

Kin and Peer Contexts, Ideological Transmission and Extremist Involvement

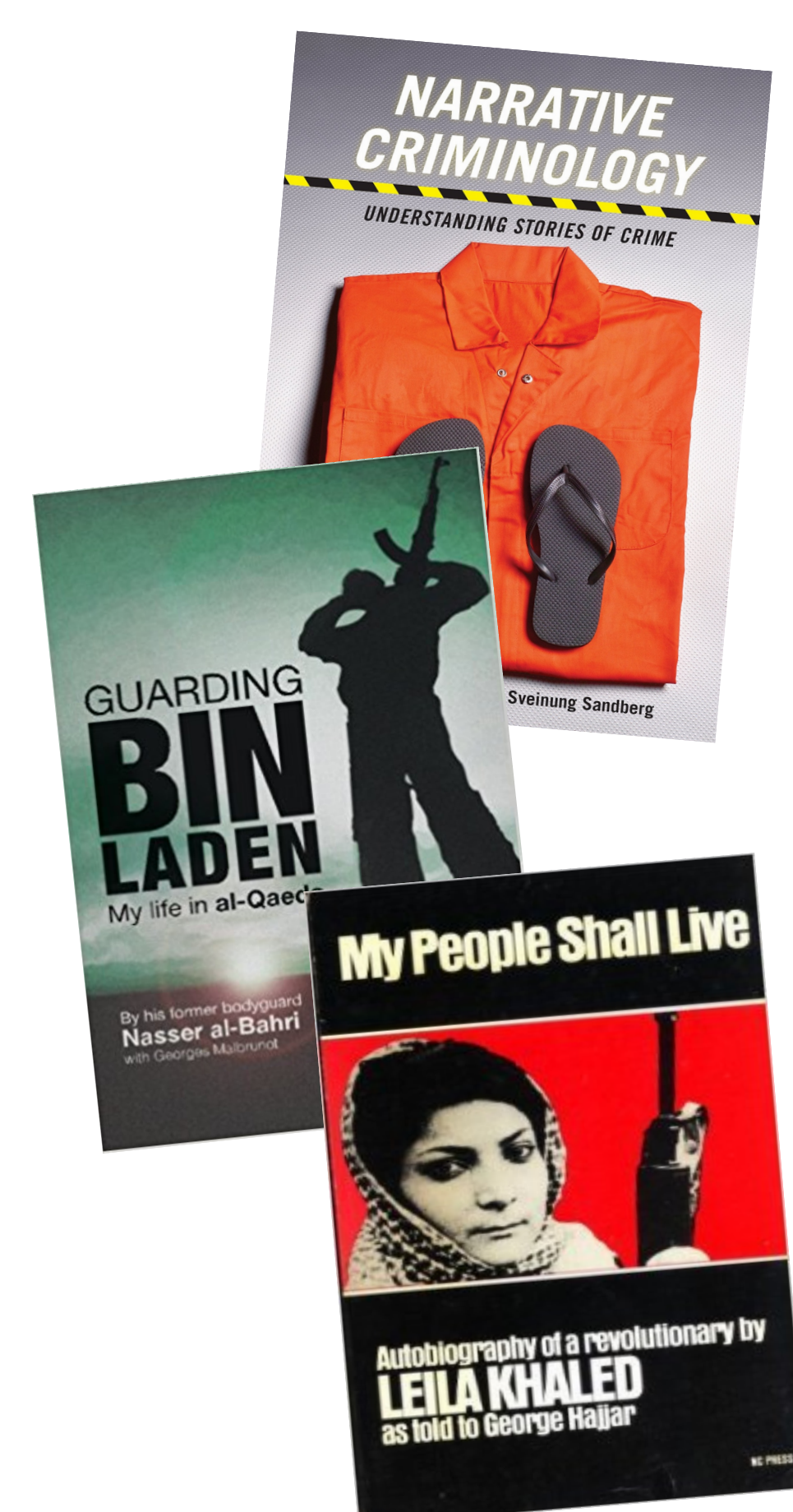
Simon Copeland

Key research question

What are the roles and impacts of kin and peer networks in the transmission of extremist ideologies and how individuals understand their involvement in terrorism?

Additional questions

- Which family members and peers do individuals consider to have impacted upon on their 'terrorist careers', and what is the nature of this impact?
- What do terrorists' accounts reveal about domestic environments and friendship groups as sites of ideological transmission or even conversion to extremist positions and identities?
- What emotions and values are associated with kin and peer influence in autobiographical accounts?

