

# The Appeal of Vocal Islamism in the West: The Case of Hizb ut-Tahrir vis-à-vis Its Competitors

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**Abstract**—Islamism is a very debated topic in the West but almost exclusively explored in its violent forms. Nevertheless, a number of “vocal radical Islamist” groups exist in the West and legally operate because of their non-violent nature. Vocal radicals continually inspire individuals and lead them towards specific goals and priorities, sometimes even towards violence. This paper uses the long-living group Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) to explore the elements that make the organization appealing to segments of Muslim community in the West. This paper uses three agency variables - reflexive monitoring, the rationalization of action and the motivations for actions – to analyze HT’s appeal vis-à-vis two other Islamist groups, Ikhwan al-Muslimun and Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), having similar goals and the same high international profile. This paper concludes that HT’s uniqueness is given by its method, detailed vision of the caliphate, consistency over time and the emphasis placed on the caliphate as the leading force of HT’s unchanged motivation for action.

**Keywords**—Agency, Caliphate, Radicalization, Vocal Radicals.

## I. INTRODUCTION

ISLAMISM in the West has been a matter of concern for many years.<sup>1</sup> While a great portion of the literature remains exclusively focused on Jihadi/Salafi groups such as ISIS or Al Qaida [10], [12], [30], [32], [34], [36], [38], only a few scholars turned their attention to “radical vocal Islamist groups” [20], [45], [46], [52], [56]. The term “vocal radical” is here associated with all forms of Islamist activism presenting a strong anti-Western and anti-integration stance but never using violent methods. These groups – often neglected by the literature – represent the choice of all those Muslims who might share the ultimate goals of Al Qaida, ISIS, or other violent groups but who do not accept the killing of innocent people.

A long-living example of a radical vocal group is HT (the “Liberation Party”), which is founded in Jerusalem in 1953 by the Islamic scholar Taquiddin An-Nabhani. HT ideological tenets continue to shape various facades of Islamist contemporary activism, including mere intellectual groups and violent ones, such as al Muhajiroun [37]. Present in more than 45 countries around the world and defined as an “Islam ideological vanguard” [20], HT continues attracting members of Muslim communities in the West.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a significant difference between “Islamist” and “Islamic”: while the former is an ideology (“Islamism”) defining the actions and conduct of Islamist groups, “Islamic” is an adjective referred to all Muslims and their faith, i.e. Islam [9].

Using a comparative approach – analyzing HT vis-à-vis Ikhwan al-Muslimun and JeI – this paper aims to identify the elements that make HT appealing in the West and to clarify why these features are considered “unique” by HT affiliates (Hizbis) vis-à-vis other similar organizations. To do so, this article uses three agency variables identified by Giddens: reflexive monitoring, the rationalisation of action, and the motivations for actions [16]. While reflexive monitoring is used to reveal the similarities among the three groups under analysis, rationalisation of action and the motivations for actions are used to uncover HT’s unique features to account for the group’s appeal to segments of Muslim communities in the West.

This paper uses original first hand data drawn from the author’s fieldwork in London (October 2015 - January 2016) and in Sydney (February-May 2016) where the author conducted 16 interviews, four focus groups and observation with HT members.<sup>2</sup> The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, it discusses HT’s agency and the three theoretical variables used for this study. Then, each variable is applied to the case study leading to relevant findings on HT’s appeal. Finally, in the conclusion, the author stresses the importance of the findings and the main contributions of the present work.

## II. HT AS AN AGENT

As an ensemble of individuals, HT acts as a collective agent with a precise ideology and towards a well-defined goal, e.g. the re-establishment of the caliphate [39]. HT’s agency - intended as the power of agents “to think for themselves and act in ways that shape their experiences and life trajectories” [11], [14] – is impacted by a number of external stimuli. These stimuli work both as constraints and opportunities and fall under the umbrella term “structure”. The latter is intended as the ensemble of rules, conventions, institutions, procedures, and resources that the agent is subject to, which are able to limit but also empower the agent’s actions [16].

When considering HT’s agency within a specific national context, it is not only impacted by national authorities and their regulations, but also by other similar agents, who act as competitors. In order to identify HT’s features that make the group more appealing than its competitors to segments of Muslim community in the West, this paper uses three agency variables: reflexive monitoring, the rationalization of action,

<sup>2</sup> To respect interviewees’ privacy, pseudonyms were used instead of real names. The only exceptions were Uthman Badar, Wassim Doureih, Ibtihal Bsis, Nazreen Nawaz, and Taji Mustafa, who are official spokespersons and prominent members of HT Australia and Britain.

and the motivations for actions. Reflexive monitoring is understood as “a chronic feature of everyday action and involves the conduct not just of the individual but also of others” [16].

Agents do not only monitor and observe their own behaviors, but they are also impacted by the conduct of other agents and by the specific temporal and spatial settings in which they perform their activities. Therefore, agents’ actions and behaviors are exposed to both the influence of their peers and to the influence of the specific environment in which the actions take place. Agents exposed to similar environmental conditions and interacting with similar actors can develop common patterns of behaviors.

Reflexive monitoring is useful for the present study because it gives greater insight into the emotional and environmental factors that gave rise to HT, Ikhwan, and JeI as international protagonists of contemporary Islamist activism. By using reflexive monitoring, this paper identifies the common ground of HT and its two competitors, which is a result of exposure to similar inputs, and analyses the two main concepts common to Islamic revivalist groups: their vision of the West and their ideal target group for recruitment.

The second variable used in this paper to analyze HT’s uniqueness vis-à-vis its competitors is the rationalization of action. This concept is defined as a process where “agents maintain a continuing ‘theoretical understanding’ of the grounds of their activity” [16]. Agents are able to provide explanations for their conduct because they are driven by a certain degree of intentionality. Ira Cohen defined intentionality as the agents’ “knowledge or belief that specific kinds of practices will have a particular quality or outcome and the agents’ use of this knowledge to achieve the quality or outcome involved” [13].

