

Quilliam Briefing Paper

Radicalisation on British University Campuses:
a case study

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Author’s note. For reasons of safety, the names of interviewees have been blocked out in the footnotes of this briefing paper. Although many of them were happy to be openly named, we have taken this preventative measure in case.

Introduction

On Christmas Day 2009, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a former student at University College London (UCL), tried to blow up a Detroit-bound airliner carrying 290 people using explosives hidden in his underwear. Nigerian-born, between 2006 and 2007 Abdulmutallab had been President of UCL's Islamic Society (ISoc). During the following weeks, newspapers, think tanks and student bodies hotly debated whether Abdulmutallab had been radicalised during his time at a British university, or through exposure to other influences encountered online, elsewhere in London or during his time in Yemen. Over the coming months, however, while this debate flowed back and forth, on City University campus, barely two miles from UCL, the head of another ISoc and his followers praised Anwar al-Awlaki, Abdulmutallab's al-Qaeda supporting mentor, called for 'offensive' and 'defensive' jihad, advocated the murder of homosexuals and non-practicing Muslims, and set their own ISoc on a collision course with the university authorities, staff, and other students. This paper aims to explain how this happened, show what the consequences have been and could yet be, and lay out what steps can be taken to curb the radicalisation of students on British university campuses.

Background

The problem of Islamist radicalisation on university campuses is not new. In Muslim-majority countries, there is a long history of such extremism. In Egypt, for example, the student Islamist organization *al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya* (JI) was extremely active during the 1970s, recruiting thousands of students to its highly politicised interpretation of Islam on campuses across the country, many of whom ultimately turned to terrorist violence.¹ In Pakistan, the student organization *Islami Jami'at-i Tulaba* (Islamic Society of Students), the student wing of the Islamist political party *Jama'at-i Islami*, has likewise been a radicalising force on campuses for decades.² In the UK there has been a growing awareness of this problem. Prior to Abdulmutallab's case, four former senior members of Islamic Societies had been found guilty of terrorism-related offences. Two of these were former ISoc presidents: Yassin Nassari, jailed for having bomb and missile-making instructions and Waheed Zaman, one of the 12 found guilty of the 2006 liquid bomb airline plot.³ There are plenty of other examples of students who have studied at British university campuses that have gone on to be convicted for terrorism-related crimes. Of particular relevance here is Abdulla Ahmed Ali, who was

¹ Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and the Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, trans. by Jon Rothschild (Al-Saqi Books: London, 1985), ch.5.

² Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, 'Students, Islam, and Politics: Islami Jami'at-i Tulaba in Pakistan', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter, 1992), pp. 59-76.

³ Nassari was formerly the leader of the ISoc at the University of Westminster's Harrow campus. Nicola Woolcock, 'Student's wife 'encouraged him to become a terrorist'', *The Times*, 31 May 2007, <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article1862719.ece>>, [accessed 1 June 2010]. Zaman was formerly president of London Metropolitan University's Islamic Society. Richard Ford, 'Raids revealed bomb-making equipment and martyr videos', *The Times*, 22 August 2006, <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article615861.ece>>, [accessed 1 June 2010]. In addition Waseem Mughal, convicted for inciting terrorism abroad, previously ran the ISoc website at the University of Leicester. Sean O'Neill, 'Al-Qaeda's British Propagandists', *The Times*, 24 April 2007, <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article1695718.ece>>, [accessed 14 August 2010]. The final former senior member was Kafeel Ahmed who died attempting to blow up Glasgow airport, and had previously sat on the executive committee of the ISoc at Queens University, Belfast. Duncan Gardham, 'Glasgow Bomb Plot: Profile of airport terrorist Kafeel Ahmed', *The Telegraph*, 16 December 2008, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/3689248/Glasgow-bomb-plot-Profile-of-airport-terrorist-Kafeel-Ahmed.html>>, [accessed 17 August 2010]. In addition, a number of British university students have also been convicted for Islamist-inspired terrorism.

also convicted for the liquid bomb plot, and was a student at City University, London, until 2002.⁴ It is City University, the institution at which the ringleader of the liquid bomb plot was once a student, which forms the case study for this report.

In order to identify the potential for radicalisation on British university campuses, it should be recognised that there is no single path to radicalisation. However, it is also imperative to acknowledge that there are a range of identifiable factors that may contribute to radicalising an individual towards making them believe in the utility, both spiritually and materially, of terrorist violence. As the government's guidance for their Channel programme correctly identifies, and succinctly summarises, the four contributory factors are:

1. '[E]xposure to an **ideology** that seems to sanction, legitimise or require violence, often by providing a compelling but **fabricated narrative** of contemporary politics and recent history
2. [E]xposure to **people or groups who can directly and persuasively articulate** that ideology and then relate it to aspects of a person's own background and life history
3. [A] crisis of **identity** and, *often, uncertainty* about belonging which might be triggered by a range of further personal issues, including experiences of racism, discrimination, deprivation and other criminality (as victim or perpetrator); family breakdown or separation
4. [A] range of **perceived grievances**, some real and some imagined, to which there may seem to be no credible and effective non violent response.'⁵ [emphasis, but not italics, added]

This paper does not argue that the presence of these four factors of radicalisation necessarily always translates into a direct commitment to carry out an act of terrorism. However, it *is* based on the premise that the presence of these four factors may *potentially* increase the risk of a person becoming involved in Islamist-inspired violence, as recognised by Home Office. That said, just as there is no empirical proof that the spread of neo-Nazi or fascist ideas leads directly to an increased violence against Jews, homosexuals or other minorities, so it is the case with non-violent Islamism; social science is sometimes a necessarily inexact science and human behaviour is not always strictly quantifiable. However, within these methodological limitations, just as it is right to be concerned about the danger of fascist rhetoric spilling over into violence, so it is right to be aware that extreme forms of Islamism may potentially provide a launch-pad for Islamist-inspired terrorism. In addition, aside from terrorist violence, the radicalisation that these factors represent is highly problematic in itself for social and national cohesion as well as potentially negatively affecting the social and academic life of universities. Such radicalisation can, for instance, generate intolerance towards others and encourage the denying to others of basic freedoms such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of expression – all of which would have a profoundly negative impact on a university campus. To prevent such issues from arising, it is vital that vice chancellors, university staff and students, and other relevant bodies are aware of the signs of Islamist extremism on campus.

This paper therefore aims to show how radicalisation can occur on British university campuses, and the wider impact that it can have, both in terms of Islamist-inspired terrorism but equally in terms of

⁴ Ali's involvement in the ISoc remains unclear. 'Profiles: Airline plot accused', *BBC News*, 7 September 2009, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7604808.stm>>, [accessed 1 June 2010].

⁵ HM Government, *Channel: Supporting individuals vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists*, March 2010, p. 10.

national cohesion. To illustrate this, it uses the activities of the ISoc at City University (City) during the last academic year (September 2009 - June 2010) as a case study.

- **Part one**, using the four factors identified above as a prism through which to work, outlines how City University's ISoc exposed its affiliates to each of the four radicalising agents. It concludes by showing how students were made vulnerable to Islamist radicalisation at City, and consequently that there was the *potential* for radicalisation to Islamist terrorism.
- **Part two** assesses the broader consequences that the presence of such factors had on the university environment – their impact on student politics and other groups of students – and concludes that, aside from radicalisation, the ISoc's activities also had implications for the wider student body by fostering an environment that had negative repercussions for campus cohesion.
- The paper **concludes** with recommendations for universities, students' unions and central government (as well as individual staff members and students).

City ISoc is, of course, not representative of all university ISocs. However, certain elements of the output and activities of the ISoc at City University may resonate with, and bear resemblance to, other university ISocs. As such it is hoped that this briefing paper will provide the relevant authorities with a real-life, recent example of how extremists can take control of an ISoc, cause disruption to the university environment and increase the risk of radicalisation on a university campus, as well as a set of recommendations that can guide future responses to such problems.

Part 1 – The radicalising effects of members of the Islamic Society

During the last academic year, individuals within the ISoc had a negative and potentially damaging impact both on other ISoc members, as well as those affiliated to the society (be they friends outside of the university, or those viewing the content of their website). The ISoc exposed these people to each of the four factors required to lead individuals along the path towards adopting violent Islamist viewpoints: propagating an **extreme, pro-terrorist ideology** through **inspirational individuals** who could articulate that ideology, whilst at the same time harbouring a sense of **perceived or real grievance** against members of the university body, and channelling individual **students' crises of identity** towards a united 'aggrieved' Muslim identity. Both of these, in turn, reinforced their extreme ideology.

Part one will begin by establishing the nature of the ideology that members of the ISoc espoused, and locating those individuals who actively and charismatically articulated it, through an analysis of the *khutbahs* (Friday prayer sermons)⁶ delivered by the ISoc and material on their website.⁷ It will then examine how the ISoc manipulated and twisted students' grievances and crises of identity using

⁶ The *khutbah* is the sermon that precedes the weekly collective *jumu'ah* prayer that takes place for Muslims every Friday afternoon. This is delivered by the ascribed *khateeb* (prayer leader). During the last academic year, the ISoc uploaded the majority of their *khutbahs* onto their website, which were saved and listened to as part of the research for this briefing paper.

⁷ During the 2009/10 academic year City ISoc, like many proactive student societies, used a website to organise and publicise events, publish articles, videos, and recordings deemed to be of interest to Muslim students. Material posted on the ISoc's website was monitored and recorded (using 'screen grabs') as part of our research until the cessation of its activity at the end of May 2010.

evidence gathered through online material – media reports, websites and blogs – as well as 15 interviews with members of staff and students at City University from May to August 2010. For reasons of security, the names of interviewees have been blocked out in the references. Part one will conclude by making the case that the presence of all of these agents means that a dangerous and explosive environment was created in which there was the *potential* for individuals to become radicalised towards adopting a pro-terrorist, al-Qaeda-inspired viewpoint.

i) Ideology

Ideology is the fundamental basis of the four ‘radicalising agents’ listed above; the bedrock that all other agents build upon, shaping a person’s identity, outlook, perception of grievance and interaction with others. Throughout the past academic year, City University’s Islamic Society has been publically disseminating a religiously-framed ideology, which could serve to legitimise intolerance, sectarianism, and even ideologically-inspired violence. The ideology of the ISoc is complex and multi-faceted, and requires a solid understanding of the theological and ideological factors involved. In general, the ISoc’s particular ideology invokes elements of Wahhabism, Islamism and a hybrid of the two that is best referred to as ‘Salafi-Jihadism’:

- a. The ISoc’s *ideological* basis is founded on **Islamism**. Islamists are those who adopt a politicised interpretation of Islam. They believe that political sovereignty is God’s alone, that *shari’ah* exists as a defined law that must be constitutionally enforced as a state’s legal system, and that all Muslims should be actively pursuing the achievement of this Islamic state as a religious duty.
- b. The *theological* basis of the ISoc’s beliefs is influenced by a hard-line interpretation of **Wahhabism**. A conservative revisionist Sunni movement founded by Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhab in 18th century Saudi Arabia, it retains an austere, literalist and highly socially conservative interpretation of Islam under which women, for example, are forced to be entirely subservient to men. Anything that veers from their hard-line interpretation they regard as *bida’a* (‘innovation’), and consequently as ‘un-Islamic’.⁸
- c. When socially conservative Wahhabism (or as part of a wider trend known as Salafism) combines with the ideology of Islamism, the political leverage is provided to realise these puritanical theological goals. In the past, this has resulted in **Salafi-Jihadism** – the ideology of al-Qaeda and similar groups;⁹ a toxic final product that was visible in the ideology of City ISoc.

The shift from an intolerant and highly politicised – though non-violent – version of Islam, to one that legitimises and encourages violent action, can already be seen in the ideology espoused by leading members of City ISoc. The process that can sometimes lead non-violent ideologies to move towards supporting violence is one that is recognised by the British government. Its latest counter-

⁸ It is worth noting, for the sake of comprehensive understanding, that Wahhabism was followed, in the 19th century, by Salafism. Also a Sunni movement, Salafism originated as a puritanical revivalist movement focused on revising traditional interpretations of Islamic beliefs and practices. Wahhabism could be viewed as an extreme and intolerant form of Salafism. Therefore, all Wahhabis are Salafis, but not all Salafis are Wahhabis. This is important to understand as often the terms are used interchangeably. Equally, Wahhabis sometimes reject the term ‘Wahhabi’ altogether and refer to themselves as those that follow the Salafiyya as the ISoc do, and have documented in detail in the first edition of their magazine. City ISoc, ‘Muslim not Wahhabi’, *An Islaamic Magazine*, Issue # 1, 15 August 2009, available at <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/18660552/cityISocom-Issue-01-An-Islaamic-Magazine>>, [accessed 22 July 2010], p.29.

⁹ Ghaffar Hussain, *A Brief History of Islamism* (Quilliam: London, 2010), p.10.

terrorism strategy, *Contest 2*, states: ‘views which fall short of supporting violence and are within the law, but which reject and undermine our shared values and jeopardise community cohesion... can create a climate in which people may be drawn into violent activity’.¹⁰ Unfortunately, during the last academic year, City University’s ISoc had already not only articulated radical views that fell short of violence, but had already started creating such a ‘climate’ as it showed signs of shifting towards a more violent ideology.

a. The political ideology of Islamism

Islamists believe that Islam is not just a religion, but a political ideology that seeks the establishment of an ‘Islamic’ state. Members of the ISoc clearly subscribed to Islamism, as was made clear in some of their *khutbahs*. Islamists believe, for example, that the Islamist political system is superior to, and should replace, all contemporary ‘man-made’ political systems. This was articulated by several ISoc *khateeb*s:

“Today we have chosen a different criterion... **the western value system, the man-made law system; they are not the criterion judging between the right and the wrong.** No. Capitalism, Communism, liberalism, modernism and all the other -isms out there they’re not the criterion differentiating between the right and the wrong. The criterion is the Qur’an”.¹¹

“Anyone who opposes the laws of Allah, anyone who comes with a law that contradicts the law of Allah has come with a law trying to fulfil his own desires based upon his own whims and desires... **Although to the western thinking mind it may be seen... to be as somewhat oppressive or somewhat going against the human rights but know for sure that the one who creates truly and only has the one or the rights to legislate**”.¹²

Instead of current systems, Islamists believe that, as only God has the right to legislate, under an ‘Islamic’ state the *shari’ah* would be instituted as law. The ISoc *khateeb*s provided some details as to what exactly ‘*shari’ah*’ would entail:

“The shari’ah teaches us through the wisdom of Allah and through the justice of Allah **to take the life of the one, of the person, who has taken the life of another.** The shari’ah teaches us from the Qur’an and from the Sunnah that this is the way of Allah [swt]”.¹³

“When they say to us ‘the Islamic state teaches to cut the hand of the thief’, yes it does! And it also teaches us to stone the adulterer... **When they tell us that the Islamic state tells us and teaches us to kill the apostate, yes it does!** Because this is what Allah and his messenger [swt] have taught us and this is the religion of Allah and it is Allah who legislates and only Allah has the right to legislate.”¹⁴

City ISoc therefore advocated key tenets of the Islamist ideology, whereby modern-day legal systems are replaced by an ‘Islamic’ state that enforces a hard-line interpretation of *shari’ah*, regardless of whether elements of it are in direct contravention of international human rights norms. Such a

¹⁰ HM Government, *Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism*, March 2009, p. 87.

