

**Islamist terror:
dilemmas for the left in
countering Islamism
AND Islamophobia**

Max Farrar

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www.maxfarrar.org.uk

OUTLINE

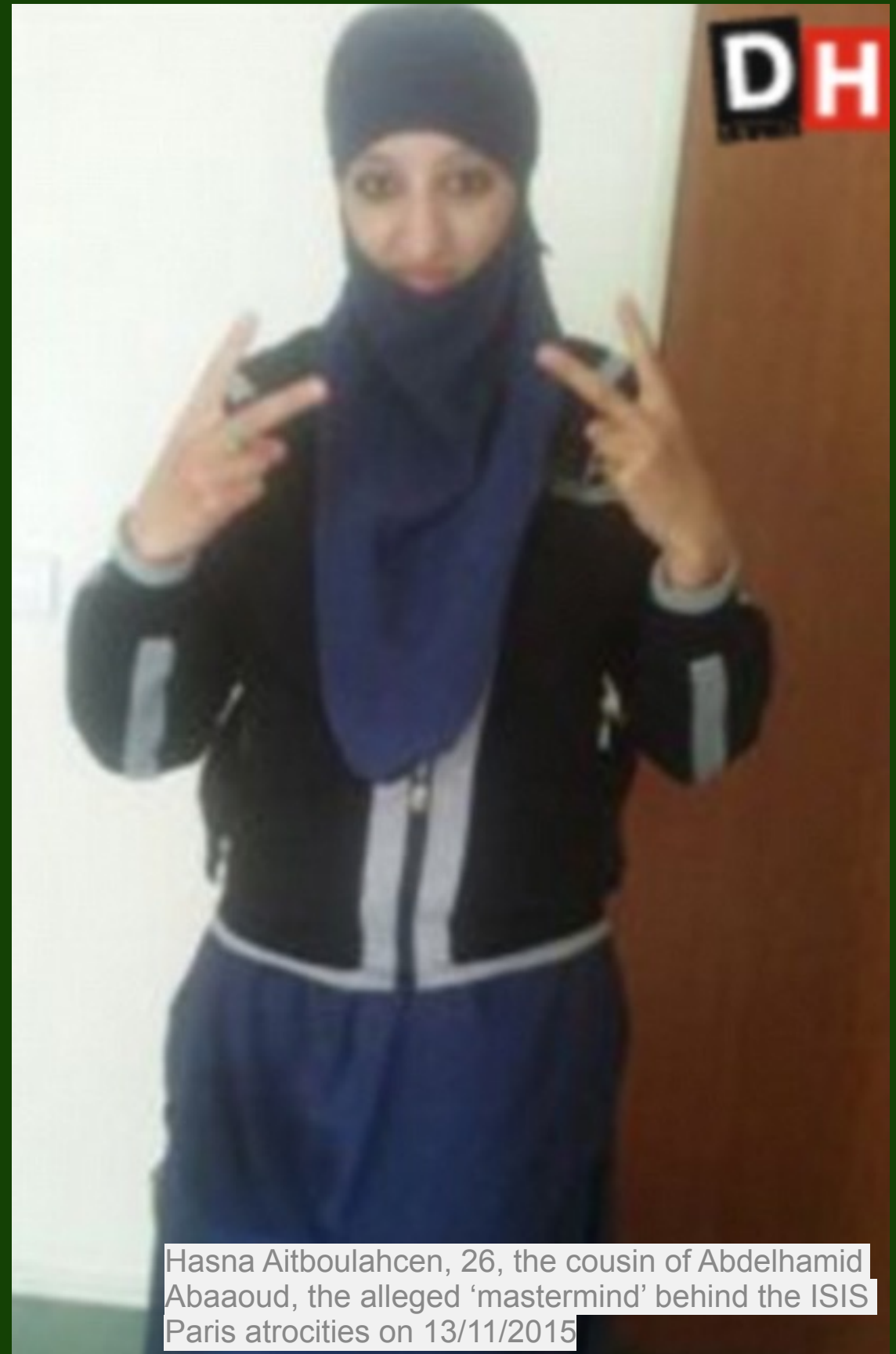
What is terrorism?

