



## The New Religiosity of Tablīghī Jamā‘at and Da‘wat-e Islāmī and the Transformation of Islam in Europe

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**Abstract.** – The Islamic missionary movements Tablīghī Jamā‘at, Da‘wat-e Islāmī, and Sunnī Da‘wat-e Islāmī share, in varying degrees, a Sufi background, and preach a peaceful Islam. At the same time, terrorists involved in the bombings in Europe since 2004 regularly visited mosques associated with these movements, especially the Tablīghī Jamā‘at. The “Islamic project” of the three movements is the “Sunnaization” – that is, the reshaping and reconstruction – of the daily routine and the individual markers of identity based on the examples of the Prophet and the Salaf (the pious ancestors) as portrayed in the Hadīth literature. This so-called “apolitical” Sunnaization can be understood as the privatization or individualization of political re-Islamization. [*South Asia, Pakistan, Europe, reform, pilgrimage, Islamic mission, lay preacher*]

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Almost all Western European societies have undergone a seemingly irreversible process of secularization since the 1960s. Globalization dissolved the territorial boundaries of traditional Christianity and challenged Europe’s hegemonic claim to be the central Christian continent. Western Europe is no longer the center of global Christianity, and most new Christianities, Pentecostalism for example (cf. Coleman 2000) are in their dynamic aspects less and less European. By the beginning of the third millennium, the one thousand-year-old connection between Christianity and West European civilization had come to an end. In this respect one may

proclaim the emergence of a post-Christian Europe (Casanova 2006).

Globalization brought increasing connectedness between places. As was once envisioned in the Torah, we now see a single humanity sharing one global space. Transsocietal migration led to the emergence of Diasporas, which in turn caused the deterritorialization of religious values from their traditional local contexts (Papastergiadis 2000). By deterritorialization, Diasporas have become centers of a global transformation of religion: religion undergoes change and somehow adapts to the Diaspora (Levitt 2007). Those who constitute the Diaspora community serve as catalysts in transforming the old religions in their civilizational homes and societies of origin. Religious traditions adapt to the religious marketplace and the cultural codes of change and privatization (cf. Roof 1999). They now become “Americanized” (cf. Ellingson 2007) in the same way as American Judaism has transformed world Judaism. In the context of mutual encounters between Islam and Europe, academics speak of two scenarios: the “Europeanization of Islam” and the “Islamization of Europe” (Tibi 2006).

Islam is currently undergoing a transformation, confronted as it is by globalization and modernity (Wolfe 2003). The aspect of modernity is visible in how a religious movement copes with surfing the wave of individualism. Migrants, who are sometimes forced to cope with the anonymity of metropolizes, tend to prefer smaller religious groups (Jenkins 2007), which enforce the tendency to prioritize religious identity over other chosen identi-

ties (Sen 2007), and resemble migrants' predominantly rural backgrounds in providing mutual social and emotional support (Lehmann 2005). The Tablīghī Jamā'at is meanwhile believed to be comparable to Pentecostalism in size and scope (Bowen 2004).

European legal systems guarantee the fundamental human right of religious freedom. Religious freedom in Europe implies the right to conversion and the freedom to proselytize. This has led to the emergence of pluralistic religious markets, with competing religious actors offering their salvation goods (Moore 1994). Missionary activities are the essence for new religious movements (NRMs), which are ideally adapted to the challenges of globalization. They usually take the form of small religious units.<sup>1</sup> NRMs are often mistrusted by the public as they appear to threaten secularism (Roy 2007). The *differentiae specificae* of NRMs are that 1) membership is not predetermined by family background; 2) converts are recruited from a specific social sphere, mostly the new middle class; 3) a charismatic leader (in Urdu: *amīr*, *negrān*) regulates all aspects of life (marriage, eating and sleeping habits, clothing and hair – especially beard – style); 4) the markers of belonging are clearly visible; and 5) the organizational structures are characterized by a certain fluidity. NRMs have a high turnover rate, with people joining for a short time and then deciding for one reason or another to drop out. Members of NRMs, who are mostly young and relatively highly educated, are generally harmless, and should probably be left to practise their religion in peace. Membership usually consists of first-generation converts, called reverts or born-again, who tend to be exceptionally enthusiastic, even zealous. In the Diaspora converts are mostly second-generation migrants who are disillusioned with the society that excluded them, mostly unemployed and as yet unmarried (Barker 2003). This supplies NRMs with a steady flow of inexperienced but healthy members who are unencumbered by responsibilities. Their conversion is often a result of a long process in which a traditional heritage has lost its meaning. Shortly prior to conversion, born-again often experience a crisis or major transition in their lives. As they have also often suffered from social disintegration, sometimes even alienation, the functional social network in the NRM is a highly significant factor explaining the attraction of the movement. Charismatic groups are highly cohesive. As with

other small groups of highly religious young men (Bakker 2006), the network is held together more by a strong in-group love than an out-group hate (Sageman 2004). Indeed, social bonds and mutual social and emotional support are the crucial elements in the development of a common identity. In an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance and support, NRMs reward conformity and implicitly punish alienation (van der Ver 2006). At the same time NRMs are generally disruptive at the family level and occasionally at the social level. As a rule, they reject prevailing religious beliefs. A common characteristic of strongly held belief systems is that they are relatively simple and straightforward – they tend to be painted in primary colours, without the messy grey areas that older religions have acquired. NRMs have charismatic leaders and preach sharp boundaries. Their identity markers are mostly simple, and they use plenty of them. The activities of the members are monitored closely by a designated observer or “caretaker” (*negrān* in Urdu). Besides social support and relief from personal anxiety, members experience the benefits of travel opportunities and health-promoting behaviors (strict prohibition of drugs, alcohol and sexual promiscuity; Galanter 1999). Another characteristic is the relatively highly homogeneous age, geographical roots, and place of recruitment. The new forms of religiosity are communitarian, exclusive in the sense that a clear line divides the saved from the damned, and inclusive in the sense that all aspects of life come under the aegis of religion. They are individualistic, very mobile, weakly institutionalized and anti-intellectual.

