

**Jihad and the Limits of Citizenship**  
**The British and Australian Experience<sup>1</sup>**

**Kylie Baxter**  
**Monash University**

**Introduction**

Within Western societies Muslim identity and religious responsibilities have been closely scrutinised in recent years. The early twenty first century has elicited a range of responses from Diaspora Muslims, a reassertion of Islamic identity being a primary trend. Fed by media sensationalism there exists in many parts of Western societies a perception of an ever-widening social, cultural, political and religious chasm between Muslims living in the West and the broader community. The overwhelming majority of Muslims in Western nations have found a mutually sustainable level of equilibrium with the society of their nation of residence. This equilibrium usually allows for the maintenance of religious freedom and cultural identity.

However, with the exception of the United States, Western nations have experienced the emergence of a fundamentalist impulse within minority sections of their Muslim community. This trend can be identified as reactive, with organisations and individuals clearly responding to international political events. The Australian and United Kingdom Muslim communities both provide clear examples of this minority trend. In both nations, organisations or movements exist which are dedicated to their own marginal interpretation of Islam.

This paper will explore the similarities between two examples of the Islamist trend, the UK-based al-Muhajiroun and the Australian Islamist movement headed by the Melbourne-based

---

<sup>1</sup> 'This paper was presented to the 15th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Canberra 29 June-2 July 2004. It has been peer-reviewed and appears on the Conference Proceedings website by permission of the author(s) who retain(s) copyright. The paper may be downloaded for fair use under the Copyright Act (1954), its later amendments and other relevant legislation.'

Sheikh Muhammad Omran. Analysis of these two movements will illustrate some striking similarities and correlations which exist between Islamist organisations functioning in Western nations. The focal point of this investigation will be the theoretical understandings and application of the Islamic concept of jihad employed by each organisation/movement. From this analysis the similarities and differences of the theoretical and ideological basis of the movements will be explored.

Throughout history a range of Islamic scholars have explored the concept of jihad, enshrined in various manifestations within the Qur'an; a full analysis of this tradition is beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, for the purposes of this exploration a brief overview of the theoretical construction of jihad will be presented and then the concept of jihad, as it is understood by the two organisations, will be focused upon. Finally, this paper will seek to understand how the Islamist movement in Western nations reconciles the tension between their perception of the Islamic responsibility to wage jihad and the concept of Western citizenship.

### **The theoretical development of Jihad**

Jihad is perhaps the most contested term within the Islamic religion. While generalisations are difficult, if not impossible, in the contemporary period mainstream Islam has displayed a public tendency to understand jihad in a non-militaristic way.<sup>2</sup> Focus has instead been upon the notion of jihad as an internal struggle, a spiritual endeavour for self-improvement.

However, the ideological basis for the militaristic interpretation of jihad exists in the Medina phase of both the Qur'an and the Hadith. In addition to these two authoritative sources, the Islamic theorists of the Classical period (first three centuries) commonly understood the obligation in a militaristic sense.<sup>3</sup> The blending of historical experiences, textual interpretation and in the contemporary period, political realities, has influenced the modern Islamist conception of jihad. It is these militaristic connotations, formulated in various historical and political experiences which are utilized to provide a legitimate basis for the modern Islamist understanding.

The contemporary radicalisation of the concept may find its roots in the thought of the legal philosopher Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), who developed the idea of legitimate warfare against the apostate Muslim ruler. Previous to Taymiyya's contribution jihad had traditionally been waged externally against unbelievers. Taymiyya's innovation was

---

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), p. 24.

the application of jihad internally; against Muslim rulers who failed to apply 'correct' Sharia. Continuing through the history of Islamic thinkers, the modern Islamist interpretation of jihad owes much to the work of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966).<sup>4</sup> While a simplification, the fundamental directives of Qutb's thought, the identification of Islam as a political movement and the need for a reestablishment of the Islamic Caliphate,<sup>5</sup> have informed Islamist organisations since the 1960s.

Within the historical evolution of the ideology of jihad there have been theoretical attempts to divide jihad into a range of categories. The most significant of these divisions has been the defensive and offensive categories. The defensive jihad has traditionally been considered a binding duty on every able-bodied Muslim man and woman,<sup>6</sup> while the more controversial offensive jihad was usually undertaken to expand the realm of Islam. Given the historical experience of the expansion of the early Islamic community, most juristic understandings of the early period can be understood as a legitimisation of the offensive jihad; war to spread the faith. However, throughout modern history and especially in the post-Caliphate period, the tendency of mainstream Muslim communities has been to limit the legitimisation of jihad to its defensive application.

Importantly, the concept of the territorial state holds no legitimacy within a literal interpretation of Islam; therefore contemporary conflicts involving the Muslims of one nation-state can be presented as an attack upon the entire *umma*.<sup>7</sup> Islamist organisations throughout the world have, in response to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, utilised this supra-national defensive interpretation of the term as the basis for the contemporary call to jihad.

### **Al-Muhajiroun**

Al-Muhajiroun, founded in Saudi Arabia in the mid-1980s is a vocal, high profile Islamist organisation. As an offshoot of the global Hizb al-Tahrir movement, al-Muhajiroun's driving ideological directive is the re-establishment of the Caliphate, or pan-Islamic state. Since the destruction of the Caliphate at the close of World War I, this has been the aim of a diverse range of Islamic organisations as many perceived Mustafa Kemal's nationalist ambitions as

---

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Sayyid Qutb definitive work on this topic is *Milestones* (Beirut: The Holy Koran Publishing House, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: the Trail of Political Islam* (London: I B Tauris, 2003), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> S. H. Hashmi, 'Interpreting the Islamic Ethics of War and Peace', in S. H. Hashmi (ed.), *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism and Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 205.

