European Study on Youth Mobilisation (ESYM)
Part of British Council Intercultural Navigators Project

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Introduction:

Recent research undertaken by the British Council found that young people in Europe are concerned with intercultural issues punctuated by a keen awareness of ever increasing global mobility. Along with general concerns about human rights, many young people report that they see social exclusion as a significant issue. To further explore these concerns and the political and social effects they engender, the British Council has initiated Intercultural Navigators – a project that aims to deal with the challenges and opportunities we face in a changing, multicultural world.

Within the Intercultural Navigators project a new initiative -- the European Survey of Youth Mobilisation (ESYM) -- explores the social and political activity among 15 to 30 year olds in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The study commenced in March 2008 and is presently scheduled to run through 2008 and 2009 with the first reports published in Autumn 2009. The pilot study to evaluate the survey will be initiated in December 2008, with pre-testing and focus groups running through February 2009. The survey instrument will be introduced into the field in February 2009.

British Council and the University of St. Andrews will collaborate with local researchers to conduct field data collection; the University of St. Andrews team will analyse data over the late spring and summer of 2009, and British Council will publish findings along with an executive summary in the late autumn of 2009. The aim of the survey is to explore how changing social, spatial and economic relations within an increasingly “integrated” Europe effect the social and political mobilisation of young people across the political and socio-economic spectra.

Motivations and Orientation of the European Survey of Youth Mobilisation (ESYM):

Following the attacks on Washington D.C. and New York in September 2001 discussions of Islamic radicalisation and extremism became part of mainstream public discourse in both the United States and in Europe. Increasingly following the 11 March 2004 bombings in Madrid and the 7 July 2005 bombings in London, as well as the November 2005 riots in the suburbs of Paris and other French cities there appeared in the media an immediate connection between the activities of radicalisation and European Muslim youth. While a great deal has been written on this topic, both in mainstream media circles and in academic journals, there has been little in the way of a systematic exploration of patterns of radicalisation and even less that examines such social and political mobilisation in a comparative fashion, both in terms of geography and social groups.

The most important distinctions of the European Survey of Youth Mobilisation (ESYM) brings to the study of radicalisation begin with a problematisation of the term “radicalisation.” The research project examines the processes and motivations for extra-parliamentary and extra-liberal youth political and social mobilisation. Unlike the vast majority of other research in the area, this project does not limit the study of “radicalisation” to Muslim communities or to social or political movements connected with political Islam. The potential for violence against the state, against property, and against members of other social communities is not limited to one social demographic; the potential for violence is in fact often used as a definition of extremist political or social action. Therefore it is an aim of this project to examine the similarities and differences in patterns of youth mobilisation, recruitment and action across these various extra-parliamentary and extra-liberal movements. Through the use of a comparative study the project explores political and social mobilisation along six conceptual strands: religious fundamentalism and extremism across Europe, including radical Islamists, Hinduists, and Christians; ethnically based social and political mobilisation, both within

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1 Extra-liberal political orientation is the main focus of the study. This refers to political movements that are either opposed to liberal assumptions such as the centrality of the abstract political individual or directly oppose liberal structures such as capital markets and rights-based juridical relations between citizens and the state. Neo-fascists and others oriented toward the primacy or centrality of collective identity see groups as the organizing unit of society, not individuals. Similarly many socialist political movements oppose liberal presumptions regarding the benefits of capitalism, and both anarchist and many religious oriented political movements oppose juridical-rights based discourses, and particularly oppose the notion that an element of the state – the judiciary – would be capable of passing judgement on other elements of the state, namely regarding executive power. Often these groups explicitly eschew parliamentary politics, associating it with liberalism. However, many neo-fascist parties and others opposed to liberalism from a “rightist” position have not only been involved in parliamentary politics, but have won seats and even have been part of government in many European countries.
Diaspora and immigrant communities, for example Kurdish communities in Sweden, and “nativist” organisations; “radical right” quarters, including activities among Integralists, neo-Nazis and Skinheads; “radical left” movements including workers’ organisations, anarchists, and anti-globalisation group; environmentalist radicalisation and activity, including animal rights activism and “earth defence” activism; and finally radical social and political mobilisation specific to the countries and polities included in the study, such as radical gay rights activism.

