

**Denunciation and the construction of norms in group conflict: examples from an
Al-Qaeda-supporting group**
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Abstract

In situations of violent group conflict, group members often argue about how to deal with the outgroup. While some argue for aggression, force and separation, others argue for negotiation and cooperation. Each side attempts to persuade the group that their own position is normative and is most in line with the interests and essence of the group. These arguments often involve denunciations of opponents as disloyal or deviant. In such situations, definitions of group identities and norms, and what counts as loyalty and deviance, are therefore disputed. This paper analyses how a UK-based Al-Qaeda-supporting organisation denounces 'moderate' Muslims in the UK who engage with secular institutions and who ally themselves with non-Muslims in political disputes. Drawing on theological, historical and political arguments, a prescriptive norm is constructed whereby the correct behaviour of Muslims in the West is to avoid participation in secular political systems and to avoid political cooperation with non-Muslims. Muslims who are seen as breaking these norms are denounced and denigrated in a variety of ways by assigning them a range of deviant identity positions. Denunciations involve explanatory accounts which construct opponents as unworthy representatives of the group based on their deviation from Islam, or from ignorance, cowardice, mental weakness or self-interest. This paper illustrates that the practice of denunciation is an important aspect of the organisation of group conflict. Finally, it argues that it is dangerous for social psychologists to treat group norms and prototypes as consensual.

In situations of violent group conflict, group members often argue over issues such as the definition of group identities, norms, loyalty and deviance. Those arguing for separation or violence ('hawks') might construct cooperation with the outgroup as disloyal and counter-normative. In contrast, those rejecting violence and advocating positive contact ('doves') might construct violence and disengagement as counter-normative and deviant. Each side attempts to persuade the group that their own position is normative and is most in line with the interests and essence of the group. This entails a claim that they are the most authentic representatives of the group, and their opponents have no claim to speak as a group member. This paper examines how a UK-based Al-Qaeda-supporting organisation characterizes political contact and cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims in the UK as counter-normative, and those Muslims who do advocate cooperation as deviant. It illustrates how a group arguing for separation and hostility comments on, denigrates, and discourages other Muslims from allying with non-Muslims. Examining how one set of group members are denounced and discounted by another set of group members illustrates how dangerous it is for social psychologists to treat group norms or prototypicality as consensual.

This paper starts with the assumption that people define groups and identities in ways that legitimate their political projects (Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). As Reicher, Haslam and Hopkins (2005, p563) point out in their discussion of leaders as 'entrepreneurs of identity': "...leaders are not passive onlookers when it comes to identity processes. They actively intervene in creating and redefining identities and thereby in creating and transforming their followers." These constructions of identities function to explain situations, organize actions, negotiate intergroup relations, and counter alternative definitions (Hopkins, Kahani-Hopkins & Reicher, 2006; Hopkins, Reicher & Kahani-Hopkins, 2003). Such issues are often matters of dispute between those who are nominally part of the same social group but who have different political agendas: members with differing definitions of the content of group identity, its values, and the actions it should take to secure the future (for an example from Israel see Zemlinskaya, 2008). Studies have shown how, for example, politicians and others construct versions of themselves and their views as part of the majority or as representing the true values of the group, at the same time as positioning their opponents as unrepresentative (e.g. Finlay, 2005; 2007; Leudar, Marsland & Nekvapil, 2004; Rapley, 1998; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996; 2001;

Rooyackers & Verkuyten, 2011; Wood & Finlay, 2007; Yildiz & Verkutyen, 2012). For example, Burns and Stevenson (2011) have shown how Irish politicians strategically construct and deconstruct the nation in order to explain their own electoral success and failure. These politicians accounted for winning a referendum on Europe by constructing versions of the nation as having a 'settled will' in line with their own political position. When the same politicians accounted for losing a similar referendum the electorate was characterized as divided or as driven by fear, nervousness or malign external influence. In this way the opposition's claims to represent the true voice of the nation on the basis of winning the vote were refuted. Research on group schisms has similarly shown how members of each sub-group define their own faction as representing the true essence of the group (Sani & Reicher, 1998; 2000). If we accept that groups can be realms of argument and debate, and that they contain struggles for dominance, then this should affect how we conceive of basic concepts such as social identity, stereotypes, context, norms and prototypes (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2006; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

When we examine real situations of group conflict, we find that one way in which people argue that their version of the group and its context is correct is through denunciations of those with whom they disagree. Although the practice of denunciation has been discussed by sociologists (e.g. Garfinkel, 1956; Brinkerhoff & Burke, 1980) and historians (for a review see Fitzpatrick & Gellately, 1996), denunciations have received only limited attention in social psychology (although see Finlay 2005; 2007; see also Bar Tal, 1997 on the 'monopolization of patriotism'). To denounce is either to 'accuse publicly', to 'condemn' or to 'inform against' (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990). In practice, to denounce is to claim there is something about the other's identity or behaviour which is offensive or dangerous to the integrity of the group. It may involve questioning the other's loyalty to the state, the community or to the ideological programme. In religious sects, for example, denunciation may involve highlighting one behaviour or act of 'questioning' and then generalizing this to other aspects of the accusee's identity and commitment (Brinkerhoff & Burke, 1980).

