Can Community Cohesion Help Deal with Radicalisation? Using Music and Poetry to Build Bridges

Community cohesion, especially with regards to the Muslim community in the UK has taken centre stage with recent terror attacks in the UK. These attacks have created even more division between various communities giving rise to extremist viewpoints for various parties on all sides. This paper argues that bringing youth from these various communities (different ethnicities and religious backgrounds) through a common shared interest can pave the way for building bridges and overcoming prejudices. The focus here is on the issue of 'strangeness' or being seen as the 'other'. As Chigas (2003) explains, two parties within a conflict can create demonic images of each other and develop a virtuous self-image. This leads onto de-humanisation and creates a stalemate on both sides. Ramadan (2010) explains that the idea of distancing oneself from the 'other' (be it a different culture, race or religion) is a subconscious effort to preserve our own identities.

> ….the other becomes our negative mirror, and the other's difference allows us to define ourselves, to identify ourselves and, basically give us some reassurance…..The other distracts us from ourselves, our ignorance, our fears and our doubts, whilst the presence of the other justifies and explains our suspicions. (Ramadan, 2010: ix)

This paper agrees with social scientists in claiming that when two parties start to see each other not as strangers but as humans and become familiar with one another, cultural and media stereotypes can be broken down. In order to achieve such familiarity, this paper calls for the use of music and poetry to make a concerted effort towards bridging the gap between communities in the UK. This paper proposes that bringing youth from various parts of the community can lead to a reduced risk of religious radicalisation by: a) creating a sense of community and belonging, b) providing a platform through music and poetry to express frustrations and disenfranchisement felt by youth.