Muslim Schools in Britain: between mobilisation and incorporation

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> I think we're at a very interesting stage. The metaphor I use is that the first Muslims that came here were like the farmer standing on the ground; they were standing on it but didn't have roots in it. But their seed has been scattered with some falling on good ground, others falling on stony ground and yet some being blown away in the wind. In some ways, we're only now at the beginning of establishing a genuine Muslim presence in Britain, and Muslim schools are the key to that presence.
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> —Idreas Mears, Association of Muslim Schools (AMS) (Interview, 1 April 2006)

Introduction

In the opening quotation, the director of the Association of Muslim (AMS), Idreas Mears, figuratively traces the emergence of Muslim schools in Britain, presently numbering over 100 in the independent sector and 20 with some kind of state funding. Whilst their number may indeed support Mears's vision of a 'flowering' British Muslim identity, their place within the British education system remains the subject of intense debate (Tinker, 2007; Parker-Jenkins, 1995; Parker-Jenkins et al., 2005; Fetzer and Soper, 2004). Frequently named in various deliberations concerning Muslim civic engagement, political incorporation and social integration (Shah, 2012, 2014), to some commentators Muslim schools represent little more than an irrational source of social division (Dawk- ins, 2007; Grayling, 2006; National Secular Society (NSS), 2006; Humanist Philosophers' Group (HPG), 2001). Others, meanwhile, are more welcoming of Muslim schools in viewing their existence as an antidote to a prescriptive or coercive assimilation, and heralding their potential incorporation into the main- stream as an example of how 'integration' should be based upon reciprocity and mutual respect (Ameli, Azam and Merali, 2005; Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS), 2004; Hussain, 2004; Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 2004). These differing sides of the spectrum, it appears, are illus- trative of the way in which Muslim schools have emerged as a highly salient issue that at times reinforces, and at other times cuts across, political and philosophical divides.

It therefore comes as some surprise to learn that despite a general proliferation of literature on Muslims in Britain, a literature that has multiplied as one seeming crisis has given way to another, very little research has explicitly investigated how an increasingly salient articulation of Muslim identity connects with the issue of Muslim schooling. To be sure, and notwithstanding sustained Muslim mobilisations for Muslim schools within and across diverse Muslim communities, surprisingly little is known of *how* these mobilisations are being undertaken, *what* is being sought, and, more generally, *why* Muslim schools are deemed to be an important issue for different Muslim communities. We address these questions through the use of primary interviews with Muslim educators and stake-holders, including teachers and Muslim educational associations, alongside other case study instruments including field notes and documentary and policy analysis. The chapter focuses on the *contemporary* nature of Muslim mobilisations that are investigated, specifically in order to answer the following questions. Firstly, *why* have there been sustained Muslim mobilisations on the issue of Muslim schools within and across diverse Muslim communities? Secondly, *what* does the engagement or non-engagement of Muslims over the issue of education reveal about their incorporation into a rubric of British citizenship? Thirdly, *how* can Muslim educators and advocates address their critics and broader concerns over the place of Muslim schools in Britain?

The policy context

In order to facilitate more advanced discussion later in the chapter, it is worth briefly setting out the public policy context with respect to Muslim schools here at the beginning, where a concise overview can be gained by turning our atten- tion to a recent watershed in Muslim schooling. This watershed was achieved in 1998 when, after 18 years of a Conservative administration, a 'New Labour' government delivered on a promise in its election manifesto and co-opted two Muslim schools, Islamia School (in Brent, London) and Al-Furqan School (in Birmingham), into the state sector by awarding each Voluntary Aided (VA) status. This status prescribed an allocation of public money to cover teacher salaries and the running costs of the school. It arrived "fourteen years and five Secretaries of State after the first naive approach" (Hewitt, 1998: 22), when Muslim parents and educators had only begun to get to grips with the convoluted application process to achieve state funding, and were dealing with a Conservative administration hostile to the idea of state-funded Muslim schools.