¹¹ [REDACTED] (City ISoc Librarian), ‘The Criterion’, *Khutbah* 3, 9 October 2009, 10:00.

¹² [REDACTED] (City ISoc Ameer), ‘Except as a mercy to mankind’, *Khutbah* 22, 12 March 2010, 31:45.

¹³ [REDACTED] (City ISoc Ameer), ‘Except as a mercy to mankind’, 33:40.

¹⁴ [REDACTED] (City ISoc Ameer), ‘Heads held up high’, *Khutbah* 14, 15 January 2010, 17:45.

political vision is in contrast to that of mainstream Muslims who, for example, in elections in Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan have rejected Islamists' vision of an 'Islamic state'.

b. Socially conservative views and Wahhabi intolerance

Alongside the need for *shari'ah* to be implemented as state law, the ISoc leadership also promoted a literalist and intolerant ideology influenced by Saudi-inspired Wahhabism. For example, a highly conservative attitude to gender interaction was frequently, and forcefully, promoted in the *khutbahs*. Several *khutbahs* outlined a role for women as would be found in Saudi Arabia; one that undermined women's rights and notions of equality, and that promoted an extreme male-dominated interpretation of Islam.

"It is only permissible for you to speak to the opposite gender in times which are necessary. In times which are darourah ['a necessity'], which are necessary, vital for you to speak. A brother [male Muslim] and a sister [female Muslim] shouldn't speak, shouldn't talk to one another, shouldn't hang about with one another. And this is something [swt] that we find common in the university, common in this institute, common in the West that the men and the women they integrate with one another...."¹⁵

"[F]or the women to try their best to stay at home unless there is a necessity – a darourah – which makes them wanting to come out of their homes. **Allah tells in the Qur'an to tell the believing women to stay in their homes for their homes are better for them.** In fact their bedroom – the salah ['prayer'] that is prayed in the bedroom is greater than the salah prayed in the jama'at – so she must strive her best to stay at home".¹⁶

"And when non-Muslims say that our women are forced to wear the veil and to cover themselves with the hijab – yes they are! Because Allah tells them to cover. Allah honours them by obliging the hijab upon them. **Allah honours them by making them follow the examples of the wives of the Prohpet [swt] a cloth from the cloth of paradise. So yes they are forced to wear the hijab**".¹⁷

"[W]hen they [the sisters] walk in the street [they must] walk as close as they can to a wall. The Prophet [saws] used to command this, to order the women to walk as close to the wall as possible and they used to say they walk so close to the wall that the dust of the wall would come to our clothes because our clothes would be rubbing on the wall. So... when you go to your lessons, in the corridor when you go to your lessons, it is sunnah – a form of application to prevent fitna [strife/mischief] – for a woman, for a sister, to walk as closely as she can to the wall so that her garments rubs against the wall, and the brothers obviously walk on the other side..."¹⁸

¹⁵ [REDACTED] (City ISoc Ameer), 'What goes around, comes around', Khutbah 18, 12 February 2010, 18:15.

¹⁶ [REDACTED] (City ISoc Ameer), 'What goes around, comes around', 28:45.

¹⁷ [REDACTED] (City ISoc Ameer), 'Heads held up high', 17:30.

¹⁸ [REDACTED] (City ISoc Ameer), 'What goes around, comes around', 29:20.

Aside from women, the Wahhabi mindset of the ISoc is also demonstrated by their attitude to other minority groups, such as Shi'ah Muslims.¹⁹

'We are talking about the fitnah ['strife'] of **the rejectionist Shi'ahs – the raafidaah ['rejecters']**... This particular sect is the most active sect in our times from the deviant sects that is keen about spreading their doctrines amongst Muslims and [they are] particularly targeting ahl as-Sunnah [the Sunnis].²⁰

'Also beware of joining little groups in protests, there are a lot of Shi'ahs roaming around – pretending to care about Muslim welfare whilst **their aim is to lead you astray.**'²¹

'It is because this creed of this sect is established on a matter known as at-Taqiyyah – concealment [...] Therefore **it is very difficult to deal with them... because of deception, concealment and lies.**'²²

One article published on the ISoc's website featured a picture that referred to the festival of 'Ashura, when some followers of Shi'ism engage in self-flagellation. The picture suggested that they should rub salt into their own wounds and directly accused Shi'is of being 'not Muslims'.²³



Although the majority of Sunni Muslims disagree with aspects of Shi'i belief, they also accept the Shi'ah as Muslims. Some hard-line Wahhabis, however, use a concept known as *takfir* ('excommunication'): the practice of declaring fellow Muslims who do not comply with their strict, literalist religious tenets to be apostates. Such *takfiri* ideology, if it is taken to its logical conclusion,

¹⁹ The Shi'ah Sect is the second largest sect in Islam. Shi'ah Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad's family, especially his cousin Ali, and some of their descendents, have religious authority in Islam.

²⁰ City University Islamic Society, 'Lesson 001 – Raafidaah', <<http://cityisoc.com/1527-lesson001-raafidaah/>>, [accessed 7 May 2010].

²¹ City University Islamic Society, 'Advice to Demo Participants', <<http://cityisoc.com/1366-protest-china/>>, [accessed 7 May].

²² City University Islamic Society, 'Lesson 001 – Raafidaah'.

²³ City University Islamic Society, <<http://cityisoc.com/3166-aashooraa/>>, [Accessed 7 July 2010].

legitimises the killing of Shi'i, as many Wahhabis also regard the penalty for apostasy as death. Therefore, this concept can constitute an endorsement of the narrative that currently fuels existing sectarian violence around the world.

Senior members of the ISoc have also promoted discrimination against those with different sexual orientations in a manner clearly inspired by Wahhabi-style beliefs. References made to homosexuality in the *khutbahs* clearly stated that homosexuals deserve punishment.

“... [T]hey say to us ‘You people, you Muslims, you are homophobes. You don’t like or you deny the rights of the homosexuals. You say gays are going to be punished because they’re gays’. And we’ve had many Muslims that say ‘you know what, maybe this is for the past. There is nowhere in the Qur’an where Allah says that it is haram to be a homosexual’. Many of the Muslims take this apologetic approach. No, the Muslims should feel proud of their religion and should show pride in his religion. **And when the non-Muslim says that Islam is a homophobic religion say ‘Yes we are. Because Allah [swt] has told us in the Qur’an that homosexuality is prohibited so yes we are’.**”²⁴

“If you look at the western society today, homosexuality is a norm. You think that homosexuality came from the western society but no. Homosexuality was practiced thousands of thousands of years ago by the people of Loot. And what did Allah do to the people of Loot al-laheesalaam? **Allah inflicted... the most severe of punishments... Gibreel... turned his wing and forced down the earth and forced down the city onto the earth, disappeared, vanished. And then Allah [swt] followed with a shower of stones... And on each stone it was written the name of who it was going to hit**”.²⁵

In addition to homosexuality, any ‘transgressions’ from the ISoc’s understanding of Islam was equated in their sermons with crimes that required punishment. For example, one ISoc sermon explained one of the more extreme punishments required for those who ‘intentionally’ miss one prayer:

“When a person leaves one prayer, one prayer intentionally, he should be imprisoned for three days and three nights and told to repent. And **if he doesn’t repent and offer his prayer then he should be killed**. And the difference of opinion lies with regards to how he should be killed not as to what he is – a kafir or a Muslim”.²⁶

Thus, as well as advocating the death penalty for adultery and apostasy (as seen above), the ISoc also advocated the death penalty for missing ritual prayers. This is what can be referred to as the criminalization of sin – when perceived moral transgressions become punishable as would other criminal acts like murder, rape and theft. Under the political ideology of the ISoc, therefore, amorality is against constitutional law and hence their socially conservative regulations would be implemented under a state’s legal system. In essence, the ISoc’s ideology is one that aspires to a system of law mirroring countries like Saudi Arabia or Taliban-era Afghanistan, where moral misconduct is punishable by the state.

²⁴ [Redacted] (City ISoc Ameer), ‘Heads held up high’, 16:30.

²⁵ [Redacted] (City ISoc Librarian), ‘The most beautiful names’, Khutbah 21, 5 March 2010, 23:15.

²⁶ [Redacted] (City ISoc Ameer), ‘Between Man and Disbelief’, Khutbah 2, 2 October 2009, 18:10-19:30. The same sentiment had previously been published in print in the first edition of the ISoc magazine. City ISoc, *An Islamic Magazine*, Issue # 1, p.19 and gets repeated again during the disagreements over prayer facilities at City (see part one, iii).

Such ideals were reinforced by the hard-line Wahhabi preachers with whom the ISoc associated. In some instances, the endorsement appeared on the main page of the ISoc website on a list of ‘*du’aat*’ (preachers) with links to their websites; in others, material from these preachers was posted on the ISoc’s blog. Whilst there is no evidence that ISoc members *necessarily* agree with all of the views of the preachers endorsed, it is of concern that no clarification about what specific views the ISoc supports is given. For example, one of the preachers listed on the ISoc website was **Bilal Philips**.²⁷ Philips, who was recently refused entry into the UK on the grounds that his presence would not be conducive to the public good,²⁸ is a Canadian convert who studied at the Islamic University of Medina, a major Wahhabi institution in Saudi Arabia. In the first publication available on his website he, among other things, appears to endorse marital rape, and the right of a husband to use force against his wife:

‘[In] Islaam, a woman is obliged to give herself to her husband and he may not be charged with rape.’

‘It is true that the shari’ah does permit a husband to hit his wife.’²⁹

Another scholar whose views appeared to be endorsed by the ISoc is **Muhammed Salid al-Munajjid**, a Saudi-based hard-line Wahhabi cleric, whose website ‘IslamQA’ was linked to by City ISoc’s website.³⁰ City ISoc members also appeared to have submitted a question to him, seeking his guidance on Friday prayer arrangements.³¹ However, ‘IslamQA’ presents some highly contentious views, for example punishing homosexual sex with death:

‘The one to whom it is done is like the one who does it, because they both took part in the sin. So both are to be punished by execution, as it says in the hadeeth.’³²

From these and other examples, the ISoc has therefore clearly advocated an ideology that not only sought the creation of an ‘Islamic’ state, but also that impacted upon, and was intolerant of, members of other faith groups, those with alternative sexual orientations and women. Aside from concerns relating to cohesion and support for minorities’ rights, the combination of extreme Wahhabism and Islamism can result in Salafi-Jihadi interpretations of Islam and consequently give rise to a more dangerous atmosphere in which radicalisation towards terrorism has a greater *potential* to occur. Unfortunately, in the case of City ISoc, elements of Salafi-Jihadi thinking were already apparent in their output during the last academic year. This is obviously a particularly concerning development and should raise alarm bells for anyone investigating the potential for radicalisation on campus.

²⁷ His views were further propagated in a number of articles posted to the society’s blog and two of his books were recommended in the first edition of the ISoc’s magazine (published in the last academic year). City Islamic Society website, ‘Judgement Day – Heaven & Hell – Bilal Philips’, <<http://cityisoc.com/167-judgement-day-heaven-hell-bilal-philips>>, [Accessed 7 July 2010]; City ISoc, ‘Recommended Book List’, *An Islaamic Magazine*, p.34.

²⁸ Bilal Phillips, ‘Dr Bilal Phillips banned from the UK’, 22 June 2010, <<http://blog.bilalphilips.com/2010/06/22/dr-bilal-philips-banned-from-the-uk/>>, [accessed 28 July 2010].

²⁹ Bilal Philips, ‘Contemporary Issues’, 2002,

<http://www.bilalphilips.com/bilal_pages.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=289>, [accessed 7 July 2010], p.7; 8-9.

³⁰ Material from ‘Islam QA’ has also been posted on the ISoc’s blog. City Islamic Society website, ‘The religion of justice’, <<http://cityisoc.com/4715-the-religion-of-justice/>>, [accessed 7 May 2010].

³¹ Al-Munajjid’s response was made available on the Islamic Society’s website, <<http://cityisoc.com/4353-two-jumua/>>, [accessed 4 April 2010] and is still available at ‘IslamQA’ <<http://www.islamqa.com/en/ref/759/>>, [accessed 4 April 2010].

³² Shaikh Muhammad al-Munajjid, ‘Fatwa number 38622’, ‘IslamQA’, <<http://www.islamqa.com/en/ref/38622/>>, [accessed 13 July 2010].

c. Salafi-Jihadi ideology

In addition to holding most of the above Islamist and Wahhabi beliefs, the ISoc additionally appears to have subscribed to particular Salafi-Jihadi beliefs. This is evidenced by *khutbahs* made by the ISoc's leadership, and by the material and scholars referenced on the ISoc's website.

For instance, the ISoc leadership advocated the concept of 'offensive jihad', saying in one sermon:

“When they say to us that Islam was spread by the sword, and there is no such thing as jihad, we say to them ‘no’. **Islam believes in defensive and offensive jihad.** The Qur’an is the proof, as is the Sunnah”.³³

As opposed to 'defensive jihad' which many mainstream Muslims interpret as the right of Muslim-majority nations and individuals to resist foreign invasion and occupation, 'offensive jihad' is the principle of the launching of unprovoked attacks against non-Muslims. Whilst both Islamists and Salafi-Jihadists believe in the concept of 'offensive jihad', Islamists (like groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir) only endorse such attacks following the establishment of an 'Islamic state', whereas Salafi-Jihadists take a much broader view of the concept. Although the above quotation is a solid endorsement of aggressive violence in the name of Islam, the speaker does not make clear which precise definition of 'offensive jihad' the speaker subscribes to, i.e. whether such violence should be conducted exclusively through a future hypothetical 'Islamic' state or through individual acts of terrorism carried out in the here and now. This lack of clarity is problematic in itself, however, as it leaves this concept open to individual ISoc members and affiliates to interpret for themselves.

