and 2.1.2). I have conducted some preliminary analysis of my dataset in this regard and intend to write more fully on the topic in due course (Timol 2015c). As mentioned in 7.4.1, Yahya lived in Mauritania for some time while learning Arabic and, during our interview, described how he stayed at various Sufi khanqahs across India. There is a distinct ‘Ghazalian’ echo to Yahya’s journeying; in his autobiography, al-Ghazali recounts the anguished wrangling in his own consciousness that provoked a sudden and extended departure from home: “It had already become clear to me that my only hope of attaining beatitude in the afterlife lay in piety and restraining my soul from passion...I reflected on my intention in my public teaching, and I saw that it was not directed purely to God, but rather was instigated and motivated by the quest for fame and widespread prestige. So I became certain that I was on the brink of a crumbling bank and already on the verge of falling into the Fire, unless I set about mending my ways. I therefore reflected unceasingly on this for some time...One day I would resolve to leave Baghdad and disengage myself from these circumstances, and another day I would revoke my resolution. I would put one foot forward, and the other backward. In the morning I would have a sincere desire to seek the things of the afterlife; but by the evening the hosts of passion would assail it and render it lukewarm. Mundane desires began tugging at me with their chains to remain as I was, while the herald of faith was crying out: “Away! Up and away! Only a little is left of your life, and a long Journey lies before you! All the theory and practice in which you are engrossed is eyeservice and fakery! If you do not prepare now for the afterlife, when will you do so? And if you do not sever these attachments now, then when will you sever them?...Thus I incessantly vacillated between the contending pull of worldly desires and the appeals of the afterlife for about six months...” (McCarthy 2000, pp. 53-54).
The following excerpt illustrates well the extent to which his involvement in TJ triggered a deep and profound ontological transformation of self:

I looked like a dervish, I did, I was emaciated, I looked tired and I had...very, very indented cheeks, long hair and...even in the village [in India] a beggar came to the door [laughs] and I was dressed in a tunic, a *kaftee* [kaftan-type of upper garment] and a lungi and this beggar came to the door, looked at me and then just Aaah...he just closed his mouth, turned around and carried on walking [laughs] thinking what’s he going to have? And I walked into the house and I said to my cousin...the beggar thinks I’m worse off than him! This was my emaciated condition. But I wasn’t bothered, it was just such an enriching experiencing...this journey had really brought something, a change in me, a sort of passiveness and an honesty as well...

I went off to the *khanqah* [Sufi lodge], spent four months there and after spending four months there I became like that mad man who’s speaking to an imaginary person next to him. Well that imaginary person next to him is Allah, and I used to actually walk around talking to Allah. My condition had become such and it was at points like that I’d be talking and people might think *[Urdu]* *yai paaghal hogayaa hai* [he’s become a madman], he’s talking to himself. I was making *duaa* whilst I was walking and things. Four months of spiritual meditation and incantation and things like that, it just makes you mad.

Yahya’s own transformation also touched the lives of his close family members. In particular, he was able to trigger an intra-religious conversion in his sister after seeing her in a dream during the course of his 1995 *khuruj* to India and Pakistan. He interpreted the dream as a good omen which prompted him to immediately and uncharacteristically write to her. Despite Appendix C2, given this thesis’ basic inability to access the female TJ experience I recount Hamza’s retelling of her conversion in some detail:

Now my sister was a secular young lady who was studying at university doing teacher training. She wore sort of...Asian clothes if you will and [after the dream] I wrote a letter to her and the letter was ten pages and it outlined the purpose of the creation of woman [laughs]. And she, she was so excited when she received this letter, she went round all the relatives and showed it to them, *[Gujarati]* *Yahya ay aay lakhoo! Yahya ay aay lakhoo!* [Yahya wrote this! Yahya wrote this!] Because they knew that I didn’t do my letters anyways and then for her to receive a ten page letter that was a real privilege.
[laughs], but yes so she was really, really excited about the letter that she got. Now when I came back I tashkeeled her for 10 days for masturat jama’at and I remember we went round Yorkshire and Abdul Fattah from Bradford, he took his wife to see my sister and look after her as well.

My sister really enjoyed the jama’at and afterwards she came to me one day and she said, Yahya I don’t like going into town now and seeing the Muslims the way they are and I remember saying to her, Alhamdulillah, Allah’s opened up the eye of your heart. And she said I feel like wearing the hijab, but I’m at university and I don’t know what to do and my answer was, probably not very helpful, but I said well all I wanted to do was start a fight in you and I’ve done that so you can decide yourself now. I just wanted to start that battle inside you.

Because that’s the thing: right has become so weak that it doesn’t even sort of push us anymore and so you just carry on with what you’re doing and just that little dose of Imaan, the environment of Imaan, literally starts that battle inside you again and to be able to see Muslims in a condition that is not befitting and to feel pain from that, it’s such a beautiful thing. It’s a sign of Imaan, you see, and to have achieved that in ten days is an enormity. That’s priceless. And she did, she started wearing the hijab, completed her teacher training in the full niqab and everything, yes, and from then on she stuck to that and she’s been on another few jama’ats with us as well since then.

Yahya’s sister’s physical and conceptual emigration to TJ’s finite province of meaning allowed her to experience temporarily an alternative rendering of existence which occasioned a longer-term transformation in consciousness. Like Yahya and Hanzalah, her conversion was predicated upon the reaffirmation of core religious values internalised initially – however nominally – during the formative primary socialisation of childhood. Yahya’s comments in this regard are instructive: “There was always an understanding of what’s right and what’s wrong and the life that we’re living ain’t right, and that life is right...”

9.2.3 Umar: the reformed drug-dealer

Finally, I sketch more fully the narrative of Umar, a 36 year old British-born Pakistani Tier 4 sympathiser from Yorkshire, whose story was introduced in 1.1. As a teenager, Umar spent several weekends on jama’at and even participated in a chillah during the 1995 summer holidays but, according to his own admission, his primary motives were “mainly to have a laugh, be away from the parents, to be with the boys and to...have a good time.” Afterwards he completely drifted away
from the practice of Islam for a period of 16 years during which time he became heavily involved in a life of violence, drugs and crime: “From say the age of 18 till 34, I was basically living the life of a kafir. All I did was pray the kalima when I woke up in the morning and on those nights when I wasn’t drunk before sleeping. That was it - nothing else for Allah.” However, his primary socialisation in a Muslim household coupled with his youthful engagement in TJ planted a seed which was to eventually bear fruit. My interview with him was particularly rich with metaphors and analogies, some of which I share here:

Ultimately, any plant once taken away from sunlight or rain has to die. That’s the nature which Allah has created. You know, there’s no plant...even if it’s a cactus that grows in the desert or whatever. It has some kind of nourishment no matter what, even if on the naked eye it doesn’t appear so. So when you take that nourishment away, which is this effort of Deen [TJ] for me personally, yeah, then that seed has to die but in terms of the seed of the heart that we’re talking about, it never really dies. It just becomes...dormant. So it’s like, you know, like the dirt has come over it and nothing can penetrate, you know what I mean? There’s like a seal been put on it and that’s the seal of the sins if you like, you know what I mean? And your desires, your lust or whatever you want to call it and...[long pause] yeah, it was a downward spiral after that, quite a long one.

Umar’s journey back to Islam was triggered by his efforts to convert his non-Muslim girlfriend to the faith:

So what happened was she wanted to become Muslim...So I started helping her...and eventually...I thought...all the stuff that I’ve learned through those times where I’ve been in Jama’at, I thought it was gone. I thought it was dead and buried, burnt in a fire and, you know, turned into ash...But what I found was, if you like, it was like a diamond but covered with loads of dirt and then when I started to talk about it again and started to call somebody towards Islam...it was like a jet-wash applied to dirt, yeah? And it’s not stuck to the diamond because it can’t stick, so what happens is that when you apply the jet-wash...it removes the dirt and that diamond will still reveal its true beauty and I think that’s what Islam is, for me anyway...Because a diamond cannot reveal its true beauty if it’s under 20 feet of dirt. You can’t see it!...I think personally to put it into like understanding form is that once I started giving da’wa maybe after a day, maybe after two weeks, one inch of dirt was removed.
Speaking about Islam reactivated in Umar a latent religiosity which sparked a desire to start offering the five daily *salat* despite having abandoned them for years. Over a period of several months, he used his new-found observance as a mechanism to wean himself off the drugs he had become so addicted to:

If I didn’t get my spliff, grrr!! I’d be angry with life, I’d be angry with the day if you like, you know what I mean [laughs]? There’s no logic behind it, there’s no sense behind it but that’s how you become. So what would happen is *Dhuhr salat* would come. So I’d go and pray my *Dhuhr salat* and then I would look and think – [it’s] winter [time], there’s only about an hour or two left for *Asar salat*. So eventually what would happen is that I would say right listen, I need to try and go without it if I can until *Asar salat*. Then *Asar salat* would happen and I managed to eventually get to that stage where I would go without it till *Asar*. In the meantime, I’ll be honest with you, while I’m going through this period I was still selling the cannabis. So I was still doing my deals, all right [laughs]? But I managed to stop smoking it now from *Dhuhr* till *Asar* and then eventually from *Asar* until *Maghrib salat*.

Umar’s commitment to Islam was definitively cemented when his girlfriend converted to Islam and they married, at which point he felt an urgent need to become an exemplary role model. Just prior to this, he plucked up the courage to participate in *khuruj* once again – after a hiatus of well over a decade – though, due to his work commitments as a builder, he is unable to spend more than 24 hours a month on *jama’at*. This temporary though consistent exposure to TJ’s finite province of meaning, over a period of a year, was sufficient however to consolidate a deep-rooted transformation of consciousness. During this period, Umar grew a beard and abandoned his life of crime, today deriving great pleasure from raising his first child with his wife. Though he would love to participate in a 40 day *khuruj* once again – with far greater maturity this time, he assured me – the practical commitments of his work and family life make this unlikely. Consequently, Umar sympathises strongly with the movement and participates in local TJ activities whenever he is able to in addition to his regular 24 hour monthly stints:

So then eventually...that seed started to grow again and...I came out [on *khuruj*] one day, I decided. Well I didn’t decide, Allah takes you out depending on your *talab* and your desire. So anyway I managed to come out and when I started coming out one day, once a month it went well. Obviously, I didn’t go for such a long period...but it was like basically coming back home, if you know what I mean? You know, it’s like living away
Umar’s description of his journey back to Islam resonates almost perfectly with Berger’s analysis of what he terms the ‘neo-orthodox’ phenomenon:

...for large numbers of people in modernized situations there remains the memory of moments when, in the confrontation with the old authority [religious tradition], there has been that inward assent and the concomitant certainty. Typically, these will be moments in childhood or early youth, enveloped in the nostalgia that such moments tend to have. This memory serves as the psychological substratum for any subsequent reaffirmations of the tradition. It allow such reaffirmations to have the subjective plausibility of a return to one’s biographical roots. (Berger 1980, p.67)

9.2.4 Conclusion: the reformulation of TJ selfhood

There are two final points to be made. First, the debunking capacity of the marginal Muslim is enhanced by, though not dependent upon, an intra-religious conversion experience which explicitly involves desocialisation from not just the taken-for-granted suppositions of the wider societal collective conscience but also the normalised practices of the local subcultural one as well (though, as we saw with Hanzalah, subsequent resocialisations may take place predicated on the concept of ‘role distance’). Should the Muslim be herself a victim of ‘bad faith’ or a social product of das Man – in other words, if her affirmation of Islam takes place within the context of a taken-for-granted symbolic universe that refuses to engage with conflicting meta-narratives – then this, in and of itself, is an expression of Heideggerian ‘inauthentic living.’ This may provide a conceptual framework for understanding the consternation often reported in first-generation parents who witness the increasing, and often inexplicable, religiosity of their children that takes them far beyond the acceptable practices of the subculture’s norms. This was demonstrated here most clearly through the rage of Hanzalah’s father; and Janson (2014) vividly relates the social ruptures, hammered out on the anvil of intergenerational conflict, triggered by the zealous challenges to time-honoured Gambian customs (usually relating to life-cycle rituals such as naming ceremonies) posed by newly-converted Gambian TJ activists.23

23 Nevertheless, particularly in the context of the South Asian diaspora in Britain, I think it would be a mistake to assume that participation in TJ by their offspring necessarily entails rupture with parents. Au contraire, I met many parents during my fieldwork who were decidedly proud of their children’s involvement in TJ, particularly if (as in Umar’s case) it weaned them off a life of crime and delinquency. On several occasions, I witnessed desperate parents (sometimes mothers from behind the door of a house being visited on gasht) entreating local TJ activists to please take their wayward sons away for 40 days on a TJ khuruj, hoping it would
The second point is that, sociologically speaking, TJ is simply one among many movements that animates the global Muslim *ummah* while Islam is simply one among many religions that together comprise the contemporary global religious landscape. What has been said above about the potency of intra-religious conversion is not restricted to either TJ or Islam but rather hinges on the social mechanics through which meaning-systems are internalised in consciousness and later reaffirmed through the trigger-points of specific biographical incidents. Consequently, I would contend that *any* experience of liminality that temporarily desocialises the individual from the paramount reality *may* give rise to an intra-religious conversion experience if – and this is a key caveat – *religious values were positively internalised into consciousness during the critical period of childhood*. A range of other factors will inevitably coalesce to determine the trajectory of individual biographies but I would maintain that the likelihood of intra-religious conversion remains high in these situations. This assertion finds support in the literature (Birkelbach and Meulemann 2013; Helve 1995), especially a recent study of religion among French prison inmates who, quite patently, exist in a state of liminal abeyance:

Imprisonment therefore constitutes a moment of reflection which, often through the encouragement of close ones, leads to “re-forging the path towards God”, finding the “right path” again and re-joining a spiritual tradition. Our investigation revealed that this resource is mainly used by those who have had a religious socialisation. A large number of people who have undergone religious socialisation then report an intensification of their religious practice in prisons; others renew their faith. (Rostaing et al. 2015, p.73)

To this generic observation I would add that TJ appears a particularly effective vehicle for facilitating intra-religious conversion through integrating a range of ritual and semantic desocialising and resocialising mechanisms into its normative modus operandi. In fact, as a worldwide movement of

be an effective vehicle for rehabilitation (note the salience of parental encouragement also in 8.2.1). There is some resemblance here with what Philip Lewis (2007, p.49) notes (citing Navid Akhtar’s BBC Radio 4 documentaries) in the context of the Pakistani system of *biradari* operative in Britain: “...hundreds of Pakistani youngsters are being sent back to Pakistan for so-called village rehab...Parents believe that the village offers a secure environment away from the allure of drugs – a chance to be socialized back into traditional *biradari* ways.” My fieldwork found that, for those without an ideological aversion to TJ, *khuruj* often represents a similar sentiment albeit within an explicitly religious framework. Tim Winter (2014, p.312), assessing British Muslim community provisions for convicts upon release, notes that TJ “has a tradition of accepting recent offenders as members of small missionary teams who travel the country...This is reputed to provide an effective cushion in which recent converts, notably, can transition to the world outside, in an environment in which prayer and fasting dominate, and access to temptation is severely curtailed.” The trajectory traversed by such youth is nicely captured in Khaled Siddiq’s rap, *On Deen* (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBOlOrRqK0), which I found was popular among several Leicester-born youth out on their first 40 day summer *khuruj*. 
Islamic renewal, it could be argued that its very raison d’être is to bring about such experiences. Thus any Muslim who innocently embarks on *khuruj* will, simply through participating in the movement’s normative activities, find herself in a state of ritual liminality in which her consciousness is temporarily and powerfully consumed by the desocialising master discourse of death and the resocialising messages of constant *da’wa* (see 10.1 below). The substantive content of the latter will often resonate, in emotionally charged ways, with the substance of the meaning-systems first internalised during childhood; in Umar’s terms, the seed then planted begins now to receive nourishment or the buried diamond begins to be excavated. The intra-religious conversion experience is thus triggered.

Of course it goes without saying that not everybody who participates in a TJ tour undergoes a deep and powerful conversion experience; in fact, my fieldwork indicates that this trajectory remains restricted to a minority of participants. There are several factors at play here – not least among which is the psychological predisposition of the neophyte to the type of religiosity presented by TJ (which, in turn, would have been shaped by the interplay of preceding primary and secondary socialisations).\(^{24}\) Put simply, the form and content of the TJ message – as also the operational methodology it proposes – does not appeal to everybody. People also have negative experiences and never return.\(^ {25}\) In this regard – and this is the key sociological fact – the extent to which continued social interaction is maintained with the ‘socialising personnel’ as also the regularity with which the neophyte’s consciousness is exposed to TJ’s finite province of meaning (in other words, the regularity with which *khuruj* is undertaken) will determine the extent to which subjective consciousness is transformed. A full-blown conversion can only be consummated when desocialisation from the wider collective conscience proceeds concurrently with resocialisation into TJ’s plausibility structure. But, as Berger and Luckmann (1966, pp.177-178) observe: “To have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real thing is to be able to keep on taking it seriously; to retain a sense of its plausibility. *This* is where the religious community comes in. It provides the indispensable plausibility structure for the new reality.” Accordingly, I now turn my attention to the mechanics through which a commitment to TJ is maintained in modern Britain, in the face of constant and massive psycho-social disconfirmation of the group’s reality.

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\(^{24}\) Campbell’s concept of the ‘cultic milieu’ is relevant here and is demonstrated by Balch and Taylor’s study of Bo and Peep’s flying saucer cult: “before they joined, members of the UFO cult shared a metaphysical worldview in which reincarnation, disincarnate spirits, psychic powers, lost continents, flying saucers, and ascended masters are taken for granted” (cited in Hamilton 2001, p.266).

\(^{25}\) Ziauddin Sardar (2004a), for instance, became quickly disillusioned with both the form and content of the TJ message and so ran away from a TJ *ijtima* he was attending. Sociologically speaking, the physical cessation of social interaction with the mediators of the group’s meaning-system prevents any further percolation of that meaning-system into consciousness thus summarily aborting the possibility of conversion.
Chapter 10

*Da’wa and Istiqaamah: Strategies of Resocialisation and Commitment*

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“Da’wa is like bouncing a ball on the wall. The harder you throw it the faster it comes back at you. So the more da’wa you give, the more it increases your own Imaan...My ears are closer to my mouth than yours. So everything I’m saying enters my heart first. I’m giving myself da’wa more than you or anybody else...”

*Common TJ refrains encountered during fieldwork*

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10.1 *Adhaan, Da’wa and the Machinery of Plausibility Structure Generation*

The key mechanism through which any system of meaning maintains its plausibility to individual consciousness is by verbalising its symbolic universe through the medium of linguistic expression. Put differently, language is a uniquely human phenomenon within which an entire corpus of socialising apparatus is embedded. Every time we speak, a constellation of semantic meanings are codified into a set of lexical and syntactical symbols that are decoded by the mind and press upon consciousness. Should the conversation be constant and pervasive, it is likely that its semantic content will appear as plausible to the subjective consciousness of those enveloped by it and, perhaps in time, be internalised by them.¹ Language is thus the reality-maintaining mechanism *par*
excellence. The extent to which the plausibility structure of any given group is sustained in space and time is coextensive with the extent to which its symbolic universe is verbalised through conversation.

On this, Berger and Luckmann are unequivocal: “The most important vehicle of reality-maintenance is conversation. One may view the individual’s everyday life in terms of the working away of a conversational apparatus that ongoingly maintains, modifies and reconstructs his subjective reality.” Or: “In order to maintain subjective reality effectively, the conversational apparatus must be continual and consistent...On the whole, frequency of conversation enhances its reality-generating potency.” Or, yet again: “...language constitutes both the most important content and the most important instrument of socialization” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.172, p.174, p.153). In The Sacred Canopy, Berger reiterates the same point with reference to plausibility structures:

The world is built up in the consciousness of the individual by conversation...The world is maintained as subjective reality by the same sort of conversation...If such conversation is disrupted...the world begins to totter, to lose its subjective plausibility. In other words, the subjective reality of the world hangs on the thin thread of conversation. (Berger 1967, pp.16-17, italics mine)

The above understanding is essential for my analysis of the socialising potential of TJ. If language, within the sociology of knowledge, is the socialising instrument par excellence then TJ, within the world of Islamic revival, is the mass da’wa movement par excellence. Da’wa, in Islam, “...has as its basic meaning ‘to call,’ ‘to summon,’ ‘to invite’...‘missionary activity’...one must verbally communicate the message of Islam to specific individuals and/or groups. The Muslim is to invite, to call, to reason with, and to exhort others...” (Poston 1992, pp.3-4). While classical conceptions of da’wa focussed on proselytising non-Muslim peoples and populations (al-Faruqi 1996; Gilliat-Ray 2002), an idiosyncratic feature of TJ is its exclusively inward focus on strengthening the faith of existing believers; an interpretation which is also encapsulated within the broad ambit of the term: “From its earliest days in Islamic history, da’wa has often been used as a means to inspire fellow Muslims in their struggle to lead more pious lives” (Moore 2014, p.1). Verbalisation of some of the core elements of the broader symbolic universe of Islam is thus instituted into the warp and woof of

until, after listening to the third swindler emphatically reiterate what the other two had said, he threw down the carcass in disgust and walked away – much to the swindlers’ glee.

2 The academic literature frequently refers to TJ as the largest movement of grassroots Islamic renewal in the world: see, for example, Ali (2010, p.104); Pieri (2012b, p.9); Robinson (2004, p.53); Troll (1985, p.138); van Bruinessen and Day Howell (2007, p.14); or Winter (2014, p.312).
daily TJ praxis, integrating the machinery of plausibility structure generation into the movement’s internal logic and constitution. ³

A good example of this is the *adhaan*, the Muslim call to prayer. ⁴ In traditional Muslim societies, the muezzin loudly and publicly declares core tenets of Muslim belief from the minaret five times daily as he summons the faithful to prayer. This serves to reinforce the objectivation of Islam’s symbolic universe within the society, corresponding to an inward assent that would be experienced within a believing Muslim consciousness. The *adhaan*, both in content and form, serves as a prototype for TJ’s vision of *da’wa*. Assembled from my fieldnotes is the following lengthy excerpt spoken mainly by Abdus-Shakur, a long-standing Tier 3 activist, in the course of a weekend *khuruj*:

I mean just look at the *adhaan*, there’s so many lessons to be learnt…The muezzin sticks his fingers in his ears and declares the greatness of Allah to everybody without fear…And he calls out the *nabuwwah* [prophethood] of Nabi [Muhammad] (s). So both *tawheed* [monotheism] and *risaalah* [prophethood] are there. He puts his fingers in his ears and gives his *da’wa*, and so he’s protected from the *da’wa* of others. We learn from this that if you don’t give *da’wa* then you’ll become a *mad’u*, you’ll become invited by others and their way of life and their way of thinking…He then calls people to *salaat* [prayer] and to *falaah* [success]. Falaah is the goodness of both this world and the next, and so *akhirah* [the Afterlife] is contained in the *adhaan* too. In other words the muezzin is calling towards *tawheed*, *risaalah* and *akhirah* – the three main principles of Islam, and also to *salaat* which is the most important *amal* [action] after *Imaan*. And when the *adhaan* is called, there’s a hadith that *Shaytaan* [Satan] runs from the scene. He runs, he can’t take it!...

And everything that hears the *adhaan*, all the rocks, and trees and flowers will testify on behalf of the muezzin on the Day of Judgment that he gave *da’wa*. The *adhaan* teaches us how to give *da’wa* and it’s called *da’wa-tut-taamah* [the complete/perfect *da’wa*], in

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³ My interpretation of the reality-defining potency of language to construct worlds of religious meaning in subjective consciousness is not unique. For instance, Harding’s (2000, p.33) analysis of the process through which people are converted to fundamentalist Baptist Christianity in America unpacks the key role played by language in meticulous detail. Even the ethnographer is not immune: “It was my voice but not my language. I had been inhabited by the fundamentalist Baptist tongue I was investigating.” See in particular her chapter entitled *Speaking Is Believing*. Alternatively, for Ammerman (2014, p.102), “…my own research suggests…that conversations are the basic building blocks of a religious consciousness, and those conversations can transcend institutional boundaries, allowing religious realities out of their strictly religious institutional boxes…Religious consciousness is produced in conversation, carried by actors from one place to another, and re-deployed and re-worked in each new telling.”

⁴ For more on the *adhaan* (and *iqaamah*), including a description of the actual words called out, see Appendix F.
the duaa we pray after the adhaan, what is it? Allahuma rabba hadhihid da’wa-tuttaamah [O Allah, Lord of this complete/perfect da’wa]...And where does the muezzin stand when the namaz begins?...He’s right behind the imam, the first one there, he calls out the iqamaah. Even if nobody else comes to the masjid, at least he got the tawfeeq [divine ability] to pray his salaat...

If you give da’wa towards an amal, then Allah will give you the tawfeeq to do that amal first, isn’t it? It’s like a ball bouncing on a wall – the harder you throw it the faster it comes back at you. So the more da’wa you give, the stronger your own Imaan becomes. That’s the way it works, and that’s why the elders tell us to speak about the greatness of Allah as the number one priority whilst we’re out in the path of Allah...

There are several points to be made here. The symbolism of the muezzin placing his fingers in his ears is significant. There is no dialogue here, nor even conversation – rather a simple declaration of Muslim truth announced as objective reality. The caller seals himself off from the exigencies of alternate plausibility structures before consolidating the reality of his own through language. The ideal subjective correlate of the call would be to trigger an embodied response. In other words, the call to prayer leads to the act of prayer in scenarios in which an internal symmetry exists between the semantic content of the adhaan and the faith of the listening believer. Responding to the call, the believer attends the mosque and offers the prayer in congregation with other believers. This collectivity is significant as the inherent sociality of the act provides essential confirmation of belief and deepens its plausibility within subjective consciousness. Put differently, rubbing shoulders (physically, as the act of congregational prayer demands) with bearded fellow believers makes one’s own beard seem a little less strange.

Second, the correspondence between the semantic content of the adhaan and the semantic content of TJ da’wa, as mentioned by Abdus-Shakur, is significant. The repetitious simplicity of TJ’s core message has been commented upon in the literature; in this regard, I think it would be accurate to observe that the talks delivered by TJ activists in the mosque after the congregational prayer simply

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5 My interpretation here finds support from Azmi’s analysis of TJ in Canada: “The Tablighi Jama’at’s rejection of modernity was never direct. Mawlana Ilyas’ movement did not arise as a reaction to the corrosive affects [sic] of modernity, but more as a reaction to a perceived decay within the Muslim tradition itself. Consequently, since its foundation Tablighi Jama’at’s tendency has been to ignore modernity rather than react to it or directly confront it” (Azmi 2000, pp.236-237). By placing his fingers in his ears, the muezzin aptly symbolises the stance of ‘ignoring modernity’...

6 Of course in situations lacking this symmetry, the adhaan may well be perceived as an annoying cacophony.  

7 See, for instance, Masud (2000a, p.31); Roy (2004, p.169); Sardar (2004a, p.13). I delve deeper into this in 10.2.1 below; and also 12.2.3.
elaborate upon the meanings of the *adhaan*. Ghulam bhai, a local Tier 2 TJ leader speaking to a group of teenagers about to embark on a weekend *khuruj* for the first time, explained:

Why do we go in *jama’at*? It’s very simple... *kalimah* and *namaz*. Everything else comes after. I mean, it’s very simple but also very powerful. We think we already know the *kalimah* because we learnt it at madrassa, don’t we? But those were the *words* of the *kalimah* we learnt, not the *reality* of the *kalimah*. The reality of the *kalimah*, that takes a lifetime of effort to bring into our hearts and that’s what this effort is all about... Do we turn to Allah immediately when we become ill or do we turn to the doctor? Do we believe that the medicine cures us or that Allah cures us?... That’s why we have to go again and again, we keep going, to learn *Imaan*... And *namaz*, we learnt the movements of *namaz*, the postures and the different *duaas* to pray in madrassa, but the real life and soul of *namaz*? That’s when we can take directly from the treasures of Allah through two *raka’ats* [units] of *namaz*. That’s the difference between our *namaz* and the *namaz* of the *sahaabah*.

On another occasion, Hafiz Suleman, the Avant-Garde *amir* of an outgoing weekend *jama’at*, candidly told his young group soon after arriving at the destination mosque on the Friday evening:

“*You stay up until 2:00am talking about liberating Palestine, but when it comes to Fajr time our heroes are in bed...so how can we expect the help of Allah to come?*”

*Source: TJ WhatsApp group author joined in 2014 while conducting fieldwork*

On another occasion, Hafiz Suleman, the Avant-Garde *amir* of an outgoing weekend *jama’at*, candidly told his young group soon after arriving at the destination mosque on the Friday evening: “The acid test of how well you spend your time this weekend is whether you’ll be [present] in Fajr at the *masjid* on Monday morning.” A key observation here is that *kalimah* and *namaz* constitute also the core content of the *adhaan*. From this it could be argued that, as a pre-eminently oral tradition, the socialising potential of language has been integrated into the religion of Islam as such (Graham 1993; Murata and Chittick 1994; Sells 2007). The muezzin’s call to prayer is, of course, not limited to TJ but made by any eligible Muslim. Similarly the vocal recitation of the Qur’an has been instituted into the five daily prayers, with the imam reciting three of them aloud. The Friday prayer – the most populous prayer of the week – has an oral sermon [*khutbah*] incorporated as an obligatory component. After the Qur’an, a huge corpus of hadith literature contains within itself an entire universe of meaning rooted in prophetic utterances. Derived from these hadith, committed Muslims...
sanctify the mundane acts of day-to-day existence (such as eating, sleeping, entering or leaving the bathroom, etc.) through a rich repertoire of verbally recited prophetic invocations allotted to each occasion. TJ builds upon this tendency by explicitly institutionalising the verbalisation of certain core meanings of the Islamic symbolic universe as part of its daily praxis. For instance, during *khuruj* the dawn prayer is invariably followed by the delivery of the ‘6 points talk’ by a designated group member. Then the morning *ta’lim*, lasting around two hours, constitutes a powerful act of socialisation in which a designated overseer reads aloud to the rest of the group stories of the Prophet’s companions and a selection of hadith, elaborating upon their meaning and relevance in his own words.8 During the course of a 40 day tour one can well imagine how a young teenager, for instance, would begin to gradually internalise these meanings within interior consciousness – particularly if they resonate with core values already internalised during formative primary socialisation. In the evening, the *aadab-e-gasht* presents the ‘Grand Narrative’ of Islam as a series of successive scriptural revelations punctuating history exemplified through the compassionate *da’wa* of the prophets and the merciless persecution of their opponents.9 This is followed by an appeal for the audience to ‘do the work of the prophets’ by joining the *gasht* groups forming to ‘remind’10 Muslims in the community. During *gasht*, TJ’s symbolic universe is actualised by the *mutakallim* [designated speaker] who explicitly bases his talks on the *mugheebaat* – those aspects of the unseen which are taken as true by Muslims based entirely on faith (for instance, the nature of God, angels, revelation, the Day of Judgment, heaven and hell, etc.). As we saw in 5.2.3, every evening dedicated TJ activists not on tour similarly gather in numerous British mosques to proselytise their local Muslim communities. We thus see how language is the key instrument *par excellence* through which the socialising potential of TJ’s symbolic universe is consistently actualised in space and time through its explicit focus on *da’wa*. Berger and Luckmann’s observation here is pertinent: “the subjective reality of something that is never talked about comes to be shaky…language realizes a world, in the double sense of apprehending and producing it. Conversation is the actualizing of this realizing efficacy of language in the face-to-face situations of individual existence” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.173). Generally eschewing electronic media or written publications, the maintenance of a symbolic world of meaning primarily through face-to-face *da’wa* is today the emblematic global motif of TJ:

By remaining true to the simple system of person-to-person contact and the regular travel of groups, the Tablighi Jama’at has developed cadres of devoted volunteers who

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8 See Metcalf (1993) for a detailed examination of both the content and pedagogy of TJ’s core curriculum.
9 The stories of Noah who, according to the Qur’an gave *da’wa* resolutely for 950 years, and the Prophet Muhammad’s visit to Taif are usually recounted here.
10 They are, of course, ‘reminding’ them about what they already know: the practice of Islam usually first learnt in the primary socialisation of childhood.
are able to communicate effectively with one another across the vast spaces of North America. They are able to reach and motivate thousands of Muslims to participate in Tablighi activities. In terms of numbers and degree of commitment, it is unlikely that any competing organization in North America can claim equal success. (Azmi 2000, p.230)\(^\text{11}\)

Thirdly, Abdus Shakur’s lengthy excerpt above makes evident the extent to which *da’wa* is used as a self-reflexive tool to consolidate the speaker’s own faith, a tendency which McGuire observes about religious movements in general: “Although proselyting activities are relatively conspicuous to outsiders, they are important mainly as a commitment mechanism for already converted members” (McGuire 1987, p.71). From this perspective, the *adhaan* serves a dual purpose: to invite those outside the mosque into it, and also – crucially – to reinforce the plausibility of the act of prayer for those already within it. In this regard, a common TJ proverb is relevant: “My ears are closer to my mouth than yours. Everything I’m saying enters my heart first.” Findings derived from my field trip to Bulgaria in December 2013 are relevant here. Prior to departure, during our stay at the Dewsbury headquarters, senior TJ leaders advised our *jama’at* to always call the *adhaan* and offer our prayers in congregation while travelling (“Of course, be sensible about it, don’t disturb people or cause a nuisance, but do make the *adhaan*. It’s one of the *ash’aar* [symbols] of Islam.”) As we had also been instructed to travel by road, this resulted in the *adhaan* being called and congregational prayer offered at service stations, on roadsides, in fields and on ferries across England, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania.\(^\text{12}\) Though, in practice, I would judge that the *adhaan* was actually heard by only a few people (though undoubtedly it did attract, on several occasions, bemused looks from passers-by!) it is the reality-defining potency of the act for the *jama’at* itself which is important here. By publicly verbalising several times daily a fixed core of meanings derived from their symbolic universe, the reality of these deepens in group consciousness. To quote Berger (1967, p.45) again: “Thus each world requires a social ‘base’ for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings. This ‘base’ may be called its plausibility structure.” The *adhaan*, then, represents a kind of ‘portable base’ which can be activated at will even in milieus – or perhaps *especially* in milieus – exhibiting massive psycho-social disconfirmation of the group’s reality, in order to consolidate core components of the symbolic universe within self-consciousness.

\(^{11}\) See also Metcalf (1996b, p.116): “Tablighis insist on the priority of face-to-face encounters, and relationships, for communicating their message. Even in the West, they eschew the powerful new media...that have been so effective in so many other movements.”

\(^{12}\) The intersection of these very public acts of religiosity with the general milieu of privatised religion dominant in Europe is explored in 11.2 (see also Casanova (1994)).
Praying by the roadside in Slovakia en route from Budapest to Vienna

Calling out the adhaan en route from Romania to Bulgaria

Source: author’s photos

Author with a German chef who kindly let us pray in the grounds of his restaurant

Praying by the roadside in Slovakia en route from Budapest to Vienna
I have spent some time unpacking the symbolism of the *adhaan* and its relevance to TJ’s vision of *da’wa*; this is because several incidents in my fieldwork have led me to conclude that the root of TJ’s plausibility structure generating mechanisms lie in the *adhaan* – even before any distinctively TJ activities. It is by calling the *adhaan* and offering the congregational prayer that accompanies it – and therefore grounding themselves in mainstream Islamic praxis – that an audience is gathered which can then be proselytised further with the TJ message. This conclusion was explicitly driven home to me during my field trip to Bulgaria when we were joined for over two weeks by Hojja Ahmed, a middle-aged rustic who had just become the first Bulgarian to have undertaken a four-month *khuruj* to TJ’s South Asian headquarters earlier that year (as described in Timol 2015b), TJ in Bulgaria is at a nascent stage of development due to the religious repression of Communism). During the *ta’lim* session one morning, we noticed that he was moved to tears while reading aloud a *hadith* in his ancestral Turkish tongue. Deciphering his animated gesticulations (for we had no common language in which to communicate), we identified the corresponding hadith in our English book:

Salman al-Farsi narrates that the Messenger of Allah (upon him be prayers and peace) said: “If a man is in an open plain and the time for *Salat* [prayer] approaches, he should perform *Wudu*, and if he does not find water, then he should perform *Tayammum* [alternate form of ritual purification]. If he calls the *Iqamah*, both his angels (who record his deeds) offer *Salat* with him. And if he calls the *Adhaan* and *Iqamah*, such a vast number of Allah’s forces (angels) will perform *Salat* with him that the two ends of their rows cannot be seen.” (narrated in Musannaf Abdur Razaq)

(Kandhlavi and Kandhlavi 2006, p.146)

He explained to us, through signs and the aid of a quasi-translator, that he lived at a considerable distance from the nearest mosque and, not being able to drive, is unable to attend daily. Therefore, when returning home from his recent four-month *khuruj* to South Asia (during which time he would have no doubt internalised into consciousness TJ’s symbolic universe), he had sought advice from TJ leaders there about how he could participate in the ‘Local Mosque Scheme’ once back in Bulgaria. He had been advised to call out the *adhaan* in the external courtyard of his house daily through which neighbouring Muslims would be constantly reminded of and invited to participate in the congregational *salaat* with him, and to supplement this with regular visits to their homes to invite them to prayer. He was advised to stick tenaciously to these acts even if nobody responded, and we

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13 Interestingly, and to our surprise, we found that the *adhaan* was sounded publicly from external mosque microphones in all the mosques we visited in Bulgaria – probably a throwback from Ottoman state control despite the intervening Communist years.
learnt that his tears had just been prompted by his having learnt that, in the absence of his neighbours, the angels had been joining him in prayer.14 The advice from the South Asian TJ leaders had been categorical: when eventually fellow Muslims do respond and join you in prayer, then encourage them to join you in meeting other Muslims in the wider locality to invite them to the regular prayers that you now offer collectively in your courtyard (the TJ activity of gasht would thus have been instituted). Should the gasht take place regularly, he was advised, he would eventually create enough interest and enthusiasm within local Muslims to accompany him on a weekend TJ khuruj to a mosque in a nearby town. Thus the machinery of TJ’s plausibility structure generating mechanisms would have been set into motion from the basic root of the adhaan.