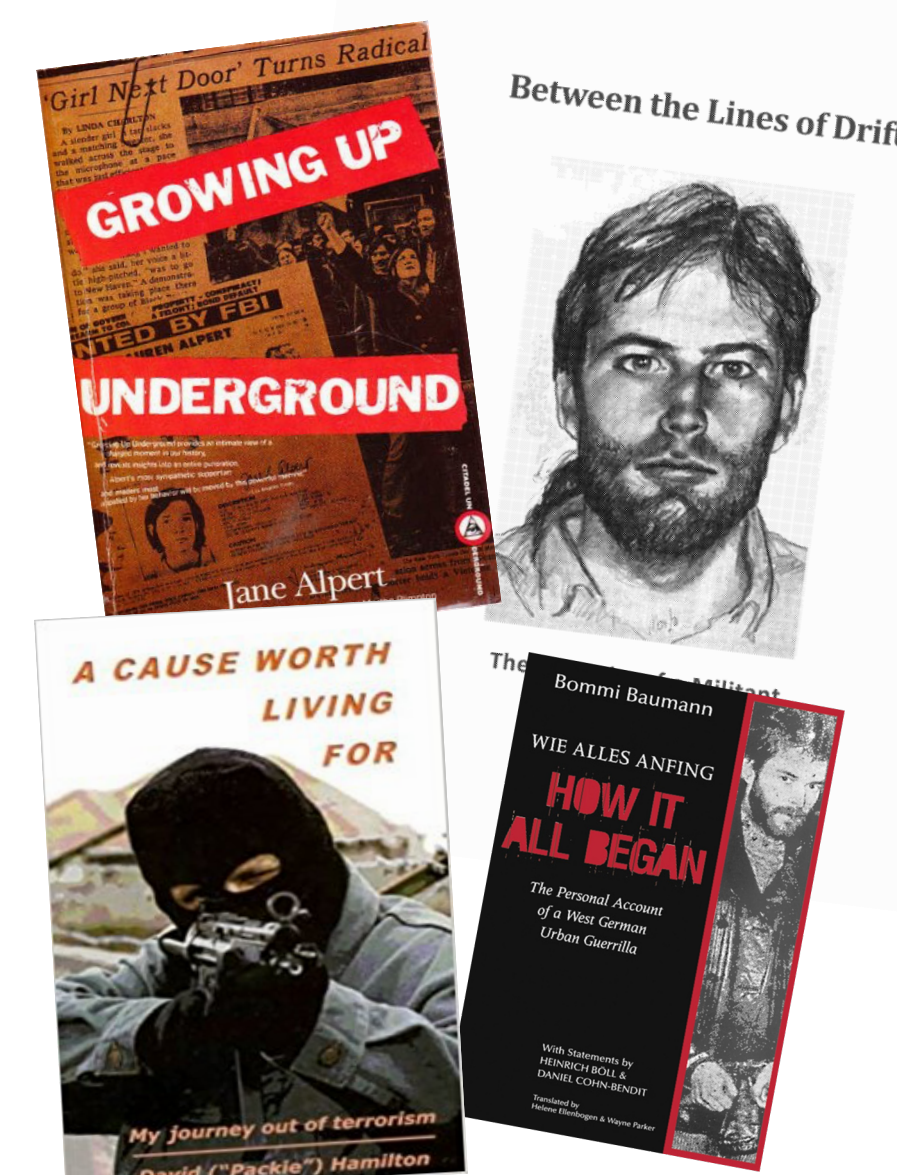


Kin and peer influences and terrorism

- Studies of violent activism, in various contexts, recognise that kin and peer networks play a significant role in the recruitment processes of terrorist groups. Analysis, however, has tended to focus on the tangible links these networks provide for individuals to interact with those already involved in terrorism.
- Much analysis fails to take into account the role of family, kin and peer relationships in shaping stories that facilitate or prevent harm. These include the stories terrorists tell about themselves, and their actions, or their 'narrative identity'.
- Drawing on narrative criminology, this thesis examines those stories that reflect, record, narrate or suggest how kin and peer relationships in some way facilitate or restrict individuals' engagement in violence.

Utilising terrorists' own accounts

- Terrorists' own accounts remain underutilised given they are often viewed as unreliable representations of their experiences.
- However, the process of narrating past events may also be seen as a shaping experience in itself, rather than something imposed upon pre-existing 'real' events. Analysis of kin and peer influences in how terrorists story their own lives is therefore not limited by concerns regarding the accuracy of the events as described.