Many of the NRMs originated in India (Holm 2001) with Hare Krishna and Osho being the most famous, also many other new Islamic movements emerged in South Asia. In South Asian Islam two major Sunnī schools of thought can be distinguished (apart from several minor ones). On the one hand, there is the reformist Deobandī School, based on a seminary founded 1866 in Deoband, which represents a “purified” version of Islam in the tradition of the founder generation of the religion (Metcalf 2005). In 1926 this tradition gave birth to the missionary movement Tablīghī Jamā'at. On the other hand, there is the Barelwī tradition (Sanyal 1996), a reformist counter-reformist movement, close to folk Islam and Sufism, which emanated around the person of “A'la Hazrat” Ahmad Raza Khan Barelwī (1856–1921) in the North Indian city of Bareilly during the 1880s. This school of thought underlines the value of traditional rituals revolving around saints and shrines and highlights the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad

<sup>1</sup> Barker and Warburg (2001); Clarke (2006); Hempelmann (2005).

(Sanyal 2005). The Memon businessman and Barelwī scholar “Amīr-e Ahl-e Sunnat” Muhammad Ilyās Qādirī Attār (born 1950) heads the “Barelwī Tablīghī Jamā‘at Da‘wat-e Islāmī” (literally: Call towards Islam), which was founded in September 1981 in Karachi.<sup>2</sup> In 1991 the Indian sub-branch of the Da‘wat-e Islāmī broke away to form its own transnational missionary movement, called Sunnī Da‘wat-e Islāmī.<sup>3</sup> The Deobandī and Barelwī schools of thought and their respective missionary movements are opposed to each other. In a competitive race for numbers they compete for impact and political power. Although they appear at first glance to have different backgrounds (Salafī/Wahhābī in the case of Tablīghī Jamā‘at and Sufi in the case of the Da‘wat-e Islāmī), both movements are reformist in the sense that they require their followers to be personally responsible for their own salvation. They stress the literal imitation of the life of the Prophet in all aspects of the daily routine, an Islamic project for which I suggest the term “Sunnaization” as this process of the Islamization of individual dress, speech, and behavior draws its arguments from specific commentaries on selected *hadīth* and focuses on the private sphere rather than the political. Despite their extremely militant judgment of contemporary societies and individuals, they are overwhelmingly nonviolent movements for the repropagation of Islam, and, along with the *takfir* and *hijra* groups, they constitute peaceful extremist movements in the taxonomy of Islamist movements (*al-Ahram Center* 2007: 16–18). Employing peer pressure, they impose a strict dress code on their adherents and are organized in extremely mobile small units of lay preachers (*jamā‘at*, *madanī qāfila*, *qāfila*), who invite for weekly and annual *ijtima*’s, congregations. The structure, organization, and approach of the movements are similar. But what is the really novel aspect of the new religiosity is its increasing visibility (Barker 2001; Jonker and Amiraux 2006). During the month of Ramadan 2008, Da‘wat-e Islāmī introduced its own Television channel “Madanī Channel,”<sup>4</sup> which is aired to over a hundred countries.

Recent years have witnessed a growing number of young men on the streets, in the mosques, and at the airports of Europe, all wearing the *shalwār-qamīz*, which is the traditional dress of Muslims in South Asia. The majority wear turbans (*‘imāma-sharīf*), which are either white (Tablīghī Jamā‘at,

Sunnī Da‘wat-e Islāmī) or green (Da‘wat-e Islāmī). For the most part these highly religious young men travel in groups of between five and ten, visiting Muslims in their homes to invite them to the mosque (*naikī kī da‘wat* – invitation to the good), where they themselves eat and sleep on their journeys. The notion of organized lay preachers in the footsteps of the Prophet is a quite new phenomenon in Europe and North America (Metcalfe 1996). Since cultural wars have become intracivilizational in response to Western modernity, the activities of both groups aim at the “inner mission,” bringing Muslims back to the “real” Islam and saving them from Western lifestyles.

### From Radicalization to Spirituality

In classical Islam *da‘wa*-proselytization and *hijra*-Islamization go hand in hand with *jihād*. In his work “The True Emigrant,” Ibn Taimiyya (1263–1328) cites the following *hadīth*: “The emigrant (*muhājir*) is the one who flees that which God has prohibited. The warrior (*mujāhid*) is the one who fights against himself for the sake of God” (Michot 2006: 67).<sup>5</sup> To flee what God has prohibited is obligatory (Michot 2006: 71): Who believes, emigrates (*hajara*) and fights (Michot 2006: 85). The Prophet spread Islam from the *hijra* stronghold through *da‘wa* and *jihād*. Within the framework of this historical Islam religious leaders have constructed a universal *hijra* doctrine prescribing migration to the non-Islamic world in an effort to proselytize for Islam (Tibi 2006: 219). Before non-Muslims could be attacked, they had to reject the call (*da‘wa*) to embrace Islam. The religious doctrine of *hijra*, which implies a movement towards Madīna, that is a step into the Utopian Medinensean society, obliges migrants who share common spiritual values to depart together, isolate themselves from the milieu they come from, and settle elsewhere in order to proselytize. From this framework the concepts developed the different missionary journeys of the Tablīghī Jamā‘at (for example, *gasht* as the biweekly preaching patrol in the neighborhood, *khurūj* as a monthly foray to a nearby city, *chillā* as an annual journey to Pakistan or elsewhere) and the Da‘wat-e Islāmī (weekly, monthly, or annual *madanī qāfila*). Besides this “nostalgia” for Madīna the call to go on missions (*al-khurūj fī sabīl illāh* or *nafar fī sabīl illāh*) combines ele-

2 <www.dawateislami.net> [04. 11. 2009]; Gugler (2007).

3 <www.sunnidawateislami.net> [04. 11. 2009].

4 <www.madanichannel.tv> [04. 11. 2009].