Hojja Ahmed: the first Bulgarian Muslim to have undertaken TJ’s signature 4-month khuruj to South Asia.

Source: author’s photos

14 This is a good example of the ‘generative mechanism’ of spirituality producing the socially accessible empirical phenomena of tears; though the stance of ‘methodological agnosticism’ requires a non-judgmental silence about the existence of angels or otherwise (see 4.1.2-4.1.3). The importance of tears to the performance of TJ subjectivity is also commented upon by Janson (2014, p.236); according to Talib (2000, p.75): “The oral narrative of Tablighi ideology is replete with anecdotes and associations that convey the importance of tears in one’s communion with Allah. Through tears the discursive content of ideology acquires existential moorings.”
10.2 “Istiqaamah – Weightier than a Thousand Miracles:” Mechanics of Reality-maintenance in an Uncomprehending World

The preceding section described how TJ generates plausibility structures through integrating the socialising apparatus of language into its core act of da’wa. This not only allows neophytes to be socialised into the movement’s symbolic universe but also consolidates the commitment of puraana saathis. In this section, I explicate ways in which TJ’s commitment to a religious Weltanschauung is maintained in a predominantly secular society, also examining reasons for waning commitment. In doing so, I augment Berger and Luckmann’s insights in the sociology of knowledge with a general stock of knowledge drawn from the sociology of religion.

McGuire (1987) identifies a number of techniques through which religious groups maintain as plausible to subjective consciousness their ‘deviant’ view of reality, all of which can be discerned in TJ. For instance, she highlights the importance of regular group gatherings – particularly those in which rituals are enacted by which “the group symbolizes meanings significant to itself” (p.77) – that help consolidate plausibility and renew commitment. TJ’s weekly umoomi gasht emerges here as a central ritual that consistently actualises in space and time core elements of the movement’s symbolic universe for participants. In some groups, “religious gatherings of the family” are also important exemplified in TJ by the daily ta’lim conducted by devotees with family at home. Another important mechanism McGuire identifies is sacrifice – of time, wealth, social status, or worldly pursuits – through which a participant’s commitment to the cause is evidenced, often publicly. Sacrifice is a particularly recurrent motif of TJ discourse – “The lifeblood of this effort is qurbaani [sacrifice] and it’s only with qurbaani that hidaayat [guidance] will spread” – and TJ activists constantly relate stories from the lives of the prophets and sahaabah in a way which emphasises, with predictable insistence, the sacrifices they gave for da’wa. Further, ascending up the hierarchy of tiered activism is intertwined with qurbaani; those who have made the greatest sacrifices are seen to deserve the highest levels of leadership. McGuire also highlights ‘witnessing’ as an important commitment-enhancing mechanism in which “All events, thoughts, and experience are transformed into significant events, meaningful thoughts, and special religious experiences.” This is

15 It is important to bear in mind here the socially constructed nature of deviancy; as Becker (1963, p.14) reminds us, “Deviance is not a quality that lies in behaviour itself, but in the interaction between the person who commits an act and those who respond to it.” In other words, behaviour only becomes deviant when it is branded as such by the majority response - and a shift in the zeitgeist may well rehabilitate a past reprobate or condemn a contemporary hero. See also Goode (2015).

16 For the Salafi women Inge (2017) conducted fieldwork with in London, participation in regular ‘circles of knowledge’ were particularly important in fostering commitment (see in particular Chapter 4 - Commitment and Belonging: The Role of Circles of Knowledge).
a fairly common trope of TJ rhetoric as demonstrated when, during a weekly umoomi gasht from Masjid Ta-Ha, the mutakallim while giving da’wa recounted an incident from earlier that day:

So I love my bikes and go biking pretty much every weekend with my kids. And as I was driving home from work today this guy went past on this beautiful racer bike...And I got distracted and started checking the bike out just for a few seconds man...and nearly crashed the car! Someone else honked and I pulled my car back on track, just missed having an accident. And I thought that’s a sign from Allah that on the road to Jannah if we get distracted and fall into ghafiat [heedlessness], even for a moment, we can mess up big time.

Thinking of themselves as extraordinary is another common method through which groups enhance their own prestige and the commitment of members. This is clearly discernible in TJ discourse; it is very common for TJ activists to begin their speeches by extolling the virtues of “this blessed effort which was the work of the prophets” and then by stressing how very lucky they are to be involved in it. McGuire (p.78) notes that this sense of singularity is often heightened by cultivating a sense of awe which “make the actions of the group appear more than mundane.” In particular, a sense that “the leaders ‘receive directions’ from God” can cause palpable excitement among rank and file members. Both these elements are discernible in ordinary TJ experience. Activists are fond of recounting to neophytes and also among themselves tales of their myriad excursions in foreign lands [kaarguzari], often embellished with hyperbole and restructured in a narrative style that drives home a particular pedagogical objective (see also Metcalf 2009). For instance, one activist during his adaab-e-gasht talk in a Bolton mosque, likened his experience of being hounded by a group of thugs in a car while doing gasht in Kosovo to the Prophet’s rejection at Taif.17 Miraculous stories also abound in which the help of Allah was experienced during khuruj as the ‘Hand of Allah’ is seen to be over the Jama’at. Similarly, TJ elders – particularly those that reside in the South Asian headquarters – are revered as almost superhuman saints and snippets from their lectures along with romantic retellings of incidents in their lives – injected with hagiographical fervour – pepper the discourse of rank and file activists.18 For instance, I heard it mentioned by more than one Tier 3 activist that Hafiz Patel corralled groups of jinn and sent them out in khuruj as well as having responsibility for (human)

17 Incidentally, the Prophet’s da’wa at Taif is probably the story that symbolises TJ’s ethos and vision more than any other, and which is retold in the very first pages of the Fadhail-e-A’amal (Kaandhlawi 1997b, pp.15-18)).

18 TJ’s founding moment is also redolent with mystical overtones and many rank and file activists, including members of the Avant-Garde, believe that Mawlana Ilyas was inspired [ilham] by God with the particular methodology [minhaj] of TJ during a three-day silent meditative retreat undertaken in the Prophet’s mosque in Medina (see Nadwi (1983, p.33); Sikand (2002, pp.130-135)). As a result, the method itself is perceived as sacrosanct by many activists (see also 4.3).
TJ activities across Europe. Or, when returning to Dewsbury Markaz after 10 days in Bradford during my 2014 summer *khuruj*, a third-generation teenager looked forward to meeting Hafiz Patel for the first time with great excitement. However, he was cautioned by the others: “He has *kashf*, you know, and can sense your sins. So when you shake his hand, make sure you look down.”

### 10.2.1 Issues of retention and attrition

For McGuire (p. 73), “The final result of the entire conversion process is not merely creating new members but creating members who will invest themselves in what the group is believing and doing.” There is a clear resemblance here with the “deployable agent” that thorough-going conversion produces for Stark & Lofland (1965), as expressed well by a TJ analogy: “Be like the arrow in the quiver of the archer which has no will of its own as to where it is fired.” Yet, clearly, many TJ arrows do misfire. The ‘deployable agent,’ having undergone a profound conversion experience, would ideally henceforth participate devotedly in the movement’s full programme of activities prioritising them above everything else in his or her life. In practice however, this is achieved by only a small minority of activists – usually Tier 1 and 2 leaders. By contrast, like Janson, I found that:

> Except for the *shura* members, the majority of my interlocutors confided their difficulties to me in finding the time for their *a’males*. Because of their professional and/or social obligations, not all Tablighis could assemble daily in the local mosque, and several told me they found it hard to read from the Tablighi literature on a daily basis. (Janson 2014, p.92)

What are the reasons for this failure to achieve total dedication to group goals? Analysing my dataset reveals the most common by far relates to the practical difficulties of juggling a full-time job, a growing family and TJ’s rigorous schedule of daily/weekly/monthly/annual demands. Consequently, many respondents described a gradual decrease in involvement over time, particularly as many had first become involved as unmarried students. Mustafa, the Bolton-based structural engineer whose university experiences we encountered in 6.4.2, now has three children and around 20 years of TJ activism. To this day, he participates fairly regularly in the weekly *umoomi gasht* and the monthly weekend *khuruj*. Further, he assiduously takes 6 weeks of unpaid leave for...

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19 The youngster considered him “a living legend” and, interestingly, had likened him earlier in that *jama’at* to Professor Dumbledore in *Harry Potter*! (Another Dewsbury elder, known for his strictness, was less graciously referred to as Severus Snape). I was with him when he finally got to meet Hafiz Patel at Dewsbury and witnessed first-hand how, despite having prepared a little speech, he was overawed and managed only to stammer awkwardly. The role of the Tier 3 Avant-Garde in building his expectations during the course of the 10 days tour is particularly relevant here.

20 This statement was made at the Dewsbury HQ in the context of the malleability expected of TJ activists to be placed in any given *jama’at* and be willing to be sent to any national or international destination decided by the elders for the duration of their *khuruj*.
his annual chillah. However his participation in the daily gasht and ta’lim activities of his local masjid-waar-jama’at has markedly diminished over the years. His comments below represent a common sentiment of my Tier 3 respondents:

Really, over time, what’s happened is that participation has dwindled. On a large part it’s a certain lack of motivation and family commitments do come in, there’s a lot of commitment from the family. But the truth of the matter is that if I really wanted, or if someone really, really wanted to be committed to TJ, then they could negotiate themselves around that framework. It’s just a matter of time management...I just hope that I can get back some of the enthusiasm and motivation which I had in the early days. I know that’s difficult because it’s that early convert zeal which is really hard to recapture because...it’s just difficult to maintain certain levels of fervour I suppose but yes, I would like to be more actively partaking on a day-to-day basis and I would like it to have a larger part of my emotional self.

What is striking about the above comment is that it exhibits no sign of ideological disillusionment with TJ. Mustafa – and the large cohort of Tier 3 activists his comment represents – still “fiercely believe” in the efficacy of the TJ vision of reform but they struggle practically to live up to its high demands. Here the reflections of Raees, a Blackburn-based science teacher active in TJ since a college student in the late 90s, are telling:

I still fiercely believe, you know, I have a deep-rooted belief that this effort is so powerful that it can have an impact on a global level and it can change the lives of people all over the world. I know that for certain and that’s what drives me on a daily basis. But my approach is very mature now, you know, because of family, children, because of...having a lifetime in Tabligh. When I do things, I try to do it a bit more seriously now than I used to...the time I give to the mosque, I try to make quality time because I think to myself that, look...I’m leaving my two young children at home, I’m leaving my wife at home...And when I go for my two days a month, you know, I try to make sure that I spend my time as best as possible...because as you mature into this movement, you sort of think to yourself, you know what? I’m giving a lot of sacrifice for this now so I’ve got to spend my time properly and I’ve got to gain something from this.

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21 In particular, my fieldwork found that the daily drop-offs and pick-ups of their children from evening maktabs interfered significantly with the daily TJ activities of Tier 3 activists. Interestingly, several respondents had explicitly encouraged their wives to take driving lessons so as to share such responsibilities.
Nevertheless there is a significant cohort of former TJ activists whose participation in the movement has entirely ceased. This might be discerned simply by comparing the list of 4-monthers in a given mosque with its active *masjid-waar-jama‘at*: the former, I would aver, will usually considerably outnumber the latter.\(^\text{22}\) For some former members, ideological disillusionment will have been a causal factor compounded, in all probability, by geography. For instance, both Mustafa and Raees live in North West England which, as has already been alluded to (see Appendix C1), is relatively homogenous in terms of the ethnic makeup and ideological orientation of its Muslim communities. The situation in Birmingham or London, by contrast, is very different. Consequently, TJ activists resident there may well interact regularly with rival movements of Islamic reform that cause ideological slippage and fracture commitment.\(^\text{23}\) This seemed to be the case with Ali, a convert to Islam with over 20 years of dedicated TJ experience, who specifically asked to meet me in Birmingham’s Green Lane Mosque – a well-known centre of Salafi activism – in response to my request for an interview.\(^\text{24}\) The rationale for this he explained, after we had offered our Isha and *taraweeh* prayers in a packed congregation of mostly black-bearded young men,\(^\text{25}\) was to allow me to experience first-hand the vibrancy of the Salafi presence in Birmingham: “when you come to these areas, yeah, there’s not even the smell of TJ but you’ve got people who are doing various activities and they’re committed, and they’re fuelling themselves to not only to keep going but to actually grow.” After 20 years of devoted TJ activism – including foreign excursions to numerous European, South American and South Asian countries both with his wife in *masturat* and in men-only *jama‘ats* – it was clear that Ali’s commitment was beginning to wane and he was approaching something of a personal crossroads. Unlike Mustafa and Raees though, he had begun to question the movement’s ideological foundations:

\(^{22}\) Recall here Geaves’ distinction between ‘active’ and ‘inactive’ members of Sufi brotherhoods in Britain (see 5.2).

\(^{23}\) One of the key sociological insights of Peter Berger’s career is especially germane here: *pluralism relativises*. That is, through the contiguous jostling of multiple perspectives and systematic exposure to the world-views of others, the corrosive acid of doubt is poured upon one’s own convictions: “Doubt is the pivot around which the dynamics of pluralism whirl” (Berger 2014, p.66; see also Berger and Zijderveld 2009). This was a central plank of his early endorsement of secularisation theory (Berger 1967) and remains important, in modified form, in his most recent theorising on pluralism (Berger 2014). Though he seeks to operationalise this with reference to the impact of the structural conditions of modernity upon the phenomenon of religion generically, I would maintain it is equally applicable in the micro-context of different sectarian groupings within a single faith tradition.

\(^{24}\) This was during my 10 day *khuruj* to Birmingham in the summer of 2014. Ali is actually from London but frequently stays in Birmingham for business purposes during which time he also participates in local TJ activities; we were introduced through a mutual contact who acted as a gatekeeper for my fieldwork in the Midlands.

\(^{25}\) Whilst chatting in the car after the *Fajr* prayer, I also observed large numbers of women leaving the mosque from a separate exit clad in *jilbaabs* and *niqabs* (Inge 2017).
It’s a very different feeling you get when you do Tabligh in France or Belgium or Holland, but then again [laughs], in terms of what they’ve achieved, it’s much less than here...because there’s other factors like the madaaris, like the ulema, like the following of the madhhab, and ta’alluq [connection] with the elders. Other communities don’t seem to have that in Europe...So although they seem to be living the TJ and following it to the letter of Nizamuddin, in reality it doesn’t work. This is my argument and this is why I’m a bit sceptical now because I don’t think it works. I mean, this is only my own perception...and unfortunately I don’t have the confidence or trust to even ask people in Dewsbury these kind of things. I just don’t think they would be willing to have that conversation with me...

You see at the moment, I’m actually kind of, I’m going through a period where I’m reassessing everything in my life to be honest with you. I mean everything. Sometimes you get such a routine of doing things, not just TJ but everything you do in life, you’ve got to ask yourself, why am I actually doing this? You have to be a devil’s advocate for yourself almost, you’ve got to pull out the question how do you know, how do you know...

Also key to Ali’s journey is the fact that, as a white convert to Islam, he does not share the South Asian ancestry of the majority of the Old Guard and Avant-Garde. In this regard, my dataset unequivocally found that long-term commitment to TJ in Britain is markedly more difficult for those not from a South Asian ethnic background.27  Janson (2014, p.253), in her study of TJ in the Gambia, found a certain turnover ingrained into the movement due to a perceived “lack of scholastic credentials.” In particular, she found disillusioned TJ activists would often defect to forms of...
Salafism deemed to have greater scriptural authenticity. In the UK, such a situation seems to have been contained -- at least in the ethnically homogeneous northern cities -- by the de facto alliance of TJ with the institutional infrastructure of Deobandi Islam, including its strong ulema base. Further, given the strong South Asian demographic of British Islam, Avant-Garde TJ activists -- unlike their non-South Asian TJ peers in the Gambia or such as Ali -- can often access the highest level of TJ scholarship (via the internet or CDs) in the original Urdu. In particular, my fieldwork found the scholarship and charisma of Mawlana Tariq Jameel has played a key role here especially among the Pakistani diaspora. Isa, for example -- who, as we saw in 7.4.2, experimented with the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Salafiyyah before committing to TJ -- had his intellectual doubts dispelled through a consistent engagement with his online lectures (augmented by extended personal interaction with Junaid Jamshed during the latter’s UK *khurus*/performances at the Islam Channel’s annual Global Peace and Unity event in London). Regularly accessing the scholarship of leading TJ elders is, for Muaaz, a crucial factor in anchoring an ongoing intellectual commitment to TJ praxis:

Whereas with the youngsters who come in with a lot of passion and whatever, then they see contradictions and if they don’t get their answers then they move on to something else...Language plays a part in that, language, because, and I found that in Trinidad [on a 40 day *khuruj*], over there they only speak English and no Urdu so...if a person thinks that Tabligh is just a vehicle to acquire Deen and the vehicle itself is not authenticated then it’s very easy for them to give it up...and we can only understand this if we listen to the elders because when we listen to *bayaans* in our local masjid and our local brothers it’s very, very diluted, very, very diluted especially if you’re going through a translation. Many times the translators don’t feel competent enough to

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28 Strikingly, and drawing upon Adraoui’s analysis of the situation in France, Janson (2014, p.247) asserts that a key global constituency of contemporary Salafism comprises of disillusioned former TJ activists. According to Sikand (2006, p.189), Farid Kassim, leading spokesperson for the Hizb-ut-Tahrir during the 1990s, had his “first exposure to Islamic reform and revival in the TJ.” Not only the intrinsic heterogeneity of contemporary Islamic activism is implicated here, but also the ways in which multiple trajectories can intersect in an individual biography. For instance, Janson (2014, pp.253-254) also found evidence of the inverse phenomenon of Salafis converting to TJ. In stark contrast to Berger’s early theorising on the impact of pluralism on religion, there is some scope here to analyse the ‘marketplace’ of British Islam using conceptual tools developed generically in ‘Rational Choice Theory’ and applied to religion most notably in the (often collaborative) theoretical contributions of Rodney Stark, William Sims Bainbridge, Roger Finke and Laurence Iannaccone (see, for instance, Stark and Finke (2000)).

29 This situation has been changing in recent years: for instance, Preston recently opened its first Salafi mosque while Bolton opened its first Somalian mosque. This indicates that the ethnic and sectarian heterogeneity of the South is slowly percolating upwards and, in future years, the nexus of Deobandi and TJ Islam may not be able to rely as much upon its traditional ‘heartlands’ in the North. On the flipside, incoming groups may appropriate elements of the local Islamic landscape and rely upon their institutional strength for their own survival. For example, a Bolton resident recently told me that up to 50% of pupils in the local *maktabs* (run chiefly by Gujarati Deobandis) are presently of Somalian ethnicity.
quote the exact verse and exact quote from text because of which that never even gets translated. And so there is a serious issue there.

Familiarity with Urdu, however, does not preclude ideological disillusionment. In 8.2.2.2 we were introduced to the conversion narrative of Nurul, a British-born Bangladeshi ‘critical sympathiser’ from Bradford. As a school-leaver in 2005 he participated in a 40 day khuruj that was life-changing; he subsequently grew a beard, became punctual in his daily salaat (practices he has maintained to this day – see 6.3) and became heavily involved in daily TJ activities at his local mosque (practices he subsequently ceased). Yet in 2006, after only 12 days, he abruptly cut short his second chillah and returned home:

Yeah, so what happened was I got bored. I found it so repetitive, we were doing the same thing again and again, and I was just thinking, we’ve done the ten surahs man, we’ve read Fadhail-e-A’ama l like 50 times, you know, I wanted something else. I was basically regurgitating the same thing again and again. I go this can’t be it, you know, because they talk about ilm and dhikr - seeking knowledge, yeah, and I was thinking, well, why are we not seeking knowledge? I was expecting that maybe there’s a level two or there’s a level three [laughs]...And what really got me frustrated was this whole regurgitating, I felt like a machine, you know, that’s being fed and just spitting out what we were being fed. And I started thinking, maybe there’s flaws here...

A final set of reasons for waning commitment identified in my dataset can be categorised under the heading of personal grudges/fallouts, negative experiences or unmet expectations. As a counter-point to the love and brotherhood recounted by Dr Uthman at the end of 9.1, it is simultaneously clear that the closed context of an extended khuruj outing with a restricted group of people may well trigger negative experiences that definitively inhibit further participation. Primarily for this reason it seems, Luqman, the Avant-Garde amir of my 42 day road-trip to Bulgaria, constantly exhorted our jama’at almost on a daily basis to ‘guard your tongues,’ avoid too much jesting and laughter and to first ‘weigh it, then say it.’ On the other hand, a Tier 3 activist I spoke to on a local

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30 This is the translation of an Urdu proverb: pehle tolo, phir bolo. Other proverbs that were repeated by him to the extent of becoming almost mantras were: “Your tongue is like a lion caged in by your teeth. If let loose it will tear you apart” and “A man lies hidden under his tongue.” ‘Controlling our tongues’ became a dominant theme of the entire chillah and, in addition to reading aloud from the copious hadith literature on the topic, the amir would also on occasion read to us from his personal copy of al-Ghazali’s Bidayat al-Hidayat in which the ‘diseases of the tongue’ are enumerated in excruciating detail covering such topics as lying, breaking promises, backbiting, disputation, argumentation, competitive debate, ascribing goodness to oneself, cursing, supplicating against creation, jesting, ridiculing and making fun of people (al-Ghazali et al. 2010). This impacted the jama’at to such an extent that we would sometimes roll out our bedding and go to sleep in complete silence.
weekend *khuruj* confided to me that he had found the *amir* of his recent 40 day excursion to have been a disappointment both because of his sarcasm and tendency to backbite. As a result, he felt disinclined to go again next year but, by consciously recalling the positive experiences and role models he had previously encountered, he was trying to buoy his spirits up again. In this, he seemed to be engaged in a type of internal cost-benefit analysis gauging whether the gains of continued participation outweighed the necessary sacrifices. My fieldwork also uncovered some evidence that cliques and rivalries can develop within a single *masjid-waar-jama’at* or between the *masjid-waar-jama’ats* of a given town/city/halqa, leading to a gradual attrition of social relations. With respect to unmet expectations, while conducting fieldwork in Masjid Ta-Ha I witnessed the trajectory of an enthusiastic Tier 4 college student who began, after several consecutive monthly weekend *khurujs*, to regularly offer his Fajr prayer in congregation at the mosque. However he was disappointed to find that the Tier 3 regulars were themselves often missing in the prayer and the daily *mashwera* that followed it. This, along with the temptation of a girlfriend he told me about, led to his enthusiasm gradually fizzling away and, before long, he stopped participating in the movement.

Despite this range of mitigating factors, it is clear that a significant cohort of Avant-Garde Tier 3 activists have maintained a strong commitment to the movement – including annual *chillahs*, monthly weekend outings and at the very least participation in the weekly *umoomi gasht* – more or less continuously since joining in the 1990s.\(^{31}\) The inherent flexibility of TJ is probably a factor here as the movement’s normative praxis offers up a skeletal menu of daily, weekly, monthly and annual activities that can be dipped into differentially to accommodate changing circumstances in individual biographies. As a result, participation in the movement can wax and wane over a Tier 3 lifespan with a lukewarm commitment conserved when other priorities take precedence.\(^{32}\) The key sociological insight to bear in mind here is that the ongoing actualisation of TJ’s symbolic universe in the consciousness of activists (necessary as a substrate driver of continued participation) is contingent upon their ongoing contact with its plausibility structure in the local context of their ordinary lives. Put differently, should regular conversation with fellow TJ activists cease then so will, in all

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\(^{31}\) This resilience to ‘burnout’ has also been noted in other studies of TJ; for instance: “Abd al-Rahman, though in his forties now, was introduced to the *tabligh* as a university student in Karachi, Pakistan some twenty years ago. Since that time, and his later immigration to Canada, he has deepened his experience of the *tabligh*, which besides regular weekly and monthly participation in *tabligh* activities has included his participation in forty day and three [sic] month long excursions in the *tablighi path*” (Dickson 2009, p.103).

\(^{32}\) For instance, a hitherto devoted Tier 3 activist in Masjid Ta-Ha suddenly ceased participating in most TJ activities upon the birth of his severely disabled child. After a couple of years, once he and his wife had acclimatised to the new demands on their time, he gradually resumed participation. Another Tier 3 activist, while participating in the daily, weekly and monthly components of TJ’s normative praxis, was unable to go out for his annual *chillah* for several years due to caring for his elderly and sick mother. Similarly, a Tier 3 solicitor, upon starting work for a new law firm, was unable to secure more than a few weeks of holiday for the first few years during which period he gave whatever annual time he could to TJ and returned back to work.
probability, the individual’s participation in the movement: “Disruption of significant conversation with the mediators of the respective plausibility structures threatens the subjective realities in question...The longer these techniques are isolated from face-to-face confirmations, the less likely they will be to retain the accent of reality” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, pp.174-175). TJ’s self-understanding as a movement geared towards generating “a mahol [lit: ‘environment,’ but which may alternatively be translated in this context as ‘plausibility structure’] in which Deen can be practised” is significant here and the monthly weekend TJ khuruj emerges as an especially vital mechanism of commitment-enhancement as it functions to repeatedly activate the ritual and semantic triggers of desocialisation and resocialisation that together allow participant consciousness to be exposed, briefly yet intensely, to TJ’s finite province of meaning. This experience, as we have seen, may well prompt an intra-religious conversion experience in neophytes but crucially, for our purposes here, it simultaneously sustains the ongoing plausibility of TJ for puraana saathis: “Just as reality is originally internalized by a social process, so it is maintained in consciousness by social processes” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.169) / “the new plausibility structure will typically provide various therapeutic procedures to take care of ‘backsliding’ tendencies” (p.179). This perspective seems to be supported by the movement itself; a Tier 3 activist at the end of an umoomi gasht bayaan described the local mosque a’amals like a tree: “So long as the leaf stays connected to the tree it receives all the nourishment that comes from the roots. But if it breaks off and falls to the side, then it might stay green for a little while but will soon wither and die.” There is also an oft-repeated incident related by TJ activists from the life of Hazratji – TJ’s global amir from 1965 to 1995 – who, when asked about a man who had suddenly stopped participating in TJ after years of devoted service, remarked: “Istiqamaamah is weightier than a thousand karaamat [miracles]. I don’t find it amazing that he left the work after so many years but that he was able to stay committed for so long (given the inevitable challenges that assail any sincere caller to Allah).”

33 This assertion finds support from Festinger et al’s (2014 [1956]) classic study of the way in which committed believers resolve instances of cognitive dissonance arising from failed prophecies. See, in particular, the final two chapters which demonstrate the differential impact of disconfirmation upon two groups of believers distinguished by their degree of attachment to the group’s plausibility structure: “It is reasonable to believe that dissonances created by unequivocal disconfirmation cannot be appreciably reduced unless one is in the constant presence of supporting members who can provide for one another the kind of social reality that will make the rationalization of disconfirmation acceptable” (Festinger et al. 2014 [1956], Location 4075). 34 I was unable to trace the original Urdu wording here and so have paraphrased from what I heard in TJ gatherings.
10.3 Conclusion

This set of meso-level chapters (8-10) has sought to map the ritual and semantic processes of desocialisation and resocialisation intrinsic to *khuruj* which reinforce in neophyte consciousness core ethno-religious meanings first internalised during childhood primary socialisation. The personal narratives of Hanzalah, Yahya and Umar have further demonstrated TJ’s ability to deliver a powerful intra-religious conversion experience for second-generation Muslims in contemporary Britain indicating its function as a manifestation of broader ‘Islamic Revival’ (Ali 2012). Yet conversion to TJ, as we have just seen, is often not definitive and is obliged to co-exist with a medley of competing demands. In the next chapter, I recall the generative mechanisms of secularity and spirituality outlined in 4.1.3 to examine how, at the level of macro-theory, both co-exist in the consciousness of contemporary Avant-Garde British TJ activists. Further, I seek to extrapolate the significance of a willed and conscious exercise of agency in ways that publicly affirm faith for the secularised sociality of contemporary Europe in which the biographies of my respondents unfold.
Chapter 11

The Giant’s Nervous Tic: Islamic Revival in SECular Europe

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For Europe, there can be no more important instance of inter-cultural encounter today than the encounter with Islam.

Linda Woodhead (2009, p.89)

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Anthropologists use the term ‘culture shock’ to describe the violent surprise occasioned by coming into contact with a drastically alien way of life. The shock is not merely because of what one sees in the alien culture. More importantly, the shock comes from suddenly seeing oneself in a new way in the mirror of the other culture.

Peter Berger (1961, p.14)

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If Europe continues to secularise, while Europe’s mosques remain full, then Islam is likely, without any planning or even forethought, to become the principal monotheistic energy through much of the continent, a kind of leaven in Europe’s stodgy dough.

Abdal Hakim Murad (2011)

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1 The metaphor of the ‘Giant’s Nervous Tic’ is taken from Berger (1963, p.152): “…the introduction of a dramatic character that does not fit into the scenario of the particular play seriously threatens the role-playing of those who do fit. Experiences such as these may lead to a sudden reversal in one’s view of society – from an awe-inspiring vision of an edifice made of massive granite to the picture of a toy-house precariously put together with papier mâché. While such metamorphosis may be disturbing to people who have hitherto had great confidence in the stability and rightness of society, it can also have a very liberating effect on those more inclined to look upon the latter as a giant sitting on top of them, and not necessarily a friendly giant at that. It is reassuring to discover that the giant is afflicted with a nervous tic.” By Europe, I am referring primarily to Western Europe and, while I recognise the internal diversity of the continent – exemplified, say, by the Catholic ‘south’ and the Protestant ‘north,’ or the differences between the strict laïcité of France and the comparatively softer church-state accommodation in the UK – I nevertheless, with Davie (2013, p.259), maintain that “European nations that have shared for centuries the experience of the Renaissance, of the Reformation, of the scientific revolution, of the Enlightenment, of Romanticism and so on are likely to have more in common than those that were excluded from this cycle of events (i.e. the Orthodox and Muslim worlds).”
11.1 “My Name is Legion”: The Intertwining of the Sacred and the Secular in Contemporary TJ consciousness

In 4.1.3, I elaborated basic theoretical foundations of this thesis explaining how I augmented Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge with Roy Bhaskar’s critical realist concept of ‘generative mechanisms.’ Citing Porter’s study of racism and professionalism in an Irish hospital, I further identified the generative mechanisms of spirituality and secularity as operative causal matrixes from which the empirical phenomena captured by my dataset emerge. While the twin processes of desocialisation and resocialisation outlined in Chapters 8-10 may suggest that such social phenomena subsist in discrete sectors, here I explicate ways in which they modify and temper each other, sometimes in a tense dialectic, within respondent experience and consciousness. But, before proceeding, I first sketch a brief theoretical preamble.

Along with most other sociologists of religion, Peter Berger was a key exponent of what is commonly termed the ‘secularisation thesis’ in his early career, developing key arguments – rooted in the theoretical framework of the sociology of knowledge – in *The Sacred Canopy* (Berger 1967). Yet in Berger (1999b), reflecting a broader shift in the discipline, he loudly retracted his earlier conclusions declaring them untenable in the face of global empirical evidence. His first attempt to systematically formulate an alternate theoretical paradigm to secularisation, however, came much more recently (Berger 2014). Here he argued that modernity results not in secularisation, as early sociologists of religion mistakenly thought, but rather pluralism defined in the twin sense of the co-existence of multiple religions as well as the co-existence of religious and secular discourses. While maintaining some of the key insights from his earlier theorising – notably that pluralism relativises by undermining the taken-for-granted certainty of an inherited world-view – he simultaneously softened his earlier volte-face by conceding that modernity has ushered in a powerful ‘secular discourse’ that operates beyond just the continent of Europe and a global intelligentsia as previously argued in Berger (1999a):

> If it is to function in society, every institution must have a correlate in consciousness. Therefore, if a differentiation has occurred between religious and other institutions in society, this differentiation must also be manifested in the consciousness of individuals...Most religious people, even very fervent ones, operate within a secular discourse in important areas of their lives. Put differently, for most believers there is not a stark either/or dichotomy between faith and secularity but rather a fluid construction of both/and. (Berger 2014, p.x)
This proposition, as I argue in 11.2.2, is not new\(^2\) and there I seek to develop Knott’s (2013) concept of the ‘secular sacred’ to consider the implications of my respondents’ willed and conscious exercise of faith, often in ways that intrude into the functionally differentiated public sphere, for the ‘sacred canopy’ of secularity that today vaults over Europe. First though, I operationalise Berger’s latest theorising with reference to the empirical findings of Chapters 6-7.

11.1.1 “Neither-Mister-Nor-Mawlana” – TJ and the emergence of the English-speaking, secular-educated pious Muslim

In this section I pick up again the issue of TJ’s relationship with secular education examined in 6.4. It was asserted there, based on the unanimous findings of my fieldwork (see also Appendix E), that Sikand’s positioning of Rangooni as a representative of TJ thought led to the erroneous conclusion that TJ is intrinsically hostile to secular education.\(^3\) Consequently, my data discerned an Avant-Garde, English-speaking TJ demographic populating various professional roles in British society. Here, I extrapolate the significance of this finding in relation to Berger’s latest theorising.

In his engaging memoir of life in a South Asian Dar al-Ulum, Ebrahim Moosa distinguishes between two contending epistemological paradigms personified in the “Mister versus Mawlana” conflict. For our purposes, the ‘Mister’ can be conceived as emerging out of the generative mechanism of secularity as evinced, typically, by his clean-shaven appearance, Western attire and secular-education. By contrast, the bearded Mawlana, garbed in traditional religious dress and the product of a seminary education, emerges out of the generative mechanism of spirituality. “Mutual recriminations between these factions feature regularly in the public media of Muslim-majority societies, including those of South Asia” notes Moosa. Yet he perceptively observes that a third figure has now entered the scenario who does not fit comfortably in either of these categories:

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\(^2\) For instance, as far back as 1969, David Martin (1969, p. 3) suggested that “The religious and the secular are in one sense opposites but in another they are intertwined. There is almost nothing regarded as religious which cannot also be secular, and almost no characteristics appearing in secular contexts which do not also appear in religious ones.” Day et al. (2013), in a recent collection of essays, further seek to demonstrate “the complex processes involved in the negotiation and maintenance of multiple sacred and secular social identities in contemporary pluralized contexts.”

