



COULD INTEGRATION PREVENT RADICALISATION OF MUSLIM YOUTH?

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 Kommentieren

By Hakim Khatib

Radicalisation is a phenomenon that has been striking not only in parts of Asia and Africa but also in the heart of Europe. While the number of Muslims in Germany is estimated by **4,7** millions (5,8%), 70% of the almost **900,000** **asylum-seekers** have arrived in recent years are believed to be Muslims. It is undeniable that there is discrimination in Germany, and it is equally undeniable that more on issues of integration and conflict prevention should be done. Thus, could effective integration processes prevent radicalisation of the Muslim youth in Europe?

In a conference on the Muslim youth in Germany between integration, compartmentalisation and new ways [in German: *Muslimische Jugend Zwischen Integration, Abschottung Und Neuen Wegen*], a variety of scholars and experts gathered to discuss issues inherent to the participation and self-alienation of Muslim youth in the German society. By large, two main pillars received more attention than any others: The first one is the feasibility of funding Muslim associations in Germany to prevent radicalisation among the youth. The second one is the processes of radicalisation and de-radicalisation of the youth and whether there are any preventive measures.

Deputy head of integration department at the Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration Claudia Hackhausen says that integration and diversity are crucial for the Hessian government. The government supports a “Welcome Culture” [lit. *Willkommenskultur*], in which respect, mutual-appreciation, commitment and a sense of responsibility for the overall good are priorities.

Thus, Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration supports innovative projects such as the Hessian Labour Market Initiative, which adopts a package of measures to integrate refugees into the work market and society. As part of the “Training and Qualification Budget”, funds were raised up to EUR 10.5 million to cover language classes, qualification and training of refugees. Hackhausen adds that the government also exerts efforts to equally support the youth of all backgrounds.

Obviously, the integration of Muslim youth in Germany is very important for the stability of the German society.

Susanne Schroeter, a professor at the Goethe University and the director of the **Frankfurt Research Centre for Global Islam**, highlights the necessity of focusing on concepts of plurality and participation, when approaching the issue of Muslim youth.

On the one hand Muslim youth face several problems such as marginalisation and discrimination, which makes it harder for youngsters from a Muslim background to, for instance, find jobs or apartments. This is more likely to make the youth more sensitive, and hence increase their feeling of being socially disadvantaged.

On the other hand Muslim youth face resistance when trying to fully integrate in the German society. Such resistance namely comes from parents and peers, who warn from losing one's identity.

THERE IS NO BLACK OR WHITE

Working with the youth poses many challenges and responsibilities. Based on her work with Muslim youth in mosques and Islamic associations in Hesse in Germany, Schroeter elucidates a few cases, in which there is a detectable impact of ultra conservative Salafist thought on the Muslim youth. Youth work in mosques is often

“problematic”, Schroeter argues, especially when supported by Islamic associations.



While conservative Salafism is more likely to espouse an extremist interpretation of Islam, in which a narrow-minded worldview is put in place, it is not necessarily inclined to violence.

Nevertheless, such interpretation of Islam, as Schroeter explains, views the world according to two templates: The house of peace [*lit. Dar Al-Salam*] and the house of war [*lit. Dar Al-Harb*]. For instance, “Safer Spaces”, a project supposedly directed to the youth and financed by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, follows this interpretation to divide the world into not two but three templates: The “house of peace”, the “house of war” and the “house of peace treaty”, where a contractual agreement between two “houses” applies. Germany in this case lies in the “house of peace treaty”. On their website, for instance, Muslims are required to understand that “in a non-Muslim country, to vote or not to vote are both equally bad options”.

“**Muslims** should try their best to unite and form political blocs in order to exert a significant influence in society,” stated on Saferspaces.de.

As preventive measures concerned, Schroeter argues that change could start at schools. For instance, new subjects

or/and workshops to address issues of multiculturalism seem to be necessary for pupils from all backgrounds. Pupils, Schroeter explains, need to learn about the differences not only between Islam and Christianity but also about the differences between atheism, Judaism and Buddhism etc. In other words, pupils need to learn about different worldviews, cultures and traditions.

In Hesse alone there are about 75,000 pupils of a Muslim background.

According to Schroeter, extremism thrives through mosques and worship halls. Therefore, they have to be closely and critically observed. Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all mosques work in this direction as some of them offer significant assistance in relation to topics of tolerance, interreligious dialogue and anti-extremism. Good examples of such efforts could be seen at the Union of Islamic Cultural Centres in Cologne (VIKZ), the Youth Centre in Biebrich and Gerhart Hauptmann school in Wiesbaden.

WHOSE MISTAKE IS IT?

The largest mosque umbrella organization in Germany, The Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (known as DITIB) has had its ups and downs since its foundation in 1984 in Germany as a branch of Turkish Religious Affairs Directorate. While DITIB remains closely interlinked with the Turkish religious authority *Diyanet* in terms of finance, staff and

organisation, it claims to manage about 900 mosques nationwide.



The umbrella organisation is still under spotlight for claims of among others spreading **anti-Semitism**, teaching **radical Islamism**, resisting efforts of **integration** and keeping a controversial link to the Turkish state. Such résumé has at least raised eyebrows across the years. Consequently scepticism towards DITIB, which directly reflects in the lives of the youth, has become commonplace in Germany.