<sup>7</sup> Bassan Tibi, 'War and Peace in Islam', in S. H. Hashmi (ed.), *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism and Conflict*, p. 187.

a betrayal of the international Muslim community.<sup>8</sup> The innovation of al-Muhajiroun is the determination to commence working towards this goal wherever Muslims are found.

Thus, Islamic revolution in the United Kingdom becomes the organisation's stated aim. This grandiose objective aside, the primary function of al-Muhajiroun in the United Kingdom context is the dissemination of an Islamist political view. Importantly, al-Muhajiroun is a minority organization, shunned by the mainstream Muslim community. However, given the radical nature of the rhetoric the organization employs, al-Muhajiroun and its leaders enjoy a significant media presence. Essentially, al-Muhajiroun provides political and social commentary on international politics, focusing on the events that have become the norms of Islamist outrage: the plight of the Palestinians, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the global dominance of the United States.

Although based in the United Kingdom, al-Muhajiroun operates in other nations with, until March 2004, a specific focus on Pakistan.<sup>9</sup> The organisation employs modern technology, utilising a sophisticated website to propagate its message. In addition to the Internet, al-Muhajiroun publishes the Sharia Magazine, holds weekly meetings throughout the United Kingdom and organises public lectures and rallies. Sheikh Mohammad Bakri, the organisation's founder and Emir, is a controversial, often quoted, personality within the United Kingdom's media. The entrenched values of freedom of speech and association have been tested by the challenge represented by this organisation since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Despite being residents or citizens of a Western nation, members of al-Muhajiroun fundamentally reject all integration and assimilation into Western society.

O Muslims do not let Shaytaan (Satan) fool you into believing the Kuffaar (e.g. the Jews, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists etc...) in anything that they say. They are not our friends or protectors nor is it allowed to take them as such. And do not become apostates by having any allegiance whatsoever to the Kuffaar and their governments, whether that be as their official representatives, as their police or army, as MP's, Lords, Senators or Governors etc... Allah (SWT) has made the enemy clear from the friend, the one you must keep distance from clear from the

---

<sup>8</sup> S. Sayyid, *A fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books, 2003), p. 61.

<sup>9</sup> In March 2004 the homepage of al-Muhajiroun, [www.muhaajiroun.com](http://www.muhaajiroun.com) declared the organization's separation from the Pakistani branch. According to press releases, the Pakistani branch has thus ceased to exist, no reasons were offered for this development.

one you must ally with, the one you must hate clear from the one you must love.<sup>10</sup>

The influence of the transnational Salafi tradition is evident within al-Muhajiroun's perspective on those it refers to as 'British Muslims'.<sup>11</sup> Al-Muhajiroun regularly condemns the integration of Muslims into Western society, using fatawas against participation in elections<sup>12</sup> and describing high-profile United Kingdom Muslims as apostates.<sup>13</sup>

The most complex area of al-Muhajiroun thought is the relationship it believes exists between its members and the State. To al-Muhajiroun the perceived enmity of the United Kingdom government towards Islam is historically evidenced, 'let us not forget that this is the same British Government which was instrumental in destroying the Islamic State and giving the land of Palestine to the Jews.'<sup>14</sup> This perceived animosity continues into the present day, 'the British government, post September 11th, has embarked upon a campaign to silence Islam and the Muslims'.<sup>15</sup> This uneasy relationship with the State has been compounded by the experiences of the twenty first century thus far. The arrest of individuals identified as al-Muhajiroun's spiritual leaders under the United Kingdom's Anti-Terror legislation has resulted in a surge of condemnation from the organization and an even greater focus on the perceived victimization of Muslims in the West.

Muslims all over the world in this era are being subjected to persecution, attack, suppression and aggression. This campaign against the Muslims is being waged in the form of physical as well as psychological and intellectual attack. In Kashmir, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine the Muslims are facing primarily a physical clash, whilst in the West they are subjected to an intellectual clash of civilizations.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Muslim, British or American -A question of allegiance', [www.muhaajiroun.com](http://www.muhaajiroun.com), (30 August 2003) (Access date 15 September 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Bassam Alloni, 'Interview: Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammad', *United Press International*, (13 September 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Fatwa Against Voting for Man-Made Law', [www.muhaajiroun.com](http://www.muhaajiroun.com), (2001) (Access date 12 January 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Muslim, British or American -A question of allegiance'.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'UK Judge Outlaws Qur'an and Hadith: Judge Jeremy McMullen calls Allah and his Messenger (saw) 'Abusive and insulting'', [www.muhaajiroun.com](http://www.muhaajiroun.com), (4 May 2002) (Access date 10 January 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Secularism: A tool to silence Islam', [www.muhaajiroun.com](http://www.muhaajiroun.com), (5 April 2002) (Access date 23 June 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'France Unveiled', [www.muhaajiroun.com](http://www.muhaajiroun.com), (2004) (Access date 15 May 2004).