Agents have a specific goal in mind, which is intentionally pursued with the knowledge and means available. While the reflexive monitoring is used in this paper to illustrate the common ground between HT and its competitors, rationalization of action is used as a theoretical tool to articulate the discourse on HT’s uniqueness. All agents have a certain degree of intentionality in performing their actions; data collected for this study reveal how HT’s rationalizations of its actions have differentiated it from Ikhwan and JeI and show how HT’s high level of intentionality constitutes the essence of the organization’s “competitive advantage” over the other two groups [35]. HT’s intentionality is very evident in three fields, which also constitute the main attractive elements of the organization for new recruits: its method, constitution for the caliphate, and rigidity over time.

Motivations for actions represent the third agency variable used in this paper to compare HT with its competitors. Motivations “supply overall plans and programs within which a range of conduct is enacted” [16]. Motivations are related more to the potential for action than to the ways in which action is performed by the agent. Therefore, strong motivations will certainly determine powerful actions even when confronted with several potential obstacles. HT has relentlessly advocated to re-establish the caliphate in spite of

decades of persecutions, bans, and arrests of its members, illustrating the strong motivation behind HT’s actions [23]. Using this third agency variable, this paper shows how HT’s strong motivations and persistence have served to increase its appeal to new recruits over the years.

### III. REFLEXIVE MONITORING: EXPLORING THE COMMON GROUND BETWEEN HT AND ITS COMPETITORS

When agents are exposed to similar stimuli, they often develop similar behaviors; therefore, the fact that the founders of HT, Ikhwan and JeI were living in similar environments explains several of the similarities between the three groups. It was a period of political instability in Muslim regions, generated by the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the creation of the state of Israel, and by the Western occupation of those territories, which had a significant political, economic, and social impact for those Muslim populations [7], [48].

HT, Ikhwan, and JeI represent the oldest and most widespread Islamic revivalist groups still active today. The three founders were contemporary brilliant minds, highly educated in both Islamic Law, the Western political system, and Western philosophy who wanted to hold on to Islam as the only powerful weapon for countering Western territorial and ideological colonialism. Ikhwan is, in a sense, the forefather of both HT and JeI, since it was founded first by Hasan Al-Banna in Egypt in 1928. After Ikhwan, Abul Ala Mawdudi founded JeI in British India in 1941, and 12 years later An-Nabhani founded HT in Palestine.

As agents who wanted to make a difference in the particular period in which they were living, the three founders organized their actions by establishing groups that went back to the true teachings of Islam to cleanse society from all kinds of *kuffar* (unbelievers) influence by applying *shari’a* [18]. Not only was their groups’ agency carried out through intellectual activities, such as lectures, sermons at the mosque, study-circles, and leaflet campaigns, but all three groups were also engaged in a process of reflexive monitoring, where interaction with other actors fostered the adoption of similar ideas and behaviors.

The single group focused on its own conduct first and then on the conduct of others, while also observing the environment in which the conduct is performed, making it an intergroup reflexive process. It is reflexive because each group first monitors and observes its own behavior, and it is an intergroup process because each group also observes the conduct and performance of its peers. Reflexive monitoring is the reason why the three groups share many of the same characteristics, which is a result of the fact that intellectuals from the three groups were familiar with each other’s ideas.

The literature suggests that both An-Nabhani and Mawdudi were deeply inspired by the writings of Sayyid Qutb, one of the most important members of Ikhwan [7], [15], [18]. He was an Egyptian intellectual and school teacher, who wrote *Milestones* during his 10-year-long imprisonment under Nasser’s rule. *Milestones* was first published in 1964 as a manifesto of contemporary Islamism, which has inspired several Islamic revivalist groups, both violent and non-violent

[47], [51].

Undoubtedly, Qutb played an essential role in shaping the nature of Ikhwan in Egypt, and he also had a significant impact on all the groups that followed, including JeI and HT. Moreover, the three groups under analysis had both physical and intellectual contact with one another, while the debate on whether An-Nabhani was ever a member of Ikhwan is still open, it is certain that he had interactions with members of Ikhwan delegations who travelled to Haifa in Palestine [19].

Mawdudi's contact with Ikhwan was purely intellectual and was initiated by one of his disciples, Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi. He met with Sayyid Qutb and translated Qutb's writings for Mawdudi and also translated Mawdudi's writings into Arabic for Qutb [18], [50]. Contacts between the groups - and the consequential reflexive monitoring - led to common ideas, such as the critique of the West and specific target groups for recruitment.

#### A. Western Enmity against the Muslims

Besides the similar beginning, a crucial common point between the three groups is the holistic negative vision of the West as a system. HT, Ikhwan and JeI all hold that the Western system represents a danger to Muslims, since it aims to use both militarily and ideological force to annihilate Islam. The three groups urge the *ummah* to go back to the fundamentals of Islam, not as a religion but as a *din* (a way of life), and to present strong anti-colonial arguments that often overlap or complement anti-imperialistic and anti-American [22], [28], [45].

According to three groups, the most dangerous anti-Islamic Western ideas are democracy, secular laws, and capitalism, which are regarded as serious threats to the population under their rule:

“Celebrities that have committed suicide include legends in their industry like Kurt Cobain, Robin Williams and Marilyn Monroe...celebrities that have suffered severe bouts of depression include Brad Pitt, Eminem, Nicki Minaj, Lady Gaga, Miley Cyrus and the list continues. The reality is that the capitalist system has not been able to provide happiness to people who are deemed as having everything which is material...money has not bought happiness to people who have immense wealth in monetary terms...the Western celebrity approach of “sex, money and drugs” has produced depressed, suicidal and unhappy individuals, it has brought misery to their lives, whilst ironically thousands look to them as the pinnacle of success...happiness has not been found at the bottom of a wine bottle and overflowing bank accounts...emptiness has overwhelmed them, because there is a vital aspect in their lives which is missing—their actual purpose in life” [25].

