



Mothers must speak out against evil of jihadism

Sally Evans

Imagine discovering the death of your child on Twitter and being both devastated and relieved at the same time. Devastated because the child you brought into the world was killed after being brainwashed into pursuing a murderous cause. Relieved because his death meant that he could no longer harm innocent people.

My son Thomas Evans was killed in Kenya two months ago. When I discovered the news I cried for Thomas — but not for Abdulhakim, the unrecognisable person that he had become.

I often asked myself how my son went from being a sweet boy full of energy and humour to a senior member of the terrorist group al-Shabaab. But then I began to understand how toxic and deadly Islamist radicalisation can be — because it doesn't only destroy the lives of young men and women who are struck by its spell, but it also indirectly devastates the lives of the

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parents and siblings. I was never opposed to Thomas becoming a Muslim — in fact I thought it would help settle his somewhat wayward teenage behaviour. But eventually he stopped respecting my right to be secular and repeatedly told me that I was destined for Hell unless I converted to Islam.

I would come to learn, but unfortunately too late, that Thomas was not practising Islam; he was practising an ideology that hijacks an otherwise peaceful religion for its own jihadist ends.

If a young man from High Wycombe who was raised in a secular household can be turned into a terrorist, then perhaps no one is immune. Radicalisation is not just a threat to the Muslim community but to all of us. And that is why we must fight against the Islamist ideology, even though at times it may seem as though we are losing the battle.

I don't claim to be an expert on extremism and radicalisation. But I am no longer going to suffer in silence and isolation because that would play into the hands of the jihadist recruiters who want to stifle opposition to their way of life.

It once seemed to me that no one cared what the families of terrorists go through — but I was wrong. Society does care, wants to care, and needs to care. It is only by caring about the impact that radicalisation has on families, individuals and society that we can begin to fight it.

A documentary about Thomas Evans, My Son the Jihadi, will be shown on Channel 4 on Thursday at 9pm