5 The first is Al-Bukhari, Sahih Iman, i. 11 (ʿAlam 9), the 2nd: Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, vi. 21,22 (ʿAlam 22833, 22842).

ments of pilgrimage, active sport tourism, and serious leisure and connects them to Sunna.<sup>6</sup>

The UK-based Tablighī scholar Shaykh Abū Yūsuf Riyadh al-Haq explains in his sermon “The Evil Within,” which is exploring the topic of backbiting while on *khurūj*, the meaning of travelling in the way of Allāh:<sup>7</sup>

O believers, when you travel on the earth in the way of Allah. And that is in Jihad ... Allah is talking about Jihad. Not just going out or not just people sitting at home. Allah is saying: O believers, when you go out in the way of Allah, i.e. in Jihad. When you go with the intention of laying down your life for the sake of Allah Talah. When you leave everything behind you and you are willing to sacrifice everything. And you are not just talking about going on to the battlefield, you are on the battlefield, you are on a military expedition. Allah is addressing the Sahabah ...: Then even at such a noble time, even in such a noble course, be careful of what you think. And, o believers, when you travel in the way of Allah, then ascertain, verify the truth and do not say to anyone who says “Salam” to you, “You are not among men ... you are not a believer.

Tablighī networks have become vulnerable to exploitation by various militant groups and this is probably best documented in the case of Kashmir.<sup>8</sup> Some “classical” stories of *jihād* have become popular books in *Tablighī* circles and can be found in many Islamic bookstores associated with the movement (e.g., ed-Dīn 2007; Akram 2007). A couple of Europe’s genuine and potential *Jihādīs* have been active in pietist movements (Howard 2006). Some of the perpetrators of the bombings on March 11, 2004 in Madrid or July 7, 2005 in London, or prominent terrorists like the “Amer-

ican Talibān” John Walker Lindh, Richard Reid, and Jose Padilla were reported to have participated in Tablighī activities. Kafīl and Sabīl Ahmed, who organized the attack on Glasgow airport in July 2007, were regular visitors in the Tablighī *markaz* (center) in Bengaluru. In India the Tablighī scholar Sufyān Patangia was accused to have headed a terror cell, which allegedly killed former Gujarat Home Minister Haren Pandya (Swami 2003a, 2003b); and two of the prime suspects for torching the Sabarmati Express, a train carrying Hindu pilgrims from Ayodhyā, in February 2002, killing 58, had links to Tablighī Jamā‘at institutions (Swami 2002). Some observers<sup>9</sup> claim that these missionary movements radicalize young Muslims, who are subsequently sent to Pakistan on a missionary journey and probably make contact there with other, more militant groups, among them the Deoband-affiliated Harakāt al-Mujahedīn (Alexiev 2005). Whether these missionary movements play an active political role or are used by militant members remains a matter for debate. Numerous Islamist groups, for example the Jamā‘at-e Islāmī, attack the missionaries for their apolitical attitude, arguing that they have a calming effect on Muslims and divert them from Islamization.<sup>10</sup> As a result both groups, Tablighī Jamā‘at and Da‘wat-e Islāmī, were tolerated and even supported by a number of governments in South Asia and other Muslim countries as they hoped to use them for countering militant groups. In the meantime it seems that post-Islamist, conservative neo-fundamentalism, aimed primarily at Islamizing society from the bottom up via *da‘wa*, has replaced Salafī Jihadism, whose goal was to Islamize society by seizing state power (Gerges 2007: 16f.).

Islamization policy also made special use of *da‘wa* as a tool for universalizing different Islamic identities and integrating them into common political action. Especially in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the growing impact of the Islamization policy lobby in government agencies is evident. Hence there is an increasing contradiction between the self-proclaimed apolitical character of these missionary movements and their transformation in modernity, which has loaded them with political impact and meaning.

Only in April 2009 Tablighī leaders in Pakistan have *expressis verbis* condemned terrorism and gunpoint sharī‘ah (Khattak 2009). Similarly, Amīr-e

6 For a short outline of the general theoretical framework of this demonstratively secular field see Fairley and Gammon (2006).

7 The lecture is presented on CD by the former Shariah-Institute, now named Al Kawthar Academy in Birmingham (<www.shariah-institute.org> = <www.akacademy.eu> = <www.alkawtharacademy.org> [04. 11. 2009]).

8 See, for example, Hindi (1999). Swami (2007: 181): “The Harkat-ul-Mujahideen’s overall leader Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman Khalīl used radical elements drawn from among the Tabligh-i-Jamāat, a proselytizing organization that in itself claims to remain above politics, but has had considerable influence in Pakistani life after it was patronized by the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. Harkat-affiliated figures frequently used these networks to fight for domestic objectives within Pakistan. In September 1995, for example, several senior Pakistani military officials personally linked with the Tabligh-i-Jamāat and officially involved in supplying weapons to the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen were charged with attempting to stage a coup against the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.”

9 Howard and Qusaibaty (2006); Tarrés y Jordán (2007); Alexiev (2005).

10 <http://www.islamicacademy.org/html/Articles/English/Tableeghee%20Jma’at.htm> [04. 11. 2009].



**Fig. 1:** World headquarters of the Tablīghī Jamā‘at at the Nizāmuddīn shrine in New Delhi.

Jamā‘at-e Tablīgh of Somalia Shaykh Isma‘il spoke up against al-Shabab and Hizb al-Islām in Somalia in 2009.

### Converting via Community

With an estimated twelve million to fifteen million adherents, the Tablīghī Jamā‘at, with its world headquarters at the Nizāmuddīn shrine in New Delhi, is among the largest of the transnational Islamic movements. Its founder, the charismatic Deobandī-trained ‘*alim* Muhammad Ilyās (1885–1944), attempted to turn members of Muslim tribes into lay preachers in order to make the transmission of religious knowledge an effective means to counter Hindu missionaries. The formation of the Tablīghī Jamā‘at in 1926 was a reaction against the Shuddī campaign in the early 1920s.

This was a missionary campaign of the Ārya Samāj, a Hindu group founded in 1875, which tried to convert Indian Muslims, whom it portrayed as Hindu victims of forced conversion to Islam (Sikand 2003). The Muslim lay preachers were sent to nearby villages to discuss and spread Islam and to deepen their own appreciation of their faith (cf.