### **The Covenant of Security and Jihad**

Committed to the restoration of the Islamic Caliphate, al-Muhajiroun identifies jihad as the 'foreign policy of Islam'. Controversially, al-Muhajiroun understands jihad as 'one of the main pillars of Islam'<sup>17</sup> and rejects the modernist interpretation of an individual, internal or spiritual struggle. Self-identifying as part of the transnational Salafi movement<sup>18</sup>, al-Muhajiroun defines jihad as the use of 'military force, where diplomacy fails, to remove the obstacles the Islamic State faces in carrying its ideology to mankind'.<sup>19</sup>

From the al-Muhajiroun perspective, jihad is the sole force capable of resolving international disputes such as the plight of the Palestinian people.<sup>20</sup> Given the controversial nature of the concept, and the position of al-Muhajiroun as an essentially Western organisation, some theoretical qualifications have been developed on the application of this duty. While 'Jihad is a divine term and entails fighting Kufaar physically to make the deen (religion) of Allah superior,'<sup>21</sup> there have been two qualifications built into the organization's understanding of the term.

Firstly, similar to some historical theological traditions, jihad has been divided by the organisation into offensive and defensive categories.<sup>22</sup> However, the organization's belief in the unity and inviolability of the transnational community of Muslims is important in this context. From this perspective, any conflict involving Muslims in the contemporary world is formulated as uniformly defensive, a call to arms in response to a usually Western occupation or invasion. Secondly, a distinction has been drawn between the responsibilities of Muslims living within conflict regions (Iraq, Afghanistan, the Occupied Territories) and those living outside these regions (the West). For Muslims 'living in, or adjacent to, occupied regions' jihad, in the physical, militaristic sense, is presented as compulsory.<sup>23</sup> For those outside such regions al-Muhajiroun believes the individual Muslim's responsibility is to support jihad (financially, verbally and spiritually) and work towards the establishment of the Caliphate. In this division of labour Muslims in the United Kingdom, the primary support base for the organisation, are directed by the organisation to focus their efforts on non-violent action.

---

<sup>17</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Introduction to Jihad, Part 1', [www.muhammad.org](http://www.muhammad.org), (2003) (Access date 20 December 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Bassam Alloni, 'Interview: Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammad'.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Introduction to Jihad, Part 1'.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Muslims to call for the destruction of the Jewish State', [www.muhammad.org](http://www.muhammad.org), (17 May 2002) (Access date 15 June 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Frequently Asked Questions and Answers By Members of Al-Muhajiroun' (Pakistan), [www.almuk.com](http://www.almuk.com), (Access date 20 November 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Introduction to Jihad, Part 2', [www.muhammad.org](http://www.muhammad.org), (20 December 2003) (Access date 21 December 2003).

The difficulties associated with this position are self-evident. Al-Muhajiroun draws an unclear and problematic distinction between the varied responsibilities for jihad. The impact on young disillusioned Muslims (the primary support base of the organization) of this rhetoric, which at a minimum clearly endorses the concept of militant jihad, is significant. The potential of this ideological endorsement to translate into practical action was confirmed in mid-2003 when two young men loosely affiliated with al-Muhajiroun undertook a suicide attack in the Israeli city of Tel-Aviv.<sup>24</sup> Al-Muhajiroun rejected accusations of an active role in the operation, yet endorsed the action.

While al-Muhajiroun has repeatedly called for the overthrow of the British government and expresses its ultimate aim as the installation of an Islamic State in the United Kingdom, leaders have been careful to reject the legitimacy of jihadi action undertaken within Britain by Muslims who are residents or citizens. While fully supporting the right of Muslims from conflict regions to enter the United Kingdom and attempt violent action, al-Muhajiroun cites a complex 'covenant of security' between the state and its Muslims residents<sup>25</sup>, which precludes such action from within.

The 'covenant of security' draws on Islamic tradition from the early period. As it endorses a literal interpretation and emulation of the time of the Prophet, al-Muhajiroun asserts that it is abnormal and undesirable to live among the *kuffar*. However, in the contemporary context where Muslim rulers are identified as oppressors and apostates operating in a post-Caliphate world, al-Muhajiroun accepts the necessity of Muslims residing in the West. In a clear attempt to explore this reality from an Islamic viewpoint, and to limit the potential for assimilation, al-Muhajiroun claims the existence of Western Muslims is regulated by this covenant.

Al-Muhajiroun posits two forms of the covenant exist. The first is the formal contract; the second a customary or implied understanding. A formal contract between a Muslim and a Western state constitutes clear permission, from the government in question, to reside in a Western state, e.g. a temporary visa, permanent residency or a protection visa. A customary understanding of the covenant is essentially the result of any Muslim legally entering a

---

<sup>23</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'The Crusaders of the 21st Century', [www.muhammad.org](http://www.muhammad.org), (20 March 2003) (Access date 27 June 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'The truth about Omar, Asif and al-Muhajiroun', [www.muhammad.org](http://www.muhammad.org), (3 May 2003) (Access date 10 May 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Aqd al Amaan: The Covenant of Security', [www.muhammad.org](http://www.muhammad.org), (15 October 2003).

Western nation. Therefore individuals entering on study visas, tourism visas, or those who hold a driver's licence or take state benefits are all bound by the covenant.

However, al-Muhajiroun asserts that this covenant does not entail a responsibility to follow the secular law of the host nation. It is 'specifically a covenant of life and wealth',<sup>26</sup> which does not include the privileging of secular law over Islamic law. Although this covenant is undertaken between the individual and the government al-Muhajiroun asserts that as the government represents the people it becomes unacceptable to 'kill or steal from anyone in that country'.<sup>27</sup>

The covenant is dissolved when an individual is obliged to leave the nation of residence (denied permanent residency, extradited or expelled), if an individual decides to leave the country and does so, or most importantly, if the individual is betrayed by the state with whom the covenant is held. This final clause is the most problematic as, in this understanding; Muslims who are arrested within their nation of residence are thus potentially released from the covenant.