Dilemmas:

1. religion,
2. Islams, Islamisms
3. violence
4. Islamophobia

Responses:

- critique
- debate



Hasna Aitboulahcen, 26, the cousin of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the alleged 'mastermind' behind the ISIS Paris atrocities on 13/11/2015

TERRORISM

- ‘An act or threat of violence against non-combatants with the objective of exacting revenge, intimidating or otherwise influencing an audience’

• STERN (2003)



Mohammed Sidiq Khan, from Beeston, Leeds, who led the 7/7 bombing of London in 2005

Dr Rumana Hashem (UEL sociologist) on Bangla *jihadi* hit list

[http://www.independent.co.uk/
news/uk/home-news/dr-rumana-
hashem-the-uk-academic-amazed-
to-have-found-herself-on-hitlist-
targeting-enemies-of-islam-
a6676821.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/dr-rumana-hashem-the-uk-academic-amazed-to-have-found-herself-on-hitlist-targeting-enemies-of-islam-a6676821.html)



Dilemma 1: what to make of religion

Karl Marx (1844):

‘Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.’

Religion functions as ‘the opium of the people’ by providing a fantasy of release from alienation



Dilemma 2: what to make of Islam(ism)

- Traditionalists (eg Deobandis, Barelwis, Tablighi-Jamat - differing interpretations of the scriptures)
- *Salafis*: literalists (no interpretation, no politics); reformists (eg Muslim Brotherhood); political literalists (eg Hizb ut-Tahrir)
- Liberal/rationalist reformism (eg Ataturk in Turkey)
- Sufis (everywhere, quietly)

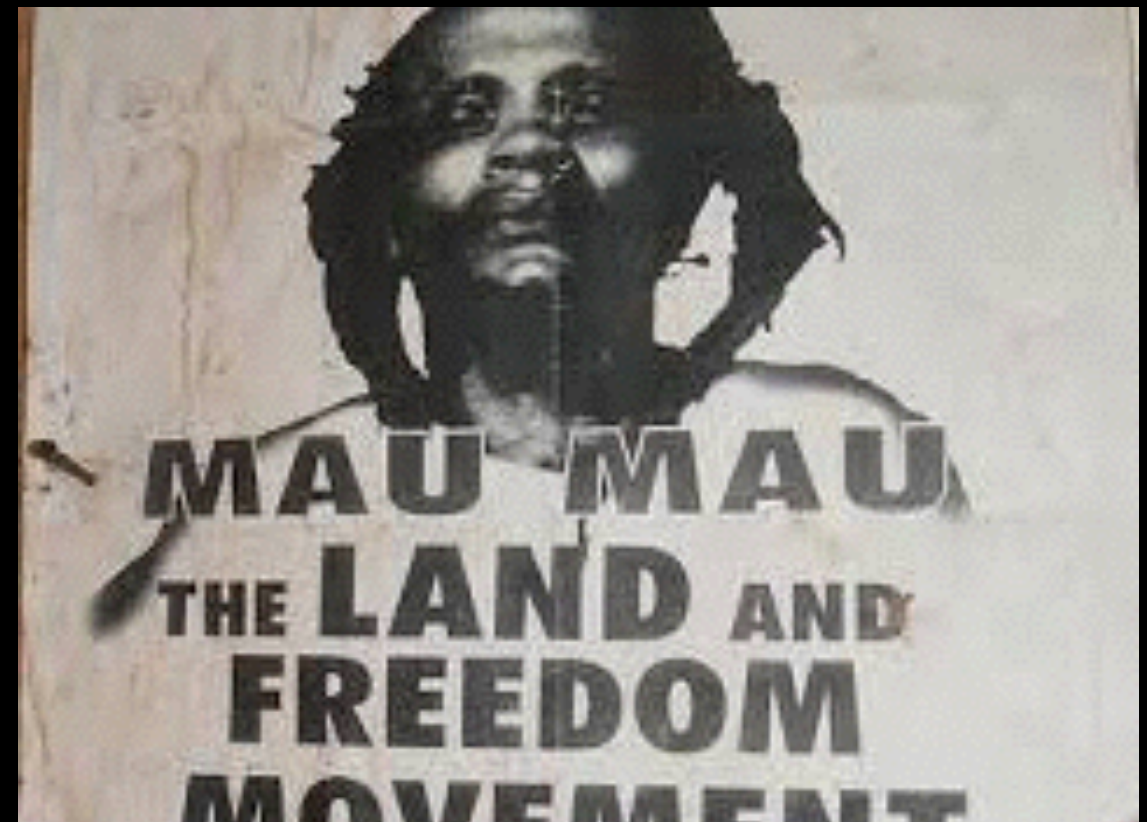
RAMADAN (2004)