Troll 1985). The system basically works in the manner of a snowball effect: anyone who listens to a sermon and learns about Islam is requested to join a group (*jamā‘at*), to travel, to spread some knowledge about the basics of Islam, and to call on new adherents to volunteer for missionary tours (*tashkīl*). Rewards in heaven (*sawab*) are promised for these efforts. Muhammad Ilyās developed a six-point (*cheh bātein*) programme, which still serves as the principal guideline for all lay preachers. The six fundamentals of Islam are<sup>11</sup>: 1) to understand the meaning of the *kalima*; 2) to perform correct and regular prayers (*salāt*); 3) to acquire religious knowledge (*‘ilm*) and actively remember God (*zīkr*); 4) to respect all Muslims (*ikrām*); 5) to purify one’s thoughts and intentions (*niyyat*); and 6) to be prepared to preach and invest time in the propagation of religion (*nafr*).

The lay preachers stay at the mosques and visit Muslim families in the neighbourhood inviting them to join in prayer. After the prayer one of the preachers delivers an inspirational religious talk (*bayān*), explaining the ideas and rules of the movement. They then urge people to register for a missionary journey (*tashkīl*). A basic preaching trip lasts three days. Longer missionary tours can last four weeks (*chillā*), four months (*grand chillā*), or a whole year. The annual congregations in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh draw between one million and two million people each, and are among the largest congregations in the Muslim world. Religious teaching focuses on a collection of *ahādīth*, known as “Fazā‘il-e A‘māl” (Urdu; meaning: Virtuous Deeds), written by the nephew of the movement’s founder, Muhammad Zakariyā (1898–1982; see Zakariyā 2001).

### Rediscovering Roots

The Tablīghī Jamā‘at began to expand globally in the late 1960s. In Europe the missionaries are particularly active in the UK. The European headquarters of the Tablīghī Jamā‘at were established in 1978 in Dewsbury, and have included a Deobandī seminary since 1981, which is attended by about 300 boys from all over Europe (Metcalf 1996). The Tablīghīs maintain connections with about two dozen Deobandī seminaries in Britain (for example, in Bury Holcombe since 1975). As early as 1969, Tablīghīs set up their own center in France

<sup>11</sup> The central reference for those is the last book of the first volume of the “Faza‘il-e A‘mal”: *cheh bātein* (the six fundamentals) written by Ashiq Ilahi.



**Fig. 2:** *Markaz* of Tablighī Jamā‘at in Raiwind (Pakistan), 25,000 people sleep here around the days of the annual *ijtima*<sup>1</sup>.



**Fig. 3:** The Tablighī Jamā‘at at Masjid Tariq Bin Ziyād was established in 1981. On Fridays Muslims line up for *salāt* outside as no space is left inside on the three floors of this largest mosque in Barcelona.

(l’Association Culturel Islamique). The example of France is important since the Tablighī Jamā‘at was obliged to overcome its focus on South Asian immigrants. From France, where Arab youth is the chief supporter of the movement, Tablighī activities spread to North Africa. In Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia Tablighī Jamā‘at has seen an enormous increase in support during the last 10–15 years. Tablighī Jamā‘at has since spread from there to Spain, setting up the first *markaz*, the Masjid Tariq Bin Ziyād, in Barcelona in 1981,<sup>12</sup> being registered since 1992 at the Entidades Religiosas del Ministerio de Justicia under the name “Asociación An-nur” (Tarrés y Jordán 2007; Tarrés 2004). The example of Barcelona is quite interesting as Tablighī Jamā‘at shifted its Barcelona *markaz* in 1985 to the very same house in which the Communist opposition gathered against the Franco regime (Morera Palenzuela 2005). At the Friday prayers, in which I participated during my fieldwork in Barcelona in November 2007, around 1,100 Muslims, mostly Arabs from Morocco and Algeria, recite *namāz* (prayer) at the Tariq Bin Ziyād mosque, which is the biggest mosque in Barcelona. Barcelona is an important case in point, as many illegal immigrants from Pakistan enter Europe there, coming via Iran,

<sup>12</sup> Tarrés y Jordán (2007).

Turkey, and Greece, where they are packed in containers and shipped to the port of Barcelona. Newspapers linked the Tariq Bin Ziyād mosque with planned bomb attacks on the Barcelona metro system in June 2007 and January 2008 (Millet 2008; Rodriguez 2007). The suspects, who were arrested in January 2008 on suspicion of planning suicide attacks in Spain and Germany, were described as Tablīghī activists.<sup>13</sup> In 1975 the Tablīghī Jamā‘at established itself in Belgium.<sup>14</sup> In Israel/Palestine the movement owns seven *marakaz*, for example in Lod, Kfra Ara and Tamra, Gaza and Ramallah.<sup>15</sup> Germany’s estimated 700 full-time members are organized in about seven city circles,<sup>16</sup> which are centered on mosques owned by other institutions. About 1,000 adherents congregated in the annual *ijtima’* (congregation) during May 2008 in Saarbrücken. About 800 adherents congregated in the annual *ijtima’* during May 2006 in Berlin (An-Nūr mosque). Following disappointment with the *Tablīghī* work in Germany, the world *shūrā* from India decided that the Indian leadership will intensify its visits to Germany, and the inner-German congregation (*mashwara*) has to take place every two months (instead of every four months as in 2005) to discuss the results of missionary activities.

Although the movement’s founder Ilyās had multiple Sufi affiliations – Chistiyya, Suhrawardiyya, Qādiriyya, and Naqshbandiyya, into which Ilyās was initiated by Rashīd Ahmad Gangohī (1829–1905), one of the founders of the seminary of Deoband; his main affiliation was the Sābiriyya-Chistiyya suborder (Gaborieau 2006) – and although their faith’s bureaucracy relies heavily on the Sufi heritage (Reetz 2006), Tablīghīs preach a purified *Islāhī*-Islam. They reject “later” rituals, in particular Sufi practices, which they condemn as reflecting Hindu influence.

## Reliving Madīna

The most important movement among their critics is the rival group Da‘wat-e Islāmī. Their world headquarters is the “Faizān-e Madīna” (Overflowing Grace of Madina) in Karachi. Emanating grace (*faiz*) is described as “enabling energy” or “spiritual electricity,” having properties of light (*nūr*).