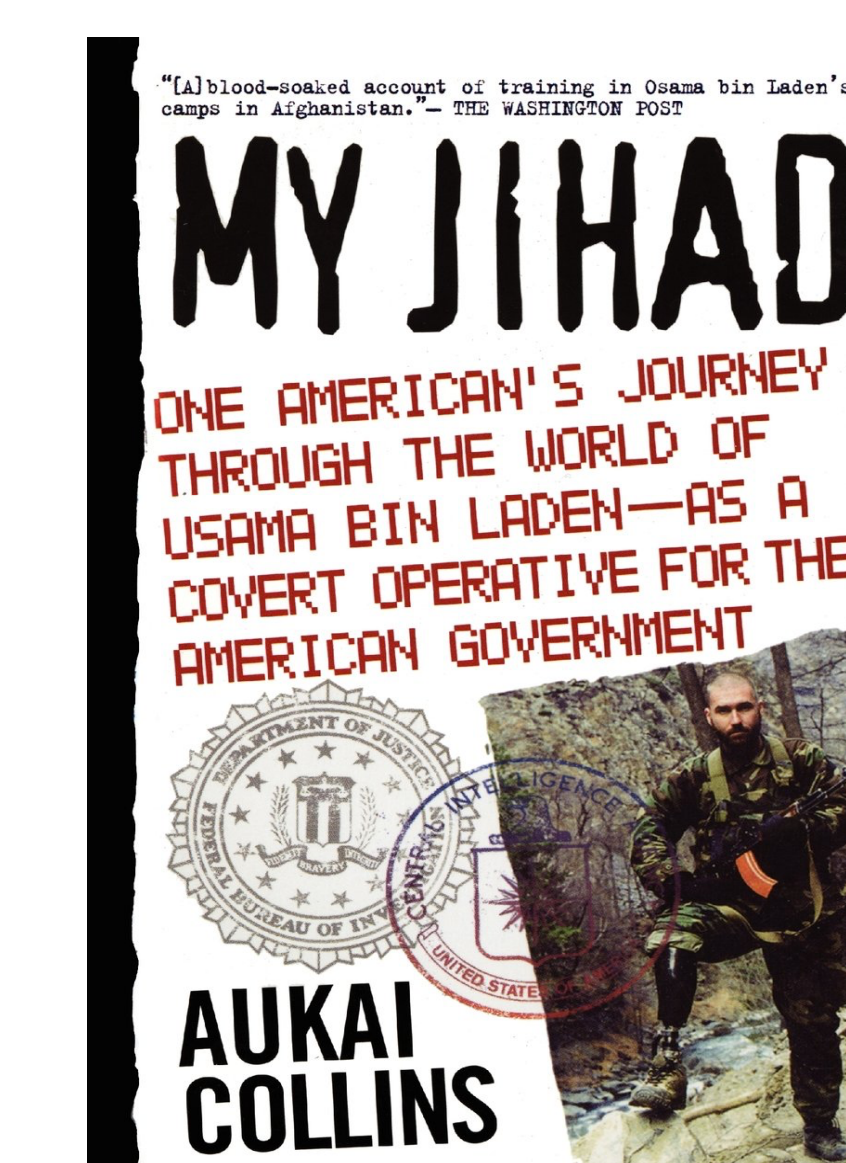


How do terrorists conceive their own kinship?