It is not an assumption of the ESYM project that youth radicalisation is normatively “bad”; nor would it be a recommendation that “radicalisation” must be stopped. Challenges to the mainstream European political societies regarding the treatment of racial, religious and linguistic minorities, of women, of homosexuals, of children, and of workers have all helped to build a stronger and more dynamic European polity. Youth “moderation” is not the counter to youth “radicalisation.” However to combat the potential destructive slide toward violence, or the indifferent acceptance of violence, mainstream political society must become aware of the motivations and inclinations of youth attracted to political and social movements that represent significant deviations from the articulated values of a given polity. By taking this position, the ESYM research teams not only will avoid the tendency to pathologise activists associated with extremist political positions, but also indeed seek to give these politically mobilised young people an opportunity and a safe environment in which to express themselves and their political and social views.

Research Design:

One of the most important aspects of the ESYM project is its methodological focus. Rather than treating individuals associated with political or social positions deemed “radical” as being outside of political society, the ESYM project examines how communities and collectivities tolerate or support “radical” action, how ideas move among mobilised youth both as individuals and through groups, and how young people see themselves within communities ranging from the most immediate and local, to state communities, European communities and global communities. Using social psychology as a point of theoretical and methodological departure, the ESYM employs ethnographic and qualitative research techniques to explore the various modes of cultural awareness that allow those who might otherwise feel culturally alienated to negotiate their everyday existence and create and maintain manifold bases of solidarity. Indeed through the study of group processes and inter-group conflict, it is possible to see “radical” political and social movements as engaged in a search for what John Borneman called a “praxis of belonging.”

Rather than exist as individual “outsiders” these politically mobilised youth seek to create a sense of belonging through a coherent collective identity that exists in four registers: as a framework of meaning, as a practice of everyday, as an idiom of solidarity, and as a consciousness of belonging linked to a specific cultural milieu. One of the most important dimensions of this cultural milieu is position, action, and attitude toward youth activism by political, cultural and legal authorities.

By recognising political and social mobilisation as a dynamic process that occurs within a context of state and social action, it is possible to examine the modes of group interaction, and the perceptions of the quality of those interactions on the part of radicalised youth. This is a broadly different approach than other studies which tend to limit the possibility, or at least the focus of their study, of radicalisation to a single community, suggesting not only that the source of radicalisation lies within that community alone, but that the impetus toward such mobilisation is either unfounded or pathological. Further the ESYM study promotes a comparative aspect, exploring similar questions across eleven European countries. Further the eleven countries share many common aspects, including population size, and social experiences such as the strong welfare state experience in Scandinavia and the collapse of Realized Socialism and the transformation to European Union membership in the Baltics and in the Central European sites.

In addition to the wide geographic and comparative approach, the ESYM project will implement sophisticated methodological protocols. The ESYM survey instrument will put through a pilot test in February through April 2009. In the four countries where the survey will be implemented – Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland – the one hour long survey is augment by the

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2 This is a term best explicated by Douglas Holmes in his book describing anti-European integration, anti-Globalization, conservative political movements: Integral Europe: Fast-Capitalism, Multi-culturalism and Neo-Fascism (Princeton, 2000).

completion of personal life event calendars, which document the significant events in respondents' lives, giving researcher a glimpse into what these young people might share as life changing events. Also respondents will be asked to engage in visual mapping of their social lives and of the cities in which they live and are active. These two graphic representations are seen as state-of-the-art interview techniques. In addition the ESYM contains instruments to explore network analysis, exploring the means by which ideas move transnationally.

