

The Relationship Between Radicalisation and the Diaspora

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

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Introduction

According to MoveHub (Tyrell, 2017), as our world is becoming more globalised, people are migrating across the globe at an increasing rate. This mass migration has not only transformed the host country, socially, economically and culturally, but has also produced diasporic communities within it. The term, diaspora is often associated with Jews living outside Israel, however it also relates to any community living outside of its homeland (Haider, 2015). For the purpose of this study, the term diaspora will relate to Muslim communities living in a Non-Muslim country specifically, in Europe and North America.

The research will focus on the impact living in a diasporic community has on a Muslim person's likelihood of becoming radicalised. The term radicalisation has been used since the 18th century. In its historical context, it refers to someone who has worked in the field of medicine or science and is often related to the period of enlightenment, which became associated with anti-clerical, anti-monarchy and pro-democratic tendencies. The 20th century definition of radicalisation is different to that of two hundred years ago. Radicalisation is still a movement which is identified as anti-government and anti-authority, however rather than being associated with often left-wing political views, it is now more commonly associated with religious radicalisation, namely that of Islamist extremism (Schmid 2016).

The definition of radicalisation, which has been adapted from the European Commission (2016) is "a social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist ideologies." The radicalisation process can have two outcomes: violent extremism and non-violent extremism. Even if a person does not resort to violent means as a result of extremism, if he or she believes violent means are justified, then he or she too has become a violent extremist. For the purpose of this study more emphasis will be placed on actualised radicalisation (violent extremism).

It is important to understand that the process of radicalisation is not quick, it takes years of dedication by both the radicaliser, and the one undergoing the process of radicalisation. Living in a diasporic community can be for some, very challenging due to economic, religious, cultural and language barriers, which can often lead to marginalisation. This environment, in turn, can become a fertile breeding ground where radicalisation can be nurtured.

Thus, the research questions under investigation are:

1. Can living in a diasporic community impact on a Muslim person's likelihood of becoming radicalised?
2. What are the factors and circumstances determining whether this person will become radicalised?

Theoretical Argument

As before mentioned, a person living in a diasporic community is often disconnected from his or her heritage, homeland, culture and traditions. This situation can create an environment where first generation immigrants are caught between two worlds; between the traditions and culture of their immigrant parents and the western, modern values of their host country. This disjuncture can generate years of internal conflict. A reconnection to a person's faith while living in the diaspora can reaffirm traditional values, and potentially fuel a hatred of the host country, and consequently, its government and people. It is often the case, that such a person will speak one language at home and another when at school or work, further exacerbating the day-to-day differences and challenges he or she may face. In terms of the redemptive power of radicalisation, Waldmann (2010) argues that "radicalism is a solution to their identity problems, albeit an exaggerated and extreme solution".

Diasporic communities often do not fully integrate into the society of the host country. Zimmerman and Rosenau (2009) argue that North American integration is far more developed than European integration, which is may be a contributing factor as to why there are more "home-grown" terrorists in Europe. "Compared with Europe, however, the United States may prove to be distinctive

in its more tolerant cultural attitudes towards migrants, as a society founded historically on the principle of open borders to diverse flows of immigrants” (Inglehart, Ronald, Norris, 2009). Failure to integrate “leaves diasporic communities vulnerable to exploitation by radicals” (Zimmerman, Rosenau, 2009). It has often been identified by counterterrorism officials and academics that the key to reducing radicalisation is to improve integration of the diasporic communities. According to Vidino (2010), it is incumbent on both the government (local authorities) and partners in the Muslim community to work together to help integrate the communities. He explains that understanding the radicalisation process is key in creating an effective de-radicalisation process. This all starts with effective integration of the community into the host country. When people feel marginalised and disconnected to the country in which they live, a lack of national identity is fostered which can potentially make them more susceptible to manipulation by radicals.

Lack of integration can fuel poor socio-economic conditions within the diasporic communities. Waldmann (2010) discusses the importance of “whether the diaspora is economically inferior or superior to the country and society hosting it”. It is usually seen that when the community integrates economically, “they usually harbour no resentment against the countries in which they live” (Waldmann, 2010). Therefore, it may follow that communities, which are economically inferior, could harbour resentment, providing the opportunity for radicals to manipulate the vulnerable. The low economic status of a person may draw him or her towards a life of terrorism and radicalisation. New immigrants often face countless obstacles, which can hinder their successful integration, and which will in turn create economic and social problems. Furthermore, language barriers may cause immigrants to find lower skilled and low paid work. Veldhuis and Staun (2009) argue that “in many European countries the socio-economic profiles of Muslims differ considerably from the overall population”.