13 <<http://n-tv.de/909931.html>> [04. 11. 2009].

14 Reetz (2007). Further information see in Masud (2000).

15 Interview with two British-Pakistani Tablīghī preachers at the immigration security centre in Tel Aviv airport in June 2007.

16 Friedrichsdorf (headquarters), Hannover (Pakistanzentrum), Hamburg, Cologne, Erfurt, Bochum, and Munich.

The movement is linked to the Barelwī school of thought. The latter emerged around 1880 in response to the puristic *dār al-‘ulūm* (seminary) in Deoband to defend traditional Islam, which in South Asia is greatly influenced by Sufi-, saint-, and shrine-culture. As saint-culture and shrine-culture are accepted by a majority of South Asian Muslims, the Barelwī school of thought calls itself “Ahl as-Sunna wa’l Jamā‘at.” While the Da‘wat-e Islāmī copies the structure and activities of Tablīghī Jamā‘at, its members differ in appearance mainly by their green turban. The green color of the turban is regarded as their trademark and has led to their popular label *jannat ke tūte*, parrots of paradise. Their *tablīgh* activities, starting in many places with waking up the Muslims from the neighborhood to invite them to recite *salāt-e fajr* in *jamā‘at*, were copied from the Tablīghī Jamā‘at in order to make sure that the Tablīghīs don’t win more ground, but made the Indian Barelwī *ulamā* suspicious, who saw the *muballighs* of Da‘wat-e Islāmī as agents of a threatening force of Deobandization from within the Barelwīyat in the early 1990s.

The lay preachers of the Da‘wat-e Islāmī are bound to the official founder and *amīr* of the movement, Muhammad Ilyās Qādirī Attār (born 1950) by a *bay‘a*, an oath of allegiance. As Madīna and Muhammad Mustafā hold key positions, *madanī* prefixes or complements several auspicious terms (for example, *madanī burqa*, *fikr-e madīna*) to constitute a corporate identity. This corporate identity is centred on the ideal Islamic society of Madīna, which is meant to be set up within the transnational Sufi brotherhood. “Madīna” also serves as a salutatory address to any adherent. The six points of action of the Tablīghī Jamā‘at (*cheh bāten*) are elaborated into 72 directives, the Madīna rewards (*madanī in‘āmāt*). Each adherent is requested to fill in a form, the *madanī card*, listing up the 72 *madanī in‘āmāt*, every evening. The chief book of the Da‘wat-e Islāmī, written by its official founder and *amīr*, also revolves around *ahadīth*. Resembling the main book of the Tablīghī Jamā‘at, “Fazā’il-e A‘māl,” it is entitled “Faizān-e Sunnat” (Urdu; meaning: Spiritual Benefit of the Sunna. 4 vols.) and is published in the movement’s press Maktabat al-Madīna (Ilyās Qādirī 2006). It is not yet translated, although it has been through three slightly different editions. As a Sufi movement, its glorification of the prophet (*na‘t*) is a central part of the preaching program. After *dars*, the lesson, read from “Faizān-e Sunnat” by any lay preacher, the highlight of the weekly (*haftawar*) *ijtima’* is the *zikr-e Madīna*. For this practice the lights in the mosque are turned off and everybody starts crying

– or if necessary at least pretending to cry. After the *bayān*, the lecture given by an Imām, people are informed about missionary journeys for which they can sign up. The basic missionary unit is referred to as *madanī qāfila* (Madīna caravan) and its slogan after the *bayān* is: “*qāfile me calo*” (Urdu; meaning: join the caravan – which is the title of Abdullah Az-zam’s famous 1987 book). The Da‘wat-e Islāmī, as an organization connected to the Qādiriyya *silsila* (line of tradition), is proud to be able to present Ibn Taimiyya as a Sufi of the Qādiriyya order (Gugler 2008b). Unlike the Tablīghī Jamā‘at, the Da‘wat-e Islāmī has its own chain of *madrasas* (Islamic educational institution), with more than a thousand in Pakistan alone (*International Crisis Group* 2007b).

Though the movement was officially founded by Ilyās Qādirī Attār himself, the idea, that the Tablīghī Jamā‘at has to be destroyed with its own weapons, came from the charismatic *munazir* (debater) Arshad al-Qādirī (March 5, 1925 – April 29, 2002). He wrote the extreme widely spread books “Tablīghī Jamā‘at” (1987 – which became a Barelwī prime reference between Indonesia and the Gambiah), “Tablīghī Jamā‘at ahādīs kī roshnī me” (Urdu; meaning Tablīghī Jamā‘at in the Light of Hadith), “Zalzala” (Convulsion, 1998), “Zer-o-Zabar” (Urdu; meaning: Complete Destruction (of Deoband); written during his third imprisonment 1979), and “Da‘wat-e Insāf” (Urdu; meaning: Call for Justice. 1992). After studying the Tablīghī dynamics of mobilization, Arshad al-Qādirī stressed the need to set up a rival Barelwī organization. The first attempt was the World Islamic Mission (WIM),<sup>17</sup> “Al-Da‘wat al-Islāmīyat al-Alamīyah,” which Arshad al-Qādirī and the Karachi-based Shāh Ahmad Nūrānī (Oct. 1, 1926 – Dec. 11, 2003) launched in Mecca in 1972. With its head-office in Bradford,<sup>18</sup> the WIM was the first Barelwī organization, which systematically funded missionary travels on the global stage, setting up several educational institutions as well, among them the Islamic Missionary College in Bradford. The WIM, however, faced serious difficulties in keeping up the incoming flow of money and in this respect the organization can be called a failure – which Arshad corrected.

