

'COMPELLING, INSIGHTFUL, AND HIGHLY READABLE.'

— PETER R. NEUMANN, AUTHOR OF *RADICALIZED*

THE RACE

**THE VICIOUS CIRCLE
OF ISLAMIST AND
FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM**

JULIA EBNER

The early twenty-first century has been defined by a rise in Islamist radicalisation and a concurrent rise in far-right extremism. This book explores the interaction between the ‘new’ far right and Islamist extremists and considers the consequences for the global terror threat. Julia Ebner argues that far-right and Islamist extremist narratives – ‘The West is at war with Islam’ and ‘Muslims are at war with the West’ – complement each other perfectly, making the two extremes rhetorical allies and building a spiralling torrent of hatred: ‘The Rage’. By looking at extremist movements both online and offline, she shows how far-right and Islamist extremists have succeeded in penetrating each other’s echo chambers as a result of their mutually useful messages. Based on first-hand interviews, this book introduces readers to the world of reciprocal radicalisation and the hotbeds of extremism that have developed, with potentially disastrous consequences, in the UK, Europe and the US.

Julia Ebner is a terrorism and extremism researcher based in London. She is Research Fellow at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and Global Fellow at the Project for the Study of the 21st Century. She spent two years working for the world’s first counter-extremism organisation Quilliam, where she led research projects on terrorism prevention for the European Commission and the Kofi Annan Foundation, and gave evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on far-right extremism. In her role as coordinator of the pan-European network Families Against Terrorism and Extremism (FATE), she carried out radicalisation-prevention projects across Europe and North Africa. On the basis of her research, Julia advises parliamentary working groups, frontline workers and tech firms, speaks at international conferences and delivers workshops in schools and universities. She regularly writes for the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, and gives interviews in English, German and French on the BBC, CNN, ZDF, ARD, France24, Al Jazeera, LBC and others.

‘Julia Ebner shows how Islamist and right-wing extremism are two sides of the same coin. Her analysis is compelling, insightful, and highly readable.’

– Peter R. Neumann, author of *Radicalized*

‘*The Rage* reads like a novel but unfortunately its story is non-fiction: Islamist hotheads and those on the far-right polarise our societies and the moderates in the middle lose ground to populists who play politics with extremism.’

– Alex P. Schmid, Editor-in-Chief, *Perspectives on Terrorism*

‘An original and highly informative book on one of the core security issues of our time. *The Rage* demonstrates powerfully how apparently opposite strands of extremism feed so readily off each other and, in doing so, it illuminates the extent of the problems facing us. Essential reading.’

– Paul Rogers, Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies,
Bradford University and author of *Irregular War*

‘An excellent debut: informed, well-researched and thoughtful. Ebner traces the increasingly important interdependency of far-right and Islamist movements, and offers humane, smart ways through the impasse.’

– Jamie Bartlett, author of *Radicals*

‘This book brings alive the causes and consequences of far-right extremism and Islamist radicalism in our midst. These two forms of rising bigotry threaten to tear our societies apart. Ebner exposes them both and powerfully calls on us to defend liberal tolerance. *The Rage* is an excellent master course for those seeking to understand the growth of fanaticism.’

– Ed Husain, author of *The Islamist*

‘Julia Ebner has written a fine book, approaching the vexing topic of “reciprocal radicalisation” with admirable ethnographic empathy. Crisply written, *The Rage* journeys through the leading and often intertwined forms of extremism today: jihadi Islamists and the far-right. The mirroring of these violent narratives is striking, and is revealed here through both eye-opening vignettes and wide-ranging empirical data. Without doubt, *The Rage* is *the* most important contribution to this burgeoning subject to date, and surely will be of use to scholars, policy-makers and the wider public alike.’

– Matthew Feldman, Professor of Contemporary History,
Teesside University

‘Julia Ebner draws on the very latest evidence to deliver important new analysis of two seemingly opposing forms of extremism and their mutually reinforcing worldviews. The perpetrators of most terrorist and violent extremist acts committed in recent years have followed some form of radicalisation process; Ebner’s book makes an important contribution to our understanding of the circumstances in which such radicalisation can take place.’

– Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol

‘There couldn’t be a more appropriately timed book than *The Rage* by Julia Ebner. With an up close and personal view of two sides of the extremist coin, Ebner lays out the nearly identical narratives between the extreme right wing and Islamists who align with Al Qaeda and ISIS. Locked at the hip, these two groups are in a perpetual battle to destroy anyone who gets in the way of their ideology. Both groups use remarkably similar techniques to radicalise recruits, preying upon a need for identity, belonging and purpose. The personal narrative breathes life into the voices of those who believe they are on a just cause even as that cause ends in terror for others. *The Rage* is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand the interconnected nature of extremism.’

– Chris Sampson, co-author of *Hacking ISIS*

*To Hilde,
my great-grandmother, who has always
been a source of inspiration and strength*



*In memory of Jo Cox,
who fought for breaking the vicious circle*

THE RAGE

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF
ISLAMIST AND FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

JULIA EBNER

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Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland
Alt-Right	Alternative Right
BNP	British National Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DGSE	General Directorate for External Security
DGSI	General Directorate for Internal Security
EDL	English Defence League
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FPÖ	Freedom Party of Austria
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
Hogesa	Hooligans Against Salafists
IIE	Institute of Islamic Education
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (alternatively ISIL, IS or Daesh)
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
LIFG	Libyan Islamic Fighting Group
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEGIDA	Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
UKIP	UK Independence Party

Movements

Islamist Extremist

Al Qaeda
Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)
Boko Haram
Die Wahre Religion (The True Religion)
Grey Wolves (Graue Wölfe)
Hamas
Hezbollah
ISIS (Islamic State/IS or Daesh)
Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)
Millatu Ibrahim
Al Muhajiroun
Muslim Brotherhood
Al Nusra Front
Al Shabaab
Sharia4UK
Tablighi Jamaat
Taliban or Tehrik-I Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

Far-Right Extremist

Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)
Bamberg Group
Britain First (BF)
British Movement (BM)
British National Party (BNP)
Combat 18
The Daily Stormer
English Defence League (EDL)

Français de Souche (FdSouche)
Freitaler Gruppe
Front National (FN)
Frontpage Mag
Gates of Vienna
Hooligans Against Salafists (Hogesa)
Les Identitaires or Die Identitäre
Jihad Watch
Ku Klux Klan (KKK)
Liberty GB
National Action (NA)
National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD)
National Front (NF)
North West Infidels
Oldschool Society
Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (PEGIDA)
Pro NRW
Sharia Watch UK
Stop Islamisation of America (SIOA) or American Freedom Defense
Initiative
Stormfront

Acknowledgements

‘YOU GOTTA BE CRAZY’ IS PROBABLY THE SENTENCE THAT I’VE HEARD THE most over the past few months. I admit, I have done some peculiar things to complete this book. I went undercover to far-right and Islamist extremist events, had drinks with EDL marchers, chats with ISIS supporters, neo-Nazis, would-be terrorists and internet trolls, clashes with PEGIDA supporters and strolled around in the Parisian suburb of Sevran, which ranks high on the list of foreign fighter hotbeds. I interviewed homeless people, refugees, hackers, intelligence officers, former jihadists and far-right militants, had my avatar Twitter accounts shut down countless times, got held up in security checks for carrying inflammatory literature and internal teaching materials of extremist groups with me, and spent the US elections night monitoring the social media feed of extremists. All this would have been neither possible nor safe without the support, help and protection of people from all over the world. Throughout the entire research and writing process I have enjoyed the support of my family, friends, colleagues, as well as strangers. Every single one of them has made a substantial contribution to this book – from its first lines that were drafted in a remote Zen military academy on a mountain in China, to interviews on planes, in hotel lobbies and at the busy Medina market in Tunis, to the last few edits made while café crawling in London.

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that showed in his way of saying ‘the current wording doesn’t quite make sense’ even when ‘this sentence is rubbish’ or ‘were you drunk when you wrote this?!’ would have been just as legitimate. I equally thank my excellent production editors Sophie Campbell and Paul Tompsett, as well as my great publicity managers Ash Khan, Tia Ali, Clare Kathleen Bogen and Rory Gormley.