- Muhammad al-Wahhab (1703-1792): the original *Salafi*
- Saudi Arabia nominally Wahhabi but politically accommodated to the West; thus technically not Islamist — but responsible for spreading its version of *Salafi* ideology

> **Violent jihadi Islamists: the minority of a minority**

- *Jihad* means 'struggle'. *Ijtihad* means 'exertion' (usually over problems of interpretation)
- Muslims who are Traditionalists, Sufis, or liberals and most Salafis reject violence as a political tactic
- Only the 'political literalists' advocate **violent jihad**
- Thus Al Qaeda and Daesh-IS are a minority among the *Salafis* who are themselves a minority among Muslims

Dilemma 3: What about violence in politics?



Dilemma 4: Is Islamophobia real?

An ideology with these features:

- Islam is monolithic and cannot adapt to new realities
- Islam does not share common values with other major faiths
- Islam as a religion is inferior to the West. It is archaic, barbaric, and irrational
- Islam is a religion of violence and supports terrorism
- Islam is a violent political ideology

(Runnymede Trust 1991)

Self reported Islamophobic incidents (May 2013-Feb 2014): 734
(599 online, 135 attacks).

Reports rate increased by almost four times in the week after the
Lee Rigby murder.

[<http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/finalreport.pdf>]

But Kenan Malik argues that, as a practice, its importance is
exaggerated

[[http://www.kenanmalik.com/essays/
prospect_islamophobia.html](http://www.kenanmalik.com/essays/prospect_islamophobia.html)]

**> Analagous to racism and anti-Judaism, hostility to
Islam and Muslims has to be vigorously opposed**



Critique: Islamism as a progressive force

- Hassan al-Banna (1906-49), Abu Ala-Mawdudi (1903-79), Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), Ali Shariati (1933-77): rigorous critique of capitalist modernisation in north Africa, south Asia and Persia (Farrar 2012)
- Susan Buck-Morss (2006, 46): 'the intellectually critical and socially accountable power of Islamism deserves our respect' (but not its reactionary dimensions)
- SWP and Galloway joined *Salafi* reformists in RESPECT party
- At least one ex-member of the Bradford 12 supports the *Salafi* reformists
- Leftists have led the defence of Cage and join Moazzam Begg (ex- AYM) on anti-Prevent platforms
- Muslim Brotherhood has renounced political violence and engages in democratic process

Critique:

Jihadi Islamism is utterly reactionary

- Women are secondary to men
- Homosexuality is sinful
- Democracy is 'man-made law' & wrong
- Capitalist mode of production & exchange unchallenged
- Original shari'a law is correct
- Followers of other religions are *kuffar* (& Muslims who disagree are subject to the *takfir* ruling)
- Terrorism is a legitimate tactic
- Stands outside all "kuffar" discourse, so no debate is possible

How to respond to the 'war on terror'?