Schroeter has shared her scepticism and critique of DITIB especially that concerns the Turkish-speaking Imams, the sense of belonging to “the fatherland Turkey” and anti-Semitic sentiment. She also brought to memory the “martyr comic” that was originally published by the Turkish religious authority *Diyanet* in Turkish, and used by DITIB for the youth in Germany. As an encouragement for the youth, the martyr comic glorifies the concept of dying for god, after which martyrs reach paradise.

Hussein Hamdan, an Islamic scholar at the academy of the Rottenburg-Stuttgart diocese, argues that younger generations are different from the older ones. Today, younger generations ask more questions and demand more answers and engagement. Breaking out of the patronage of older generations, they attempt to found youth associations for education, free time, and sport activities. For instance, The Association of Alewite Youth in Germany (**BDAJ**), was

founded in 1994 and comprises of branches in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, Bremen, Hamburg, Berlin, Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony. BDAJ represents the interests of more than 33,000 children, adolescents and young adults until 27. While the association focuses on the Alewite doctrine, it is also committed to promoting a just society and peaceful coexistence, where human rights, equality between women and men, freedom of all faiths, rights of oppressed minorities, critical thinking, democratic participation of Alewite youth, and integration of young people with a migration background, take precedence. As concrete programs, BDAJ offers inter alia educational seminars, panel discussions for the youth, educational field trips, workshops, theatre performances and festivals.

Hamdan argues that this is not the only positive example to draw a differential line between younger and older generations. "While BDAJ started their activities for the youth in 1994, DITIB began their activities for the youth in 2009. This should urge to think," Hamdan said.

It is worth to note that Alewites increasingly identify themselves as Alewites and not as Muslims.

It is important, Hamdan notes, to pay attention to the positive signs from the Muslim youth, therefore, there must be caution in Germany that the Muslim youth do not pay for the mistakes of older generations.

RADICALISATION OF THE YOUTH

It is quite obvious that Muslim youth get caught up in religious fundamentalism, and increasingly become entangled in Jihadist ideologies such as that of ISIS.

Ahmad Mansour, a psychologist and a programme director at the European Foundation for Democracy, argues that while radicalisation is a very complex topic and is perceived differently by different people, it is also a process, which does not happen overnight. But why do Muslim youngsters slip into radicalisation?

Young people, Mansour explains, might be unhappy or discontent with their lives, and are constantly looking for alternatives. There are several reasons that could push young Muslims into radicalisation. Perhaps they lack a role model such as a father, regardless of whether the father has abandoned the family, passed away or been unable to find himself in society. Perhaps they have experienced failure at school or a frustrating transition period from school to work. Perhaps they have dealt with a family member's illness or death. There are cases, in which, a teenager changes hearts because of such a tragic incident in family. Perhaps they have encountered discrimination experiences, in which they may have felt their religion and place of origin were viewed with prejudice. Those who feel they are somehow disconnected from the society develop feelings and unstable personalities that make them susceptible to radicalisation. Such

vulnerability could be at its peak in a “time window” of one to two years that starts at the ages between 15 and 17.

There are, however, cases where such time window towards radicalisation starts at the ages of 13 or 14.



Salafists fill such gaps with their patriarchal ideology and concepts of the all-knowingly punitive God. Salafism is very well received by these young people and this might be for several reasons: Offering the youth an identity, a sense of belonging, a simple explanation of a complex world, friendships and community. In other words, while Salafism is dangerous; it is also attractive because it presents a regulated, structured world, for which a clear vision, mission and orientation are put forward.

For instance, Mansour illustrates, explaining the war in Syria might need hours to break down its complexity and make sense of it. However, for radical Salafism, it can be explained with a simple statement: “It is a war against Islam”.

Mansour calls for a social and political rethinking process of the phenomenon of radicalisation in order to prevent and combat ideological extremism. It is a process, in which every one in the society should take part.

The Flame of Hope

Perhaps it is true that instead of playing the role of victim in a complex world, it is more fruitful to participate in an

inclusive preventive process, in which all do their share in order to live together in a peaceful society.



“This is possible when the people have the will to do so,” said Taoufik Hartit, a national project manager at the Federation of Muslim Scouts in Germany (BMPPD).

Too hopeful?

BMPPD was founded in 2010 and aims to educate and train young people between the ages of seven and 21 in Germany. Following the principles of the Quran as they represent themselves, the BMPPD recognises that dialogue with people of different faith, ethnicity, skin colour, language and nationality as equal partners is indispensable. But are there any concrete signs?

The Muslim scouts organised a project called “The Flame of Hope”, which is intended to help Muslim youth to gain a better understanding of German history and the social responsibility for a peaceful coexistence far from prejudice and ideological frameworks. In this project, a group of Muslim scouts travelled to various cities across Germany from September 2012 to October 2013 to meet with other youth groups of different backgrounds. The goal was inter alia to integrate young people with a migration background in the society in order to strengthen their sense of citizenship.

This should also, Hartit argues, actively involve the youth in building a better future for a diverse and pluralist society.



While asked to describe the current integration processes of Muslim youth in Germany in one word, Hartit said it remains a “virtuous action”. The same question was directed to Susanne Schroeter, Claudia Hackhausen, Ahmad Mansour and a civil police officer and they answered respectively “ambivalent”, “hopeful”, “needs to be brought up-to-date” and “improvable”.

The article appeared in [Mashreq Politics and Culture Journal](#)

The conference was organised by [Frankfurt Research Centre for Global Islam](#) at the Excellence Cluster "[Normative Orders](#)" at [Goethe University](#) under the auspices of the [Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration](#) in the [Historical Museum](#) in Frankfurt.

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