

## **Research Proposal**

### **The Radicalisation of young Muslims in Britain: Understanding the roots of the problem**

#### **(A) Objectives**

The aim of this research is to investigate in detail the reasons for the radicalisation of many young Muslim people in Britain at the present time. By radicalisation we understand a process that is political and social and involves their polarisation and atomisation from their own community and from the wider communities in Britain.

The focus will be on finding out whether the primary challenge for young Muslims is cultural, personal, political or religious. The Channel 4 Dispatches survey (2006)<sup>1</sup> and the Policy Exchange study (2007)<sup>2</sup> have conducted a quantitative survey of attitudes and examined the proportions of Muslim people who are sympathetic to the radicals' points of view. The Policy Exchange study also investigated the social context of their feelings. However, they have not examined in detail the reasons why individual young people have the feelings that they do. Our study sets out, for the first time, to examine the precipitating factors in radicalisation for individual young Muslims.

Our study poses some very important questions:

- What are the typical catalysts for radicalisation among young Muslims in Britain?
- At which point do radical Islamist political ideologies take root for a small minority?
- How fast does this small minority of young people get affected by these teachings?
- What conclusions can be drawn for social policy?

The aim of the study is to relate the feelings that are expressed as radicalisation to the specifics of individual experience. At what point do these feelings drive individuals into radical politics? Is this change the result of a gradual process, or is it typically precipitated by a particular event (racial discrimination, encounter with a charismatic teacher, news reports from the Muslim world)?

The context for this will be to find out what young people (aged 15-35) are feeling and the particular reasons for these young people's feelings; whether they are happy; why some may choose to live apart; and the nature of their families and friendships.

The study will therefore concern itself with their broad feelings toward the tradition of Islam and the decisive, radicalising experiences in their lives.

#### **(a) How do young people's feelings relate to their sense of the Muslim tradition?**

Are the teachings that young people believe a part of Muslim ideology and tradition? How do they regard their friends? Are they interested in learning (highly regarded in Muslim tradition)? Are they suffering from poverty and inequality? Who do they relate to most of all – their Imam (Sunni)/Sayyed (Shia), elder community leaders, their friends and peers, their parents, their bosses or their teachers? Why does religiosity amongst younger Muslims tend to be more politicised? Why is there a greater stress on asserting one's identity in the public space?

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<sup>1</sup>Dispatches 'What muslims want' [online] 2006 (accessed 07 August 2006)  
<http://www.channel4.com/news/dispatches/article.jsp?id=412>

<sup>2</sup> Mirza, M, Senthilkumaran, A and Ja'afar, Z (2007) Living apart together: British Muslims and the paradox of multiculturalism, London: Policy Exchange

## **(b) What are the decisive experiences in radicalisation?**

The purpose of the research is to identify the points in their lives at which vulnerable Muslim youth experience this change in attitude. These are the points at which they start to feel that they are separating and living apart; the point at which they feel that they find these ideologies are of interest.

### **These points may be distinct and identifiable and relatable to particular experiences.**

They may have suffered inequality and discrimination. They may have started to feel that their only way of identifying with the 'Ummah' (Muslim brotherhood) is by feeling sympathy and empathy with other oppressed Muslim people in the world.<sup>2</sup> They may have been shocked or angered by a news report. But the question is: at which point do they start to feel so disconnected from the mainstream of British society within which they are living that they reject it and act against it? Are they affected by living in Britain, one of the rich countries of the world, and yet suffering from poverty? Does this affect their perspectives on political Islam?<sup>3</sup>

## **(B) Target population**

Young Muslim people aged 15-35 years living in Britain today.

## **(C ) Methodology**

A comprehensive online survey will be prepared for this study. The online survey will be formulated to reveal whether there is a difference in the life-experiences of radical and non-radical young Muslims in Britain today. By using a large online population, it will ensure that the data from the literature review does not represent an anomalous sample of dysfunctional people.

The survey will comprise 40 questions split into 10 sections. Initial questions will cover age, ethnicity, disability, social class, earnings, savings, type of housing, area of the country (by postcode) and highest educational level.

Guided by the material coming from the literature reviews, we will ask questions covering different areas: experiences in childhood and adolescence at home and school, further education, higher education, work, and experiences of the police service and the prison service. We will ask questions about respondents experiences while out and about – using leisure facilities, retail outlets, and their neighbourhoods. We will also ask about their response to the reporting of Muslim affairs in the media. We will ask how being a young Muslim affects respondents' relationships with their families, their spouse/partners and children, their close friends and local communities. Finally we asked respondents how different agencies have handled their embracing their faith (for health care and government agencies).

Questions are multiple-choice, within which respondents have the option of choosing answers like 'nothing like this happened to me'. In some sections respondents also have the opportunity to give details in their own words about particular experiences. It will take around 20 minutes for respondents to fill in and will be completely confidential.

The survey will be posted online and a link to it will be displayed on Islamic websites. Announcements about the survey will also be posted with permission on the websites of Muslim support groups and networks around the country. Emails will be sent to website owners using a snowball technique to reach as many Muslim people as possible.

Participants will be given the opportunity to self-identify in twelve different categories:

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<sup>2</sup> Conflict resolution through engagement with muslim minorities **as citizens**

(ref: Policy Exchange report 29.01.07 Living together, Apart)

Mirza, M, Senthilkumaran, A and Ja'afar, Z (2007) Living apart together: British Muslims and the paradox of multiculturalism, London: Policy Exchange

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF report on childhood in industrialised countries

UNICEF (2007) Report Card 7, Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-being in Rich Countries, Florence: The United Nations Children's Fund

- male (fully practicing Muslim);
- male (part- practicing Muslim);
- male (spiritually Muslim);
- male (non-practicing Muslim);
- female (fully practicing Muslim);
- female (part-practicing Muslim);
- female (spiritually Muslim);
- female (non-practicing Muslim);
- man or woman with a transsexual background (fully practicing Muslim);
- man or woman with a transsexual background (part- practicing Muslim);
- man or woman with a transsexual background (spiritually Muslim);
- man or woman with a transsexual background (non-practicing Muslim).

These different options will not be used to categorise participants in terms of the status of their political affiliations. Rather, we see it as important to give respondents the choice to identify with nomenclature specific to how they feel - the terms 'fully practicing' or 'part practicing' are examples of this. This is particularly important for the Muslim populations who, up until the last 25 years have been largely categorised by the academic profession according to shared interpretation of the Koran<sup>4</sup> (Gellner, 1983)

#### **(D) Qualification to undertake this study**

The research team for this project will consist of ...

[M.Alami] One of the researchers has had considerable experience working as part of a team over the last six months on a significant project for the Equalities Review. The work involved developing a tool for the keyword searching of an electronic database of materials of over 60,000 documents and emails. There was also undertaken an online survey, which resulted in the large response rate of any survey of trans people to date. Over 870 valid responses were received, which resulted in an analysis being undertaken of over 113,000 pieces of data. The final 30,000 word report; *Engendered Penalties: Transgender and Transsexual People's Experiences of Inequality and Discrimination*, showed that trans people experienced a life time of prejudice and discrimination. This was most notable at the time of transition, in the workplace, in civil society and very significantly in health care.

[H.Khanom] One of the research assistants has had considerable experience working to support research teams over the last year on significant projects.

***References furnished on request***

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<sup>4</sup> Gellner, E (1983) *Muslim Society* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press