- Critique capitalism, militarism, imperialism and Islamism
- Analyse the appeal of violent jihad to alienated, sex/gender-insecure people of all faiths and none
- Oppose bombing/banning of the jihadi ideology and support police & proper judicial process against organisers of violence
- Defend the 'grey zone' by promoting open debate which respects the progressive elements in religious discourse

Thanks for participating

- References

Buck-Morss, Susan (2006) *Thinking Past Terror – Islamism and critical theory on the left*, London: Verso.

Farrar, Max (2012) 'Islamism and Terror: A Western way of doing politics' in Farrar, Max; Robinson, Simon; Valli, Yasmin; and Wetherly, Paul (2012) *Islam in the West: Key issues in multiculturalism*, London: Palgrave

Marx, Karl (1844/) 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' in K. Marx and F. Engels (1955) *On Religion*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House

Ramadan, Tariq (2004) *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stern, Jessica (2003) *Terror in the Name of God – Why religious militants kill*, New York: HarperCollins.

A version of this talk is published here:

Farrar, Max and Hashem, Rumana ('2015) Opposing terror: dilemmas for the left on Islam, Islamophobia and Islamism' *openDemocracy* (3.12.15)

<https://opendemocracy.net/uk/max-farrar-rumana-hashem/opposing-terror-dilemmas-for-left-on-islam-islamophobia-and-islamism>



Dalyan, Turkey: modernism and mosques
[photo Max Farrar]

FURTHER INFO

HASSAN AL-BANNA (1906-1949)

- Founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1927 in Egypt
- ‘Traditional Islamic ideas of egalitarianism and social justice had been swept aside by the country’s political and religious elites’
- Capitalist, colonial, secular culture immiserated the poor and corrupted morals
- Used Western political methods (rallies, leaflets, newspapers) to build a mass organisation for an authoritarian ‘Islamic socialism’, ‘Islamic modernity’

• ASLAN (2006) COMMINS (2008) KEPEL (2004)

ABU ALA MAWDUDI (1903 - 1979)

- Founded the Islamic Party (Jama'at-e-Islami) in India in 1941. Moved to Pakistan after partition
- Influenced by his study of Hegel, Adam Smith, Rousseau, Voltaire, Darwin, Marx
- Politican party with an elite, supreme leader (Emir), no mass membership
- Fighting against both socialism and capitalism
- Modern 'Islamic' countries are *jahiliyya* (ignorance, before the Prophet)
- Anti-nationalist 'universal revolution': 'all that is on earth belongs to Allah'
- Governed by *shari'a* law, with 'deep seated conservative cultural attitudes' on women
- Accepted Pakistan as an Islamic state (1956) after democracy, equality, tolerance, social justice 'as enunciated by Islam' incorporated in its constitution

• ADAMS (1983) NASR (2008) PARACHA (2015) [HTTP://WWW.DAWN.COM/NEWS/1154419](http://www.dawn.com/news/1154419)

SAYYID QUTB (1906 - 1966)

- Applied Mawdudi's writings to Egypt after visit to USA (1948-50) revealed the West to be 'uncivilised' and '*jahili*' (backward, ignorant) because
 - US women are 'freed of their basic responsibilities to bring up children'
 - sexual relations based on 'lust, passion and impulse'
 - 'even homosexuality is not considered immoral'
- Joined Muslim Brotherhood to use both 'preaching and persuasion' and 'physical power and *jihad* for abolishing the organisations of the *jahili* system'
- Brotherhood resists the 'individualism generated by the secular, materialist, capitalist West'

QUTB [1964] TRIPP (2008)

ALI SHARIATI (1933-77)

- Persian [Iranian] revolutionary and sociologist
- Collaborated with Algerian FLN
- ‘Red Shi-ism’: Islamic values (in the Shi’a interpretation) plus political movement for social justice (the Freedom Movement for Iran)
- Influenced by Marx, Fanon, Guevara, Catholic liberation theology
- Arrested by the Shah’s govt, 18 months in solitary, released and died soon after in Southampton