The 'covenant of security' appears to hinge upon the recognition of the legitimacy of constructs associated with the nation state, passports and visas. For an organization that rejects the legitimacy of the nation state this is clearly problematic. Therefore, while it would appear that any Muslim who enters a Western nation through recognised channels is bound by the covenant, al-Muhajiroun has further refined the doctrine to make admission of Muslim identity the factor which determines the application of the covenant.

Therefore, al-Muhajiroun presents four categories which encompass all Muslims living in the West.

1. An individual holding a legitimate passport in their own name, which states they are Muslim, is under the covenant.
2. An individual holding a fake passport, even in a fake name, which states he/she is a Muslim is under the covenant.
3. An individual that enters a Western nation illegally (without a passport), but declares their Muslim identity is also bound by the covenant.

---

<sup>26</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Aqd al Amaan: The Covenant of Security'.

4. Therefore the only Muslims who are excluded from the covenant are those who enter a Western nation with a fake name and deny their Muslim identity. In this case the individual must be sent by a jihadi leader in order to undertake specific operations against the Western nation.<sup>28</sup>

This convoluted argument was developed to enable al-Muhajiroun's leadership to continue to glorify the actions of the September 11 hijackers. It is under the fourth clause, outside the covenant, which al-Muhajiroun claims the men entered the United States; however, US investigations have not supported this claim. The individual who perpetrated the September 11 attacks entered the US under their own names, applying for tourist and student visas. Applying the stated framework these men were bound by the covenant. However, by claiming otherwise the organization attempts to employ the 'covenant of security' to legitimise and sanction the actions of those involved in the terrorist attacks.

### **The Australian Islamist Movement: Sheikh Omran**

The Australian Islamist movement sprung to public attention in the closing months of 2003. The current affairs program *The 7.30 Report* ran a controversial, and to some sensationalised, report on the international connections of Sheikh Omran (also known as Abu Ayman), a man widely respected as the spiritual head of Australian Islamism.<sup>29</sup> *The 7.30 Report* charged that Omran had been cited in a Spanish terrorism indictment for alleged contacts with the suspected head of al-Qaeda in Europe, Abu Dadaha, also known as Imad Edin Barrakat Yarkas.<sup>30</sup> Dadaha was the European link to the leader of the September 11<sup>th</sup> hijackers, Mohammed Atta. Thus a relationship between Dadaha and Omran would place the Australian Sheikh in only a minuscule degree of separation from the major players in the international al-Qaeda network.

Born in Jordan, Sheikh Omran immigrated to Australia in the 1908s. Similar to al-Muhajiroun's Sheikh Bakri, Omran received a Saudi Arabian education, studying law at Medina University.<sup>31</sup> He received a sponsorship from Medina University to teach Islamic law

---

<sup>27</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Aqd al Amaan: The Covenant of Security'.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Aqd al Amaan: The Covenant of Security'.

<sup>29</sup> Raphel Epstein, 'Documents allege Al Qaeda contact with Australians', *The 7.30 Report* (3 September 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Brendan Nicholson and Linda Morris, 'Police Probe Australia, al-Qaeda link', *The Age* (4 September 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Cameron Stewart and Collen Egan, 'A word from the wise -'the approached me and said this man wants to make some attacks on things...and what do you want to do about it?'--Sheikh Mohammad Omran', *The Weekend Australian* (16 October 2003), p.22.

in the country of his choice; with his Saudi education, academic backing and adherence to the Salafi movement Omran was quickly propelled to the forefront of the Islamist movement after his arrival in Australia. In an important dissimilarity from Sheikh Bakri, Omran does hold citizenship in his nation of residence.<sup>32</sup> In the mid-1980s he founded a nation wide network, affiliated to the global Ahl Sunnah wal Jama'ah, which in 2004 has branches in Perth, Melbourne and Sydney. Omran also co-founded the *Ni'dul Islam* magazine with a Sydney based leader of the controversial Islamic Youth Movement.<sup>33</sup> This man, Bilal Khazal, was recently charged with inciting terrorism through a book and website that allegedly endorse militant action against non-Muslims. The CIA has previously named Khazal as an Australian al-Qaeda recruiter, an accusation which was supported in the Spanish anti-terror trials that exposed Omran's alleged relationship to Dadaha.<sup>34</sup>

The nature of the Islamist tradition in Australia is limited and essentially revolves around the personage of Sheikh Omran who claims a nation-wide following of around 10,000 people.<sup>35</sup> Despite the difficulties associated with verification of such figure the June 2004 purchase of a Sydney mosque for \$2.65 million by organizations associated with Omran indicate that he heads a movement of significant, and increasing, size.<sup>36</sup>

Similar to the British experience the importance of charismatic leadership and perceived theological authority is a feature of the Australian Islamist movement. Khazal's Islamic Youth Movement, which publishes the *Ni'dul Islam* magazine, regards Omran as their spiritual leader,<sup>37</sup> a role he can probably claim in relation to all Islamist proponents in Australia. Indeed, Omran has been identified within the community as the 'father of the movement'.<sup>38</sup> The importance of the position of Sheikh Omran is evidenced by the assertion from members of his community that in the case of suspicions regarding potential terrorist threats or action within Australia they would approach Omran before the authorities.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Brian Toohey, 'ASIO steps lightly where the media blunders in', *The Australian Financial Review* (11 October 2003), p. 24.