\(^3\) Nevertheless, I do not think that Sikand’s characterisation of the TJ attitude to secular education is entirely without foundation. His broader analysis of the appeal of TJ in Britain – particularly in the 70s and 80s – identified a demographic of socially disengaged and largely disenfranchised first-generation migrants – the Old Guard – who found in TJ important functions of social utility in helping formulate a coherent sense of self during a period of immense, and often bewildering, flux (there are clear parallels here with Herberg’s (1955, pp. 23-28) brilliant unpicking of the “aching question of identity” confronting successive waves of immigrants to the Land of Immigration par excellence). The existential threat to identity represented by Western culture – and perhaps best typified by its secular education system – would have been a common concern among the Old Guard which is why the Deobandi maslak in general seems to have played a leading role in the establishment of exclusively Muslim spaces of learning such as the Dar al-Ulums and Muslim primary and secondary schools.
While the alliterative phrase “mister versus Mawlana” is partly true, the tensions have become more complex. Now the secular educated class is also divided between a religiously devout but secularly educated segment of Muslims and ultrasecular elites. The tensions between these groups are more social than ideological. While it is easy for the ‘ulama to dismiss the ultrasecular elites for their ideological antipathy for Islam, the real challenge to ‘ulama authority comes from secular-educated pious Muslims. The best the ‘ulama can do is to discredit them as lacking a proper understanding of faith. (Moosa 2015, p.225)

It may plausibly be argued – as substantiated by my fieldwork as well as, for example, the geographically disparate studies of Janson (2014), Amrullah (2011), or Gugler⁴ (2013) – that TJ has been an implicit international driving force in the emergence of this new “secular-educated pious Muslim” who may alternatively be labelled “neither-Mister-nor-Mawlana.”⁵ As we have seen, committed TJ activists dress, as a matter of course, in traditional religious attire often crowning their bearded faces with turbans. Yet they are not the product of a Dar al-Ulum education but rather have often maintained their commitment to piety in the midst of a spiritually hostile secular university environment (see Muaaz’s account in Appendix E). Faith, for them, thus becomes a willed choice hinging on the conscious and consistent exercise of individual agency. While the extent to which they engage with the epistemological ramifications of the secular knowledge they imbibe is questionable, it is clear they have appropriated it without relinquishing a strong and overt commitment to faith. This lends credence to Berger’s assertion above that modernity is comprised of an often unwieldy symbiosis of the sacred and secular both in human society and consciousness. Further, unlike many ulema,⁶ Avant-Garde TJ activists usually interact regularly with the wider British mainstream as part of their occupational roles, in the process often developing professionalised skillsets and cultural resources that allow them to navigate multiple social worlds with relative ease. Their incomes frequently trump those of the imams they pray behind and there is also evidence to

⁴ For instance, Gugler (2013) states: “...it will come as no surprise to learn that transnational Muslim missionary movements like Tablighi Jamā’at and Da’wat-e Islāmi – the movements that promise a revitalization of Muslim solidarity – are gaining strength day by day and that they are particularly powerful on university campuses and in college politics” (p. 71). Alternatively: “Another central aspect of this new religiosity is the novel relationship between tradition, community, and authority. The market condition creates an environment in which lay preachers without any formal Islamic education act as religious entrepreneurs...” (p. 82)

⁵ In the Muslim-majority context of Pakistan, celebrity examples of this character type include the popstar-turned-preacher Junaid Jamshed and the cricketing hero Saeed Anwar.

⁶ Chaplains are a good example of an exception in this regard (Gilliat-Ray et al. 2013). There is also evidence to suggest this is changing among the British-born generation of ulema, who increasingly seek to supplement their seminary training with university education and/or careers, indicating that my conceptual distinction between the ‘Old Guard’ and ‘Avant-Garde’ has wider applicability than the specific empirical context that led to its generation.
suggest many are well-attuned to the challenges facing Muslim youth in a contemporary society; I witnessed first-hand, for instance, Avant-Garde Tier 3 activists dispensing sundry advice as a matter of course to young Muslims on *khuruj* regarding issues as diverse as girlfriends, halal food or praying in the workplace. I also witnessed, on numerous occasions, TJ activists (usually, though not always *hufaaz*) called upon to lead mosque prayers in the absence of the imam indicating their role, somewhat, as a buffer-zone between ulama and laity. Additionally, although formal TJ policy advocates a respectful deference to ulema learning, in practice TJ derives its guidance from the *markazes* in a way that often bypasses local configurations of ulema authority. The net impact of all this is to undermine the hegemony of the ulama as sole guardians of Islamic tradition by redistributing the weightings of power, authority, and social accessibility in British Muslim communities with reference to a set of alternatively calibrated axes.

Moreover, like Beekers’ (2015a) ‘travelling preachers,’ Avant-Garde TJ activists are proficient in the language of the society in which their secondary socialisations occur: English. This is significant if we accept the premise that any given language cannot be separated from its cultural and cognitive residues. Recalling a key finding of Chapters 6-7 is relevant here: while the hierarchy of British TJ continues to be dominated by the Urdu-speaking Old Guard, a vibrant English-speaking Avant-Garde presence has developed at the grassroots. The resultant shift in language-usage, however, may

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7 This might be a subtle underlying reason for the criticism (Deobandi) ulama sometimes level at TJ. Also worth noting is that most of the hierarchy of British TJ, in contradistinction to the South Asian headquarters, markedly lacks ulama. However, the production of the ‘secular-educated pious Muslim’ character type is, of course, not the sole prerogative of TJ. For instance, Beekers (2015a, pp.200-201), in his study of Dutch Salafism, identified the popularity of what he terms ‘travelling preachers’ who “are usually young men (only very rarely women)...who commonly grew up in the Netherlands themselves and are therefore familiar with the life-worlds of the young Muslims they address. They preach in Dutch, often using popular (youth) language...while clothing and authorising their speech with Arabic...They are commonly ‘self-made’ preachers, as they have often not enjoyed a formal theological training but educated themselves...usually combined with a secular education. Most of them have regular paid jobs next to their preaching activities...” Similarly, in the Muslim-majority context of Egypt, Mahmood (2005, p.64) identifies the anti-clericalism of the Muslim Brotherhood as a key enabling factor for the emergence of the ‘self-trained preacher/da’iya, who took on da’wa as a vocation rather than as a form of employment...Significantly, it is not an accident that it is secular universities – not the state-run Islamic University of Al-Azhar where the ulama are usually trained – that have produced the most prominent da’iyat (both male and female) of the last century.” Nevertheless, particularly in the context of South Asian (diasporic) Islam, TJ has been a significant driver in producing the “Neither-Mister-Nor-Mawlana” character type: “While he now occupies a position of leadership at the Nadwat al-Ulama, Salman Nadwi freely acknowledges that his institution has largely failed in its early aspiration to remedy the divide between secular and religious learning. More remarkable than this candid admission is his observation that it is those belonging to the Tablighi Jama’at who have been rather more successful in mitigating the long-standing division between rival intellectual streams. This is remarkable because the Tablighi Jama’at is not an educational venture in any conventional sense but rather a worldwide proselytizing movement...The rank and file of the movement consists of those who are not formally trained ‘ulama but rather people with different levels of modern education...the Tablighi Jama’at has influential centres at...institutions of modern education, and graduates of these universities have served as preachers...” (Zaman 2012, p.164). More recently, the influence of the Salafi Indian preacher Dr Zakir Naik, and his 24-hour English-language Peace TV satellite television network, should also be recognised.
signal more than just a cosmetic facelift. Put differently, it could be asserted that both Urdu and English drag in their wake differing epistemologies and Weltanschauungen which unavoidably impinge upon their users. Nasir’s comments about rice and snow in 7.1.1 indicate that language functions as a repository of deeper cultural values reflecting even the climate and geography of the place of origin. In the case of Urdu – a long-standing language of high Islamic culture and a cognate of Arabic – the underlying cultural and cognitive assumptions could be said to reinforce the TJ ethos while the inverse might be asserted for contemporary English. The fear of cultural and cognitive contamination is thus probably an important contributory factor to the disdain of English expressed by some of the Old Guard. In his incisive analysis of the forces that underpin cultural globalisation, Berger puts it thus:

Every language carries a freight of values, of sensibilities, of approaches to reality, all of which insinuate themselves into the consciousness of those who speak it. It makes sense to assume that the attractiveness of English, especially in its American form, is due at least in part to its capacity to express the sensibilities of a dynamic, pluralistic, and rationally innovative world. This is even true of Evangelical Protestantism, which mostly expresses itself in languages other than English, but whose leaders and young people learn English in order to be in touch with the Evangelical centers in the United States. In doing so, they may get more than they bargained for. The road from the Christian Broadcasting Network to Oprah Winfrey is disturbingly straight. (Berger 2000 [1997], p.427)

While – as shown in 7.1.2 – the TJ hierarchy seem to have set in motion a process of gradual transition whereby English will eventually replace Urdu as the movement’s primary British lingua franca, it seems they have not yet engaged with the cultural and cognitive ramifications of such a switch. At present – from what I witnessed at the Dewsbury HQ in the summer of 2014 – the cultural and cognitive assumptions of South Asian Islam have simply been painted over with a veneer of English language. Whether this situation will change with the upward percolation through the TJ hierarchy of British-born, secular-educated, English-speaking leaders is a matter for debate. Culturally, certainly there seem to be signs that, with the advent of the Avant-Garde, British TJ – at the periphery more than the core – is being modified according to local contexts. Cognitively, though, the matter might be different. Both the movement’s anti-intellectual ethos coupled with its

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8 Mawlana Zakariyya’s comments in the Fadhail A’amal are interesting in this regard: “...every discourse carries the qualities and influencing traits of the speaker...Although as languages, both English and Persian are equal, they produce varying influences upon the readers due to the divergence in the beliefs and attitudes of the various authors” (Kaandhlawi 1997d, pp.56-57).
track record - as convincingly argued by Azmi (2000) - of ignoring, rather than engaging with, modernity seem to be forces which will inhibit an indigenisation of TJ into an epistemological framework of ‘Western’ knowledge of which the English language is but a symbol. Yet the fact that the Avant-Garde ordinarily speak English as their primary **lingua franca** while simultaneously being able to communicate with the Old Guard in Urdu is the key relevant point here: “I am convinced that the mix of sacred and secular is more like ‘Spanglish’ than like being bilingual. Words from both languages appear in the same sentence, sometimes modified in ways not native to either language” (Ammerman 2014, p.103). This indicates a deeper versatility in Avant-Garde consciousness substantiated through examining other markers of religious/secular identity.

### 11.1.2 Different strokes for different folks: the epistemological versatility of Avant-Garde consciousness

Dress as a visible symbol of identity can be interpreted as a window into the innermost chambers of the human soul: “...the costume which a man wears...is the sign, partly conscious and partly unconscious, that he accepts a certain view of the human self and its vocation...” (Pallis 2007 p.276). For Pallis, contemporary forms of dress “specific to modern Europe and America” constitute a visible manifestation of secular frames of thought and reference – “of mankind regarded as sufficing unto itself” (p.277). These contrast sharply with the traditional clothes of classical civilisations as exemplified, for our purposes, by the flowing robes and turbans so beloved to TJ activists. Yet the ability of contemporary TJ activists to inhabit, in a single day, both traditional and modern forms of clothing is indicative of a deeper ability to simultaneously inhabit within the realm of subjective consciousness both religious and secular frames of reference. Schutz’s concept of ‘relevance structures’ is germane here which Berger (2014, p.xii) uses to theorise what he considers the “prototypical cognitive balancing act of modernity”:

> For most religious believers faith and secularity are not mutually exclusive modes of attending to reality; it is not a matter of either/or, but rather of both/and. The ability to handle different discourses (to use Alfred Schutz’s term, different relevance structures) is an essential trait of a modern person. (Berger 2014, p.53)

A little later Berger (2014, p.54) points out that “...the secular discourse is always co-present with the religious one. The two discourses create pressures between them.” This recalls a key conceptual insight of critical realist ethnography: namely that the empirically accessible social phenomena produced by the generative mechanisms often co-exist in a tense dialectic and, as we

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9 This is in spite of the ‘intellectual cosmopolitanism’ discerned in figures such as Luqman (7.4.1).
saw in Porter’s study of hospital staff interaction (see 4.1.3), moderate and mitigate each other when variously activated from their dormant states. How is this to be applied here? If we accept the premise that modern Western and classical Islamic forms of clothing – both in their casual and formal permutations – represent distinct civilizational approaches to the human subject, then switching between them might cause an experience akin to ‘cognitive dissonance.’ This indeed seemed to be the case with Luqman (see 7.4.1), who loves ordinarily to dress in a white robe with matching turban. Throughout his three years at university he proudly dressed in this manner (“the turban is the crown of the believer”) but, when commencing his first job after graduation, was forced to make concessions:

Luqman: My work didn’t allow me to wear loose, baggy clothing because of the machinery...So hence I transformed into Clark Kent and I wore trousers [laughs] and a shirt and a tie and have done ever since.

Riyaz: And do you feel that you’ve lost something essential to yourself, your Muslim identity?

Luqman: Erm [long pause], it was a very difficult period you know...I didn’t understand then, which ties into other questions regarding knowledge and understanding...that I wouldn’t be performing a haram activity if I wore a shirt and pants and combed my hair. But we were ingrained to stay upon the sunnah in every way...and it’s only when I saw other fellow Tablighis who used to wear shirt and pants that I thought well, actually, I’m not committing a sin. But you do lose your identity, no matter what, you lose your identity. Nobody could tell if you were a Hindu or a Sikh, you lose your identity, because people do not know who you are.11

Unlike Luqman, many other respondents seemed to experience little or no tension exhibiting an ability to switch between multiple Schutzian ‘relevance structures’ with ease: after returning home from the office, they seamlessly change into their traditional Islamic attire before attending the mosque for their daily gasht. This attitude was best exemplified by Hanzalah whose detailed story we encountered in 9.2.1:

I’ve represented my firm in meetings all over the world. I go in a suit because I’m traveling on company business, so I don’t have an issue. The company’s very relaxed.

10 For more on the symbolic import of classical forms of Muslim dress see Schimmel (1994, pp.36-41).
11 Pieri (2015, p.139) observes in the context of London TJ: “Clothing becomes an external indicator of an individual’s religious zeal. It also acts as armor to protect that individual, serve as a reminder that they are Muslims, and that they should behave as Muslims at all times.”
I’m not too keen on wearing ties so they don’t have an issue with that whatsoever. But obviously, I can’t take my beard off and put it away for four or five days while I go on business.

Hanzalah’s comment about his beard tacitly acknowledges that the professional context of his workplace requires him to engage with the dominant ‘relevance structure’ of secularity during which period his religious identity becomes comparatively dormant. However, because both cognitive frames inhere in a single organism, some overlap is inevitable. The beard, having emerged out of the generative mechanism of spirituality during his intense intra-religious conversion experience, continues to impinge on the structurally differentiated public sphere of his workplace - despite Hanzalah’s conscious adaptation to the dominant frame of secularity. The same could be said about his commitment to offering the daily *salaat* on time which, he informed me, occasionally interferes with his managerial responsibilities. Conversely, while conducting fieldwork over five months in Masjid Ta-Ha, I was struck at how several Avant-Garde Tier 3 activists would contribute to the daily *mashwera* using corporate, target-driven terminologies imported from the secular setting of the workplace: “we need to administer our resources and manpower effectively to ensure all local houses are covered in *gasht*” / “I suggest we deploy a different strategy for the logging of our daily *mulaakats*.” Additionally, as a sign of Weberian bureaucratisation perhaps, local Tier 3 activists had drawn up a tick-box chart of individual acts of supererogatory worship which had been distributed to youngsters in a 10 days ‘Christmas *jama’at*’ to help structure their time:

12 Recall also Umar’s conversation with his boss in 1.1 here. Most of my respondents had dedicated prayer rooms at work where they were able to offer their daily *salaat* on time without much trouble. However, especially in winter due to the quick succession of prayer times, tension was sometimes experienced when a prayer time clashed with a meeting, for example. Inge’s (2017, pp.168-176) female respondents also at times experienced similar tensions relating both to dress and prayer as the generative mechanisms of secularity and spirituality vied for primacy in the public spheres of their workplaces.
Such interpenetration of spiritual and secular frames in ways amenable to empirical investigation indicates a deeper versatility within subjective consciousness; according to Berger’s (2014, p.53) latest theorising the essential mistake of both secularisation and sacralisation theorists has been to “over-estimate the coherence of human consciousness. In the experience of most individuals, secularity and religion are not mutually contradictory. Rather, they co-exist, each pertaining to a specific form of attention to reality.” There is another way this might be demonstrated. Many devout Muslims brush their teeth with a herbal tooth-stick known as *miswaak* - a practice which derives from the Prophet Muhammad who strongly encouraged oral hygiene. Consequently, use of the *miswaak* was sanctified as a staple of Muslim religiosity (Al Sadhan and Almas 1999) and, along with the beard and robe, its adoption becomes an important symbol of conversion to TJ. Yet modernity ushered in a secular alternative: the toothbrush and toothpaste. While some ulema inveighed against the new practice, others argued it achieved the objective of *miswaak* – namely, oral hygiene – more efficiently. Be that as it may, the toothbrush and toothpaste has de facto replaced the *miswaak* for many contemporary Muslims; yet for those still concerned with maintaining the *miswaak* as an explicit expression of the Prophet’s *sunnah* (like the members of my *jama'at* to Bulgaria), it is usually used *in conjunction with* rather than instead of the toothbrush and toothpaste. The argument can be summed up succinctly: the jostling of a *miswaak* and toothbrush/toothpaste in a single toiletry bag (as I saw regularly in Bulgaria and other *khuruj* outings) is an apposite visual representation of the co-existence of religious and secular discourses most recently theorised by Berger.

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13 To illustrate, in the *Fadhail-e-A’amal*, both medical and spiritual benefits are attributed to the *miswaak*: “It is said in a hadith that the salaat offered after doing miswaak is seventy times superior to the salaat without miswaak. In another hadith, use of the miswaak has been enjoined very strongly, and the following benefits are attributed to it:-

“It cleanses and sweetens the mouth and checks its bad smell.”

“It is a cause of Allah’s pleasure and a blow to the Devil.”

“Allah and his angels love the person doing miswaak.”

“It strengthens the gums and improves eye-sight.”

“It is a purge against bile and phlegm.”

To crown it all, “It is a Sunnah i.e. the practice of our beloved Prophet (Sallallaho alaihe wasallam).” (Kaandhlawi 1997c, pp.14-15)

14 This was probably exacerbated by the antagonistic conditions of colonialism and the fact that early toothbrushes introduced into Europe from China used swine bristles; see [http://www.colgate.com/en/us/oc/oral-health/basics/brushing-and-flossing/article/history-of-toothbrushes-and-toothpastes](http://www.colgate.com/en/us/oc/oral-health/basics/brushing-and-flossing/article/history-of-toothbrushes-and-toothpastes) (accessed 13/08/2016). Other innovations or new technologies initially resisted by the ulema include the printing press and coffee – see Juma (2016). According to Robinson (1993, pp.233-234): “…there would have been the doubt which many pious Muslims would have felt about associating with *kufr*, with the products of non-Islamic civilization. Such doubts never lasted for long in the case of seriously useful items like military technology, or significant sources of pleasure like tobacco, but it has been a feeling which has dogged all initial Muslim responses to new things from the West from clocks to electric light.”
There is another sense in which the religious and secular could be said to mutually inhabit subjective consciousness. Classical Sufi doctrine envisions the human soul as existing in one of three states: the *nafs-ul-ammarah* [commanding self], *nafs-ul-lawwamah* [reproachful self] or the *nafs-ul-mutmainnah* [peaceful self]. The first, in the words of the Qur’an, “commands to evil” and may be said to emerge from the generative mechanism of secularity in so far as it reflects, in human behaviour and consciousness, a lack of the divine. The last, by contrast, represents the soul of the saint who, having traversed the arduous path of self-mortification, pines for reunion with God – as such, it may be said to emerge from the generative mechanism of spirituality. Between these polarities are the souls of the great masses of humanity containing both light and darkness: “it has been said that only the saint has the right to say ‘I’; the rest of us would do better to confess ‘My name is legion’” (Gai Eaton 1994, p.73). Winter (1995, pp.xxviii-xxix), reflecting somewhat the critical realist approach to generative mechanisms, puts it thus: “These three conditions of the soul are not to be thought of as distinct stages, but rather as different aspects or potentials within the soul, which are all present simultaneously, some being latent and others active.”

In applying this to my respondents’ experiences, it is worth observing that the very term ‘consciousness’ emerges out of the generative mechanism of secularity while its religious counterpart – the ‘soul’ – emerges out of the generative mechanism of spirituality (Burkeman 2015; Dennett 1991). While carefully maintaining the stance of methodological agnosticism on which this thesis is premised (and simultaneously recalling the importance of reflexivity captured in Chapter 3), it is nevertheless possible to acknowledge that the same phenomena might be perceived

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15 The nomenclature derives from the Qur’an: Q.12.53, Q.75.2 and Q.89.27 respectively. For more, see any classical manual on Sufism such as Khan (2005). More esoteric treatises, such as al-Shabrawi (1997), discern several additional finely nuanced states of soul.

16 Grotius’ principle – *etsi Deus non daretur* – is relevant here which, when transposed to the realm of the individual, may be conceived thus: “…the sinner has in effect behaved as though God did not exist and as though he were free to act exactly as he pleased, that is to say as a little god in his own right” (Gai Eaton 1994, p.72).

17 The reference is to an incident in the New Testament in which Jesus, while performing an exorcism, discovered the possessed man was inhabited by a multitude of spirits: “Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘My name is Legion; for we are many’ (Mark 5:9).

18 Picking up from Footnote 19 in 9.2.1, I maintain that it is possible to posit the existence of a non-empirical theomorphic human essence, rooted in the Muslim concept of the *fitra*, which consciously or unconsciously
differently depending on the viewer’s standpoint. The detailed narratives of Hanzalah, Yahya and Umar – while explicated in 9.2 primarily in terms of Schutz’s phenomenology of consciousness – may then alternatively be conceived in Sufi terms as the tugging of binary states of being for primacy in the human soul. From this perspective, the intensity of the intra-religious conversion experience, predicated upon the concurrent social processes of desocialisation and resocialisation, represents a brief yet highly-charged ‘alternation’\(^{19}\) from the *nafs-ul-ammarah* to the *nafs-ul-mutmainnah*. Yet, as we further saw in 10.2, the even keel of the *nafs-ul-lawwamah* tends to surface as the primary operative mode of the post-liminal TJ ritual subject.

11.1.3 Conclusion: the mélange of cultural and epistemological indigenisation

As a historical reformist paradigm, the Deoband movement was forged in the crucible of anti-colonialist sentiment and several scholars have identified the preservation of Islamic identity as integral to the vision of its founders (Geaves 1996; Metcalf 1982; Robinson 2000). As with language then, it might be asserted that particular modes of dress (and, indeed, teeth-brushing!) are freighted with cultural and cognitive assumptions from which they cannot be detached; Pallis (2007, p.271) recounts how the deep-rooted reforms of Tsar Peter I of Russia and the post-1864 modernisation of Japan were both initiated through replacing centuries-old forms of indigenous clothing with imported European styles. The prototypical case of a forced and accelerated modernisation campaign, however, remains the Kemalist regime in Turkey:

...the fez...symbolized for modernists the old belief and superstitions of the traditionalists. It was for this reason that the Hat Law was passed in 1925, prohibiting the fez and restricting the use of the veil. For the reformists, the new Turk not only had to think like Europeans but look like them too. Indeed, the Hat Law signified, more than

impinges upon human experience. From the perspective of secular sociology, this might be conceptualised in terms of George Herbert Mead’s well-known distinction between the ‘I and the Me,’ or alternatively articulated thus: “Consciousness precedes socialization. What is more, it can never be *totally* socialized – if nothing else, the ongoing consciousness of one’s own bodily processes [including, for males, beard growth – see 11.2.3.2 below] ensures this. Socialization, then, is always partial. A *part* of consciousness is shaped by socialization into the form that becomes the individual’s socially recognizable identity. As in all products of internalization, there is a dialectical tension between identity as socially (objectively) assigned and identity as subjectively appropriated...” (Berger 1967, p.83). Switching to the ‘relevance structure’ of Islamic theology would conceptualise the matter differently: “Am I not your Lord?” [Q.7.172]...We have all pledged our fealty to the Real, when He was manifest to us all, *in illo tempore*. The memory of that elemental cry is the foundation of the mystery of consciousness” (Murad 2012, p.72; see also Gai Eaton (1994, p.97) for more on Islam’s primordial ‘Day of the Covenant’). While such considerations would be central to any attempt to develop what might be termed an ‘anthropological theology’ of Islam (Martin 2001), they regrettably lie beyond the purview of this thesis.

\(^{19}\) It will be recalled that this term is used in the technical sense to refer to “The effects upon an individual’s identity as a result of his or her changing meaning systems” (Swatos Jr. 1998).
any other legislation, that secularization had to penetrate all aspects of life. (Turner 1974, p.168)

In this, Deoband could be said to have represented a cultural resistance movement of sorts; TJ received its impetus from this historical matrix and, transposed to the diaspora, found the old mechanisms functioned effectively to preserve the Islamic identity of the Old Guard in an alien socio-cultural milieu. Yet their offspring,²⁰ are developing novel expressions of hybridised identity grounded in a pragmatic symbiosis of social context and religious impulse: it is now Coca-Cola that is drunk in three sips and pizza that is consumed in strict accordance with the sunnah during a khuruj outing. While this was captured in 7.4, we might add here that the mutual fecundity of both religious and secular frames of reference in contemporary TJ consciousness is not just a function of its modernity, but also a signal of its ongoing indigenisation in Britain. This was highlighted to some extent – and termed “the worldly unworldliness of TJ” – by Pieri (2015) in his study of the regional adaptations undertaken by London (Old Guard) TJ leaders provoked by the exigencies of their ‘mega-mosque’ proposal. But the changes with the Avant-Garde, as we have seen, are far more telling. Consequently, and mirroring somewhat on the cultural level Berger’s construction of the porous boundary between the religious and secular, the emergence of this new generation of British Muslims might facilitate – despite the very real mitigating impact of xenophobic Islamophobia (Allen 2015; Awan 2014; Hussain and Bagguley 2012) – a transition from what Alba has termed a ‘bright’ to a ‘blurred’ boundary:

The counterpoint to a bright boundary is one that is or can become blurred in the sense that, for some set of individuals (generally members of the ethnic minority), location with respect to the boundary is indeterminate or ambiguous. This could mean that individuals are seen as simultaneously members of the groups on both sides of the boundary or that sometimes they appear to be members of one and at other times members of the other. Under these circumstances, assimilation may be eased insofar as the individuals undergoing it do not sense a rupture between participation in mainstream institutions and familiar social and cultural practices and identities; and they are not forced to choose between the mainstream and their group of origin. Assimilation of this type involves intermediate, or hyphenated stages, that allow individuals to feel simultaneously as members of an ethnic minority and of the mainstream. (Alba 2005, p.25)

²⁰ In this regard, even the impromptu references to such cultural symbols as The Full Monty (see Yahya in 7.2.1) or Clark Kent (see Luqman above) in their everyday speech is telling.
11.2 Islamic Revivalism and Europe’s Secular ‘Sacred Canopy’

11.2.1 Islamic Revival and secularisation theory

Having explored the versatility of Avant-Garde consciousness, I now examine the implications of an active and conscious exercise of faith, deriving usually from a prior intra-religious conversion experience, for the taken-for-granted structures of secularity that comprise contemporary European social reality. In doing so, I first juxtapose, very briefly, a history of the ‘secularisation thesis’ with a broad scholarly consensus on what has been termed the ‘Islamic Revival.’

From its very inception, sociology has been a godless discipline.21 Its founding fathers, inspired by a Comtean positivism that sought to apply the methodological detachment of the natural sciences to the study of human society, were children of the Enlightenment (Stark and Finke 2000). While religion figured prominently in the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, they lived at a time when its decline seemed inevitable. Secularisation theory was thus wedded umbilically to the conceptual apparatus of the emerging discipline and has consistently exercised the minds of subsequent theorists. In its barest outline, the thesis argues that religious decline is the inevitable consequence of modernisation (Bruce 2001, 2011). Religion thrived in pre-industrial, agrarian settings in which the functions of the state were bound up with ecclesiastical authority and the mysteries of the cosmos could only be explained with reference to the supernatural. The cumulative impact of a post-Enlightenment social system rooted in principles of industrialisation, bureaucratisation, urbanisation, rationality and capitalism, however, has been to usher in what Weber termed the “disenchantment of the world” (Gerth and Mills 1946, pp.51-52).

Yet recent decades have seen the adequacy and unilinearity of the thesis brought forcefully into question (Hammond 1985b; Stark 2000). In 1994, Casanova (1994, p.11) provocatively asked “Who still believes in the myth of secularization?” before asserting that a Kuhnian revolution of paradigms was in motion in which the old thesis, having been thoroughly discredited, was in the process of being supplanted. While Western Europe – the crucible in which the theory was first forged – remains the key geographical arena where it remains plausible, recent scholarship has pointed out that when juxtaposed to the enduring religious verve of North America, for example, or the religious vitality of developing countries that have engaged with modernising processes without jettisoning

21 This view reflects the rise of the discipline in essentially Occidental terms – as succinctly enunciated, for instance, by Wilson (1985) – and neglects pre-Comtean, non-Occidental developments. With regard to the latter, Sutton and Vertigans’ (2005, p.3) comments may be taken as instructive: “Undoubtedly the significance of Ibn Khaldun’s fourteenth-century study of changing Arabian civilizations and the impact upon social behaviour has been neglected within Western accounts of sociology’s heritage...” See also Dhaouadi (1990); Khaldun (2015 [1967]); Spickard (2001).
faith, Europe becomes transfigured into the great global anomaly (Berger 1999a; Berger et al. 2008; Davie 2002; Finke 1992; Martin 1990). Initially signified by the 1979 Iranian Revolution, a broad scholarly consensus further posits a global reawakening of Islamic faith and identity among a geographically diverse spectrum of Muslim societies. This phenomenon is generally subsumed under the umbrella terms of ‘Islamic Revival’ or ‘Islamic Resurgence’ and is described by Samuel Huntington thus:

This Islamic Resurgence in its extent and profundity...is a broad intellectual, cultural, social, and political movement prevalent throughout the Islamic world...it refers to an extremely important historical event affecting one-fifth or more of humanity, that is at least as significant as the American Revolution, French Revolution, or Russian Revolution...and...is similar to and comparable to the Protestant Reformation in Western society... (Huntington 1996, p.109)

The empirical data presented throughout this thesis has permitted a micro-level detailing of the way this Revival has played out in the lives of contemporary British TJ activists. Utilising insights from Peter Berger’s latest theorising, we have also seen how their passionate Islamic faith co-exists symbiotically with both epistemological and cultural dimensions of life in post-Christian Britain (Moreton 2010). I now develop this theoretical architecture to examine more closely the implications of Islamic Revival for secularisation theory in Europe.

11.2.2 Theodicy and the weaving of a sacred canopy of secularity

Berger’s (2014) proposals about the intertwining of the sacred and the secular may be extended, as I argue here, to sacralise the secular when the ‘secular discourse’ religious believers are obliged to navigate itself assumes a ‘sacred’ character. Hammond (1985, pp.4-5) decouples the concept of the sacred from religion by analogising the distinction between love and marriage: “Love...is routinely understood as a quality that may be reflected in the institution of marriage and child-production, but it may also be independent therefrom.” This distinction is important when considering the ways in which the sacred, when unshackled from its institutional anchors by processes of modernisation, might be refracted into the interstices of everyday life in often unexpected ways (Ammerman 2007). Developing further Hammond’s distinction, Knott (2013) analytically unpicks the popular conflation...
of religion with the sacred by theorising the debate around same-sex marriages. She proposes the concept of the ‘secular sacred’ to demonstrate the extent to which secularity has its own sacred cows: a configuration of inviolable values that provide non-negotiable touchstones and assume transcendent significance for their purveyors. Woodhead (2009) too, in her nuanced consideration of the controversy provoked by the niqab in contemporary Europe, cogently argues for the unfolding of a ‘sacred narrative’ of European secularism against which public manifestations of religion, such as the niqab, militate - often provoking visceral reactions. Religion, then, is not the only generator of Berger’s Sacred Canopy. Secularity too weaves webs of meaning within which contemporary life is enmeshed and which, taken together, (attempt to) serve the important social function of providing a “shield against terror” and anomy.

It is useful to consider here Weber’s engagement with the question of theodicy which, in its broadest terms, can be construed simply as the attempt to make sense of existence. Though rightfully belonging to the discipline of theology, Weber’s preoccupation perennially fixed upon it the gaze of the sociologist of religion; indeed, Berger (1967) draws extensively on Weber for his arguments. In developing his theodicies of suffering and good fortune, Weber posited the essential role of religion as being to reconcile the discrepancy between an idealised world-view and the actual experience of lived reality (Gerth and Mills 1946, pp.270-280). Put differently, the efficacy of religion lies in its ability to explain why good people suffer and evil ones prosper; in this, theodicy appears the diametric inverse of anomy. Yet Campbell, in his careful attempt to trace the contours of a ‘New Age theodicy,’ pertinently observes:

Now there has been a tendency historically, in keeping with the origin of the word, to restrict the term ‘theodicy’ to religious systems of meaning, and even then to apply it simply to those attempts to provide an answer to the problem of reconciling the existence of evil with an omnipotent and good god. However, there seems to be no very good reason for restricting the usage of the term in this way since the need to have answers to the fundamental questions of existence would appear to be a cultural universal, as apparent among the non-religious as among the religious, while among the latter it is as apparent among non-theists as among theists. It is also important to recognize that theodical systems do not simply deal with issues of justice or morality – even though this may be their focus – but necessarily also deal with meaning-puzzles more generally. (Campbell 2001, p.75)

23 For more on the extent to which a secular nomos is able to achieve this, see Berger (1967, pp.124-125).
Put differently, just as Hammond proposed that the concept of the sacred should be decoupled from religion, Campbell proposes that the concept of theodicy may alternatively be anchored in the secular. This is significant when triangulated with Knott’s concept of the ‘secular sacred’: secular theodicies, developed *etsi Deus non dare tur*, still need to assuage the very real and apparently congenital “human craving for meaning that appears to have the force of instinct” (Berger 1967, p.22). Campbell goes on to suggest that any meaningful theodicy must simultaneously confront three dimensions of human experience: the cognitive, emotional and moral. The role of the first is to explain the brute fact of existence; in classical theodicies it therefore developed unsurprisingly in relation to a creation myth. The second is designed to channel emotional responses to the content of the first along prefigured, legitimated routes. The last, invoking the most common usage of the term, vindicates pain and suffering by situating it within a cosmic framework of meaning. Even - or perhaps especially - “in the context of the largely non-theistic (if not actually atheistic) cultures of modernity” (Campbell 2001, p.76), secular theodicies must provide adequate responses to each of these perennial and endemic features of the human condition if they are to sustain a credible canopy of meaning over the tempestuous activities of disenchanted contemporary hominids (Gray 2002).

It is worth recalling for a moment here the tripartite model of social reality that constitutes the theoretical bedrock of *The Social Construction of Reality*: "*Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product*" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.79). In *The Sacred Canopy*, Berger developed this to argue that, by projecting a humanly constructed nomos from subjective consciousness into the cosmos, the key function of religion is to keep the omnipresent forces of chaos and anomy at bay by enveloping human life within a precarious yet comforting web of meanings – a theodicy. The same point can alternatively be expressed in terms of the critical realist distinction between epistemological relativism and ontological realism outlined in 4.1: according to the logic of *The Sacred Canopy*, the former becomes objectivated as the latter as part of the process of nomic world-construction; put differently, our subjective perspectives bleed into the very fabric of the universe. This results in ‘alienation’ when the socialised actor is unable to distinguish, within the realm of consciousness, between world-as-is and world-as-socially-construed. While Berger upholds that, throughout the bulk of human history, religion has been the vehicle both of nomos-generation and alienation par excellence (probably due to its intrinsic theodical capacity), he simultaneously acknowledges that socially objectivated nomoi do not necessarily have to be religious in character: “Particularly in modern times there have been thoroughly secular attempts at cosmization, among which modern science is by far the most important” (Berger 1967, p.27). While it is beyond the remit of my concerns here to elaborate the ways in which a thoroughly secular theodicy might be
said to operate in contemporary consciousness, the key point I wish to assert is that the mechanisms through which a secular ‘sacred canopy’ is externalised and objectivated as taken-for-granted social facticity then internalised into subjective consciousness operate in exactly the same way as they did for their religious forbears. Put differently, irrespective of the actual content of the nomos, the processes through which it is given social legitimation, and through which the potential of alienation is actualised, remain entirely unchanged. As a result, though the parameters and definitions of what constitutes ‘cognitive deviance’ may shift, its sociological impact remains identical.