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Preface

THURSDAY 16 JUNE 2016 BEGAN AS A NORMAL, MILD SPRING DAY IN THE WEST Yorkshire town of Birstall. The newspaper headlines that day were dominated by the upcoming Brexit referendum and the aftermath of the Orlando shooting. Hundreds of families were still mourning the victims killed four days earlier in the deadliest mass shooting in US history, committed by Islamist extremist Omar Mateen. At around 1 p.m., outside Birstall town library, far-right extremist Thomas Mair shot and stabbed MP Jo Cox as she was on her way to a constituency meeting.¹ Cox died of her injuries later that day. She left behind her loving husband Brendan Cox and two small children. This book has its origins in this sombre June week that illustrated the simultaneous surge of far-right and Islamist extremism.

The place where Jo Cox died is 15 minutes away from Dewsbury. The ringleader of the 2005 London tube bombings Mohammad Sidique Khan lived there, as did Britain's youngest suicide bomber Talha Asmal.² Dewsbury and its neighbouring towns have gained notoriety in the tabloid and broadsheet press for its thriving Islamist extremist scene. Its far-right activities are less widely known to the public. Yet, at least seven far-right groups who share anti-Muslim or xenophobic ideologies are active in West Yorkshire. White supremacist and patriotic parties that have turned the area into one of Britain's primary far-right strongholds include: Britain First, the National Front (NF) Party, anti-Islamisation street protest movement the English Defence League (EDL), and ultra-violent group The British Movement (BM).³ Jo Cox's death brought the threat posed by far-right radicalism back to public conscience.

In the past, the media has given disproportionate attention to Islamist extremist attacks but has been reluctant to label violence motivated by right-wing ideologies as terrorism. The Norwegian far-right extremist Anders Breivik shot dead 77 civilians in 2011. Headlines described him as a 'murderer' and 'killer'.⁴ Omar

Mateen, who killed 49 civilians in Orlando's Pulse Nightclub, was immediately called a terrorist. The Munich shooting of July 2016, the Quebec City mosque shooting of January 2017, the Portland train stabbing of May 2017, vehicle attacks in Finsbury Park in June 2017 and in Charlottesville in August 2017 were all far-right-inspired incidents. Although there is enough evidence concerning their perpetrators' political and ideological motivations, they are not often referred to as 'terrorist attacks' by politicians and the media. As a result, few people today know that attacks motivated by anti-Muslim or xenophobic sentiments take place 50 per cent more often in Western countries than those inspired by Islamist extremist ideologies. While 130 violent far-right incidents occurred across the US, Australia, the UK, France and Germany between January 2012 and September 2016, only 84 such attacks were staged by Islamist extremists.⁵ The distorted depiction of today's terrorist threat landscape has not only led to a perceptual gap among the general public; could it also be responsible for the lack of academic research on the increasingly concerning dynamics between far-right and Islamist extremists?

This book stems from my desire to gain a better understanding of the vicious circle of spiralling extremism known as 'reciprocal radicalisation'. Comprehending the drivers and dynamics behind mutual breeding grounds for radicalisation is a crucial step to preventing future terrorist attacks. The murder of Jo Cox not only deeply moved me; it also motivated me to keep defending her belief that we are 'far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us'.⁶ Building on these common grounds, I will try to trace back the sources of today's widening divisions in this book.

Introduction

DRINKING STRONGBOW WITH FAR-RIGHT MILITANTS IS NOT MY NORMAL idea of a casual Saturday morning. Discussing a caliphate in the UK with Islamist extremists is also not a normal Saturday evening. Nevertheless, on 5 November 2016, I broke my routine and, within a mere 20 hours, plunged into two radically opposed extremist worlds that I would soon realise are two sides of the same coin.

When I began my research on extremism, I did not realise how biased I was. I grew up without material worries in Austria, attended university abroad and read the *New York Times*. I never questioned the universality of human rights, the indispensability of democracy and the benefits of cultural diversity. As a former researcher at the London-based counter-extremism organisation Quilliam I spent my days studying radicalisation. And yet, when I first tried to put myself into the shoes of extremists – whether far-right or Islamist – I failed miserably. Throughout this research I was exposed to people I would never normally have talked to and heard stories I would have never heard otherwise. My research made me realise that had I been taught a different narrative, I would have thought, acted and reacted differently. The stories we are told determine how we construct our worldviews.