Both Islamia and Al-Furqun schools had already undergone a strict inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) (2004) and had more than met the appropriate governmental criteria required of independent schools apply- ing for state funding. Alongside the obvious, such as the delivery of a good stand- ard of education and the economic feasibility of a school, these criteria required: (a) the adoption and delivery of the National Curriculum, (b) the appointment of appropriately qualified staff, (c) the provision of suitable school buildings,

(d) equality of opportunity for both male and female pupils and (e) consideration of parental demand. All of this is of course premised upon the 'need' for a school in a given area based upon the number of available pupil spaces. In the past, this has been cited as the principle reason for – having met all other criteria – refusing some Muslim schools to opt into the state system, whilst simultaneously inviting other religious schools in similar areas to do so (see AMSS, 2004: 20; Parker- Jenkins, 2002: 279). Nevertheless, the success of these two schools was given fur- ther impetus in the Government White Paper, *Schools: Achieving Success* (2001), so that nine years and another four Secretaries of State later the current number of state-funded Muslim faith schools has risen to include Al-Hijrah (a secondary school in Birmingham), Feversham College (a secondary school in Bradford), Gatton Primary School (in Wandsworth, South London), Tauheedul Islam Girls High School (Blackburn, Lancashire) and The Avenue School (another primary school in Brent, London).

It has been argued that – given the existence of over 4,700 state-funded Church of England schools, over 2,100 Catholic, 33 Jewish and 28 Methodist schools – Muslim campaigns for Islamic faith schooling in the state sector is indicative of "a modern society which is widely perceived as increasingly secular but is paradoxically increasingly multi-faith" (Skinner, 2002: 172). Thus until 2010 there were predominantly two broad types of faith schools in England and Wales. These were privately funded independent schools and voluntary-aided denominational schools. The School Standards and Framework Act introduced the concept of a 'religious character' in 1998 thus modifying the range of types of school receiving state funding (UK Parliament, 1998). Of these schools voluntary-aided (VA) schools are free to have denominational religious education. Voluntary-aided schools with a religious character are funded up to 90 per- cent by local authorities, with outstanding costs being covered by an associated religious organisation (DfES, 2002: 4). A small number of state-funded faith schools also emerged with the 'City Academies' scheme introduced through the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and later shortened to 'Academies' with the 2002 Education Act. Within the independent sector, all schools are required to be registered and may be inspected at any time under the 2002 Education Act. Faith schools within this context are independent schools which have registered as hav- ing a religious character under the Designation of Schools Having a Religious Character (Independent Schools) (England) Order 2003. Therefore, although there may be instances of schools within the state sector having intakes of almost exclusively Muslim children, this characteristic in and of itself does not define a 'faith' school. Muslim 'faith' schools in England and Wales currently exist in the following forms: independent fee-paying schools with a distinctive religious character; voluntary-aided schools funded up to 90 percent by the state with a distinctive religious character and denominational Religious Education; academies that are state-funded in partnership with sponsors and/or educational trusts; and state-funded free schools. Although many Muslim children attend madrasahs, these are supplementary classes rather than schools in themselves.

The faith schools landscape has thus changed significantly over the last two decades. Prior to 1998, the 1993 Education Act provided an opportunity for independent religious schools to apply directly to the Department for Education for state funding through 'grant-maintained' status (DfE, 1993). Schools successful in the application process would be answerable to central government rather than to the then 'local education authorities'. It was this mechanism which allowed for the first independent Muslim schools, the Islamia Primary in Brent and Al-Furqan in Birmingham, to enter the state sector as grant-maintained schools in 1998. With the abolition of 'grant-maintained status' in 1999, these schools were incorporated into the voluntary-aided sector. Numbers of state- funded Muslim schools have grown slowly but steadily and between 1998 and 2010 12 voluntary-aided Islamic schools were established in England and Wales. New Labour's support for the expansion of state-funded Muslim schools was sustained through the 2005 white paper: *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*. The white paper invited independent schools to enter the state sector, but a particular emphasis was placed on encouraging Muslim schools to apply for voluntary-aided status (DfES, 2010). This rhetoric was sustained in subse- quent years with representatives of major faith groups being encouraged to work closely with the government to produce *Faith in the system* (DCSF, 2007). The paper was centred around a "joint declaration and shared vision of schools with a religious character in twenty-first century England" (DCSF, 2007: 4). The paper identified that nearly 15,000 Muslim children were attending independent schools with a particular religious character. Thus, catering to the needs of these children within the state sector could provide an important contribution to inte- gration and the empowerment of these communities. The primary mechanism for Muslim schools to secure state funding for a denominational school with a distinctive Islamic 'character' up until 2010 was through successfully qualifying for voluntary-aided funding. The public policy narratives from 1998 to 2010 facilitated the watershed of establishing the first state-funded Muslim schools in England and Wales and their legacy is manifested in the 12 voluntary-aided Islamic schools currently receiving state funding.