Arshad al-Qādirī and the Karachi-based Shāh Ahmad Nūrānī, since 1973 head of the “Jamiyat-e Ulama-ye Pakistan” (JUP), were the most prominent among the actual founders of Da‘wat-e Islāmī and appointed Muhammad Ilyās Qādirī, who was the then Punjab president of “Anjuman Tulaba-ye

Islam,” JUP’s youth wing (a Barelwī student organization) as its *amīr* at Dar al-‘ulum Amjadia university. As his name resembles the name of the founder of Tablīghī Jamā‘at they sought that he was 1) someone who could mobilize the young, and 2) a Memon as the organization’s *amīr*, who with his connections to the Memon business community could systematically break up the Gujarati trader networks on which Tablīghī Jamā‘at economy relies.<sup>19</sup>

In Deoband Da‘wat-e Islāmī is seen as another attempt of Barelwīs to copy the success of Deoband: “They try to imitate anything we do without understanding it, which is why they always fail. One cannot imitate something one doesn’t understand.”<sup>20</sup>

The intrareligious rivalries between these movements and traditions have led to questions on their involvement in subversive and sectarian activities (cf. Roul 2009).

On the margins of the movement a militant group emerged called Sunnī Tahrīk,<sup>21</sup> which was formed in 1992 by the Da‘wat-e Islāmī district leader (*negrān*) Salim Qādirī (murdered in 2001) with the main purpose of taking control of Deobandī mosques. The movement was connected to the Barelwī organization Zia al-Qur‘ān, then headed by Justice Pir Muhammad Karam Shāh Al-Azhārī (1918–1998).<sup>22</sup> His Qur‘ān translation “Jamāl al-Qur‘ān” is available online on the Da‘wat-e Islāmī homepages “Faizān-e Madīna” (English)<sup>23</sup> and “Nafs-e Islām” (Urdu).<sup>24</sup> Sunnī Tahrīk was established by Barelwī Muhājir youth, especially after “Muhājir Qaumī Movement” (MQM) activists were forced to join other movements to escape persecution by the secret service after the military “Operation Clean-Up” in Karachi in 1996.<sup>25</sup> Sunnī Tahrīk became infamous for the systematic killing of Deobandī scholars, among them Binori Town chief Yusuf Ludhianvi (1932 – May 18, 2000; *International Crisis Group* 2005), and Shī‘as, for example, on “‘īd-e Milād an-Nabī” (the birthday of

19 Interview with the grandson of Arshad al-Qādirī, Khushtar Nurani in New Delhi, March 2008.

20 Interview with the first Vice-Chancellor of Dar-al-ulum Deoband, Prof. Abd al-Khalique Madrassi in Deoband, April 2008.

21 <www.sunnitehreek.com.pk> [04. 11. 2009].

22 <www.zia-ul-ummat.com> [04. 11. 2009]; <www.zia-ul-quran.com> [04. 11. 2009].

23 <www.faiizanemadina.com/Jamāl-ul-quran/index.php> [30. 09. 2009].

24 <www.nafseislam.com/en/Zia-ul-Quran.php> [04. 11. 2009].

25 For a study on the MQM in Karachi and their connection to Da‘wat-e Islāmī see Verkaaik (2004).

17 <www.wimnet.org> [04. 11. 2009].

18 <www.wimuk.com> [04. 11. 2009].



**Fig. 4:** Madrasat al-Madīna in Muridke (Pakistan).

the Prophet) in 2005, as they resent the Shī‘a practice of lighting fires to commemorate important religious events (*International Crisis Group* 2007a). The movement was banned for several months in 2001 after Sunnī Tahrīk were reported to have killed the brother of the then Home Minister, Muin ad-din Haider. Prior to this no Barelwī organization engaged in organized sectarian violence. The leadership of Sunnī Tahrīk was wiped out in a suicide attack at Nishtar Park, Karachi, during an “īd-e Milād an-Nabī” celebration on April 11, 2006. This attack on a Barelwī gathering was the biggest-ever sectarian blow in Pakistan, killing 57,<sup>26</sup> immediately following an “incident,” which the Da‘wat-e Islāmī interprets as an attack, in the Da‘wat-e Islāmī headquarters “Faizān-e Madīna” in Karachi on April 9, killing 29.<sup>27</sup>

This seems to be the end of Sunnī Tahrīk, which since November 2008 is advertising tolerance by its new slogan: “*Jīyo aur jīne do*” (Live and let live).

In Europe the Da‘wat-e Islāmī began “Madani work” in the United Kingdom. Da‘wat-e Islāmī activists started to unfold their missionary efforts

in Bradford’s World Islamic Mission in the 1990s. In 2000, the first European *markaz*, the Faizān-e Madīnah in Bradford was launched. *Marakaz* of the same name were then set up in Birmingham (2003), Accrington (2006), and Peterborough (2008). The Faizān-e Madīnah in Accrington is currently the European headquarters for Da‘wat-e Islāmī administrative issues. All Faizān-e Madīnas run their own tertiary educational institutions, the Madrasat al-Madīnas, and shops of the Maktabat al-Madīna-chain, selling DVDs, VCDs, Islamic software like searchable traditional *fatawa* collections, devotional paraphernalia, and literature. The Maktabat al-Madīna published as yet over 400 pieces of Islamic literature in fifteen languages.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore these centers organize weekly congregations (*haftawar ijtimā’s*) in mosques owned by other Pakistani religious groups (for example, in London, Birmingham, Bolton, Nottingham, Sheffield, Dewsbury, Oldham, Leicester, Rochdale, etc). An annual *ijtimā’* for Europe is being held in Birmingham, which attracts around 15,000 followers and is modelled after the annual *ijtimā* for Pakistan in Multan, where several important saints have shrines.

26 <[www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C04%5C13%5Cstory\\_13-4-2006\\_pg3\\_1](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C04%5C13%5Cstory_13-4-2006_pg3_1)> [04. 11. 2009].

27 <[www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C04%5C10%5Cstory\\_10-4-2006\\_pg1\\_1](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C04%5C10%5Cstory_10-4-2006_pg1_1)> [04. 11. 2009]. In an interview, in November 2006, Ilyas Attar told me, that some of his female adherents had seen male hands of “dushman-e Islam” coming out from a burqa, pushing children to fall on the steps.