The first step in tackling extremism is to listen to extremists' stories. This is, of course, best done from within – where the unfiltered conversations happen. It was for this reason that I decided to go undercover to infiltrate both far-right and Islamist extremist groups. Coincidentally, both the EDL and Hizb ut-Tahrir happened to organise events on Saturday 5 November 2016.

Inside Extremist Groups

Infiltration of the EDL

The EDL's Facebook page had announced a national protest against 'Muslim grooming gangs' in the English town of Telford. When the *Sunday Mirror*¹ dubbed the town the 'child sex abuse capital', it did far-right groups a favour. As the rape gang members were of Pakistani descent, the EDL was quick in adding an 'Islamic' to the label. The protest was not just against the 'Telford child rape gang', it was also against 'the cover-up by officials and churches' and 'Islamification in the UK'.²

I am not the only one to get off at Telford railway station on that chilly Guy Fawkes morning. Many of the disembarking passengers wear remembrance poppy flowers on top of their EDL-branded jumpers. St George flags and beers change hands and there is an agitated atmosphere in the air. 'Welcome to the Islamic child rape capital,' says a man in a grim voice. They all seem to know each other and immediately identify me as an outsider. But they are curious enough to enquire. 'Are you also here for the protest?' one of the men asks. He is probably in his late forties and has tattoos inked across every inch of his skin not covered by his jeans, T-shirt and leather jacket. I nod. Technically I'm not lying; I have come here for the protest. He gives me an odd look.

'Are you surprised?' I ask.

'You're not English, are you?' he responds. His alcoholic breath momentarily stuns me; it's only 11 a.m. after all.

'No: Austrian.' His forced smile indicates he is not convinced.

'Where do you live?'

'London,' I reply.

'You came all the way up for this?'

'It's a national protest, Danny,' his friend interjects.

'Is this your first one?'

'Yes.'

Danny seems amused. 'Oh don't worry darling – we'll take care of you then.' As long as I am not exposed as a spy, I assume.

'How often have you been to these ... protests?' I am careful to use their vocabulary.

'Oh, I stopped counting.'

We walk up to the town centre, which obviously has heightened security. Police officers from all over the country are deployed; one of them tells me later he came all the way from South Wales.

Danny tells me about the early times of the EDL. He was one of its first followers, when the membership numbers were still in the tens of thousands.³ He takes out his mobile and starts playing an EDL song. 'I'm here to protest, right, 'cos I'm going on a march 'cos I want Britain to be about British. I want Britain to be about British.'

I breathe deeply. Is he really playing this song to an Austrian living in the UK?

'We've got inter-racial law, and the Muslamic infidel; they're trying to get their law over our country.' He waits for my reaction.

'Ah,' I respond, not sure what to do or say. 'Will you be playing this at the march?'

'Yes.' He closes his eyes in what seems to be a melancholic daydream. 'You know, it has changed a lot over the years. In the beginning there used to be many more but now not so much.' I am not sure if he means events or people. Probably both.

The police are still following us – on horses, in cars, by foot.

'You know these things can turn violent.' It was more of an observation than a threat, though it did nothing to lessen my fear of that violence. I believe him. He has deep bruises below his eyes and some of his teeth are missing.

We stop in front of a café. At first I assume that we are going to have breakfast and I feel my mood brighten; at least a morning cappuccino would feel normal. But the cans of beer being swigged by the EDL members quickly puts a stop to that prospect. Danny greets several men, who seem to be friends that he hasn't seen in a while. 'Did you hear, George is in prison?' he asks them. Some are too busy staring at me to hear what he says. 'Oh, this is Julia.' He gives me a pat on the shoulder. 'It's her first time. Let's look after her.' We have one hour left before the march starts. 'Want to join us at the pub?' Danny asks. 'Your drink is on me!' I decline politely and instead take a seat on a bench outside next to a young woman who looks slightly bored.

Sarah has a slim face with a slim nose and even slimmer eyebrows. Her hair is dyed red but her hairline reveals that her natural colour is a light brown. 'Strongbow?' she offers.

‘Sure,’ I say. Somehow a cider first thing in the morning with a woman unimpressed by this motley gathering of men seems to fit. I help myself to a can.