This is significant when considering the findings of this thesis. The lived experiences of my respondents, as recounted in previous chapters, unfolded under a predominantly secular sacred canopy - in which their secondary socialisations took place - deriving its existential moorings from a theodicy that operates in significant domains etsi Deus non daretur. The pervasiveness of the

24 Nevertheless, I will offer a few brief thoughts. On the cognitive level, one would have to acknowledge (with Berger) the central role played by modern science. For instance, note the quasi-religious fervour of Dawkins (1986, p.6) who maintains that it was only the advent of Darwin that made it possible to become an “intelligently fulfilled atheist”: “Why are people? Intelligent life on a planet comes of age when it first works out the reason for its own existence. If superior creatures from space ever visit earth, the first question they will ask, in order to assess the level of our civilization, is: ‘Have they discovered evolution yet?’ Living organisms had existed on earth, without ever knowing why, for over three thousand million years before the truth finally dawned on one of them. His name was Charles Darwin. To be fair, others had had inklings of the truth, but it was Darwin who first put together a coherent and tenable account of why we exist. Darwin made it possible for us to give a sensible answer to the curious child whose question heads this chapter. We no longer have to resort to superstition when faced with the deep problems: Is there a meaning to life? What are we for? What is man? After posing the last of these questions, the eminent zoologist G. G. Simpson put it thus: ‘The point I want to make now is that all attempts to answer that question before 1859 are worthless and that we will be better off if we ignore them completely’” (Dawkins 2006 [1976], p.1). On the emotional and moral levels, it appears that the operative modalities of secular theodicy are still a work in progress. The problems they are obliged to confront though are intimately bound up with the unleashing of the forces of chaos and anomy that Berger’s Sacred Canopy was designed to keep at bay. Here the anguished cries of Nietzsche’s (1974 [1882], p.181) madman appear to still reverberate in the amphitheatre of contemporary consciousness: “The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. ‘Whither is God?’ he cried; ‘I will tell you. We have killed him - you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space...? God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers?’”

25 It must be stressed that these considerations operate at purely a conceptual level; at the level of lived experience, it would be well to recall the point made in 4.2.2 that residual faith, or new spirituality, continue to persist in Britain as well as Europe. The taken-for-granted nature of the secular nomos is termed ‘The New Norm’ by Woodhead (2016, p.259): “The ‘norm’, the unmarked, that which just ‘is’, does not have to justify itself in the same way that minority positions do. Of course, no set of commitments can ever fully occupy this position in plural societies, but ‘no religion’ is now closer to it than anything else, and benefits accordingly. When everyone used to have a Christian funeral, for example, that was just what you did when someone died; you did not have to choose, you did not even have to think about it. When non-religious funerals started to occur they were regarded as odd and deviant; people used to feel uncomfortable and to mock. These days they are the new normal...it
assumptions which uphold this canopy derives from a series of well-developed plausibility structures deeply-rooted in societal infrastructures. As such, contemporary Europe might be said to represent – despite the persistence of ‘vicarious religion’ (Davie 2000) or the emergence of new types of spiritual experimentation (Woodhead and Heelas 2005) – the inverse of its religious forbear. The historical processes that led to this situation have been amply chronicled by Casanova (1994, p.11-39) who observes: “If before, it was the religious realm which appeared to be the all-encompassing reality within which the secular realm found its proper place, now the secular sphere [is] the all-encompassing reality, to which the religious sphere will have to adapt” (p.15). In such a scenario, any set of committed religious believers find themselves in the unenviable position of cognitive minorities:

“By a cognitive minority I mean a group of people whose view of the world differs significantly from the one generally taken for granted in their society...the plausibility of ‘knowledge’ that is not socially shared, that is challenged by our fellow men, is imperilled, not just in our dealings with others, but much more importantly in our own minds. The status of a cognitive minority is thus invariably an uncomfortable one...” (Berger 1971, pp.18-19).

The mechanisms through which commitment to an alternate – or ‘deviant’ – view of reality can be maintained in the midst of pervasive psycho-social disconfirmation were explored in 10.2. Here, picking up from my analysis of Yahya’s narrative in 9.2.2, I instead focus on the debunking capacity of such deviance in exposing the essentially contingent and precarious nature of the secular nomos is religious funeral which have to be justified; people who choose them worry about ‘imposing’ them on non-religious people and people of other faiths. Similarly, many aspects of a non-religious worldview, not just its ethics, have now become taken-for-granted in the way Christian teaching used to be. Thus the idea of ‘creation’ has been supplanted by the view that reality is brought into being by immanent cosmic processes and humans by naturalistic evolutionary ones—views which simply need not be defended these days. Ritualy, there has been an incredibly swift normalisation of new rites like school proms...” (see also Moreton 2010). Nevertheless, residual Christianity as well as the introduction of new types of religion continue to inform contemporary culture: “Britain is no longer the ‘Christian country’ Mr Cameron and the Daily Mail imagine, but neither is it ‘no religion’. It exists somewhere in-between – between Christian, multi-faith and ‘none’” (p.260).

Grace Davie (2015, p.63) seems to agree with this assessment: “…it must be argued, surely, that the religiously active of whatever Christian denomination have more in common with each other than any of them do with the majority of the population – a statement that should perhaps be extended to the other faith-populations as well. Here, in short, are the individuals in British society who take faith seriously.” See also Matthew Fforde’s (2009, p.vi) Catholic critique of contemporary British culture which propelled his migration to Rome: “I found myself in the unenviable position of belonging, to employ the phrase of P.L. Berger, to a ‘cognitive minority’; it was as though I was seeing ghosts or tilting at windmills.” Again, it must be emphasised here that my appellation of ‘cognitive minorities’ applies only to active and committed religious believers - such as Tier 3 TJ activists or Inge’s (2017) and Beekers’ (2014) Muslim and Christian respondents - and not to the much larger demographic of “fuzzy” ambivalents identified both by Woodhead (2016) and Voas (2009).
that, as with any nomos, is usually taken entirely for granted by those nurtured under its sheltering canopy.

11.2.3 Debunking the debunkers: Islamic Revival in secular Europe\(^{27}\)

11.2.3.1 Cognitive deviants and strategies of rehabilitation and nihilation

Cognitive deviants, by virtue of the fact they exist intrinsically as a numerical minority lacking widespread social support, are obliged to confront an ever-present threat of cognitive liquidation and assimilation into the taken-for-granted structures of predefinition that constitute the collective Weltanschauung. As such, their existence is inherently precarious. This situation only changes with two factors. First, the society in which they live must permit the existence of individuals who dissent from the normative and cognitive presuppositions of the established status quo. Here the institutionalisation of religious freedom in modern democracies is crucial as it insures basic, inalienable rights that minority religions rely upon for survival. Secondly, the cognitive deviant must be able to establish a durable social base, with like-minded deviants, in which the machinery of plausibility structure generation is activated so as to maintain as credible to subjective consciousness the particular configurations of reality posited by the group. Particularly through the mechanisms outlined in Chapter 10, TJ is able to achieve this in contemporary Britain through the ensemble of activities it habitually conducts in mosques. As such, its perspectives on reality receive essential social support and become substantiated as a realistic mode of human living for those exposed and predisposed to them.

In The Social Construction of Reality, Berger and Luckmann develop these ideas with reference to the prototypical cases of the cripple, the bastard and the leper who, through congenital defect and/or social stigma, are subject to processes of socialisation that impress upon them their own inferiority. Successful socialisation would see the stigmatised individual accept as existentially proper, and ultimately meaningful, their own disenfranchised status. Yet this is not the only possibility:

> The situation begins to change when there is a leper colony sufficiently large and durable to serve as a plausibility structure for counter-definitions of reality – and of the fate of being a leper. To be a leper...may now be known as the special mark of divine election...As the individual accords a privileged status within his consciousness to the colony’s definitions of reality and of himself, a rupture occurs...He acts the leper, he is a son of a god...when this cleavage becomes known to the non-leprous community, it is

\(^{27}\) My inspiration for this section derives from the chapter ‘The Perspective of Sociology: Relativizing the Relativizers’ in Berger (1971).
not difficult to see that the community’s reality too will be affected by this change. (pp.186-187)

Premised upon Schutz’s phenomenology of consciousness, it is here that the debunking capacity of the deviant begins to manifest itself: cognitive deviancy when translated into social deviancy ineluctably impacts the status quo - “On a more fundamental level, the deviant’s conduct challenges the societal reality as such, putting in question its taken-for-granted cognitive…and normative…operating procedures” (p.131). As such it may be profoundly disconcerting. Consequently, those responsible for maintaining the integrity of the symbolic universe in question resort usually to one of two procedures: ‘therapy’ or ‘nihilation.’ The former “entails the application of conceptual machinery to ensure that the actual or potential deviants stay within the institutionalized definitions of reality” (p. 130). The latter seeks to liquidate, either physically or conceptually, the threat represented by the counter-definition of reality. Most significantly: “The nihilating application of the conceptual machinery is most often used with individuals or groups foreign to the society in question and thus ineligible for therapy” (p. 132). These concepts provide a framework in which the contemporary Muslim presence in Europe may be considered.

In doing so it is crucial, for several reasons, to locate the present communities of Muslims in secular Europe within antecedent, and ongoing, processes of immigration. First, as pointed out in 4.3, the primary (and a range of secondary) socialisations of migrants take place in a very different socio-cultural ambience to their newly adopted host country. As a result, upon arrival, they immediately transition into the position of cognitive minorities should they wish, as many do, to retain allegiance to their pre-immigration definitions of reality. Second, as an inescapable reminder of their cultural origins, migrant cognitive minorities tend also to be ethnic minorities. This is critical when considering the ‘nihilation’ strategies of the host society as the boundaries between Islamophobia and xenophobia, for example, often become blurred.28 Thirdly, specifically in relation to Islam, there is a historical precedent of antagonism between Christian Europe and various factions of Islamdom represented, most emblematically, by the Battle of Tours (732), the Crusades (1095-1291), the Reconquista (711-1492) and the Ottoman Siege of Vienna (1529); (Wheatcroft 2004). Though, as we have seen, the material of Europe’s sacred canopy has subsequently been supplant by secular

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28 For instance: “Assimilation of an ethnic minority is not the same issue as that concerning a religious minority. A religious minority may refuse assimilation not merely to protect their language, dress code and customs of another place, but because participants feel that they have a duty to an all-powerful Deity to protect moral and ethical codes given through revelation. In addition, the ‘gaze’ that is directed at Muslims has a history that has nothing to do with ethnicity. The problems experienced by the Liverpool Muslims in the nineteenth century with the attacks on property and persons did not occur because of skin colour, class, competition for jobs or unfamiliar cultural practices. This was a discrimination against Islam that was whipped up by patriotic fervour and a perception that Muslims were the enemy” (Geaves 2010, p.309).
fabric, the memory of these conflicts might still be said, either consciously or unconsciously, to inform contemporary attitudes.\(^{29}\) Fourthly, and somewhat related to the third, many European Muslims hail from countries which had been subjected to colonisation by European nation-states in the recent past; as a result, their (or their parents'/grandparents') initial encounter with European civilisation may well have been negative as a conquering imperial force.\(^{30}\) Lastly, current conflicts in countries of origin coupled with a sense of allegiance to the broader ummah affect the political dispositions of many diaspora Muslims, especially in relation to American foreign policy, occasionally resulting in high-profile terrorist atrocities (Bruce 2011, p.206; Geaves 2010, pp.303-304). These have contributed to an aura of suspicion leading some to assert that European Muslims now constitute a securitised ‘suspect community’ akin to the Irish during the height of the British government’s conflict with the IRA (Abbas and Awan 2015; Choudhury and Fenwick 2011; Hussain and Bagguley 2012; Pantazis and Pemberton 2009; Ragazzi 2016). This complex of factors coalesces to determine the trajectories along which efforts to rehabilitate the Muslim deviant into or nihilate her from the Durkheimian facticity of the dominant status quo proceed. While it is beyond the purview of my concerns here to elaborate specific modalities of operation, I would submit that the classical sociological studies of Goffman (1963), Becker (1963) and Cohen (2011 [1972]) all offer considerable analytical purchase in this regard.

11.2.3.2 Structure, agency and the conflation of public and private spheres

According to Dobbelaere (1985, 2000), secularisation operates simultaneously on three levels – the societal or macro-level, the organisational or meso-level and the individual or micro-level – to diminish the significance of religion socially, institutionally and within the realm of individual consciousness. While indigenous processes of secularisation within Europe have transformed the experience of lived reality into a largely ‘disenchanted’ one that operates etsi Deus non daretur, the ongoing influx of immigrant groups from various non-European locales – many of whose experiences of primary socialisation emerged from the generative mechanism of spirituality – has had some influence in reconfiguring the religious landscape of the continent:

\(^{29}\) For instance, Muhammad Asad (2004 [1952], p.6) employs the rationale of psychoanalysis to assert that antipathy for Islam was incubated during the childhood of European civilisation – its powerful, emotive experience of collective ‘primary socialisation’ – as a result of which it remains inexorably seared in its adult psyche: “The Crusades were the strongest collective impression on a civilization that had just begun to be conscious of itself. Historically speaking, they represented Europe’s earliest – and entirely successful – attempt to view itself under the aspect of cultural unity...The traumatic experience of the Crusades gave Europe its cultural awareness and its unity; but this same experience was destined henceforth also to provide the false colour in which Islam was to appear to Western eyes.” See also the chapters ‘Muhammad the Enemy’ in Armstrong (2001 [1991]) and ‘Islam and Europe’ in Gai Eaton (1994). For a more optimistic appraisal of the possibilities of mutual convergence, see Bulliet (2004) or Küng (2007).

\(^{30}\) According to Woodhead (2002, p.6): “In 1800 Western nations controlled 35 per cent of the world’s land surface; by 1914 they were in charge of 84 per cent.”
Indeed, one of the hallmarks of Britain in the year 2000 is the recent growth of ethnic diversity, largely through immigration, and the rise of a multi-faith society in which Christianity has been joined by Islam, Hinduism and the Sikh religion, amongst others. However, what has been noticeable to all observers is that the strength of attachment to other religions in Britain has not, in the main, suffered the collapse that has afflicted the bulk of the Christian churches. In the black and Asian communities of Britain, non-Christian religions are in general thriving. Moreover, one of the few sections in our society where Christian churches are thriving is in the predominantly black communities. (Brown 2001, p.2)

However, for Steve Bruce – who I think could rightly be called a ‘cognitive minority’ now in terms of his dogged defence of what he prefers to call the ‘secularisation paradigm’ (2001, 2011) – non-Christian religion “is not yet central to the argument about the secularity or otherwise of Britain” for four reasons. First, he says, these religions are still numerically quite small. Secondly, they are bound up largely with ethnic identities and therefore hold only minimal appeal for the indigenous population. Thirdly, through their recent immigration, the minority religions have been immune to the corrosive effects of secularisation that have been operative in Britain for some centuries. And lastly, Bruce asserts that the offspring of migrants will probably secularise over time (Bruce 2002, pp.243-244). Elsewhere, Bruce asserts that cultural transition and cultural defence – phenomena that are particularly germane to the experiences of migrant groups – function to retard the efficacy of secularisation where “religion finds or retains work to do other than relating individuals to the supernatural” (Bruce 2011, p.49).

While each of these assertions merits careful analysis, it appears Bruce underplays a factor that has become increasingly prominent in recent decades: the impact of immigration in thrusting religion back into mainstream public consciousness. This creates a paradox – highlighted in the subtitle of Grace Davie’s (2015) recent book – in which while general indices of religious activity continue to show decline, public debate about religion has conversely mushroomed. Islam has played a key role here: from one perspective privatised Islam is simply an oxymoron. Any number of issues from the Rushdie affair to l’affaire du foulard (and its more recent ‘burkini’ permutation) or the commitment of my respondents to offering their daily salaat on time at their workplaces can be cited to illustrate

31 In a more recent publication, Bruce (2011, p.210, 217) does acknowledge that: “It is not just Islamophobia (though there is plenty of that) that makes the presence of Muslim minorities potentially awkward...Non-Christian migrants and their offspring potentially challenge the secular accommodation because they are often unusually religious...That some scholars now talk of a post-secular Europe is largely a result of the migration of non-Christians making religion newsworthy again.”
In their co-authored analysis of the underlying causes for the palpably different religious trajectories of Europe and America, Berger, Davie and Fokas point out:

“It is for this reason that the presence of some, if not all, religious minorities becomes so problematic for many Europeans. Simply by being there, they bring to the attention of Europeans a series of unresolved issues which – for decades, if not centuries – have been placed in the realm of the private. To the consternation of many, these are back in the public sphere. (Berger et al. 2008, pp.104-105)

At this point, it is useful to bring into conversation the relationship between structure and agency outlined in 4.1 and the distinction between public and private spheres alluded to above but more explicitly elaborated in Casanova’s (1994) incisive study. While it is clear that the public structure of contemporary European societies emerges out of the generative mechanism of secularity, the intra-religious conversion experiences of my respondents were predicated upon the consistent exercise of private agency. Nevertheless, this intensely private experience, as we have seen, eventually impinges upon the public sphere in myriad forms as their cognitive deviancy – channelled along prefigured routes first chalked out during the formative primary socialisation of childhood – transitions into an embodied social deviancy that challenges, however minimally, the hegemony of the taken-for-granted status quo. This was most explicitly illustrated in Yahya’s conversation with his work colleagues (see 9.2.2) but may alternatively be exemplified simply by the fact of the beard or hijab. Put differently, a clean-shaven visage is a taken-for-granted expression of contemporary social reality for most European males. As such, it is internalised into consciousness unthinkingly for those subsisting in a state of sociological ‘alienation’ through exactly the same set of social processes through which Berger (1967) anatomised religious reality. It is fruitful to recall here Sartre’s concept of ‘bad faith’ so central to Berger’s early theorising: “To put it very simply, ‘bad faith’ is to pretend something is necessary that is in fact voluntary. ‘Bad faith’ is thus a flight from freedom, a dishonest evasion of the ‘agony of choice’” (Berger 1963, p.164). From this perspective,

My argument for the essential secularity of European public life (particularly when placed in global context) derives both from Davie’s (2002) notion of ‘European exceptionalism’ and Berger’s (1999) concept of ‘Eurosecularity.’ Nevertheless, the secular modalities of contemporary European institutional infrastructures do not obviate or negate residual forms of often inchoate faith that persist across significant swaths of the population (Jenkins 2007; Voas 2009; Woodhead 2016).

Berger’s (1967, p.85) concept of ‘alienation’ derives both from Marx and Mead and is described as a state of consciousness “in which social world and socialized self confront the individual as inexorable facticities analogous to the facticities of nature...Put differently, alienation is the process whereby the dialectical relationship between the individual and his world is lost to consciousness. The individual ‘forgets’ that this world was and continues to be co-produced by him. Alienated consciousness is undialectical consciousness...Inasmuch as alienated consciousness is based on this fallacy, it is a false consciousness.”
growing a beard – as an explicit expression of a religious identity that emerges out of the generative mechanism of spirituality35 – would not, for most indigenous European males, be considered even a remote “possibility, because they take their own obedience for granted. Their institutional character may be the only identity they can imagine having, with the alternative seeming to them as a jump into madness.”36 The bearded Muslim man then, or his covered female counterpart – particularly if the product of an intra-religious conversion experience premised upon concurrent processes of desocialisation and resocialisation and fuelled through the consistent exercise of personal agency against the taken-for-granted structures of a secular sociality – is thus a marginal figure (mirroring the ‘marginal situation’ recounted in 8.3) intrinsically imbued with debunking potential. As such they are also intrinsically disconcerting figures eligible for either therapy or nihilation.

Crucially Berger, in his treatment of religion in *The Sacred Canopy*, acknowledges its Janus-faced potential to act both as a force of alienation and de-alienation. While he contends that, throughout the bulk of human history, religion has been the alienating force par excellence through its ability to construct constellations of meaning that are entirely taken-for-granted by their purveyors, he simultaneously posits that religion – particularly when wedded to Weber’s concept of charisma, as asserted in 9.2.2 – has been a force of radical relativisation and social revolution:

Such a “debunking” motif may be traced all through the Biblical tradition, directly related to its radical transcendentalization of God, finding its classic expression in Israelite prophecy but continuing in a variety of expressions in the history of the three great religions of the Biblical orbit...False consciousness and bad faith, widely legitimated by means of religion, may thus also be revealed as such by means of religion...One may say, therefore, that religion appears in history both as a world-maintaining and as a world-shaking force. (Berger 1967, pp.99-100)

35 For interesting discussions of both the pogonophilic and the pogonophobic dimensions of Christian history, particularly in relation to the East-West/Greek-Latin schism, see Howse (2013), McNamara (2015) and Olsen (2013). C.S. Lewis (2009 [1942], pp.105-106), in his fictitious exploration of diabolical consciousness, locates the beard at the interface of man’s biological and social natures thus reflecting Berger’s concept of alienation in the above footnote: “It is the business of these great [demonic] masters to produce in every age a general misdirection of what may be called sexual ‘taste’. This they do by working through the small circle of popular artists, dressmakers, actresses and advertisers who determine the fashionable type...Thus we have now for many centuries triumphed over nature to the extent of making certain secondary characteristics of the male (such as the beard) disagreeable to nearly all the females—and there is more in that than you might suppose.”

36 The same could be said for the indigenous European woman who has unthinkingly internalised into her subjective consciousness notions of female emancipation in terms intimately bound up with the freedom to appear in public in various states of undress. The debunking capacity of the covered Muslim woman, in this instance, is nicely captured by Azra, a 20 year old member of Janmohamed’s (2016, p.223) *Generation M*: “I’m a young Muslim woman. I am not oppressed by my hijab, I’m liberated by it. If you don’t understand that, that’s completely fine, you don’t need to...The emotion you’re seeing in my eyes is not a plea to ‘help me’ but one for you to take your self-righteous bullshit and shove it up your arse.”
In contemporary Europe, a commitment to Islam, the third historical extension of Abrahamic monotheism, may well serve to debunk the taken-for-granted assumptions of post-Christian social actors who have unquestioningly internalised into consciousness the presuppositions of a secularised nomos. Beyond the beard or hijab, this debunking capacity might also be demonstrated by the ritual enactment of the daily *salaat* – normative to any classical reading of Islam yet alien to the contemporary European collective conscience – which, in secular liberal democracies, can provoke a Pandora’s Box of tensions relating to structure, agency and the rightful locale of religion:

While premodern societies tended to coerce public expressions of religion...modern societies by contrast tend to banish any public display of religion. Actually, the privatization of religion reaches the point in which it becomes both “irreverent” and “in bad taste” to expose one’s religiosity publicly in front of others. Like the unconstrained exposure of one’s private bodily parts and emotions, religious confessions outside the strictly delimited religious sphere are considered not only a degradation of one’s privacy but also an infringement upon the right to privacy of others. (Casanova 1994, p.64)

This might help explain the almost visceral disgust expressed by Porter’s nurse in 4.1.3 when stumbling unexpectedly upon the Palestinian doctor at prayer (probably exacerbated by the ‘foreignness’ associated with Islam) in the functionally differentiated, religiously neutral, public sphere of the hospital. It also sheds light upon the almost radical nature of the imperative, received by our *jama’at* from the European HQ of TJ, to call out the *adhaan* and offer our prayers publicly in congregation whenever the time set in during our week-long road trips to and from Bulgaria (see 10.1).

11.2.3.3 ‘Precarious Piety’ and Europe’s ‘creaky floorboard’

Here, I correlate two key assertions arising from my thesis with a recent study of Muslim and Christian youth religiosity in the Netherlands before extrapolating their combined significance for Europe’s secular sacred canopy. First, precisely because of its volitional nature, my respondents’ consistent exercise of agency in ways which publicly affirm faith makes it a peculiarly modern phenomenon: “The autonomous believer who displays his or her freedom of adherence, and his or her ability to assume responsibility for moral choice, has become the central figure in our religious

37 The British Sufi academic Abdal Hakim Murad certainly seems to encompass this as part of his vision for Islam’s role in contemporary Europe as exemplified, for example, in the following ‘contention’ – “European Islam: the hand at Belshazzar’s feast” (http://masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/contentions15.htm; see also Murad 2011 or Winter 2007). For more general perceptions of Islam as an alternative to ‘Euro-secularity’ or the ‘discontents of modernity’ provided by British Muslim converts, see Zebiri (2008, pp.144-160).
modernity” (Hervieu-Leger 2001, p.113). Secondly, antecedent processes of immigration coupled with the structural conditions of modernity – of which pluralism is an integral component: the contiguous jostling of multiple Weltanschauungen in close proximity – make the Avant-Garde’s volitional experience of faith, premised on an intra-religious conversion experience, very different to the Old Guard’s taken-for-granted certainties:

Pluralism changes the “how” rather than the “what” of an individual’s faith. This becomes very clear if one looks at an individual who has decided to affirm a very conservative version of a particular religion – say, an individual in their twenties or thirties, with a Catholic background with which they never identified very strongly, who now comes to affirm the Catholic faith in a very conservative form. Perhaps they have become a lay affiliate with an organization like Opus Dei...What was previously a destiny, taken for granted, has now become a deliberate choice. The implications of this shift are immense. (Berger 2014, p.32)38

It is striking that Berger, in illustrating this point, should sketch the hypothetical scenario of an intra-religious conversion experience – something my study has elaborated with copious empirical detail. In 8.1, I highlighted the dearth of academic research on the phenomenon of intra-religious conversion particularly in relation to Islam, and in 9.2.4 made the point that such experiences are far from being the exclusive preserve of TJ. While I have consistently referenced Inge’s (2017) study of intra-religious conversion among Salafi women in London, here I corroborate my findings with another recent PhD – Precarious Piety: Pursuits of Faith among Young Muslims and Christians in the Netherlands (Beekers 2014, 2015b) – striking for the similarity of its conclusions. First, Beekers (2015c) found that both his Muslim and Christian interlocutors had experienced ‘intra-religious conversion’ experiences that “entailed a turn from what they regarded as a latent and rather non-reflexive religiosity (which they often associated with their upbringing), to a self-conscious, reflexive and active religious commitment” (p.2). Second, he found that the majority of his respondents’ “religious pursuits were shaped...by revivalist movements, particularly Salafism and evangelicalism...” (p.2). Third, reflecting my findings in 11.1 above, he found that the socio-cultural exigencies of Dutch society meant that “their pursuits of faith co-existed, competed and enmeshed with other, in their eyes, more ‘worldly’ activities” (p.3). As a result the pursuit of piety hinged crucially on the consistent exercise of personal agency: “I argue...that an ethics of

38 Woodhead (2001, p.2, italics mine) makes the same point: “...it is still possible to hold religious beliefs even though they have ceased to be taken-for-granted certainties – but it is impossible to hold them in the same way. People continue to be religious in most modern societies (with the possible exception of Europe), but are religious in new ways – even when the new ways present themselves as a return to the old ways.”
Two structural conditions of the secular sacred canopy of Dutch society militated against their pious pursuits. First, reminiscent of Berger, the implacable fact of pluralism cast doubt upon either the truth claims or practical applications of their respective traditions. Second, the fast-paced nature of contemporary life with its “continuous stream of distractions” arising from an inescapable engagement with the “‘secular’ mass-mediated popular...accelerated and digitalized culture of contemporary consumer capitalism” made it difficult for them to find time to “fit God in” (pp. 4-5). Consequently, the survival of their religious life-worlds – their ‘deviant’ perspectives on reality – depended critically on their regular participation in “pedagogies of piety” unfolding in “communities of conviction” – in other words, plausibility structures that allow faith to remain credible to subjective consciousness. Rather than withdrawing decisively from the sacred canopy of secularity that dominates public life in the Netherlands, Beekers found that both his Muslim and Christian respondents’ experience of faith was boosted by the omnipresent challenge of maintaining it in a culturally hostile milieu. Put differently, their pursuit of piety was paradoxically fuelled by the socio-cultural conditions of modernity which demand active and constant vigilance to ensure survival.

The similarities with my own study should be self-evident and need not be elaborated beyond reiterating that, in contemporary Europe, committed religious believers of any persuasion are inherently cognitive minorities obliged to swim against the tide of public opinion to prevent their deviant perspectives from being submerged in the collective Weltanschauung (see Footnote 26 above). As a result, faith shifts from the taken-for-granted sphere of public structure to the volitional sphere of private agency that requires the careful cultivation of sub-societies of meaning – umbrellas of religiosity under the larger canvas of the secular sacred canopy – for survival. This is the inverse of the historical reality: in bygone eras, it was freethinkers, sceptics or atheists who constituted the cognitive minorities obliged to consciously sustain their deviant view of reality under pressure from the taken-for-granted sacred canopy of religion (Spencer 2013)." 39 Central to my argument here is
the assertion that despite the differing content of the respective nomoi, the brute sociological facts remain constant: reality is socially produced, externalised, objectivated and then internalised into subjective consciousness as taken-for-granted facticity by social actors who exist for the most part in a state of alienation or Sartreian ‘bad faith.’ Given Europe’s contemporary secularity, committed religious believers of all persuasions can, by their public and willed adherence to a deviant view of reality, force a dialogue within the consciousness of the socialised secular actor that is usually experienced as profoundly disconcerting:

Anthropologists use the term ‘culture shock’ to describe the violent surprise occasioned by coming into contact with a drastically alien way of life. The shock is not merely because of what one sees in the alien culture. More importantly, the shock comes from suddenly seeing oneself in a new way in the mirror of the other culture. (Berger 1961, p.14)

Also relevant here is Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of ‘The Look’ illustrated through the analogy of a voyeur wholly absorbed in gazing surreptitiously at a scene through a keyhole. Suddenly, upon hearing the creaking of a floorboard behind him, he becomes reflexively self-conscious of the Other’s gaze upon him (Lavine 1984, pp.377-379; also recall here Umar’s ‘gaze’ in 1.1 as we looked out at the drunken revellers from the mosque landing). Europe’s recent colonial record, premised upon an outwardly directed ‘gaze,’ combined with the alterity of its longer-term relationship with Islam and the ongoing phenomenon of immigration all lend credence to the assertion that, today, Muslims have become the creaky floorboard of Europe. More than any other immigrant group, they have thrust religion back into the public consciousness of post-Enlightenment societies obliging them to (re)consider issues – such as the construction of minarets, sartorial expressions of faith, or free speech/blasphemy laws – long considered extinct.40 In a book co-authored with Zijderveld (2009), Berger proposes a practical method that secular liberal democracies might employ to interact and fulfil each other...Everything is chosen for an individual from birth until death. A child is born and raised to become Muslim and never given a choice to look at other religions. Education is highly biased and focused upon the Islamic world. There is no chance of considering multiple points of views...I mean, we’ve had a different perspective than the rest of our society from an early age, and we’ve learnt that sharing these views is not feasible for us. Some of us tried hard to fit in and share our thoughts, but ended up serving time in jail, so the lifestyle of being mentally isolated from the surrounding environment started from an early age...” (Chester 2015).

40 Both Warner (2010) and McGrath (2011) also attribute the rapid rise of ‘New Atheism’ – exemplified in the caustic denunciations of, say, Dawkins (2006) or Hitchens (2007) – to Islamist terrorism: “The continuing impact of Islamic fundamentalism appears to have further alienated secularized Westerners, not merely from religious terrorism or fundamentalism, but from religion in all its forms” (Warner 2010, p.109). In particular, 9/11 was seen to be the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back: “The 9/11 attack turned out to be the intellectual and moral launch pad for the New Atheism” (McGrath 2011, p.viii; see also Warner 2010, p.105).
develop policy around such contentious issues based on a concept of “triage.” While broadly agreeing with this approach, I would simultaneously add that the resolution of the “large gray area” will intrinsically necessitate in European self-consciousness an intense self-reflexive wrangling that may force a reappraisal of European self-identity: “...the introduction of a dramatic character that does not fit into the scenario of the particular play seriously threatens the role-playing of those who do fit” (Berger 1963, p.152). In undertaking such an enterprise, indigenous European responses may proceed along ‘nativist’ lines – attempting to resurrect from the embers of a de-Christianised, postmodernist culture the ghost of Jesus – or, more likely, the retrenchment of core secular values used either as a yardstick to measure the acceptability of certain imported cultural practices or as a baton to coerce conformity (see Bruce 2011, pp.217-223; Murad 2011).

11.2.3.4 Conclusion: clearing a mote in the sociological eye

In concluding it is instructive to also highlight parallels between my findings and Mahmood’s (2005) landmark study in Egypt. Both TJ and the women’s piety movement are essentially religious in nature, focussed on the cultivation of prayer and piety among participants. Consequently, they are both avowedly apolitical eschewing any formal engagement with the public square in favour of an introspective focus on ethical self-cultivation. Further, they are both da’wa movements that wrest the responsibility for pious preaching away from the ulema and place it squarely upon the shoulders of the ordinary believer. It is this final point which, in 8.2.2.1, I identified as a key appeal of TJ: it effects a change in the relationship the participant enjoys with her religion from a passive consumer to an active purveyor. As we have just seen with Beekers’ study also, the autonomous exercise of volitional agency in pursuit of piety becomes the key pivot around which contemporary religiosity is actualised. In this it is inherently modern. As such, it is eminently suited to the conditions of structurally differentiated liberal societies in which religion has been restricted to the locale of the

41 “We can envisage a kind of triage. At one end are issues on which it’s possible to be certain—for example, in absolutely proscribing ‘honor killings,’ genital mutilation, and the advocacy of violent jihad. At the other end are issues on which, it seems to us, one can be fully liberal—for example, in allowing time for prayer to Muslims during working hours, in safeguarding the right to build mosques anywhere (subject to normal zoning considerations), and in allowing the wearing of kerchiefs by women and girls in public places. But between these two poles within the triage, there’s a large gray area. Take issues such as the demands by some Muslim parents that their daughters be excused from sporting events with boys, or demands for gender segregation in education generally, or demands for the revival (or introduction) of laws against blasphemy. It seems to us that a cautious, prudent, indeed doubting approach to these middle issues is what’s called for” (Berger and Zijderveld 2009, p.141).

42 This can be discerned in the usually inchoate lurching of certain far-right groups, such as the English Defence League, towards some kind of ostensible veneer of Christian identity. Consider also the wording of the petition proposed allegedly by a British National Party member/supporter that garnered more than 255,000 signatures in opposition to TJ’s controversial ‘mega-mosque’ plans: “We the Christian population of this great country England would like the proposed plan to build a Mega Mosque in East London scrapped. This will only cause terrible violence and suffering and more money should go to the NHS” (Birt and Gilliat-Ray 2010, p.147, italics mine).
private. This may well be a reason for TJ’s success in modern, secular democracies. In rooting his programme of reform in the almost pacifistic paradigm of pre-hijra Mecca in which faith was the prerogative of an embattled minority, Mawlana Ilyas inadvertently unleashed a global movement of Islamic revival able to flourish in the structural conditions of post-Enlightenment European societies. Further, his vision of social transformation – predicated upon the emergence of a critical mass of believers committed to the volitional practice of their faith – is essentially democratic in nature; the appropriation of state apparatus, unlike many ‘Islamist’ movements that derive inspiration from the post-hijra Medinan phase of the Prophet’s biography, remains entirely alien to TJ’s goals. As such TJ, like Mahmood’s female piety movement in Egypt, challenges the received presuppositions of Eurocentric scholarship. Put differently, my study begs the important questions raised by Davie in her ‘critical’ appraisal of the sociology of religion’s conceptual apparatus and reiterated in her collaboration with Berger and Fokas:

43 For instance, note King’s (2002, p.302) comments: “A common Western view of Islamic ‘fundamentalists’ is that they are harking back to the past, and want a return to some mythical state of Islamic society, or adherence to some set of rules which has formerly been accepted. Quite to the contrary, however, I believe phenomena such as Tablighi Jamaat, whether or not they are seen as ‘fundamentalist’, should be regarded as thoroughly modern.” Reflecting somewhat my description of the Avant-Garde phenomenon of British TJ, he goes on to say: “Tablighis do not call for a return to some former version of Islamic society, but rather attempt to construct something new and in tune with contemporary needs...Organisations such as Tabligh are responding to changing circumstances with a flexible approach to the organisation of an Islamic society, not rejecting anything from the past, but applying it and adapting it in new ways. The flexibility of Islam is something which many informants have stressed. Furthermore, Tabligh is not an inward looking organisation which sees its aim as the production of an isolated and withdrawn society...” Alternatively, consider Metcalf (2002, p.10): “…participants felt themselves part of dense networks of Muslims, both dead and alive, and aspired to reliving the Prophet’s own time when he too was part of a faithful few among a population sunk in ignorance. Participation thus gave meaning and purpose to everyday life. It is important to see that participation in such a movement, often explained as a response to the failures of the corrupt, underdeveloped, or alienating societies in which Muslims perhaps find themselves, in fact offered a positive, modern solution to people who were geographically and socially mobile. Participants in principle made a ‘lifestyle’ choice; they found a stance of cultural dignity, they opted for a highly disciplined life of sacrifice; and they found a moral community of mutual acceptance and purpose.”