According to Fitzpatrick and Gellately (1996), "the practice of denunciation exists to some degree in all organized societies" (p759; see also Garfinkel, 1956). Institutionalized forms of denunciation are part of law enforcement and other forms of social regulation in established democracies, while "police, revolutionary, and

theocratic states and communities – as well as twentieth-century totalitarian states – have been particularly likely to encourage their citizens or members to write denunciations against each other for purposes of maintaining social control, ideological purity, virtue, and so on” (Fitzpatrick & Gellately, 1996, p 761). Although the phenomenon of individual denunciations made by citizens to the authorities and the press has been the subject of historical research (e.g. Bytwerk, 1983; Gellately, 1990), denunciation can take many forms and can serve many functions (Lucas, 1996). In situations of group conflict and in authoritarian regimes it is used to suppress criticism and dissent, acting both as a form of social sanction and a warning to others (e.g. Dittmer, 1977; see also Levine & Moreland, 2002, for a discussion of reactions to disloyalty). When political groups or religious sects have internal arguments over important political issues, it is used to suggest opponents have strayed from the correct path, casting their arguments as unreliable and unrepresentative of the group’s values. Denunciation can therefore function as: a public display of norms; a sanction to ensure conformity; a display of commitment to the group by the accuser; a method of revealing hidden ‘enemies’; and a way of silencing opponents or damaging their reputation. Typically it involves explanatory accounts of ignorance, selfishness, pathology or malign influence. Just as individuals can be denounced, so can sub-groups and unnamed, generalized others.

Denunciation involves the condemnation of those accused of infringing the basic values of the group, and is therefore relevant to understanding social psychological issues such as the construction of deviance, prototypicality and group norms. When it occurs in situations of group conflict, we also see how hostile and violent relations between groups can be sustained through intra-group social practices. This paper takes the position that to understand social life it is important to examine the social practices of which it is made up. In this respect it shares the concerns of discourse analysts, conversation analysts, and other social psychologists who draw on social/political sciences and historical research. This is not to claim that the study of beliefs, attitudes and emotions is unimportant, just that we need to do both. The study of real-life situations is a crucial counter to research which breaks variables into separate units and studies them in controlled contexts, because it allows us to see how intertwined such variables and processes can be outside the laboratory.

Since denunciation involves an accusation that another person or group has committed an offence, it involves the specification of a prescriptive norm which has

been violated, as well as the construction of a ‘good’ versus a ‘bad’ member of the group. This is relevant to understandings of the ‘black sheep effect’ (Marques, Yzerbyt & Leyens, 1988; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988) and disloyalty/defection in groups (Levine & Moreland, 2002; Mannetti et al, 2010). Studies of the ‘black sheep effect’ suggest that, in particular circumstances, an ‘unlikeable’, ‘unfavourable’, ‘deviant’ or ‘nonprototypical’ ingroup member is judged less favourably than a comparable outgroup member. These experimental studies create a pre-determined non-prototypical (or counter-normative) target in a range of ways: by describing poor performance (e.g. Lewis & Sherman, 2010; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988); unfavourable character descriptions (e.g. Marques, Robalo & Rocha, 1992; Marques et al, 1988); disloyalty (Branscombe, Wann, Noel & Coleman, 1993); lack of stereotypical traits (e.g. Abrams, Marques, Bown & Henson, 2000; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001); non-modal behaviours (Marques, Abrams, Paez & Martinez-Taboada, 1998); or beliefs (e.g. Abrams et al, 2000; Eidelman & Biernat, 2003; Pinto, Marques, Levine & Abrams, 2010; Scheepers, Branscombe, Spears & Doosje, 2002). Such studies are useful, but understanding norms and deviance in real-life situations of political turmoil requires us to take a step further and accept that what counts as a normative behaviour or belief can be a political judgement rather than a fact. In political disputes, norms are constructed by group members to argue that their agenda is correct (and vice-versa), and their in-group opponents are wrong. If norms are disputed, then what counts as ‘disloyalty’ and ‘defection’ can also be a contested issue.

In intergroup situations involving conflict, one important set of prescriptive norms concern group contact and attitudes towards the outgroup. In situations of sectarian conflict, racial segregation or inequality, we might find norms and sanctions which discourage contact with other groups (Allport, 1954/8; Pettigrew, 1998; for examples see Connolly, 2000; Dixon & Durrheim, 2003; Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2006) and accusations of disloyalty directed at those who engage in such contact (Finlay, 2005, 2007). We also find members of groups argue over these norms. Examples of such arguments include those between ‘hawks’ and ‘doves’ during war, between opponents and proponents of racial and caste segregation, and between those for and against inter-ethnic marriage in multicultural societies.

Arguments over contact norms are found among Muslims with different political, theological and cultural backgrounds and projects (Hopkins & Kahani-

Hopkins, 2006). Muslims are a heterogeneous social group. According to Jackson (2007) the category includes ‘over a billion people from more than 50 countries, languages and cultures, five major doctrinal groupings and hundreds of smaller sects, theological traditions and cultural-religious variants’ (p413; see also Esposito, 1991). The variation provides for a range of differing practices, rules for living as well as widespread debate over the meaning or application of Quranic verses (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2009; Malik, 2006; Peters, 1996). For example, Roy (2005) describes the differing interpretations of Islam from fundamentalist as opposed to liberal, reformist or more generally moderate Muslim theologians and thinkers. In the UK, there is much debate among Muslims over what a Muslim identity involves, what the correct actions and political positions for Muslims in multicultural societies are, and how Muslims should interact with non-Muslims (Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Hopkins et al, 2003). For example, Hopkins and Kahani-Holkins (2004a; 2006) illustrate how the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain argued that the west was hostile to Islam and urged UK Muslims to develop autonomous political organisations, identifying with the global ‘ummah’ rather than the nation state. Other organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain argued for greater participation with the political system (see also Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2012) and many UK Muslims report valuing having dual identities as both British and Muslim (Hopkins, 2011). Both sides argue that their position is correct and normative for the group.