When first generation immigrants grow up in a household with parents on a low-income salary, there is the possibility that they could become susceptible to crime. In such cases, the community may

become an increasingly important figure in their development, increasing potential ties with radicals. A combination of a sense of no belonging and financial difficulties, may lead an immigrant to becoming radicalised.

The aim of this study is to understand to what extent living in a diasporic community, with its inherent challenges of identity, economic security, sense of well-being etc, increases a Muslim person's chance of becoming radicalised. Whilst this environment is not a guarantor for breeding radicalisation, the study is interested to what extent it might be.

The field of political science that is going to be investigated is that of international terrorism and Islamist radicalisation. Terrorism is an issue at the forefront of global foreign policy, most notably since the 9/11 attacks in 2001. It is important to understand the causes of Islamist radicalisation in order to have an effective counter terrorism policy. If a government is able to assess and remove the factors contributing to home-grown terrorism, then it can transform its counterterrorism strategy into one that is pre-emptive terrorism.

Literature Review

Many studies undertaken on the roots of radicalisation, do not focus on the fact that living in the diaspora may be the cause of radicalisation. For example, Harris-Hogan (2014) argues that the “influence of family and other close social relationships has played a significant role in the passing of ideology and the recruitment and retention of jihadists into the network”. He further explains that a “Jihadist network is a complex interlinking of close relationships which transcend operational cells”. The study does not centre on the fact that these people are indeed, living outside of their home country. What is important is the connection of family and close relations, which influence the radicalisation process. Harris-Hogan's study interestingly is concerned with Jihadism in Australia.

So, while Harris-Hogan places importance on close connections, the very fact that it relates to Australia gives credence to the study in this paper. It illustrates that a strong connection between diasporic communities and their susceptibility to radicalisation cannot be ignored.

In addition, further research has been undertaken on the development of the internet and its subsequent impact on radicalisation. Veldhuis and Staun (2009) state that with “the introduction of the personal computer and the World Wide Web, most barriers that possibly hindered global relations and transactions have practically disappeared”. This is true for the Jihadist social network. The internet has provided terrorists with a platform to spread their message and reach vulnerable individuals. The use of online networks was popularised by ISIS, which is well known for its explicit violent videos reaching online communities worldwide.

Other research finds that the radicalisation process takes place in prisons. In 2015, the Prison Officers Association (POA) claimed that “Islamist extremists were deliberately seeking custodial punishments or jobs in prisons to target vulnerable populations” (Rushchenko 2018). The POA provides figures that in France, “roughly 8% of the population is Muslim, yet Muslims make up an astounding 80% of some French prisons”. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) released the figure that “13% of the prison population in England and Wales is Muslim.”

These statistics bear out the assertion that radical Islamists have infiltrated Western prison systems in order to convert the vulnerable, where “this percentage translates into a prisoner conversion rate of approximately 30,000 per year” (Rushchenko 2018). This trend is growing across Europe and North America and this study confirms that radicalisation in prisons is a growing phenomenon. The link to the diasporic community is still evident due to the low socioeconomic situation of immigrant families. Low economic mobility makes one more likely to be involved in crime and subsequently serve a prison sentence. Such an example is Khalid Kelkal, who was radicalised in a French prison in the early 1990s. Recruited by radical Algerians, he went on to become involved in the murder of a moderate Imam in Paris and the attempted bombing of the high-speed rail link between Paris and Lyon (Neumann, 2010).

It is important to acknowledge that all of the arguments presented in the Literature Review are valid. This particular study, however, aims to expand on the existing research by identifying the

existing link between diasporic communities and likelihood of radicalisation. It is the intention of this study to look at the various forces at play and the inherent problems faced by diasporic communities, which in turn, can foster a culture of radicalisation.

Methodology and Research Design

Methodology:

The research methodology will be qualitative in nature, and as such, the study will not be aiming to prove or disprove any hypothesis. Rather, it will be a case study of three particular diasporic communities, which will aim to illuminate answers to the research questions posed above. It will seek to find answers, factors and circumstances that contribute to radicalisation within that community.

