



Engaging young people in talking about extremism. Why? How?

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Overview

- Policy shifts in addressing extremism: engaging communities
- Conceptual starting points: extremism, radicalisation and non-radicalisation
- Engaging young people: the DARE project
- Introducing our milieus
- From research to intervention: creating a mediated dialogue
- Talking our way out of conflict (short film)



Policy shifts in addressing extremism

Engaging communities

Recognising radicalisation as 'home grown'

*'the challenge of radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism will not be met by governments working alone, but by **collaboration with communities**, civil society, nongovernmental organisations (NGO) and the private sector'*

(Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism, 2014, p.5)

From policy to people...

‘The days of securocrats alone successfully addressing our national security challenges are history.’

Mark Rowley, Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police for Specialist Operations and National Lead for Counter Terrorism Policing, UK, 26 February 2018)

He goes on to say:

*‘the acute threat from terrorism will only be tackled when **the whole of society** can respond to the chronic threat we face from extremism.’*

Engaging communities

- **'Aarhus model'**: young people become radicalised because they are not sufficiently included in society.
- Solution is to make those tempted by radical circles **better integrated** into the mainstream. **Multi-agency response centring on 'info houses'** and dialogue.
- **Manchester**: Greater Manchester Commission on Preventing Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion (set up after the terrorist attack on the MEN Arena in Manchester, 22 May 2017), recommended a strategic commitment to 'developing a **community-led response to challenging hateful extremism**' (July 2018).
- This community focused work is already underway in Manchester through the **RadEqual network** which aims to bring key community players into discussion and '**ownership**' of **counter-extremism initiatives**.

Critiques: Appeasement? Responsibilization?

- Criticisms of 'soft' (Aarhus) approach: **where do we draw the line in terms of dialoguing** with groups that oppose 'fundamental values' of democratic societies?
- **Focus on individuals** (and socio-psychological approach) ignores real political issues driving radicalisation.
- **'Whole-society approach** to countering radicalisation effectively responsabilizes communities for policy failures.
- These criticisms can be addressed only if communities are properly recognised partners in dialogue and action.
- That means having **genuine dialogue** and *properly valuing and supporting community engagement* with counter-extremism (not targeting Muslim communities as 'suspect' while labelling other communities 'far right' if they fail to voice their concerns in an 'appropriate' way).
- If we can create that dialogue, community engagement could not only help agencies seeking to prevent terrorist attacks but **provide space for communities to highlight, and demand action on, the root causes of violent extremism.**