Such clarification may have been provided in *khutbahs* given on other dates. For instance, one ISoc *khateeb* promised, two months after the above statement, that another *khutbah* would be dedicated to the topic of justice – including *shari'ah*, jihad, peace and war – but this promised *khutbah* was not uploaded onto the website.³⁴ According to comments on the website, 'khutbah 024 will not be uploaded as per the request of the khateeb'.³⁵

Despite this, the ISoc's website clarified the ISoc leadership's views on jihad. Here the ISoc repeatedly promoted individuals who explicitly follow some of the most extreme Salafi-Jihadi interpretations of jihad. As with the ISoc's promotion of hard-line Wahhabi preachers, that the ISoc promoted these individuals on their website is not necessarily to say that they subscribed to all of their ideas, but it does strongly suggest that they agreed with at least the broad thrust of their teachings.

One of the most alarming examples is **Anwar al-Awlaki**. Widely recognised by intelligence agencies as being one of the most effective English-speaking jihadist recruiters and preachers, al-Awlaki is linked to several terrorists including Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab.³⁶ Despite this, in April 2009, the

³³ [REDACTED] (City ISoc Ameer), 'Heads held up high', 18:20.

³⁴ [REDACTED] (City ISoc Ameer), 'Except as a mercy to mankind', 34:45.

³⁵ The comment was made on the thread at the bottom of the page by a user called I-slaam al-Internettee. The *khutbah* on justice had been promised in *khutbah* 22 but was postponed at the last minute. In *khutbah* 23 the reason given for this was that the sermon needed to be more appropriate for the non-Muslim audience that they had present that day. *Khutbah* 24 is then missing. City Islamic Society website, <<http://cityisoc.com/i-media/khutbah/>>, [accessed 7 July 2010].

³⁶ As a result, al-Awlaki has now been placed on CIA and United Nations terror lists. 'UN Lists US-Born Muslim Cleric as Al-Qaeda Member', *Dawn News*, 21 July 2010, <<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/world/14-un-lists-us-born-muslim-cleric-as-al-qaeda-member-zj-01>>, [accessed 25 July 2010].

ISoc planned to use a pre-recorded sermon from al-Awlaki at their annual dinner.³⁷ However, City University's then Vice-Chancellor, Malcom Gillies, intervened to prevent this after concerns were raised on a prominent blog.³⁸ The fundraising dinner was consequently postponed until the following week where the ISoc reportedly asked the university authorities whether they could distribute DVDs of the al-Awlaki recording, which they had been prevented from playing. However, the university authorities refused them permission to do so.³⁹ Four months later, in August 2009, the ISoc published the first edition of their magazine in which they claimed that 'Imaam' Anwar al-Awlaki had indeed appeared at their annual dinner via a 'pre-recorded message' (although university authorities re-emphasised this was not the case)⁴⁰ and reprinted an excerpt from one of al-Awlaki's online articles as a half-page spread.⁴¹ In early December the media reported that al-Awlaki had been killed by an air strike in Yemen.⁴² In response, the ISoc published a blog post on their website entitled 'Is al-Aulaqi Dead?' under which they asserted 'May Allaah protect him and the Muslims', referred to 'staunch al-Qaa'idah soldiers', and declared '[t]here are many others like al-Aulaqi, and if he dies a hundred more like him will arise, alhamdulillah [praise be to God].'⁴³

Articles by other leading jihadi ideologues, in particular **Abdullah Azzam** and **Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi** were also re-posted onto the ISoc website.⁴⁴ Azzam is seen as the intellectual godfather of modern-day al-Qaeda, and al-Maqdisi is a well-known and highly influential Salafi-Jihadi ideologue and the former mentor of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the former head of al-Qaeda in Iraq.⁴⁵ Both their articles appear to have been taken from 'Iskandrani' – a blog that, until his arrest in October 2009, was run by suspected terrorist Tarek Mehanna.⁴⁶ In fact, the ISoc used 'Iskandrani' as a source of articles on a number of other occasions.⁴⁷ This is a cause for concern because, aside from publishing

³⁷ Interview with [REDACTED], 15 June 2010. Confirmed in an interview with [REDACTED] at City University, 22 June 2010.

³⁸ This was ostensibly done on a technicality – on the basis that the ISoc had broken Student Union regulations surrounding event procedures, rather than on the issue of al-Awlaki per se. Interview with [REDACTED] at City University, 22 June 2010. The mentioned blog article was Habibi, 'A dinner for extremists at City University', *Harry's Place*, 25 March 2009, <<http://hurryupharry.org/2009/03/25/a-dinner-for-extremists-at-city-university/>>, [accessed 19 August 2010].

³⁹ This was on the grounds that the DVD was partly recorded in Arabic, and they did not have sufficient time to get it translated so were unclear about the nature of its content. Interview with [REDACTED], 22 June 2010.

⁴⁰ City Islamic Society, *An Islaamic Magazine*, p.8.

⁴¹ Anwar al-Awlaki, 'Quraan Behind Bars' reprinted in City Islamic Society, *An Islaamic Magazine*, p.15.

⁴² Mohamed Sudam, 'Yemen says Fort-Hood linked imam may be dead', *Reuters*, 24 December 2010, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5BN0S220091224>>, [accessed 13 July 2010].

⁴³ City Islamic Society website, 'Is al-Aulaqi Dead?', 26 December 2010. The post was removed, but a screen shot is available as an upload on *The Inquirer* website, <<http://cityinquirer.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/awlakicityisoc.pdf>>, [accessed 7 July 2010].

⁴⁴ For articles re-posted on the ISoc's website originally by Azzam see: City Islamic Society website, 'Living Together', <<http://cityisoc.com/5682-living-together/>>, [accessed 7 May 2010]; City Islamic Society website, 'Mothers Producers of Heroes', <<http://cityisoc.com/2336-mothers-producers-of-heroes/>>, [accessed 7 May 2010]. Examples of al-Maqdisi include: City Islamic Society website, 'Which Group Should I Join?'. <<http://cityisoc.com/5246-%E2%80%9C%E2%80%A6which-group-should-i-join%E2%80%9D/>>, [accessed 7 May 2010]; City University Islamic Society, 'Advice on Dealing with Family', <<http://cityisoc.com/4009-advice-on-dealing-with-family/>>, [accessed 7 May 2010].

⁴⁵ Information on these leading al-Qaeda figures can be found in sources including Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Pennsylvania, 2004) and Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (Taylor & Francis: Oxon, 2008).

⁴⁶ Mehanna is a US citizen accused of planning to 'obtain automatic weapons, go to a shopping mall and randomly shoot people'. Shelley Murphy, 'Highlights of the case against terror suspect', *Boston Globe*, 21 October 2009, <http://www.boston.com/news/local/breaking_news/2009/10/highlights_of_t.html>, [accessed 12 July 2010].

⁴⁷ For example, City Islamic Society website, 'Recognizing the Bounds of our Mannerisms,' <<http://cityisoc.com/5978-recognizing-the-bounds-of-our-mannerisms>>; City Islamic Society website, 'The Virtues of Fasting in the Summer', <<http://cityisoc.com/6005-the-virtues-of-fasting-in-the-summer>>; City Islamic Society website, 'Thoughts on a Statement of al-Miqdad', <<http://cityisoc.com/5942-thoughts-on-a-statement-of-al-miqdad>>, [all accessed 7 May 2010].

articles by Azzam and al-Maqdisi, 'Iskandrani' also contains articles by figures such as Abu Qatadah, whose sermons were found in a Hamburg flat used by some of the 9/11 hijackers and Abu Basir al-Tartusi, a prominent UK-based Islamist ideologue.⁴⁸ These individuals promote some of the most violent, jihadist forms of Islamism and are directly associated with inspiring young Muslims to become involved in terrorist violence. It is highly suggestive that ISoc members not only accessed this website but actively re-posted articles from it.

Moreover, the ISoc also uploaded material which called for solidarity and support for convicted and imprisoned terrorists. For example, in March 2010, a recording of a talk by Ali al-Tamimi was posted to the ISoc's website.⁴⁹ Al-Tamimi, an American Muslim convert, is currently serving a life sentence in jail (as was the case when the ISoc posted his talk) for inciting followers to fight with the Taliban in Afghanistan against Americans.⁵⁰ On the website his name was followed by the invocation 'may Allah hasten his release', suggesting that whoever posted this video not only supported al-Tamimi personally, but was well aware of his conviction for terrorism. According to one report, alongside material on the website, al-Tamimi's book *The Fundamentals of Islam* was also one of the books in the ISoc sisters' library.⁵¹

This section has sought to show how **the first of the radicalising agents, a potentially dangerous ideology**, was articulated by the ISoc in *khutbahs* and material distributed through their website, and was adopted by senior ISoc members. This ideology combined many aspects of hard-line Wahhabi thought, such as intolerance for alternative worldviews and lifestyles, with more Islamist concepts, such as the need to establish an 'Islamic state', impose a hard-line interpretation of *shari'ah* as state law, and kill those who follow alternative versions of Islam. Historically, this combination has resulted in the creation of a volatile compound ideology, Salafi-Jihadism. Significantly, this is also the case at City ISoc. Not only did the ISoc advocate 'offensive' as well as 'defensive' jihad in one of their *khutbahs*, they promoted influential jihadi ideologues, such as Anwar al-Awlaki and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. This promotion of radical ideologies by leading jihadist figures also illuminates the ISoc's role in exposing Muslim students to **the second of the radicalising agents: individuals or groups who can articulately promote this ideology**.

ii) Individuals or groups

During the last academic year, the majority of the ISoc's output and decision making appeared to have derived from its president, who also delivered the majority of the ISoc's *khutbahs* (the others were apparently delivered by the president's close associates). According to one interviewee, the president "is a very forceful personality, so the society is taking a lead from him... he decides the direction of the society".⁵² The formal membership of the ISoc in the last academic year was 186,⁵³

⁴⁸ For example Abu Qatadah, 'Milestones on the road to firmness in faith', Iskandrani, <<http://iskandrani.wordpress.com/category/scholarly-selections/abu-qatadah/>>; Abu Basir, 'Free the Prisoner!', Iskandrani, <<http://iskandrani.wordpress.com/category/scholarly-selections/abu-basir/>>, [both accessed 20 June 2010].

⁴⁹ City Islamic Society website, <<http://cityisoc.com/5176-masjidorcell/>>, [accessed 7 July 2010].

⁵⁰ Eric Lichtblau, 'Scholar is given life sentence in 'Virginia Jihad' case', *New York Times*, July 14 2005, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/14/national/14cleric.html>>, [accessed 7 July 2010].

⁵¹ Pakinam Amer, 'Islamic Radicalization on UK campuses: Islamic literature', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 9 August 2010, <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/news/islamic-radicalization-uk-campus-is-lamic-literature>>, [accessed 16 August 2010].

⁵² Interview with [REDACTED], student at City University, 10 May 2010.

although it has been estimated that the number of active members was far lower. Audiences at Friday prayers were considerably larger, as they included many Muslim students who were not active members of the ISoc, therefore providing the opportunity for the ISoc leadership's influence to spread more widely. It is important to qualify, however, that the ideology and actions attributed to the ISoc were not necessarily reflective of all ISoc members, but were probably the products of the ISoc president and what another interviewee referred to as "his henchmen".⁵⁴ Interviewees have noted the president's "command of the room" and the "hypnotic power" of his public speaking – that can be heard in his delivery of sermons. Other interviewees have painted a picture of an ISoc leader with almost schizophrenic qualities, one moment polite and charming, the next dogmatic and uncompromising.⁵⁵ This was a man who made himself inaccessible to certain members of the student body and that was reportedly often surrounded by a small, and equally inaccessible, group of loyal followers.⁵⁶ That the ISoc was led by someone who appears to be such a charismatic and powerful figure is hugely significant and should not be underestimated; any ideology requires powerful articulation in order to give it credibility.

A number of interviewees have speculated that the ISoc's activities during the 2009/10 academic year would probably have been far less radical and controversial without the presence of the ISoc's president. This is likely true and it demonstrates the importance of what can be described as 'radicalisers' – people or groups who can directly and persuasively articulate an extremist ideology, making it relevant, authoritative and compelling. The government's *Contest 2* strategy correctly recognises that 'the messenger is as important as the message'.⁵⁷

Alongside their president, the ISoc also promoted charismatic and seemingly influential Wahhabi and pro-jihadist clerics via its website, and invited them to speak at public events (see next section). The ISoc president, on account of his charismatic presentation of an extremist ideology, should therefore be seen alongside other figures promoted by the ISoc, in the overall matrix of radicalisation on City's campus. The president also played a central role in the events that followed – exciting and exacerbating tensions on campus. The stark presence of such potentially **radicalising figures** provides explicit evidence of the presence of the **second radicalising agent: people or groups who can directly and persuasively articulate** the ideology. The next section seeks to illustrate the potential consequences of the presence of this ideology and these recruiters, and the prevalence on campus of the final two 'radicalising agents': the existence of **created or real grievances** and the active channelling of a crisis of belonging into a **separatist, aggressive 'Muslim' identity** set apart from other members of the university.

iii) Grievances and identity

During the 2009/10 academic year, City ISoc had a number of high profile altercations with various members of the university body. These incidents illustrate how aspects of the ISoc's Wahhabi-Islamist ideology, as articulated by key charismatic and forceful individuals, had immediate practical

⁵³ Official statistic obtained from City University's Students' Union student activities co-ordinator, 30 July 2010. [REDACTED] pointed out that it is worth noting, due to the IT system in place at the time, people from outside of the university could join and pay membership, which may have affected the numbers.

⁵⁴ Interview with [REDACTED], student at City University, 29 April 2010.

⁵⁵ Interview with [REDACTED] *The Inquirer*, 25 June 2010.

