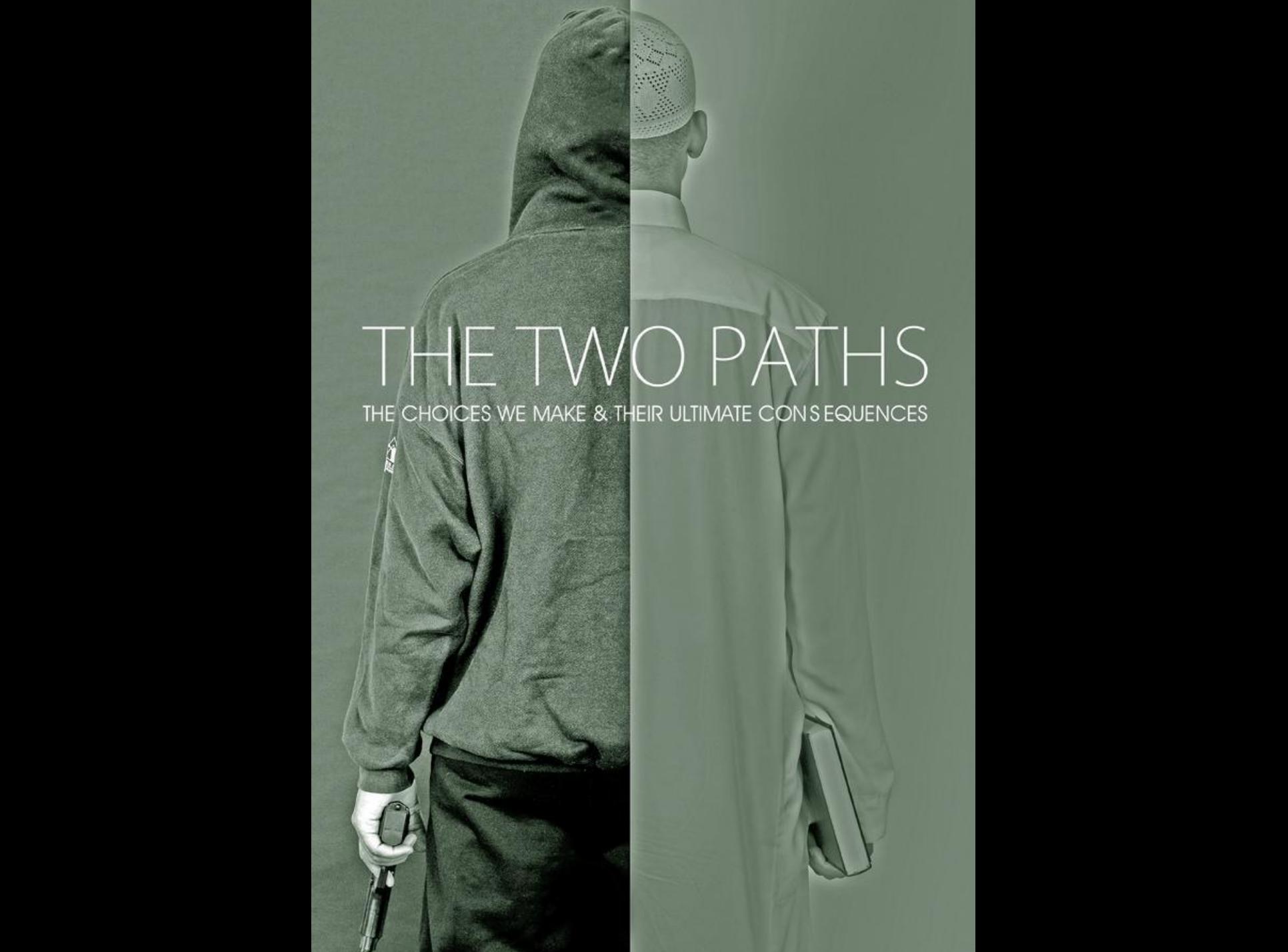

Violent Extremism and Counter-radicalization: Experiences from the UK

**National Imams' Consultative Forum (NICF) workshop 2: 21st April
2013, University of Melbourne**



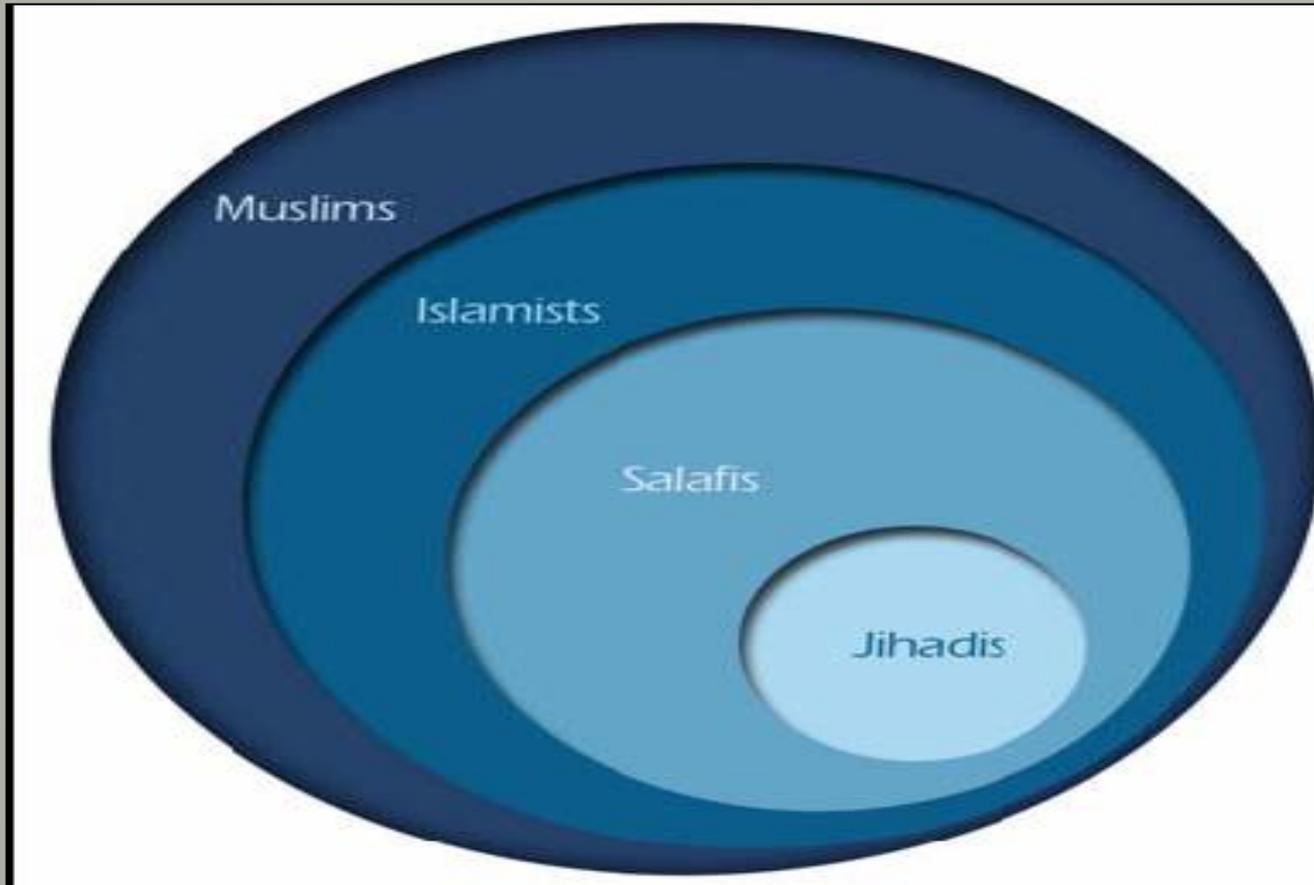
THE TWO PATHS

THE CHOICES WE MAKE & THEIR ULTIMATE CONSEQUENCES

Understanding reasons behind an individual's gravitation towards violent radicalisation and extremism is an issue that continues to be debated today. More often than not, perspectives of this phenomenon insofar as it relates to Muslim communities, are from an external/outsider perspective. Increasingly, insider perspectives emanating from grassroots practitioners are being acknowledged in view of their experience in recognising and tackling violent extremist propaganda.