As highlighted by this recent HT Britain post, the organization sees the capitalistic ideology in Western democracies as producing an unhealthy environment, creating unhappy people who build their life on concepts that lead them to depression, anxiety, and misery. Both Ikhwan and JeI agree with HT on the excessive materialism in the West at the

expense of the spiritual dimension. Materialism is regarded as sinful also by members of the Ikhwan, following the teaching of their founder Al-Banna:

“The Europeans worked assiduously in trying to immerse (the world) in materialism, with their corrupting traits and murderous germs, to overwhelm those Muslim lands that their hands stretched out to...you are a new spirit making its way into the heart of this nation—reviving it with the Qur'an; a new light dawning, dispelling the darkness of materialism through the knowledge of Allah [3].

In his message *Between Yesterday and Today*, Al-Banna exposes the effects of colonization in the Muslim world, defining the European-imported concept of materialism as a “tyranny on Muslim lands” [3]. According to Al-Banna (and An-Nabhani), the most dangerous kind of tyranny is the ideological kind established by colonial powers by introducing their *haram* (forbidden) practices into the Dar al-Islam (the Muslim world). Among these *haram* practices, Al-Banna includes the display of semi-naked women, drinking alcoholic beverages, the presence of theatres and dance halls, and the multitude of Western “silly games and vices” [3], [41].

Al-Banna created Ikhwan to be a group of sanctified individuals capable of leading their nation (Egypt) out of the darkness of materialism and Western influence to an Islamic revival based on a deeper knowledge of Allah [2]. Mawdudi's view was also in line with An-Nabhani and Al-Banna's ideas concerning materialism and Western cultural subjugation of Muslims in their home countries:

“This new civilization reached the height of its materialism and unfaith, where most of the Muslim nations are subjugated by the West...Muslims were invaded by the Western pen and the sword simultaneously... the minds that had already succumbed to the political dominance of the West quite easily also became impressed by Western knowledge” [49].

As illustrated by this quote, Mawdudi was also concerned about the spread of Western lifestyle, culture, and knowledge in Muslim majority countries where he thought Islam might be neglected in favor of new *kuffar* and *haram* practices. Having experienced British invasion in India, Mawdudi thought - like An-Nabhani and Al-Banna - that the only way to resist a slow but pervasive *kuffar* contamination was to establish a group to lead a revival of Islam and instruct people on their religious obligations and Islamic tenets.

Ikhwan, HT, and JeI all share the same conviction that only *shari'a* is capable of assuring a good life, as it works as an intellectual (not coercive) regulating force for all realms of life [49], [53], [57]. These realms include the personal sphere (where the government is supportive of citizens, ensuring the population's basic needs and the protection of disadvantaged social categories), and the international sphere (where a nation grounded on Islamic law should serve as an example of conduct for others, advancing international cooperation and working for the common good). Given the several advantages of a system based on *shari'a*, Ikhwan, HT, and JeI are confident in presenting the caliphate as the only system that

can holistically improve life for mankind [57]. At the same time, the three groups see Western former colonial powers as the main obstacle to its re-establishment. Al-Banna and Mawdudi were both severely critical of colonialism and its impact on Muslim identity and shared An-Nabhani's belief in a Western hidden agenda to annihilate Muslims:

"The aim of colonialism was to create a generation of Muslims enslaved by Western culture and advocates of the Western system to further their colonial objectives in the region...Muslim puppet rulers continued to implement secular reforms, fostering the continuous process of decay and restricting the teaching of Islam...the result of this actions was a disastrous impact on Muslims' identity especially on youths. This hidden agenda has intensified in the last few years pursued under the umbrella of the war on terror and prevention of extremism...in addition, decades of poor organization, ineffective teaching methods, under investments due to fraud capitalistic systems and visionless regimes compounded the education crisis" [57].

The alleged Western hidden agenda to destroy Muslims is a common theme of HT publications, events, and speeches even today. As illustrated by the above quote from the women's section of HT, the group believes Western former colonial powers are determined to maintain their hegemony of Muslims by using soft power, such as the use of "puppet rulers", the restriction of Islamic teachings, and the numerous measures that have taken place under the banner of the War on Terror. HT, the Ikhwan, and JeI maintain that Western colonial powers have "enslaved" Muslims not only through military, cultural, and political means, but also through an education crisis, which is held up as another core cause of decay fostered by Western colonizers [31], [57].

Given the numerous ideological similarities among these three groups, it appears that the reflexive monitoring process that HT, Ikhwan, and JeI are continually engaged with as collective agents have impacted the activities of the groups, creating similar patterns of behavior as a result of their similar worldviews.

#### *B. The Target Group for Recruitment*

The need to make the ummah familiar with the "authentic Islamic principles", and not a blurred Westernized version, has pushed Ikhwan, HT, and JeI to perform the role of "educators of the masses" in the Muslim community. With this goal in mind, all three groups, in different areas of the world, have identified the same target group for recruiting their potential members: young Muslim intellectuals. This target group represents the second element resulting from the reflexive monitoring process of the three groups.

Given the nature of their founders (Al Banna, Mawdudi, and An-Nabhani were all prominent intellectuals of their time) Ikhwan, JeI, and HT have always distinguished themselves by their ability to attract young Muslims, especially politically-minded university students who are disenchanting with the democratic system and are looking for an alternative model to address their current problems, individually and collectively

[20], [32], [33], [57].