‘The police made us rip off the question marks.’ She points to a small pile of paper. Indeed, every single one of the flyers has a torn-off edge. The question on top of the paper, ‘Islam a peaceful religion?’, now reads like a statement. But below this the paper quotes 12 Qur’anic verses that contain calls for violent action. These are, however, incomplete verses quoted out of context. Even the most hard-core Salafi English translations of the Qur’an do not contain passages such as ‘Terrorize and behead those who believe in scriptures other than the Koran’ or ‘The unbelievers are stupid’.

‘You can keep one,’ she says. I take a flyer, hoping that no one will look into my bag later.

‘How did you get involved?’ I ask Sarah. She admits that at first she didn’t know how to go about it, though she had been following the EDL on social media for a long time. ‘And then my boyfriend met Luke, who introduced us to all the others.’ She gets up. ‘Paul!’ An attractive man in what looks like EDL-branded pyjamas turns around, walks over to us and gives her a kiss on the cheek. ‘We have a six-month-old baby girl. We are here because we want our Mia to grow up in a better world, right Paul? I don’t want to be scared for her to be raped in the street. I don’t want her to end up jobless one day.’ For lack of comforting words, I resort to downing my cider. ‘We can’t continue to pretend all is fine, when it’s so obviously not. Now we have to be careful, though. The police know Paul.’ Most of their friends are involved with the EDL too. ‘It’s like a family – we protect each other,’ she says.

‘Protect from ...?’ I ask.

‘Well, it’s not us who are the aggressive ones but the left and the Muslims – they always start the fighting.’ In the background, I hear them chanting: ‘Muslim penises – get out of our streets.’

‘I’ll take another one, yeah?’ A middle-aged guy sits down on the opposite side of our table and opens his Strongbow. ‘Hi, I’m Sam.’ He leans over the table to shake my hand. Sam has a friendly smile, even if some of his teeth are missing. It doesn’t take long until he tells me his story. ‘I used to be a security guard at Gatwick Airport, so I couldn’t tell anyone at first about my joining the League because they might think you are racist. You have to be careful with who

you are seen.’ He unfolds an EDL flag with pride, revelling in the moment.

It is Sam’s firm belief that ‘there is no such thing as a moderate Muslim’. To him, all Muslims are the same. He thinks that it is only a question of time until the moderates turn to extremism. His conclusion is that ‘you cannot trust anyone who subscribes to that religion because they wouldn’t say “no”, if an extremist asks them for help’. In the same way you would do anything for your militant mates here, if they ask you to? I don’t ask that question however; the cider hasn’t given me quite enough courage. Instead, I listen to his analysis of the political dynamics in the Middle East. His detailed historical knowledge surprises me. How naive was I to assume that all EDLers were ignorant, uninformed thugs?

When one of his friends takes a seat next to him, Sam has a sudden shift of inspiration and starts talking about a halal butcher in Bradford: ‘and he doesn’t serve non-Muslims’. That was not his only concern: ‘they live in our houses, rape our women, it’s gradual but they are slowly taking over everything that is precious to us’. I can sense his desperation; he feels powerless. ‘The politicians don’t listen; they think we are extreme and call us racist.’

‘So what’s the solution?’ I ask without having an answer myself. ‘Maybe we need to nuclear bomb everything and start from scratch.’

His friend laughs. I cough, and spill cider over my trousers. Sam instantly gets up to fetch a napkin and offers to lend me his scarf in case I get cold.

‘Liberalism and tolerance don’t work, we have seen that. The only solution is war,’ he adds as he sits back down. Apparently he shares an apocalyptic world vision with the very people he blames for every failure in British society. As I raise a cynical eyebrow he is overcome by a moment of weakness. ‘Maybe it needs extremism to fight extremism,’ he utters almost under his breath.