The data I present here consist of emails sent out by a UK Al-Qaeda-supporting group (for discussion of the difficulties of terms such as ‘extremist’, ‘jihadist’, ‘islamist’ see Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2009; Jenkins, 2007). The communications use the category ‘moderate’ in a pejorative sense and question the use of the term ‘extremist’ and ‘fundamentalist’, declaring that this term is used to silence Muslims with a political orientation or who speak with a ‘true’ understanding of Islam (see Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2009 for debates on this issue). The analysis will first examine the construction of prescriptive norms against political contact and cooperation with non-Muslims. It will then illustrate how denunciations and particular explanatory accounts are used to present fellow Muslims who engage in such contact as deviant and disloyal.

Method

The Organisation

The data set consists of a collection of e-mails from an organisation called the Party for Islamic Renewal (PIR), which is linked to the Tajdeed.net web-site. Tajdeed is Arabic for Renewal. The PIR was formerly known as the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR). The PIR and Tajdeed web-site were run by the Saudi dissident Mohammed al-Masari (also spelt al-Massari). The Tajdeed web-site, often described in the press as a 'jihadi' site, was reported as posting video messages from Ayman al-Zawahiri (the Al Qaeda second-in-command in 2005 and leader in 2011), an online terror training manual, and videos of beheadings and suicide bombings (Times & Guardian, 2005). One of the al-Zawahiri videos posted on the Tajdeed site was reported as providing a justification for the London bombings of 2005 (Sunday Times, 2005). In July 2005, the Daily Telegraph claimed that al-Masari 'is considered by Islamist experts to be a key influence on young jihadists in Britain.' In the same year, there were widespread reports in the press that al-Masari and the Tajdeed site were on a list that MI5 had drawn up of 'Islamist militants' to be deported and web-sites to be shut down under new anti-terrorism laws. Although the deportation of al-Masari failed due to conflicts with the Human Rights Act, in August of 2005 he suspended the web-site, and in October the PIR mailings abruptly stopped. At the time of writing (2012) the PIR had a Facebook page which links to the Arabic-language Tajdeed site, which was running again.

Data-Set

The articles analysed come from a series of 146 e-mails sent out between 11/4/2005 and 2/10/2005 from the sender 'Party for Islamic Renewal'¹ to its mailing list. Each email contained a link to the Tajdeed web-site as part of the 'signature', and many emails contained the following disclaimer: 'This mailing list strives to educate the general public and inform it about interesting news, issues worthy of reflection or even points of view worthy of condemnation and rejection. Therefore the content of the topics published here should not be regarded as representing PIR's point of view,

¹ These emails were sent directly to my university email account by the organisation after I came to be on their mailing list. I did not request to receive their emails, nor had I heard of them before receiving the first message. It is possible my email address was gleaned from previous papers, from online discussions of these papers, or from an online petition. A university ethics panel indicated there were no ethical concerns in analysing and publishing this data.

neither in full nor in part. **Please adopt, print, translate in various languages and distribute widely!!**

The emails were all written in English and came in two forms: 110 emails containing single articles or messages (12 were blank or consisted of nonsense characters, leaving 98 for analysis), and 36 emails containing the Al-Hillal newsletter. Typically the emails had themes that I would describe as anti-Western; against the established rulers of Muslim countries; and against Western involvement in Muslim countries. Emails expressing direct support for Al Qaeda carried titles such as ‘Why the world loves Usamah and not Bush’, ‘Inside the mind of the suicide bomber’, and ‘Shock and awe in London.’

The analysis in this paper is based on the 98 emails consisting of single articles or messages. These emails were mostly polemics written by single authors, or articles copied from newspapers or other web-sites. They also included calls to sign petitions and attend demonstrations, a fatwa (on not voting), and statements by organisations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and the PIR. The media articles came from a range of sources such as the BBC, The Independent, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, The New Statesman, the LA Times and the Daily Star. The essays were often reproduced on other sites such as Media Monitors, The Official Clearing House, the Institute of Historical Review, Yahoo Discussion Groups, and ummah.com. It was often unclear where the articles were first posted. Two regular writers dominated the polemical pieces, although a number of other writers were also featured on more than one occasion.

The emails represent a running commentary on current affairs over the course of almost six months in 2005, a period of political turmoil which included the ongoing Iraq war, reports of the desecration of the Quran and mistreatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, the UK general elections, the London bombings of July 7th, 2005, and the subsequent government actions to draft new anti-terrorism legislation.

Analytic Approach

Although the analysis shares the view of critical discursive approaches that writers and speakers ‘draw on cultural resources that have a history, and the repetition of these resources has important social consequences that we need to study’ (Wetherell, 2003, p26), this paper uses thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was chosen because the goal of the paper is to provide a broad overview of 1) the construction of prescriptive social norms (in particular norms against political

cooperation and contact) and 2) the denunciation of ‘moderates’ who break these norms. The aim was to identify broad themes used to construct the commentators’ political positions as correct and those of other Muslims as incorrect, and to examine how social identities and psychological explanations feature in these constructions. Although much could be gained from a discursive analysis, the level of detail required would only have permitted a small number of quotes to be analysed, and would therefore not have allowed such a broad sweep. Although attention is paid to the cultural resources drawn on in these constructions (for example the notion of ‘kufr’), less attention is therefore given to a detailed consideration of more local aspects of context.

All emails that mentioned the issue of political contact with, or influence by, non-Muslims, or participation in secular political processes, were identified and the specific context of this contact was noted. Thematic analysis focused on 1) reasons offered for why such contact was to be avoided (i.e. arguments supporting norms of political separation and non-contact), and 2) the ways in which Muslims engaging in such contact were denounced and constructed as deviant through the use of labels, slurs and explanatory accounts. The former are presented in the first half of the Analysis section. The latter are described in the second half of the Analysis section.