In light of the advances made in terms of the enfranchisement of Muslim com- munities through state funding for Islamic schools, the arrival of the Coalition government in 2010 was met with some anxiety over the level of support that faith communities would continue to receive. Specifically, the advent of the reces- sion, the Coalition's commitment to 'austerity measures' raised questions about the future of financial support for the expansion of Muslim schools. Since the Academies Act (2010), voluntary-aided schools across the board have been faced with balancing the perceived benefits of converting to academy status against the risks of retaining their existing status within a competitive education mar- ket. Government statistics indicate that the conversion rate for voluntary-aided schools becoming academies across the sector had reached 33 percent by 2013 (UK Parliament, 2013: 4). In terms of uptake across denominations, Church of England schools appear to be taking the lead with 41 percent having converted

to academy status by 2013 compared with 25 percent of Roman Catholic schools (UK Parliament, 2013: 4). Whilst this is insightful, the impact of the academy system for Muslim schools is not yet clear. In addition to championing academies, the Academies Act (2010) also provided the framework for Free Schools as a mechanism for 'communities and faith groups' (UK Government, 2014) to develop schools to cater to local needs.

The development of Muslim schools has raised questions about the implications of these schools for social divisiveness. For example, Rabbi Jonathan Romain argued that faith schools had an instrumental role in the riots in Bradford, Oldham and Leeds in the summer of 2001 (*pre*-9/11), with the implicit division across religious lines meaning that children may become "suspicious, fearful and hostile" (Romain, 2001: 18). However, it is important to recognise that the 'schools' within which intakes had become segregated across religious lines were not actually Muslim 'faith' schools. This kind of blurring of the lines between anxieties about Muslim schools and occurrences of segregation in the non-denominational sector have most recently been manifested in media cover- age of the 'trojan horse' letter sent to Birmingham City Council in 2013. The anonymous letter reportedly identified that schools in Birmingham had been tar- geted 'to be taken over' with a view to running those schools according to 'strict Islamic principles' (Kershaw, 2014: 3). An investigation into 'trojan horse' found that a systematic strategy had been outlined in the letter for establishing stronger Islamic influence in non-denominational state schools catering for local Mus- lim communities (Kershaw, 2014: 6). This strategy comprised a five-step process which included identifying groups of Salafi parents and garnering their support, installing governors to 'drip feed' ideals for an Islamic school and bringing existing head teachers into discredit and applying pressure until they are removed (Kershaw, 2014: 6). Whilst the investigation identified that there were "concerns which require immediate attention", it concluded that the "evidence collated to date does not support a conclusion that there was a systematic plot to take over schools" (Kershaw, 2014: 8). It is also worth restating that any issues of concern which might be raised by 'trojan horse' are relevant to non-denominational schools with a majority intake of Muslim children, not denominational Islamic schools.

Nevertheless, anxieties about publicly funded Muslim schools continue to dominate media narratives on faith schooling. For example, following the announcement in 2011 that the Tauheedul Islam boys school would be the first Muslim free school in the country, the *Daily Mail* immediately published an article quoting Simon Jones (national executive for the National Union of Teachers) stating that the school was "extremely bad news" for community cohesion and that there will be "potential social problems on the future" (Daily Mail, 2011). Time has revealed that the Tauheedul Islam boys school is now one of two Tauheedul free schools, with its sister institution, a girls secondary, fostering excellent exam results and topping a secondary school league table whilst also being praised for quality of teaching and the behaviour and prospects of its pupils (Evans, 2013). Furthermore, the schools are "non-selective Muslim faith-based schools who

welcome pupils from all faiths and none" (Tauheedul Education Trust, 2014). Furthermore, the schools are now part of the wider Tauheedul Education Trust, a growing "not for profit multi-academy trust" (TE Trust, 2015) that appears to be engaging in entrepreneurial activities in exactly that way that the 2010 Academies Act has encouraged.