Like HT, JeI, and Ikhwan are all very active in the academic world because of their desire to create a group of brilliant minds, educated on the group-sponsored tenets, who would then constitute the "vanguard party" challenging the Western social, political, and economic model [3], [6], [40]. With this aim in mind, the current leadership of the three groups encourages activists to constantly engage with society. While HT "knocks at society's door" [52] with its publications, rallies, talks, lectures, public events and also through specific sister organizations that work with young adults, Ikhwan and JeI have built a solid network of infrastructures in the territories they operate.<sup>3</sup> These infrastructures mostly concern schools, colleges, dispensaries, and hospitals and provide services to the population that the central government would normally offer [7], [15], [54]. By focusing on a variety of community support activities, all three groups aim to convince their audience of the benefits of re-establishing the caliphate by comparing the glorious time of the Khilafah al-Rashida with the current troubled status of the Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

By contrasting the glory of the Khilafah al-Rashida with the current troubled status of the Middle East and the decadence of the West, HT, Ikhwan, and the JeI all look for young intellectual minds from which a revolution of thought might originate, since these minds are best placed to educate Muslims on their religious obligations and present the caliphate as the only government that can "prevent anarchy and chaos" in the Muslim world [7].

#### IV. RATIONALIZATION OF ACTION: THE INTENTIONALITY OF HT AS AN AGENT

While reflexive monitoring was used to explore the similarities between HT, Ikhwan, and JeI, this section uses rationalization of action—previously defined as an agent's awareness that specific actions will lead to specific outcomes [13]—to point out HT's intentionality as a distinguishing feature of the group vis-à-vis similar groups. HT's strong intentions – over time and places - produced to a system of never-changing elements very much appreciated by its associates. In particular, the interviews conducted with current HT members identified three elements: HT's precise method, detailed vision of the caliphate, and high degree of consistency over time.

##### *A. A "Rational, Clear, and Effective Method"*

In his interview with the author, Mohammad, a HT member for 15 years, described the group's method using three simple adjectives: "rational, clear, and effective" [67]. Mohammed revealed how HT's method was the main driver in attracting him to HT when he was a university student in Islamic studies, an experience that was common among other interviewees, who all identified HT's method as one of the elements that first attracted them to the group. Mohammad's idea on the

<sup>3</sup> An example is HT's sister organisation Ansar-Sisters for Revival [5].

<sup>4</sup> Al-Khilafah al-rashida refers to unified Islamic state "rightly guided by the four successors of the Prophet between 632-661" [19].

method of HT was also shared by Nuha, senior member of HT Australia:

“No other group has such a rational, clear, and effective method as the Hizb, for whom the caliphate is not mere utopia, but it is the main goal activists work for everyday following a detailed method” [58].

Undoubtedly, both Mohammad and Nuha were impressed by the work of HT activists to re-establish the caliphate, and especially the precise method employed to achieve this goal. HT’s current method is the same as the one proposed by the founder An-Nabhani in his seminal book *Islamic State* (1998), still read as part of the training and education of HT members today. HT’s founder envisaged five phases for the re-establishment of the caliphate: the starting point (a small group of Muslims intellectuals, educated on HT’s main tenets, is constituted as the first nucleus of the group), the phase of indoctrination (the nucleus carries HT’s message and ideology outside the in-group to recruit new members), the take off point (HT becomes as a recognized collective presence among population), the phase of interaction (HT is ready to start controlling the society replacing Western-sponsored ideas with the Hizb-sponsored ones), and the phase of government, which marks HT’s ascent to power [4].

As pointed out by Uthman Badar – one of the leaders of HT Australia – in his interview with the author, HT’s ascent to power through a coup d’état concerns the Muslim world (specific areas called *majaal*) and not the West. As alarming as the word “coup” might sound, Badar defined HT’s coup as “consensual and not-bloody” since it would be preceded by the five phases. Maintaining a bottom-up approach - from a small nucleus, to the larger society, and eventually to powerful elites – once the ruling class agrees with the need of living under the caliphate as their Islamic obligation, Badar said that “they will then be ready to pass the power on to HT who will then initiate the coup” [59].

Thus, the educational preparation of the population will prevent any significant objections resulting in civil strife, given that both the society and the rulers will acknowledge the role of HT as the “legitimate actor” leading the change. The process described by Badar is what HT endeavors to create in all Muslim countries where it operates, even though the group is proscribed in all of them except Lebanon and the UAE.

#### *B. Differences with al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun and JeI*

HT’s method also stands as an important recruitment tool for the organization. While HT promotes a bottom-up approach that begins with a revolution of thought followed by a non-bloody coup to re-establish the caliphate, Mawdudi believed that an Islamic revolution should initiate a process of societal reform within the governance of an Islamic state. Hence, Mawdudi’s method is essentially a top-down approach, which emphasizes political struggle rather than working on individuals to first “make them perfect Muslims” [7] and then to change society and eventually the entire political system. In Mawdudi’s view, social change happens when political power is seized, which allows the implementation of large reforms. Furthermore, Mawdudi envisaged the rise of an Islamic

governance within the structures of Western democracies, assuming that, with some significant adjustments, the Islamic state would emerge as a “theo-democracy” or a “democratic caliphate” [7], [8].

Such claims are absolutely haram for HT since the two terms (democracy and caliphate) are mutually exclusive. Given these premises and JeI’s rejection of violence, Mawdudi thought that engagement in politics was the main viable path towards re-establishment of the caliphate. For these reasons, JeI became a recognized and influential political party in Pakistan, capable of mobilizing the masses around specific issues. At the same time, the group exhibited contradictory behavior: while advocating for social justice and a pious Islamic ruler, Mawdudi himself became a senior statesman subject to man-made laws [44], [48].

JeI’s method is considered by current HT members as too accommodating of *kuffar* politics. Though it strongly criticizes the state and the political establishment, JeI still accepts the political process as a viable path to an Islamic state. This mixed attitude accompanied by a top-down approach is what has pushed several individuals away from JeI and towards HT. This is the case of Farah, one of the most prominent female activists of HT Australia:

“I have always been political minded since I was a teenager and—before joining the Hizb with my husband 10 years ago—I was a member of the JeI in India. What drove me away from that group was the confusion among several concepts and stances, which all coexisted together...HT is very different: everything is clear and there is only one stance corresponding to the main plan...the individual is the center of HT’s actions because it is impossible to change a system from above in a long-lasting way without working on its constitutive elements to make the change stable...and the smallest units of a system are the individuals” [60].