44 According to Birt (2001, pp.375-376): “Tablighi Jama’a’at can be placed in many contexts and succeed because of its sphinx-like agnosticism of politics and economics: it can flourish equally well in a mercantile or a welfarist context. This doctrinal and methodological simplicity is the key to understanding Tablighi Jama’a’at and its overall ethos. It is a movement that bureaucratizes Sufic virtue, democratizes religious authority and accepts the realpolitik of secularism...Its politics are classically Makkah in methodology and Sufic in inspiration: it is only by the creation of a sufficient aggregate of pious individuals that God will intervene to transform adverse political fortunes; in this sense Tablighi Jama’a’at espouses the utopian politics of the pietist rather than those of the tactical crypto-Islamist.”

45 “As we have seen, large numbers of researchers from many different disciplines are currently engaged in the study of religion – much of their work is innovative and insightful. In itself, however, this success suggests further steps: the need to penetrate the philosophical core of the associated disciplines and to enquire what difference the serious study of religion might make to their ways of working. The size of the task should not be underestimated. Most of the disciplines in question have emerged more or less directly from the European Enlightenment, implying that they are underpinned by a markedly secular philosophy of social science...Is it possible for a set of disciplines which take very seriously the secular philosophies of science that underpin their
What, in short, are the consequences of taking seriously the fact that for the great majority of the world’s populations in the twenty-first century, it is not only possible but entirely “normal,” to be to be both fully modern and fully religious? Might this make a difference to the paradigms that we construct to understand better the nature of the modern world, whether European, American or more generally? The answer must surely be “yes.” (Berger et al. 2008, p.143)

As this thesis has shown, many of my respondents, while intensely and passionately committed to their faith, have simultaneously enjoyed a British secular education and work successfully in professional occupations – as engineers, teachers or computer programmers – demonstrating an ability to navigate multiple Schutzian ‘relevance structures’ with ease. As we have also seen, this marriage of a pre-modern religious praxis with the rational ethic at the heart of secular bureaucracies captures, according to Berger’s latest theorising, the lived reality of modern societies: the empirical phenomena emerging out of the generative mechanisms of secularity and spirituality do not tower over us as monoliths but rather coalesce and overlap indeterminately in the lives of individual believers. Too often, I would contend, has this marriage of faith with modernity constituted a mote in the sociological eye. Yet minority populations within Europe and majority populations in the rest of the world seem to be managing this “prototypical cognitive balancing act” (Berger 2014, p.xii) just fine. While Jurgen Habermas has popularised the notion of the ‘post-secular’ (Beckford 2012; Habermas 2008), I think Schmuel Eisenstadt’s (2000) concept of ‘multiple modernities’ may be more relevant here. It basically asserts that the European model of modernity with secularity as an integral component is not the prototype to which all other societies and peoples must in time conform. Rather it is the consequence of a particular confluence of historical circumstances which happened to occur in a localised region of the world. As a result, the lived experiences of twenty-first century Muslims - and others - who today inhabit those self-same

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46 In this sense, the persistence of the *miswaak* could be said to modify what Berger has humorously termed the ‘electric toothbrush theory of modernization’ (Berger 2014, p.68): “This idea implies that if one drops an electric toothbrush into the Amazonian rainforest, within one generation the place will look like Cleveland.” See also Woodhead (2002, p.8): “Another observable phenomenon is that whereby modern men and women compartmentalize their lives, living part of them in conformity with rational principles (in the laboratory, workshop or workplace), and others in conformity to non-rational or supra-rational beliefs and practices (asking invisible deities for worldly success, placing faith in alternative forms of medicine).” For Ammerman (2014, p.107): “Wherever that veiled Muslim goes...she introduces the reality that not everything is governed by modern reason, secular efficiency, and pluralist neutrality. When she wears her hijab under a hard hat or laboratory goggles or a graduation cap, she stands as a visible reminder that sacred and secular can exist side by side.”

47 Both Berger (2014, pp.68-78) and Davie (2002, pp.150-159) share the view that Eisenstadt’s work can be deployed as a very useful ‘conceptual map’ to gauge the empirical reality of the modern world.
spaces whilst remaining passionately committed to their faith may well help to illuminate more than just current debates about religion, secularity and the polyvalent nature of modernity. They may also help to reconfigure the conceptual apparatus with which we seek to theorise them.
Chapter 12

Conclusion

12.1 Summary of Findings

This thesis has sought to interrogate British TJ from both empirical and theoretical angles. In Chapter 2, I surveyed primary and academic literature identifying key themes for investigation. In Chapter 3, I outlined my methodological approach as an indigenous ethnographer describing the methods through which a voluminous dataset was generated. Subsequent chapters presented empirical and theoretical findings derived from this dataset and here I recapitulate the key overarching contributions this thesis might be said to have made.

12.1.1 Empirical findings

Chapter 5 sought to provide the most detailed description of TJ’s operational modalities available to date. There, I examined how British TJ is organised institutionally – encompassing local/regional/national/international dimensions – and individually through a typology of tiered activism. Building on Reetz’s scholarship, this chapter also provided, for the first time, a detailed overview of TJ’s ‘Local Mosque Scheme’ based on sustained ethnographic fieldwork in Masjid Ta-Ha.

Chapters 6-7 examined intergenerational transmission within British TJ and, building on Sikand’s 1990s study, posited the conceptual categories of the ‘Old Guard’ and ‘Avant-Garde’ to describe clear shifts in identity between migrant and British-born generations. Chapter 6 further identified a lacuna within extant studies of British Muslim youth activism that fail to map the continuous influence of TJ since the broader 1990s second-generation ‘turn to Islam’ - highlighting the salience of the 1994 Dewsbury ‘World ijtima’ as an important catalyst. Crucially, TJ’s ostensibly hostile stance toward secular education was also interrogated and found to lack empirical validation.

Chapter 7 analysed three cultural markers of British Muslim identity – language, dress and food – to argue that a process of indigenisation has set in within British TJ: while the institutional hierarchy continues to be dominated by the Old Guard, the grassroots is now largely Avant-Garde. Urdu dominates the Markazes/ijtimas, while English has become the normative lingua franca of the ordinary khuruj outing; my fieldwork also identified a ‘turn to Arabic’ among some sections of the Avant-Garde. Further, despite the general persistence of the beard and libaas, I found more cosmopolitan forms of dress supplanting specifically ethnic ones among the Avant-Garde. Analysing
the ‘sociology of the palate’ also revealed distinct shifts in identity: while the Old Guard’s experiences of primary socialisation unfolded in the very different socio-cultural ambience of South Asia, the Avant-Garde’s unfolded in contemporary Britain. As a result, the culinary predilections of each differ.

Chapters 6-7, I argue, should be situated within broader processes of indigenisation within British Islam thus capturing generic cultural evolution among immigrant communities and their offspring. Further, beyond language, dress and food I identified other markers of identity – such as technological savviness, the popularity of football or a self-conceptualisation of less sectarian identities – that indicate the contours along which processes of indigenisation seem to be proceeding.

12.1.1.1 Limitations of this thesis

Nevertheless, due to fieldwork restrictions and the pragmatism of word counts, I frankly acknowledge limitations. For instance, I could only access the male experience of British TJ; the masturat, in all probability, requiring a female researcher. Additionally, much fieldwork was conducted among South Asians in Lancashire; the extent to which this represents the whole of British TJ is debateable. To illustrate, a disproportionate number of primary respondents were Gujarati (12/25 formal interviewees) while only 7.3% of British Muslims hail originally from India (Ali 2015, p.24). Further, socio-economic deprivation is significantly more marked among the numerically larger Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities (Jivraj and Khan 2013). The social ascendancy of the largely Gujarati Avant-Garde Tier 3 activists I interviewed then, achieved chiefly through access to higher education and well-paid professional occupations, may not represent other South Asian communities residing in areas of greater structural inequality. While qualitative research never claims to be representative (Bryman 2008), such limitations should be borne in mind.

In Chapter 2, I analysed issues relating to the London ‘mega-mosque’ controversy, allegations of cultural isolationism and suggestions that participation in TJ might ‘radicalise’ young Muslims. Despite generating voluminous data on these topics, I have not directly engaged them in this thesis primarily due to the nature of my research questions and word count restrictions. Nevertheless, phenomenon captured here – such as the emergence of the Avant-Garde – might usefully illuminate

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1 According to the Muslim Council of Britain’s analysis of 2011 Census data, “Just less than half (47.2%) of the Muslim population is UK-born” (Ali 2015, p.22).

2 Nevertheless, I did conduct fieldwork outside the NW of England and accessed non-South Asian experiences of TJ. While in Footnote 27 of 10.2.1 I briefly expand upon underlying reasons, I would broadly summarise here that while vertical transmission from the Old Guard to the Avant-Garde of British TJ has been relatively successful within certain segments of the South Asian Muslim population, horizontal transmission of TJ to non-South Asian Muslims (including converts) has generally been less successful.
issues such as cultural separatism. Again, despite generating relevant data, I have not reported here on other topics such as contemporary TJ’s relationship to Sufism and the broader Deobandi reformist paradigm (Timol 2015c), though the potential for future journal articles on disparate aspects of British TJ is considerable.

12.1.2 Theoretical contributions

In 1.3, I explained my thesis operates on three levels: the micro, meso and macro. Here, I review the principally theoretical meso- (8-10) and macro-level (4/11) chapters. In line with my ‘grounded theory’ approach (3.3.3), several disparate theoretical frames developed out of emergent data. First, in Chapter 4, I augmented Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge with Bhaskar’s critical realism identifying the ‘generative mechanisms’ of secularity and spirituality as unseen causal matrixes producing social phenomena available for empirical investigation; accordingly this thesis adds to the small number of explicitly critical realist ethnographies. Further, the key processes of ‘primary and secondary socialisation’ were explicated in Chapter 4 to undergird theoretically the process of ‘intra-religious conversion’ mapped in Chapters 8-10. However, to mitigate somewhat the central power assigned to language in the sociology of knowledge, I introduced, in Chapter 9, Turner’s concepts of ‘liminality’ and ‘communitas’ to account for the ritual dimensions of khuruj. This was complemented by Schutz’s phenomenology of consciousness to examine how ‘alternation’ between competing life-worlds is apprehended in respondent subjectivity. Lastly, particularly in Chapters 8 and 10, I drew upon a broad stock of knowledge in the generic sociology of religion to identify ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors precipitating conversion and strategies of post-conversion commitment-maintenance.

Nevertheless, Chapter 11 highlights the pre-eminently Bergerian nature of my theoretical infrastructure arguing that the ostensibly sharp dichotomy of the generative mechanisms is moderated through their mutual co-existence in my respondents’ lives. Further, I appropriate key Bergerian concepts relating to the social construction of reality/religion applying them instead to a ‘sacred canopy’ of secularity that today vaults over Europe. The social mechanics through which such a secular nomos is externalised and objectivated as facticity, I argue, then internalised unthinkingly into socialised consciousness, produces exactly the same ‘alienation’ as did its religious forbear. As such, the willed and conscious exercise of agency in ways which publicly affirm faith breaches the cognitive and normative presuppositions of the European collective conscience. In this it is inherently disconcerting and imbued with ‘debunking’ potential by exposing the precariousness of the ‘social fictions’ that together conspire to construct the taken-for-granted realities of contemporary secular actors. Consequently, it may well attract strategies of ‘therapy’ or ‘nihilation’
to maintain the integrity of the symbolic universe though this would, I argue, inadvertently necessitate a reflexive wrangling in secular European self-consciousness.

12.2 The Future of British TJ

Despite Woodhead et al’s (2003, p.1) proviso that, in the social sciences, “the very enterprise of futurology [has] become suspect,” I nevertheless cautiously consider here the shape British TJ may take in coming years.

12.2.1 Issues of leadership

Chapters 6-7 characterised TJ as a movement in transition operating at the interface of an institutionally powerful Old Guard and a popular grassroots Avant-Garde. In coming years the consummation of this transition seems reasonable witnessing the increasing percolation of Avant-Garde activists upwards through the tiered structural hierarchy. More and more amirs of ordinary mosques will be British-born (or of non-South Asian ethnic origin), and the Tier 2 regional shuras will also absorb more Avant-Garde influence – a phenomenon for which there is already some evidence. Eventually, the impact will be felt at the level of the Tier 1 national shura. Here, the recent passing of Hafiz Patel – TJ’s European amir – is telling. As an emblematic spiritual figurehead, many rank and file activists regard him as personally irreplaceable (Timol 2016c). However the remainder of the council he presided over are all extremely aged and their ethnic composition reflects the demographic reality of British Muslim communities in the 1970s (comprised entirely of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi first-generation migrants). The increasing heterogeneity of subsequent Muslim migration into Britain, coupled with the extreme youthfulness of the community’s age profile, have served to weaken in general terms the hegemony of such South Asian elders (Lewis 2007). The question of who is selected to succeed the present Tier 1 shura thus becomes of crucial significance in determining the long-term future trajectory of British TJ.

It was noted earlier that, while vertical transmission of British TJ from the South Asian Old Guard to the Avant-Garde has been relatively successful, horizontal transmission to non-South Asian Muslims has been less so. A key reason for this is language: non-South Asians unable to understand Urdu are

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3 Not least in the face of the failed predictions regarding religion made by the founding figures of the discipline: “Freud wrote about ‘the end of an illusion’, Comte anticipated the demise of traditional religion and magic, and Durkheim predicted that a religion of individual consciousness would develop. Such forecasts (and we could add many more) have since fallen from favour...In a considerably chastened post-colonial and post-modern climate, academics have come to favour the particular over the general, thick description over grand theory, and close attention to the present rather than speculation about the future, particularly when the latter carries the hidden assumption that Western societies are at the leading edge of an almost evolutionary progress” (Woodhead et al. 2003, p.1).
inherently at a disadvantage when attempting to participate in a movement that continues, in Britain certainly, to be *institutionally* tied to its cultural origins. As we have seen with Noor’s (2012) study of TJ in South East Asia or Janson’s (2014) study of TJ in the Gambia though, TJ has a global track record of successfully indigenising itself in new socio-cultural milieux appropriating myriad local cultural identity markers in the process; this thesis has argued that such indigenisation is also taking place in the British context with the advent of the Avant-Garde. Consequently, it seems likely that the appropriation of English as the Avant-Garde’s primary lingua franca will facilitate TJ’s spread among non-South Asian Muslim ethnic groups in Britain as expressed by Abdul Karim, a Tier 2 leader in Lancashire:

> At the moment you have elders involved in Tabligh, their first language is Urdu. So they like to speak in Urdu, they cannot, sometimes they want to but are not able to, communicate as fluently in English. Come the second-generation who will then be taking over the lead of the work of TJ, then normally more English will be spoken, the medium through which they communicate. And then I would see it will have a greater impact on all nationals...and that will have the unifying impact of getting all to be involved in the work of TJ...It’s a transition. This work is always a transition, it’s never a revolution.

Such a transition would be definitively boosted through the appointment of English-speaking, Avant-Garde leaders to the Tier 1 national *shura*. Further, the incorporation of non-South Asian TJ leaders to this *shura* – including, perhaps, even a white English convert – would do wonders to reflect the subsequent heterogeneity of Britain’s Muslim communities and facilitate an increasingly diverse ethnic participation.  

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4 The TJ *amir* of America, I was told by British Tier 3 activists who have frequently visited the country on *khuruj*, is an African-American convert to Islam called Hajji Luqman. Key figures of authority in American TJ are also African-American converts, such as the Detroit-based Mawlana Zubayr who, I was told, along with several fellow converts trained as an Islamic scholar in TJ-affiliated seminaries in South Asia (Jackson 2005, p.50). In the British context, Shaykh Muhammad Jihani – a charismatic London-based Libyan former professional footballer (who apparently captained the national team and has played against both Kevin Keegan and Pele) with several decades of dedicated TJ experience – would have been a prime non-South Asian candidate for incorporation into the national Tier 1 *shura*. However, following the fall of Colonel Gaddafi in 2011, I was informed he relocated to Libya where he was promptly appointed national TJ *amir* by the Nizamuddin authorities. The impact that charismatic personalities like Jihani can have in attracting Muslims of a similar ethnic heritage was made clear during my interview with Dr Uthman, the British-Tunisian Tier 2 leader quoted at the end of 9.1: “When I first started in TJ, most of the people in Birmingham were from Asian background and most of the talk was in Urdu and some translation in English, so I understood but, in my heart, I felt this is probably just for the Asians, not for us. But when I was invited to come to Dewsbury...it was *ijtima*, so brother Muhammad Jihani was there, so I say Libyan! It’s not just for Pakistani, Arabs are also involved and not just Arabs, but Jihani! Not a normal Libyan, he was very famous, nationally-known, very famous footballer all over Libya...he's like [Wayne] Rooney now, in his time. For British youth, how people know Rooney, it is how people
demographic analysis of the 2011 Census, is pertinent: “The ethnic diversity of the Muslim population needs to be reflected within the decision-making forums of Muslim institutions, such as mosque management committees” (Ali 2015, p.16). Whether this happens though, or whether British TJ – for a host of conceivable reasons – remains, at the level of the institutional hierarchy at least, tightly in the grip of South Asian elders, is a matter for debate.

It was noted in 5.2.1 that British TJ, in contradistinction to the South Asian headquarters, markedly lacks ulema at the highest levels of leadership. Hafiz Patel – certainly in TJ and Deobandi-affiliated communities in Britain and beyond – was widely recognised as a saint; his individual piety and influence thus served to mitigate the potentially negative impact of this social profile. As also noted in 5.2.4.1, there is a not insignificant tendency of some Deobandi ulema to voice subdued criticism of TJ. Here, the incorporation of appropriately qualified ulema to the Tier 1 hierarchy would strengthen its scriptural foundations and bolster its credibility among British mosque imams as well as Dar al-Ulum teachers/students. Hafiz Patel’s son, Mawlana Saeed Patel, the long-standing rector of the Dewsbury Dar al-Ulum, appears a prime candidate in this regard.5

Further, senior ulema have played important historical roles at the highest level of TJ, not just in key decision-making processes, but as charismatic spokesmen who have attracted huge numbers of laity into the movement.6 The Urdu-speaking Mawlana Tariq Jameel is probably the best living exemplar of this role today, his rhetorical panache and mastery of classical Arabic having made him a household name far beyond his native Pakistan. Yet, British TJ, despite having produced English-speaking ulema for some decades now – cadres of whom have undertaken a year-long khuruj to South Asia immediately following graduation – has thus far failed to produce a single nationally recognised spokesperson able to articulate the TJ vision to the cross-ethnic, cross-sectarian Muslim audiences of contemporary Britain. Weber’s concept of charisma, as we saw in 9.2.2, teaches us how religion has inherently been a force of “world-shaking” transformation in human history. Part of TJ’s success as a global movement of Islamic revival has probably derived from its ability to harness to its vision of social transformation the charisma of leading ulema. The failure to achieve this in the British context – through the emergence of a dynamic spokesperson able to speak competently to the particularities of the post-immigrant socio-cultural condition in English – will hamper its future success.

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5 This possibility becomes more likely in light of the fact that Mawlana Saeed, according to several respondents, was appointed the primary khalifa of his late father thus inheriting the responsibility of maintaining his Sufi order.

6 Beyond the numerous scholars of the Kandhalawi family, one may cite Mawlana Umar Palanpuri, Mawlana Saeed Ahmad Khan or Shaykh Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi as examples here.
A striking fact of British Islam’s demographic profile is its relative youthfulness: “33% of the Muslim population was aged 15 years or under in 2011, compared to 19% of the population as a whole...By 2021 there will be approximately 300,000 Muslim teenagers...” (Ali 2015, pp.16-17). As we have seen, as a movement that attracts considerable numbers of (male) British Muslim youth, this is of some significance for British TJ’s future. Other structural factors should also be taken into consideration not least the exigencies arising out of a socio-political climate punctuated with ‘Islamophobia.’ According to Voas and Fleischmann (2012, p.538), such hostility is one among...
several causal factors for a generic Western diaspora-born ‘turn to Islam’: “…the inescapable pressure of contemporary Western suspicion of Islam and Muslims makes this identity particularly salient. Muslims currently encounter far greater hostility than members of any other religious group... With external evaluations being so negative, there is a natural tendency to react by upholding what is being disparaged.” Bruce (2011, p.51), drawing upon the conflation of ethnic and cognitive minorities highlighted in 11.2.3.1, puts this slightly differently: “When religious differences are strongly embedded in ethnic identities, the cognitive threat of the other is weak.”

There is also the pressing structural factor that many Muslim youth are raised in regions of significant socio-economic deprivation: “46% (1.22 million) of the Muslim population resides in the 10% most deprived...local authority districts in England” (Ali 2015, p.18). The MCB report goes on to note the “well-established correlation...between low family income and educational underachievement”; my fieldwork indicated that this situation has been compounded by the British government’s failure to provide an Islamically-viable alternative to the current interest-based university student loan system which decisively dissuaded several young TJ activists I spoke to from pursuing higher education.\(^8\) Such a complex of structural factors – relating to a youthful ethnic minority community growing up in conditions of significant socio-economic deprivation and Islamophobia – may well lead to disenfranchisement and resentment. Taken together, the escapist lure of gang culture, drugs and crime for many inner-city youth often prove overwhelming - probably key explanatory factors for the disproportionately high number of Muslims in British prisons: “Muslims account for 4.8% of the overall population and 13% of the prison population in England and Wales...” (Ali 2015, p.42). While much of my interview sample were part of an upwardly mobile second-generation facilitated by their access to higher education, their experience – as pointed out in 12.1.1.1 – should not be unduly generalised. As evident in 5.2.4.1 and Footnote 23 in 9.2.4, a significant national Avant-Garde TJ demographic simultaneously comprises streetwise British Muslims who, following intra-religious conversion experiences, have abandoned a life of social

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\(^8\) Starting in the academic year 2010-2011, the government increased annual university tuition fees from £3,000 to £9,000 simultaneously increasing the student loan allowance to ensure the fees are not immediately payable. However, the student loan operates on the basis of an interest-rate which contravenes Islamic principles accepted as normative by many mainstream Muslim groups. As a result, practising young Muslims unable to secure alternative funding are faced with the dilemma of forgoing their educational aspirations or compromising their religious principles: “An increasingly pressing issue for British Salafis is how to afford university without obtaining a student loan, which would incur interest” (Inge 2017, p.166). Though, in principle, following a public consultation that ended in September 2014, the government has endorsed the development of an alternative ‘Takaful’ product that accommodates Muslim sensibilities, there is at present no clearly agreed timescale for implementation meaning that practising Muslim students continue to be adversely impacted (see DBIS Report May 2016, pp.59-60).
rebellion and/or crime - exemplified most clearly in this thesis by Umar.\(^9\) In such a situation, TJ’s basic yet powerful message, enhanced by its focus on orthopraxy over orthodoxy, seems able to attract structurally disenfranchised (male) British Muslim youth: “Many of those who avoid crime turn to Islam to give them a sense of dignity and identity, a particularly noticeable trend among college and university students” (Parekh 2008, p.32).\(^{10}\) Such appeal will be facilitated by the exposure of future British Muslim youth to TJ through the mediation of an Avant-Garde generation whose secondary socialisations have taken place in Britain. The insight of Mustafa is relevant here:

I think what happened is in the 90s there was a catalyst. I think the World Ijtima was a catalyst as a huge event and then you get things occurring like the phenomena of Hafiz Yasin. So you get individuals who are quite spectacular in their personality who have a huge influence on the youth. Now, I think…the youth are open to many, many things. So they’re willing to consider and take part in any number of activities and for that reason as long as TJ is presented to them…as something to enjoy with their friends…and as well as enjoying achieve something in terms of spirituality, then I think it will continue to be a recruiting movement.

12.2.2.1 Secularisation as the handmaiden of indigenisation?

Chapters 6-7 charted the process of intergenerational transmission in British TJ, while Chapter 11 analysed the intersection of Islamic Revival with secularisation theory in Europe. The link between the two is made by Scourfield et al:

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\(^9\) For instance, recall the words of Adam, the Tier 4 ‘critical sympathiser’ cited in 5.2.4.1: “And you see a lot of people reforming themselves [through TJ] you know, former convicts, former drug dealers or drug users or what have you…I’ve seen them with my own eyes how they’ve reformed and how they’ve changed their character and how righteous they have become.”

\(^{10}\) That many of these British Muslim youth are from the rival Barelwi stream might inhibit TJ’s appeal though the narrative of Isa, the dynamic Avant-Garde Tier 3 activist from a Barelwi background captured in 7.4.2, indicates this isn’t always the case. His recollection of visiting Dewsbury Markaz for the first time at the outset of a 20 day khuruj in the summer of 2004 is particularly telling: “But that was it, man. Turned up [to Dewsbury Markaz], and Room 8 [a large sleeping room for visiting jama’ats] was difficult. But what I really saw interesting in Room 8 was some of the rude boys at university that I was with or knew of in passing, they were also in that room…on 40 days! Some of the rude boys, whether they were in the clubs, whether they were smoking, whether they were with the girls, that was an awkward moment for all of us. We were sociable guys, but it was really awkward to sit down and talk to each other and we just said Salaam, duaa, how’re you doing, man? Are you all right? And I’d walk away thinking he’s got about six girlfriends, what the heck’s he doing here? And he’s walking away thinking he’s clubbing all the time and he’s a DJ, what the heck’s a DJ doing here? And we were all thinking that’s the impact of Tabligh in that semester, whoever made effort on all of us...That was a really interesting feeling for me. I’d go into my bistra [sleeping bag] trying to find those guys and think I want to ask them this question, man, what are you guys doing here? How do you guys compromise between the two? And I’m sure they were thinking the same thing as well…But it was so packed because it was June, you know. It was unbelievably packed, like, a lot of people. I found it very difficult to sleep at night. People snoring and talking and it was awkward for me. But I got through it, Subhanallah…”

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If there is a process of secularization, this is in part due to the failure of the intergenerational transmission of religion. It is difficult to separate these two domains – secularization and transmission. To understand secularization we need to consider what is happening to religious transmission... (2012, p.92)

Given the salience of conversion in TJ experience, generic sociological insights may usefully be consulted to evaluate future possibilities. For instance, the convert’s child tends to take-for-granted what the parent worked hard to achieve: “...the commitment of those born into the sect is generally weaker than that of the founding generation, because they have not chosen to make sacrifices for their faith. Parents may work hard to socialize their children in their principles, but what people inherit will generally be less important to them than what they create themselves” (Bruce 2011, p.40). Further, increasing prosperity in subsequent generations might lead to less assiduous religious devotion: “When they could afford the work of the Devil, they relaxed their disapproval” (p.43). This is of particular relevance to the transition from the Old Guard to the Avant-Garde: the clear shifts in identity chronicled in Chapters 6-7 may well lead to the eventual dilution of the latter’s religious impulse. Put differently, there is a risk that as TJ becomes increasingly indigenised in contemporary Britain through the maturation of an upwardly mobile Avant-Garde generation, it simultaneously secularises by softening the boundaries that circumscribe the modalities of its religious devotion.

This is already evident to some extent in the more laissez faire attitude of the Avant-Garde toward TJ, captured especially in 10.2.1, which saw the rigorous demands of complete participation modified by the exigencies of domestic, social and professional pressures. Consequently, I would contend that most Tier 3 British activists today balance some form of regular commitment to TJ with other demands on their time. TJ’s inherent flexibility plays a part here; by offering a skeletal menu of daily/weekly/monthly/annual activities, it can accommodate the shifting circumstances of individual biographies without forcing complete relinquishment:

...the extreme demands they make are likely to ensure a following as small as it is totally committed and unremittingly enthusiastic. Only as the ‘edge’ presented to society dulls somewhat is a wider expansion likely, and this indeed is what is happening in some degree. Categories of commitment are allowed which permit believers to sojourn partway between the religious universe and the wider secular world. (David Martin cited in Woodhead and Heelas 2000, p.66)

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11 This is expressed also by Wilson (cited in Stark 2003, p.268): “There is certainly a difference between those who are converted to a sect, and those who accept Adventist teachings at their mother’s knee.”
This recalls Berger’s intertwining of the sacred and secular detailed in 11.1. However, while Martin’s comments map the impact of the collectivity on the group, I would argue that the inverse is simultaneously possible; indeed a key insight of Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge is that social reality is continually constructed by human actors in toto. Put differently, the Avant-Garde’s familiarity with secular modes of reference may facilitate an interpenetration of life-worlds that works both ways. While TJ proscribes organised proselytisation to non-Muslims, my interview with Hanzalah, the Avant-Garde Tier 2 leader of 9.2.1, was striking for his vision of how TJ might implicitly impact Britain’s broader social fabric:

Riyaz: What do you see as the future of TJ in this country? What role do you think it will be playing in the lives of British Muslims 50 years from now?

Hanzalah: I would like to think it builds upon what has been established by the first/second-generation of Muslims to date...But more importantly I would like to think that the effort of da’wa provides a means of bringing back into the country of England those values which pre-50, 60, 70 years were prevalent. They used to wear...long flowing skirts, the men would have hats on their heads, they would open a door. All those days of chivalry and manners and, you know, family values and...ethics...where a shopkeeper could leave his shop open all day and nobody would be bothered. You know, oh, I’m just nipping out, can you keep an eye on my...? All that sort of stuff...all those values from 50, 60 years ago which were prevalent in British society, right, but because of the lack of Deen and Imaan, it’s disappeared. I would hope that the effort of tabligh would slowly but surely bring about those same values back into our lives. Whether they’re Muslims or not, I’m not particularly bothered at this moment in time, but I think we have a lot to offer the society, the wider society...and I think tabligh has a major role to play in trying to establish those and the fact that our youngsters are being educated, professionals and therefore are more able to converse and bring those values to play in their respective professional organisations, I think will help.

Presumably, by which he means the demise of Christianity. See Zebiri (2007, pp.155-156) for similar views, regarding Islam more generally, echoed by British converts to the faith.
12.2.3 Circumscribed by the 6 points: the limitations of TJ’s reform agenda

Despite Hanzalah’s optimism, other factors seem to militate against TJ’s future success. At several points in this thesis, TJ’s ‘repetitious simplicity’\(^\text{13}\) has been highlighted uncovering, perhaps, a central paradox of contemporary TJ: despite its unmistakable anti-intellectual ethos, it continues to attract significant numbers of secular-educated professionals. In explaining this, I would revert back to the key attraction proposed in 8.2.2.1: TJ’s normative praxis functions to inherently empower participants by facilitating a shift in the relationship they enjoy with their religion from passive consumers to active purveyors. Put differently, TJ institutionalises the enablement of agency, from a dormant to an active state, to empower essentially unqualified laity to function as religious preachers. Further, the doctrinal and methodological simplicity of TJ’s core message has been identified as a key factor in its global spread: “As a populist movement of faith renewal, these country studies point to Tablighi Jama’at’s greatest strength: its uncontroversial insistence on the basics that gives it wide social adaptability” (Birt 2001, p.375). This may be triangulated with Berger and Luckmann’s theorising in the sociology of knowledge which attempts to capture, in macro-terms, the processes through which the common activities of a group sediment into tradition. In order for the constellation of core meanings to be transmitted effectively to new collectivities or generations, usually through a reciprocally comprehensible sign system rooted in language, the relevant features of the symbolic universe must be compressed into a series of simplified formulae:

> The institutional meanings must be impressed powerfully and unforgottably upon the consciousness of the individual. Since human beings are frequently sluggish and forgetful there must also be procedures by which these meanings can be re impressed and rememorized...Furthermore, since human beings are frequently stupid, institutional meanings tend to become simplified in the process of transmission, so that the given collection of institutional ‘formulae’ can be readily learned and memorized by successive generations. The ‘formula’ character of institutional meanings ensures their memorability. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, pp.87-88)

There is no doubt that contemporary TJ discourse revolves around the constant reiteration of key themes that have been reduced to easily memorisable formulae. This is perhaps best typified by the daily ‘6 Points’ talk while on \textit{khuruj}, usually delivered after the Fajr prayer, in which the appointed \textit{jama’at} member recounts key qualities from the lives of the \textit{sahaabah} in terms of a strictly defined

\(^{13}\) See also, for instance, Masud (2000a, p.31), Roy (2004, p.169) and Sardar (2004a, p.13). According to Janson (2014, p.235): “One of the reasons why the Tablighi Jama’at attracts so many young people is that the tenor of its Islam is emotionalist rather than intellectualist.”
format and content. While such repetitious dogmatism may well have facilitated TJ’s international spread among an astonishing array of diverse audiences, it simultaneously functions as a double-edged sword as clear in the abrupt disillusionment of Nurul in 10.2.1. Unlike Nurul though, the ‘turn to Arabic’ identified in 7.2.3 indicates that segments of the Avant-Garde, rather than cede to a disappointed abandonment of TJ, are willing to substantiate the movement’s scriptural foundations through personal study, sometimes as an explicit response to the critiques of other sectarian groupings such as the Salafiyyah. Further, the personal examples of figures such as Luqman, Yahya or Muuaaz indicate that TJ’s simplistic veneer camouflages a powerful spiritual and intellectual substance that yields itself to those with the proclivity and perseverance to plumb its depths. Nevertheless, despite these various caveats, it is difficult to deny that contemporary TJ discourse – certainly at the grassroots level – has stultified into a series of predictable bromides that lack vitality or originality. More often than not, TJ gatherings consist of a variety of regurgitated dogmas preached to the already converted. This becomes apparent, for example, when witnessing the dwindling number of Tiers 4 and 5 congregants who, responding to the weekly TJ announcement, remain after the prayer for the umoomi gasht speech. This might indicate that the incessant arrival and departure of TJ groups in a sizeable number of the country’s mosques has caused something akin to TJ-fatigue to set in; the constant repetition of a core set of recycled tropes by unqualified laity, who sometimes make egregious public errors that antagonise ulema, desensitises ordinary congregants to the efficacy of their message. Here, mediocrity emerges as the flipside of agency; TJ’s empowerment of the layperson to act as a purveyor of religious sentiment inhibits the elevation of its discourse beyond the lowest common denominator. Another paradox may be mentioned: despite the ‘cultural cosmopolitanism’ outlined in 7.3.3, contemporary TJ is simultaneously characterised by a methodological parochialism that a priori disengages large swaths of the British Muslim population (recall, for instance, the experience of the website developer in 7.4.2). In the context of an increasingly competitive and complex marketplace of British Islam then, such a rigid insistence on ‘the basics’ may well prove to be an Achilles heel.

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14 The situation was very different in Bulgaria where the arrival of our small TJ group in a mosque was clearly regarded as a novelty that attracted all manner of people.

15 The frankly stated frustrations of Raees, a long-standing Tier 3 activist, are especially telling in this regard: “Now the problem with Tabligh and the people that get involved inside Tabligh is they just come to a standstill. I mean, so when they’ll come for the two days or 40 days whatever, they’ll just go through the motions and there’ll be a whole period of time that people will just waste, you know, in chatting nonsense, instead of sitting there and trying to progress their knowledge. So, you know, simple things like learning ahaadith, progressing their knowledge of the Arabic language, reading. I mean, how many people involved in Tabligh have ever read the translation of the Qur’an from al-Fatiha to an-Nas? Anyone? Has anyone read the Tafsir? Who are these Tafsirs written for? They’re not written for scholars; they’re written for us. Do you understand? So I just think there’s a huge apathy in terms of the people that are making the effort and call themselves activists that they’re just not willing to progress inside their knowledge. And I just find that really, really frustrating and sad.
Nevertheless, given the various structural factors outlined above coupled with TJ’s clear ability to deliver a powerful religious experience – premised upon the rejuvenation of key meanings first internalised during the emotively charged primary socialisation of childhood – that offers British-born youth certainty, authenticity and fraternity in an increasingly atomised postmodern society, I do not think it will fade from the landscape of British Islam. Rather, it will continue to play a significant role, particularly at the level of the grassroots Muslim, in tandem with the broader institutional infrastructure of Deobandi Islam. In doing so though, it will characteristically understate its own presence and remain camouflaged within a heterogeneous landscape of ‘noisier’ though not necessarily more influential Muslim actors.

12.3 Final Reflections

This thesis has argued that British TJ should be located within broader processes of immigration and indigenisation in British Islam more generally. Further, it has sought to map the experience of intra-religious conversion using conceptual tools of the social scientist. Finally, I offer a few reflections about the potential value of my study in Britain’s current socio-political climate.

TJ’s self-preference for orthopraxy over orthodoxy makes it eminently suited to the techniques of ethnographic investigation, providing the researcher is able to cultivate sufficient trust and rapport to access primary field-sites. My own positioning as an indigenous ethnographer – anatomised in Chapter 3 – was of primary significance here. Not only was I able to enjoy unprecedented access in the field, but participated in religious activities with my respondents – such as prayer and fasting – as a believer. Further my biographical trajectory as a second-generation South Asian Muslim, born and raised in Britain, converged in important ways with my respondents. Consequently, my cultivation of Verstehen became more of an existential enterprise than a mere sociological formality.