Analysis

The analysis focuses on mailings which refer to situations of political contact, cooperation or political agreement between Muslims and non-Muslims. There were 35 such mailings, written by 12 individuals/organisations. The two regular PIR writers authored 22 (commentator A = 13; commentator B = 9), with commentators C and D authoring 3 and 2 respectively. Other authors featured once each. Muslims engaged in political contact were described in derogatory terms in all. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB - an umbrella organization of several hundred Muslim organizations) was a particular target in this respect. In 2005 the MCB was widely seen to represent the UK Muslim community, participated in a government taskforce on extremism, criticized terrorist attacks, and its leader, Sir Iqbal Sacranie, received a knighthood.

A second set of targets included Muslims participating in UK politics during the general election of 2005, particularly those who supported the newly-formed Respect Party and its leader George Galloway. Galloway, an ex-Labour Party Member of Parliament, was known for his criticism of the Iraq War and his support for the

Palestinians. The Respect party targeted constituencies with large Muslim populations, and many of its leading members were Muslims. The leaders of Muslim countries and Muslims calling for the reform of Islam were also denounced for being too influenced by the West. Mailings often called for Muslims in the UK to build stronger ties with their ‘own community’ in order to achieve political change. In no case in the data-set were arguments made in favour of political or personal contact between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Preliminary Note on the Concept of ‘Kufr’

Before examining the extracts, the concepts of ‘kufr’ and ‘shirk’ need to be described. The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam defines al-Kufr as ‘Unbelief in God, the state of being an infidel, blasphemy’ (Glassé, 1989, p241). Watt (1964) describes the concept as ‘that which characterizes non-Muslims or rather opponents of the Islamic community, and also that which changes a Muslim into an opponent of the community. Any article of belief or any activity which was felt to indicate that a man had broken away from the Islamic community would be an instance of kufr’ (p11). Watt goes on to write that a ‘man ceases to be a member if he does something which the general body of Muslims feel to be incompatible with membership. Usually this will be something which aligns him with a rival community’ (p12). The concept of ‘kufr’, then, is ideal in arguments about identity and who should represent the group – to accuse another party of kufr is a discursive move to declare them no longer a group member and therefore to deny their right to speak from the same identity position. This is made explicit by commentator A, who takes issue with prominent Muslims in the MCB who suggested that French Muslims should obey a recent law to ban the wearing of the hijab in schools:

There is no such principle within Islam that says you have to obey any laws other than what Allah (SWT²) has revealed. (...) ³ To legitimise obedience to anyone or anything else, other than Allah (SWT), is a clear act of major Shirk (polytheism) and Kufr (disbelief) which takes one out of the fold of Islam. (Extract 1: A 28/6)⁴

The same root is found in the word ‘kuffar’ (‘kafir’), which describes a group of people. A kafir is ‘one who refuses to see the truth, an infidel’ (Glassé, 1989, p216).

² SWT is short for ‘Subhanahu wata’ala’ (glorified and exalted). This is often inserted after the name of Allah in Islamic texts.

³ (...) indicates omitted text.

⁴ Throughout the analysis, each quote is coded with the date of the email and its author.

The act of declaring a Muslim to be a kuffar is ‘takfir/takfeer’, while the behaviour which causes a person to be declared kuffar is called the ‘mukaffir’. The concept of shirk is used in a similar way. ‘Shirk’ is the sin of associating something with God (idolatry). Like the concept of ‘kufr’, the root of ‘shirk’ also describes an outgroup: “The sin of shirk (“association”) is a name for paganism: pagans are called ‘the associators’ (mushrikun)” (Glassé, 1989, p370). When these terms can legitimately be used is a controversial matter, and is the subject of debate among Muslim scholars and commentators.

The notion of ‘kufr’ is used extensively in the emails to describe the UK political system and Western society. It is an essentialist and homogenising label used to group non-Muslims into the same moral, political and cultural system, defined by its essential ‘kufr’ nature. Kufr is everything which is not Islam, and kuffar are everyone who are not Muslims – it is a powerful and concise way of saying ‘not us’. It is also of central importance to the distinction between ‘dar al-Islam’ (the land of Islam) and ‘dar al-kufr/harb’ (the land of non-believers/war) which is part of the debates over ‘da’wah’ between UK Muslims described by Kahani-Hopkins and Hopkins (2002). Da’wah is the ‘call’ to Islam, and is interpreted in a variety of ways by different movements and traditions (Esposito, 2003). Some see da’wah as calling believers back to an earlier, purer version of Islam and rejecting influence by the secular West while others concentrate on the mission to bring non-believers to the faith. Kahani-Hopkins and Hopkins (2002) describe how different organisations in the UK characterize it as either requiring separate political organisation outside the secular system (e.g. the Muslim Parliament) or as requiring engagement in Western political systems since this would promote respect for Islamic values (e.g. the Islamic Party of Great Britain).

The analysis is split into two sections. The first describes the main arguments in favour of the prescriptive norm that Muslims should not join, support, or be influenced by non-Muslims in a range of political matters. The second considers how ‘moderates’ (those who break this norm) are denounced and constructed as deviants. The split is made here for the purposes of clarity, however the construction of deviance is part of the construction of norms and they often occur within the same account. Because the main focus is the practice of denunciation, more detailed analysis will be presented in the second section.

Prescriptive Norms: Reasons for Avoiding Political Contact

Several arguments are advanced to explain why Muslims should not engage with secular systems or cooperate politically with non-Muslims. These are separated into three broad themes: religious injunctions, Western opposition to Islamic values, and the threat from the West.

1) Religious injunctions. A variety of arguments, often using Quranic verses as evidence, declare that Muslims are prohibited by Islam from participating in secular systems, taking ‘kafirs’ as friends, or supporting ‘kuffar’ who are fighting against other Muslims. References to such verses are a common feature of Al Qaeda treatises and supportive web-sites, in which they are used to denounce other Muslims as apostates (Musawi, 2010; see for example Al-Zawahiri, 2002). It should be noted, however, that there are many Islamic scholars and theologians who reject these interpretations, arguing that the verses are taken out of context, the translations from Arabic are not straightforward, and that their use to justify separation or hostility ignores the many verses in the Quran promoting peace and tolerance (e.g., Shaltut 1940; Dakake 2006, Laher 2006; Al-Akiti 2005; Seedat, 2006; Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2012).