The example laid out by the Tauheedaul Education Trust demonstrates arguably the most substantive example of how the new and emerging frameworks around faith schooling have been used effectively within Muslim communities. Yet, recent media narratives around Muslim schools continue to manifest anxieties about problems that might arise with Muslim free schools. This has most notably been the case with the media attention around the Al-Madinah free school in Derby following concerns being raised by OFSTED, the Education Funding Agency and the Department for Education. The exact nature of the concerns raised by the above agencies appears to be primarily focused on 'finan- cial irregularities'. A number of further issues have been discussed in the media such as the implementation of gender-segregated classes or enforcing compulsory headscarves for female students, but substantive evidence remains elusive. A consistent trend in the media circus around Al-Madinah is that its shortcomings, whatever they may be, are principally attributed to the schools status as a *Muslim* school rather than as a *free school*. Within the frameworks for free schools, 'communities and faith groups' may very well be free to establish schools to serve local needs, but under the understanding that they are entirely accountable for any difficulties that occur. Thus whilst new and emergent frameworks are available for Muslim communities to utilise in terms of establishing or bringing existing Islamic faith schools into the state sector, it might logically follow that a relative lack of state-led guidance in the process may lead to some reluctance for com- munities to use these frameworks.

Within the context of the recent history of state-funded Muslim schools, the state of mainstream Islamic schooling can be seen to be held in a rather delicate balance with hard-fought, slow-paced and relatively long-standing gains being secured through the voluntary-aided system. An important point to note here is that there is a continually growing demand for Muslim schools in the independent sector. Exact numbers of independent Muslim schools have been difficult to reliably establish in recent years due to two main reasons. Firstly, there has been a tendency for numbers to fluctuate as independent Muslim schools face ongoing instability in the struggle to economically sustain themselves (see Breen, 2009, 2014). As one head of an independent school in the process of applying for state funding at the time of Breen's research put it: "the impossible we do every day, miracles take a little bit longer. . . ." This indicates that closure is an ongoing and realistic risk faced by a number of independent Muslim schools. Secondly, fluctuations in numbers can be explained by default as the number of independ- ent Muslim schools entering the state-maintained sector increases, albeit slowly. Thus, between the years 2009–13 numbers of independent Muslim schools were thought to number approximately 120 at any one time. More recent analysis appears to reveal that there may have been some expansion in the independent

sector with the current number of independent Muslim schools totalling 158 (AMS data as of October 2014). Whilst it might not be possible to establish the exact scale of expansion in recent years, it is clear that the number of Muslim schools in the independent sector is on the rise.

In line with the apparent recent expansion in the independent sector, numbers of Muslim schools in the state-maintained sector have also increased in recent years. The shift in policy frameworks around faith schooling have coincided with an increase in the number of state Muslim schools. The number of voluntary-aided Muslim schools has remained at 12 since 2009. However, following the 2010 Academies Act, there are now eight Muslim free schools and one Mus- lim academy. The total number of state-funded Muslim schools in England and Wales is currently 21, with the most substantive recent gains having actually risen out of the new and emergent frameworks for free schools. In the interests of clar- ity it is worth noting two points here. Whilst numbers of voluntary-aided schools have remained at 12 for a number of years, the single Muslim school operating as an academy was previously a voluntary-aided school. The implication of this is that one school has entered the state sector through voluntary-aided status. The second point to note is that a large number of independent Muslim schools use the term 'academy' in their name, although these schools do not receive any state funding. This phenomena has the capacity to distort reality quite dramatically in the public perceptions of the extent of educational enfranchisement Muslim com- munities have experienced in recent years.

Current trends indicate that the new and emergent frameworks around 'free schools' are being utilised by Muslim communities. Whilst this is a positive development in terms of the educational and political enfranchisement of British Muslims, this has happened against a backdrop of negative media narratives around a Muslim free school. It is also worth considering that the mechanism which has facilitated the most recent increase in state-funded Islamic schools is that which requires minimal state involvement. Thus, whilst increasing numbers of Muslim free schools may represent important economic gains for British Muslim communities, the extent to which these advances can be considered to represent partnerships with the state such as those manifested in the voluntary aided system is open to question. Within the frameworks for free schools, investment in terms of time, risk and accountability almost exclusively lie with the community found- ing the school. Having set out the broad policy context, we are able to move to a more ethnographic account of the motivations for Muslim schools in Britain.

Identity articulations

Muslim children of school age are numerically disproportionately present in the British education system, making up nearly 6 percent (588,000) of the school population from under 3 percent (1.8 million) of the national population (Halstead, 2005; see Office for National Statistics, 2005). Reflecting the particularly youthful demographic of British Muslims, where 33 percent fall into the 0–15- year age bracket and 15 percent into the 16–24-year category (MCB, 2015: 27),

in some LEAs (Local Education Authority), Muslim children comprise a significant presence within school districts and wards. This is partially the result of concentrated settlement patterns by first generation migrant workers and is sometimes intensified by 'white flight' to the suburbs (Simpson, 2005).