The rally starts and, with every metre it moves forward, the crowd’s angry chants grow louder. The friendly chats and warm smiles in front of the café almost feel surreal now; it is as though rage has erased all other emotions. I stay in the background, away from the cameras. A Quilliam staff member caught in the midst of anti-Islamic banners, crosses and British flags would make for a good headline. As I mingle with the journalists instead, my eyes meet Sam’s disappointed gaze. ‘Come on, she’s one of them,’ I hear

one of his friends say before he shoots me a dirty look. To avoid sharing a train compartment with them, I leave the rally early. I feel guilty and confused: I had not been prepared to meet a protective drinking buddy, a caring mother and a well-read gentleman at the rally. What led them to support one of Britain's most extreme anti-Muslim hate groups? How did they accumulate so much rage?

On the train I start reading Hizb ut-Tahrir's political handbook *From Darkness into Light*,⁴ trying to make sense of Chapter 4, 'The Enemies of Islam', while my head is still filled with EDL chants. As I get off the train, the Qur'anic verse, 'Mocked were (many) apostles before thee; but their scoffers were hemmed in by the thing that they mocked', echoes in my head.

Infiltration of Hizb ut-Tahrir

I arrive at Mile End Road just before 7 p.m. The street is barely lit, which plays to my advantage, as the two men standing in front of the entrance won't be able to make out my face. 'I'm here for the Kashmir event.' They immediately let me in. I climb up the stairs to the second floor where I find a large conference room that can host roughly 300 people with a speaker's podium in the front. A man stands at the door to welcome the audience. As he looks at me, I can sense a touch of suspicion. Luckily, he does not realise that I worked for someone he considers a traitor. My boss, Maajid Nawaz, was a leading recruiter for Hizb ut-Tahrir. Now he runs Quilliam. 'You have to go over there,' he finally tells me and points to the very back of the room: the segregated women's section.

I sit down next to a group of women with colourful hijabs because they look friendly. A woman called Sana immediately starts talking to me. Sana is eloquent, well-read and holds a degree from Westminster University. At least in the women's section she appears to know everyone. 'I often come to these events,' she tells me. 'What are you doing in London? Are you a student?'

I decide not to lie. 'No, I finished my studies not so long ago. Now I'm doing research on the rise of the far-right and anti-Muslim hate crimes. I actually just came from an anti-EDL demo in Telford.' I go on before she can ask me more about my research affiliation.

It works; Sana picks up on the EDL topic. 'Oh, what's their leader called again ... Tom ... Tommy ...'

I decide to help her. ‘Tommy Robinson? He’s no longer their leader but—’

‘Oh right, he’s with Quilliam now’, she interrupts. Quilliam’s engagement with Tommy in 2013 sparked a national controversy and generated a creative set of rumours. To put it simply, Quilliam succeeded in decapitating the EDL, resulting in a membership drop from over 25,000 to only a few hundred. But it failed to deradicalise Tommy, who would later return to his anti-Muslim rhetoric after having served time in prison.

I can’t afford to put Sana off, so I stay in character.

‘Interesting,’ I mumble.

But the girl next to me is curious. ‘What’s Quilliam?’ It is obvious that she was dragged along to this event – she fits in as little as I do, with her strong eye make-up and long, loose hair.

‘The bigoted advocacy group that this traitor Maajid Nawaz heads.’ Sana is now almost shouting. I keep my head down as more and more people are arriving. Most of the around-300 seats are filled up by now. I am glad when she returns to the EDL topic. ‘Far-right groups like the EDL are just manifestations of the evil that exists within our society. In a way, I actually pity them.’ For her, EDL’s actions are the product of larger ideas that are circulated by the media and politicians. They are representative of all the evil in Western societies. ‘We have to ask where they get their ideas from. Islamophobic hate crimes are rising,’ she says; ‘incidents on public transport have become more frequent especially. But we just have to be patient; eventually it will be those who mock the Prophet who will be hemmed in,’ she says, pursing her lips.

When the UK chairman of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Dr Abdul Wahid, begins his speech, the room immediately falls silent; only a baby is crying in the back. After welcoming everyone, Dr Wahid starts talking about the oppression of Muslims in Kashmir. I’m having a *déjà vu* moment. When he speaks of the rape of Kashmiri women by Indians I am reminded of the speeches that I heard earlier in the day. The wording he uses is similar to that used by the EDL leaders: ‘rape epidemic’ and ‘no respect for women’ are recurring terms. Dr Wahid thinks of Kashmir as just one example of the worldwide oppression of Muslims. He lets the next speaker shed light on what he means by that. Mohammad Atif explicitly addresses the rise of the far right across Europe, the US and Australia. ‘Western countries

all across the world are voting for anti-Muslim politicians,' he says. His voice is calm but I can sense his agitation as he talks about what he calls 'the global discrimination against Muslims'.