Farah’s words stress the two core elements of HT’s method that made HT more attractive than JeI in her eyes: its immutable plan and the bottom-up approach. These two elements also form part of HT’s competitive advantage compared to Ikhwan. For individuals like Farah who long for the caliphate and a reliable actor to lead the Islamic revival in the contemporary world, the stability of HT in terms of method and main goals, made HT a more attractive option than Ikhwan.

Over the years, Ikhwan has engaged with national governments, created parties, run for elections, and participated in a system which, according to HT, is nothing but corrupt [31]. On this subject, the words of Karyme’s (HT Australia) words are very strong:

“Ikhwan political participation in *kuffar* systems has marked the end of their role as a reform group advocating for Islamic revival...how can they talk about purity, about the need to go back to the sources of Islam and about reforms when they participate in a corrupted system, playing by corrupted rules and sitting in corrupted parliaments?” [61].

Karyme expressed disdain for groups like Ikhwan who

formally stand as Islamic revivalist groups but which also actively participate in a system that they consider corrupt. Again, Karyme's interview points out HT's rigid stances on many relevant themes such as political participation, which have remained unchanged and have served as a strength. HT members often point out the fact that, unlike Ikhwan, decades of repression have never altered HT's method or plan. Conversely, under the umbrella of Ikhwan, there are many different groups ranging from political reformism to terrorism [15]. HT members dismiss Ikhwan and JeI for their involvement in allegedly corrupted systems, for changing their methods and goals, and for compromising with the West.

### C.A Detailed Vision of the Caliphate

"Many groups advocate for the caliphate but they have no plan and no idea on what the caliphate should look like once established... not only HT has a plan but it also has a constitution ready" [62]. The words of Sadiqa, a senior member of HT Australia, illustrate another constitutive element of HT's appeal over its peer groups, namely HT's detailed vision of the caliphate. During the interviews, current members of HT stressed the high rationalization of action of their group based on HT's thorough understanding of the future Islamic state, differentiating the caliphate from *kuffar* models.

HT members often criticize both Ikhwan and JeI for not having a clear vision of the caliphate and for not producing specific literature on how an Islamic state should function. This is the case of Farah (HT Australia):

"We can't advocate for something we do not even have clear in our mind... what kind of caliphate do they [Ikhwan and JeI] want? It seems to me that what other Islamic revivalist groups advocate for is more of a blurred image drawn from Western parliamentary democracies" [63].

This "blurred image" linked to the Western system of government, mentioned by Farah in her interview with the author, is linked to some particular aspects of Ikhwan and JeI that deeply differentiate these two groups from HT. Ikhwan considers the re-establishment of the caliphate as a secondary element: the group has always been more concerned with the diffusion of Islamic morals within the society by providing education, healthcare, and other welfare services [7], [30], [54]. Ikhwan formally advocates for the Islamic state but also thinks that the Islamic state can take several forms, such as a parliamentary democracy, and see no contradiction between Islam and the "government of people". Also, Mawdudi's caliphate appears to include many Western elements. Although he did not write any draft constitution on the political apparatus of the future Islamic state, the founder of JeI borrowed Western concepts, such as the vision of the Imam as an elected president and the establishment of a parliament and an independent judiciary power [7]. Conversely, HT leadership attempted to map out all aspects regarding the future caliphate and its functioning, not only on a theoretical and conceptual level through the works of An-Nabhani, but also by drafting a specific constitution for the

Islamic state in 1979.

HT's constitution is important to HT members and is held up as evidence of the rationality and credibility of the organization compared to its competitors, especially Ikhwan and JeI. The first version of the "Proposed Constitution for an Islamic State" was issued right after the creation of the Party (in 1953), and an English version appears as an appendix in An-Nabhani's book *The Islamic State* (1998). It is organized into the following 14 parts with specific provisions regulating all important aspect of life within the caliphate.<sup>5</sup> The major role played by Islam is stated in the first part of the constitution (General Rules) in Article 1 and clearly states:

"Islamic 'Aqeedah [doctrine] is the foundation of the state's constitution and laws. Therefore, nothing is permitted to exist in the State's structure, system, accountability, or any other aspect connected with the State that does not take the Islamic 'Aqeedah as its source" [4].

The opening is very clear: the foundation is Islam and only Islam, and every single aspect of the state should develop accordingly. This first article serves as a guarantee of a just system of government for HT members since "knowing Islam as the basis of the state is something that reassures us because our existence will not be regulated by man-made laws but by what God has established" [64].

The second part of HT's constitution is specifically devoted to the Ruling System, where An-Nabhani introduces the concept of accountability. The document determines that all people occupying a position of power are responsible for all citizens equally and must not discriminate among groups. On this subject, HT's constitution establishes that "non-Muslim citizens have the right to voice their complaints for any injustices or misapplications of the Islamic rules upon them by the rulers" [4]. Moreover, the multi-party system, articulated in Article 21 of the constitution, is something that HT members are very proud of because it distinguishes their Islamic state from the Islamic dictatorships characterizing many Muslim countries today [65].

The constitution then addresses elements concerning the social and economic system. The specific provisions of HT's caliphate call for gender segregation and to preserve the role of women as "mothers and home makers". Thus, the constitution guarantees the same rights for men and women but distinguishes different gender roles. HT allows caliphate women to "conduct all of life's affairs" including participation in politics and working as public servants. The only limitation that imposed concerns are governmental positions, which women are barred from [4].