<sup>33</sup> An affiliate of the Australian arm of Ahl Sunnah wal Jama'ah.

<sup>34</sup> Nick MacKenzie, 'Spanish documents reveal possible Australian Al-Qaeda connection', *PM ABC Radio* (3 September 2003).

<sup>35</sup> Brian Toohey, 'ASIO steps lightly where the media blunders in'. However, in other interviews Omran has claimed to hold the support of 70% of the 300,000 strong Australian Muslim community, see Larry Schwatz, Eamonn Duff and Frank Walker, 'Cleric in struggle for power', *The Age* (6 June 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Larry Schwatz, Eamonn Duff and Frank Walker, 'Cleric in struggle for power'.

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Ferguson, 'Sheikh Omran', *Insight SBS* (30 October 2003).

<sup>38</sup> Cameron Stewart and Colleen Egan, 'A word from the wise -'the approached me and said this man wants to make some attacks on things...and what do you want to do about it?'

<sup>39</sup> Cameron Stewart and Colleen Egan, 'A word from the wise -'the approached me and said this man wants to make some attacks on things...and what do you want to do about it?'

*The 7.30 Report* exposé led to a series of extraordinary claims that further illuminated the interlinked nature of the movement in Australia. Omran claimed that the Indonesian twins, Abdul Rahim Ayub and Abdul Rahman Ayub who masterminded the Indonesian terror network *Jemaah Islamiyah* in Australia, approached him, in his capacity as elder Islamist statesmen, to seek advice regarding an individual planning terrorist attacks within Australia.<sup>40</sup> This man, Jack Roche, has since been arrested and is convicted for terrorism offences. Omran claimed he personally warned against these attacks and his rejection was relayed to Abu Bakir Bashir, spiritual leader of JI in Indonesia.

In addition to the accusations of contact with the Spaniard Dahada and the Southeast Asian connection, Omran has maintained a relationship with Sheikh Qatada,<sup>41</sup> now held under the United Kingdom's anti-terror legislation. Sheikh Qatada's centrality to the Islamist movement is evidenced by the outrage expressed over his arrest by al-Muhajiroun.<sup>42</sup> Omran has maintained a friendship since his Jordanian childhood with the imprisoned Sheikh. These important contacts with the international Islamist network aside Omran has denied the accusation that he is al-Qaeda's man in Australia, citing his relationship with ASIO as evidence of his innocence.

Rather than accusations of planning or perpetrating terrorist actions within Australia, the primary accusation levelled at Omran has been that of recruitment<sup>43</sup> and the clichéd 'guilt by association'. Parallels can clearly be drawn with the al-Muhajiroun case, where recruitment for international jihad has been a consistent charge against the organisation. Essentially, the Islamist tradition in Australia appears largely theoretical as opposed practical with only isolated individuals detained worldwide in relation to armed action.<sup>44</sup> In late 2003, the Australian Islamist scene was again thrust into the public realm, with the deportation and subsequent arrest of the French born Willie Bridgette. The interlinked nature of the network in Australia has been further confirmed by Bridgette's attendance at Omran affiliated

---

<sup>40</sup> This is not a uniform claim; Omran has denied knowing the twins in other media reports. See Trudy Harris, Colleen Egan, Martin Chulov and Barclay Crawford, 'Australia's terror web gets bigger', *The Australian* (5 September 2003), p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Larry Schwartz, 'Cleric left feeling like an alien', *The Age* (7 September 2003), p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Muhajiroun, 'Sanctity of Muslims in the UK violated by Aby Qatada arrest', [www.muhaajiroun.com](http://www.muhaajiroun.com), (25 October 2002).

Al-Muhajiroun, 'Tony Blair, Ken Livingstone and Mab Sham', [www.muhaajiroun.com](http://www.muhaajiroun.com), (14 October 2003).

Al-Muhajiroun, 'Al-Muhajiroun raided by Blair regime', (30 July 2003). (All accessed 25 October 2003).

<sup>43</sup> Edward Owen and Trudy Harris, 'Australian Muslim Cleric Linked to Osama', *The Australian* (19 September 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Willie Bridgette, the French national deported in December 2003 for suspected terrorist links attended Omran's Sydney group.

congregations and the arrest of other alleged associates.<sup>45</sup> Further to these developments Bridgette's French investigators identified an Omran-backed Sydney preacher, Sheikh Zoud, as Australia's 'chief recruiter' for jihad.<sup>46</sup>

The emergence and subsequent arrest of several individuals in Sydney throughout early 2004 has removed Omran from the media spotlight. However, his role within the movement, especially in relation to its ideological basis, is of great importance. This quandary is acknowledged by ASIO who have been in sporadic and shadowy contact with him for at least seven years. The exact nature of this relationship came under scrutiny after the media expose, with Omran now permitting that he shares an 'understanding relationship' with ASIO.<sup>47</sup>

### **Australian Perspectives: the Covenant and Jihad**

The Australian Islamist movement shares many significant theoretical perspectives with its United Kingdom counterpart. The influence of the Salafi tradition is evident in a broad range of directives. The Australian movement supports the importance of the restoration of the caliphate, the single greatest focus of al-Muhajiroun. Also a commonality is the endorsement of violence to achieve this aim, with Australian Islamist sites proclaiming that (Arab/Muslim) leaders who have instituted secular law are 'at war with Allah and must be fought and killed'.<sup>48</sup> The Australian movement's often-confused theoretical approach to the responsibility of jihad, especially in relation to the local application, also echoes the United Kingdom example. Many of the resources published on the Australian Islamist sites are authored overseas; however, their inclusion on Australian sites infers some level of endorsement of the views contained within.<sup>49</sup>