Starting points

Extremism

Radicalisation

Non-radicalisation

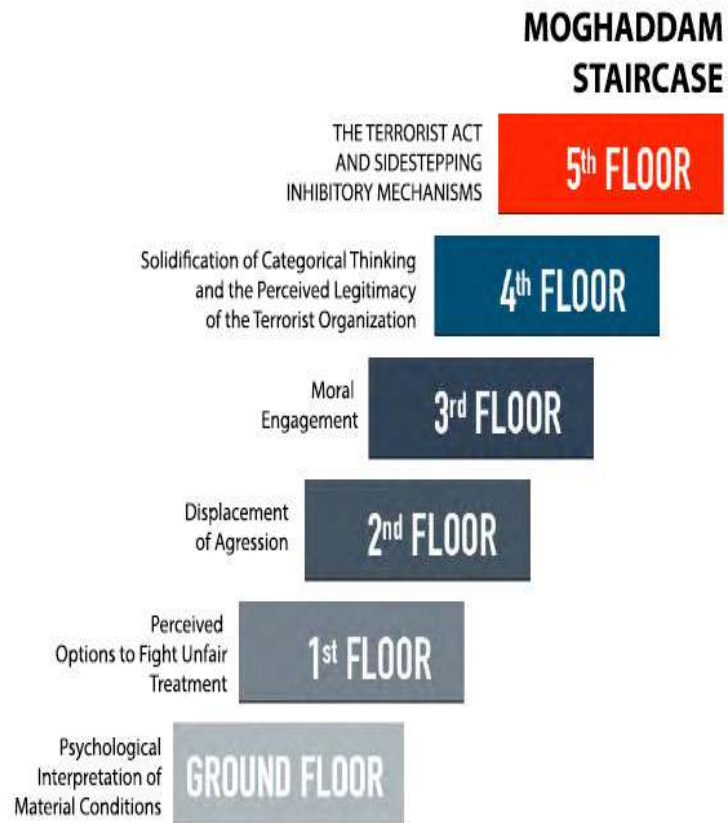
Extremism

- The key distinction in various national legal definitions is whether or not 'extremism' includes attitudinal (ideas, beliefs) or only behavioural (actions) extremism.
- UK Government definition of extremism is very broad:
*'vocal or active **opposition to fundamental British values**, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs [as well as] calls for the death of members of our armed forces'* (HM Government, 2015).
- Important to distinguish between '**radicalism**' and '**extremism**'. Following Schmid (2013) we might see this as:
 - **extremists** are closed-minded and seek to create a homogeneous society based on rigid, dogmatic ideological tenets, which suppresses all opposition and subjugates minorities;
 - **radicals** are open-minded, accept diversity and believe in the power of reason rather than dogma.

Radicalisation

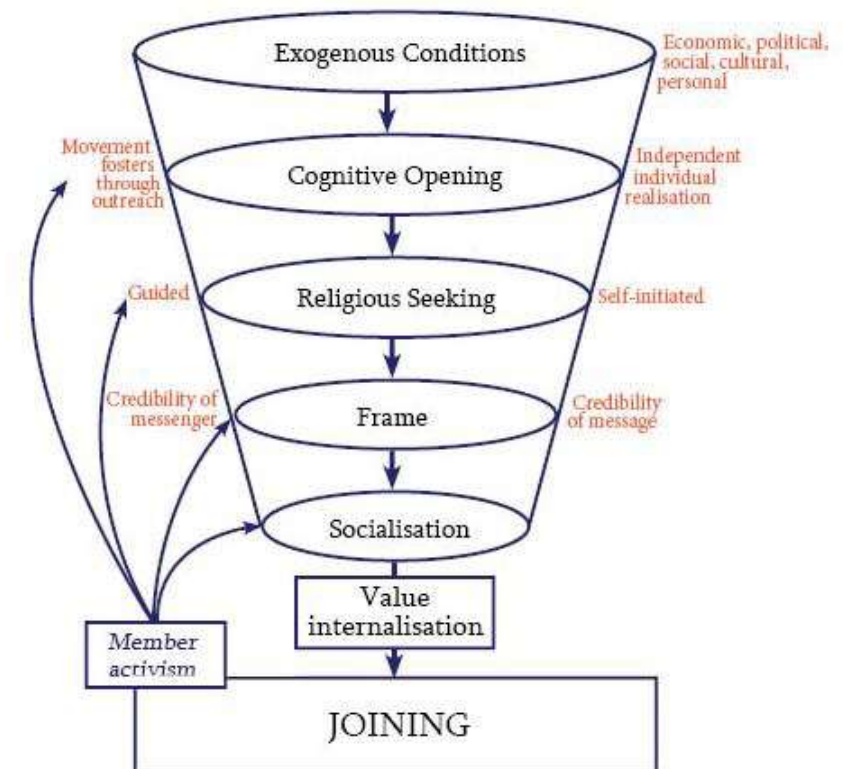
- Radicalisation refers to ***the process*** by which individuals or groups come to embrace attitudes, or engage in actions, that support violence in the pursuit of extremist causes.
- Can be applied to a range of, ideologically different, violent actors, including the state, but is used mostly in relation to non-state actors.
- Key conceptual disputes are:
 - whether it is an ***absolute*** concept (pinned to a fixed outcome i.e. terrorism or violent extremist behaviour) or a ***relative*** concept, i.e. a shift to a more radical position regardless of whether the end position is 'extremist' or 'violent extremist'
 - whether that end-point extremism is manifest in **behaviour or ideas**.
- The term is also **politically highly contentious**:
 - **Supporters** argue that the **focus on 'process'** allows policy-makers to talk about the root causes behind political violence and employ the analysis of those causes to inform counter-radicalisation policies and programmes (Neumann, 2008: 4).
 - **Critics** argue that radicalisation discourse has not led to the objective study of how terrorism emerges but has been **dominated by counter-terrorism policy makers' concerns** with developing 'indicators' of radicalisation, which have **constructed particular populations** (most notably Muslims) as **'suspect communities'** (Kundnani, 2012: 3, 5).