While prohibiting seductive dress and make-up, HT's constitution appears to be open minded in its conception of marriage as a set of mutual responsibilities between husband and wife, where the husband's primary role is to take care of

<sup>5</sup> In details, the 14 parts are: General Rules, the Ruling System, the Khalifah, Deputy Assistant, Amir of Jihad, The Armed Forces, The Judiciary, The Governors of the Provinces, The Administrative System, Assembly of the Ummah, The Social System, The Economic System, Education Policy, and Foreign Policy [4].

rather than rule over his wife. The Marxist/Leninist influence on An-Nabhani's thought is evident in the regulations of the economic system. In HT's caliphate, all individuals are able to meet their basic needs, and the state has the primary role of distributing funds to citizens, ensuring an equitable distribution of resources [4]. For this reason, capitalistic companies and monopolies are absolutely forbidden, together with some other practices like usury, gambling, and squandering [4]. While allowing private ownership, the Hizbi caliphate advocates for a strong welfare state based on solidarity, making it a quasi-communist economic system. For instance, HT's constitution establishes that salaries will not be determined by the "knowledge or qualifications of the employee" but by the "value of his/her work or the benefit expected by the employee" [4].

The document also defines specific social responsibilities for the Islamic state, such as the public duty to give adequate support for those who have no funds and no job and to provide housing for the disabled [4]. Lastly, HT's constitution also addresses education and foreign policy. HT's rationalization for its actions, as having and pursuing a clear goal, is here highlighted by the provision of a state school curriculum, reminiscent of some authoritarian regimes, such as Italian Fascism, whose primary goal was to create a "Fascist personality"; similarly, the main aim of the HT's caliphate is to create an "Islamic personality" [4]. For this reason, the constitution establishes that Islamic culture and Arabic are to be taught at all levels of education, and classes would be structured according to strict gender segregation [4]. The constitution also makes it clear that education should be provided freely, as an essential right for all citizens. This vision opposes what HT members often label as "the elitist Western view" that private education providers are better, since they are characterized by restricted access and high annual fees [4]. By establishing these regulations, HT aims to emerge as a "justice promoter" and an equal opportunity provider by promoting a model based on the "care of people, on their growth and development both individually and as a community" [66]. Furthermore, the fact that HT's caliphate would have treaties and agreements with other states outside the Islamic state leads to two important conclusions: first, the aim of HT is not to subjugate the world under the power of Islam within a global caliphate, and secondly, HT's Islamic state would maintain peaceful and collaborative relationships with other non-Muslim states. These two conclusions provide insights into the significant differences between HT's caliphate and Al-Baghdadi's one. The idea of a caliph and a caliphate apparatus caring for every individual is for many a very attractive aspect of HT. The fact that this intention is not tacit but written down in a constitution that makes HT even more credible and gives it a significant advantage over its competitors.

#### D. The Organization's Consistency over Time

"Consistency is an essential element...a group cannot be considered reliable if it is not consistent overtime" [67]. Mohammad's words introduce the third constitutive

element of HT's appeal over its competitors: the organization's consistency. While many actors, such as national politicians or Muslims outside of HT, often criticize HT for its rigidity compared to other Islamist groups, which participate in the political process, HT's rigidity was an appealing characteristic for all the members the author interviewed.

"We are well aware of social, political, and economic changes of modern times but our aim and methodology do not change and never will" [66]. What Khalida stressed here perfectly epitomizes the position of HT members throughout the history of the organization: while being very politically minded and engaging in all the most pressing contemporary debates, HT members do not change their positions on salient themes, such as political participation or the re-establishment of the caliphate [24].

According to members, change their views on salient topics would mean "alter[ing] the nature and the very essence of HT" [58]. While this rigidity may be considered a disadvantage by some Muslims who see modernization as an essential requirement for the success and appeal of a group, members of HT represent that subgroup of people who look at structural rigidity as a great advantage for the organization's effectiveness. In particular, this study looks at two HT-specific positions that the group has never changed: the use of violence and political participation.

#### E. The Use of Violence

With regard to the use of violence, HT has always presented itself as an "intellectual group", rejecting violence and terror acts. Even more recently, after the ISIS terror attacks in Europe, senior HT members have emphasized that they do not support violent organizations, describing individuals perpetrating brutalities as unrepresentative of the Muslim world and their din. On this subject, Nazreen Nawaz - senior and prominent member of HT Britain - clearly depicts the terrorism of ISIS as not part of the *ummah*, but as a result of "misguided individuals and organizations", who harm innocents:

"I apologies that in the absence of the true Khilafah al-rashida, many of your citizens have come to view the great din of Islam through the violent actions of a few misguided individuals and organizations... as a Muslim, this is what I will apologies for...I will not apologies for the actions of a few individuals or groups whose acts of violence against innocents does not represent my din or my *ummah*" [43].

Nawaz's opinion is widely shared among HT Australia members interviewed by the author, who harshly condemned terror groups for disrespecting the "sacredness of life" and the role of God in deciding "who dies and who lives", and many quoted the Qur'an 2:256: "there shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion". Given these ideas, HT's condemnation of terrorism has always been accompanied by a direct attack against Western governments, which are deemed responsible for the emergence of terror groups. HT members

have no hesitation in presenting terrorism as a natural outcome of centuries of Western occupation of Muslim lands and military, economic, and political subjugation of the *ummah* [68].

The unity of HT members as a shared intentionality, deriving from the same ideological sources as its rationalization for action, has prevented the organization from experiencing significant differences of opinion as well as the emergence of more extreme factions within the group. If somebody were to develop more violent inclinations, he or she would be immediately expelled from the organization.<sup>6</sup> The same cannot be said for Ikhwan, who have split into several cells over the years and today is barely connected to the central Egyptian leadership [7]. The lack of centralization in the group has fostered several trends within Ikhwan, allowing the rise of cells that are very different from one another. The significant differences among the cells are mirrored by the different attitudes they have towards violence.

