

Institution: BRUNEL UNIVERSITY (H0113)
Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Discourses of young Muslims in contemporary Britain
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Mondal's research has been of benefit to policy makers and civil servants advising government departments dealing with social integration, education and youth, and counter-terrorism and radicalization including the Home Office, Association of Chief Police Offices, PREVENT and the Department of Children, Schools and Families. The research has provided a more nuanced and detailed qualitative analysis of the attitudes of young British Muslims aged 16-20 towards religious belief, identity, politics, society, culture and inter-generational relationships. It has also been of use to third-sector and inter-faith organizations working with Muslim youth, and Higher Education courses training youth workers specialising in Muslim youth. It has also made a contribution to the wider debate in the media about young Muslims in contemporary Britain.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>From late 2006 to early 2008, Mondal, then a Senior Lecturer in English at Brunel, undertook some in-depth qualitative research into the lives, ideas and attitudes of young British Muslims in contemporary Britain, interviewing approximately 30 young, self-identified and practising Muslims aged between 16 and 30 from across the UK, principally in London and the North-West (Pendle, Lancashire), but also Scotland and the Midlands.</p> <p>Drawing on his research interests in the development of Muslim social, cultural and political discourses in the modern world from the early twentieth century to the present, Mondal's first book, <i>Nationalism and Post-Colonial Identity</i> (2003), discussed the emergence of Islamist ideology in 1930s Egypt. More recent research has focussed on the relationship between Islam and multiculturalism (published as 'Multiculturalism and Islam: some thoughts on a difficult relationship' (2008)). This is closely related to the underpinning research insofar as it deals with overlapping social and political debates about integration, identity and cultural difference in contemporary Britain. Later, more literary and philosophical research on the same issues led to the award of an AHRC Research Fellowship in 2012-13 on Muslim-related freedom of expression controversies. This research challenged the biases towards quantitative research (opinion polls undertaken by commercial market research companies) on the one hand, and the almost exclusive focus on 'extremists' and 'radicals' or straightforwardly political attitudes and allegiances on the other. Instead it favoured a detailed qualitative investigation of the social discourses of young Muslims across the whole spectrum of issues confronting them, from politics, belief-racism and cultural integration, to leisure, friendships and relationships with peers and parents. The research explicitly rejected a specific focus on political extremism or radicalism that had hitherto dominated discussion of young Muslims following 11 September 2001.</p> <p>This methodology enabled the research to make the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It challenges the idea that there is a cultural conflict between British 'norms and values' and Islamic ones. Rather, for these young Muslims, the principal cultural conflict is with the cultural and religious norms of their elders. Their understandings of Islam emphasize individuality and choice. • It undermines the stereotypes of dogmatism and intolerance and extremism associated with young Muslims. They emphasize plurality – there are many ways of being a Muslim – and

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flexibility and pragmatism in approaching their religion.

- Contrary to popular assumption, young British Muslims do *not* feel culturally alienated from Britain. They feel very strongly British, are committed to living in a multi-faith, multicultural society, and deeply committed to their local communities. They do, however, continue to feel marginalized and excluded by racism and Islamophobia.
- So-called 'moderates' and 'extremists' should not be identified simply by their political attitudes but rather by asking:
 - Do they exhibit pluralist or binary thinking?
 - Is their attitude towards belief and scripture flexible and ethical or literal and legalistic?
 - Is Islam the *only* lens through which they look at life?

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The underpinning research led to one major output, a single author book:

Anshuman A. Mondal, *Young British Muslim Voices* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2008) – ISBN: 978-1-84645-019-8. (Available from Brunel University).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Shortly after the publication of *Young British Muslim Voices* in September 2008, Mondal was invited by the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) in the Home Office for a meeting on 8 October 2008 with the Head and Deputy Head of PREVENT, which is a part of the CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy, to discuss the research in the book. On 31 October 2008, Mondal met with staff at the Community Cohesion Unit (CCU) at the Department for Children, Schools and Families, also to brief them about the research. Personal correspondence from the CCU testifies that the book 'informs our policy development on youth engagement', and Mondal was subsequently invited to advise DCSF research on 'PREVENT in Schools' (27 November 2009). Following on from this, Mondal was invited as a keynote speaker at a Wilton Park conference sponsored by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) on 'Understanding Islamism' (2-4 November 2009), sharing the table with Government ministers and senior Whitehall officials. Wilton Park organises UK Government roundtable strategic policy conferences.

While it is impossible to gauge the extent of influence on government policy with regard to PREVENT given the number of contributors to this process, many of whom would have offered similar advice based on their research, it is likely that at this time Mondal's repeated invitation to government events that specifically aimed to feed into policy towards young Muslims demonstrates that UK Government officials and policy personnel benefitted from the research, and that it did inform their deliberations and debates. Several passages of the PREVENT review undertaken by the Home Office in 2011, for instance, concur with advice offered by Mondal at these events, and that resonate with the general and more specific implications of the research (see Home Office 2011, paragraphs 3.14, 3.25, 3.26 and 3.30).