28 On April 15, 2009, publications were distributed in Urdu (232), English (83), Hindi (29), Sindhi (28), Gujarati (23), Kreolic (9), Arabic (7), Farsi (4), German (4), Bengali (3), Suwahili (2), Hausa (2), Spanish (2), Russian (1), and French (1).



**Fig. 5:** The *markaz* of Da‘wat-e Islāmī in Barcelona is called Fai-  
zan-e Madīna. It was established  
in April 2007 and is located  
just a two-minute walk away from the  
Tablighi mosque in El Raval.

During Milād an-Nabī 2007, the celebration for the Prophet’s birthday, the Da‘wat-e Islāmī *negrān* (caretaker) for Europe opened the first Fai-  
zān-e Madīna in Barcelona. In the same year  
the movement overtook a mosque in Besos, the  
“Centro de Cultura Jamē Masjid Ghulamane Mus-  
tafa Catalunya” (cultural center “Congregational  
Mosque of the Lovers of Mustafa”), a suburb of  
Barcelona. Other centers were established in the  
Spanish cities of Malaga and Valencia, where many  
Pakistani immigrants live and work.

In numbers the most centers of Da‘wat-e Islāmī  
in a continental European country, however, are lo-  
cated in Greece. This is not too surprising, as many  
new, often irregular migrants from Pakistan reach  
Europe via Iran, Turkey, and Greece. In 2004, the  
Faizān-e Madīna in Omonia, Athens, was estab-  
lished. In 2006, this center was renamed Faizān-e  
Attār after Ilyās Qādirī as a new and larger Faizān-e  
Madīna opened in Athens. Other *markaz* were es-  
tablished in Thiva (2007) and Marathonas (2008).  
In Germany the Da‘wat-e Islāmī runs *halqaha* (cir-  
cles) revolving around mosques in Stuttgart, i.e.,  
the Al-Madina Masjid in Bad Cannstatt, and Frank-  
furt a. M., i.e. the Pak Dar al-Islam Masjid.

The *negrān* of each *halqa* and each *markaz* send  
*madanī* reports to the “Da‘wat-e Islāmī kā ’alami  
*madanī* markaz Faizān-e Madīna” in Karachi to in-  
form the international headquarters about the out-  
come and success of regional missionary activities.

In 1991, the *negrān* of the Indian branch of Da-  
‘wat-e Islāmī, Muhammad Shākīr ‘Ālī Nūrī, split

off to form the independent movement Sunnī Da-  
‘wat-e Islāmī, which has its world headquarters in  
Mumbai. The SDI commentary on selected *ahadīth*  
“Faizān-e Sharī‘at” is meanwhile officially named  
“Barakāt-e Sharī‘at” (Urdu, meaning: Blessings of  
the *sharī‘ah*; Shakir Nuri 2006), which the press of  
the Sunnī Da‘wat-e Islāmī, Maktaba-e Taiba, has  
partly published in English under the same title.  
The doctrinal affiliation of this movement is also  
Barelwī. The highlight of the weekly *ijtima’* is the  
*zīkr-e Madīna*, the call to the Beloved Prophet to  
save one from the tortures of hells. Besides the  
weekly *ijtima’* on Saturdays at their headquarters,  
the “Ismā‘īl Habīb Masjid” in Mumbai, the move-  
ment has its European headquarters, “Noor Hall”,  
in Preston, UK, where adherents gather for an an-  
nual *ijtima’* in May. Sunnī Da‘wat-e Islāmī orga-  
nizes regular youth camps in Manchester at the  
North Manchester Jāmia Mosque. Other centers  
are in Blackburn (Razā Masjid), Bolton (Madīna  
Masjid), and Leicester (‘Usmānī Masjid).

### Restoring “Islamic” Prominence

Tablighī Jamā‘at, Da‘wat-e Islāmī, and Sunnī Da-  
‘wat-e Islāmī stress the strict and literal imitation of  
the life of the Prophet; and although the approach  
of the three movements is anti-intellectual, their  
discourses have been extremely influential in shap-  
ing the Islamic religious fields (Bourdieu 2000) in  
the modern world (cf. Ramadan 2007). They focus

**Fig. 6:** Sikh boy embracing Islam in the Faizān-e Madīna of Da‘wat-e Islāmī in Athens, taking the new name Saif Ullah (sword of Allah).



**Fig. 7:** Sunnī Da‘wat-e Islāmī started its activity in Europe in Masjid-e Noor in Preston, United Kingdom.



their teachings on their respective commentaries on a specific collection of *ahadīth*, namely, “Fazā’ile A‘māl,” “Faizān-e Sunnat,” or “Barakāt-e Sharī‘at.” These “handbooks” teach how to Sunnaize the daily routine as well as the course of life and the individual markers of identity based on the example of the Prophet and the Salaf, the pious ancestors. They teach a very specific Islamic etiquette in drinking, eating, walking, greeting, sleeping, brushing teeth, combing the beard, etc; and I follow Roy (2005) in interpreting this as the privatization or individualization of traditional Islamic fundamentalism. It is apolitical in the sense that it focuses on the private sphere rather than the political. In this respect agents of fundamentalisms transformed by privatization are – as were Protestant movements in

their time – paradoxically agents of secularization as they individualize and thereby desocialize religious observances (Roy 2007: 76). Furthermore, neo-fundamentalists (Roy 2005) draw their arguments from *hadīth* or interpretations of comparable material, especially dreams in which the Prophet appeared rather than from the Qur’ān – as did the Islamic fundamentalists (Abbas 2007). As they draw their arguments from a different fundament I find the term “neo-fundamentalism” problematic and probably misleading in the case of Islamic neo-fundamentalisms as I do the label “Islamization” for their “Islamic projects.” I would prefer to call their Islamic projects, that is, their virtual direction of change in society, “Sunnaization,” as it is a process that encourages people to establish