And it’s just there’s no desire to…they’re just content with exactly what they’re regurgitating. And I’ve got to admit, I mean, most of the talks are just totally uninspiring and you sit there and you go to sleep and you think, oh, here we go again. And it’s just the same. Fair enough, there is a spiritual aspect to it; there is a worry and concern that you can talk about; you can talk from the heart. But there comes a point where you’ve got to back it up with some knowledge, you know, and some serious references and some serious knowledge. And unfortunately it just doesn’t happen and, like I said, there’s a whole sea of apathy.”

16 This is substantiated by Inge’s (2017, pp.37-38) observation of changing language-usage and dress among her Somali respondents that reflects my distinction between the Old Guard and Avant-Garde: “During my fieldwork, I noticed that the older-generation Somali women, dressed in colourful Somali clothing and conversing in Somali, congregated in the downstairs part of the women’s section of the mosque. Their daughters and granddaughters, on the other hand, mostly sat upstairs, where Salafi circles of knowledge were held in English, and wore head-to-toe black garments like the Afro-Caribbean converts and others who congregated there.”

17 As stated earlier, the female experience of British TJ remains un-researched and would be a fertile area for future study.
though without, I would hope, compromising scientific rigour. While such an approach might have been anathema to the classical positivist moorings of qualitative research, it has been legitimised by the postmodernist fracturing of the discipline’s epistemological foundations. Accordingly, my self-reflexive positionality was, I would argue, able to contribute important insights.

The post-9/11-7/7-Brexit socio-political climate in Britain is both tense and uncertain, one in which immigrant communities in general, and Muslims in particular, are viewed with suspicion and/or hostility. The Conservative government’s counter-extremism strategy, published on 19 October 2015, sought to bolster ‘fundamental British values’ by extending the definition of ‘extremism’ to include non-violent practices and attitudes: “We know that terrorism is really a symptom; ideology is the root cause” (David Cameron, preface to Home Office Report 2015, p.5). Further, public institutions such as schools and universities were impacted by a statutory duty to monitor and report pupils suspected of ‘extremism’ (see also Inge 2017, pp.236-239). While it is not entirely clear how future operationalisations of this ‘muscular liberalism’ will affect conservative Muslim groups such as TJ, the underlying philosophical bugbear implicated by such measures – and hinted at in Chapter 11 – was succinctly captured by Tariq Modood in the wake of the 1989 Rushdie Affair:

The issue is of the rights of non-European religions and cultural minorities in the context of a secular hegemony. Is the Enlightenment big enough to legitimise the existence of pre-Enlightenment religious enthusiasm or can it only exist by suffocating all who fail to be overawed by its intellectual brilliance and vision of man? (Modood, cited in Davie 2015, p.62)

Grace Davie (2015, p.62) – further citing Oliver Leaman: “how do we (western commentators) accommodate ‘that unusual phenomenon in our society, the person who takes religion seriously...?’” – observes: “The question lies at the heart of what it means to live in a pluralist society. It raises complex and difficult issues that require the sustained attention of many different groups of people.” This thesis has demonstrated that religion continues to animate the existential horizons of significant numbers of British Muslims. In seeking to interrogate, conceptualise and extrapolate the significance of this for the broader sociality in which their biographies unfold, I would argue that

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18 The inherent possibility of this is suggested by Stark and Finke’s (2000, p.2) powerful critique of the ‘atheistic roots’ of social science: “In this introduction, we first summarize the intellectual history of the social scientific study of religion as atheism, tracing the links through major scholars across the centuries. Then we examine the recent shift toward a more truly scientific approach, documenting the fact that this transformation was mainly the result of the increased participation of persons of faith. Against this background, we note “survivals” of the traditional atheistic biases, albeit in a somewhat muffled form, and seek to show that a scientific study of religion is entirely possible for both believers and unbelievers, if not perhaps for aggressive ideologues of either commitment.”
social scientists should resist the pressure to pathologise their respondents by deploying reductive analytical frames deriving from a master discourse of ‘radicalisation.’ Rather, religious phenomenon should be studied on its own merits and conceptual apparatus developed organically to map emergent data. In this regard, and particularly in the contemporary context of ‘securitised’ Muslim communities, indigenous ethnography can make a valuable contribution: “Broadly speaking the potential of religion to become a positive resource is most easily appreciated by those who know it best” (Davie 2013, p.xviii). Yet accommodating this phenomenon within the parameters of a discipline whose foundational epistemologies, operational methodologies and living exemplars overwhelmingly function etsi Deus non daretur presents a very specific Janus-faced challenge. On the one hand, the indigenous ethnographer is obliged to cultivate an analytical distance that allows the preservation of conceptual integrity – termed ‘methodological agnosticism’ in this thesis. On the other, the discipline is obliged to confront the possibility that its philosophical substratum may be conscientiously rejected, appropriated or interpreted in novel ways. Such cross-fertilisation is yet another reflection of the empirical reality that, according to Berger (2014), characterises the modern world. Surveying the condition of religion in modern Britain, Davie laments that:

...at precisely the moment when they are most needed, British people are losing the vocabulary, tools and concepts that they require in order to have a constructive conversation about faith. The result all too often is an ill-informed and ill-mannered debate about issues of extreme importance to the democratic future of this country. More heat than light is an understatement. (Davie 2015, p.xiii)

The production and dissemination of rigorous, evidence-based research, conducted ethically and empathically “by those who know it best,” may well be a vital antidote to this situation.

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19 For more on this, see my review of Crane and Weibel’s (ed.) Missionary Impositions: Conversion, Resistance and Other Challenges to Objectivity in Religious Ethnography (Timol 2014).
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PhD Thesis: Spiritual Wayfarers in a Secular Age


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Spencer, N. 2010. Without God and country, how will the young flourish? The Guardian. 17 October.


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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: Glossary

Adab-e-gasht – short talk, delivered as part of the umoomi gasht, that outlines the objectives and etiquettes of the impending gasht to be performed

Adhaan (sometimes spelt azan) – Liturgical call to prayer that precedes each of the five daily salaat, often called aloud from the minaret in Muslim countries

Alhamdulillah – lit: ‘Praise be to Allah’; common expression used to express gratitude to God

Amir – the appointed leader of a TJ group, or the masjid-waar-jama’at of a particular mosque

Alim – singular of ulema

Asar – third of the five daily salaat offered in the late afternoon

Banglawali Masjid – the mosque in Nizamuddin where TJ first took root and where the global headquarters is still located today

Baraka – Blessings, benedictions

Barelwi – sectarian denomination of South Asian Islam, associated with Mawlana Ahmed Raza Khan (1856-1921), known for a historical antagonism with the Deobandi school

Bayaan – speech or lecture, usually delivered at a mosque after one of the five daily prayers

Bay’ah – oath of allegiance taken with a Sufi Shaykh as part of the initiation as a disciple of the order

Beruni gasht – type of weekly gasht in which the masjid-waar-jama’at of a given mosque visit Muslims of a neighbouring town/city/locality

Chillah – a 40 day khuruj outing, undertaken annually by dedicated TJ activists

Da’ee – one who gives da’wa

Dar al-Ulum – lit: ‘Abode of Knowledge’; refers to Islamic seminaries that train imams in the South Asian Islamic tradition

Dastarkhan – tablecloth laid on the floor upon which TJ activists eat during khuruj

Da’wa – lit: ‘invitation’ or ‘inviting.’ Calling others to Islam, preaching, Islamic proselytisation

Deen - religion

Deobandi – sectarian denomination of South Asian Islam, associated with the 1867 founding of a Dar al-Ulum in British India, known for a historical antagonism with the Barelwi school

Dhikr – (supererogatory) remembrance of God, usually in the forms of litanies repeated with the aid of a tasbeeh

Dhuhr – second of the five daily salaat offered after noon

Du’aa – personal prayers / supplications

Dunya – the world / worldly life, used usually as a diametric opposite to Deen
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Elan – announcement made in the mosque after one of the five salaat usually to inform congregants about an impending gasht activity or bayaan


Fadhail-e-Sadaqat – lit: ‘Virtues of Charity’; a core reading compendium of hadith used by South Asian TJ for ta’lim purposes

Fajr – first of the five daily salaat offered before sunrise

Five A’amals – see Maqaami Kaam

Gasht – the act of visiting Muslims at their homes to invite them to the mosque or participate in a khuruj outing

Hafiz [plural: hufaaz] – honorific title for somebody who has memorised the entire Qur’an in Arabic.

Halal – permissible (according to Muslim jurists)

Halqa – a geographic region, delineated for TJ ministering purposes, that encompasses a number of towns / cities and their respective mosques that are networked to a regional Markaz

Haram – forbidden (according to Muslim jurists)

Hijab – Islamic headscarf worn by females

Hizb ut-Tahrir – sectarian denomination of contemporary Islam, associated with Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani (1909-1977) that seeks to establish an Islamic state

I’itikaaf - ritual seclusion at the mosque, usually during the last 10 days of Ramadan

Ijtima – convocation, a huge gathering of Muslims that is convened in a single place over several days and addressed by TJ leaders with the aim of forming outgoing jama’ats for khuruj

Ijtimaee amal – activities carried out collectively while on khuruj (as contrasted with infiradee amal)

Ijtimaee money – the collective monetary kitty of a given jama’at, collected by the amir, and used to fund jama’at purchases for the duration of the khuruj.

Ikraam – to honour a fellow Muslim / hospitality

Ikhlaas – sincerity, to do something for the sake of God alone

Ilm – (Religious) knowledge

Imaan – faith (belief in Allah, angels, divine books and messengers, the Day of Judgement, and predestination)

Infiradee amal – activities carried out individually while on khuruj, mostly consisting of different forms of worship or litanies.

Insha-Allah – lit: ‘If God wills’; common expression used when expressing an intention to do something

Iqaamah – litany called aloud to announce the impending commencement of one of the five daily salaat – usually by the muezzin standing in the prayer row (saff) directly behind the imam.
Isha – fifth of the five daily salaat offered in the early night

Ishraaq – type of nafl prayer offered soon after sunrise very commonly while on khuruj

Istiqamaah – steadfastness (in religion in the face of hardships / obstacles)

Jabbah – type of long, flowing robe

Jannah - Hell

Jama’at – lit: ‘group’ – used to refer to a TJ group travelling from place to place

Jama’at-i Islami – sectarian denomination of South Asian Islam, associated with Syed Abul A’la Maududi (1903-1979), known for its desire to establish an Islamic state

Jannah - Paradise

Jilabaab - Type of loose-fitting Islamic robe worn by females

Jore – synonym of ijtima, but usually on a smaller-scale

Jumu’ah salaat – the Friday prayer, which incorporates a sermon as a compulsory element, and is usually the most populous prayer of the week at the mosque

Kaafir – disbeliever

Kaarguzari – feedback / debriefing; used to refer to the verbal recollection of experiences on a khuruj outing

Kalimah – lit: ‘word’ – usually used to refer to the cardinal expression of Islamic faith: ‘There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger’

Kashf – disclosure of the unseen/spiritual world sometimes bestowed upon saints

Khalifah – in Sufism, used to refer to the appointed deputy of a Shaykh who is authorised to initiate his own disciples into the Sufi order

Khanqah – a Sufi lodge usually presided over by a Shaykh (sometimes called zawiya)

Khilafah – Islamic State

Khuruj – lit: ‘going out’ – used to refer to the act of spending time travelling from mosque to mosque on a TJ outing as part of a jama’at

Libaas – generally used to refer to traditional Islamic clothing, such as a thawb or jabbah

Madhhab – one of the four canonical schools of Islamic jurisprudence (usually rejected by Salafis)

Madrassa - Islamic supplementary/evening school for children, usually appended to a mosque

Maghrhib – fourth of the five daily salaat offered at sunset

Mahina mashwera – a weekend-long mashwera held at the Dewsbury Markaz every six weeks or so and attended by J leaders from around the country.

Maktab – Islamic supplementary/evening school for children, usually appended to a mosque

Maraakiz – plural of Markaz
Markaz – a TJ centre that coordinates activities across a halqa and usually hosts a weekly Thursday night bayaan programme that attracts hundreds of Muslims

Maqaami Kaam – lit: ‘local work’ – used to refer to the ‘Local Mosque Scheme’ or ‘Five A’amals’ that TJ seeks to establish in mosques and that incorporates daily mashwera, gasht and ta’lim as well as weekly beruni and umoomi gasht and a monthly weekend khuruj.

Masha’Allah – lit: ‘Whatever God wills’; common expression of happiness

Mashwera – lit: ‘mutual consultation.’ A key TJ activity used in its decision-making processes at all levels of the movement; the mashwera is usually presided over by an amir who makes the final decision and is one of the ‘Five A’amals’

Masjid – mosque

Masjid-waar-jama’at – a group of TJ activists that convene regularly in a given mosque to carry out the Maqaami Kaam – usually presided over by the local mosque amir

Maslak – a particular theological orientation, methodology or school of thought

Masturaat – Female TJ activism

Mawlana – lit: ‘our master’; an honorific title accorded to qualified ulema in South Asian tradition

Mewat – region in India where TJ was first initiated by Mawlana Ilyas

Miswaak – herbal tooth-stick used by devout Muslims in emulation of the Prophet Muhammad

Mulaakats – lit: meetings; a synonym for gasht

Murid – disciple of a Sufi Shaykh

Mutakallim – designated speaker who gives da’wa in umoomi gasht

Nafl – supererogatory acts of workship

Namaz – another (Persian) name for salaat

Nikah – Islamic marriage ceremony

Nizamuddin – region in New Delhi India where the global headquarters of TJ is located

Niqab – Islamic face-veil worn by females

Paidal jama’at – a TJ group that walks from place to place, in strict/literal emulation of the prophets, rather than rely on conventional modes of transport.

Pir – South Asian title for a Shaykh

Puraana saathi – ‘experienced brother’; usually used to refer to a TJ activist who has undertaken the movement’s trademark four-month khuruj to the South Asian headquarters

Raiwind – region in Pakistan where an important international headquarters of TJ is located

Riyad-us-Saliheen – lit: ‘Gardens of the Righteous’; a core reading compendium of hadith used by Arab TJ for ta’lim purposes

Sahaabah – companions of the Prophet Muhammad
Salaat – the five daily prayers, offered by practising Muslims, as part of the second pillar of Islam

Salafi – a follower of Salafism

Salafism / Salafiyyah – sectarian denomination of contemporary Islam that seeks to return to the ways of al-salaf al-salih, the pious predecessors (the first three generations of Islam) and known for its rejection of Sufism and the madhhab system

Salam / Salaam – lit: ‘peace’ condensed form of al-salam-u-alaykum; Islamic greeting used when meeting other Muslims

Shaykh – a Sufi master, or a honorific title used for a pious / knowledgeable Muslim

Shaytaan – devil

Shura – council of TJ leaders appointed by a Markaz

Shuyukh – plural of Shaykh

Six Points – A list of qualities, derived from the lives of the sahaabah, that are central to TJ self-identity and usually recounted as part of a short bayaan after the Fajr prayer on a khuruj outing. Briefly, they comprise: 1) Faith (Imaan) 2) Prayer (Salaat) 3) Acquisition of Knowledge (Ilm) and Remembrance of God (Dhikr) 4) Honouring others (Ikraam) 5) Sincere intentions (Ikhlaas) 6) Inviting to God (Da’wa)

Subhanallah – lit: ‘Glory be to Allah’; common expression used to express wonder, amazement or surprise

Sunnah – established practice of the Prophet Muhammad

Tabligh – lit: ‘to convey’; a synonym for da’wa; sometimes used as shorthand for TJ

Tablighi – a TJ activist

Tahajjud – supererogatory salaat offered in the night by devout Muslims

Ta’lim – a general term for Islamic education but used, in TJ circles, to refer usually to the collective reading aloud from core texts that occurs several times a day during a khuruj outing and also as part of the Maqaami Kaam

Taraweeh – additional prayers lasting over an hour offered congregationally at the mosque during each night of Ramadan in which the entire Qur’an is recited over the course of the month

Tasawwuf – Sufism

Tasbeeh – rosary used to count dhikr

Tasbeehaat – Daily dhikr prescribed for TJ activists that consist of three distinct litanies to be recited one hundred times each every morning and evening

Taskeel – the act of encouraging somebody to participate in a TJ khuruj; usually follows da’wa or a bayaan – in the latter case, names from the audience are written down by an appointed person

Tawfeeq – Divine ability, from God, that facilitates the performance of good deeds

Tazkiyah – spiritual purification / Sufism
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**Thawb** – Type of loose-fitting Islamic robe worn by males

**Tilaawat** – (usually audible) recitation of the Qur’an

**Tongi** – region in Bangladesh which is the site of a huge annual international TJ *ijtima*

**Topi** – Islamic hat / skullcap worn by males

**Ulema / ‘Ulama** – qualified experts in Islamic theology and jurisprudence who often function as imams (singular: *alim*)

**Umma (or ummah)** – worldwide community of Muslims

**Umoomi gasht** – type of weekly *gasht*, a crucial element of the *Maqaami Kaam*, that involves a *mosjid-waar-jama'at* visiting all adult male Muslims on a selected street followed by a *bayaan* at the mosque

**Umoor** – an agenda item to be discussed in a *mashwera*

**Wudu** – ritual washing that precedes *salaat*. In the absence of water, an alternate form of symbolic cleansing using dust, called *tayammum*, can be done.
APPENDIX B: Fieldwork Documentation

B1 – Interview Information Sheet
B2 – Interview Consent Form
B3 – Participant Observation Information Sheet
B4 – Debriefing Sheet
B5 – Interview Schedule
B6 – List of Quotations
B1 – Interview Information Sheet

Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK
Department of Religious and Theological Studies
School of History, Archaeology and Religion
Cardiff University
Cardiff
CF10 3EU

INFORMATION SHEET FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT ON

ISLAM IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN

This information sheet invites you to participate in a research study. To help you decide whether or not you wish to take part, you may find it helpful to know what the research aims to achieve and what it will involve. I would be grateful if you would read the information below carefully. Do not hesitate to ask if you would like more information and please feel free to take time to decide whether or not you wish to participate.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the School of History, Archaeology and Religion’s ‘School Research Ethics Committee’ based at Cardiff University. The researcher, Riyaz Timol, has also met with and obtained permission from national TJ authorities, based at the Markazi Mosque on South Street, Dewsbury to conduct this research. More information about this can be provided upon request.

What is the purpose of the study?

• I am interested in examining the reasons why Islam, as a spiritual and religious tradition, continues to appeal to second and third generation British-born Muslims in modern, secular societies. I think the Tablighi Jama’at (TJ), as the largest movement for grassroots Muslim renewal in the world, provides an excellent example of this. I am trying to understand why British Muslims continue to be drawn to TJ’s distinctive preaching-reform methodology. I want to know how well it has been transmitted to second and third generation British-born Muslims and how it helps them navigate their social reality of modern Britain. I am also interested in exploring what the success of the TJ tells us about the broader function of religion in modern societies.

• To do this I want to speak to TJ activists, like you, to gain a deeper understanding of your experiences with TJ.

Why have I been chosen?

• You have been chosen to take part in the study because you have experience of participating in TJ activities in modern Britain and could contribute valuable data to my research study.
**What do I have to do?**

- I would like to arrange a mutually agreeable time for us to speak about your experiences with TJ. This can take place in my home, your home or the local mosque—wherever you feel most comfortable. I would expect the conversation to last at least one hour. With your permission, I would like to record this interview so I am able to refer back to what was said.

**What will happen to the information about me that you gather?**

- All data I gather will be treated in the strictest confidence. It will be securely stored and only be available to me for my personal use. The recording of the interview will be written up into what is called a ‘transcript’. This will allow me to read what you’ve said again. The transcript will be stored as a password-protected Microsoft Word file, which, again, will be available only to me.

- When I produce the transcript, I will change the names of yourself and everyone you happen to mention. Nothing in the written outputs of the project will identify who you are.

- If you wish, I will give you a copy of the transcript of your interview so that you can be sure that what I’ve written is accurate and that no-one in it can be identified by others.

- As a participant, you can give as much or as little information as you wish. You can also request that I do not record the interview but take notes instead.

- An analysis of the data I gather from the interview will form part of a finished thesis which will be read and marked by my supervisors and external examiners.

**Do I have to take part?**

- It is up to you to decide whether or not you wish to take part. If you do decide to participate you will be given this information sheet and will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You are also free to ask for more information before making a decision. After the interview you will also be given a debriefing sheet to take away with you.

**Who is the researcher?**

- The researcher is Riyaz Timol, a postgraduate student at Cardiff University in the Department of Religious and Theological Studies. The PhD is supervised by Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Mawlana Dr Mansur Ali (contact details below).

**Contact information**

- If you would like more information about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisors:
  - Riyaz Timol - Email: timolr@cardiff.ac.uk – Tel: [removed]
  - Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray - E-mail: Gilliat-RayS@cardiff.ac.uk – Tel: [removed]
  - Mawlana Dr Mansur Ali - E-mail: AliMM1@cardiff.ac.uk – Tel: [removed]

Thank you for reading this information sheet.
CONSENT FORM FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT ON

ISLAM IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN

Name of Researcher: RIYAZ TIMOL

Please initial box:

1. I understand that my participation in this project will involve sharing my experiences of TJ with the principal researcher, Riyaz Timol. I have had the opportunity to consider the information sheet, to ask questions and have had any questions answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I experience discomfort during participation in this project, I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with the researcher.

4. I understand that the information provided by me will be held totally anonymously, so that it is impossible to trace this information back to me individually. I understand that this information may be retained indefinitely.

5. I understand that information provided by me for this study, including my own words, may be used in the research report, but that all such information and/or quotes will be anonymised.

6. I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback.

I, ____________________________(PRINT NAME), consent to participate in the study conducted by Riyaz Timol, School of History, Archaeology and Religion, Cardiff University under the supervision of Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Mawlana Dr. Mansur Ali.

Signed:

Date:
B3 – Participant Observation Information Sheet

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INFORMATION SHEET FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT ON

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What is the purpose of the study?

- I am interested in examining the reasons why Islam, as a spiritual and religious tradition, continues to appeal to second and third generation British-born Muslims in modern, secular societies. I think the Tablighi Jama’at (TJ), as the largest movement for grassroots Muslim renewal in the world, provides an excellent example of this. I am trying to understand why British Muslims continue to be drawn to TJ’s distinctive preaching-reform methodology. I want to know how well it has been transmitted to second and third generation British-born Muslims and how it helps them navigate their social reality of modern Britain. I am also interested in exploring what the success of the TJ tells us about the broader function of religion in modern societies.

- To do this I want to observe TJ activists, like you, in motion. I also want to speak to you to gain a deeper understanding of your experiences with TJ.

Why have I been chosen?

- You have been chosen to take part in the study because you have experience of participating in TJ activities in modern Britain and could contribute valuable data to my research study.
What do I have to do?

- Nothing out of the ordinary. I would like to observe how you participate in TJ activities and take some notes. I may also want to speak to you about your experiences and thoughts of TJ.

What will happen to the information about me that you gather?

- All data I gather will be treated in the strictest confidence. It will be securely stored and only be available to me for my personal use. Written notes made will be typed up as a Microsoft Word file, which will be saved as a password-protected document and available only to me.

- When I type up the notes, I will change the names of yourself and everyone you happen to mention. Nothing in the written outputs of the project will identify who you are.

- As a participant, you can give as much or as little information as you wish.

- An analysis of the data I gather from the observation and the interview will form part of a finished thesis which will be read and marked by my supervisors and external examiners.

Do I have to take part?

- It is up to you to decide whether or not you wish to take part. If you do decide to participate you will be given this information sheet and a debriefing sheet to take away with you. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You are also free to ask for more information before making a decision.

- If asked, I will not record the details of any conversations, encounters or exchanges that you or the other people concerned explicitly ask me not to.

- Without your consent, I will not be recording conversations or encounters electronically, but I will be writing notes as I go along. If this is in any way intrusive, you can ask me to stop.

- If anything I do is intrusive or inhibiting you can ask me to stop doing it.

Who is the researcher?

- The researcher is Riyaz Timol, a postgraduate student at Cardiff University in the Department of Religious and Theological Studies. The PhD is supervised by Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Mawlana Dr Mansur Ali (contact details below).

Contact information

- If you would like more information about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisors:
  
  o Riyaz Timol - Email: rtimol@live.co.uk – Tel: [removed]
  o Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray - E-mail: Gilliat-RayS@cardiff.ac.uk – Tel: [removed]
  o Mawlana Dr Mansur Ali - E-mail: AliMM1@cardiff.ac.uk – Tel: [removed]

Thank you for reading this information sheet.
Thank you for taking part in this study.

The aim of this research was to understand the reasons why Islam continues to appeal to second and third generation British-born Muslims in a modern, secular society. The information you have provided about your experiences with the TJ will help me to appreciate how religion functions in modern societies and how TJ continues to play a role in the lives of Muslims in those societies. The data you have provided is entirely anonymous, which means nothing can be traced back to you. Should you wish to withdraw your contribution retrospectively, please contact the primary researcher or his supervisors below.

If you would like to read more about the area of this research the following resources may be of interest:


If you have any questions about this study or your participation in it, please contact:

- Riyaz Timol - Email: timolr@cardiff.ac.uk – Tel: [removed]
- Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray - E-mail: Gilliat-RayS@cardiff.ac.uk – Tel: [removed]
- Mawlana Dr Mansur Ali - E-mail: AliMM1@cardiff.ac.uk – Tel: [removed]

Thank you for taking part in this study.

Riyaz Timol

Date:
B5 – Interview Schedule

**Personal background**

- So let’s begin with some background information, can you tell me a little about yourself please?
- Age?
- Born in UK?
- Ethnic origin / languages?
- And how about your family life, are you married with children? (Aspirations for children, Muslim schools / Dar al-Ulums?)
- Religious commitment prior to TJ? Maktab education? Regular in 5 daily prayers?
- Educational attainment? (University / were you involved in TJ while at university?)
- Profession / occupation?

**Association with TJ**

- So when did you first get involved? Can you tell me the story of what happened? How long ago was this?
- What was the initial experience like? What were the key aspects of TJ that attracted you in particular?
- What was the reaction of your friends and family and how did you handle this?
- (How punctual are you in your collective (ijtimaee) and individual (infiraadee) daily a’amals? Which aspect do you find the most difficult?)
- So how long have you been involved for now? How active would you consider yourself? Which countries have you visited over the years?
- How important is TJ to you? In what ways would you say participation has affected your life? How is participation now different to the early days?
- If you had to capture the essence of TJ in a single sentence what would it be?
- What’s the best thing you like about TJ? How about the worst?
- In all your years of experience, what is the most important lesson you have learnt?
- Participation in regular TJ activities can be demanding; how do you negotiate your commitment to TJ with your family life and your occupation?
- What are your aspirations in terms of TJ for the future? Where would you like to be in 5 years?

**British Muslim identity**

- TJ is a movement which originated in India nearly a hundred years ago. Can you shed some light on how you feel it functions differently in modern Britain?
- How successfully do you think it has transmitted itself to second and third generation British-born Muslims? What do you feel are the key factors contributing to its appeal in a modern society?
- What are the best things you like about living in Britain? How about the worst?
- Are most of your work colleagues Muslim or non-Muslim? What is your experience of practising Islam in the modern British workplace? Do you actively proselytise your colleagues? Are there provisions for prayer, etc. and how important is this to you?
- How do you negotiate commitment to TJ with living in a predominantly secular society? Do you experience any tensions?
- How important are outward markers of Islamic identity, such as the beard or dress, to you? What do you wear to work?
Previous studies of TJ have asserted that it encourages isolation from the wider society; what are your thoughts regarding this? (READ QUOTE)

What are your views on the secular education system – school, college and university, etc.? (READ QUOTE)

Many third-generation British-born Muslims can no longer speak their languages of ethnic origin – such as Gujarati, Urdu or Bengali. What are your thoughts regarding this?

What do you see as the future of TJ in this country? What role do you think it will be playing in the lives of British Muslims 50 years from now?

Miscellaneous

The founders of TJ – such as Shaykh Muhammad Ilyas and Shaykh Muhammad Zakariyya Kandhalawi – were accomplished Sufi masters. In what ways and to what extent do you think this Sufi legacy permeates modern TJ practice?

One of the ways in which British TJ has hit the headlines recently is with the so-called “mega-mosque” controversy in London – what are your thoughts regarding this?

Several respondents have mentioned there was a great influx of young people getting involved with TJ in the early nineties. What is your experience of this? To what extent would you say TJ in Britain operates as a youth movement?

To what extent would you consider TJ to be a Deobandi movement? Do you consider yourself to be a Deobandi?

What are your thoughts regarding the use of mobile phones or smartphones in TJ?

Some critics of TJ assert that while activists are eager to spread Islam, they lack the requisite knowledge to do so effectively – what are your thoughts on this? (READ QUOTE)

My fieldwork to date has uncovered an increasing number of British-born TJ activists who are learning or fluent in Arabic. How important do you feel fluency with the Arabic language is for TJ activists?

Last week was Election Day. Did you vote and what are your thoughts with regards to Muslim participation in the electoral process?

What are your thoughts with regards to my research? Is it a good thing or bad?!
I would eclectically read aloud from some of the following quotations, as appropriate, during my formal interviews to elicit responses from my interviewees.

### CULTURAL ISOLATIONISM

“The Tablighi Jama’at has been almost unique in the Muslim community for inspiring in its followers isolationist attitudes which run against the grain of multicultural notions. This is reflected in that it alone, of all the major Islamic groupings in the Toronto area, has been able to inspire the formation of the rudiments of Muslim ghettos.” Azmi (commenting on TJ in Canada)

“The Tablighi ethos attracts those British Muslims who, in their social and economic dealings, have little interaction with non-Muslims and the wider British society...people who have little hope of rising up within the existing system, or quite simply people who wish to drop out of the system itself, seeking refuge and comfort in a culturally more familiar world. The Tablighi ethos works to minimise contacts with people of other faiths, withdrawing from the wider society to protect Islam from the threat of secularism and materialism. Excluded from the dominant British society in the midst of whom they live, they see that society as particularly ungodly and immoral and thus respond eagerly to Tablighi calls for social and cultural separatism and insularity.” Yoginder Sikand

### VIEWS ON WESTERN EDUCATION

Sikand cites the Gloucester-based Haji Ebrahim Yoosuf Bawa Rangooni who unequivocally declares: “Save your progeny from the education of school and college...in the same way as you (would) save them from a lion or a wolf...To send them in the atmosphere of college...is as dangerous as throw(ing) them into hell with your own hands.” Based on this, Sikand concludes that “The Tablighi Jama’at has very little presence among Muslim students in British schools and colleges”

### FUTURE OF TJ IN BRITAIN

“Few British Muslim youth would probably find in the average tablighi Maulana, who hardly knows any English, dressed in his shalwar-kamiz or lungi, shunning all contact with the outside world, a role model to follow. On the other hand, you have the smart English-speaking professionals—doctors, lawyers and so on—in Islamic groups such as the Young Muslims or the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, debating with Europeans and championing the cause of Islam. These are the sort of people young Muslims in Britain would now look up to for inspiration.” Philip Lewis

“From its phase of consolidation in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, the TJ seems to have entered a phase of gradual decline with the emergence of a new generation of British-born Muslims. Many young British Muslims today would seem to find the Tablighi expression of Islam outmoded, if not ‘un-Islamic’. By making no significant modifications in its methods and approach to suit the exigencies of the British context, the TJ seems to have little hope for any very significant breakthroughs in Britain in the years to come.” Yoginder Sikand

### TJ LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

“Since I was a kid I asked myself what my purpose on earth was. My search for an answer to this question brought me to the Tablighi Jam’aat in 2001. The Jam’aat was an eye opener for me. I finally became a practising Muslim. Before, I lacked an agenda in my life. I used to have bad habits. The Jama’at calmed down my ego and hot headedness, but when time went on I realised that there was
a lot of nonsense in the Jama’at. It’s intention, and Allah knows best, is good, but its method is very wrong. Islam is like an ocean and nobody can drink it in one day. Tablighis believe, however, that setting out on khurooj is more important than gaining knowledge of Islam. They preach that Allah created the sun, the moon and the stars; even a girl in nursery school knows that. Tablighi preachers lack proper knowledge of Islam. Since I was eager to learn more about Islam I was bored to death about the Jama’ats method. I surfed the web and I came across the names of many Islamic scholars. I skyped with Saudi scholars and they told me which books I had to read. The things I read I tried to implement in my life. I strive hard to lead a halal life. My philosophy is to live Islam the way it’s supposed to be and to search for religious knowledge. During my search for true Islam, I met many Muslims calling themselves Salafis. I also attended a Salafi study group during which we read and discuss the Islamic scriptures. I took Arabic lessons as well. Tablighis are English students, but instead of reading English translations of the scriptures, they should study them in the original language.” (a respondent account from Janson’s study of TJ in the Gambia)
APPENDIX C: Addendum to Chapter 5 - ‘An Anatomy of British TJ’

C1 – A Profile of Masjid Ta-Ha

Here I present a profile of Masjid Ta-Ha, my principal fieldwork site for five months (see Section 3.3.1.2). Located in Preston, in the North West of England, it is a fairly typical British Deobandi mosque run by Gujarati Muslims. Comprising a total population of 140,202, Preston was granted city status in 2002 and recently acquired a Catholic cathedral in July, 2016. In the years following WWII, its textile industry attracted significant numbers of economic migrants, notably from South Asia and the Caribbean. According to the 2011 census, approximately 11% of Preston’s population self-identify as Muslim. Unlike, say, London or Birmingham, this community is ethnically homogenous consisting almost entirely of South Asians, with a strong (Gujarati) Indian majority and a sizeable Pakistani minority. Around 15 mosques (approximately 1 per 1,000 Muslims) serve the community most of which belong to the Deobandi school and have an active TJ presence. Additionally, the city has both primary and secondary schools for Muslim children, two Dar al-Ulums (one for boys, one for girls), and a Muslim chaplain at the university.

Masjid Ta-Ha first operated out of a donated house in the 1960s and relocated, in the late 1970s, to a large, purpose-built building designed to accommodate up to 700 worshippers (the worshippers are all male; women occasionally attend for select ladies-only programmes but there is no provision for them to participate in the daily prayers – though the daily adhaan, prayers and speeches are relayed to individual homes in the community through a radio transmitter. The mosque also owns an adjacent building which provides a dedicated space for ladies-only classes, study circles and recreation). A management committee comprised entirely of Gujarati Muslims runs the mosque; in the 80s and 90s this committee consisted of first-generation migrants but recent decades have seen the British-born generation taking on a more assertive role in managing mosque affairs. Reflecting the pattern of many other British Deobandi mosques, two imams are employed on a full-time basis - one a first-generation Urdu-speaking migrant and the other a British-born graduate of a UK Dar al-Ulum. Each takes turn delivering the weekly Friday sermon in Urdu and English respectively to cater for the generational diversity of congregants. A well-established maktab system provides after school Islamic education every weekday to around 370 local children up till the age of 13, now delivered mostly by British-born (male and female) teachers in English. This maktab has produced hundreds of hufaaz over the years, many of whom lead the taraweeh prayers in Ramadan locally and further afield, and a small minority of local teenagers are also enrolled at British Dar al-Ulums training to become future imams. Keeping post-maktab youth connected to the mosque is a key concern and the mosque occasionally hosts guest scholars, such as Shaykh Zahir Mahmood or Mufti Abdur-Rahman Mangera, known for their ability to deliver an English-language message relevant to...

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20 I have anonymised the name to protect the identity of my respondents.
22 The famous Prestonian Sir Richard Arkwright (1732-1792) pioneered several technical inventions such as the water frame which revolutionised the manufacture of textiles which may have contributed to the city’s appeal. As noted above, Hafiz Patel, TJ’s European amir, worked for some time in Courtaulds, a textile factory in Preston. Additionally, Abdullah William Quilliam (1856-1932), Sheik-ul-Islam of the British Isles, spent some time living in Preston (Geeaves 2010, p.259; Gilham 2014, p.76) where he may have forged alliances with the strong temperance movement first initiated there by Joseph Livesey (1794-1884) – and which is credited with introducing the word ‘teetotal’ into the English language.
23 The actual sermon is delivered solely in Arabic, but the speech preceding it is delivered in a local idiom to the largest number of Muslims that gathers in the mosque each week. Neither of the imams has any significant engagement with TJ, though they occasionally encourage congregants to participate in its activities and may take out half an hour to sit with a visiting TJ group to offer encouragement and advice (mudhakaras).
contemporary youth concerns. Additionally, a youth group operates from the mosque that organises barbeques, football tournaments and camping trips and which sometimes liaises with local TJ activists to encourage teenagers to participate in a weekend TJ outing.