A significant shortcoming of many previous studies into radicalisation not only focus solely on Islamic communities, but are conducted in the context of a single county study. Yet, there is a simultaneous presumption made in these studies as to the significance of international or transnational influences. The ESYM project seeks to explore the extent of such influences not only within religious communities or Diaspora communities, but also across self-proclaimed internationalist groups, such as environmentalist, and even self-declared nationalist groups. The full network analysis sites will conduct structured and standardised interviews with at least 150-200 self-identified political or socially mobilised participants, through a process of double-strand, reciprocal snowball referrals. In Hungary 400 individuals will be interviewed. It is hoped that in the next iteration of the ESYM, after this field test and pilot study that the results of this first round of interviews will be compared to results of random sample interviews of young people in a number of comparative field sites.

Outside of Central Europe will be a second tier of field sites where workshops will bring together researchers and social activists from the field site to share their findings and perspective on work exploring issues of radicalisation. The workshops will give a sense of the most recent research on questions of radicalisation, de-radicalisation, youth activism, and youth mobilisation and political participation. Each workshop aims to bring together nearly 50 experts in the field, researchers, academics, community workers, or community leaders. These workshops will also be augmented by rough ethnographic studies of youth mobilisation but may not include the structured interviews. These small ethnographic sketches, augmented by informal or semi-structured interviews will still be extremely valuable contributions to the over all study, and should not be underestimated in their importance.

The British Council seeks to establish collaborative relationships with local researchers who are familiar with the social and political contours of the field site communities. The local British Council offices will help to provide logistical support and meeting facilities, as well as some translation services and data storage. The University of St. Andrews team will work closely with local researchers to tailor survey instruments to local considerations, and local research concerns while ensuring comparability across all cases. The St. Andrews team will also travel to meet the local research teams, and lead workshops hosted by the local British Council offices to train field site data collectors and interviewers. Local research collaborators will conduct the field research and the workshops will be hosted and organised by Workshop Organisational Collaborators.

Other Studies and Other Research Approaches:

Much of the work on “radicalisation” either assumes its own conclusions or asserts a normative claim of social and political behaviour. Likewise much the research is largely anecdotal. For example toward the first point, Andrew Silke is particularly concerned with the link between radicalisation and terrorism, and offers a study on individual psychology as to the motivations of individual subjects toward violence. Likewise, Edwin Bakker is expressedly concerned with the link between radicalisation and violence, although in the autumn of 2007 he told Der Spiegel that he is not particularly worried about terrorism. He did suggest however that one of the ways to combat radicalisation was to send radical Islamic clerics “home;” that is, he suggested to expel them from the Netherlands or Germany. Not only does this miss the point as to question why “radical” rhetoric might

6 The basis for this modelling technique can be found in Douglas Heckathorn “Respondent-Driven Sampling II: Deriving Valid Population Estimates from Chain-Referral Samples of Hidden Populations” Social Problems Vol. 49 No/1 Feb. 2002 pp. 11-34
7 September 17, 2007.
hold attraction with either Dutch or Germany Muslim youth, it also misses the issue of alternate modes of radical mobilisation. For example, in terms of violence, eight of the nine most recent violent acts of “terrorism” in Germany were related to Kurdish activities directed at symbols of the Turkish state or bank appropriations to fund further Kurdish activities in Germany or in Turkey. These actions fall outside of Bakker’s major study while they would be explored in the ESYM study. Further, like Silke, Bakker is interested in determining individual motivation for joining organisations that Bakker has already determined to be threatening. One of Bakker’s major conclusions is to present the “countries of family origin” of “European jihadis” without recognising that countries of origin he sites are also the source cultures of most of the major labour migration into north western Europe throughout the second half of the twentieth century. This presentation ignores the larger social context of a history of labour migration, and the state and social policies in each of the different polities.

The recent studies by Jean Tillie have included examinations of state policy and social context, although they likewise have focused explicitly on Muslim “radicalisation” in a single country study: the Netherlands. However in some of these studies the single country study focus has been amplified by the rather small scope of the investigation. In work with Marieke Slootman, Tillie interviewed only twelve self-identified political radicals who endorse the use of violence against the Dutch state. Likewise, Colin Millie in his 2002 on radicalisation focuses explicitly on Amsterdam. By contrast the ESYM project will explore the processes of youth political and social mobilisation in eleven European countries, and will conduct more than 1000 interviews.