⁵⁶ Interview with [REDACTED] *The Inquirer*, 25 June 2010.

⁵⁷ HM Government, *Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare*, p.88.

consequences. In addition, these events also provide evidence for the presence of the remaining ‘radicalising agents’: a crisis of belonging that gets channelled into an **antagonistic and divisive ‘Muslim’ identity**, and the existence of **potential or real grievances** amongst Muslim students at City University. As will become apparent, the ISoc leadership constructed such identities and managed such grievances in order to propagate their ideological agenda, twisting and manipulating the situations that arose in order to promote their Wahhabi-Islamist ideology as the only workable solution. The final two ‘radicalising agents’ were closely interconnected. As they served to reinforce each other in a repetitive and self-serving cycle, they have therefore been addressed together in this paper. To illustrate how the ISoc achieved this, this section will take, as examples, the disagreements firstly between the ISoc and members of the journalism faculty, and secondly between the ISoc and the university authorities.

a) City ISoc and the journalism faculty

In its dispute with City’s student-run newspaper and the journalism lecturers, the ISoc’s actions and rhetoric were clearly informed by an ideology based on a strong sense of grievance and on an exclusivist Muslim identity. This identity, when mixed with the ISoc’s ideology, encouraged ISoc members to see all criticisms of the ISoc’s behaviour as a form of targeted attack against Islam and evidence of a broader anti-Muslim conspiracy endemic within British society. By casting these ‘threats’ in religious terms – as part of a wider religious conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims – the ISoc’s leadership used them to urge Muslims to buy into the ISoc’s exclusivist Muslim identity and to argue for a more separatist, tribalist approach to university life, mobilising other Muslim students to unite together under their leadership.

In late 2009, the first major public altercation between the ISoc and other students took place between the ISoc and *The Inquirer*, City University’s student-run newspaper. This occurred after the ISoc invited a number of radical Islamic preachers to talk on campus. On 4 November 2009, the ISoc held an event entitled ‘The People of Paradise and Hellfire’ featuring Abu Usamah. A well-known American convert to Islam who is an imam at the prominent Wahhabi-influenced Green Lane Mosque in Birmingham, Abu Usamah was filmed in a Channel 4 undercover documentary saying that Bin Laden was better than a "million George Bushes and a thousand Tony Blairs" and making derogatory comments about women and homosexuals, including telling an audience to “take that homosexual man and throw him off the mountain”.⁵⁸ Also speaking at this ISoc event was the preacher Murtaza Khan, a primary school teacher at a London faith school, who had also been featured in the same Channel 4 documentary as referring to Jews and Christians as “filthy”.⁵⁹ Prior to the event, the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Society condemned the invitation of Abu Usamah by releasing a statement calling the invitation ‘morally and ethically wrong’ and as likely to contribute to an ‘already increasing rise in homophobic hate crime in London’.⁶⁰ The gay-rights activist, Peter Tatchell, publicly called on City University’s then Vice Chancellor, Julius

⁵⁸ ‘Undercover Mosque’, *Dispatches*, January 2007, available at <<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2515587181120245843#>>, [accessed 15 August 2010].

⁵⁹ ‘Undercover Mosque’, *Dispatches*.

⁶⁰ Official statement obtained through email correspondence 02 June 2010. Also quoted (though not in full) in Gemma Meredith, ‘Storm over extremist preachers’, *The Inquirer*, 18 November 2009, <<http://cityinquirer.com/?p=1156>>, [accessed 12 June 2010].

Weinburg, to resign.⁶¹ After the event, *The Inquirer's* student journalists criticised the platform given to Abu Usamah in their paper, describing him as a 'radical Islamist preacher'. They also strongly criticised the ISoc in an editorial, declaring that it 'needs to take more responsibility about who it extends its invitations to'.⁶² In response, the ISoc announced that they would hold a press conference on 9 December 2009 to answer *The Inquirer's* criticisms.⁶³ However, this was cancelled by the university administration at the last minute because the ISoc were planning to enforce gender segregation at the event.⁶⁴

A few weeks later, in late December and January, the argument between the ISoc and the *The Inquirer* flared up again when the ISoc published an article on their website entitled 'Words to be written in gold' – a belated response to *The Inquirer's* article on Abu Usamah. In this, the ISoc strongly denounced the student newspaper and its journalists in religious terms, saying they had 'mocked the running of the Islamic Society, its beliefs, its principles and its creed', that they were part of a coalition of 'bloggers, the odd newspaper journalists [sic], right-wing think tanks, self-professed neoconservatives who are hell-bent on demonising all Muslims' and describing the article as evidence of the students' 'hate towards a religion of truth and strength'. It also 'warned' them 'of a terrible final destination in the next life, the life after death, a life of a severe and painful punishment, a humiliating torment, the ever-lasting curse of your Creator, and the blazing Fire whose fuel is disbelieving men, women and stones'.⁶⁵ The article also warned that '[w]hoever is not convinced by the evidence of the Qur'aan will not be convinced by anything other than the sword'.⁶⁶ The ISoc later edited this final sentence.

Following this, *The Inquirer* published an article referring to this ISoc web posting and noting the website's support for al-Awlaki (see previous section). In response, supporters of the ISoc then posted a series of angry and personal comments on *The Inquirer's* website. One commenter described the newspaper editor who had written the piece as 'a sick Sikh' and told her 'Day of Judgement my dear, we will see who has the last laugh. No, it will happen before that. You wait for the angel of death. I swear by God you wait. You will be paid ur [sic] wages in full. You wait'.⁶⁷ The editor of the student newspaper felt personally threatened by this and the 'Words to be written in gold' article and contemplated alerting the police.⁶⁸ Another female journalist at *The Inquirer* also felt threatened and considered complaining to the university authorities, later saying that she felt

⁶¹ Peter Tatchell, 'Kill Gays Preacher hosted by London Universities', *Peter Tatchell Blog*, 24 November 2009, <<http://www.petertatchell.net/>>, [accessed 2 June 2010].

⁶² Editorial, 'The inquirer says', *The Inquirer*, 19 November 2009, <<http://cityinquirer.com/?p=1281>>, [accessed 2 June 2010].

⁶³ "Invited speakers will explain the Muslims beliefs regarding the homosexual and his punishment in this life and the next, women being "deficient," Christians and Jews spending eternity in the Hell-Fire along with principles and foundations that all Muslims adhere to. All journalists are more than welcome to attend". Following the cancellation of the event, this had been removed from City ISoc's website but reference to its intentions can be found in the comments below *The Inquirer* article. See Abdullah, 3 Dec 2009, 10:34pm below Meredith, 'Storm over extremist preachers'.

⁶⁴ City Islamic Society, 'Religious Discrimination on Campus', <<http://cityisoc.com/3179-religious-discrimination-on-campus/>>, [accessed 10 May 2010].

⁶⁵ City Islamic Society, 'Words to be written in gold', 31 December 2009, <<http://cityisoc.com/3702-words-to-be-written-in-gold/>>, [accessed 3 May 2010].

⁶⁶ This was later changed to '...will not be convinced by anything other than what they shall see at the time of their death...' City Islamic Society, 'Words to be written in gold'. Quilliam has a screen shot of the original quotation.

⁶⁷ Fran Singh, 'City Islamic Society defends radical preacher...', *The Inquirer*, 2 January 2010, <<http://cityinquirer.com/?p=1787>>, [accessed 4 June 2010].

⁶⁸ She refrained only because everything began to calm down. Interview with ██████████ *The Inquirer*, 6 July 2010.

“really uncomfortable” and that she believed that the ISoc’s postings amounted to threats against her, albeit ones made in religious terms. She said, “they are very clever; using what the Qur’an says and then hiding behind it. And you go [to them] “that is incredibly offensive” and they say “it isn’t offensive, it is what the Qur’an says” ... To me it is just threatening. You have told me I am going to burn in hellfire”.⁶⁹ Needless to say, by this point, cordial relations between the student paper and the ISoc leadership had entirely broken down.

Regardless of whether the ISoc intended its messages to be threatening, it is clear that the ISoc’s leadership had framed criticism of their activities by the student newspaper in starkly religious terms. Their ideology had encouraged them to see this issue not as a dispute between students, but rather as symptomatic of a wider religious conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims. In turn, this led the ISoc to identify themselves as the victims of an anti-Muslim conspiracy. In other words, the ISoc’s ideology helped amplify a sense of grievance among ISoc members, caused this grievance to be framed in religious terms and reinforced a divisive identity defined largely in opposition to perceived non-Muslim aggression.

In the midst of these on-going altercations between the ISoc and *The Inquirer*, Rosie Waterhouse, Senior Lecturer in (MA) Investigative Journalism at City, published an article in *The Independent* newspaper entitled ‘Universities must take action on Muslim extremism’. Using specific examples from City University she wrote that she considered the niqab, which she saw becoming more popular among female City ISoc members, to be ‘offensive and threatening’ and said that it should be banned at universities.⁷⁰

Soon after, the ISoc held a press conference, partly in response to Waterhouse’s article and partly in response to tensions also arising over the interfaith prayer-room (see below). During the proceedings, a member of the audience asked for the ISoc leadership’s opinion on Abdulmutallab – the former UCL student who attempted to bomb an airliner bound for Detroit using explosives concealed in his underwear. According to eyewitnesses, the ISoc president publicly claimed the charges against Abdulmutallab were fabricated and were evidence of an anti-Muslim conspiracy.⁷¹ Unfortunately, no precise transcription of this statement exists as the ISoc had refused to allow the press conference to be recorded – while additionally demanding that all questions had to be submitted on paper.⁷² Paul Anderson, the programme director of City’s Journalism course, having walked out of the event in protest at these restrictions calling it a ‘farce’, soon afterwards wrote an article entitled ‘Secularism is not Islamophobia’ on his blog. This article criticised the ISoc’s support for the ‘hate speech’ of al-Awlaki and Abu Usamah, their issuing of ‘none-too-veiled threats’ against student journalists and their ‘insistent pleading for special treatment’.⁷³

In response, the ISoc published an article on their website entitled ‘Secularism is not Islamophobia, but secularists are Islamophobic’ in which they denounced the two journalism lecturers as having an

⁶⁹ Interview with [REDACTED] *The Inquirer*, 25 June 2010.

⁷⁰ Rosie Waterhouse, ‘Universities must take action on Muslim extremism’, *The Independent*, 18 March 2010, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/higher/rosie-waterhouse-universities-must-take-action-on-muslim-extremism-1922730.html>>, [accessed 7 July 2010].

⁷¹ Interviews with [REDACTED] *The Inquirer*, 6 July 2010; interview with [REDACTED] *The Inquirer*, 25 June 2010.

⁷² Interview with [REDACTED] *The Inquirer*, 25 June 2010; Paul Anderson ‘Response to City University Islamic Society’, *Gauche*, 29 April 2010, <http://libsoc.blogspot.com/2010_04_01_archive.html>, [accessed 25 July 2010].

⁷³ Paul Anderson, ‘Response to City University Islamic Society’.

‘out right [sic] hatred for the Islamic way of life’, a response which once again deliberately conflated criticism of the ISoc’s activities with ‘Islamophobia’:

‘Despite Ms Waterhouse and Mr Andersons [sic] political opportunism, their ideological contradictions expose their conscious ignorance, and some may say, out right [sic] hatred for the Islamic way of life and all Muslims that adhere to the principles of their religion... it is time Mr Anderson takes a really good look at himself and sincerely contemplates why he possesses so much hate to a society that proudly adheres to principles sent by Allah and His Messenger. Surely, there must be more to it than what the eye can see’.⁷⁴

This statement was accompanied by two photographs of each of the lecturers on the homepage of City ISoc’s main website which, as described above, also contained numerous links to pro-jihadist websites and material by wanted terrorists such as Anwar al-Awlaki. Waterhouse later said she was “shocked” and “frightened” by the use of her picture in this context and that she found it ‘a deeply disturbing and palpable threat’.⁷⁵ Behind the scenes she lobbied the university authorities to force the ISoc to remove both the article and the images of her and Anderson from the website. According to Waterhouse, the ISoc initially refused to remove either – even claiming they had lost control of the website and no longer knew who the administrator was.⁷⁶ Eventually, the images of the lecturers were removed.

The disputes between the ISoc and students of *The Inquirer* newspaper, and later with the two journalism lecturers, illustrate a number of alarming trends. Rather than responding to Waterhouse’s article with an article rationally defending the niqab, or responding to *The Inquirer’s* condemnations by defending their invitation of Abu Usamah, the ISoc’s leaders instead accused both parties of anti-Muslim prejudice and issued what were interpreted as threats against both parties. In order to better mobilise Muslim students against the lecturers, the ISoc additionally seized on the incident to advance its ideological portrayal of British society as broadly Islamophobic. They presented an attack on the ISoc as an attack on Islam and generally sought to unite Muslims into a solid bloc under the leadership of the ISoc, viewing criticism of the ISoc as an extension of a wider assault on Muslims and their religion.

b) City ISoc and the university authorities

As with the journalism faculty, tensions between the ISoc and the university authorities escalated throughout the year as the ISoc repeatedly manipulated existing grievances, triggered conflicts through their provocative behaviour and reinforced their separatist identity in opposition to non-Muslims. Initially, the ISoc took advantage of the unfortunate circumstances surrounding gang attacks on Muslim students, projecting them as evidence of the discriminatory nature of the university authorities and of British society in general. This sense of perceived injustice was then intensified and perpetuated when the ISoc clashed with the university over prayer facilities. Through these conflicts, the ISoc stoked a sense of crisis that helped to cultivate an ‘aggrieved’

⁷⁴ City Islamic Society website, ‘Secularism is not Islamophobia, but secularists are Islamophobic’, <<http://cityisoc.com/5769-secularism-is-not-islamophobia-but-secularists-are-islamophobic/>>, [accessed 5 May 2010].

⁷⁵ Interview with Rosie Waterhouse, Senior Lecturer in (MA) Investigative Journalism, 15 June 2010; Rosie Waterhouse, ‘Will the voice of moderate Muslims be heard at City’, *Independent*, 1 July 2010, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/higher/rosie-waterhouse-will-the-voice-of-moderate-muslims-be-heard-at-city-2014822.html>>, [accessed 25 July 2010].

⁷⁶ Interview with [REDACTED], 15 June 2010.