Unlike HT, Ikhwan has always accepted the use of violent means to achieve political goals. For instance, in December 1948, Ikhwan secret apparatus killed the Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi al-Nuqrashi to counter the opposition by the government [48]. This event paved the way for several violent retaliations by both the group and the Egyptian national authorities, leading to the assassination of Al-Banna in 1949 and Qutb in 1966.<sup>7</sup> Executed under President Nasser's rule, Qutb strongly believed that violence and martyrdom were essential to for re-establishing the true Islamic state and that the *da'wah* alone was not enough [47].

Qutb's ideas have produced operative branches of the group that are considered terror organizations. A well-known example is Hamas, founded by Ikhwan in 1987 after the beginning of the First Intifada to fight Israel and its occupation of Palestine.<sup>8</sup> Over the years, Hamas has perpetrated frequent suicide attacks against Israel, affecting the civilian population. At the same time, and in perfect harmony with Ikhwan's attention to social programs, Hamas runs many support programs for the people of the Gaza Strip and has built hospitals, schools, and libraries throughout the area; as a result, Hamas has achieved widespread support among locals [17].

JeI is also a very heterogeneous group with multiple coexisting organizations operating under the umbrella family of JeI. For instance, in Pakistan, there are over a dozen

organizations connected to the JeI, but only two of them are active through political channels. Four organizations are violent groups perpetrating violent acts and one represents a union of religious scholars [18]. This significant variety in just one country is a marker of the many trends existing within the same group.

While it is fully involved in the political scene in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, JeI has adopted strong pro-Taliban attitudes, cultivating links with Al-Qaida and strongly opposing interventions in the global War on Terror. The different attitudes and positions of JeI branches even within the same country suggest a high degree of fragmentation and a low rationalization of action, given the different intentions of the branches and the individuals leading them.

#### F. Political Participation

Another unique aspect of HT is the group's consistent stance on political participation. HT has always fought against the concept of the modern state, depicting it as a Western construction aimed at dividing Muslims and weakening the *ummah* [21], [26]. HT members have remained faithful to An-Nabhani's position on the illegitimacy of Westphalian states in the West and even more so in Muslim regions.

In Muslim regions, HT members argue that all matters should be ruled by Islamic law (*shari'a*) with an Islamic system of government (*khilafah*). HT members do not recognize the Western division of the world into nation-states and still uses the Ottoman caliphate terminology to refer to geographical locations. For example, HT members use the term *wilaya* (province) to identify a territory, which can correspond to a nation or a region.<sup>9</sup> The uncompromising refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the modern state also entails HT's refusal to directly participate in the political process. HT prohibits its members from voting and running for elections. It also prohibits individuals from forming political parties in what is for them an "illegitimate *kuffar* system" [68].

While keeping up to date on the most pressing political issues by publishing daily news commentary and providing lectures and talks on the most relevant national and international matters, HT has not given in to the temptation to become a political party; however, both Ikhwan and JeI have become political forces in several countries and have participated in the Western system of the modern state, while advocating for the implementation of *shari'a*. As stated above, while occasionally pointing out the need for a caliphate to re-establish order and peace in the Middle East, neither Ikhwan nor JeI shied away from playing a protagonist role in national politics. In fact, Ikhwan has not opposed the concept of nation states and has even declared itself in Egypt as a "popular national movement" [30]. Ikhwan has always struggled to be part of the political scene and to foster an Islamic revival in the countries they operate in through reforms. Towards the goal of reviving Islam in society and the state, Ikhwan members founded several, highly-supported political parties

<sup>9</sup> See the division of HT's branches between "Muslim Lands" and the "West" on the official Central Media Office website [29].



throughout the Middle East and the Muslim world.

Some examples of Ikhwan-sponsored political parties include the Iraqi Islamist Party, Kurdistan Islamic Union (Iraq), Islamic Action Front (Jordan), Hadas (Kuwait), Movement of Society for Peace (Algeria), Justice and Construction Party (Libya), Justice and Development Party (Morocco), and Ennahda Movement (Tunisia). Al-Banna's desire for political participation was also shared by the founder of JeI, Mawdudi, who supported the Indian National Congress Party, the first modern nationalistic movement in British India, established in 1885.

Today, the JeI enjoys a high degree of support in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, and has engaged with the electoral process in these countries since the 1950s. In countries like Pakistan, JeI has become an influential national political party. It has formed alliances with other groups to reinforce its power such as the army, which due to JeI's influence adopted an Islamic code of conduct [33].

#### V. HT'S MOTIVATIONS FOR ACTIONS

A group's motivations for actions are the third agency variable used in this paper to analyse HT's uniqueness. While Ikhwan, JeI, and HT all aim to return to the "Golden Age of Islam" that will end the subjugation of Muslims and halt societal decline, their actions differ significantly [55], [57]. As stressed in the previous sections, Ikhwan and JeI have changed their positions over time and have participated in the political process to Islamize society through reforms. Conversely, HT has not changed its action or motivations for action since 1953. Yet, the three Islamist groups share the conviction that the need to re-establish the caliphate is driven by two main reasons.

First, the *khilafah* is the only way to fulfil a crucial religious obligation for Muslims, allowing them to live within a system based on *shari'a*. Ikhwan, JeI, and HT all consider *shari'a* the only law that allows men and women to live a good life and to prosper on earth, since it was divinely provided. Moreover, they all consider European colonial expansion in the Arab world to be the main cause for the fall of the caliphate. Secondly, the re-establishment of the caliphate is considered the only way to prevent the falling-off experienced by the *ummah* after *kuffar* influence and contamination.

In Islamist discourses, the influence of Western colonizers in the Muslim world produced a gradual secularization of societies through the introduction of *kuffar* thoughts, which contradict Islamic principles, triggering the *ummah's* stray from "God's true path (Sirat-1 Mustakim)" in favor of the progressive adoption of un-Islamic practices and values [7].

All three groups have boldly spoken not only against Western colonial powers but also against Muslim rulers, who have been corrupted by the *kuffar* and have started leading their populations in a manner inconsistent with *shari'a* [55].