Classic models of radicalisation



Source: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/qc/pub/sn-ns/rad-eng.htm>

Wiktorowicz's radicalisation model



Source: Schmid, 2013: 23

Turning models into practice

- The **Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF)**: identifies **22 factors** used to measure 'risk' of someone becoming 'radicalised' (not necessarily violent).
- Used to **assess risk in not yet radicalised individuals** as part of the Channel support programme under the PREVENT arm of UK Counter-Terrorism strategy (CONTEST).
- Risk assessment tools such as the VAF are **psychological measures of individuals** and fail to capture the political and societal context of an individual's radicalisation.
- This reflects its clinical practice base but also general **under-estimation of importance of context** in radicalisation and, in particular, the **situational (interactive) and complex (non-linear) dimensions** of radicalisation.

22 Risk factors of VAF/ERG

Engagement

1. Need to redress injustice and express grievance
2. Need to defend against threat
3. Need for identity, meaning, belonging
4. Need for status
5. Need for excitement, comradeship or adventure
6. Need for dominance
7. Susceptibility to indoctrination
8. Political/moral motivation
9. Opportunistic involvement
10. Family or friends support extremist offending
11. Transitional periods
12. Group influence and control
13. Mental health

Intent

1. Over-identification with a group or cause
2. Us and Them thinking
3. Dehumanisation of the enemy
4. Attitudes that justify offending
5. Harmful means to an end
6. Harmful end objectives

Capability

1. Individual knowledge, skills and competencies
2. Access to networks, funding and equipment
3. Criminal history



Radicalisation: from 'roots' to 'routes'

- **'Attempts to profile terrorists have failed resoundingly'** (Horgan, 2008:80).
- **'Pathways'** instead of 'profiles'? But even mapping individual trajectories shows:
 - different pathways lead to radicalisation outcomes;
 - different people on a shared pathway have varying outcomes;
 - Specific factors may be pivotal in one case but irrelevant in another.
- General consensus:
 - Those who become involved in violent extremism have **diverse class, educational level and biographical backgrounds**.
 - **Radicalisation is driven by multiple causes** and it is unlikely that any single model can integrate the influences that bring individuals to violence (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008: 429).

Rethinking the research agenda: putting youth first

- **Proposal:** start not with the 'problem' – 'pathological' individuals committing acts of violent extremism' - but the desired outcome.
- **Desired outcome:** engaged, reflective citizens who recognise when ordinary political disagreement threatens to become something we might call 'extremist' (Berger, 2018: 22).
- **Practice:** by studying how young people accomplish this (despite significant and often justified grievances) we can generate evidence of practice that can be used for prevention in informal settings in communities of potential receptivity to radicalisation.
- We could think about this as the identification and promotion of trajectories of '**non-radicalisation**'.

Non-radicalisation

- A concept rarely discussed but crucial for understanding and promoting resilience to radicalisation and extremism is **‘non-radicalisation’** (Cragin, 2014).
- Non-radicalisation is a key focus of the EU-funded **H2020 DARE** project because:
 - It is the **most common outcome** of encounters/engagement with radical ideas.
 - It allows us to see **why and how people do not become violent extremists** (given the same structural factors and individual socio-demographic characteristics as those who do).
 - It takes seriously the **role of agency**; it understands people as active agents not ‘brainwashed’ victims.
 - It allows us to **map the everyday strategies individuals already employ to challenge and resist radicalisation** and to engage potential informal actors (peers) in prevention of radicalisation



Engaging young people

The DARE project

How can research help?

- DARE is funded under the EU H2020 framework (1 May 2017-30 April 2021).
- It involves 17 partners in 13 countries across Europe (and beyond).
- It responds to a topic on 'Current trends in radicalisation in Europe' under the Reversing Inequalities call of the **Societal Challenges Work Programme**.
- It sets out to develop a **societal approach** to radicalisation focusing on young people and on 'Islamist' and 'anti-Islam(ist)' (extreme right) radicalisation.
- It investigates **young people's encounters with messages and agents of radicalisation** (Islamist and anti-Islamist), **how they receive and respond** to those calls, and **how they make choices** about the paths they take (including paths of non-radicalisation).
- We do this by:
 - Focusing not on terrorist events/actors but **milieus** where radicalisation messages are encountered.
 - Adopting an **ethnographic approach** i.e. sustained engagement with young people, observing their everyday encounters with radicalisation messages and responses to them and conducting semi-structured interviews.