Radical communities?

One perspective of Muslim constituencies in the West



McCants, W, Brachman, J & Felter, J; 'Militant Ideology Atlas: Executive Report'
Combating Terrorism Center, U.S. Military Academy, November 2006, p.10

The perspective illustrated in the previous slide fails to take into account many other Muslim communities within the UK; however, the interpretation of the illustration will be revised and used to explain the gravitation of two well known cases towards terrorism:

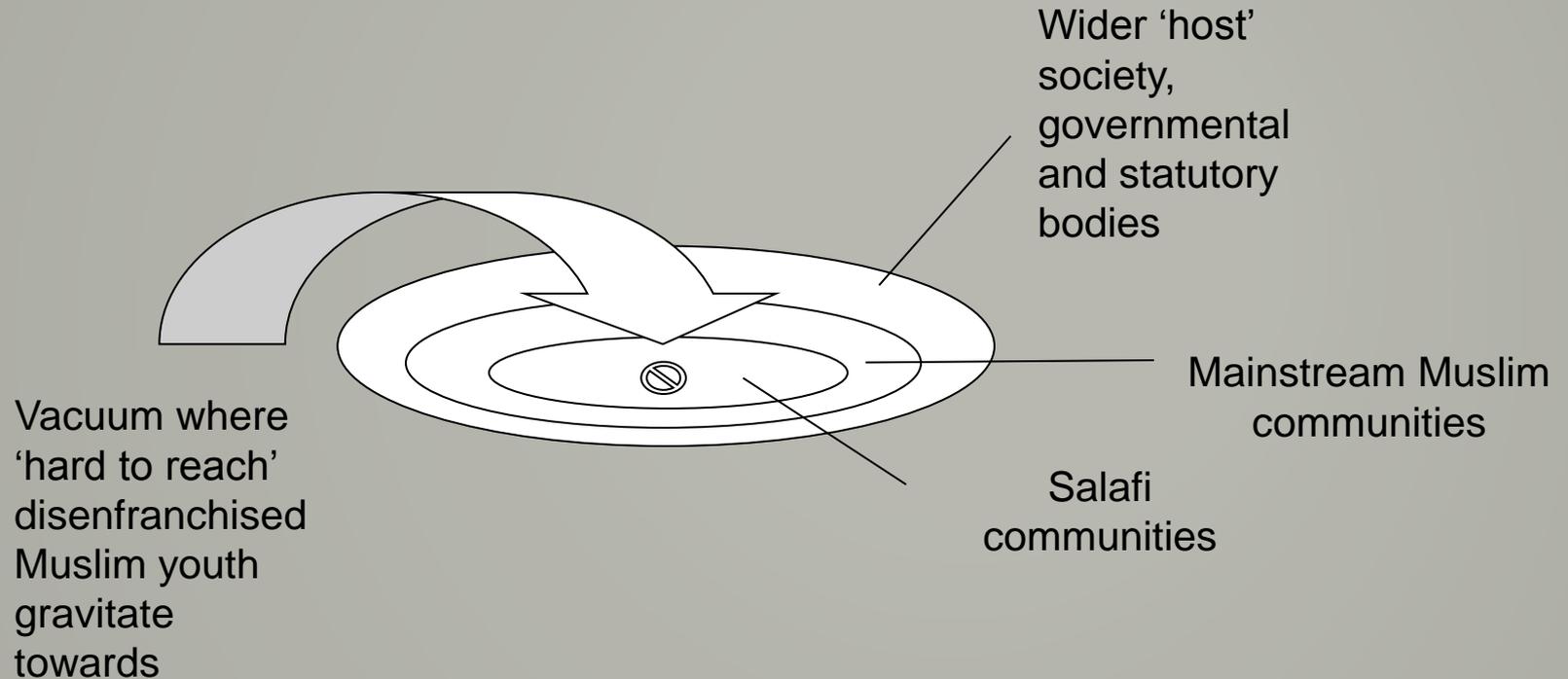
Case studies: Zacarius Moussaoui (aka 20th 9/11 bomber) and Richard Reid (aka the Shoe Bomber)

