

Dutch mini-'caliphate' is no paradiseDoor **SILVAN SCHOONHOVEN**

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In the grip of the sheik



Abdul Wahab Siddiqi was my great example", says Alwin, once the right-hand man to the bearded Pakistani leader - But then he raped my two daughters

NUNEATON - One hour away by plane there is a Dutch 'mini-caliphate'. In the middle of England, Dutch Muslims numbering double figures are living on a county estate under the leadership of a clan of radical sheiks. It is no earthly paradise: ex-followers are sounding the alarm through De Telegraaf. They have destroyed my life."

The Noeroel Islam mosque in The Hague pours thousands of Euros per year into the coffers of the 'Hijaz' Islamic community, a country estate not far from Birmingham. Tens of believers from The Netherlands, Surinamese people in particular, are travelling there to settle around the little castle belonging to sheik Faiz Siddiqi and his family members. The Siddiqis are no everyday imams, but are gurus of mystical Pakistani Islam. They are revered as saints, but they are by no means of unblemished record. Injured parties are coming forward with accounts of sexual abuse, manipulation, intimidation with demons and the financial extortion of members.

Behind an electrified fence and 'no entry' signs, a driveway stretches some 700 metres. At the end, a 1001 Nights-like- mausoleum looms and on the right hand side there is a dilapidated country house, like the set for a horror film. There is a faint smell of incense. A woman wearing the veil is walking back and forth, as a car with Dutch registration plates turns on to the car park. There is a tranquil serenity; there are no prying eyes for miles. The commune of over a hundred members has the place to itself.

This is Hijaz, an Islamic sanctum in the hills of the British Midlands. "In Hijaz everybody is warm and hospitable, 30 year old Halima said. Whoever you are. Nobody looks down on you. The more I heard about Hijaz, the more I knew that this was what I wanted."

Sheik Faiz Siddiqi rules over the Islamic enclave like a monarch. He is a busy man. He arranges marriages between Hijaz members and advises on business and life issues. He also runs a Sharia court, where violent husbands are sentenced to anger management courses instead of a custodial sentence, for example. The sheik is also wading into the terrorism debate. One month after the shooting of Charlie Hebdo editorial staff in 2015 he organised a protest march. Not against the murder of eleven members of the editorial staff, but against insulting cartoons. 'Learn manners', one banner said.

Faiz wants to play a leading role in the Muslim community", according to religious researcher Santi Rozario of the University of Sydney. „He is very articulate and active, modern and traditional at the same time. He is charming and charismatic and has a huge appeal to young people.”

At the same time she identified that some women in Hijaz were extremely fervent in their belief in Faiz. Tahera (23), who wore a burqa, left all the big decisions in her life up to him. The sheik advised her and she did everything he told her to.”

De Telegraaf spoke to fifteen former members, relatives and other injured persons. All of them are angry, afraid or aggrieved. A charlatan”, Muslim woman Gulshar Akthar calls the sheik. From the outside the Siddiqi brothers' group looks like a sweet shop. But once you are inside, you notice there is something sinister behind it. Yes, Faiz is charming, but when I was with him in his office wearing the veil, I saw him staring at the uncovered parts of my body. It was uncomfortable and I wondered if that wasn't inappropriate for a sheik. A lot of stories are going around about his behaviour. His marriage to a student half his age caused quite a stir.”

For some time now, there seems to be something seriously wrong in Hijaz. "I've still got scars", says one of two Dutch women who used to live with the Siddiqis during their childhood. They were supposed to receive an Islamic education but they were made to be domestic slaves instead. The family members called me 'the dirt beneath their feet', I always had to clean, wasn't fed properly and was beaten with a baseball bat.”

Even more disturbing is the statement by the sisters that they were systemically sexually abused by Abdulwahab Siddiqi, now deceased, the father of the current sheik Faiz. Faiz, too, couldn't keep his hands to himself. One of the women stated that Siddiqi senior made her keep quiet about the rape by threatening her with jinns, a kind of Islamic demons. If she were to speak out, they would take revenge. The jinn would destroy my parents and my future. I was afraid every day. I was eleven years old, I had nowhere to go.”