'France banned students from wearing the hijab, Germany recently banned the niqab in schools, in the Netherlands Geert Wilders wants to ban the Qur'an (his party ironically calls itself The Freedom Party), in Australia the One Nation Party called for a ban on Muslim migration, and, of course, let's not forget about the circus we see in the US right now.'

In the same breath, he also refers to former British Prime Minister David Cameron's extremism-prevention strategy, the Prevent programme, which he believes is merely a tool to spy on Muslims. 'All the liberalism and tolerance that they talk about seems insecure and fragile. We have seen that democracy doesn't manage to secure the rights of minorities. Muslims are literally bullied in the West, all under the guise of freedom. Western politicians have let this happen. What happened 70 years ago is happening again today. Muslims are today's Jews.'

'Are we dreaming?' the next speaker, Rizwan Sheikh, asks. 'Liberation, jihad – in fact, defensive jihad – is the only solution.' He explains that jihad means fighting against the *kufir* occupation and liberating the world from capitalism and colonialism. 'There is no greater evil than these twin sisters.' This required jihad, according to Rizwan, was exemplified by tribal militias who liberated areas of Kashmir during the Indo-Pakistani war of 1947–8. 'The very same people are being bombed now in the War on Terror, which we now know is war on Islam.' In the light of what he calls 'the global war on Islam' it is necessary for all Muslims to return to their true identity and to unite 'as a brotherhood' to confront all enemies. Liberation, however, will only solve half of the problem, according to Hizb ut-Tahrir. Once the lands are liberated, one must give them a system. Their proposition for a post-liberation system is a *khilafah*, which will unlock the potential of all these lands.

'Now we will take questions from the audience,' the chairman concludes. He explicitly invites women to submit questions in writing, if they prefer not to speak out in front of everyone. The woman beside me looks at me in anticipation. 'Do you want to ask a question?'

I hesitate. But she takes my silence as a 'yes' and gives me a piece of paper. I write down my question and hand it back to her.

‘You don’t want to stand up and ask it yourself?’

‘I’m shy.’

She nods, walks up to the barriers that separate us from the men’s section and submits my paper to the front. The chair clears his throat as if to gain time to make out my sloppy handwriting. I instantly regret not having written more legibly; what if he calls me to the front to help him decipher my letters? ‘What can be done against the rise of right-wing parties and anti-Muslim hatred across the world?’ he finally says, addressing the question to Mohammad Atif.

It’s impressive to watch Mohammad skilfully link the grievances resulting from anti-Muslim incidents to the wider failure of democratic and liberal systems and to the conclusion that the only alternative solution is to establish a caliphate. ‘Whether it is Modi, Trump, Wilders – these people have a free run. There are about 60 Muslim leaders worldwide, yet none of them has spoken up against these bigots. There is complete silence because they don’t actually represent Muslims. The War on Terror, the financial crash and the serious economic problems unleashed in the West all derived from the capitalist system.’ This will only be resolved if the *ummah* has its own state, media and foreign policy,’ Mohammad explains.

‘I have to go,’ I whisper in Sana’s ear.

‘Okay, you should come to our other events. And ... don’t get too involved with the EDL,’ she adds, winking.

As I leave the conference, my head becomes a peculiar meeting point for EDL rally chants, Qur’anic lines and Guy Fawkes fireworks. The two 5 November excursions into the mindsets of far-right and Islamist extremists are a good starting point for exploring the parallels and dynamics between them.

You Hate Me and I Hate You

On the next morning, I find a little note in my bag: ‘Stay safe as we are approaching the final battle.’ The ink is purple, the handwriting shaky. While speculating about the originator of the note, I realise that it could be from a member of either the EDL or Hizb ut-Tahrir. In many ways the rhetoric and *modus operandi* of the EDL and Hizb ut-Tahrir are strikingly similar. Both are inciting hatred against the other, which is presented as representative of society as a whole. Both