The milieu

- For us a milieu includes **the people, the physical and the social conditions and events and networks/ communications in which someone acts or lives and which shape a person's subjectivity (identity), choices and trajectory through life.**
- The milieus we choose to study, however, must **be spaces of encounter with radical/extreme messages** (via presence of recruiters, high receptivity to radical messages etc.) and the messages and **encounters experienced must include calls to active engagement** e.g. attacks on refugee houses, punishable acts (hate speech, violence etc.).



Introducing the UK milieus

Anti-Islamist street movements

Street-based Salafist peer group

'Extreme right' milieu

- The milieu consists of groups and individuals communicating at street actions of anti-Islam(ist) groups and through social media.
- Respondents are/have been active in Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA), Justice for the 21, English Defence League, Generation Identity, Britain First, anti-CSE ('grooming gang') movements and Tommy Robinson support groups.
- Ages range from 19-33 years.
- 10 of 13 interviewees are male, 3 are female.
- Class background is mixed. Around half have strongly working class identities, two have middle to upper-middle class backgrounds, three have university degrees (or are completing degrees). Two have rural background.
- Most are employed.
- All are white.
- Four are believers and practising, six are believers but not practising. Four are Roman Catholic. Three have strongly Protestant backgrounds.

Emergent themes ('Common denominators')

- **Cumulative radicalisation'?**
 - Terrorist attacks are explicit reason for formation of DFLA;
 - Protests of Al Muhajiroun led to formation of EDL;
 - Increased activism and violence of anti-fa/far left.
- **Mainstreaming of radical right:** empowers people *and* heightens sense of persecution.
- **Social media:** facilitates mobilisation but bans embed sense that freedom of speech is under attack.
- **Internationalisation** of extreme right and emergence of cult heros: Donald Trump; Tommy Robinson.
- **Distrust in institutions:** Fight against perceived collusion between government, MSM, academia and far left. Also against miscarriages of justice (Justice for the 21)
- **Meaning and belonging:** EDL 'one big family', DFLA 'Together we are Stronger'.
- **Violence:** acceptable only in self-defence.



Placard at EDL Telford (Wellington) demo, 12 May 2018



Example: Thomas

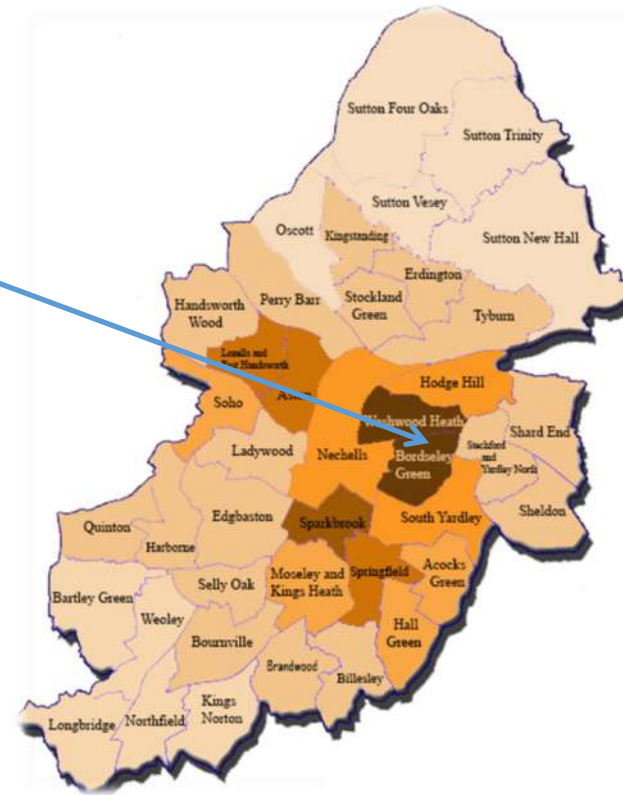
- 23 year old who grew up with grandparents and left school as soon as possible. Trained as chef.
- Became active (first in EDL) following murder of Lee Rigby but taken to first demo by his father.
- Strong local identity but feels excluded from his home city which is notoriously 'left-wing'.
- Has been speaker for EDL and organised events including his own demonstrations.
- Has been targeted by anti-fascist groups.
- Has travelled widely including to Muslim majority countries (Egypt, Turkey).
- Sceptical about all religions – is 'agnostic' himself.

