

**Sunday 12 August 2012
FOR IMMEDIATE USE**

**The 'Charismatic Recruiter' Maajid Nawaz
talks to Broadcaster & Guest Selector Sue MacGregor
at the Edinburgh International Book Festival**

Former Islamist extremist turned democrat, Maajid Nawaz, appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival today to discuss the catalysts which pushed him from a hip-hop loving Essex schoolboy to a recruiter for the terrorist organisation Hizb al-Tahrir.

Nawaz recalled the grim reality of growing up as a British-Asian in Southend in the 90s, living under constant threat from the neo-Nazi group Combat 18 and their 'hammer...screwdriver... and knife attacks...'. He said 'by the age of fifteen I had already witnessed a number of my friends being stabbed... I was very disillusioned with society.' However he notes that disillusionment itself is not enough for a person to turn to extremism, 'there is a missing ingredient... you [need to] meet a charismatic recruiter.'

Despite his liberal mother's vehement opposition to his radicalisation, Maajid Nawaz enlisted with Hizb al-Tahrir, and soon became a proactive (and one can imagine, very charismatic) recruiter himself. Elected president of the Student Union at Newham College, Nawaz was not only able to influence a new generation of Hizb al-Tahrir recruits, but, ironically, was now receiving inside information about where and when Islamist meetings were being held directly from the police who wished to forewarn students about the dangers of radicalism; he mused, 'the 90's were the Islamists heyday... MI5 was caught completely off-guard'.

But as he rose through the ranks, Nawaz's situation became ever more precarious. In 2002 he was arrested in Alexandria for belonging to Hizb al-Tahrir (a group illegal in Egypt, but not in the UK and Europe). Reading from his book *Radical* he recalled the horror of his situation: 'To be

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asked to voluntarily walk towards your own torture is the cruellest of expectations... Each step is a personal betrayal.'

However it was during his four years of imprisonment, and with the help of Amnesty International, that Nawaz began 'a process of rehumanisation'. Under the rule of Mubarak, political prisoners consisted of anyone from Islamist extremists 'to liberal intellectuals... to homosexuals', and it was through discussing and debating with those around him that he began to change his world-view: he reflects that, 'a microcosm of the Egyptian uprisings was happening in Egypt's prisons, years before they happened on the streets'.

Now, as the Co-Founder and Chairman of Quilliam – a globally active think tank focusing on matters of Integration, Citizenship & Identity, Religious Freedom, Extremism and Immigration – and Founder of Khudi, a Pakistan based social movement campaigning to entrench democratic culture among the nation's youth, Maajid Nawaz hopes to utilize the skills he acquired as a Hizb al-Tahrir recruiter to mobilise and indeed 'radicalise' democratic movements in the 'repressive social fabric' of Pakistan and across the world.

The Edinburgh International Book Festival runs until Monday 27 August. Tickets are still available across the programme, and full details of all events can be found at www.edbookfest.co.uk

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