As an example of the use of Quranic verses, in one email commentator B cites nine verses from the Quran warning against alliance with ‘kafirs’. This includes:

Allah says about Kafirs such as Galloway who are in the business of peddling Kufr, Surah III Family of Imran O you who believe! Take not for intimates other than your own folk, who would spare no pains to ruin you; they (Kafirs) love to hamper you. Hatred is revealed by the utterances of their mouths, but that which their breasts hide is greater. (v118)

B concludes:

Just that small selection of verses from Allah’s message tells us that in the area of politics we cannot ally ourselves with Kafirs. (Extract 2: B 17/4)

In other cases, religious injunctions come from the writings or fatwas of Islamic scholars and ideologues. According to these, the secular and ‘kufr’ nature of the political system itself is also a problem (see Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004b; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002 for further use of this notion in debates among UK Muslims; see also Musawi, 2010, on the concept of ‘taghut’ in ‘Salafi-Jihadism’). In an email arguing that Muslims should not support Galloway, B writes that:

Sheikh Qutb, by redefining Jahiliyya to cover secular systems of political organization, said that all existing systems are unacceptable and against the spirit of Islam(..) Any system of rule that is not based on Allah's supreme and sole right as a legislative source, is Shirk. (Extract 3: B 24/4)

On 1/5, an email was sent containing a fatwa on voting. Although this was written to cover participation in US elections, it was sent around the PIR mailing list at the time of the UK general election in 2005 (see Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins, 2004b and Hopkins et al, 2003 for this debate in the context of the 1997 UK election). In a similar way to the quote above, participation is rejected because secular systems are not based on the laws of Allah. The fatwa declares:

What we believe and take as a religion is that participating in the legislative assemblies is Kufr, and Shirk in Allah (..) this is because these assemblies give the right of legislating unlimitedly to humans, and not their Lord, and the evidences that such an action is from the clear Mukaffirat (actions causing disbelief) and nullifiers of Islam, are many (..) there are several inescapable causes of Takfir (..) the most dangerous of these is accepting the right that the constitution bestows upon the member, to legislate limitlessly, and to abide by that, and this is clear-cut Kufr. (Extract 4: Fatwa signed by list of scholars 1/5)

This leads to the argument, in some mailings, that Muslims must organize within their own community. For example, C (17/8) asserts that Muslims have a distinct role which can only be played if 'we are independent of the secular empire and not a branch of it'.

2) Western opposition to core Islamic values. Here it is argued that Muslims should not cooperate because the 'kuffar' oppose Islamic values (and therefore Islam). Evidence is provided by politicians' opposition to certain positions which the commentators claim represent the true spirit of Islam. These include support for Shariah, the Muslim Brotherhood, the mujahideen, Sayid Qutb and Al Qaeda, and rejection of secular nationalism. For example, commentator B (11/4) argues that Muslims should not be loyal to 'Kafir' political parties because: 'All the Kafir political parties are peddling the same kuffar excrement because they oppose the Shariah of Allah.' Not only does this essentialise the political parties (as essentially 'kafir') but it also presents a strong extreme case that they are 'all' the same. This flexibility of the 'kufr' root means that it can be applied to a group, a system, or any other thing seen to be un-Islamic. The use of the term 'kuffar excrement' implies the

ideology to be disgusting, a theme linked to notions of contagion that we will see later.

In attacks on George Galloway, his support for ‘apostate Arab rulers like Nasser and Arafat’ and his criticism of Bin Laden proves he is against Islam since ‘the ideology behind the mujahideen group, Al Qaeda, is Islam (..) Their statements are always backed by references to the Qur’aan and Hadeeth.’ Galloway’s criticism therefore ‘confirms his hatred of Islam as a bona fide Kafir’. (B:17/4)

3) Threat. Non-Muslims are described as having a variety of malign motives regarding Islam and Muslims (see also Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004a; 2006; Leudar et al, 2004; for this theme in relation to Iraq see Hafez, 2007). In this respect, the discourse is a mirror opposite of the discourse of far right parties in Europe which portray Islam as a threat European culture (e.g. Verkuyten, 2011; Wood & Finlay, 2008). Throughout the mailings Muslims are described as under attack. There are regular references to Muslim deaths in Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia and Palestine, abuses of human rights in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, UK government anti-terrorism actions seen to be targeting Muslims, and historical examples such as the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. Those who ally with Western powers are accused of sharing responsibility for attacks on Muslims. For example, commentator A (12/5) criticizes the regimes of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan for not providing security for the ‘Muslim Ummah’. The writer states that the Quran prohibits ‘aligning with belligerent infidels to fight fellow muslims.’ Of Muslims who voted for pro-war parties in the UK elections, ‘They are in fact worshipping over the graves of the Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan for which they have become complicit.’

A related argument that runs through many emails is that the UK is racist and Islamophobic: Muslims are structurally disadvantaged in society and victimised by the security services. For example, B (2/9) argues ‘British Muslims are disadvantaged and discriminated against. They are the last to get hired and the first to get fired.’

In an echo of an argument in an Al Qaeda treatise on Loyalty and Enmity (Al Zawahiri, 2002), it is also argued that non-Muslims want Muslims to turn away from Islam (see also Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004a). The following quote begins with an injunction from the Quran, then follows with a warning that George Galloway

wants Muslims to reject Allah. The category ‘kuffar’ is again used to suggest that all political parties, and the United Nations, have the same basic orientation and aim.