Muslim identity. In the minds of the ISoc leaders, disagreements on a small university campus in London soon became an “attack against all Muslims and the religion of Islam” and likened to conflicts in countries like Kashmir and Palestine, that required all Muslim students “to gather under one banner” (under the co-ordinated leadership of the ISoc). Such a series of events was ultimately used to reinforce the single narrative of the ISoc’s self-serving ideology.

At the beginning of November 2009, a number of City ISoc students were attacked by a group of white and black youths from the local area on two separate occasions in one week.⁷⁷ During the latter incident, three people were stabbed (two of whom were members of the ISoc). Fortunately, the injuries were not life-threatening.⁷⁸ These attacks took place outside the then-prayer room, which was located away from the main campus in the basement of the university’s St John Street building. Police arrested three of the attackers and the victims were taken to hospital.

For the ISoc, these attacks were a valuable opportunity to promote their narrative of victimhood and to urge Muslim students to put themselves under the authority of the ISoc leadership. Moreover, by interpreting these assaults in religious terms, the ISoc used them as evidence of societal Islamophobia and therefore reinforced their identity as ‘aggrieved’ Muslims who needed to isolate themselves on campus. In the *khutbah* delivered the following day entitled ‘Our appearance is their terror (Islamophobic attack on campus)’, the ISoc president said:

“Do not go home by yourself. For these gangs, they are looking in the building and the prayer room and looking for the brother and the sister to be by themselves, and as soon as they are by themselves they will attack you”.⁷⁹

However, one member of the ISoc privately reported that “[t]he stabbing was not a racial or Islamophobic attack – it was not random but personal; they were a gang from a nearby estate who had a problem with the people they attacked”.⁸⁰ The police and the university treated the attacks as racially motivated rather than specifically Islamophobic.⁸¹ In the same *khutbah* the president said:

“I order every single sister [female Muslim student] to leave the university by 4pm... Not a single sister is allowed to come to the prayer room, not a single sister is allowed to be in the classes, to be in university, or in the library, or anywhere around this campus at 4pm. Any sister who stays behind by Allah, on the day of judgement, I will speak against you...”⁸²

The ISoc issued this guidance, intended to consolidate the ISoc’s control over its members, without liaising with the university authorities. The university authorities therefore responded to these directions by declaring that ‘[t]he Islamic Society of City guidance that Sisters should leave the

⁷⁷ Sofia Diogo Mateus, ‘No prosecution for attack suspects’, *The Inquirer*, 7 February 2010, <<http://cityinquirer.com/?p=1936>>, [accessed 20 June 2010].

⁷⁸ Various media sources reported different figures, which were apparently incorrect. Figure here quoted from interview with members of student management team and head of security.

⁷⁹ [redacted] (City ISoc Ameer), ‘Our Appearance is Their Terror [Islamophobic attack on campus]’, *Khutbah* 7, 6 November 2009, 16:40.

⁸⁰ Interview with [redacted] and member of the Islamic Society, 11 May 2010.

⁸¹ Julius Weinburg, ‘A message from acting Vice Chancellor Julius Weinberg in response to student attacks’, 9 November 2009, <https://www.city.ac.uk/news/archive/2009/11_November/091109_6.html>, [accessed 8 July 2010].

⁸² [redacted] (City ISoc Ameer), ‘Our Appearance is Their Terror’, 13:40.

University by 4pm is not University advice'.⁸³ In addition, the university authorities sent an open email to every student saying they were 'shocked and saddened' by the assault, which they referred to as 'racially aggravated', adding that they were 'working very closely with the local police' who had stepped up their patrols in the area as a result.⁸⁴

Despite this, the ISoc continued to promote a partly-fabricated narrative of this incident in order to bolster their victimhood identity and their ideology of social separatism. Linking local events on a London university campus to the global narrative of religious persecution by non-Muslims, the ISoc explicitly equated the attack with international conflicts across the globe. In one of their *khutbahs* the president said:

"They [the gangs] will do what they did to us and they did to the people before us – the people of Filistine [Palestine], the people of Kashmir – the Muslims are being oppressed, the Muslims are being attacked. Let us as Muslims – listen to what I say – and let us as Muslims stick together, united as one. One brotherhood, one sisterhood, united at all costs".⁸⁵

Similarly, despite the police arresting some of the attackers and increasing their patrols, the ISoc president told worshippers that:

"I have spoken to the police... on several occasions; I have spoken to [university] security on several occasions. They have promised us that they will patrol this place regularly yet the promises of the kuffar [unbelievers] are nothing and they mean nothing".⁸⁶

Inevitably such attitudes, based on the ideological rejection of non-Muslims, led the ISoc leadership to discourage their followers from cooperating with the police investigation; their presumption that the investigation could be a failure helping to cause the *actual* breakdown of the police enquiry. Indeed, one ISoc member said in an interview with the Islamist-funded European Muslim Research Centre that:

'A lot of the Muslim students who were attacked were asked to give statements and a couple of them were asked to go to ID parades. Some of them did those things; a lot of them just didn't want to ... [because of] a lack of feeling that anything would happen or just that they didn't really want to go to the station and things like that. Some of them were asked to give DNA ... they were a bit concerned about doing that, so once they were asked to give DNA, they kind of like, in their minds, kind of shut off all cooperation with the investigation'.⁸⁷

The police were consequently unable to bring charges against the attackers due a lack of evidence, despite urging witnesses and victims to come forward. Detective Inspector Trevor Borley, of Islington police, told the *London Student* newspaper: "We haven't had the assistance we had hoped from the

⁸³ Professor Julius Weinburg & Nikhil Raj Cumlajee, 'Message from the President of City University London's Students' Union and the Acting Vice-Chancellor of City University London', 10 November 2009, <http://city.ac.uk/news/archive/2009/11_November/101109_2.html>, [accessed 1 June 2010].

⁸⁴ Weinburg, 'A message from acting Vice Chancellor Julius Weinberg in response to student attacks'.

⁸⁵ (City ISoc Ameer), 'Our appearance is their terror', 17:20.

⁸⁶ (City ISoc Ameer), 'Our Appearance is Their Terror', 18:10.

⁸⁷ Jonathan Githens-Mazer & Robert Lambert, *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: a London Case Study* (European Muslim Research Centre: Exeter, 2010), <http://centres.exeter.ac.uk/emrc/publications/Islamophobia_and_Anti-Muslim_Hate_Crime.pdf>, [accessed 8 July 2010], p.31.

victims and from witnesses. At least two of the victims didn't come forward and make statements. A number of witnesses also didn't".⁸⁸ Despite this, even though the police had held meetings with the ISoc representatives to ask for their help, the ISoc still claimed that the non-Muslims of the university were somehow conspiring to prevent a proper police investigation. According to the *London Student* newspaper, the ISoc claimed that 'those willing to go to the police with information' were on two separate occasions 'threatened with disciplinary action' by the university – a claim that the university fervently denied.⁸⁹ Once again, the ISoc had manipulated genuinely concerning issues to create a grievance-based identity; one founded on a set narrative that depicts Muslims against non-Muslims, and, ultimately, a global conflict against Islam. Rather than helping Muslim students, the ISoc's message of non-cooperation instead may have aided a group of thugs who physically attacked Muslim students to escape justice.

With the onset of the new term in January 2010, the fall-out from this incident might have blown over. However, the university authorities decided to move the ISoc's isolated Muslim-only prayer room to a multi-faith room in the main university building. The decision was made partly on the basis of safety requirements – in order to protect Muslim students against a repeat of the previous term's violent attacks.⁹⁰ However, the acting Vice-Chancellor, Julius Weinberg, additionally said that the secular nature of the university meant they would not favour one faith group over another by giving them a dedicated space.⁹¹ According to a member of City's student services, they had consulted 'moderate' Muslim scholars beforehand to ensure a multi-faith prayer was acceptable to Muslims.⁹²

The ISoc responded by opposing these new facilities on the basis that the room was too small for the numbers attending prayer, that it had limited accessibility, that it was in a basement, and that holding prayers in a multi-faith room was 'impermissible' on religious grounds.⁹³ They also rejected the university's claims to have consulted Muslim scholars. In response, the ISoc began holding Friday prayers outdoors in Northampton Square, in the centre of City University's campus, and inaccurately alleged that the nearest mosque was '39 minutes away via bus'.⁹⁴ In addition, the leadership urged their members to write letters to university authorities and even for foreign students to lobby their respective embassies.⁹⁵ In response to an email by the acting Vice-Chancellor about the outdoor

⁸⁸ Sheeza Anjum, 'City University 'went back on their promise' claims Islamic Society', *London Student*, 30 April 2010, <<http://www.london-student.net/2010/04/30/city-university-went-back-on-their-promise-claims-islamic-society/>>, [accessed 9 July 2010].

⁸⁹ Anjum, 'City University 'went back on their promise'.

⁹⁰ According to an interview with security at City University, the university had been planning this move prior to the attacks. Interview with [REDACTED], City University, 1 July 2010.

⁹¹ Julius Weinberg quoted in Poonam Taneja, 'Muslim students in London university prayer room row', *BBC Asian Network*, 1 April 2010, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/8598455.stm>>, [accessed 13 July 2010].

⁹² Interview with [REDACTED], City University London, 1 July 2010. They cannot disclose the identity of those consulted due to issues of privacy although *City Offline* reported John Tibble, Director of Services for Students, as confirming that they consulted the East London Mosque, Islam Online and Queen Mary's University, London. Tibble was paraphrased in Heena Tailor and Seher Mahmood, 'City ISoc go all out for separate prayer rooms', *City Offline*, Issue 7, March 2010, <http://www.jonrossswaby.com/pdf/City_Offline_March_2010.pdf>, [accessed 7 July 2010].

⁹³ The website is run by those who organized the prayer protests; therefore we can safely assume they are ISoc members. Muslims of City University, 'An Open Letter to University students & staff by the Muslims of City University', *City Muslims*, 26 February 2010, <<http://citymuslims.co.uk/?p=310>>, [accessed 8 July 2010].

⁹⁴ Muslims of City University, 'An open letter to University students & staff...'

⁹⁵ City Muslims, 'Phase one: template letter', *City Muslims*, 15 February 2010, <<http://citymuslims.co.uk/?p=6>> [accessed 8 July 2010]; City Muslims, 'Phase two: On the Block', *City Muslims*, 7 March 2010, <<http://citymuslims.co.uk/?p=320>>, [accessed 8 July 2010].

prayers, the ISoc replied that they were ‘forced’ to conduct their prayers outside although they were adamant that this was ‘by *no* means a demonstration... [r]ather it is an obligation’.⁹⁶



Photograph taken from official campaign site⁹⁷

As with the gang attacks, the ISoc worked the prayer protests into their narrative in order to create a sense of victimhood among Muslim students. In particular, as the ISoc argued on their dedicated campaign website, the university’s decision to move to prayer room was an ‘injustice’ and an attack ‘against all Muslims and the religion of Islam’:

‘The drama that has collected over the past months, which has led to us losing the prayer room is undoubtedly and clearly not only an attack against the Islamic Society (ISoc) but an attack against all Muslims and the religion of Islam. Many a time we have witnessed the attack against Muslims be it by the tongue, the pen or other means, in the lands of our brothers and sisters, across other universities and amongst the homes of our families’.⁹⁸

At the same time as both creating a problem and cultivating a sense of grievance, they also offered the ‘solution’: namely the ISoc’s extremist brand of Islamism. The same article resolved that ‘this is a call for unity and a time for us to gather under one banner no matter what organisation or principle of Islam we may follow. A time for us all to unite as this is an attack on us all’ – a clear demonstration of how the ISoc sought to galvanize and unite Muslims against a perceived external enemy and draw them towards their highly politicized brand of Islam.

The language used in one of the *khutbahs* was explicitly threatening. In this *khutbah*, delivered at the outset of the prayer room disagreements, the university authorities’ actions were described as being illustrative of ‘the black heart of the kuffar [unbelievers]’:

“It is time to penetrate the heart – the black heart – of the kuffar [unbelievers]... This is the time oh brothers and sisters in Islam for the non-Muslims, the polytheists, the university officials who are driving us out of our homes to truly be effected [sic] of Allah’s reminder...”⁹⁹

The ISoc leadership also tried to use the campus prayer room issue to impose their hard-line, austere religious views on other Muslims. For instance, according to a member of the ISoc, “[t]he ISoc left a

⁹⁶ Muslims of City University, ‘An Open Letter to University students & staff...’

⁹⁷ City Muslims, ‘Love at Jumu’a!’, *City Muslims*, 19 February 2010, <<http://citymuslims.co.uk/?p=103>>, [accessed 8 July 2010].

⁹⁸ City Muslims, ‘About this campaign’, *City Muslims*, 15 February 2010, <<http://citymuslims.co.uk/?p=127>>, [accessed 8 July 2010].

⁹⁹ [REDACTED] (City ISoc Ameer), “Driven Out”, *Khutbah 17*, 5 February 2010, 20:00.

sign outside the prayer room telling us not to pray there".¹⁰⁰ A photograph in a university magazine shows the ISoc's sign on the prayer room reading 'It is haraam [forbidden] for the Muslims to pray here'.¹⁰¹ According to one source, the ISoc also handed out leaflets at the prayer protests in which they declared it 'impermissible' to pray in places 'where other than our Lord, Allah, is worshipped'.¹⁰² Such behaviour runs contrary to the ISoc's mission statement which claims it is 'dedicated to catering for the needs of all Muslim staff and students on campus'.¹⁰³ Many Muslims – unlike the ISoc's Wahhabi-influenced leaders – would ordinarily have no problem in praying in a multi-faith prayer room.

Akin to the handling of the gang attacks earlier in the year, the ISoc therefore actively peddled a particularly uncooperative line with the university authorities, manipulating grievances that enabled them to cast the university as an enemy intent on launching an 'attack' on the ISoc – and all of Islam – a situation that required all Muslim students to identify as a single Muslim bloc and to 'unite' as one under their leadership. In turn this bolstered the ISoc's narrative of being participants in a global 'war on Islam'.

iv. Conclusion: the *potential* for radicalisation to terrorism

As explained, there are four main factors that usually need to be present for radicalisation towards terrorism to occur: people need to be exposed to an **extremist pro-terrorist Islamist ideology** and also to **people or groups who articulate that ideology**, they may be suffering from a crisis of belonging that gets channelled into an **aggressive and separatist 'Muslim' identity**, and they will also have some form of **grievance** which can be amplified, distorted and exploited by those who promote these extremist ideologies and advance the narrative of a 'war on Islam'. Throughout the past academic year, City University's ISoc has enabled all four of these agents of radicalisation, through individuals promoting extremist ideologies, exacerbating existing students' identity crises and creating and inflating their grievances.