The police investigation into the rape of the two sisters ended when Siddiqi senior suddenly died in 1994. The allegations were subsequently swept away as 'slander'. Still, followers continue to revere him as a major saint and suggest a supernatural glow emanates from his tomb on the estate grounds. Believers can purchase a burial plot in the consecrated soil for a hefty price tag. „We have to look up to my father's life, do as he did and follow in his footsteps”, Faiz said during a memorial service in The Hague.

Both the faith in Siddiqi senior and the fear of demons remain prevalent in 2017. Fences, cameras and motion sensors are not the only means being deployed to protect the 33 hectare site, according to the believers. There is also a jinn who watches over the site twenty-four-seven. They call him 'Babi Ji'.



The Islamic boarding school in the mini-caliphate (above) is bankrupt. The diplomas were not recognized anywhere. In the background the mausoleum of Abdulwahab Siddiqi, father of Faiz Siddiqi.

Many former members are wary about speaking negatively about the Siddiqi father and sons because of these jinn spirits. Because the Quran is full of references to these creatures, they are part of reality for many devout Muslims. The sheiks possess an army of a thousand jinns who will go to your house and attack you”, a former member whispers. Then your children get sick and the doctor can’t understand why. Your customers leave. Your wife’s ovaries are destroyed.”

Sometimes the Siddiqis give the spirits a helping hand. I experienced us seeing a little gnome-like man creeping through the gardens outside the house”, says a former admirer of Siddiqi senior. „I was shocked. Siddiqi said: don’t look, it is a jinn. Later, I found a rubber mask of the same frightening grimace in the basement.”

I don’t believe in goblins”, says a former business partner of Faiz Siddiqi. I always say: I’ve only heard of jinn and tonic. But for them, the spirits are a real specialisation. People come to Faiz when a relative is sick, for example. Then he writes a paper amulet and when the patient recovers he says: ‘look, it works, we need another donation’. It couldn’t be any easier, it is the ultimate licence to print money, you are literally changing worthless paper into bank notes. On any given Sunday afternoon he can write out fifty of those amulets. Uneducated immigrants from third world countries believe in it.”

Superstitions therefore form a source of income for the Siddiqis. But is not their only one. For years the family ran an expensive boarding school at Hijaz, which was full of Dutch-Surinamese children from the age of 11 upwards. It isn’t surprising that it went belly-up, when you hear the accounts of two former pupils. „The school fees were twice as high as anywhere else. After three years, our qualifications turned out to be worthless: they weren’t recognised anywhere. Meanwhile, they were keeping back our allowances and driving expensive cars. The food was completely inedible and there wasn’t enough of it. We had to break into the kitchen, that’s how hungry we were. The heating wasn’t working. In the winter, we lay there in bed wearing all of our clothes, shivering. We were supposed to view it all as a spiritual battle. But, in the sheiks’ own wing there was plenty of luxury.”

‘Does not meet the requirements’, was the view of the British ministry of education in 2012. The boarding school closed down. Now, the dormitories have been converted into rental apartments for the believers. This way, the Hijaz members bring in thousands of pounds every month.

Hijaz is clearly more than a commune, it is a commercial enterprise. Or, to put it better: a mishmash of commercial enterprises. Faiz Siddiqi is registered with a long list of companies to his name, such as ‘Divine Cosmetics’, ‘Cardiac Cars’ or ‘Halal corp’. In all, there are at least 28 companies of which Faiz currently is or has been a director. His right-hand man in The Netherlands, Archino Chedie, also registered in connection with 28 companies. Faiz’s brother in law has eight.

Faiz' brothers have their own companies, but there, too, things didn't always run smoothly. In 2008, one younger brother was temporarily suspended as a barrister due to some unlawful financial transactions involving large sums of money. Another brother's legal practice was closed down for malpractice this year, without notice.