**Fig. 8:** Maktaba-ye Taiba shop in Mumbai. It is the SDI version of the Maktabat al-Madīna of Da‘wat-e Islāmī.

the “Sunnas of the Prophet,” whereby every individual establishes deep ties to the Prophet in his personal spheres of daily life and, thereby, regulates his behavior by either substituting norms of behavior (for example, cutting instead of shaving a beard) or integrating additional essential parts into otherwise unchanged behavior (for example, doing *zikr* – active remembrance of God by a specific auspicious mantra – while stepping aboard a bus with the right foot first). Sunnaization combines Sufi elements (cf. van Bruinessen and Howell 2007), as it connects all individual activities to the beloved Prophet Muhammad Mustafā with Salafī elements, by stressing the strict and literal imitation of the Salaf. And anybody talking to different kinds of fundamentalists will easily notice the completely different rationalities among the agents of either Islamization or Sunnaization. The killer argument of traditional Islamists is: “This is Islam,” “... we set as our criterion the book of God to which we all owe allegiance and to which we all turn, then we will be on agreed ground” (al-Banna 2004: 5). Meanwhile the lay preachers argue: “This is the Sunna of Our Beloved Prophet.” And this is why the movements focus on a virtual and translocal Madīna, the *dar as-sunna* (abode of sunna), instead of any state government. Yet these movements have an enormous political impact, which shines through in a statement in the British Barelwī magazine *The Islamic Times* (August 2006: 9 f.)<sup>29</sup>:

It is especially important to emphasize that the religious is the political when direct politics in so many Muslim countries has failed, or is very difficult due to nightmarish secret police persecution. ... To change the World, all you have to do is to be religious.

Sunnaization has a special attraction for converts and Muslim youth, as it is a process in which anybody can autonomously generate symbolic capital. Muslim youth and converts, who usually occupy an inferior role in the Islamic religious field which is traditionally dominated by male elders, autonomously generate social, trust, and authenticity capital by visibly Sunnaizing their norms of behavior and stage manage their imitation of the Salaf. In this respect Sunnaization is also a tool for social mobility, empowering those who traditionally are subordinated to Muslim male elders. Through Sunnaization anybody can become a lay preacher and start to restructure the Islamic field in his neighborhood or to use the metaphor of the pluralistic religious market economy (Bauman 2007: 6):

[T]he commodity they are prompted to put on the market, promote and sell are themselves. They are, simultaneously, promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote ... The test they need to pass in order to be admitted to the social prizes they covet demands them to recast themselves as commodities: that is, as products capable of catching the attention and attracting demand and customers.

29 <[www.theislamictimes.co.uk/pdfs/islamic\\_times\\_august\\_06.pdf](http://www.theislamictimes.co.uk/pdfs/islamic_times_august_06.pdf)> [30. 09. 2009].



Fig. 9: British Madina caravan at the annual ijtima in Multan.

### *Khurūj fī sabīl illāh*

Islamic missionary movements in post-Christian Europe are often perceived as clashing with secularism (Roy 2007). Tablīghī Jamā‘at and the Da‘wat-e Islāmī generate broad visibility by occupying public spaces with their religious signs and symbols, which they use ostentatiously to construct and formulate their identity. Both groups have an obvious impact on how Islam is practised in their neighborhood. This may contribute to the impression among the public that both movements are associated with radical groups. Yet the inner logic of missionary groups and the way in which both movements operate are not helpful in the recruitment processes of *Jihādī* groups. Indeed peaceful fundamentalist Muslim groups may help to promote a conciliatory message and repudiate terrorist violence (cf. Puschnerat 2007). Their help could be essential to efforts to neutralize terrorist networks since they “fish in the same waters” as militant groups. They attract the same clusters of socially alienated and inexperienced young men, whose lack of responsibilities is combined with a love of adventure and a burning desire to save the world (Sageman 2004). The lay preachers provide them with a rather dichotomous worldview, but a peaceful alternative. Having entered the mainstream of the new and transnational Islamization transformed

through modernity, which more accurately should be named Sunnaization, the two movements attract opportunists who join to operate under cover and escape police persecution. Although the movements have long followed the policy of not asking where their adherents come from (since everyone is supposed to repent, revert, and be integrated), their professional and extremely bureaucratic organizational structure has in the last five years developed strict and bureaucratic procedures for checking the identity of potential members and limiting the infiltration of militant elements by other movements. This perspective reveals the overlap of different milieus – political, militant, social, cultural, and spiritual. Militant *Jihādīs* now tend to look up to the missionaries and see *da‘wa* as the spiritual *jihād*, the greater *jihād*. Missionaries say the time for the smaller, militant *jihād* has not yet come: people first have to reform and be educated in real Islam.

### Parrots of Paradise

Western observers find it irritating that both movements are organized differently from Western institutions. It is almost impossible to find a written agenda, membership lists, or fees, or a transparent management, or institutional ownership structure. Although their organization is bureaucratic, they remain pietist movements that revolve around specific members and operate via informal, flexible, and mutual face-to-face contacts. Although these movements spread Salafī symbols and values, they are organized as a Sufi movement, i.e., there is no fixed membership and frequently a lack of clear-cut boundaries. Members enter the milieu of the missionary groups and leave it again. Muslim businessmen, students, and traders are often merely seeking a spiritual break from the Western lifestyles. Migrants, who may lack language skills and are trapped in a village or a certain neighborhood, discover a new mobility in these movements. It is difficult for the Western public sphere to begin dialogue with these movements neither participates in public dialogue projects, and there is no official representative to act as a contact for journalists or politicians. Hence, the leaders of the movements remain behind the activism of lay preachers. Their property and institutions are mostly in private hands. In European countries, their schools are trust-owned, so that the movements themselves do not become legal persons.

As a rule modern societies become increasingly diverse and religiously pluralistic.<sup>30</sup> Capitalist transformation of traditional communities and the

global circulation of ideas by new media and the information technology have led to a situation in which people have had to find new modes of coexistence (Wuthnow 2005). As modernity comes with growing pressure to draw boundaries and formulate identities, globalization also brings a new ambiguity into Islamic interpretations, enabling them to integrate different Islamic identities (Graf und Große Kracht 2007). At the same time it is clear that it is only a relatively small group believing to hold a monopoly on the truth, trying to convince “the rest.” They represent the religion of the margins and not the middle.

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30 Eck (2007); and as most discussions of plurality neglect the negative side effects of diversity: see also Putnam (2007).

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