As noted, City ISoc's ideology combined socially conservative Wahhabi-influenced Salafi Islam (as evidenced, for example, by their attitudes to women, homosexuals and Shi'ah Muslims) with hard-line Islamist teachings (for example, advocating '*shari'ah* law' in place of 'man-made law' and the murder of Muslims who do not follow the ISoc's version of Islam). Historically, the combination of these two ideologies has created the phenomenon of modern Jihadism, also known as Salafi-Jihadism. Troublingly, many aspects of this compound Salafi-Jihadi ideology can already be found in the ISoc's output, through their advocacy of 'defensive' and 'offensive jihad' and their promotion of pro al-Qaeda preachers such as Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi and Anwar al-Awlaki. This strongly suggests that a number of the ISoc's members, and particularly its president, have already subscribed to significant parts of the Salafi-Jihadi ideology; the ideology behind modern Islamist terrorism.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with ██████████ and member of the Islamic Society, 11 May 2010.

¹⁰¹ *City Offline*, Issue 7, <http://www.jonrossswaby.com/pdf/City_Offline_March_2010.pdf>, [accessed 12 July 2010], p.4.

¹⁰² Waterhouse, 'Will the voice of moderate Muslims be heard at City', *The Independent*.

¹⁰³ City University London Student Union website, 'List of clubs and societies: Islamic', <http://www.culsu.co.uk/studentactivities/content/180875/clubs__societies/#Islamic>, [accessed 7 July 2010].

Moreover, over the past academic year the actions of the ISoc contributed to a series of escalating incidents on City University’s campus. The altercations that the ISoc had with members of the journalism faculty and then with the university authorities, provide substantive evidence for the existence of two other ‘radicalising agents’ on City University’s campus: a strong sense of grievance and the creation of a ‘Muslim’ identity based not on openness and tolerance but instead on division and paranoia. The ‘Ameer’s Address’ in the first edition of their magazine in August 2009, provides explicit evidence for the ISoc’s intention to shape Muslim students in this way. The ISoc president refers to the ‘phase of University’ as the time in which ‘one questions ones [sic] very identity’ and where all student societies aim ‘to influence and indoctrinate the masses into understanding their cause’. On this apparent battlefield over students’ identity, it is ‘the mission of the Islamic Society’ to help Muslim students ‘discover and preserve your Islamic Identity’ whilst ensuring ‘we do not blend into society and take an apologetic approach for our faith’.¹⁰⁴ The notion that some Muslims took an ‘apologetic’ approach by accepting what were regarded by the ISoc as mainstream social values was a theme that was used in a number of *khutbahs* (see above), and served to further reinforce the ISoc’s identity in opposition to both mainstream society, and to those Muslims who had ‘surrendered’ to western values.

Alongside these attempts to nurture this sense of ‘Muslim’ belonging and a victimhood-based identity, the ISoc twisted perceived or genuine grievances in order to reinforce and confirm their ideology. They did so to convey to their followers the ‘injustices’ brought against Muslims and Islam on campus in a manner that fed into their projected ‘Muslim’ identity and reignited it in a complicated cyclical and escalating relationship. In the run up to the Students’ Union elections, for instance, the ISoc wrote that Muslims ‘have faced numerous forms of difficulty practising our faith on campus throughout the past several years... No longer is it easy to practise Islam on campus’.¹⁰⁵ The ISoc then equated such persecution with conflicts abroad in order to feed the narrative of a global ‘war on Islam’. As witnessed, there were numerous instances where the ISoc took a deliberately uncooperative stance with various authorities, exploited the tensions arising from this non-cooperation, and in turn managed to promote their own ideological agenda as the only feasible solution to the ‘injustices’ faced by Muslims.

This was all enabled and facilitated through the presence of a number of charismatic and influential individuals who were able to powerfully articulate the Wahhabi-Islamist ideology and adeptly conjure up a sense of crisis by skilfully handling and manipulating situations on campus, none more so than the ‘hypnotic’ character of the ISoc’s president. In addition to the ISoc leadership, a number of key jihadi ideologues and Wahhabi preachers were promoted on the ISoc website and invited onto the university campus who were able to articulately propagate and reinforce this dangerous ideology.

The presence of all four radicalising agents at City University is summarised in the following table:

Table:

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| Exposure to an | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> City ISoc events and particularly <i>khutbas</i> (Friday prayers) |
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¹⁰⁴ ██████████, ‘Ameer’s Address’, *An Islaamic Magazine*, p.4.

¹⁰⁵ Private email obtained by Quilliam, dated 29 March 2010.

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| <p><i>ideology</i> that seems to sanction, legitimise or require violence, often by providing a compelling but fabricated narrative of contemporary politics and recent history</p> | <p>have repeatedly promoted an extreme Islamist ideology that combines many aspects of jihadist and Wahhabi thought.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially, this ideology, as laid out by the ISoc’s leaders in their Friday sermons, calls for an ‘Islamic state’ in which shari’ah law will be instituted. It also calls for, in the words of the ISoc leader, ‘offensive jihad’ – i.e. unprovoked attacks on non-Muslims. • Friday sermons given by ISoc members have additionally explicitly advocated the murder of individuals who do not pray, for women to be ‘forced to wear’ hijab, for the ‘prohibition’ of homosexuality and the ‘killing’ of apostates. • Furthermore, extremely conservative opinions are advocated by ISoc speakers, such as that Muslim women must ‘walk as close as they can to a wall’, that women ‘should try their best to stay at home unless there is a necessity’, and that men should only speak to women ‘in times that are necessary’. • Simultaneously, the ISoc have promoted a warped understanding of current affairs in which Muslims are the innocent victims of complex plots and conspiracies. This serves to reinforce their narrative of a global religious war between Muslims and non-Muslims. For instance, attacks on ISoc members by local gangs were deliberately and explicitly equated with foreign conflicts such as those in Kashmir and Palestine, while the attempted Detroit airliner bombing was dismissed as anti-Muslim propaganda. |
| <p>Exposure to <i>people or groups who can directly and persuasively articulate</i> that ideology and then relate it to aspects of a person’s own background and life history</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through material made available on their website, City ISoc have exposed students to a number of extreme Islamists whose pro-jihadist teachings are likely to prove a radicalising influence. These include Anwar al-Awlaki and Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, both of whom have directly radicalised a number of prominent terrorists who have subsequently carried out attacks in the Middle East and in the West. • Through its website, City ISoc has also exposed students to a number of extreme Wahhabi scholars who promote an intolerant and hard-line version of Islam. Such Wahhabism has historically helped to nurture pro-jihadist ideologies and to fuel religious tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims, and between Wahhabists and other Muslims. • In addition, the president of City ISoc, its ‘ameer’, appears to be a significant radicalising influence in his own right. A number of students have described him as a “hypnotic”, charismatic figure, who is capable of inspiring unquestioning obedience and devotion among his immediate followers. |
| <p>A crisis of <i>identity</i> and, <i>often</i>, <i>uncertainty</i> about belonging which might be triggered by a range of further personal issues,</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partly through promoting its false narrative of victimhood and partly through its separatist and confrontational Islamist ideology, ISoc members have sought to create a globalised ‘grievance-based’ Muslim identity that is hostile to non-Muslims and paranoid and suspicious of outsiders. The ISoc’s president particularly sought to shape this identity. ISoc sermons, for example, deliberately reinforced this ‘us and |

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| <p>including experiences of racism, discrimination, deprivation and other criminality (as victim or perpetrator); family breakdown or separation</p> | <p>them’ outlook, for instance through the use of phrases such as ‘the black heart of the kuffar [‘infidels’]’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to push Muslim students into adopting this binary ‘us and them’ outlook, the ISoc has manipulated genuinely disturbing incidents and presented them as being part of a global conspiracy against Muslims. For instance, following the gang attack on Muslim students, the ISoc’s Friday sermon used war-like language to urge students to unite behind the ISoc’s leadership to the exclusion of other religious and social groups, saying ‘let us as Muslims stick together, united as one. One brotherhood, one sisterhood, united at all costs’. • Additionally, Islamist policy proposals advocated by the ISoc, such as stoning adulterers and killing apostates, are presented as being core Muslim beliefs and as being at odds with the ‘western value system’. Such phrasing deliberately creates a conflict between students’ ‘western’ identity and their ‘Muslim’ identity; effectively a laying down of a ‘with us or against us’ ultimatum for Muslim students – who are also told by the ISoc to defend such ‘Islamic’ acts against non-Muslims and not to become ‘apologists’ for their religion. • Moreover, they engaged with other members of the university campus, and student politics, in religious terms. For example, they advocated voting as <i>Muslims</i> – and what would benefit <i>Muslims</i> – rather than as members of a democratic, secular student body (see part two). |
| <p>A range of perceived grievances, some real and some imagined, to which there may seem to be no credible and effective non violent response.¹⁰⁶</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As shown above, ISoc members have repeatedly taken Muslim students’ <i>perceived</i> and <i>genuine</i> grievances and amplified them by combining them with the ISoc’s Islamist ideology and with the ISoc’s preferred grievance-based identity. A typical ISoc strategy was to create a crisis between the ISoc and various members of the university population, to depict this crisis as evidence of Muslims being persecuted by non-Muslims and then to advance Islamist or separatist policies as a solution. • For instance, the ISoc has depicted the university’s closure of Muslim-only prayer facilities as evidence of an institutional hostility to Muslims. The ISoc, using religiously-loaded language at one Friday sermon, described this as an example of ‘the non-Muslims, the polytheists, the university officials who are driving us out of our homes’. Ultimately, they projected the conclusion that ‘no longer is it easy to practice Islam on campus’. • In addition the ISoc fostered a sense of grievance by presenting all criticisms of the ISoc as examples of wider society’s intrinsic Islamophobia. ISoc members writing on the society’s website abused individual university staff critical of the ISoc as ‘having an outright hatred for the Islamic way of life’. Similarly, staff and students critical of the ISoc’s activities have been repeatedly described by ISoc members |

¹⁰⁶ Emphasis, but not italics, added. HM Government, *Channel*, p. 10.

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| | <p>as 'Islamophobic', implying that their opposition to the ISoc was based on irrational, anti-Muslim prejudice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ISoc leadership also used the incident over the campus stabbings to their advantage. By taking a genuine grievance – a serious and alarming incident in itself – they managed to draw parallels between their 'plight' and the people of Kashmir and Palestine, declare the university to be throwing them "out of their homes" and cast the police as the "kuffar" whose promises "mean nothing". |
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As a result, an unstable environment was fostered in which there was the *potential* for radicalisation towards Islamist violence. After all, the insistence that Muslims are under attack naturally becomes highly dangerous when combined with any ideology that encourages Muslims to 'fight back'. This would have been primarily, though not entirely, confined to those Muslim students directly affiliated to the ISoc – although the ISoc's sphere of influence may have extended to those who had access to their website or attended their events. This is not to necessarily say that any one individual has now been radicalised into accepting the ideology of modern Islamist terrorism – although it is highly possible that some members of the ISoc's leadership have accepted some key tenets of Salafi-Jihadism, as we have seen with the promotion of pro-jihadi preachers on their website and their support for 'offensive jihad'. However, it can certainly be concluded that the right atmosphere was there, the environment was ripe, and the correct ingredients were present. Hence there was the *potential* for radicalisation towards the ideology of al-Qaeda was an individual to prove sufficiently susceptible to the influence of these four factors.

Pt. 2 Impact on the wider student body

In addition to the creation of a climate in which there was the *potential* for radicalisation to terrorism, the actions of the ISoc also served to impact the student body more widely. The ISoc's ostentatiously separatist policies, that set them apart from the rest of the student body, as well as their tendency to cast everything in religious terms, and to view relatively trivial campus incidents as evidence of a 'war on Islam', had a distinct and negative impact on both student politics, and on various minority student groups – including homosexuals, Jewish students, women and Muslims who did not abide by their interpretation of Islam. Taking each in turn, this section will clarify how the actions of the ISoc during the last academic year had a largely negative impact on campus cohesion.

i) University politics

Throughout the 2009/10 academic year, as well as enforcing their austere religious interpretation on other Muslim students, for instance by trying to prevent Muslim students from using the multi-faith prayer room, the ISoc leadership also tried to enforce its hard-line religious principles on non-Muslim students. According to one society president, the ISoc leadership "try to influence all council meetings, they bring lots of people along and try and push through all of these difficult policies," which he found "confrontational".¹⁰⁷ One particular example of this was at the Students' Union's (SU) Annual General Meeting (AGM) in February 2010 where the ISoc put forward a motion that

¹⁰⁷ Interview with [REDACTED], 9 June 2010.

reportedly caused ‘uproar’, with members of the student body storming out.¹⁰⁸ The motion in question was an attempt to change the university academic timetable to accommodate Friday prayers because, according to the ISoc’s president, students were ‘missing important classes and labs’ and ‘doing badly in exams’.¹⁰⁹ He also said to a student reporter, “This is extremely important as Friday is our day of celebration and our most virtuous day of the week. The Friday prayer is something which distinguishes the Muslims from the non-Muslims. The one who doesn’t pray has left the fold of Islam.”¹¹⁰ This is instructive both in terms of the influence the ISoc’s ideology is having on its members and as a straightforward example of the ideology’s practical impact on the university environment. It was reported that over 150 members of the ISoc were in attendance at the AGM, and that this number constituted over half of the total attendees.¹¹¹ One non-Muslim student said “I felt my voice was not heard and it was really intimidating... I heard comments from the crowd that I’m not Muslim and that I should shut up and not talk about Islam. If you’re not Muslim people won’t listen to you. It’s selective hearing going on”.¹¹² Such perceived stifling of opinion on campus has already been witnessed during the disputes between the ISoc leadership and members of the journalism faculty resulting in apparent threats made by members of the ISoc. This is a dangerous precedent to set on a university campus which must remain a bastion of free speech free from undue pressure or intimidation. Due to the large number of ISoc members in the meeting, the motion was passed at the AGM, although all motions are then assessed by the SU Executive Committee,¹¹³ who later rejected it. The ISoc president also put forward a motion calling for a boycott of Starbucks, which stated that: ‘Starbucks in the canteen donate their money to Zionists who are hell-bent on killing and oppressing innocent Muslims in Palestine’.¹¹⁴ According to one attendee at the AGM, the phrasing of the motion, which as it stood was libellous, was changed by the SU president before the motion was put to the vote. The motion was passed in the altered form.¹¹⁵

The ISoc’s religious interventions were therefore not confined to trying to change the lives and outlooks of Muslim students, but also had direct implications on a ‘secular’ campus and on students from a range of religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. This is because the ISoc cast their involvement in university politics in overtly religious terms. For example, the religious motivations behind the ISoc’s involvement in student politics were overtly expressed during the March 2010 annual SU election campaign. At the end of March, the ISoc circulated an email in which they announced the candidates that they would be publically backing. The content of the email was firstly intended to ‘help’ ISoc members establish whether or not voting in the SU elections was permissible on the basis that ‘there is no doubt that the candidate and team elected to represent students will undoubtedly involve themselves in things which are prohibited in the pure and perfect sharee’ah of

¹⁰⁸ Heena Taylor, ‘ISoc proposals cause chaos at SU general meeting’, *City Offline*, Issue 7, March 2010, <http://www.ionrosswaby.com/pdf/City_Offline_March_2010.pdf>, [accessed 7 July 2010]. According to one eye witness, this was over half of the room. Interview with [REDACTED].