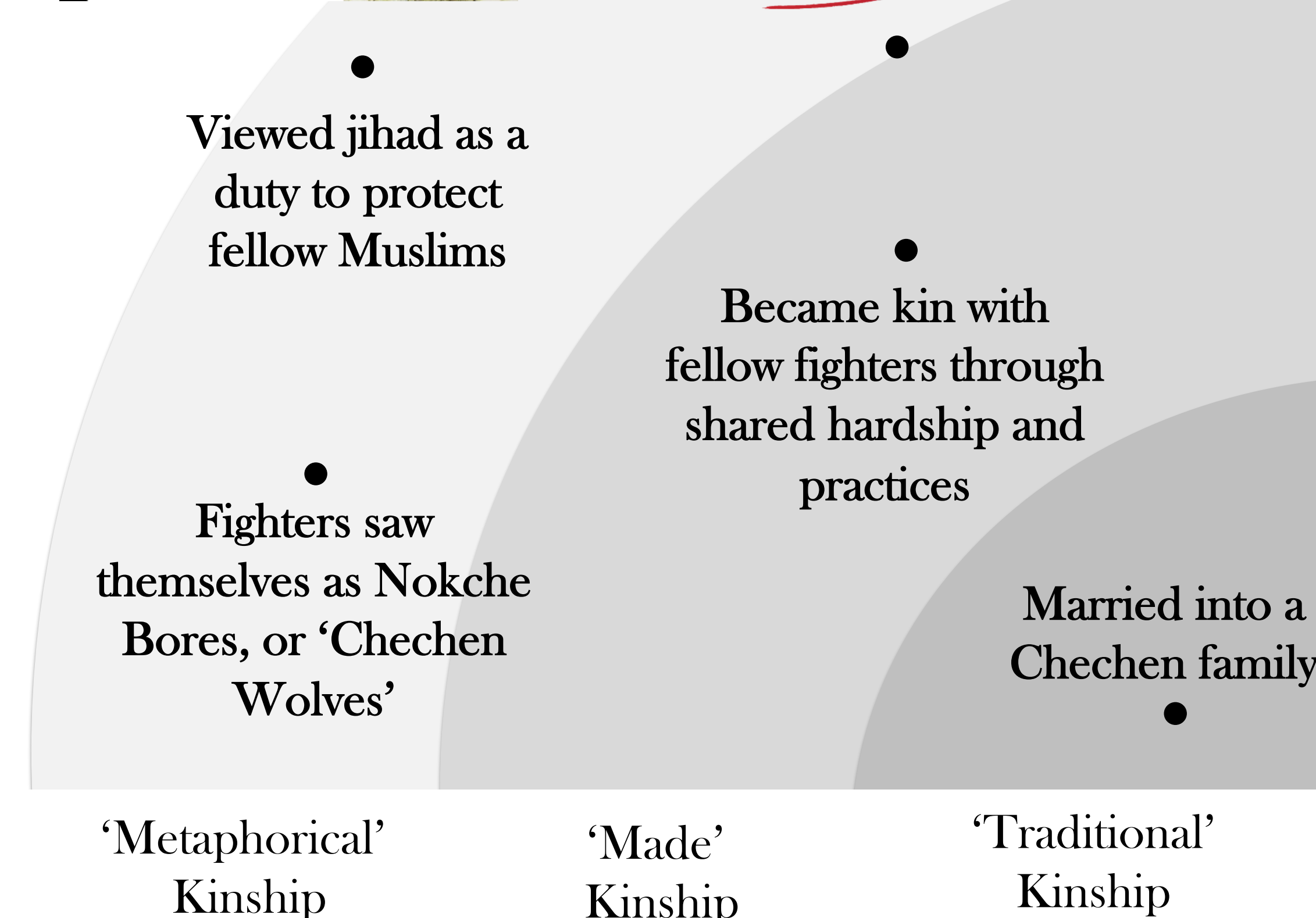
Western-centric, traditional anthropological approaches have advanced 'blood ties' and marriage as the fundamental basis of kinship. However, it is useful to understand kinship as being 'made' through social means as well as being 'given' by biological links. Kinship is also frequently employed 'metaphorically' to construct 'imagined communities', such as the modern nation states and transnational ethnic, political and religious collectives. Terrorists' accounts reveal a whole host of ways in which they construct these different forms of kinship with others through various means, including the shared participation in violence.

Case Study: Aukai Collins

An American citizen and convert to Islam, Collins explains in his autobiography how he conceived his links of kinship to the Chechen people and the conflict.



After being wounded from that day on I considered myself a Chechen; my blood mixing with their soil earned me the right



Narrative, kinship and terrorism

Group identities are often difficult to substantively define. Instead, the identity of any group, culture, people or nation can be best thought of as a recounted story, which individuals locate themselves within. Significantly, these stories often imbue action with emotional and transcendent collective value, telling these individuals how to properly live or die. Narrative is therefore critical for understanding terrorism but nevertheless remains poorly explored within much research.



'I believed that in our actions we gave form to the stifled rage of our ancestors'

IRA volunteer Eamon Collins

The temporal dimension of kinship

Outside of conceiving time in a purely chronological sense, narrative provides the vehicle for humans to understand time in a way that is meaningful. Terrorists frequently reveal temporal dimensions in their understandings of their own kinship in their accounts. Ongoing persecution is framed as part of wider historical subjugation, with significant incidents narrated to appear as recent occurrences. It is no coincidence then that so many authors find themselves becoming involved in violence at 'breaking points' where the historic persecution of their kin suddenly becomes unbearable. Framing their involvement so lends authenticity, urgency and communal support for their actions.