The presence of militant Islamists has also gained significant relevance to Australia. Omran has publicly supported Muslim youths who have attended military style camps overseas, claiming that patriotism would prevent such individuals from undertaking terrorist action within Australia. Furthermore, Omran seeks to present such facilities as 'training camps', similar in nature to the Army Reserve, as opposed to the widespread public perception of 'terrorist training camps'. This distinction, where nation sentiment also plays a role in

---

<sup>45</sup> In addition to the Bridgette case, Faheem Khalid Lodhi a 34 year old Sydney architect is an alleged associate of Bridgette was arrested and charged with seven offences (three terrorism related) in April 2004. Additionally, 21 year old Izhar Ul-Haque, was also arrested in April for training in Pakistan with the proscribed Lashkar-e-Toiba.

<sup>46</sup> Trudy Harris, 'On the line after years in obscurity', *The Australian* (23 March 2004), p.2.

<sup>47</sup> Sarah Ferguson, 'Sheikh Omran'.

<sup>48</sup> Abu Dujanah Al-Canadi, 'Khilafa: The Dire Need', *Nida'ul Islam*, No. 21 (1997).

<sup>49</sup> Muhammad Saeed al-Qahtani, 'Jihad for Allah's sake', [www.iisca.org.au/knowledge/jihad/jihad\\_for\\_allah.htm](http://www.iisca.org.au/knowledge/jihad/jihad_for_allah.htm), (Accessed 4 January 2004).

regulating an individual's behaviour, is a marked departure from the al-Muhajiroun model, where the concept of patriotism is non-existent.

As the most infamous proponent of militaristic application of the Islamist movement, Osama Bin Laden has polarised the international Muslim community. Al-Muhajiroun consistently seeks to glorify the attacks of September 11, 2001 organising conferences and rallies to commemorate the event. Furthermore, Bakri has exulted in his description as a follower of Bin Laden whom he identifies as 'the lion of the Muslim nation.'<sup>50</sup> By contrast Omran's commentary on Bin Laden is significantly more measured. He focuses on the willingness of Bin Laden to sacrifice his wealth and position for his beliefs, 'I find him a very great man for some of his actions',<sup>51</sup> rather than interacting with the methodology employed by his organisation, al-Qaeda.

Despite the endorsement of international military training and the support for the ideological basis of transnational movement, Omran has been careful to draw numerous distinctions regarding where the application of jihad is legitimate. From a theoretical perspective Omran endorses jihad as an integral component of the Islamic religion. However, in line with the teachings of the Sunni theorists of the classical period, Omran asserts a legitimate authority must order jihad,

To have jihad you have to have a state, a very well established state, under attack. The prophet never committed to jihad until there was an established state in Medina and enemy forces came to attack it<sup>52</sup>

In al-Muhajiroun's view the transnational Muslim community actually fulfils this role in the absence of the state. From this understanding the call to jihad becomes legitimate in a range of contemporary contexts, Iraq and Afghanistan the most obvious. However, illuminating his often-contradictory and reactive discourse Omran has supported armed jihad as the fulfilment of Islamic duty in a range of international conflicts involving Muslims, for example against the coalition forces in Iraq.<sup>53</sup> Within Australia Omran denounces armed jihad as

---

<sup>50</sup> Brian Toohey, 'ASIO steps lightly where the media blunders in'.

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Ferguson, 'Sheikh Omran'.

<sup>52</sup> Muhammad Saeed al-Qahtani, 'Jihad for Allah's sake'.

<sup>53</sup> 'Terror Target No.1: the Jewish Community', *Sunday*, [http://sunday.ninemsn.com/sunday/cover\\_stories/transcript\\_1376.asp](http://sunday.ninemsn.com/sunday/cover_stories/transcript_1376.asp), (Accessed 5 February 2004).

inappropriate,<sup>54</sup> stating that terrorism, should it occur in Australia, will be imported.<sup>55</sup>

However, the endorsement of jihad in varied international locations clearly contradicts his stated 'jihad as foreign policy' perspective.

This contradiction could be explained through the traditional division of jihad into categories. Omran's statement on the role of the Islamic State and its ability to wage jihad draws on the historical concept of the defensive jihad, with the state posited as acting in response to attack. However, his endorsement of jihad in contemporary political situations, while it can be constructed as defensive (Muslims responding to invasion/occupation), appears to mirror the al-Muhajiroun understanding. Here, the Muslim community is seen to be fulfilling the role of the absent Islamic State. Similar to the endorsement of 'martyrdom operations' by United Kingdom Islamists, Australian Islamist sources also identify, and legitimise, such operations as Qur'anically sanctioned<sup>56</sup> thus demonstrating the Australian Islamist movement's willingness to support and legitimise the use of violence in international conflicts. Alternatively, such trends could be understood as part of Omran's political and social context, which requires him to support the Islamic resistance in conflicts such as Iraq and Palestine in order to retain legitimacy.

### **Mainstream Response**

In both the United Kingdom and Australia, the mainstream Muslim response to local Islamism has been one of condemnation and rejection, yet differences do exist. The more vocal and extreme nature of al-Muhajiroun's doctrine has resulted in a comparatively higher level of condemnation within the United Kingdom Muslim community. However, the theme of media sensationalism is prevalent in both contexts. The Islamist perspective, in a post-September 11 context, simply makes headlines. This quandary exists not only in the media

For global theorists, all too often the extremists alone speak for Islam.