When examining these individuals' lives it becomes clear that they gravitated inwards towards the 'Jihadi' violent extremist constituency. In the case of Moussaoui, his cognitive openings began after he had progressed from the more cultural and wider *Muslim* constituency and had gravitated towards the *Islamist* one. The nature of these constituencies is such that they are predominantly *Ikhwani* / Muslim Brotherhood and, therefore **politicised** in their understanding and application of Islam.

In the case of Reid, he entered the *Salafi* constituency after completing his prison sentence in Feltham. Due to time constraints, a discussion on Salafism and whether it correlates with extremist ideology has to be limited. Suffice it to state that Salafist ideology, although closely related to 'jihadi'/violent extremist ideology, is not the same.

Nevertheless, the time it took Reid to gravitate towards extremist constituencies is markedly quicker than it took Moussaoui.

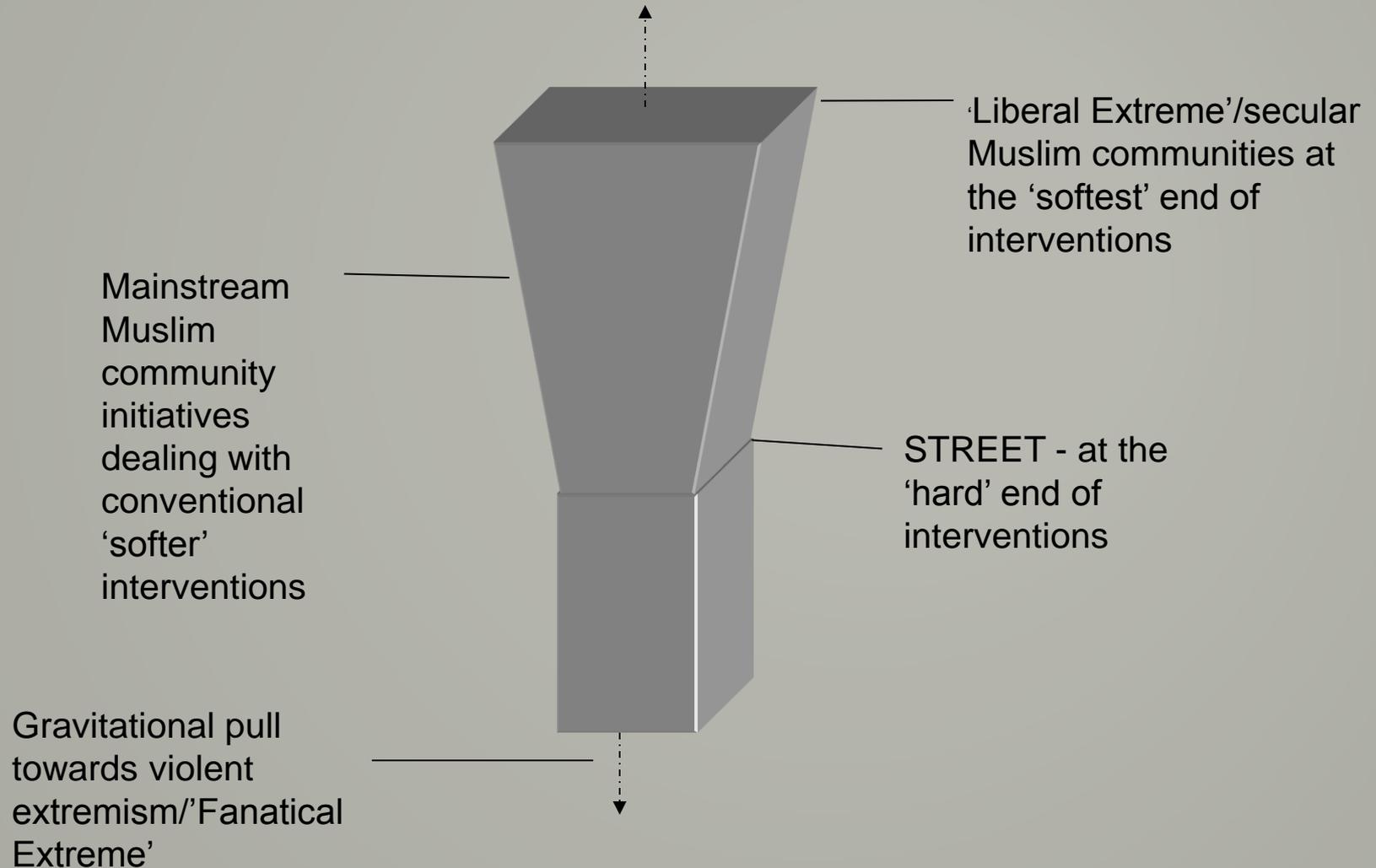
Falling below the radar



Below the Radar: Lessons learned from losing community members to violent extremism

Once Moussaoui and Reid had either been expelled or left Brixton Mosque following their violent radicalisation, no inter-community or social arrangements with statutory partners were in place to address or even monitor the degree to which these individuals had become extreme. Figure 3 illustrates a societal framework of the threat posed by violent extremism to susceptible individuals:

Positioning of Muslim communities & intervention projects



The establishment of STREET

Strategy To Reach Empower & Educate Teenagers

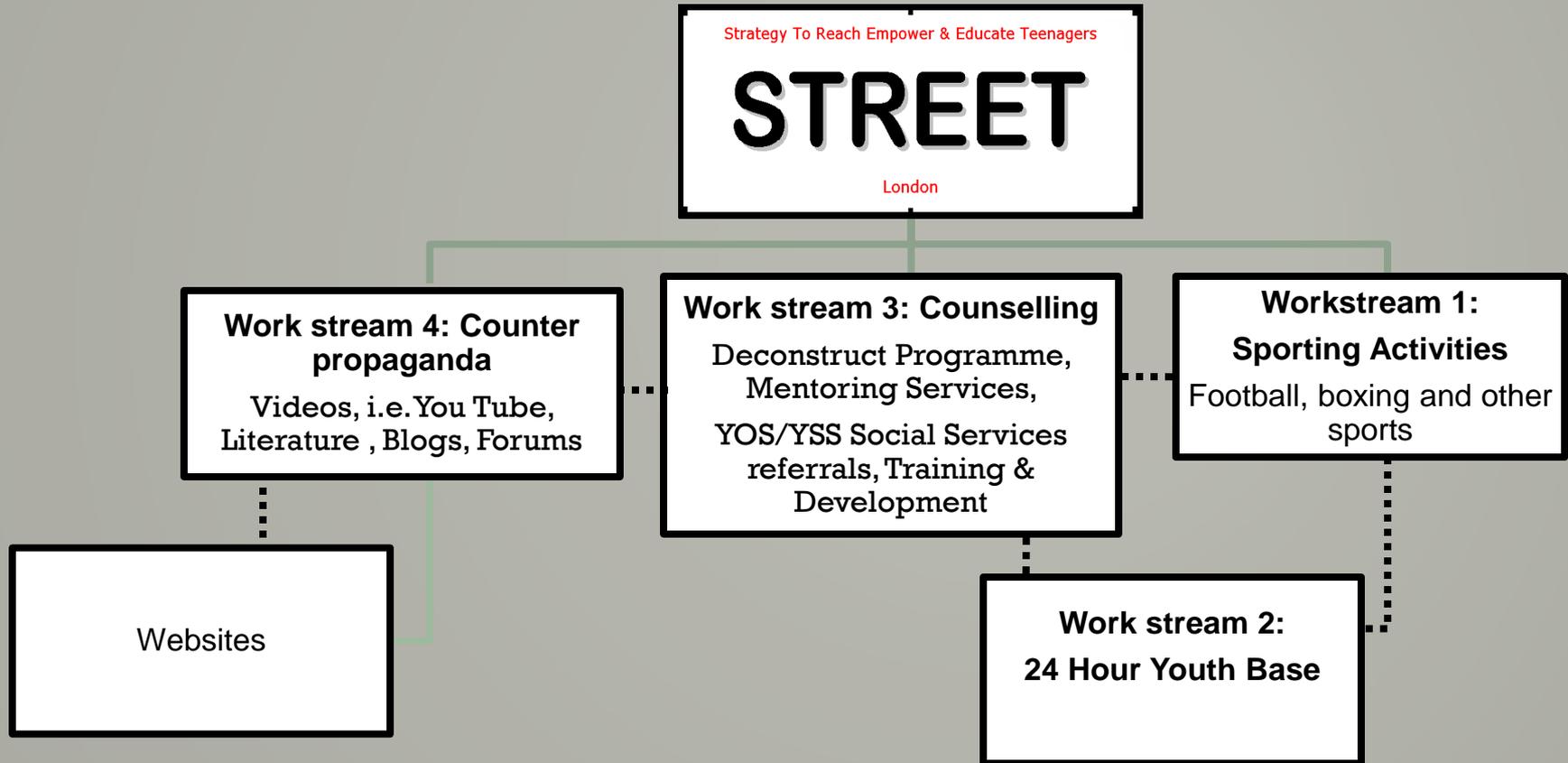
STREET

London

The establishment of STREET

In recognising the need to counter the effect of violent extremist propaganda from beyond conventional Muslim entities, like mosques, STREET was developed as a robust intervention model. As an independent, autonomous organisation, STREET was able to attract young Muslims, some of who were highly susceptible to violent extremist propaganda and commence various recreational, social and educational programmes that addressed their requirements. The Work Streams highlighted below illustrate the operational tiers of STREET as it relates to engagement with the target audience.

STREET Operational Tiers



Recognising stages of development and vulnerability in Muslim youth

The ability to engage with and determine the extent of young Muslims' understanding of their religion is essential as part of a process to address potential pitfalls or vulnerability. Very few grassroots community groups are able to recognise stages of development among Muslim youth and provide tailored and measured programmes to cater for them. For example, during the founding or cognitive phase of development an individual may mistakenly be exposed to politicised teachings in an attempt to address his/her concerns about national/international events affecting Muslims, i.e. Palestine, Afghanistan or Iraq. Politicised teachings of this nature are potentially explosive at this formative stage of development, especially when they fail to provide a correct contextualisation of religious understanding relating to such events. By adapting existing theoretical frameworks from other disciplines, i.e. management theory, to fit into more conducive social scientific models, the above mentioned stages can be illustrated more clearly.

A convert's contextualisation and understanding of Islam moves forwards and backwards