In line with what the founders of the three groups believed decades ago, current members have been persuaded that the abandonment of Islamic principles has damaged the *ummah* globally:

"The *ummah* is like the human body: if one part is

suffering, the whole body is in pain...and, when Islam is not correctly implemented, Muslims unavoidably suffer" [66].

This powerful comment was made by one of the senior members of HT Australia in her interview with the author and is typical of the position of the three groups compared in this paper. The common thought among the groups is that the *ummah* is suffering because of the bad choices made by people in power who have neglected the divine law. Therefore, Ikhwan, JeI, and HT all have the main goal of re-establishing the caliphate, which they see as urgent and absolutely necessary because of the discomfort the *ummah* is experiencing:

The unified call for the *khilafah* was awe-inspiring, humbling and mesmerizing. From all around the world, from the rich to the poor, from the famous former Indonesian rock star Hari Mukti, to your everyday Muslim, there was only one thing on the minds of the people at the conference, and that was the *khilafah* [1].

The demands of the "Arab Spring" in the last few years were a manifestation of the *ummah's* resistance and perseverance. Their cries of "As-Sha'b yureed isqaat an-Nizam", "the people demand the fall of the regime!" were not only chanted in the streets and squares of the Arab world, but echoed throughout the Muslim world [27].

You can see the massive change in the Muslim world today, the Indonesia conference (100.000 attendees) is the perfect example of the largest conference supporting *khilafah* in history... also many recent studies and surveys—such as the one of the University of Maryland in the US (April 2007)—published a report that said that 70% of people in the Muslim world would support a strict application of shariah and the unification of the Muslim states into one, i.e. the caliphate...this is something inevitable [42].

As stressed by these three extracts from HT official communiqués, textual posts, and videos, the organization is constantly engaged in producing visual and textual material to claim that the *ummah* throughout the world is longing for the caliphate and is deeply unhappy about the political, social, and economic status quo fostered by capitalism and Western powers. Nevertheless, while HT advocates daily for the caliphate, orienting all its actions towards this goal, Ikhwan and JeI have slowly adapted to the Western political context and campaign as a political party from within the system.

While HT regularly organizes *Khilafah* Conferences around the world to familiarize Muslims with the glory of the caliphate, its two competitors appear to have moved the caliphate to the bottom of their political agenda and instead campaign for reforms and social justice within what HT members call a "*kuffar* system" [68]. Although there are common motivations for the actions of HT and its two competitors, the importance of their various motivations differs, and these differences determine different attitudes. More specifically HT has never changed its priorities, which is a direct result of its unchanging motivations for action. The

latter is rooted in the constant commitment of members to study of HT's official adopted literature as soon as they join the group.

New members are also required to pledge an oath, stating that they are ready to adopt everything that HT calls for, even if they are not fully convinced of the validity of HT's arguments [56]. The need to always agree with HT leadership has assured the group a high level of consistency over time and engages members in daily activities able to provide them with a sense of security, deriving from being righteous before God, which significantly reduces their anxiety, shame, and guilt because they are persuaded that they are fulfilling God's will. Therefore, HT motivations for actions are hard to change and they result appealing to those people looking for a stable and invariable advocate for Muslims.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The present paper examined the specific elements that make HT attractive for certain segments of Muslim communities in the West vis-à-vis its competitors. Through comparing the group with Ikhwan al-Muslimun and JeI, the present paper analyzed HT's uniqueness by using three agency variables: reflexive monitoring, rationalization of action, and motivations for actions. While reflexive monitoring was useful for elucidating the common ground between Ikhwan, HT and JeI, rationalization of action and motivations for actions were used to identify the main differences among the three Islamic revivalist groups.

The present analysis concluded that HT's rigidity—best expressed by the group's rationalization and motivation for actions—was the main element constituting HT's competitive advantage over Ikhwan and JeI. More specifically, the group's unchanging method (following the steps outlined by An-Nabhani in the 1950s), its detailed vision of the caliphate (supported by a constitution), and HT's stable premises for actions (with the caliphate as the group's number one priority) conveyed an image of HT as a stable and reliable actor, advocating for a global Islamic revival. This HT-sponsored image is an attractive element for a number of Muslims in the West, who decide to join HT rather than JeI, Ikhwan or even other violent groups because of HT's ability to stand as an ideal arena where members feel safe and fulfilled in their role as zealous Muslims. Furthermore, HT emerges as a stable group through which Muslims can oppose Western (cultural, social and political) domination, not through engaging in violent acts but through a war of ideas based on the view of the caliphate as a panacea for the hardship experienced by the *ummah* in the world.

As stressed in this paper, HT advocates for the caliphate and has a draft constitution ready, which provides useful information on what kind of caliphate it envisages. Since this is the first study presenting an overview of HT's constitution, this analysis was both useful and necessary for a deeper understanding of HT's competitive advantage over Ikhwan and JeI.

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**Elisa Orofino** completed her Bachelor in International Relations and her Masters Global Politics and Euro-Mediterranean Relations in Italy (University of Catania), graduating cum laude. Since 2009, Elisa's research has focused on Islamism, terrorism and radicalization. In 2011, Elisa was granted a scholarship to conduct fieldwork in Egypt, where she spent three months during the revolution. In 2014, Elisa started her fully funded PhD program at the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne, Australia. Her project focused on the radicalization of Muslims in Australia and in the UK, taking the group Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) as a case study. Since 2014, Elisa has focused on non-violent Islamist groups, often representing the choice of all those people who agree with Islamist arguments but reject the use of violence. Elisa published several pieces of research on this topic, still representing a niche in the literature, contributing to the knowledge of "vocal radical Islamist groups" and their appeal in the West. Elisa finished her PhD in June 2018 and joined PIER at Anglia Ruskin University in October of the same year as a Post-Doc Research Fellow.