¹⁰⁹ [REDACTED] quoted in City University London Students’ Union AGM, ‘Religion on Campus’ in ‘Part Three Motions’, 11 February 2010, <http://culsu.co.uk/files/minisites/19315/gm_part_3.pdf>, [accessed 3 August 2010], p.5.

¹¹⁰ [REDACTED] quoted in Taylor, ‘ISoc proposals cause chaos at SU general meeting’, *City Offline*.

¹¹¹ Taylor, ‘ISoc proposals cause chaos at SU general meeting’, *City Offline*; Interview with [REDACTED] *The Inquirer*, 25 June 2010.

¹¹² Taylor, ‘ISoc proposals cause chaos at SU general meeting’. *City Offline*.

¹¹³ City University London Students’ Union, ‘How the union works’, <http://www.culsu.co.uk/content/152225/how_the_union_works/>.

¹¹⁴ [REDACTED] quoted in City University SU AGM, ‘Part Three Motions’, p.5.

¹¹⁵ Interview with [REDACTED] and journalist for *The Inquirer*, 10 May 2010.

Islaam'. Having resolved that, although in some circumstances it was 'wrong to vote', in this instance Muslim students should vote because it was in the 'interests of Islaam... to ward off the greater evil', the ISoc leadership declared that ISoc members should vote for Team Edge (one of the 'slates' – a group of candidates who run in multi-seat elections on a common platform) on the basis that Team Edge were 'a team of young zealous brothers' who wanted to 'bring ease and comfort to the lives of Muslims' for whom it is 'no longer... easy to practice Islam on campus'. The email also clarified that, when voting for the SU president, ISoc members should cast their votes 'in favour of the less evil candidate' who would be more likely to 'aid the Islamic Society', and that they should ultimately vote for the Muslim candidate because they 'will be much less hostile than the other two'.¹¹⁶ Such tactics caused disruption on campus. After the elections, one of the presidential candidates emailed members of the student body to complain about the 'slandorous' allegations of the ISoc made against him.¹¹⁷ In the end, the university elections were declared void due to a number of breaches of the election regulations.¹¹⁸ What is particularly of note, however, is that the ISoc's campaign demonstrated not only a typically Wahhabi ideological reluctance to take part in elections (as it would involve 'engag[ing] themselves in haraam'), and the peddling of an exclusivist and 'aggrieved' Muslim identity, but also their identification of political opponents as enemies of Islam, their self-identification exclusively as *Muslims* and a concern only with Muslim-related issues.

ii) Members of the student body

Homosexuals

A senior member of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) society has said that he believed that certain members of the ISoc were responsible for a perceived rise in homophobia on campus during the last academic year.¹¹⁹ The ISoc extended invitations on at least one occasion to homophobic speakers – namely Abu Usamah, who has called for homosexuals to be thrown off mountaintops (see part one) – and homophobic remarks were also made in a few of the ISoc's *khutbahs*. In what appears to be a direct result of such ideological viewpoints, similar extreme homophobic statements were repeated online by some ISoc members. For example, in the comments on an *Inquirer* article on the ISoc, one individual writing under the name of 'Matthew' (who identified himself as an ISoc member)¹²⁰ wrote 'Oh and homosexuals being nailed down and and [*sic*] bleeding to death for three days? Who on earth said that!? As far as I kw [*sic*] Islam says stone them to death or throw them off a mountain. Bleeding to death?'¹²¹

Such extreme homophobic sentiment had clear practical effects on campus. The LGBT society member said that "[i]t feels like there has been a licence for homophobia with what has happened. I can't say statistically there has been more. But what I know is that there hadn't been any cases of

¹¹⁶ Private email obtained by Quilliam, dated 29 March 2010. This was reported in the *Inquirer* newspaper. Danny Crowley, 'Bickering as SU elections kick off', *The Inquirer*, 1 April 2010, <<http://cityinquirer.com/?p=2067>>, [accessed 9 July 2010].

¹¹⁷ Private email obtained by Quilliam, dated 29 March 2010. For privacy reasons, the candidate will remain unnamed.

¹¹⁸ Tony Slater, *Independent Review of City University Students' Union Election 2010* (UK Engage, May 2010), <http://culsu.co.uk/files/city_university_students_union_independent_review.pdf>, [accessed 1 August 2010].

¹¹⁹ Interview with ██████████, senior member of the LGBT society, 9 June 2010.

¹²⁰ 'I am an ISoc member like every Muslim at City is. Not a very high one at the mo but hopefully oneday [*sic*]. 'Matthew', 3 January 2010 at 3:30pm on thread below Singh, 'City ISoc defends radical preacher', *The Inquirer*. Journalists at *The Inquirer* also traced 'Matthew's IP address (and others on the same thread) back to an IP address that a self-identifying ISoc member had been using previously. Interviews with ██████████ *The Inquirer*, 6 July 2010; interview with ██████████ *The Inquirer*, 25 June 2010.

¹²¹ This can all be found in the comments feed below *The Inquirer* article. Singh, 'City ISoc defends radical Islamic preacher'.

homophobia before, and now there is one at least, that I am aware of".¹²² The case he was referring to took place in Spring 2010, when one homosexual student reported to the LGBT society that he had been openly called a "fag" on campus by a group of students, whom he believed to be Muslims (although he was unsure if they were ISoc members). The LGBT member admitted that he found the ISoc leadership intimidating during SU meetings, and admitted to feeling "scared" on campus. He also reported that some homosexual Muslim students at City initially contacted the LGBT society expressing an interest in joining and asking for contacts with other members, but never joined or attended the society's events. He felt that this was due to an atmosphere in which they were unable to openly express their sexual orientation.¹²³

Jewish students

According to a member of the Union of Jewish Students (UJS), Jewish students at City University had also become increasingly "nervous" and "fearful", finding the atmosphere on campus towards them "intimidating" and "hostile".¹²⁴ During the academic year, a number of incidents were alleged to have taken place on campus that contributed to this sense of unease. UJS reported that during 'Islam Awareness' week one visibly Jewish male student (wearing the skullcap) approached the ISoc's stall to complain about literature critical of Israel, but got chased away and had leaflets thrown at him by those staffing the stall. They also reported that a number of incidents took place in the library, where a group of male Muslim students were said to have intimidated several individual Jewish students through shoulder-barging and making derogatory remarks about Jewish people and their religion. Complaints were reportedly made by students involved to the SU management and UJS.¹²⁵ According to this interviewee, due to the increasing "tensions surrounding the interfaith dynamic", Jewish students were reported not to be using the interfaith prayer room, but instead to be praying alone in empty classrooms and lecture theatres. The interviewee also affirmed that the number of anti-Semitic cases reported at City University had increased in the last year or so, which they concluded was the result of the conflation of Israeli policy and British Jews (as 'Jew' had often become synonymous with 'Zionist'), and because anti-Semitic preachers, such as Murtaza Khan who had called Jews "filthy", had been invited onto City University's campus by the ISoc (see part one).¹²⁶

Muslims

As has been repeatedly illustrated, the ISoc leadership continually stifled alternative interpretations of Islam beneath their religiously austere beliefs and practices. Their hard-line proclamations regarding, for example, the wearing of the hijab, the punishment for 'intentionally' missing prayer, the rejection of Shi'i Muslims, and the restrictions imposed on the use of the multi-faith prayer facilities, left little manoeuvre for more mainstream and tolerant variants. It is little surprise that the ISoc's extremist behaviour alienated and upset a number of Muslim students on campus. In January 2010, in response to the ISoc's decision to host Abu Usamah, some Muslim students wrote an open letter to *The Inquirer*. This stated that the ISoc's 'religiously intolerant and sexist views' were not in accordance with their interpretation of Islam. It additionally said that '[w]e Muslims also have a responsibility to ensure that the moderate voice is heard louder by all, and not allow a religion

¹²² Interview with [REDACTED], senior member of LGBT society, 9 June 2010.

¹²³ Interview with [REDACTED], senior member of LGBT society, 9 June 2010.

¹²⁴ Interview with [REDACTED], a member of the Union of Jewish Students, 2 August 2010.

¹²⁵ Interview with [REDACTED], a member of the Union of Jewish Students, 2 August 2010.

¹²⁶ Interview with [REDACTED], a member of the Union of Jewish Students, 2 August 2010.

whose name means peace to be hijacked by people who advocate the antithesis'.¹²⁷ Whilst the fact that they are articulating an alternative moderate viewpoint is encouraging, the fact that these Muslims were too afraid to put their name to the article, signing their letter only as 'City Muslim Students', demonstrates the levels of intimidation that some Muslim students at City University were feeling. The ISoc's leadership appeared to be stifling other interpretations of Islam and monopolizing both the practice and the perception of Islam on campus.

Women

The highly conservative aspects of hard-line Wahhabism meant that the ideology of the ISoc's leadership was vehemently discriminatory towards women. In the *khutbahs*, men were told to only speak to women 'in times which are necessary' and that women should 'stay in their homes'. One ISoc member, posting under the name of 'Matthew' (see above) took such sentiments to a particularly offensive conclusion. On a comments feed below an *Inquirer* article he stated that 'Women being deficient is [sic] something the ISoc will need to address. And boy they have a perfect explanation.'¹²⁸

Such a socially backward ideological agenda had direct implications for female students on campus. For example, as seen above, after the gang attacks the ISoc president demanded that no female Muslim was to 'be in the classes, to be in university, or in the library, or anywhere around this campus at 4pm', thus negatively impacting these students academically. In addition, the ISoc also tried to implement gender segregation at public – rather than purely religious – events on campus. At the annual dinner in which they attempted to air a pre-recorded sermon by al-Awlaki (see above), the ISoc successfully implemented a strict policy of gender segregation, dividing attendees according to 'brothers' and 'sisters' by hanging a sign above the entrance,¹²⁹ and using a central screen in the room.¹³⁰ At the press conference that they organized in November 2009, they also planned to implement segregation, which resulted in the university authorities cancelling the event as it would have constituted a breach of university regulations that state '[a]ll members of the community should have equal and open access to these spaces...'¹³¹ The ISoc interpreted this as a sign of 'religious discrimination'.¹³²

A particularly alarming manifestation of these attitudes was anecdotally reported by one interviewee who described how one day a fellow female Muslim student attended classes without wearing the hijab, having previously always worn one. After that day, however, the interviewee observed that she never again came into university without wearing it, remarking that "she obviously felt the pressure, because she's never come in not wearing it again. You can tell – people would have pulled her aside and asked her what she's doing".¹³³ Although there was no way of

¹²⁷ Comment, 'A religion whose name means peace', *The Inquirer*, 21 January 2010, <<http://cityinquirer.com/?p=1871>>, [accessed 7 July 2010].

¹²⁸ This can all be found in the comments feed below *The Inquirer* article. Singh, 'City ISoc defends radical Islamic preacher'.

¹²⁹ Interview with [REDACTED], 17 May 2010.

¹³⁰ Interview with [REDACTED] at City University, 22 June 2010.

¹³¹ City University London, 'City University London community: our values and behaviours', *Security Policy and Procedures*, Appendix B. It also contradicts the Students' Union committee's beliefs on 'equal opportunities' where discrimination is not allowed on the basis of gender and support is given to female students to further equal rights. See 'Equal Opportunities' in 'Executive Committee Policy', <http://culsu.co.uk/files/minisites/19315/gm_exec_policy.pdf>, [accessed 3 August 2010].

¹³² City ISoc, 'Religious Discrimination on Campus'.

¹³³ Interview with [REDACTED], student at City University, 29 April 2010.

validating this particular case, it is not altogether unlikely, as similar incidents have anecdotally been reported on other university campuses. Actions, and attempted actions, such as these clearly impinge on a secular university environment in which it is prohibited for members to discriminate on the basis of gender.

General disruption

As well as alienating and intimidating various members of the student body, the activities of the ISoc also impacted on the academic environment of City University. A direct consequence of the prayer room controversy was to cause disruptions in the run-up to the exam-period. As the library sits directly above the area the ISoc dedicated to their prayer, various students reported disruption to their studies. According to one report, this provoked anger among non-Muslim students, with one quoted as saying “[t]his is a university, not a mosque”,¹³⁴ and another that “some people in the library that is just above came down and asked what was going on because they’d been disturbed. We didn’t want to cause any trouble, but we were trying to study and they were disturbing us. Quite a lot of arguments broke out...”¹³⁵ The first priority of any educational institution is inevitably to provide quality education and an environment which is conducive to academic study. As the Equality Challenge Unit noted in their report on campus cohesion, where disruptive incidents occur, ‘Consideration should be given to how such incidents can affect the ability of staff and students to make the most of their experiences at university or college’.¹³⁶ Despite the efforts of City University’s management, some students were unfortunately disturbed by the prayer protests in the run up to the summer exam period.

iii) Conclusion: negative effects on campus cohesion

Consequently, the actions of the ISoc’s leaders also impacted on other university students and the wider campus environment, alongside the impact they had on a relatively small number of ISoc members and affiliates. Not only did they cause disruptions in the run-up to the summer exam period, but the ISoc’s ideology and their – at times – aggressive assertion of a Muslim identity meant that the LGBT Society felt “scared”, some Muslims felt that their religion had been ‘hijacked’, Jewish students felt “intimidated” and female members of the student body faced being disadvantaged. It also meant that their involvement in student politics was purely *as Muslims*, rather than as individual members of the body politic, whereby they attempted to pass motions specific to a handful of Muslim students despite the secular nature of the university’s public space.