TJ has been active in Masjid Ta-Ha since its inception and the present amir, a middle-aged administrative manager at the local council, became actively involved as a teenager in the early 80s soon after his arrival from India. Subsequently he has travelled the world on TJ tours and dedicates several hours every evening to managing the movement’s local activities. Conversations with local respondents indicated that TJ activity in the mosque peaked between 1993-1998 when a huge influx of youth became actively involved; many of the core activists today had their first exposure to TJ in this period (see Chapter 6). Subsequently, my respondents told me, though TJ has maintained a robust presence, it has never been able to recapture the same spirit of vibrancy and dynamism of that time. According to statistics compiled by local TJ activists, there are around 450 Muslim houses in the vicinity of the mosque and around 700 baaligh mard – men who have passed the age of puberty and are thus obligated to offer their daily salaat and potentials to recruit for outgoing TJ tours. Out of these, around 50 have undertaken TJ’s signature four-month khuruj to the South Asian headquarters and approximately 120 have undertaken a UK-based chillah at some point in their lives; the number to have participated only in weekend TJ outings will be far greater. Around 20 TJ activists constitute the mosque’s masjid-waar-jama’at – that is they convene in the mosque on a daily basis to carry out the programme of local TJ activities such as gasht, mashwera and ta’lim (see Section 5.2.3 for a detailed description of the TJ local mosque scheme). Most of this core group are British-born and have already undertaken TJ’s signature four-month khuruj to South Asia. Additionally, many of them have been participating in annual chillahs for many years. This core group of 20 has been further sub-divided into smaller groups of 4-5, each of which has been allocated a monthly weekend (for example, the third weekend of each month) in which they embark on a 48 hour TJ khuruj to a neighbouring town or city with new (usually youthful) recruits. Thus the mosque has an outgoing TJ khuruj every weekend, in addition to a masturat khuruj that goes once a month. Similarly, incoming TJ groups regularly visit the mosque from nearby places, such as Bolton or Blackburn (on weekend tours), or further afield (across the UK or abroad usually on a 40 day tour). Additionally, the masjid-waar-jama’at aims to collectively take out from the locality every year two 10 day jama’ats in Christmas and two 40 day jama’ats in summer to coincide with student holidays, and individual TJ activists regularly participate in annual 40 days khuruj outings to countries around the world.

24 He told me, during an interview, that he has reduced his weekly working hours to facilitate this. As an aside, many of the dedicated TJ activists I spoke to had also negotiated part-year contracts at their workplaces which allowed them to take unpaid leave for the period of their annual TJ khuruj.

25 This number includes those recent migrants who had undertaken a chillah in their country of origin prior to their arrival in the UK.

26 The official guidelines from global TJ authorities are that the monthly khuruj should be for three full days - that is 72 hours. However, this would necessitate taking the Friday off from work and thus most of my respondents instead undertook 48 hours weekend tours every month from Friday to Sunday evening. However, one of the four monthly khuruj groups in Masjid Ta-Ha had recently increased their monthly outing to 72 hours from Thursday to Sunday evening (also see Section 5.2.3).
C2 – Female TJ Activism: the Masturat

While TJ has a vibrant strand of female activism, it is a gendered movement that operates along strictly segregated lines. Consequently, like other male researchers, I strategically decided to concentrate my fieldwork in exclusively male settings (see Section 3.3.1.1). However, I found the female dimension [masturat] was frequently discussed in the daily local mosque mashweras I attended and, sometimes, I participated in evening mulaakats being made to prepare a weekend masturat jama’at. In this section then, I succinctly delineate the contours of female TJ activism based upon the insights derived.

As Metcalf (2000), Janson (2008) and Siddiqi (2012) have all noted, TJ enacts a partial reconfiguration of gender roles by insisting that females, in exactly the same measure as males, are responsible for da’wa. It therefore places an amalgam of responsibilities upon the female activist that empower her beyond the traditional expectations of, say, a Gambian gerontocracy (Janson 2014); building upon Mahmood (2005), Janson thus interprets female TJ activism as an expression of autonomous agency in a way which disconcerts the received presuppositions of Eurocentric scholarship. As core elements of TJ praxis remain rooted in socio-cultural values emanating from the patriarchal norms of classical Indo-Muslim civilisation, this determines the operational dynamics of its masturat division. While TJ does place equal responsibility for da’wa upon the shoulders of both women and men, it does not seek to reconstitute the fundamental gender dynamic underpinning what is arguably a classical vision of Muslim society. In other words, while men are expected to engage in da’wa and khuruj along with their occupational commitments, women are expected to equally do so along with their domestic commitments; from what I could discern TJ does not seek to alter the fundamental male-public / female-domestic dynamic in any way. Bearing this in mind, my fieldwork intimated that TJ women are expected to contribute to the movement in two key ways:

- Firstly, they are encouraged to facilitate and support the TJ activities of any male family member (usually a husband) active in the movement. This is not insignificant as the wife of any committed TJ activist will necessarily have to endure his frequent absence from her side (some time every evening, one weekend a month, 40 days a year, etc.) which may well clash with other responsibilities the couple have. The patiently enduring wife is assured that she will share in the reward of any good that comes out of her husband’s activism.

- Secondly, women – along with their normative domestic responsibilities – are expected to engage frequently in da’wa among other women. Like the men, this is calibrated by a set of local and supra-local activities. At the local level, female TJ adepts are expected to:
  - Attend a weekly ta’lim for an hour that takes place at a house in their locality selected from a roster of volunteers on a rotation basis. The ta’lim will have been approved by the regional markaz and is administered, ultimately, by the local mosque amir. During this female-only ta’lim – the day and time of which is determined by mashwera – core TJ texts are read aloud by different attendees and one of the more experienced ladies, who would have usually participated in several masturat khuruj, will deliver a short speech on the 6 points. The ta’lim has traditionally been conducted in Urdu and is attended predominantly by (elderly) first-generation migrants who may have no other form of connection with TJ. Increasingly now though, I was informed, English-language weekly ta’lims are organised to accommodate second and third generation British-born female TJ activists.
  - Implement an equivalent set of Five A’amals within the house. These consist of:
    - Offering the five daily salaat punctually, preferably as soon as the time sets in (and encouraging the male members of the household to offer their prayers in congregation at the local mosque)
Punctually making dhikr every morning and evening, and reciting at least 1/30th portion of the Qur’an

Conducting the daily ta’lim within the home and attending the weekly ta’lim in the locality. The daily home ta’lim includes components of tajweed [correct pronunciation of Qur’anic letters] and da’wa. It also includes a daily mashwera in which the male TJ activist can share key objectives discussed at the mosque and relay back into the mosque mashwera any opinions or ideas contributed by the wife / mother / sister / daughter (this derives from the TJ idea that women constitute a ‘concealed faction’ of the masjid-waar-jama’at).

Ensuring that the children are raised with adequate tarbiyah [moral and character formation] in accordance with the sunnah (prophetic prototype). They should be encouraged to offer their salaat upon reaching the age of 7.

Running the house along the key principle of saadghee [simplicity], particularly with reference to such things as food, clothing and furniture.

At the supra-local level, female TJ adepts are expected to embark on khuruj trips, both nationally and internationally, though to a lesser extent than men. I was able to discern several key differences and caveats which together shape a distinct female TJ experience:

- In line with the global guidelines of the movement, women are only able to participate in a khuruj outing if accompanied by a mahram; either the husband or another male relative unmarriageable under Islamic Law (that is, her father, brother, uncle or son). While the men stay at the local mosque, the ladies of the TJ group reside in the house of a local host (all male members of that household will be evicted for the duration of the masturat stay). Over the course of the masturat outing, the ladies of the TJ group will conduct a series of activities in the house that mirror that of the men in the mosque. Women of the locality will visit the TJ group at the house throughout their stay and, at peak periods, upwards of 50 women might be gathered at one time (the furniture of the house will usually have been rearranged in advance to accommodate the expected crowd). The ladies in the TJ delegation will encourage the local ladies, among other things, to adopt lives of piety, send their menfolk to the mosque for the daily salaat, to urge their men to go out in khuruj and to participate in masturat jama’at themselves, persuading their husbands (or another mahram) to accompany them if necessary.

- The schedule of khuruj for women is less demanding than that for men; presumably because if both the husband and wife are simultaneously in khuruj, frequent childcare arrangements will become necessary. Women are expected to engage in a weekend (ideally 72 hours) TJ outing every three months, rather than every month. Similarly, an annual outing of 10 days is more common for them than the men’s 40 days. Lastly, the signature khuruj [which would grant them the appellation of puraani saathi] to the movement’s South Asian headquarters lasts 40 days for women rather than the men’s four months. In practice, while many male Tier 3 activists stick assiduously to a schedule of men-only khuruj, it is a far smaller number who simultaneously adhere to the full masturat schedule also. It is also quite common for young, enthusiastic TJ activists (both male and female) to explicitly seek marriage partners with whom they will be able to participate in masturat jama’at (see also Siddiqi 2012; Winkelmann 2006). Generally speaking, women are

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27 Men are also encouraged to meticulously adhere to the above two daily activities, though they do not constitute part of their Five A’amals but are rather part of a set of Infiradee A’amols [Individual [Good] Deeds] they are expected to observe.
discouraged from participating in *khuruj* outings if pregnant or breastfeeding, though they can if menstruating.

- Having undertaken a 40 day *khuruj* to South Asia, a female TJ adept would then be eligible for international TJ tours (with her husband, or other mahram, of course) to any part of the world. In contrast to the men, who participate in a 40 day outing every year, women are required to do so every three years. However, it is quite common for Tier 2 elders, whose children are all now grown up and married, to participate in an international 40 day *masturat khuruj* more often than this.

Just as male TJ activists, upon conversion to the movement, tend to change their dress code and grow beards (see Section 7.2.1), their female counterparts frequently adopt the *niqab* as exemplified in the story of Yahya’s sister’s conversion in 9.2.2.
In this appendix, I reconstruct from my fieldnotes a description of a typical 24 hours out on *khuruj* in a British mosque so as to provide the reader with a window into the practical mechanics and functioning of the movement.

**Friday, 15 August 2014**

As had been previously agreed, we meet in the Asar prayer at Masjid Ta-Ha which was at 7.40pm. After the *salaat*, the imam reads from the *Fadhail-e-A’mal* in Urdu for just over 5 minutes to around 50 assembled congregants – including several restless-looking youth, I notice, who are there for the weekend *jama’at* but probably don’t understand Urdu. After the *ta’lim*, the crowd disperses; some leave the mosque, others take Qur’ans from the bookshelves and sit down in the prayer rows to recite individually. Around 20 guys gather in a large circle to discuss the impending weekend *khuruj* including the white-bearded 50-something TJ *amir* of the mosque, Ghulam bhai. Initially, we’d expected enough participants for two *jama’ats* but as it transpires, only around 10 people in the circle are ready for *khuruj* that weekend (others are Tier 4 sympathisers or Tier 3 activists – members of the Masjid Ta-Ha *masjid-waar-jama’at* – who are there for their daily evening *gasht*). The *amir*, rather than dispatch the *jama’at* immediately, decides to use the assembled manpower to make last-minute *gasht* visits to houses of local Muslims (*wusooli*) who had made an intention for *khuruj* that weekend to see if numbers could be driven up to get the two *jama’ats* out. Consequently, names are written down on small slips of paper and distributed to groups of 2-3 guys each. I go out for around 20 minutes with two Tier 3 activists, but there is no answer at the three addresses on our list; so we return to the mosque where the *amir* is still sat with a few guys round him. We join them and feedback that we had not met anyone; Ghulam bhai at this point decides to merge the two groups into one and send out a single *jama’at* that weekend. However, as we had been given two separate mosque destinations from the regional TJ Markaz in Blackburn, he phones them to inform them that only one *jama’at* is actually going from Masjid Ta-Ha and, from the two, chooses the destination of Masjid Bilal in Bolton; the other mosque destination, he tells the Markaz in Urdu over the phone, will now be vacant this weekend (this, I learnt, was for planning purposes as Blackburn Markaz orchestrates all weekend *jama’at* visits to mosques across the Lancashire *halqa* and likes to ensure that every mosque is visited with fairly uniform frequency). A brief *mashwera* ensues in which Ghulam bhai asks the assembled crowd of around 15 their opinions each on who should be the *amir* of the outgoing *jama’at*, before appointing a 30-something member of the Avant-Garde, Abdul Haleem. Abdul Haleem, at this point, takes over and asks the 10 or so *jama’at* members to gather in a separate circle. He asks how many cars we have (three, which is enough), decides who will travel in which car and tells everybody to ensure their baggage is loaded in the cars before the impending Maghrib prayer (8.40pm) so we can leave straight after.

We all offer our Maghrib *salaat* at Masjid Ta-Ha after which a total of 11 guys leave for *jama’at* to Bolton in three cars, each with its appointed *amir* for the length of the journey. I am the *amir* of my car and drive to Bolton with three youngsters I’ve occasionally seen around; some chit-chat reveals they have all just returned from their first ever 40 day *khuruj* on 1 August. They are all 16 year old school-leavers about to start college. I probe with a few more questions; one tells me he had only been on 2 previous TJ weekend trips before taking the 40 day plunge, and he thoroughly enjoyed it. Another says his mother strongly encouraged him to spend his summer holidays on a 40 day *khuruj* ‘as a protection’ before starting college; I later learnt his parents had recently divorced which might have also played a part. The third had tagged along because ‘his mates were going.’ We arrive at the Bolton mosque as the *adhaan* is being called for Isha, unload our baggage and begin to carry it to the room where we’ll be sleeping upstairs. The sight of a *jama’at* arriving, with sleeping bags on backs, causes a few elderly locals, arriving early for the Isha prayer, to smile at us by the shoe-racks – enquiring where the *jama’at* is from and praising the youngsters for spending their youth ‘in the
Path of Allah. ’ The upstairs room we’ll be sleeping in appears to be a *maktab* classroom for children (probably on weekday evenings) as evidenced by the posters on the wall and the wooden benches arranged in a square, which we pile up against a wall so as to make room for our sleeping bags to be spread out later on. We then go down and offer our Isha prayer (10pm) in congregation.

After the prayer, Abdul Haleem and another Tier 3 activist, Hamza, speaks to members of the local TJ *masjid-waar-jama’at* while the youngsters mill around chatting. After a few minutes, as the locals began to leave, Abdul Haleem gathers the *jama’at* in a single circle and gives a prep talk for around 10 minutes. Just before he begins, I remind him that I will need to disclose my researcher identity to the group and explain my research; he agrees (he is already familiar with my research from Masjid Ta-Ha). His talk is based on rectifying our intentions about why we had come out in *jama’at* and practical guidelines about how to spend our time to derive maximum benefit. Key points mentioned are:

- The primary purpose for coming in *khuruj* is self-rectification and to increase our *Imaan*.
- This we can achieve by obeying the *amir* – whoever it is – and taking part in all the programme of activities over the weekend, ensuring we arrive on time. Please, please don’t be late for the *ta’lim* in the morning guys!
- Any smokers need to be discreet and ensure locals don’t see them; don’t gather around the mosque entrance smoking as it sets a bad example.
- Ensure we make our wudu and are ready for prayer by *adhaan* time so as not to clog up the toilets / wudu area for locals who want to use them.
- Please ask permission before leaving the mosque for anything.
- Try and pray each of the *fard salaat* with the first *takbeer* – and also try and recite 1/30th of the Qur’an each day and do your daily *dhikr*.
- Don’t disturb anybody else at night by chatting loudly, etc. as to annoy/inconvenience/hurt the heart of another Muslim is worse than breaking the Ka’ba.

As he finishes, I quickly interject mentioning I need to say something: as many of you are aware, I’m doing a PhD...and explain my research. I tell the *jama’at* I’ll be taking fieldnotes over the course of the weekend which will be anonymised but anybody can opt out if they want. They are fascinated and a 20 minute discussion ensues about what my research involves in which I end up discussing methodological issues of insider research and handing around the information sheet and Cardiff University’s Islam-UK Centre Public Lecture brochure. Most participants seem impressed and all are more than happy to participate. Several youngsters mention they need to eat; the *amir* allows them to go to a nearby takeaway with Harun, a more experienced TJ activist, telling them to be back in half an hour. Others go upstairs and lay out their sleeping bags. It’s just after 11pm now; a couple of guys get ready to sleep while others come back down to the prayer hall where they recite Qur’an or offer *nafi salaat / make duaa*. I begin to type my jottings up via my Bluetooth keyboard on a chair outside the prayer hall; the youngsters get back from the takeaway just before midnight and cause a bit of a disturbance – I ask them to keep the volume down so as not to disturb those who are sleeping. Eventually, I get to bed around 12.30am (a few youngsters are still on their phones and laughing in the hallway area downstairs). Here’s a list of the members of the *jama’at*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Tier</th>
<th>Age (approx.)</th>
<th>Ethnic origin</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>British-born?</th>
<th>Previous time in <em>khuruj</em></th>
<th>Misc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abdul Haleem</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Yes – 2nd gen</td>
<td>Several 4-months and regular annual</td>
<td>Amir of the group. Got involved in TJ as a teenager and has been active since. Married with 3 children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIER 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>Chillahs Description</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamza</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>Business admin manager</td>
<td>2nd gen</td>
<td>Several 4-months and regular annual chillahs</td>
<td>Got involved in TJ as a teenager and has been active since. Returned from a 40-day khuruj to Spain two months ago. Married with 3 children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufyan</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>2nd gen</td>
<td>One X 4-months to South Asia</td>
<td>Spent 4 months on khuruj many years ago after the sudden death of his best friend but has not been actively involved since. Occasionally participates in some TJ activities. Married with 4 children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harun</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>2nd gen</td>
<td>Several UK-based chillahs as a student</td>
<td>Not a dedicated TJ activist, but a practising, bearded Muslim who empathises with core TJ values. Married with one child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junaid</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>School leaver – will start college</td>
<td>2nd gen</td>
<td>One chillah</td>
<td>Returned from his first 40 day khuruj a few weeks ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhammad</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>School leaver – will start college</td>
<td>3rd gen</td>
<td>One chillah</td>
<td>Returned from his first 40 day khuruj a few weeks ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sajid</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>School leaver – will start college</td>
<td>3rd gen</td>
<td>One chillah</td>
<td>Returned from his first 40 day khuruj a few weeks ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inayet</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>College student</td>
<td>2nd gen</td>
<td>Several weekend tours</td>
<td>Has been participating in weekend TJ tours on and off for over 6 months. Dyslexic and often gets in trouble at college as he “loves to fight.” Goes to the gym regularly and has a very well-toned body he is proud of.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasin</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>College student</td>
<td>2nd gen</td>
<td>Two weekend outings</td>
<td>Third weekend on khuruj. TJ has made him seriously reconsider the ‘purpose of my life;’ planning to go for chillah and is considering enrolling at Dar al-Ulum after college instead of university now. Paired with me for “teaching and learning” hence opportunity for in-depth probing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yunus</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>Van delivery driver</td>
<td>2nd gen</td>
<td>Several weekend outings</td>
<td>Been involved in drugs and crime and recently spent some time in jail. Family strongly encouraged him to come out in TJ to help reform himself so he can find a wife and settle down.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Saturday, 16 August 2014

Awoken by *adhaan* at 4.50am, Fajr is at 5.20am. It takes around 20 minutes of constant cajoling for Abdul Haleem and Hamza to get the youngsters out of their sleeping bags – I give them a hand. After Fajr, imam reads from a book in Urdu for a few minutes after which Junaid stands up and delivers the standard ‘6 points’ talk in English for just over 10 minutes to a crowd of 20+ including the imam. He is quite confident for a 16 year old, I think, and has clearly learnt them well during his recent *chillah*. After this we gather in a circle for *mashwera* and a local TJ activist sits with us to give a lowdown of the local area. It’s quite a new mosque with only a small catchment area, he explains. Around 10 locals have spent 4 months or 40 days on *khuruj* and one weekend *jama’at* goes out every month: it happens to be this weekend and they have gone to a mosque in Blackburn – as a result of which there won’t be many guys around to assist our *jama’at* (I mentally compare this to the 5 *jama’ats* which go out from Masjid Ta-Ha every month). The local guy suggests the *jama’at* youngsters can meet the local youngsters at a nearby park during the day where they hang out to invite them to the mosque. Abdul Haleem agrees with him that the *umoomi gasht* should happen today at 6.15pm and the *bayaan* delivered by the *jama’at* after Asar (7.15pm). Local guy leaves.

Amir looks round at the group and notices the youngsters, in particular, look exhausted: I know you spent all night in worship that’s why you’re tired, he jokes. Then he asks Hamza to give a few minutes inspirational prep (*fikr*) talk. Hamza emphasises:

- Preciousness of time, giving an example about a goldmine I have heard on several occasions: Imagine if you were given a weekend in a goldmine to collect as much gold as you can. Would you waste your time on your phones or spend all day sleeping? No, you’d minimise the time on your necessities and spend time gathering as much gold as possible. Similarly, in the Path of Allah we’re in a spiritual goldmine and we should try and collect as many good deeds as possible and not waste time sleeping or messing around.
- Importance of *da’wa*: “once you start to talk about Allah you will be captivated. This is the greatest *sunnah* of our Prophet (s) which all other prophets also carried out.”
- The importance of “knowing” Allah in order to invite towards Him (through worship, *salaat*, *dhikr*, *duaa*, etc.) Hence, please ensure you stay on top of your individual acts of worship throughout the weekend.

Then the *amir* consults with the group to decide the practical schedule for the day. After asking opinions from everyone, it’s decided that breakfast will be at 10.15am and the morning *ta’lim* will commence at 11am to be conducted by Hamza. Harun and Junaid are appointed for *khidmat* (to buy the groceries, and make breakfast for the *jama’at*). Amir says everybody should contribute £10 each which he collects and divides into two piles of notes; one he keeps and the other he passes to the *khidmat* brothers. He then makes ‘pairs’ between experienced and inexperienced members of the *jama’at* for teaching and learning purposes throughout the weekend – I have been paired with Yasin, who has also been appointed to deliver the *aadab-e-gasht* talk for the first time ever that evening at 18.15; the *amir* asks me to ensure he does a good job! At 6.15am, the circle breaks up and, as per the *amir*’s exhortations, everybody spends some time making *dhikr*, reciting Qur’an and eventually offering the voluntary *Ishraaq* prayer 15 minutes after sunrise before making their way upstairs back to the sleeping bags. The *khidmat* brothers go shopping as I begin to walk up the stairs with the *amir* who tells me that Sufyan had to leave the *jama’at* during the night sometime and returned home due to ‘family issues’ – he’s a little concerned that will now leave us a car short in terms of the return trip on Sunday evening. I’m shattered and get to my sleeping bag again around 7am.

*Amir* starts waking everybody up at 10am for breakfast – the *khidmat* brothers are already in the kitchen and soon ‘Indian tea’ is served with scrambled eggs, cereal, cream, honey and a pile of buttered toast. Some of the youngsters only get out of their sleeping bags around 10.30am; they’ll
be late for the 11am ta’lim I think. Breakfast talk revolves around football as the new Premier League season is about to kick off; Hamza, in particular, is an avid Liverpool supporter and talks incessantly about his hopes for the coming season. The amir cuts us short around 10.40am, reminding everybody that ta’lim will commence in 20 minutes and encourages everybody to offer two raka’at of nafl salaat in advance. I wrap up my sleeping bag and add it to the growing pile in the corner of the classroom before quickly going to the wudu area to brush my teeth and freshen up. I get into the prayer hall for ta’lim at 10.58am and offer two raka’at as per the amir’s instructions; he is already there along with Hamza and a couple of others. The khidmat brothers are clearing breakfast away while the youngsters are still in the wudu area; they slowly trickle in until everybody (except the two khidmat brothers) is finally present at 11.18am.

Hamza conducts the ta’lim reading from an English translation of the Fadhail-e-A’amal. He intersperses his reading with anecdotes and exhortations that clearly seems to keep the group engaged. He also passes the book around, giving different people an opportunity to read. At 12.05pm, we break into three smaller groups for the usual tajweed circle – he ensures that one proficient Qur’an reciter is in each sub-group. After around 15 minutes of reciting Qur’an to one another, we reconvene into a single large circle and Hamza asks Sajid to explain the purpose of the tajweed halqa we just had. He explains quite well, I think, illustrating with a classic example of the distinction between the Arabic words ‘qalb’ (heart) and ‘kalb’ (dog): a small change in pronunciation can lead to a large change in meaning. Hamza asks if anybody wants to add anything; our amir Abdul Haleem, who had been relatively passive until this point, suddenly interjects and talks for around 10 minutes about the importance of not just learning correct pronunciation of the Qur’an but also progressing to learn the meanings of what we recite so as to enhance the spiritual experience of the prayer. Hamza reads another hadith then passes the book to Inayet who struggles to read and makes a mistake in pronouncing “votary” (I only find out later that he’s dyslexic and most others probably don’t know). Yunus, looking at me scribbling away in my notebook quips, Riyaz is writing that Inayet doesn’t know how to read – everybody laughs and Inayet, clearly embarrassed, quickly passes the book on. Yasin reads a hadith about knowledge being of two types: one internal and spiritually beneficial and another external and on the tongue only. Interesting, he observes, having internal knowledge too – yes, says Abdul Haleem that’s tasawwuf. Hamza immediately counters (a little jokingly it seems): but Tablighis don’t do dhikr! But then adds if we follow all the usools and guidelines we’re covered. On a serious note, says Abdul Haleem, that’s Mawlana’s … [naming a respected Tier 2 leader] biggest gripe, that Tablighis don’t do their infiraaadee a’amals. It’s only if we adhere to the practices properly that TJ has the desired effect and Mawlana’s biggest gripe is: have you done your daily recitation of the Qur’an today? Have you done your morning and evening tasbeehat? That’s how a person gets made, through his infiraaadee a’amals, but we’re lax.

It’s now time to practice the 6 points and Hamza asks Yunus to explain them to the group - even though he’s not been out in khuruj for several months and hence is ‘rusty.’ ‘Are you having a laugh?’ he counters directly! Why, asks Hamza? Well, my confidence is at an all-time low, he retorts. That’s the best time for you to do it, says Hamza. “I mean, if you have a poorly-performing footballer with low confidence, the worst thing to do is to keep him on the bench. But if you make him play he’ll get the hang of it again.” Yunus stands up and has a go, clearly struggling but trying while the rest of the jama’at listens. The youngsters are slightly in awe of Yunus given his rough past and he seems to have a lot of ‘street cred.’ Abdul Haleem steps in with occasional encouragement, correcting and helping gently as he covers various qualities from the lives of the sahaabah. As he speaks, Yunus’ phone vibrates; he takes it out of his pocket and stares at it – do you need to take that call, asks Hamza? No, it can wait, says Yunus, and continues on. The adhaan for Dhuhr is called terminating the ta’lim and the mosque begins to fill with local worshippers. The jama’at quickly disperse, most youngsters going to the classroom upstairs where we had slept to enjoy some ‘chill time’ before the
prayer. I realise that Junaid and Harun hadn’t joined the ta’lim and surmise that they were probably busy cooking the afternoon meal for the jama’at in the kitchen after clearing breakfast away.

Dhuhr prayer is offered at 1.30pm, after which Muhammad makes an elan to let the locals know that a jama’at is here. Abdul Haleem asks me to do a short ta’lim after the prayer; I read a hadith and request the gathered locals to take the jama’at out for gasht. Only five locals sat in the ta’lim; three leave and two volunteer to take us for gasht. Abdul Haleem appoints a couple of jama’at guys to accompany each and then forms another two groups of two each telling them to visit the nearby park we’d been told about after Fajr to give da’wa to local youngsters. He tells everybody to return sharply for 14.30 when lunch will be served. They all leave and I spend the next 10 minutes or so reciting Qur’an before making my way upstairs where I begin to type up my fieldnotes, chatting to Junaid and Harun who have prepared a pasta meal with Dolmio sauce, boneless chicken, peppers, sweetcorn and grated cheese to be eaten with bread, tomato ketchup and mayonnaise. The gasht groups all arrive back just after 14.30 and everybody tucks into the meal with relish – which is delicious; Junaid and Harun are clearly pleased and appreciate the compliments that come their way. Abdul Haleem tells the jama’at now is your free time until we gather again at 5.30pm to have tea, and don’t forget umoomi gasht is at 6.15pm; Riyaz have you been teaching Yasin his adab-e-gasht? I realise I haven’t and take out some time after the meal to schol him. Several youngsters, after asking permission, go to the shop and return with sweets and chocolates which they share with everyone. Hamza is speaking to them informally asking about their future career aspirations: “Don’t be bums hanging around on street corners all your life but get a good education to get a decent job. Trust me or you’ll regret it later. And keep up with your three days every month and chillahs in summer and you’ll have the best of both worlds.” Talk soon turns to football again and, after Hamza lies down for an afternoon nap, I hear the youngsters in hushed, excited tones comparing among themselves the sexiness of various female celebrities. Meanwhile, Abdul Haleem has been sat with Yunus for over an hour both poring intently over a book; it appears he is teaching him something. After I finish with Yasin, I type up some more fieldnotes before lying down for a nap also – like several others.

The amir himself has made the tea and wakes us up at 5.20pm; we gather around the hot mugs and share several packets of biscuits. Muhammad is getting picked on by his friends Junaid and Sajid for consistently ‘making things up’ during their recent chillah together. Even our amir in 40 days said that he realised that 98% of what he says is absolute codswallop, they tell the rest of the jama’at. Yes, adds Hamza, he [the amir of their chillah group] told me and proceeds to illustrate with an example: apparently he told everyone in that jama’at that he bought his mum a washing machine as a present which turned out to be total nonsense – everybody laughs. I feel sorry for Muhammad and have no way of knowing whether he does habitually makes things up but think to myself that if Tier 3 activists are openly teasing him, then it legitimises the mocking of the youngsters. Yunus jumps on the bandwagon and cracks a couple of especially ruthless jokes at his expense at which everybody laughs again; poor Muhammad is silent not knowing how to react it seems. If this carries on, I think to myself, he’ll stop coming in jama’at.

We finish off and make wudu before heading into the prayer hall to convene for the umoomi gasht programme at 6.15pm. A couple of locals arrive and Yasin begins his adaab-e-gasht nervously but increasing in confidence as he proceeds. He had spent the entire afternoon practising them after I had taught him and he speaks for around 8 minutes in a basic but heartfelt way. He sits down, wiping the sweat from his brow; clearly a personal milestone had just been achieved and Abdul Haleem praises his excellent effort. The amir appoints people for the various roles in umoomi gasht and I proceed with the jama’at that goes out to give da’wa. Abdul Haleem is the mutakallim and, after making a collective dua, we follow the local rehbar who takes us to the selected street where we attempt to visit every Muslim house. The local has with him a list of Muslim names and
addresses which he consults and gives a little background about the person we are about to meet before knocking on the door. I notice that a Barelwi, Somalian, Deobandi alim and a Syrian Shia are all covered, suggesting TJ’s determination to convey their message to all Muslims; though non-Muslim houses are avoided. As per TJ protocol, no da’wa is given to the alim, but rather his du’as simply requested. I also notice that Arabic, Urdu, Gujarati and English, with varying levels of fluency, are all used by Abdul Haleem when inviting local Muslims to the mosque – depending on the person being met. We finish the street and return to the mosque just as the adhaan for Asar is finishing.

After the prayer, Abdul Haleem speaks for around 20 minutes in English interspersed with occasional Arabic quotations. Around 25 people participate, including the members of the jama’at of course. The following key points are made:

- Everything in this world has a purpose: the purpose of the pen is to write and the light bulb is to give light. So everything the human being makes is for a purpose but insaan [the human being] never stops to ask himself: what’s my purpose? Why have I been created? Allah tells us in the Qur’an He created us to recognise Him and worship Him.
- We need to distinguish between the necessities of life and the purpose of life. For example, with a car: petrol, water, oil, air in the tyres are all necessities that help you fulfil the purpose which is to drive from A to B. Nobody buys a car just so they can put petrol in the tank or fill the tyres with air and then leave it in the driveway – that’s daft! Similarly, our purpose is ibaadah and da’wa and our necessities are food, drink, clothing, shelter, transportation, marriage, etc – for which we need to work. But the work isn’t our purpose – that’s just our necessity to help us fulfil our purpose.
- No more prophets will come so the work of da’wa is now our responsibility. Therefore da’wa is also our purpose along with ibaadat. So long as the ummah remained strong upon this then the help of Allah was with us. But when we made our necessities into our purpose and abandoned our actual, real purpose then Allah abandoned us.
- Having strong imaan and yaqeen in the heart is essential because that controls the deeds which come out of our bodies. This, in turn, rectifies our external conditions. When the Prophet (s) went up for mi’raaj he saw that something was ascending and something was descending. When he asked the Angel Jibreel [Gabriel], he was told these are the actions of your ummah going up and these are the conditions from Allah coming down. So there’s no point complaining about how bad the conditions have become for the Muslim ummah if we don’t make an effort to rectify ourselves. That’s why we go in khuruj, to rectify our hearts which will rectify our deeds which will rectify our bad conditions. So brothers, please give your names for 4 months and 40 days in khuruj.

Sajid stands up and writes down the names and intentions of those who volunteer themselves, including jama’at members – the youngsters, I note, stand up and make intention for 40 days again next summer. Abdul Haleem concludes with a short collective duaa asking for Allah’s help, mercy and guidance to which the assembled crowd say Ameen repeatedly. Everything is wrapped up for 8pm after which, following a few minutes of encouragement by Abdul Haleem, the jama’at engages in recitation of Qur’an, dhikr and duaa until Maghrib (8.42pm). I notice that the youngsters seem to have been affected by Abdul Haleem’s talk and instead of sneaking away to the sleeping room upstairs as they usually might have all sit and pray nicely. After Maghrib, Abdul Haleem informs us that a local had offered to cook for us that afternoon and would be bringing the food shortly. As we wait, he asks Hamza to cover the sunnahs of eating. Hamza talks about the importance of appreciating the blessing of food by being grateful for the effort that went into preparing it and,

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28 A miraculous night journey in which the Prophet Muhammad is said to have visited Jerusalem on a winged horse and ascended through the seven heavens, holding intimate discourse with God, before returning in a single night.
citing the example of the Prophet, emphasises that we should never criticise it: “Our Prophet (s) ate humbly on the floor in the manner of slaves. Though Allah offered to turn the mountains of Mecca into gold for him, he declined and chose the way of voluntary poverty.” He then begins to cover some of the sunnahs of eating such as ensuring your head is covered, eating with your right hand, praying bismillah [in the name of God] before you eat, etc. but is interrupted when the food arrives. It’s a lavish meal of chicken, rice, soup, various salads and mango lassi which we all enjoy. The amir asks everybody to make special prayers for our generous host who is busy serving us; he seems to be a TJ sympathiser but not activist. After eating, the youngsters go upstairs to the sleeping room to chill out as there is still around half an hour till the Isha prayer (10pm). I follow them and type up my fieldnotes until the adhaan after which I visit the loo, make wudu and join the rest of the jama’at and locals in the prayer hall.
Here I reconstruct from my fieldnotes my participation in TJ activities carried out in Masjid Ta-Ha over a single day by activists while not on khuruj – termed the ‘Five A’amals’ or ‘Local Work.’

February 2014

Fajr mashwera

I arrive at Masjid Ta-Ha for Fajr prayer at 7am, after which the imam does the usual ta’lim in Urdu for 5 minutes from a book he’s been using for some weeks now (I’m not sure which one it is – but certainly not one of the core TJ curriculum). Around 70 people were in the prayer and around half stay for the ta’lim, after which several more leave. Others remain in their places busy in individual worship / dhikr while some take Qur’ans from the bookshelf and begin to recite in a low voice. 16 people gather at the back in the usual corner for the daily TJ mashwera. Ghulam bhai, the TJ amir, is in the centre as usual, while others form a circle around him. I notice Qasim is dressed in a suit probably because he departs for the office straight from the mosque, while Abdullah is in his Royal Mail uniform. Mubarak has his young son with him, around 10 years old, who sits quietly observing proceedings.