The news media, it goes without saying, refuses even more emphatically to complicate the useful images of militant Islam in conflict with the global era.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Abu Ruqaiyah, 'The Islamic Legitimacy of the 'Martyrdom Operations', *Nida'ul Islam*, No. 16 (1996).

<sup>55</sup> Bassam Alloni, 'Interview: Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammad'.

<sup>56</sup> Sarah Ferguson, 'Sheikh Omran'.

<sup>57</sup> Raymond William Baker, 'Screening Islam: Terrorism, American jihad and the New Islamists', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1/2 (2003), p.33-.

Britain's mainstream Muslim community, represented by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), has essentially been locked in a media war with al-Muhajiroun. Describing the organisation as 'peddlers of hate (who) are held in utter contempt by ordinary Muslims,'<sup>58</sup> the Council has repeatedly rejected the radical, anti-Western platform of al-Muhajiroun and the media coverage the organisation attracts. Some leaders have furthermore suggested that the organisation is a puppet of the UK's intelligence agencies.<sup>59</sup> In addition to these concerns, Muslim leaders have expressed concern that the statements of al-Muhajiroun add to the 'culture of fear'<sup>60</sup> which is emerging against Muslims in the United Kingdom.

Islam is the second largest faith in United Kingdom, with the 1991 census confirming the 1.6 million British residents self-identify as Muslim.<sup>61</sup> Throughout 2003, the mainstream Muslim bodies increased their public condemnation and rejection of al-Muhajiroun. In a tense political environment, Muslim leaders such as the MCB's Inayat Bunglawala have attempted to demonstrate the 'symbiotic relationship that exists between the media and al-Muhajiroun'.<sup>62</sup> Mainstream leaders have repeatedly pointed to the extremely limited and marginal nature of the organisation<sup>63</sup> and decried the sensationalism and coverage which is characteristic of the media's response.

Unlike the condemnation that Bakri receives in the United Kingdom, Omran's role within a smaller and less publicly radicalised movement has dictated a different response from the Australian Muslim community. There have been rejections of his theoretical position by community leaders. An example of this is the public statements of Sheikh Taj el-Din Al Hilaly, the Mufti of Australia who, although usually considered as a moderate, is himself emerging as a contested figure in Australian Muslim society. However, Hilaly's muted observation that 'it is no good for young people to have a teacher like Abu Ayman' clearly implies a rejection of the ideological basis of Omran's teaching.<sup>64</sup> Sheikh Hilaly's perception of the Islamist movement generally is also evidenced by his rejection of the theological basis

---

<sup>58</sup> Inayat Bunglawala, 'Why do UK Muslims turn to terrorism?', [www.mcb.org.uk/02may03.html](http://www.mcb.org.uk/02may03.html), (Accessed 20 January 2004).

<sup>59</sup> Anas al-Tikriti of the Muslim Society of Britain quoted in 'UK Muslim Society Spokesman say Al-Muhajiroun statement on Demos 'Worthless', *Al-Hayat* (22 November 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Mohammed Naseem, 'Muslim Outcry at 9/11 March', *The Birmingham Post* (11 September 2003).

<sup>61</sup> Inayat Bunglawala, 'Don't let the evil of extremism taint Islam's good name', *The Daily Telegraph* (17 September 2003), p. 22.

<sup>62</sup> Inayat Bunglawala, 'Don't Let the Evil of Extremism Taint Islam's Good Name'.

<sup>63</sup> Muhammad al-Shafi'i, 'UK: Moves to freeze al-Muhajiroun as it prepares to 'celebrate' 9/11', *Al-Sharq al-Wsat* (8 September 2003).

Muhammad Naseem, 'Muslim Outcry at 9/11 March'.

Nick Meo and Lucy Adams, 'Jute, Jam and Jihad', *The Sunday Times* (21 September 2003), p. 21.

<sup>64</sup> Sarah Ferguson, 'Sheikh Omran'.

of the teachings of the imprisoned Sheikh Abu Qatada, which he has described as a 'disease'.<sup>65</sup>

In a more practical sense Omran's followers share the isolation from the mainstream Muslim community that is a feature of al-Muhajiroun's membership. Mainstream Islam within Australia reports that Omran's followers are viewed with distrust, a sentiment which echoes the United Kingdom experience. In an important commonality, both national examples revolve around the leadership of a charismatic individual who is comfortable with, if not actively courting, media attention.

Similar to the UK example, it is clear that the mainstream Australian Muslim community rejects the ideological basis of Islamism. These two impulses, the moderate and the radical, also coexist within the theoretical development of the Islamic faith. While Taymiyya and Qutb provided two of the influential understandings of a radicalised militant jihad, other theorists, notably the medieval philosopher Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazzali (1058-1111), have rejected such interpretations. Al-Ghazzali's contribution to Islamic theory focuses on the notions of ethical governance and justice within society<sup>66</sup>, in contrast to thinkers such as Qutb, there is a de-emphasis on the role of jihad within Muslim society.

While similarities can be identified between the Australian and United Kingdom examples the two case examples do not constitute an equal comparison. The Muslim community in Australia is significantly smaller and the nature of the rhetoric that is presented by the proponents of an Islamist perspective is also significantly more moderate. Thus, the mainstream response, through a lack of necessity, is more muted than the United Kingdom example.

While mainstream condemnation exists for the rhetoric and methodology of the Islamist movement in both nations the glaring similarity between the Islamist movement and the mainstream community is the shared condemnation of international political developments. The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the invasion of Iraq represent two events which were uniformly rejected by Western Muslim associations regardless of their ideological orientation.