The research has also been of benefit to educators and third sector organizations working with the development of Muslim youth, and Muslims generally. It has been required reading for students taking the Muslim Youth Work module in the BA Youth Work at the University of Chester and, as a vocational programme, this indicates its impact on and benefit for those working directly with Muslim youth. Mondal was also an invited speaker at a conference organised by AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society programme on 'Young, British and Muslim: Academic Research and Real Lives', held at Manchester Town Hall (22 November 2011). This brought academic researchers

into direct contact with practitioners in all the major third sector organizations working with Muslim youth. Mondal's book was cited by Professor Linda Woodhead in her keynote address as one of a handful of works that have successfully enabled academic research to be brought to bear on the real lives of young Muslims.

Mondal has successfully exploited his research in order to contribute to and develop the wider public understanding of Muslim discourses and the reality of young Muslim life in the UK. He has written articles related to the research for major national and international media, such as *The Guardian's* Comment is Free blog (over 600 responses) and the highly influential magazine *Prospect* (monthly circulation 28,000). The exchange between Mondal and Ed Husain, author of *The Islamist*, has been picked up by policy makers, cultural organisations, think-tanks and a wide readership. A report by the think tank Theos cited Mondal's articles and the exchange with Husain in its influential 2008 report *Talking God*. Mondal's research has thus fed directly into the wider debate about the importance of religious groups in public life.

He also undertook many interviews in the media to promote and discuss *Young British Muslim Voices*. These included BBC and independent local radio stations and an interview with British Satellite News that was transmitted globally. Mondal read several extracts from the book and responded to listener questions on the BBC West Midlands show 'Midlands Masala' and the producer wrote later that 'there had been lots of positive emails from people wanting to get hold of the book'. There was also press coverage of the book in *The Asian News*, a major newspaper oriented towards the British Asian community and the Associated Press of Pakistan. He has also undertaken many public speaking engagements on matters concerning Muslims and faith issues to non-academic audiences, including the Foreign Press Association, Oxford Secular Society, Asia House, and at an Open Society Institute/British Council event at City Hall, London. He also delivered a public lecture – 'Young British Muslims in literature and life' – at the Islam-UK Centre, Cardiff University.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Radio and TV appearances discussing young British Muslim.

Radio: BBC Bristol, 7 October 2008;
 BBC North West/Manchester, 19 October 2008;
 BCB Radio (Bradford), 21 October 2008;
 BBC Kent, 4 November 2008;
 BBC West Midlands, 9 November 2008;
 BBC Three Counties, 24 November 2008;
 TV: British Satellite News, 1 November 2008

Press coverage of *Young British Muslim Voices*

The Asian News 16 October 2008
 Associated Press, Pakistan 12 November 2008

Journalism

'Wanted: British Imams' *The Guardian*, Comment is Free, 28 April 2008
 'A Muslim Middle Way?' *Prospect*, August 2008, pp.24-27
 'For God and Country' *Prospect*, web exclusive, September 2008
 'An Unfunny Valentine' *The Guardian*, Comment is Free, February 16 2009

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'British Islam after Rushdie' *Prospect*, web exclusive, April 2009

Public speaking engagements

'Religion and Secularism', Oxford Secular Society, 7 May 2008

Foreign Press Association debate, Islam and Democracy, 23 October 2008

Asia House, London – speaking about *Young British Muslim Voices*, 19 November 2008

Harrow Literary Festival, (as above) 19 March 2009

Launch of *Muslims in Europe – A Report on 11 EU Cities*, 'At Home in Europe Project' organised by the Open Society Institute and British Council, City Hall, London, 15 December 2009.

Public Policy Advisory Work

Office for Security and Counter-terrorism (OSCT-PREVENT), Meeting with Head and Deputy Head of PREVENT, 8 October 2008.

Community Cohesion Unit (CCU), Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 31 October 2008.

DCSF research on 'Prevent in Schools'. 27 November 2009.

Invited speaker at Wilton Park conference on 'Understanding Islamism', invited by OSCT and Association of Chief Police Officers, 2-4 November 2009.

Other advisory work

Advisor to Counterpoint, British Council's Cultural Relations Think Tank, 2004-present – advisor on workshop on strategic future of Counterpoint: 'A Conversation with Counterpoint – where to from here?', 26 February 2009.

Advisor for 'Our Shared Europe' Project (which addresses the growing gulf between Muslim and non-Muslim Communities in contemporary Europe), British Council, 2007-present.

Interviewed as expert for research on Muslim Media Consumption in Europe conducted by Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Thursday 30th July 2009

Advising the film director who wrote the script for Brick Lane on young British Muslim characters in her new film project (September 2008).

Contactable sources

1. Producer at BBC West Midlands (9 November 2008) 'Midlands Masala' can confirm the user responses from the radio interview
2. Head of the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism PREVENT, Home Office, UK, can confirm the research impact on government policy development
3. Officer at the Community Cohesion Unit, Department for Children, Schools and Families, can confirm how the research has informed their policy development on youth engagement.
4. Deputy Director, Counterpoint, British Council, can confirm the research impact on their project 'Our Shared Europe'
5. Programme Director for the Wilton Park Conference can confirm how the research had impacts on civil servants and police officers' understanding of Islamism; the conference was sponsored by the Association of Chief Police Officers.