Allah told the Muslims in the Qur’aan not to take Kafirs for confidantes.(..) No matter what happens, Galloway and his sort are part and parcel of the Kuffar establishment. They want to play the game by the system, which the Kuffar invented. (..) The socialists like the rest of the Kuffar system want to handicap the Ummah into begging for mercy to the United Kuffar Nations and the other Kuffar institutions because the aim is to propagate disbelief (kufr) and turn Muslims away from Allah and his Messenger. (Extract 5: B 11/4)

Commentators also argue that western powers want to create their own version of Islam in order to better control it. For example, C (17/8) argues that ‘States throughout Europe (..) are now creating Establishment Muslim bodies, to shape a deviant Islam in the image of the West.’ A month later, the same commentator, in an email on the Task Force on Preventing Islamic Extremism, links this to the secularism of the Church of England:

the Government’s agenda is to reform Islam and Muslims instead of reforming their own foreign policies and support for the State of Israel. (..) The control of Islam in Britain will be further handed to the British government thus paving the way for the development of an Islam in the model of the Church of England, one that is secular in nature and subservient to the State. (Extract 6: C 26/9)

The history of the British Empire is also put forward as evidence that working with the British establishment is dangerous. Below it is suggested Muslims are fooled into believing they are helping their communities, while in reality they are being manipulated:

Dear Muslim Brothers and Sisters! Be warned of one thing. People over the centuries have slipped into a dangerous relationships with the enemies of Islam, often thinking they were helping their communities. The history of the British Empire and post Empire shows us that they are past masters of such manipulation. (Extract 7: Anon 14/6)

In mailings by commentator B, references to contagion and infection are often used to imply contact is dangerous. For example, an attack on Galloway states:

I personally don’t think it’s hygienic for Believers to allow the dirty Marxist Kafir within 5m of them without taking vaccines against venereal diseases. (..) I ask sincere believers to bring their community back to Allah by keeping this Marxist Kafir and his filthy party out of Muslim areas for environmental health reasons at the very least! (Extract 8: B 24/4)

The notion of contagion is also linked to cultural tropes implying subservience (described below). In the following quote, the MCB, by cooperating with the taskforce on extremism, endanger other Muslims:

Obviously other Muslims are not safe from the tongues of the MCB, and I don't mean because they are infected with Blair's backside bacteria, but because the MCB also use their tongues to make Muslims unsafe from the attention of Blair the war criminal Kuffar. Which means the MCB is a Kaafir organisation. (Extract 9: B 4/8)

To summarize, the emails construct a prescriptive group norm whereby avoidance of political contact and cooperation with non-Muslims is consonant with authentic Muslim values and interests. This then allows those Muslims who break this norm by engaging with Western politics and secular institutions to be discounted as deviant and disloyal. The next section illustrates how these 'moderate' Muslims are denounced in ways that both explain their behaviour in derogatory terms, and categorize them in such a way as to deny their claim to represent Muslims.

Denunciation and Derogation: The Construction of Deviants

A great variety of derogatory names and concepts are used to denounce Muslims in the UK who are seen as being too close to non-Muslims. These are divided into themes of apostasy/losing one's Muslim identity, subservience, and self-interest and ignorance. These accounts and descriptions explain the behaviour of targets as based on weakness, ignorance, character flaws or religious deviation rather than due to considered political beliefs or alternative theological interpretation.

a) Apostasy/rejecting one's Muslim identity. Previous research has shown how both those who reject Al Qaeda (e.g. Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2012), and those who support Al Qaeda (e.g. Leudar et al, 2004), construct versions of Muslims that place opponents outside the group. Apostasy (and kufr) is a strong accusation as it places the person outside the Muslim community (and thus outside the social identity). The notion of kufr is frequently used in emails which denounce Muslims as apostates for supporting governments at war with Muslims. For example, D (8/8) draws on similar Quranic injunctions to those seen above when declaring that:

Allah tells us that Muslims must not make of the Kuffars his allies behind other Muslims' backs. (..) This means that no Muslim is authorised to help those who invaded Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, Palestine or repress honest Muslims. (..) To help the Kuffar against Muslims is an act of Kufr.. they are apostates! (Extract 10: D 8/8)

In another email, the MCB are described as ‘munafiq’. This term describes a religious ‘hypocrite’, a person who may seem to practice Islam but inside is a disbeliever. The context here is that an alleged leaked email suggested the MCB should write sermons for UK imams. The email refers to the MCB as ‘a.k.a. the Munafiq Council of Britain’ and describes it as ‘favoured by the British government and its intelligence services’.
(17/6 Petition Call)

The image of a Muslim joining the ‘kuffar’ is also seen in commentator A’s criticism of particular MCB members:

Some senior MCB member or like-minded supporter is reported to have affectionately called those British soldiers murdering Iraqis as: ‘our boys’. Yes that provoked my imagination of the Lords and Knights of the MCB exiting the Mosque and then entering the Pub (Bar), celebrating the ‘victory’ over a pint with the lads (‘our boys’) and collectively singing some song about paki-bashing! (Extract 11: A 28/6)

Here the image of Muslims joining the ‘Kuffar’ is even more explicit. The MCB member is imagined joining in cultural practices associated with secular culture and which go against Islam. Joining ‘the lads’ in the pub breaks the Islamic proscription on alcohol, while the ‘paki-bashing’ song reminds the reader of the street violence towards Muslim immigrants that was carried out in recent decades by some sections of the white community. The same email discusses Inayat Bunglawala’s (member of the MCB and chair of a government taskforce on extremism) alleged statement that Muslims could fight in the British forces and advises other Muslims to shun him. In this extract we see Bunglawala’s manhood questioned with the use of quotation marks around ‘man/he/him’. The charge of apostasy is again justified with references to the Quran:

Numerous verses in the Quran have clearly stated that the believers are prohibited from allying with the non-Muslims and most definitely if the alliance is against fellow Muslims (..) I would sincerely advise everyone to treat this ‘man’ as if ‘he’ is a belligerent apostate! I would not pray behind ‘him’ nor would I permit any Muslim female to marry him. (..) I would strongly advise his wife to leave the joint home because apostasy annuls marriage automatically. (Extract 12: A 28/6)

As we will see below, historical precedent is regularly drawn on in these denunciations. For example, references are frequently made to crusades and crusaders, a common feature of Al Qaeda discourse (see Ibrahim, 2007). Commentator E (28/6) discusses Iqbal Sacranie’s (leader of the MCB) acceptance of a knighthood, which is

described as ‘an award which was to honour crusaders ... you know the knights of Britain who wreaked havoc in the Holy Lands causing rivers of the blood of innocent Muslims to flow knee-deep through Jerusalem?’ Here, the acceptance of the award means Sacranie has joined the aggressors against Muslims: ‘a man who claims to represent the face of ordinary British Muslims is to become a Crusader.’

The charge of apostasy and/or joining the ‘kuffar’ is a categorical judgement in these extracts rather than an explanatory account: it is an assertion that the target is no longer a category member, and thus has no speaking position as a Muslim.

b) Subservience. The second category of dishonour describes Muslims as being subservient to non-Muslims, suggesting a weakness of character in the targets. Rather than drawing on theological arguments, these accounts draw instead on post-colonial, psychological and gender discourses, and in doing so combine explanations with identity constructions. General terms such as ‘stooges’ and ‘sell-outs’ are often used along with dehumanising references to trained animals. For example, B (6/8) describes the MCB as the “Kuffar’s stooges”. In other emails, B refers to ‘compliant eunuchs’, ‘sidekicks from the British Muslim community’ (17/4), ‘bootlickers’ (2/9) and ‘trained monkeys’ (4/8), while commentator E (28/6) writes ‘Iqbal Sacranie has been a willing lapdog of British Prime Minister Tony Blair.’

These Muslims are sometimes accused of feeling inferior and seeking validation from non-Muslims. In the quote below, Muslims are removed from the category of men rather than the category of Muslims. Thus B (11/4) emasculates those who support Galloway as they become ‘the eunuchs of the Ummah who have consistently denounced the Mujahideen and other activists as ‘extremists’ and are happy to sniff around a Kaffir’s rear end to get validation from a white Kafir.’ Metaphors of emasculation and backside-licking (or ‘ass-kissing’) are often used by B in particular. In a mailing on 4/8, B refers to the MCB as ‘the brown-tongues-in-chief’ and suggest the government create a new award ‘Knight of the Order of the Brown Tongues’.

The notion of an inferiority complex is used to denounce moderates. In a similar way to ideas of Jewish self-hatred (Lewin, 1941; Finlay, 2005) it is suggested that domination by the British (historically and through being in a minority in Britain) has led to a pathology of identity – the targets are ‘mentally colonised’ or suffer from an ‘inferiority complex’, causing them to revere and bow before non-Muslims, and ultimately betray their roots:

they suffer from insecurity, inferiority complex and are desperate to be accepted by their new communities, thus they have turned their back on their roots, foul mouthed their ancestry, rubbish their native values and vilify Islam. (Extract 13: A 14/9)

Commentator B offers a similar account in a discussion of why Muslims might support Galloway:

He's figured that the British Muslims are so mentally colonised from the days of the old British Empire that if they see a white man showing sympathy for them then they'll be flocking to him. (Extract 14: B 24/4)

In this extract we see history again used as a resource for derogation. History (and 'serial connectedness' – Condor, 1996) is an important feature in debates about identity and political action (Condor, 2006; Lyons, 1996; for examples in Muslim politics see Hopkins et al, 2003; McKinlay, McVittie & Sambaraju, 2011). In the PIR mailings the history of colonial rule in India, the Crusades, and the Inquisition were frequently used to denounce opponents. Thus B discusses Islamophobia in the UK, and links this to colonial rule in India:

The wholesale betrayal of the UK Muslim population by the Establishment should have been enough to get Muslims on the warpath; never mind the Crusade against Iraq and Afghanistan. This lack of backbone is consistent with the attitude from back in the days British colonial rule in India. (Extract 15: B 2/9)

Comparisons are frequently made to historic groups such as 'coolies' and 'muddajjin'. Commentator C (17/8), discussing Muslims who report on others thought to be extremists, argues that:

These groups of Muslims aligned with the authorities existed under the Inquisition too, they were known as Muddajjin by the Muslims (domesticated, tamed, in total darkness). Such Muslims foolishly believed that by collaborating with the State they could save themselves. (Extract 16: C 17/8)

c) Self-interest and ignorance. The final set of accounts suggest Muslims who engage in political contact are motivated for personal status, favour, or grant money, and/or have a limited understanding of the nature of non-Muslims. Again, the identity constructions involve explanatory accounts for their positions, in this case greed or naivety. Commentator A explains that Muslims who voted for pro-war politicians did so

because they get their grant money to build plush Mosques and schools. (Extract 18: A 12/5)

History is also drawn on when talking about self-interest. Commentator A uses the term ‘coolies’ to describe those Muslims who participated in UK government moves to deport extremists during 2005:

The self-serving individuals in our midst are like the coolies that served your forefathers in the British Raj. They argue in collusion with some of the Muslim moderates in favour of deportation, desperately trying to preserve their self-interest. (Extract 19: A 26/8)

Commentator C lists the following reasons why Muslims might engage with the government. The writer describes Muslims participating in a government taskforce on extremism as ‘Opportunist Muslim Parliamentarians’ who:

use the task force to promote themselves as Blair loyalists, hence working their way up the ladder at the expense of British Muslims. There will be plenty of work for consultants and Muslims seeking to establish their careers, and places on ‘influential’ committees. (Extract 20: C 26/8)