Data:

The research will focus on three Muslim diasporic communities in England, namely, in the cities of London, Birmingham and Bradford. The MCB (Ali, 2015) released the following figures: 8% of the population of London is Muslim, 14.3% in Birmingham and 16.1% in Bradford. Yasin Hassan Omar, a British national who grew up in Birmingham was convicted for his role in the attempted 21st July attacks on London's public transport system in 2005.

It is important to be aware of the possible resistance the study may experience when approaching such communities. The very lack of integration and possible subsequent language barriers may cause communities and individuals to decline participating in the study. With this in mind, in order to encourage people to participate, it would be beneficial to employ a native Arabic speaker to help ease the language barriers and help allay any fears about taking part in the study.

The study will focus on three groups. First, young men between the ages of 18 and 35. The rationale for this is because global terrorism trends show that the majority of terrorists are males between these ages. "The average age is in line with other estimates of foreign fighter age, including an average age of 24-25 for al-Qa'ida" (Global Terrorism Index, 2016). The second group will be women of the same age range.

This is to assess the level of integration into the diasporic community from the women's point of view. The third will be the leaders of the community (Imam and other prominent figures). This is to assess what the leaders are doing (or not) to integrate their communities into the host country. It is acknowledged that recruitment of youth is also a factor, however, interviews with anyone under the age of 18 will require strict permission from the parents/guardians.

The study will first identify from which religious sect the community comes, and from which countries the participants originate. It will also identify the general socioeconomic conditions of the community before concluding personal interviews with some members of the groups. The personal interview questions will focus on the level of integration he or she has had in the host country. This will include information about language levels, levels of education, personal feelings towards the host country and feelings towards the Mosque and religion. It would be important to first understand the community on a macro level; how the community works as a whole and presents itself to the host country. Secondly, it would be important to speak to members of the community on a micro level to better understand the nuances of the environment of the community, their life styles and more.

The study will also seek to identify members of the community who are currently or have served in prison for radical related circumstances. It is the hope, that during the personal interviews, the interviewer will be able to identify certain elements of radical behaviours and acts.

Operationalisation

Low socioeconomic status, including with low host-country's native language level are indicators of a poorly integrated community.

It is likely to indicate that the lower these are, the more marginalised the community is likely to be and thus increasing the likelihood of radicalisation taking place within the community.

After collecting data on the macro and micro levels, a comparison of evidence of radicalisation within the communities will be made. It is the hope that the study will provide clear links between poorly integrated communities and higher levels of radicalisation.

Research Methods

As mentioned earlier, the research will be qualitative in nature and as such, the methods employed will comprise a combination of individual interviews, observations and focus groups in each of the three diasporic communities. Robson (2002) explains interviews work best “where a study focuses on the meaning of particular phenomena to the participants”, which concurs with this study which will be focusing on the reasons why radicalisation occurs more in diasporic communities. “Interviews can be used as the primary or only approach in a study. However, they lend themselves to use in combination with other methods, in a multimethod approach” (Robson, 2002). For this reason, interviews will be used in conjunction with observations and focus groups. The observations will take place before the focus groups and interviews so that both the researcher and participants have time to acclimatise to the research environment. Angrosino (2005) warns that “researchers claim that they are able to maintain objectivity and that they do not influence, interfere with people or activities under observation”. Care will be taken during the observations to minimize this affect by taking the following measures:

1. Ensuring that observers are well trained
2. Screening observers for potential biases
3. Having clear rules and procedures in place for the research
4. Making sure behaviours are clearly defined
5. Setting a time frame for: collecting data, for the duration of the research (Glen, accessed 12 August 2020)

Conclusion

The importance of understanding the root causes of Radicalisation is key in being able to have effective de-Radicalisation programmes. The research will contribute to the field of International Terrorism and counterterrorism measures, as it identifies what factors in diasporic communities contributes to radicalisation.

This in turn will help policy implementers to more fully understand the causes, and what it is about diaspora and migrant communities that breed radicalisation and make it attractive for certain individuals. The research findings should help to identify what hinders diasporic communities and individuals from fully and successfully integrating into the host country. This could include, amongst others, low socioeconomic standing, susceptibility to crime, lack of personal cultural identity and feelings of disenfranchisement.

The study hopes, in shedding light on this phenomenon, that host communities can help diasporic communities to be better integrated and ultimately reduce the chances of Radicalisation.

ITCT does not necessarily endorse any or all views expressed by the author in the article.

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