---

<sup>65</sup> Sarah Ferguson, 'Sheikh Omran'.

<sup>66</sup> Ozay Mehmet, 'Al-Ghazzali on social justice. Guidelines for a new world order from an early medieval scholar', *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 24, No.11 (1997), p.1203.

While there may be some elements of common ground, the ways in which the mainstream and the radical streams engage with the concept of citizenship are markedly different. For the mainstream Muslim community co-existence and the often ongoing search for equilibrium with the society of their nation of residence is the norm. In the both national contexts citizenship is conformed to, and constitutes a firmly held belief in the mainstream community. This is evidenced by strength of the MCB in the UK and the Muslim Councils of Australia. Such organizations work to improve the relationship between Muslims and the broader national communities.

While the relationship of Omran to the mainstream in Australia is strained it has not resulted in a conflict which is played out in the media. The tension between the understandings of national and religious identity in the UK is significantly more pronounced as Bakri consistently condemns, and agitates against, the role of 'British' Muslims.

### **Conclusion: Reconciliation between Western citizenship and the duty of jihad?**

In an increasingly tense international context many Islamist organizations perceive the concept of jihad has become synonymous with Muslim identity. The primary theoretical difficulty faced by the Islamist movements in the United Kingdom and Australia, as in the West generally, is whether there can be reconciliation between the concept and duty of jihad and citizenship in the West. This complex question, and the Islamist attempts to formulate a response, has resulted in significant media attention. The two case studies, the Australian and United Kingdom examples, have thus far demonstrated the resolution of somewhat disparate responses. Importantly, this is an ongoing, evolutionary process, which will undoubtedly be affected by the future direction of Muslim/Western relations and geopolitics.

Sheikh Bakri and Sheikh Omran have both endorsed the legitimacy of jihad in the international context. Both men present the involvement of British and Australian Muslims in jihadi activities in conflicts such as Afghanistan and Iraq as a fulfilment of this aspect of the Islamic faith. The traditional understanding of the defensive jihad, war in response to attack, has lent itself to the current international climate. While both men categorically reject the application of militant jihad by Muslims within their Western state of residence, the rationale behind this rejection differs; for Bakri the formulaic 'covenant of security' prevents such an attack, while Omran cites patriotism as the preventative force.

Therefore the way in which each understands the very concept of citizenship differs. For Bakri, with his radical rejection of the legitimacy of the state in any context, the actions of a Muslim are governed solely by religion and its ability to regulate an individual's behaviour. In this conception the 'covenant of security', as an Islamic dictate, holds the power to prevent

armed action by Muslims against their state of residence. Thus Bakri can demand his followers observe the spirit of the social contract between a state and its citizens, albeit reformulated in an Islamic format, while still rejecting the political legitimacy of the state. The legalistic formulation of a 'covenant' which prevents al-Muhajiroun's followers from attacking their state implies that the desire to do so exists and that such action can only be proscribed effectively under Islamic, as opposed to British, law. This is both problematic and divisive.

Omran's perspective on the relationship between the state and its Muslim inhabitants is, publicly at least, more in line with mainstream interpretations. Omran's assertion, 'I am not an Australian by birth, but I feel this is my country. I feel I have to protect my country',<sup>67</sup> stands in direct opposition to Bakri's stated position. The very notion of patriotism entails a fundamental acknowledgment and acceptance of the legitimacy of the state. Religion does not supersede, nor is it antithetical to, that responsibility. To Omran, this interpretation of the relationship between the individual and the state, a relationship which is characterised by patriotism, is the governing force which precludes militant action by Australian Muslims.

Considering these views, it can be implied that Omran, and with him Australian Islamism, has potentially reconciled the competing narratives of citizenship and Islamist theory more effectively. The endorsement of jihad in the overseas context, a rejection of domestic armed attack and a strong sense of patriotism are the images of Islamism within Australia that Omran seeks to present. For Sheikh Bakri, the situation is more complex. Al-Muhajiroun rejects secular law and assimilation, condemns patriotism as contradictory to Islam and asserts the right of Muslims not residing in the United Kingdom to undertake jihadi activities on British soil. By contrast, while Omran asserts that Islamist terrorism, should it occur in Australia, will be imported, he publicly rejects the legitimacy of *any* armed action on Australian soil.

The al-Muhajiroun 'covenant of security' can be seen as either an attempt to reconcile the competing identities which it perceives Western Muslims face, or, alternatively, as an attempt to circumnavigate the contradictions between the organisation's doctrine and its geographical location. Given the historical and textual examples of legitimacy of militant jihad, the Islamist movement has a rich and varied history to draw upon in its advocacy of armed jihad. However, in the context of the mainstream interpretation of Diaspora Muslims, the search for equilibrium and an historical reading of the Islamic faith has become the predominant norm.

---

<sup>67</sup> John Lyons, 'I am Behind Every Muslim in this Country', *The Bulletin* (10 September 2003).

Fundamentally, the United Kingdom example should be viewed as rejectionist, while the Australian Islamist movement, publicly at least, seeks a greater level of accommodation.

The differing level of radicalism prevalent in the Islamist rhetoric within each nation dictates a varied response from both the mainstream Muslims community and the broader society. The question faced by Western Islamists is where does the concept of citizenship end? Can an individual reside in the West while theoretically rejecting its legitimacy? For al-Muhajiroun and the Australian Islamist movement the answers to these questions are different.