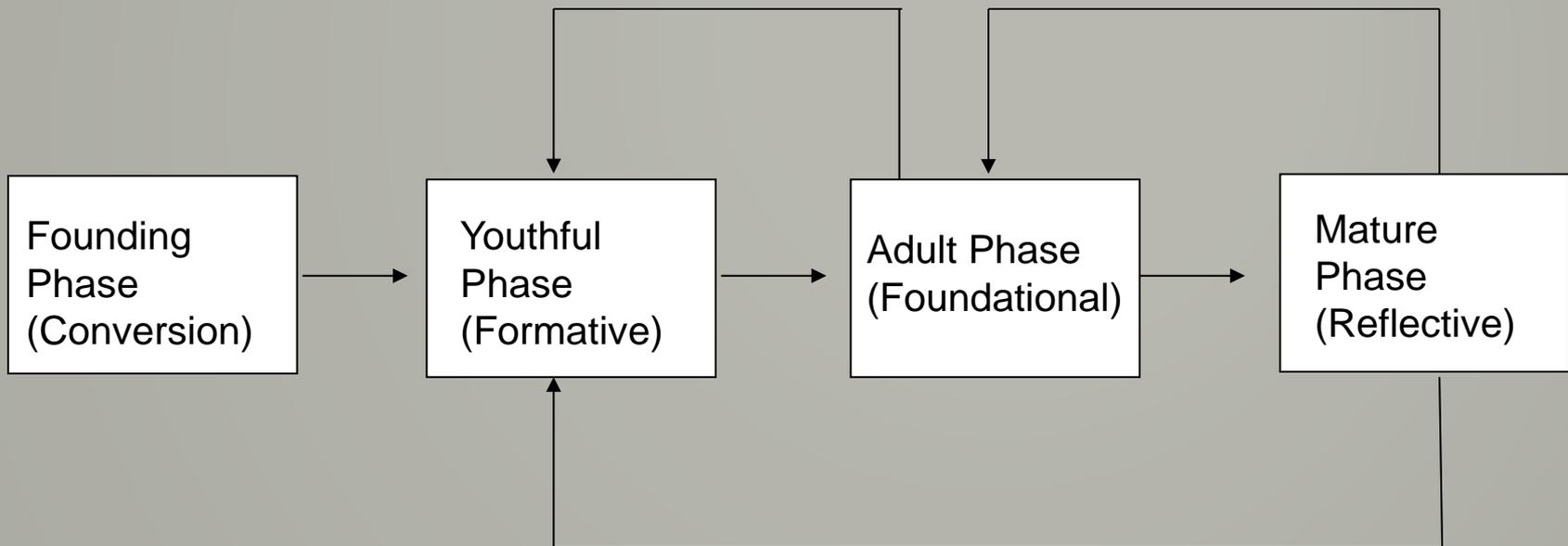


Figure 4: The life cycle of a convert's post conversion process

The above model is basic in its depiction of converts' conversion processes, however, it is useful as a framework to immediately identify stages of, not only converts, but 2nd/3rd generation Muslims' development after cognitive openings in the Muslim constituencies highlighted above in figure 1. The following model (figure 5) is a more detailed framework within which to determine a religious/ideological development according to the degree of learning/inculcation received by individuals.