'this is why I do what I do. [...] I want to make a difference, you know what I mean. I want to live for something. Even, even if people don't agree with me, you know, what I feel is right, I want to do something.' (Thomas)

'Islamist' milieu

- 'Muslim street' is located in area of city which has more than 70% Muslim population.
- Two Salafi mosques (competing with one another) is a prominent feature of the street.
- Tension between established 'ethnic' infrastructure and recent 'Islamic' infrastructure.
- Young people express desire to escape this locality while also being attached to it for religious socialisation.
- The milieu studied is a 'street based Salafist' peer group which has a weekly night-time social gathering where young men meet to discuss contemporary issues facing Muslims.

Muslim Birmingham



Emergent themes ('Common denominators')

- The milieu is highly diverse and diversifying mix of young ethnicities – south Asian, Somali, Libyan, French-Maghrebi, converts.
- It is a transient space – where ideas and people circulate and new trends emerge.
- This makes the area very popular among young people seeking 'a way out' from drugs, criminality and troubled family lives – they seek solace in religion and brotherhood.
- Respondents are highly critical of multicultural settlement that presents religion as 'cultural' or as an artefact – for them it is ideology.
- BUT – transience and unsettled nature of the street prevents forming of a stable narrative of Muslimness (which they seek).
- 'Street Preacher' – attempts to work with disaffected young Muslims through engaging them in discussions – this includes entering public spaces and debates through *dawah* activities.
- Dawah based social activity becomes a frame for engagement with the district that may help change it and make it habitable – very often antagonistic
- While the milieu and key 'head men' appear to offer a stable space for being Muslim - many young people slip off the radar out of the field of vision.



Dawah stall in Birmingham city centre, September 2017

Example: Mo John

- 19 year old, south Asian male
- Educated in an Islamic school and madrasah environment but highly critical of it.
- Active in local community – interested in learning about range of different ways of practising Islam.
- Active sportsman – member of England karate squad.
- Strongly against ISIS but had considered travelling abroad to help the ummah.

'A lot of Muslims that are dying, unnecessarily dying, you know what I mean. Innocent people. This is where it clicks, to see that, 'Hang on. This is your test, man, to see how you will take these things. People are suffering around the world. What's the first thing you will do? You want to go round help them.' (Mo John)





From research to intervention

Creating a mediated dialogue

Creating a mediated dialogue

- Inspired by participants in the DARE research themselves.

'I'd like to actually sit opposite a radical Muslim or someone with thoughts of being radical and have a talk with them, and just find out why, why it is he feels that way'. (Thomas)

- Those taking part did not identify themselves as 'extremist' or 'radicalised' (but were seen by others as being so).

- Initial dialogue brought 3 members of each milieu together.
- Facilitated by practitioners from Tim Parry Jonathan Ball Peace Foundation and a film maker/youth worker.
- Engaged young people as subjects rather than objects of the intervention.
- Underpinned by critical engagement with 'contact' theory.



Problematizing 'Contact'

- On-going conundrum – 'there is no contact between communities' – yet communities hold definite opinions about others. Their sense of self is formed in proximation to others.
- Contact is a desirable and inevitable feature of advanced urban life – multiculturalism, conviviality.
- Contact leads to different outcomes – surprise, prejudice, inequalities, violence
- Contact *per se* – is not a guarantor for shifting prejudice/sensibilities *if not meaningful*
- Mediated contact/dialogue – uncomfortable (for participants and mediators) but also *affective*.

Mediated contact, producing dialogue

- Pre-interviews 'Imagined contact' – revealed optimism, fears and prejudices
- Mediation - facilitating the development of new reference points
 - Play as expression and critique
 - Equality experienced – time and space equally distributed
- Facilitators mindful of achievements made and challenges ahead, while also of their role in nurturing follow-on contact
- On-going contact – social media and second meeting more on their 'own terms'

Bringing meaning to contact

- Prior to dialogue: definite, entrenched, salient positions about self and others.
- Mediation *moved* them: not necessarily out of their own skin – but into a new relationship to it that is less insular and more open to contact
 - Muslims want to address the sentiment about impending civil war – reflections on their insularity
 - Young far right exposed to new experience of the Quran. Visits a mosque randomly.
- Commitments to, openness, movement and critical enquiry signals potential for such interventions to prevent the solidifying of extremist attitudes/behaviour .

‘Other people should be doing what we’re doing – maybe we could help others to come together like this’ (Thomas)





Talking our way out of conflict

Short video