Scotland as a 12th Site:

In addition team the St. Andrews team will add two field sites replicating the complete protocols including the network analysis in Glasgow and Dundee. Including Scottish sites will provide the British Council and the Scottish Government with insight to the patterns and motivations for youth radicalisation and support for violence within a specifically Scottish context as well as in comparison to other European tendencies. It will also provide insight to the patterns of radical political attitude transmission and re-enactment within and across immigrant and Diaspora communities. The research seeks to explore how communities of belonging amplify, accentuate and even reify or ossify identity performances within new geographic and social contexts. That is the ESYM will explore how performative symbolic violence, or performative rituals, manifest as physical violence in alternate settings. By running the protocols in Scotland the University of St. Andrews team will also be able to test the application of research methods and compare experiences with other field teams. The research in Scotland is supported through a post-doctoral researcher and other granted funds by the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR).

Timeline:

2008 Autumn Identify local research team leaders who will in turn identify potential field data collectors. Ideal local research team leaders will be familiar with both quantitative and qualitative research techniques and will be able to implement structured interviews and related survey instruments. Local teams should also be familiar with local politics to be able to identify easily interview “seeds” that will serve as the first participants in the respondent-driven sampling threads.

October The St. Andrews research team will begin to schedule workshops with local field site research teams to discuss the protocols and local research considerations. These workshops will run through February 2009. Training has taken place in Slovakia, Czech Republic and for Hungary.

November The ESYM survey completed and translation begun. ESYM survey introduced for field pre-testing and terms to be checked by focus groups if necessary.

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9 See Jean Tillie and Marieke Slootman *Processes of Radicalisation: Why Some Amsterdam Muslims become Radicals* (Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, 2006).

Workshop Organisational Collaborators for the Nordic and Baltic sites should be identified.

2009

January
Pre-testing and term focus groups completed. Potential workshop invitees should be identified.

February
Field data collection begins: Interview “seeds” should be identified and respondent-driven sampling “snowballing” interviews should begin. Invitations to participate in research workshops should be sent.

April
Field data collection concludes. Research workshops held throughout the month.

May
Data analysed at the University of St. Andrews. Local teams are also encouraged to engage in their own analysis. Analyses will be compared and shared.

October
First drafts of the final report will be circulated among participants and the British Council Offices.

November
Final Report and Executive Summary will be presented publicly and made available to the news media and other researchers.

2010

November
Year long data embargo will conclude and raw data will be made available to the public and research community. During the data embargo local research teams will have access to all of the raw data and can conduct their own separate analyses and publish their findings under their own auspices.

Conclusions:

Thus the British Council and University of St. Andrews project as the European Survey on Youth Mobilisation differs from other studies into radicalisation in five important ways. First and foremost the ESYM explores the concept of political radicalisation in its many different forms and manifestations. It does not presume that those who hold political or social views associated with “radical positions” are misguided, defective, or otherwise pathological. Rather the Survey treats these views as extreme positions relative to a specific cultural and political milieu that is characterised by the dynamic interplay of many actors including policy makers and agents of the state. Second, by examining how communities create their own sense of belonging and determine their own symbolic and performative borders it is possible to see the larger social dynamics of recognition and identity formation. Thus it becomes possible to see motivations to hold “radical” political and social views in a larger social context and not in a limited view of individual or rational decision-making. Third, this application of the fundamental conceptual underpinnings of social psychology shifts the focus from understanding individual motivations to that of understanding group processes and inter-group conflict. Fourth, and related, this application of ethnographic, anthropological and social psychological techniques and methodologies transforms the study from one which objectifies these communities, treating them within a single dimension, to an intersubjective study which suggests both the state and these communities possess agency, capable of responding to one another and capable of recognising one another.

The organisation of the study itself is innovative and multidisciplinary, taking cues from political science, assumptions from Social Identity Theory in social psychology, life event calendars from demography, social mapping from human geography, and network analysis from sociology. In this way the ESYM employs sophisticated, cutting-edge social scientific techniques and methodologies, in a comparative approach that will yield new insights into patterns and modes of transnational transmission of identity and performance.