Discussion

To understand group conflict in the real world we must understand how support for conflict is constructed as normative, and how those who are not seen as sufficiently hostile are constructed as disloyal and deviant. This is part of the persuasive discourse of militant groups. In situations of political turmoil there are disputes over what the correct norms are regarding the outgroup as well as who can be labelled disloyal/deviant. Group members argue that their versions are the truth, and their internal opponents’ versions are corrupted. The practice of denunciation illustrates how this is done. In a similar way to Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins (2006), the first section of the analysis has shown how norms against political participation and cooperation are constructed as natural and correct through essentialist assertions about the teachings of Islam and particular versions of the intergroup context in which the West is threatening Muslims. The analysis then goes further, showing (in the second section) how this relates to constructions of opponents as deviant using theological, post-colonial and psychological discourses. These denunciations position their targets as both outside the group and suffering from a range of pathological complexes and character weaknesses.

As with Garfinkel’s (1956) description of ‘status degradation ceremonies’, accounts of the reasons or motives for the other’s behaviour are a crucial feature of the denunciations seen here. By using explanations based on character failings, there is no need to examine the possible logical, theological or political analyses behind an

opponent's position, and the reaction is one of moral indignation or disgust rather than debate. Orcutt (1973) suggests that when deviance is attributed to character failings (rather than situational pressures), the reaction of other group members is more likely to be exclusionary – isolating and excluding the individual from the group (see also Levine & Kerr, 2007; Levine & Moreland, 2002).

Although each situation of violent conflict has its own particular cultural and historical context, militants face a common problem in dealing with fellow group-members who disagree. A response found in a number of situations is to delegitimize this section of the community using a variety of denunciations and derogations (Finlay, 2005; 2007). These social practices are part of explicit attempts at social influence and the regulation of the group. Public demonization is a warning to others as to how they might be branded should they adopt a similar position, and it is relevant that some of the slurs in the data presented in the second section seem directed particularly at the sensitivities of young men, in particular at their bravery (e.g. 'lack of backbone'), integrity (e.g. 'bootlickers'), loyalty (e.g. 'they have .. foul-mouthed their ancestry') and masculinity (e.g. 'compliant eunuchs'). For those members who are undecided about their position, it gives emotive reasons *not* to be a moderate - they would become 'brown tongues', their masculinity would be questioned, they would be labelled mentally and morally weak, they would become apostates. This is also reflected in research into Al Qaeda communications, which separate, for example, pious youth from those susceptible to western influence, and 'islam' from 'kufr' (Cheong & Halverson, 2010). In a recent report, Musawi (2010) discusses how 'Salafist-Jihadist' web-sites devote a good deal of space to attacking those they perceive to be 'internal enemies'. The issue of moderate Muslims has also been a subject discussed by Al Qaeda leaders. For example, Al Qaeda issued an essay entitled "Moderate Islam is a prostration to the West" which appeared on many web-sites (translated in Ibrahim, 2007), and Ayman Al-Zawahiri (2002) wrote a whole treatise on the subject of 'Wala/Bara' (Loyalty and Enmity).

There are similarities between the arguments used here to discount internal opponents and those described in other studies of political rhetoric. Politicians often claim that they represent the majority while their opponents are disconnected from the people or represent a minority or politically elite grouping (e.g. Rapley, 1998; Reicher & Hopkins; 1996, 1998; Rooyackers & Verkuyten, 2011; Stevenson et al, 2007). The notion of mental colonisation (or internalized oppression) seen in the section on

subservience is used in hawkish Zionist discourse to discount the peace movement in Israel as 'self-hating' (Finlay, 2005), the notion of weakness or cowardice is used by far-right politicians to discount mainstream politicians (Rooyackers & Verkuyten, 2011; Wood & Finlay, 2008), and notions of bribery, personal reward and ignorance (seen in the section on self-interest) are found in fascist rhetoric to delegitimize members of the ingroup who oppose racism and anti-semitism (Finlay, 2007; Wood & Finlay, 2008). These types of accounts fall into the category of the 'psychologization' of opponents (Papastamou, 1986). Historical studies show similar strategies, where American and French revolutionaries tended to understand opposition in terms of greed, selfishness and corruption (e.g. Ducharme & Fine, 1995; Lucas, 1996).

In the communications analysed above, historical comparisons relating to the history of Muslims and colonialism are drawn on in both the construction of norms and deviance. This temporal aspect is important to acknowledge (see Condor, 1996, 2006, for discussions of this issue) since the emails construct a version of the world where the West is historically attacking Muslims, and where current Muslims engaging in political contact are just the most recent examples of an historically-enduring category of apostates or subservient Muslims. Similar discursive themes can be seen in other historical contexts and other Islamic political movements, from the ideology of the Kharijites of the seventh century, through to the anti-colonial revivalist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Esposito, 1991). These movements also argued for an Islamic system devoid of western influence and rallied against the leaders of many Muslim countries seen as too westernized.

To conclude, in conflict situations members who engage positively with outgroups pose a threat to other group members who argue for separation and/or hostility. In such cases, norms of intergroup contact are disputed within the group. If norms are disputed, so are constructions of prototypicality and deviance, and it is the job of those who wish to lead the group to try and get their versions accepted. In this paper we have seen in some detail how a group advocating militancy use the practice of denunciation to present disengagement as normative, and those engaging in cooperative contact as deviant. This illustrates one way in which intra-group practices of social influence are an important aspect of intergroup conflict. Finally, our understanding of norms and deviance need to recognize that these constructs might not be consensual, but are often constructed in political arguments to align with ideological positions.

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