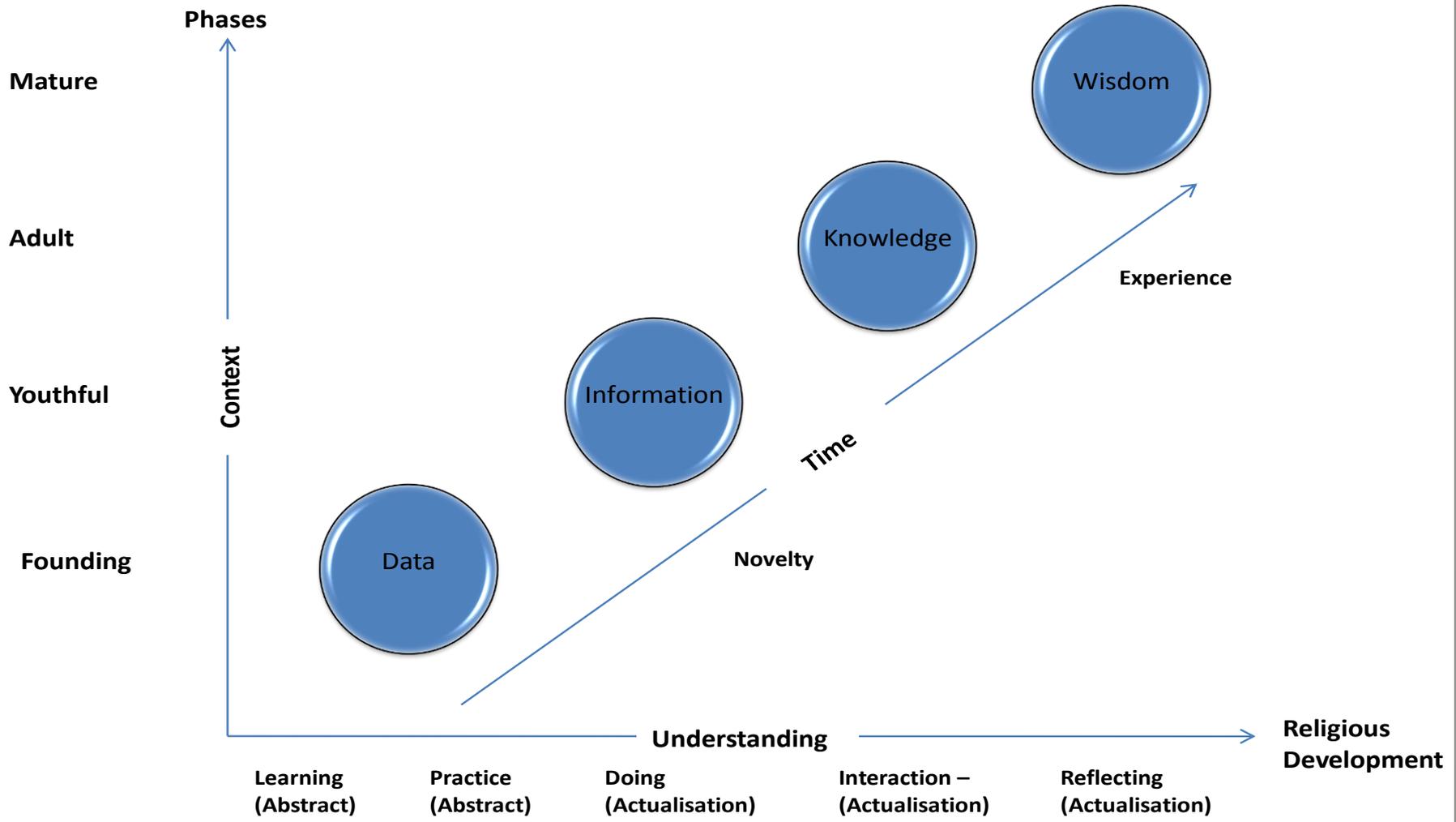


Figure 5: Adaption of ‘The Continuum of Understanding’ model

Gun, gang culture & criminality = Darul Harb -The Abode of War

Anwar Al Awlaki's justification for criminality in the west can be read in Inspire Magazine – December 2010 edition, pages 55-60: *The Ruling on Dispossessing the Disbeliever's wealth in Dar al-Harb* .

This was an incitement towards criminality, i.e. murder, theft, robbery, fraud and kidnapping, using distorted religious legislature and jurisprudence on the premise that such crimes are religiously permissible within context of war. It is particularly appealing to youth whose background and propensity for criminality was established prior to practising Islam. Indeed, they are the ideal 'foot soldiers'.

Deconstructing extremist narratives and propaganda

The Deconstruct programme addresses violent extremist propaganda like that of Anwar Awlaki et. al head on and provides:

a counter-narrative from an Islamic perspective, using authentic sources to repel justifications offered by the extremist protagonists. [The counter-narrative is] aimed at devaluing the arguments put forth by highlighting the weaknesses...in light of the Qur'an and Sunnah.*

*Media deconstruction and Counter-narrative of “as-Shahab Video 1”, STREET UK Ltd Deconstruction Team, August 2008, p.21

Conclusion

A Multi-pronged and organic approach is required to tackle the continuing threat of violent radicalisation and extremism in the West.

Additionally, a multi-agency approach can only be effective if statutory bodies align themselves with credible grass roots community entities that are experienced or familiar with the challenges outlined in this presentation.