With the above factors taken together, the ISoc’s activities can be said to have had a negative and unsettling effect on the cohesive nature of the university environment. This can be summed up succinctly in the following points:

- **Rising separatism.** The ISoc has successfully encouraged many Muslim students to retreat into an isolated, paranoid and — at times — aggressive bloc which deliberately avoids any positive interaction with ‘the kuffar’ and asserts and identifies themselves solely as Muslims. At the same time, the ISoc attempted to impose its values on non-Muslims, for instance

¹³⁴ Student quoted anonymously in Tailor & Mahmood, ‘City ISoc go all out for separate prayer rooms’.

¹³⁵ Interview with ██████████ student at City University, 29 April 2010.

¹³⁶ This paper was intended to serve as an update to the 2005 Universities UK guidelines. Equality Challenge Unit, *Promoting good campus relations – an institutional imperative*, Update September 2007, p.3.

through attempting to change the university timetable to accommodate Friday prayers, to enforce a university-wide boycott of 'Zionist' Starbucks, and to sectarianise the SU elections through lobbying in favour of the 'Muslim-friendly' candidate. These polarising initiatives have arguably increased a sense of 'us and them' among both Muslims and non-Muslims.

- **Increasing threats to minority groups and growing campus tensions.** The aggressive rhetoric deployed at times by the ISoc and its members against non-Muslims ('the kuffar'), Shi'ah Muslims ('deviants'), women ('deficient'), and Sikhs ('sick'), further increased campus tensions. ISoc members have advocated the murder of homosexuals, and Muslim 'apostates', and have repeatedly incited hatred against Shia'hs. There were also reports of rising tensions between Muslim and Jewish students. Unsurprisingly, representatives of these groups reported feeling increasingly threatened and unsafe on campus.
- **Undermining of free speech.** The ISoc's intimidation made some public critics of the ISoc fear for their physical safety declaring that they felt "threatened" and "scared". In previous years, journalists at the student newspaper *The Inquirer* had a policy of avoiding stories relating to the ISoc. In the last academic year, at least one member of the student body was contemplating complaining to the university authorities, and another to the police. Intimidation was most notably targeted at a number of individual university staff and journalism students. However, on a smaller scale, other university students felt silenced, for example during the SU AGM where one student reported that his 'voice was not heard' because of the domination of the ISoc, and that this was 'intimidating'.
- **Undermining of religious pluralism.** The ISoc also sought to impose their version of Islam on other Muslims. ISoc members discouraged Muslims from praying in a multi-faith prayer room, enforced gender segregation at public events, declared that those who missed prayers were punishable by death and dismissed *shi'i* Muslims as 'rejectionist' and apostates. Other Muslim students spoke out against this, but in a limited capacity only, and were too fearful to identify themselves by name.
- **Disruption to the academic environment.** Of primary concern at an academic institution is ensuring a peaceful environment in which students are able to study without distraction. Although the university has successfully ensured that disruption was kept to a minimum, students complained that the 'protest prayers' which took place for over two months in the run up to the summer exams were held next to the library and consequently caused distraction.

It is clear that the ISoc's members, without necessarily breaking any laws, have had a chilling effect on the academic and social life at City University. Through exerting its own freedom of speech, expression and action, the ISoc successfully and deliberately reduced the freedoms of others, as well as undermined efforts to improve understanding between people from different racial, religious and social backgrounds. Thus, the ISoc leadership directly undermined two of the five key objectives put forward by the government for university campuses in 2007: 'to break down segregation amongst

different student communities' and 'to ensure student safety and campuses that are free from bullying, harassment and intimidation'.¹³⁷

To its credit, City University has recognised many of the serious problems arising from the ISoc's behaviour. After being alerted to the numerous problems on the ISoc's website, the university forced the ISoc to shut it down at the end of May 2010. It remains inactive. In addition, due to a number of transgressions of SU rules, the ISoc had their privileges as an officially recognised society removed by the SU in June 2010. These privileges include having access to their members' registration fees, being allowed to host a stall during Freshers' Week, and being allowed to host a website. As a result, under these restrictions, a society is unable to easily recruit members and is therefore in effect largely inactive. In response to this pressure, the ISoc signed an agreement promising not to again transgress SU regulations in return for having their privileges reinstated before the start of the new academic year. City University SU has said that any further transgressions of the rules will result in a removal of all privileges once more which would make the society once again unable to operate. On the subject of the prayer room, a number of meetings were held between the ISoc and the university authorities to try to come to some kind of arrangement but, at the time of writing, no resolution that both parties consent to has been found; the university authorities have no plans to institute changes to the current prayer room facilities.

Conclusion

On Christmas Day 2009, Umar Farouq Abdulmutallab, the former president of UCL Islamic Society, attempted to blow up a transatlantic airliner and kill its 290 passengers and crew. Until this point, however, any risk that Abdulmutallab posed to society was purely hypothetical. Although he had voiced extremist opinions, posted regularly on pro-jihadist websites, organised controversial events on the 'war on terror' at UCL, hosted extremist speakers there, adopted extreme Salafi opinions on a number of issues and had been in touch with known terrorist facilitators such as Anwar al-Awlaki, none of these necessarily meant that he would ever carry out an act of terrorism. After all, the only conclusive proof that a person has adopted a pro-terrorist ideology is when they try to carry out an attack.

At the same time, however, there are a number of pointers that can indicate when a person is at risk of adopting terrorist ideologies and methods. At City ISoc these factors were all present to a lesser or greater extent. Firstly, the ISoc promoted an exclusivist Muslim identity as an alternative to an apparently conflicting British-Muslim identity. In the words of the ISoc, the vision behind this new identity was the goal of 'one brotherhood, one sisterhood' which was 'united at all costs' against the 'black hearts' of the 'kuffar'. Often this was a deliberate process. The ISoc president had himself written in the ISoc's magazine that 'the Islamic Society acknowledge that the most important issue in the life of every individual and every society is its identity, as it is only the identity that characterises the value and status of a person and a nation as a whole'.¹³⁸ Secondly, to strengthen this point, the ISoc also concurrently stoked grievances, presenting all criticisms by non-Muslims of its activity as evidence of their intrinsic 'outright hatred for the Islamic way of life and all Muslims that adhere to

¹³⁷ Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, *Promoting Good Campus Relations, Fostering Shared Values and Preventing Violent Extremism in Universities and Higher Education Colleges*, (2007), pp.8-10.

¹³⁸ ██████████, 'Ameer's Address', *An Islaamic Magazine*, p.4.

the principles of their religion'. In the minds of the ISoc's leaders, Islam and the ISoc were one and the same; both were under attack, both should be defended at all costs. Having drawn this equivalence, the ISoc also explicitly equated its own troubles on campus with events in Palestine and Kashmir. This effectively linked local grievances to the global Islamist narrative and further entrenched its message that Muslims should unite against non-Muslims.

Thirdly, just as it had promoted an exclusivist Muslim identity as an alternative to an inclusive British-Muslim identity, the ISoc promoted its own radical ideology as a solution to these questions and challenges. This ideology, as promoted through the ISoc's sermons, website and choice of outside speakers, was by turns extremely conservative Wahhabi, politically Islamist and even potentially Salafi-Jihadi. This ideology, the linchpin of the ISoc's work that guided how its followers interpreted and reacted to events on campus and further afield, was unashamedly authoritarian, illiberal and reactionary, particularly in relation to its outlook on women and minority groups. The ISoc's leaders even came perilously close to promoting terrorist violence, for example through openly advocating 'defensive and offensive jihad' and exposing students to external extremists who are supportive of al-Qaeda. Finally, where this potential brew of identity, ideology and grievances exists, a charismatic recruiter or radicaliser can, advertently or inadvertently, transform it into a desire and intention to carry out violence. The presence of the president of the ISoc, who was described as "hypnotic" by one interviewee, provided the perfect vehicle for such transmission. The president was reinforced in this role by the apparently authoritative ideologues that the ISoc promoted through their website and their public events.

Taken altogether, the consequences of these factors were already visible on the campus of City University. Staff and students who have criticised the ISoc have been threatened; Jewish and LGBT students have been intimidated and prevented from openly expressing their identities; a police investigation into a serious attack on Muslim students collapsed, at least in part because of the ISoc's non-co-operation; some Muslim students have been disrupted from practicing their religion as they chose; students have had their exams and studies disrupted by the ISoc's ostentatious prayer protests. In addition to these existing problems, there is the threat, at the moment hypothetical, that a Muslim student influenced by the ISoc will at some future point be inspired, at least in part through the ISoc's radicalisation, to carry out an act of terrorism, whether in the UK or overseas. Such a threat will inevitably remain purely hypothetical until the moment that a terrorist attack is actually attempted. Yet to put such concerns in context, four senior members of British ISocs have already gone on to attempt or take part in conducting terrorist atrocities during the last decade. It should be stated, however, that the students responsible for such radicalisation, such as the leaders of City's ISoc, may not always be aware of the damage that their actions may ultimately cause to themselves and others.

The situation at City University during the 2009/10 academic year is both typical and atypical. Not every British university has problems on the same scale or scope. However, on many British campuses similar patterns may be seen. Possible long-term consequences of this include increased divisions between Muslims and non-Muslims, reduced freedom of expression on university campuses and an increased risk of radicalisation towards terrorism among Muslim students. This report provides a number of recommendations which can help mitigate such problems. However, such recommendations are meaningless without the political will to make them happen. The successful resolution of these potentially serious problems therefore depends on a range of actors

including university vice-chancellors, SU managers, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), teaching staff, the National Union of Students, along with ordinary students themselves, recognising both that the liberal traditions of British universities are under threat and that they are worthy of defending.

Recommendations

Students' union management

An individual is required who is responsible for the oversight and guidance of all the religious societies on campus. Working alongside the Students' Union (SU) management, this individual would be able to discourage societies from inviting intolerant speakers, manage disputes between student societies and coordinate a 'civic challenge' to sub-criminal extremism. This individual could also share information and expertise with similar staff members at other universities.

Students Unions should provide a clear point of contact for students to report, in confidence if necessary, any concerns relating to campus extremism. SUs should ensure that students know who they can contact regarding issues which involve political or religious extremism, including intolerant literature or prayer sermons, homophobia, gender or religious discrimination (NB. This could be the person who is responsible for oversight of religious societies - see above).

All speakers must comply with a university's statement of values. In instances where speakers incite violence, the incident should be brought to the attention of the law enforcement agencies. In instances where the speaker incites hatred but not violence, such views should face a 'civic' challenge from students or civil society groups.

All issues with student societies on campuses should be dealt with by the students' union (SU) management through standardised procedures. This will help to break down the Islamist narrative of Muslims being unfairly targeted as part of a 'war on Islam'. To achieve this, SU rules and regulations need to be exhaustive open and robust and, where necessary, reviewed.

To ensure a 'civic challenge', SU events teams should ensure that all public events are appropriately advertised across the university campus in order that any potentially problematic viewpoints get the opportunity to be challenged by students. This should include those events hosted in prayer rooms, which must be considered as public spaces.

Students' union events teams should adopt a policy of horizon scanning for speakers who are not familiar to them. At the moment there are a limited number of speakers who are doing tours of university campuses, so often information will be readily available online. Where information is not available, or is insufficient, please contact Quilliam.

Gender segregation at public events should be prohibited by SU management in accordance with a university's equality guidelines, although such regulations should not be extended to events intended purely for religious worship (i.e. Friday prayers).

Students' Union management should encourage the creation and use of neutral multi-faith prayer facilities. Multi-faith environments encourage inter-faith negotiation and interaction, and lessen the likelihood that the space will be taken over by one particular faith group or religious society. Student societies should be prevented from putting up posters or storing literature in this room. This will measure will prevent this space from being 'colonised' by any single faith group.

Prayer rooms are public spaces and should be treated accordingly rather than left entirely unregulated. Those who conduct Friday prayers should be subject to the same regulations as speakers invited to other public events.

Students' Union management must ensure that all student society websites share the same URL as the SU webpage, and are prohibited from publishing on external websites. This will guarantee a measure of liability on the part of the SU for the website content of student societies.

University and students' union management

Universities should encourage students to challenge Islamist extremism on campus. They must be careful to protect the rights of students who put forward these challenges, for example by ensuring that students who do so are not subjected to intimidation, vexatious complaints or other threats to their freedom of speech.

Students should have access to shared spaces where informal discussions can take place between those of different backgrounds, in order to help facilitate this vital 'civic challenge'. This could include, but must not be limited to, a multi-faith prayer room.

The representation of students should be through universities' democratic structures. Too often universities incorrectly assume that societies are representative of specific religious, political and cultural groups – for example, that Islamic Societies speak on behalf of all Muslim students. They may also incorrect assume, for instance, that Muslim should be solely represented through ISocs rather than through a more diverse range of student groups. Adopting such a policy risks reinforcing extremists' beliefs that Muslims should be solely defined by their religion.

Government

More funding is needed for Prevent at universities. This should be tightly focused on universities where extremist ideologies are being propagated and not simply where there are large numbers of Muslims studying or living. Target universities should be identified with contributions from community groups, independent experts and local police, as well as the security services.

The Charity Commission (CC) must provide effective oversight of students' unions (following the new charity legislation that requires SUs to become registered charities). Where possible, university management need to speed up the process of instituting the new charity trustee boards so that there is a vital measure of external monitoring and liability surrounding student societies.

National and local conferences could be arranged for university vice chancellors and SU managers to clarify their role in Prevent, explain to them what problems exist on campuses, and to discuss how best to move forward.

Training and clear guidance needs to be given to SU presidents and officers, who at present do not understand the problems on campuses and the tactics used by Islamists. These front-line individuals need to be provided with the tools to identify where radicalisation may be occurring.