It isn't surprising that the victims this newspaper spoke with called the sheiks crooks and con-artists. The injured parties have lost hundreds of thousands of pounds. Their accounts are a sorry collection of fiascos. They were persuaded to make investments that resulted in nothing. One person recounts how he had a mortgage foisted on him making him, and not the sheik, liable for the financial risk of a large building project. A second person performed work on the construction of apartments, but was never paid, even though the flat were sold at a premium. A third person donated money to an orphanage for ten years until he found out that there was no orphanage.



„They are cruel and vengeful and they have destroyed my life and others' lives”, says one of the victims. „Nobody knows where the money is going. It disappears. Hijaz is a black hole.”

Sheik Faiz Siddiqi refuses to answer questions himself. Dutch members are issued with the warning that Hijaz is under attack by 'Dutch extreme right wing politicians and islamophobic media'. „Their agenda is to destroy the good in Islam. May Allah protect us and unite us against this evil.”

Child stabbed

A Dutch disciple of the Siddiqi sheiks is active as an imam in Rotterdam, even though he was found guilty of child abuse in England earlier this year. It was pointless denying it: there was camera footage. Harun Karamat of the Shan-e-Mustafa mosque, Coventry hit children, twisted their arms and stabbed a nine year old in the hand with a pen multiple times.

Radicalisation, expulsion, tempers running high; all is not well in Hague mosque

The long arm of the sheikhs

Door SILVAN SCHOONHOVEN

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Faiz Siddiqi, son of Abdul Wahab, is now a lawyer in British Sharia Courts

A family of British-Pakistani sheikhs, accused of child abuse, is threatening to take over a mosque in The Hague and to set up a Sharia court there.

"Abdul Wahab Siddiqi was my great example", says Alwin, once the right-hand man to the bearded Pakistani leader - But then he raped my two daughters."

A family of British-Pakistani sheikhs, accused of child abuse, is threatening to take over a mosque in The Hague and to set up a Sharia court there. Concerned mosque members are in opposition. Six of them have been expelled because they are protesting against the dissipation of thousands of Euros to the sheikhs on their lavish country estate. Today, a preliminary injunction hearing will take place.

"Abdul Wahab Siddiqi was my great example", says Alwin, once the right-hand man to the bearded Pakistani leader.

"But then he raped my two daughters."

To his followers, Abdul Wahab is a saint. He has been dead for 23 years now, but he is still worshipped daily, in the Noeroel Islam mosque in The Hague, among other places. The centre of worship in the British village Nuneaton, too, is a kind of Dutch enclave. Many Surinamese people from The Hague commute back and forth to the large estate or even settle to live on the 25 hectare grounds.

There, Abdul Wahab's eldest son Faizul Siddiqi reigns supreme.

Faizul, himself a lawyer in the British Sharia courts, aims to give the mosque in The Hague its own arbitration council very soon. Such courts are widespread in England, but here they are very contentious because the judgments in family cases can be contrary to Dutch law. For example, women may be advised by Sharia judges to accept polygamy, or not to report domestic violence to the police.

Audience - Dutch academic Machteld Zee, an Islam researcher, went to visit Faizul in Nuneaton. She was given an audience in his luxurious office 'with the biggest flat screen I have ever seen'. Faizul told her that it would be to great advantage if Dutch Muslims no longer have to go to England for a Sharia judgment.

A group of people at Noeroel Islam mosque want nothing to do with this sort of thing. They do not trust the Siddiqi clan one bit. This can certainly be said of Alwin, who now has the deepest regret about handing his girls over to the family long ago in blind idolisation. He sent them to England to live with the Siddiqis. The daughters were supposed to receive an Islamic education. In reality, they became domestic slaves.