The mashwera begins with Ghulam bhai asking everybody to feedback from yesterday’s mulaakaats starting from the person on his right. Hafiz Suleman, a young Tier 3 activist, explains how yesterday evening he went to meet several youngsters for the coming weekend’s khuruj: “we met two of the three and they seemed quite positive, I think they’ll come.” Iqbal enters the prayer hall and joins the mashwera; I think he prays Fajr at another mosque closer to his home but then comes specifically to Masjid Ta-Ha for the TJ mashwera; he’s very dedicated I think. We continue to go round giving karguzari from yesterday’s mulaakaats; Yusuf explains how he picked up an Arab brother from a London jama’at that is staying at another Preston mosque and took him to meet several local Arab students he’s got to know at university – they were quite receptive, and very happy to meet a fellow Arab he says. A few people shake their heads indicating they did not meet anybody yesterday, or maybe did not do gasht due to other commitments. It gets to my turn and I explain how I had accompanied Aziz bhai an elderly first-generation migrant, to meet some of the elders in the locality whom he had given da’wa to in Gujarati; they listened respectfully, I said, but didn’t make any real intention for khuruj. OK, says Ghulam bhai in Urdu, what shall we do today? Talha raises the question about the masturat jama’at being prepared for this weekend; how many couples are ready? It appears three couples are definitely ready with several more potentials; a few names are bandied about, and some discussion about whether they are ready from Thursday night or Friday night. Abdul Haleem asks about the Turkish brother in hospital - when was he last visited? It’s been over a week several guys concur; we should go again to see him.29 OK, asks Ghulam bhai, who’ll go? After some discussion Mubarak and Talha agree to go that evening. Ibrahim mentions that two brothers currently out on chillah will be back this weekend and we should make an effort to keep them connected to the local work; others concur. It’s our umoors [i.e. the various roles designated to individuals] in the evening. OK let’s finish and he recites the duaa for the completion of the mashwera. It’s 7.32am so the mashwera lasted 13 minutes.

Half the guys rise and leave the mosque, presumably to home or to work. A few (including me) go to the front and either sit individually making dhikr or take a Qur’an and begin to recite – Hafiz Suleman

29 As he is elderly and long-term hospitalised without any local family, the local masjid-waar-jama’at made a rota between themselves to ensure he is visited fairly regularly during evening gasht time. He passed away several weeks after this mashwera.
sits with Hafiz Ilyas and they recite to each other from memory, a fairly regular routine I note. A group of four young activists remain sitting in the same place where the mashwera had taken place and continue talking. There is some laughter and their voices rise until another (non-TJ) worshipper, evidently annoyed, looks back from the front row and shushes them loudly – again, not the first time that’s happened I note. They quieten down and leave after a couple of minutes. I follow shortly and meet them, by the shoe-racks, talking to a member of the mosque committee who is complaining that the last jama’at who visited Masjid Ta-Ha took so long to leave in the evening that he had waited for half an hour and in the end told them to post the mosque keys through his letterbox as they were still cleaning the kitchen. As a result, he couldn’t set the mosque alarm and wasn’t happy. Further, as he didn’t know they were leaving that day, he had switched the heating on for them which could have stayed on all night for no reason – so better communication is needed he stressed. The TJ activists he is speaking to assure him that they will feed this back in the next mashwera to prevent a repeat occurrence. I leave the mosque at 7.50am.

Evening gasht

I get to the mosque at 6.20pm, Ghulam bhai is sat on a chair and reciting from a book of duaas. I talk to him briefly, he mentions that he will be leaving for his annual chillah this coming Friday. Aziz bhai, another elderly first-generation migrant, is also already here and sat in the front row reciting the Qur’an. I offer two raka’ats nafl then recite Qur’an also as I wait for the umoomi gasht to commence. Slowly, more and more guys trickle in to the prayer hall and a circle starts to form at the back in the usual place. I put my Qur’an away and join a group of five; Ghulam bhai and Aziz bhai are still praying. Hafiz Suleman is discussing with Abdul Haleem a verse of the Qur’an which specifies that the ‘salaam’ greeting of peace should be made when entering a house – I don’t catch the full discussion, but he recites the relevant verse in Arabic. Ghulam bhai joins the circle and draws attention to a paidal jama’at from London that has recently arrived in Lancashire and will be spending two months walking through various villages in the countryside. It was mentioned at the Tuesday evening mashwera at Blackburn Markaz, he says, that every mosque should make a rota and go and visit them for nusrat [help/assistance]. Not just taking food for them, but also walking with them and helping them navigate the various areas which we might be more familiar with. We don’t have much time now but let’s discuss it after the bayaan today. As he was speaking, another few guys had trickled in bringing the total to 13 now including Aziz bhai who has also joined us. Ghulam bhai asks opinions and assigns the various roles to different individuals for the umoomi gasht programme. As he’ll be leaving for chillah this Friday, several people were of the opinion that he should do the bayaan – joking it will be his ‘farewell sermon’ – but he chooses Abdus Shakur instead. As I’ll be leaving, he says, should we do what we did last year which seemed to work quite well and have a rotation system for the amir? Should we select three people for two weeks each? Different opinions come forward about whether to have a single deputy or a rotation system and also who should be appointed to manage Masjid Ta-Ha TJ affairs in Ghulam bhai’s absence. After listening to all of them, he appoints three people for two weeks each in a way that gives me the impression it was already a foregone conclusion in his mind. Hafiz Suleman, a young Tier 3 activist, is gobsmacked when he is appointed to be amir for the last period of two weeks, particularly as he will be acting as amir over those older and more experienced than him. However he is very regular in his ‘Five A’amals’ and Ghulam bhai probably sees this as a good development opportunity for him.

Suddenly Ibrahim interjects: there’s no point going for gasht now, its 7pm and there’s only half an hour left till Ish! This causes some heated discussion; how can we not go for gasht on our umoomi gasht day, retorts Hamza. Yeah, but we always go late replies Ibrahim. Ghulam bhai gently chides the group: well we decided 6.30pm in the morning mashwera but only a few guys were here then. If people come on time, we can go on time. Hafiz Suleman adds that today was a bit of a one-off as we discussed the paidal jama’at and also had an additional mashwera about who should be the deputy.
– hence the extra time. Ibrahim requests Ghulam bhai if he can do a separate gasht for the coming weekend's jama'at rather than participate in the umoomi gasht; Ghulam bhai seems to be reluctant but agrees. Ibrahim stands to leave with another activist but by the door turns and addresses the group: just so you know guys I knew we had to go in gasht but I was just trying to make a point! The others laugh as he leaves; Hafiz Suleman says Hamza was fuming like it was blasphemous! Six guys in total also leave for umoomi gasht; I stay with several others for a ‘sitting talk’ in the mosque. A young and newly-involved activist called Masoom is appointed to deliver the talk; as he begins, some of the older ones begin to rib him about the itr [fragrance] he has on. It smells like insect-repellent one says; it's so strong like something my grandad would wear. I realise that the type of fragrance preferred by the younger generation is another indicator of shifting identities between the ‘Old Guard’ and the ‘Avant-Garde.’ Ibrahim suddenly returns and asks if one of us can join him to make mulaakaats for that weekend’s jama'at as the guy with him had to leave suddenly as he had forgotten it was his turn to pick up the children from madrassa. I volunteer and join him; we meet two teenagers who had been in for a weekend khuruj the month before and had seemed to enjoy it. Both are clearly happy to see us and, after only a few minutes of da'wa, agree to come again this weekend. We knock at the address of another teenager who is not in; but his mother pleads to us from behind the door to please ensure we come back and take her son with us in jama'at. She insists we take his mobile number and phone or text him; Ibrahim makes a note and immediately drops him a text. She’s worried that he’s dropped out of college and is falling in with the wrong crowd he explains to me as we get back in the car; she did the same thing when I went round a couple of weeks ago, but he’s ducking and diving and hard to get hold of.

Ibrahim goes to pick his children up from madrassa at 7.30pm and I return to the mosque and offer Isha at 7.40pm. After the salaat, Abdul Haleem makes the elan and, after a few minutes, Abdus Shakur begins his talk. There are approximately 35 people who stay from a congregation of around 350 – around 10%, including all the TJ regulars I think. Abdus Shakur talks, in English, on the following points:

- Our entire lives consist of the blessings of Allah – including our eyes, ears, food, drink, families and houses. But the greatest gift is the gift of Imaan as this is what will save a person from Hellfire on the Day of Judgement.
- However being born into a Muslim family does not guarantee death with Imaan. Imaan fluctuates like a thermometer according to environment. That’s why constantly nourishing the roots of Imaan is essential. This can be done through the four channels to the heart: the eyes, ears, tongue and mind. In other words, whatever we look at, listen to, speak about and think about enters the heart. If we look, listen, speak and think about the latest mobile phone then the love for that phone will enter our heart. But if we look at the signs of Allah in creation, listen to talks of Imaan and the unseen, give da’wa toward this constantly and ponder over Allah’s greatness in our mind then this will enter our hearts.
- If our Imaan and yaqeen become kaamil [complete] we can gain directly from the treasures of Allah. Like the female sahaabi who without even praying salaat just makes dua and cries to Allah, saying to Allah that she migrated to Medina purely for His sake, and as a result Allah brings her dead son back to life. He was dead and shrouded, the sahaabah said, but after she made that dua we saw the shroud move and he ate the evening meal with us and stayed alive for many years after that. That’s the type of yaqeen we need to develop where we can take directly from the treasures of Allah through asking Him our needs.
- Also mentions story of a lady who loses her goat and needle and asks Allah, He returns it. And then references a recent message which has been going around on WhatsApp about Shaykh Hamza Yusuf in America who led the prayer of istisqaa – special prayer for rain at the time of drought in California. Immediately it began to rain, he says, that’s yaqeen which is the purpose of this effort. If our Prophet (s) has taught us an amal then we should do it with absolute conviction and expect the results just as we expect sugar to be sweet or a fire to be
hot. But we have deficiency in our yaqeen which is why we can’t take from the treasures of Allah like the sahaabah did. Whatever we sacrifice for we get the love and value for that thing in our hearts, so through this work of TJ we want to get the love and value of Imaan and Deen in our hearts. The more we sacrifice, the greater we will benefit so please brothers give your names to go out in the Path of Allah.

Yusuf stands up to write the names down, quite a few people from the audience are standing and volunteering their names with intentions for 40 days in the summer and 4 months to South Asia also. After a few minutes Ghulam bhai, still sat on the floor, begins to speak and everybody immediately falls silent – a sign of his natural authority I think. He addresses the audience in English: just as we take our jobs seriously and attend every single day, on time, and without fail, please also take this work seriously. We don’t wake up and think I can’t be bothered today, I’m going to give my work a miss and so skive off. You might get away with it once or twice but constant absence or turning up late would mean you getting sacked. Similarly, whether we feel like it or not we should attend for our daily *gasht* every single day. It’s food for the soul so please, everybody make an effort to come on time especially on our *umoomi gasht* day. Also it’s very important to do daily *ta’lim* at home for the ladies and children otherwise Deen will stop on our doorstep and not enter our houses. We can travel the world giving *da’wa* but it won’t enter our own homes. Plus the weekly ladies *ta’lim* has now started in English too and around 15 ladies attended last week, so please encourage your wives/sisters/mothers to attend too. The English one is especially for the younger ladies so ask them to spread the message among themselves so we can drive the numbers up. OK, we need to discuss the *nusrat* of the *paidal jama’at* – who should go and when? Some discussion ensues and, eventually, Hamza and Abdul Haleem agree to go the following Monday evening and spend some time with them. You will need a minimum of four hours, advises Ghulam bhai. It will take you an hour to reach them, you need to spend at least two hours with them, and an hour back. Both Hamza and Abdul Haleem agree that this will be manageable from between 6-10pm or so (presumably after full days at work). Iqbal reminds the brothers about the weekly *bayaan* at Blackburn Markaz on Thursday; we’ve been taking a good bunch of youngsters who enjoy it and we have a takeaway after. We should try and stay the night and come back at Fajr, advises Ghulam bhai. Some guys are getting impatient to leave, so Ghulam bhai asks Abdus Shakur to conclude with a short *duaa* which he does asking for forgiveness, steadfastness and sincerity of intention - everybody raises their hands and says Ameen. On the way out there’s some banter and camaraderie as we pause to put our shoes on in the shoe-rack area. I get to my car around 8.35pm and begin my drive home determined to type up my notepad jottings that same night so as to start afresh, once again, at the Fajr *mashwera* in the morning.
APPENDIX D: Contemporary TJ Poems

D1 – Poem 1

They came a-knocking on my door,
Not one- not two- not three, but four
I was half asleep you could hear me snore
Those brothers with tablighi tendencies hard-core.

I tried my best to ignore,
Those people whom I used to abhor,
I always thought of tabligh as quite a bore.
Those pacifists who never talk of war.

But this was before I used to pray
To me spirituality was just a cliché,
So I wasted my entire life away
9 to 5 work was my routine everyday

But something woke me from my hibernation,
Perhaps it was divine decree for my salvation?
So I went down the stairs with trepidation
And opened the door with hesitation.

We exchanged salams and I let them enter,
They suggested I visit the markaz- the tablighi center,
So I agreed eventually not wishing to dissent
And they made me stand and wrote down my intent.

And ever since I have travelled the globe,
In my coloured hat and delightful robe,
Gone are the nights of the flashing disco strobe
The Masjid has become my nocturnal abode.

And in my days I call to ALLAH-the heavenly Lord,
And besides him none deserves to be adored,
Doors are slammed in my face and I am often ignored,
But I aspire in Jannah to a great reward

I no longer drive a Lamborghini,
My wife sports now a niqaab, and not a bikini
The sunnah of milk has replaced my Vodka martini,
Oh what joy to be a tablighi!

What do kings know of what we own?
They but delight in their earthly throne
Praise be to God who kept the pleasures of tabligh unknown,
How can the deaf man appreciate Beethoven’s tone?

How many a person has been caused by tabligh to convert,
By the simplicity of message - pure and clean without dirt
This sweet spiritual nectarous desert,
Waking and changing sinful hearts that once were inert

There may not be pamphlets or elaborate computer graphics,
No polished speeches to give people kicks,
No free-mixing of guys and chicks
Like some conferences – we’ve all seen the pix

But to nourish water just needs to be simple and pure
This much my friend I can assure
That though it has no electrifying allure
It’s a way oft-tried and most secure

Scientists say a true equation’s truth lies in its simplicity,
So said William of Ockham in conformity,
Tabligh is simple, true and full of authenticity,
In both worlds it will give you felicity.

There’s no takalluf – or fake duplicity,
Only a shallow pond pretends to have depth with turbidity,
So in this age of media spin and sophistry
Tabligh provides us with many a refreshing quality
Purity, probity, modesty, integrity, certainty!

Anonymous

Source: https://theijtema.com/2012/10/20/poem-tabligh/
D2 – Poem 2

The Tablighis, easy target for criticism,
Attacks against them launched with cynicism
Politically unaware, intellectually docile,
Painted as some as simplistically puerile

But I must hasten to disagree,
And quote to you some history
To prove the nature of my claims
And perhaps to defend their noble aims

When Hinduism was spreading in Mewat,
And Muslims were losing imaan from the heart,
A spiritual man arose who stood apart,
And founded what we now know as Tablighi Jama’at

Who knew this spark of love would spread like fire,
For the situation seemed quite dire,
It transformed darkness to illumination,
And rescued the sunnah from devastation

Empty masjids cried floods of tears,
As no worshippers made sujood for many years,
And then crowds came back and thronged their floors,
You can see angels smile, and the heavens echo with applause.

The dhikr of Allah is being revived by their crowds
Throughout the lands ja’maat travel like rain-bearing clouds
Bringing much sought for water to thirsty lands,
And turning to luscious green arid desert lands.

Some people may be unaware of this information,
That Mawlana Ilyas was an initiated Sufi master
But he saw the mutasawifs and ulema remaining aloof from their congregation,
Whilst Indians Muslims plunged into great disaster

So he took the da’wa out to the masses,
Like bees flying on journeys making honey in stashes,
Unknown inhabititations became honeycombs sweet,
Where millions of Muslims gather and meet

They left their families and their abodes,
And embarked on difficult dusty roads,
Travelling for the pleasure of the Divine,
To replace the darkness of postmodernity with the sunnah’s shine.

Embryonic change happens in Forty Days,
Strange Indeed are Allah’s ways,
Don’t call this number a reprehensible innovation,
Perchance it be a sign of your lack of academic discrimination.
In the way of Allah each step they tread,
But only for jihād this should be said?
Open the hadith work of Bukhari - the chapter on Jumu’ah, ya akhee f’ilah,
In that very chapter not about jihad - it quotes the hadith of feet being covered with dust Fee sabeellillah

How many a former drug addict I have encountered in these lands,
Whose previously injecting hands are enshrouded with ancient sins
And now he sits in the house of God with a tasbeeh in his hands
Those same hands make dhikr on those beads of strings.

How many a robber who used to steal,
How many a zaani who shamed the earth’s surrounds
How many a musician singing profane sounds
Now recounts God’s Jalal - it makes him yell out squeals
And now the earth begins to smile, as he prostrates and as he kneels..

How many a face - black white and yellow from every schism
Sit on a mat and eat together their repast
Whilst politicians talk of the problems of racism
Oh this is not out problem - a thing of the past.

He makes nadaama and in tawbah turns
His heart with Love of Allah yearns
God Bless you Oh dearest Mawlaana Ilyas
How beautifully you turned Yaas Into Aas

From the orient to the occident
And from the south right to the north
Crowds emerge with intentions heavenly bent
And taking Allah’s name alone, they come forth

Pakistanis, Caucasians, Malaysians, Africans and Turks
Chinese, Eskimo, and Russian faces
Ethnicities unheard of fill Masjids where traces,
Of their forefathers are written in historical works.

Whilst nations sit before cathode rays,
That titillate their eyes with their enticing ways,
These men rebel against Satan’s invitation
And turn to the work of the prophets - driving Iblees to frustration

They sit of the floor as it indents their knees,
They know not of Nietzsche, Hume, Kant or Socrates,
They couldn’t perhaps recount Ghazzali or Avicenna’s complex kalaam,
But the dhikr of Allah makes their souls calm

This is not to deny the place of the mutaklimeen,
Without whom we would be in disarray,
But for the awaam such complex arguments can lead astray
So let *dhawq* and *wijdaan* provide them with *yaqeen*.

They are not by tales of Machiavelli’s Prince infected
The *sahaba*’s stories motivate their lives
Such dark political ideologies before such heroes stand rejected
Upholders of truth and self-sacrifice

They hold no huge political rallies protesting to creation
In the nights they stand in prayer before the answer of every supplication
And with tears flood the floors begging for mercy and rejuvenation
Once more gifting glory to the *Ummah* of the best of creation

Don’t approach the worldly kings - they cannot protect,
A Pretzel falls into their tracheas, almost suffocating
Such a small little thing He cannot eject?
How will he give Honour to those who stand outside the White House waiting?

They couldn’t tell you about quantum mechanics or Hawkins
They couldn’t refute Darwinian thought or the reductionism of Dawkins
They don’t know that much of Heisenberg’s principle of uncertainty
For to them the *kalima* is a deeply rooted certainty

They might not know Chomsky’s views on linguistic *bayaan*,
Or how Steven Pinker’s instincts about neurolinguistics fit,
But they have of a surety read Surah Rahman
And know that language is from Allah a merciful gift.

And not the product of random forces without end,
Or indeed a blind watchmaker - no my friend
The blindness is in your hearts - not the maker of harmony
So with *ahsan-ul-qawl* - they call to the Absolute with humility

On the Day of Reckoning when the Prophets say *nafsee nafsee*....
Perhaps Dawkins will smile, albeit, temporarily
Thinking "Ah my Selfish Gene Thesis was true!"
Even these prophets are exhibiting ultimately a selfish hue

But then Mustafa shall come and say *Ummati Ummati*...
Such selflessness which will cause his theory to terminate suddenly,
This is the beloved of Allah, and this *maqam* you cannot explain scientifically,
So discard Dawkin’s memes for Muhammad (s)’s MEEM

They fall not prey to materialism or such *bakwaas*,
They see the divine hand behind each moving leaf,
In fact they are aboard a Noah’s ark constructed by Mawlana Ilyas,
They hold on to the *sunnah* with their teeth

Of Freud’s Oedipus Complex they remain unaware
Or indeed of changing uncertain paradigms
Imaan, Salaah, the 6 points are in the air
The *kaafirs* who promote intellectual *kufir* will pay for their crimes
Qiyamah is before their eyes
Not mere logical premises philosophers surmise
But deep rooted convictions that change their lives
You don’t have to read volumes to be called wise

Those of us who study in intellectual arrogance
Forget Rumi's tales of the lover’s simple acceptance
The intellect is still looking for its transportation
Love has circled the ka’ba seven times in dedication

Anonymous

Source: http://muslimmatters.org/2010/04/17/tablighi-jamat-%E2%80%93-anon/
APPENDIX E: Respondent Views on Secular Education

This appendix supplements Section 6.4. In it I present a range of respondent views and experiences on TJ’s relationship with secular education pursued in British state schools, colleges and universities. In all my interviews, the basic gist of my question was as follows:

Riyaz: The last major study of TJ in this country was done by somebody called Yoginder Sikand who conducted fieldwork back in the 1990s. He quotes a certain Haiji Ebrahim Yoosuf Bawa Rangooni extensively – I’m not sure if you’ve heard of him? – and presents his writings as depicting the Tablighi perspective on, for example, the Western/secular education system. Rangooni says: “Save your progeny from the education of school and college in the same way as you would save them from a lion or a wolf. To send them in the atmosphere of colleges is as dangerous as throwing them into hell with your own hands.” Based on this Sikand concludes that “the Tablighi Jamaat has very little presence among Muslim students in British schools and colleges.” What are your thoughts on this? Does this chime with your own experiences?

As a sample, I reproduce here several Tier 3 responses:

Ilyas (a 23 year old student in a British Dar al-Ulum): No, no, definitely not. I think from what I’ve heard the actual Tablighi elders within the Markaz, Dewsbury Markaz, is that they encourage students to go to university and to do the best in their studies. They actually say come first in your studies and come first in Tabligh also and it’s actually they, as an usool [formal principle] we’re not allowed to tashkeel youngsters studying in university for a four months Tabligh tour until they finish their studies. So they encourage, the Tablighis actually, the elders actually encourage people, young Muslims to study. At the same time they encourage them to participate in the effort taking place in the university or college campuses, university campuses and I know a lot of university students who are activists on their campuses.

Raees (a 34 year old science teacher in a state school): So in terms of that particular quote, I think it’s a total misrepresentation, you know, of exactly what’s happening on the ground and what’s happening in Tabligh. Now all of the senior figures of Tabligh, they encourage to the hilt that every single youngster who is involved inside Tabligh goes through the full Western educational system and achieves the best possible grades. Do you understand? And they’re saying that this whole effort and the whole religion is not for you to isolate yourself, you know, from society. I mean it goes totally against the grain of TJ that if you isolate yourself, how are you ever going to influence anyone of the community or any person at any level if you’re a recluse, you know, doing your own thing and in your own world? Well, who are you going to affect? You’re going to affect a very small, small, small, small, tiny minority. So this is a total misrepresentation of what Tabligh is. And, I mean, it just goes against the whole grain of the effort.

Ismail (a 45 year old civil servant): I mean when I was a student in the late 80s the pioneers of TJ in the UK, they used to very actively encourage the youngsters. Like I said every December around Christmas period time they used to gather a lot of students who were in universities and they used to, I distinctly remember the lectures that used to take place in the Markaz in Dewsbury. And they really used to emphasise on youngsters being number one in the studies and number one in Tabligh as well, so they were encouraging both lines, you know? In your studies always be
number one, be ahead, you know, achieve the top marks, attain the best results and also they used to encourage that whatever time that you have like your holidays, go in the path of Allah, you know, go in jama’at, learn about your faith, learn about Islam and connecting ourselves with Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta’ala. So this was the message that was given at the time which I distinctly remember.

Hussein (a 22 year old British-born Tier 3 university student): I can see where he’s coming from but there’s been a paradigm shift. I do believe that we do, really do, need education and we can’t be, you know, anpar, you know, like we can’t be illiterate, yeah. That was then, that was possible then in the 60s and 70s, but now the paradigm shift is going towards education and diversity...I’m a true believer in education and also understanding other people, other people’s ways of thinking if we are to survive in, you know, this Western civilisation that we’re living in here. Western civilisation has a very interesting - how shall I put it? - ability to wash away any other terms of civilisation. For example, if you’re from China and you have a very strong Chinese belief or with the other civilisations that are now following Islam they - because they’re not exposed to TJ like we are - they seem to be washed away. Because Islam and TJ specifically, the inner workings of Tabligh, if you have constant, you know, exposure to Tabligh and Islam, you have a strong footing and you won’t be washed - hopefully not - won’t be washed away by, you know, totally thinking Western. But we’ll be a hybrid of Islam and Western, we will, we’ll try and accommodate both sides and be utilitarian.

Luqman, a 36 year old Tier 3 computer programmer with three children aged 9, 5 and 2, was the amir of my 42 day khuruj to Bulgaria in 2013.

Riyaz: What are your views on the Western/secular educational system?

Luqman: What a dumb question!

Riyaz: Well, the reason I ask that is because Sikand cites the Gloucester-based Haji Ebrahim Yoosuf Bawa Rangooni, who was a prolific writer. Sikand cites him as a TJ authority who unequivocally declares: “Save your progeny from the education of school and college in the same way as you would save them from a lion or a wolf. To send them in the atmosphere of college is as dangerous as throwing them into hell with your own hands.” Based on this, Sikand concludes that “the Tablighi Jama’at has very little presence among Muslim students in British schools and colleges.”

Luqman: That’s wrong then, isn’t it? I’m an example of a person who went through college and university and I don’t see any problems.

Riyaz: In terms of your aspirations for your children for the future, would you want to send them to secular educational institutes or would you keep them in Dar al-Ulums?

Luqman: I have absolutely no problem with them going to a Western institution to further their education and to become professionals in whatever field they want to be.

Riyaz: Do you send them to a Muslim school or a state school?
Luqman: Currently, my children go to Muslim schools.

Riyaz: And what’s the rationale behind that?

Luqman: The wife! [laughs] That’s the best answer.

Riyaz: But personally what are your feelings?

Luqman: I think, from my experience, I don’t think there’s anything much Islamic about Muslim schools. I really, really don’t.

Riyaz: So you’re happy for your children to go through the whole system, get the best education and become professionals…?

Luqman: Yeah, I’m quite happy with that.

Muaaz, a 41 year old London-based Tier 3 activist, was the amir of my 20 day khuruj to Birmingham and Bradford in the summer of 2014.

Riyaz: Was your decision, you mentioned you were quite close with the London shura and they were advising you on many things including life issues. What was their perspective in terms of you furthering your education at university?

Muaaz: They kept saying go for study, go for education but I got into a dilemma that if life is about preparing for Aakhirah [the Afterlife], why do I need to study? Got into that dilemma, so I went to [name of a shura member] and he said well, you study to get a job and if you can get a highly paid job where you’re spending less time earning your money, you’ve got more time for Deen. And if you don’t study, you’ll end up working hard for dunya [the world] and you won’t be having enough time for Deen. And people will say, because of Tabligh, you didn’t get to study. So we want you to not give up your studies, make sure you don’t give up your studies. But then I didn’t want to go into medicine because doctors have to do all sorts of things. And I didn’t want to go into law, I didn’t like any of the pressures. But I loved physics and it was, now I realise it was a dead-end degree, but I enjoyed it while I did it.

Riyaz: What inspired you to study physics?

Muaaz: Physics is the explanation of everything. Physics is a factual subject and every scientific fact is underpinned by a physical principle. And so I was going right to the root of creation, that’s why.

Riyaz: Okay, that’s interesting cos the last major qualitative study of Tabligh in Britain was conducted by a man called Yoginder Sikand and one of the things he said is, he cited somebody, you may have heard of him, a Gloucester-based Haji Ibrahim Yusuf Bawa Rangooni…

Muaaz: I’ve heard of him, yeah.

RT: Okay. What do you know about him? Just generally...

Muaaz: Bawa, Gloucester, something [pause] was it moonsighting probably?
Something about masturat jama’ats I think and that was it. I’ve never really gotten into it, I’ve never really learnt about it. But when I’d come to Dewsbury for my chillah...I used to hear his name and I used to know that he was a bit of a controversial figure, but I didn’t really understand.

RT: Okay, that’s fine. What Sikand does is he quotes him as a TJ authority in Britain and then...

Muaaz: I certainly thought of him as an outsider?

Riyaz: Yeah, that’s what I’m finding from my interviews but Sikand cites him as a TJ authority in Britain and he quotes from his publications to represent the Tablighi perspective on secular education and this is what he says: “Save your progeny from the education of school and college in the same way as you would save them from a lion or a wolf. To send them in the atmosphere of college is as dangerous as throwing them into hell with your own hands.” Based on this, Sikand concludes that “the Tablighi Jama’at has very little presence among Muslim students in British schools and colleges.” Now what you’re saying is that from your experience with the shura of London - they never articulated that sentiment to you even in the slightest?

Muaaz: Even in Dewsbury, they would always say you have to be very good at your studies. You have to be a role model student and you have to pursue educational achievements. They would emphasise that all the time. To the extent that I would start questioning well, how does that fit in with our understanding of Aakhirah? Yeah, at all times they wanted people of Tabligh to be involved in all levels of society and to be able to access all levels of society. They, many a times we would hear people say in the mudhaakaras, the purpose of Tabligh is not to turn you into a hermit. The purpose of Tabligh is not to turn you into somebody that lives outside society.

Riyaz: So, on the one hand, you were being actively encouraged to pursue your further education. On the other hand, college and university is not an ideal place for cultivating spirituality. So how did you manage that?

Muaaz: Spiritually, it wasn’t a problem for me at all because, spiritually it became a problem after starting work. Spiritually wasn’t a problem at all because it was a simple matter of keep your eyes down, don’t talk to the girls [laughs]. And that’s what I did. I did that in college. I did that in uni, got on with my studies. I was a very, sort of, studious person. Didn’t have any other pursuits outside of education in uni. And I studied from home, all my uni life and college life I was at home and I studied from there, I didn’t go out to stay in the hostels. I suppose if I did, then there might have been some temptations or whatever. But every evening I was coming back to the masjid. I was coming back to my two and a half hours [gasht]. I was coming back to my ta’lim, so it wasn’t an issue. Went in the morning as an inviter, did my stuff, gave da’wa as much as I could, kept my eyes down, came back home. So it wasn’t an issue at all.

Riyaz: And you were fully in your libaas [Islamic dress] throughout?

Muaaz: Yes, throughout.

Riyaz: And what was the response of, we’ve talked about fellow Muslims, by and large, critical and hostile because they had different perspectives on Tabligh and
you were attempting to convince them. But what about non-Muslims, fellow students, lecturers?

Muaaz: Oh, this is what convinced me I was on the right! Because everybody had great respect for it and they’d ask me about it and I’d explain it and they would show a great respect and admiration that I lived by some principles and I wasn’t just a blind follower. So yeah, that helped me. British society helped me to live a principled life. I mean when I went to Bangladesh to visit relatives and that, I got criticised as well and I found that very hypocritical. And this is why I like British society because you’re allowed to follow your principles and believe your principles and lead a principled life. You don’t have to be hypocritical.

Finally, I cite from my interview with Hanzalah, the only British-born Tier 2 leader I interviewed, now with over 20 years dedicated TJ experience. Unlike most of my Tier 3 respondents who first became involved in TJ during their youth, Leicester-based Hanzalah had already completed a MA and worked for several years as a chartered accountant before undergoing a powerful intra-religious conversion experience (see 9.2.1). Rather than focus on his own experiences at university then, it was more apt for me to ask about his aspirations for his children:

Riyaz: We talked before about secular education and your views on that. In terms of your understanding and application for your own children, would you be happy for them to go to secular educational institutions?

Hanzalah: Both my daughters are currently at university. My eldest one Aisha is doing a degree in English, just finished her second year. She’s got one year left and then both of them want to go into teaching. My Khadija, I think she got two A stars and an A in her A levels. My Aisha got two As and a B in her A levels. She’s studying maths at university, my second daughter. Shuaib is at college doing A Levels in accounts, maths and business, looking to go ahead into university as well. So I don’t have any issues whatsoever. I am more than happy for them to go as far as they can. If Allah has given them the ability then they should use it. It’s disrespectful to the ability that Allah has given you if you don’t utilise it for the purposes of dunya [worldly achievement] as long, and this is the message I’ve given to my kids from day one, as long as you do not contradict and go against the teachings of Allah and Deen. So my girls, they go to university and they’re in purdah [niqab]. My lad, he goes to college and he’s in jabbah [traditional robe]. They’re alimahs [graduates of female Dar al-Ulums], my lads are hafiz. So as far as I’m concerned, I’ve given them the best of both worlds. I’ve never, ever been a restriction for them in their educational desire. Riyaz: So rather than going down the route of segregation, isolation that Haji Ebrahim Bawa...

Hanzalah: Total opposite, total opposite. What does Hafiz [Patel] sahib say over and over again? You have to be number one in Deen and number one in dunya, and that’s what I’ve said to my kids. That, look, nobody is saying you cannot achieve a phenomenal position in dunya. If Allah has decreed it for you to happen, it’s going to happen. You can’t stop it. I can’t stop it. The world can’t stop it. But what you do have control over is the life you live of Deen. So you can easily establish that life of dunya which has already been destined for you with Deen or without Deen. If you do it with Deen, then everything you do in dunya will be of barakah [blessing], of benefit to you. Otherwise everything will become a burden and pain and suffering for you in this life
and obviously in the hereafter as well.\textsuperscript{30} And that’s what I’ve told them all along. So when they’re at college or they’re at uni, namaz is their priority, their hijab and purdah is a priority. Clothing I’m not overly fussed. For my Shuaib, if he said to me, dad, I’m gonna wear pants and top to college, I’d say fine. Some of his mates do. My sister’s lad, he does. But my Shuaib, no, I’m quite happy wearing my jabbah, so he wears it. It costs me a few bucks buying them some decent jabbahs but I’d rather do that, you know. I get him, he wears designer shoes and nice jackets and tops over his jabbahs, you know, I don’t have an issue with that whatsoever.

\textsuperscript{30} It is striking that Hanzalah’s understanding of predestination, as espoused in this excerpt, is an almost perfect inversion of the ‘Protestant ethic’ Weber (1985 [1905]) identifies as a key progenitor of modern capitalism.
APPENDIX F: The adhaan in Islam

The adhaan is the Islamic call to prayer that precedes each of the five daily salaat. It is usually called aloud from the minarets of mosques in Muslim-majority countries. In Sunni Islam, the words of the adhaan are as follows:

Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar.
Allah is Greater (than anything), Allah is Greater.

Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar.
Allah is Greater, Allah is Greater.

Ash-hadu alla ilaha illa-ilah.
I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but Allah.

Ash-hadu alla ilaha illa-ilah.
I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but Allah.

Ash-hadu anna Muhammadar-Rasulullah.
I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah

Ash-hadu anna Muhammadar-Rasulullah.
I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah

Hayya ‘ala-s-Salah, hayya ‘ala-s-Salah.
Hasten to the Prayer, hasten to the Prayer.

Hayya ‘ala-l-falah, hayya ‘ala-l-falah.
Hasten to success, hasten to success.

Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar.
Allah is Greater, Allah is Greater.

La ilaha illa-ilah
There is none worthy of worship but Allah.

In the adhaan for the Fajr Prayer, the following words are added after Hayya ‘ala-l-falah:

As-Salatu khairun min an-naum, As-Salatu khairun min an-naum.
Prayer is better than sleep, Prayer is better than sleep.

After the adhan, it is recommended to say the following du’aa [supplication]:

Allahumma rabba hadhihi-d-da’awati-t-tammati wa-s-Salati-l-qa’imati, ati Muhammadan il-wasiliata wa-l-fadiliata wa-d-darajata-r-rafi’ati wa-b’ath-hu maqamam mahmudan illadh niwa’adatu.

O Allah, Lord of this most perfect call, and of the Prayer that is about to be established, grant to Muhammad the favor of nearness (to You) and excellence and a place of distinction, and exalt him to a position of glory that You have promised him.
Iqaamah

The *iqaamah* is a litany called aloud several minutes after the *adhaan* just before the actual *salaat* begins. While the *adhaan* is usually a lengthy and melodious call, the *iqaamah*, in comparison, tends to be much shorter with each phrase simply spoken usually by the muezzin standing in the prayer row (*saff*) directly behind the imam. The words of the *iqaamah* are exactly the same as the *adhaan*, except that after “*Hayya ‘ala-l-falah*” the following phrase is added:

*Qad qamati-s-Salah, Qad qamati-s-Salah.*

Prayer is ready, Prayer is ready.