Their mother Farida became suspicious and made a police report in 1993. 'You did not teach my daughters about Islam and Arabic as was promised', she wrote to Abdul Wahab, 'but you raped them, abused them and assaulted them from the age of eleven.' To the mosque-goers she wrote: 'People who are known as a saint, are worshipped, receive good treatment everywhere and who secretly violently rape young girls for years, week in, week out, terrify them with stories about evil spirits, so that they cannot sleep at night, and make them work as slaves all day until late at night, I will never forgive people like that.' Nobody at the mosque wanted to listen.

Investigation - Rotterdam police did want to listen. They, together with Interpol London, started an investigation. However, it was stopped when Abdul Wahab died in 1994 at the age of 52. No suspect, no case.

One of the daughters wrote a detailed statement about what happened to her in the Siddiqi household. According to her, Faizul, the movement's current spiritual leader, couldn't keep his hands to himself either. Her sister confirms this. A second son, Noor, also made advances on the young teenage girls. But according to the statement, the father was the worst.

'Abdul Wahab called me into his room, suddenly grabbed hold of me and pulled my trousers [or: pants] off', the woman writes in an account full of fear and pain. After that first time, the abuse took on systemic forms. According to the victim, Abdul Wahab would threaten that jinns (Islamic spirits) would punish her if she spoke out. 'The spirit would have become very angry and would have destroyed my future and my parents. I would be left unable to have children'.

She describes how the sheikh tried to make her believe that a spirit could give back her virginity. 'But first he had to take nude photographs of me to give to the jinn'.

Charges - Not only the father and the eldest son were accused. A third son, Qamar, was prosecuted in 2013 for the rape of a woman, but was acquitted. A fourth son was convicted, but for something very different: embezzlement.

There has been trouble at Noeroel Islam mosque in The Hague for some time. Meetings are rowdy and sometimes descend into pushing and shoving. According to the board, threats were even made with a handgun during one of these meetings. Six of the Hague congregation were expelled as members last month. Today, they are before the court to try to get that reversed. Previously, the board had tried to exclude four mosque-goers who were critical, but the courts prevented it.

The rebels call the Siddiqis' Islamic movement 'a sect' and have watched with disquiet for years as the family on their English country estate receives money from The Hague every month. They do not trust the late Abdul Wahab's clan an inch.

The expelled members are demanding transparency in the financial affairs and want to know what happens to the monthly payment to England. They fear that the mosque in The Hague will fall prey to the Pakistanis' greed, and are demanding to view the accounts. Faizul claims that his family paid for our Noeroel Islam mosque", they say, but we, the members, did that. The building is now fully paid for and we are afraid that they want to get their hands on the building, which cost five million Euros. The spiritual leader has the association in a stranglehold for financial gain."

The Surinamese people's mosque in The Hague is not the only place of worship where a power struggle is raging. In many Moroccan mosques, Salafists and traditionalists are battling for the upper hand. Surinamese Islam is originally oriented on India and Pakistan, and for the Surinamese the tug-of-war usually arises due to extremist Pakistani spiritual leaders, who vie among themselves and who want to leave their mark on the Dutch believers.

The Noeroel Islam mosque is best off being entirely free of the influence of England." Thus, imam Goelab from

Zwolle. He himself was a follower of Abdul Wahab in England. The accounts of abuse linked to his guru mean nothing to him.

Even so, he believes that Dutch mosques would be better off without foreign influence. He himself was thrown out of his mosque in Zwolle when he opposed the influence of the extremist Pakistani sheikh Noorani.

Faizul Siddiqi informs us through is solicitor that the reports of sexual abuse are ‘unfounded’. He says that the insubordinate Hague mosque members are seeking to discredit the Siddiqi family in order to influence the court case. The relationship between the mosque in The Hague and the Hijaz group in England is ‘experienced by both parties as constructive’, he states. He ‘regrets that the dispute inside the mosque has resulted in one of the parties has taken recourse to the media’.

According to the board of the Noeroel Islam mosque, the expulsion of the six members is a majority decision by the members and they knew nothing about the abuse case.