At the same time, Muslim pupils throughout the British education system her- ald a diverse ethnic composition which mirrors that of the Muslim population as a whole. Alongside the Pakistani (38 percent) and Bangladeshi (14.9 percent) contingent, it includes Turkish and Turkish Cypriot, Middle-Eastern, East-Asian, African and Caribbean groups (10.1 percent), mixed race/heritage (3.8 per- cent), Indian (7.3 percent) and not an insignificant number of white Muslims (7.8 percent) (MCB, 2015). Does this reality of ethnic heterogeneity rule out the prospect of an over-arching Muslim identity? According to Tahir Alam, former trustee of Al-Hijrah secondary school, director of the teacher training wing of the Al-Hijrah Trust and former chair of the MCB education committee, it does not so much 'rule out' as give emphasis to the differentiation amongst pupils in Muslim schools.

It is worth noting *how* this imagining of a Muslim and Islamic identity in Muslim schooling goes hand in hand with a re-imagining of British identity, which is very evident in Trevathan's characterisation of the 'ethos' of Islamia Primary, one of the oldest Muslim schools in Britain and one of the first to receive state funding:

> If anything – this school is about creating a British Muslim culture, instead of, as I've often said in the press, conserving or saving a particular culture, say from the subcontinent or from Egypt or from Morocco or from wherever it may be. Obviously those cultures may feed into this British Muslim cultural identity, but we're not in the business of preserving . . . it's just not feasible and it's not sensible . . . it's dead: I mean I'm not saying *those* cultures are dead but it's a dead duck in the water as far as being *here* is concerned.
>
> (Trevathan, Interview)

Trevathan is obviously keen to partner the Muslim dimension with the British, so that instead of suffocating hybridity or encouraging reification, for example, the outward projection of this internal diversity informs the pursuit of hyphenated identities. The casualty in this 'steering' of British Muslim identity is the geographical origin conception of ethnicity, witnessed in the scramble to de- emphasise 'ethnic culture' in favour of an ecumenical Islamic identity. This is elsewhere evident in the complaint that there are a lack of provisions within comprehensive schooling to cater for identity articulations that are not premised upon the recognition of minority status per se, but which move outward on their own terms in an increasingly confident or assertive manner, based upon the subscription to common Islamic traditions. Idreas Mears, director of the Association of Muslim Schools (AMS) stresses this position:

> [S]tate schools do not handle the meaning of Muslim identity well for the children. In actual fact, the way that general society looks at Muslims is as

> an immigrant minority-ethnic-racial-group and how young people are made to look at themselves through the teaching in state schools tells them 'you are this marginal group/minority group and have therefore got to integrate with the mainstream'. So there's a process of marginalisation and that often leads to resentment. But in a Muslim school that identity is built upon being a Muslim *not* an ethnic minority. . . . I think it gives young people a greater sense of who they are and how they can interact in society and therefore learn that Islam is not just a thing that is relevant to minority rights. Islam is rel- evant to economy, to foreign policy, etc. which means that we're not getting on to a stationary train but a train that is moving.
>
> (Mears, Interview 1 April 2006)

This 'train' moves between sites of boundary maintenance in which Mears expresses a 'clean' version of Muslim identity free from ethnic and racial markers. While this view ignores the lived reality, Mears appears to express it more as a hope to be realised through Muslim schooling. This desire corresponds with findings from Patricia Kelly's (1999: 203) ethnographic study of schooling choices among Muslim parents with both secular and Islamic worldviews, which concluded, "as some less-religious families do opt for specifically Muslim education, we can consider this as an example of a decision selectively to emphasise this pan-ethnic [Muslim] group identity, in order to reap whatever benefits – eco- nomic, social and psychological as well as spiritual – it offers." A similar rationale permeates the Association of Muslim Social Scientists' (AMSS) (2004: 11) mani- festo, *Muslims on Education*, in which 'Muslim' refers "not only [to] practising adherents of Islam, but also those who identify themselves 'Muslim' (without necessarily being practising) or who belong to a household or family that holds Islam as its descendant faith."

This conception of Muslim identity is expressed and consolidated in survey data that inevitably includes both types, behavioural and attitudinal, but reports that 74 percent of a representative *adult* Muslim sample in Britain say that religion is 'very important' to them (Modood et al., 1997: 331) without necessitating an inquiry into their degree of religiosity, let alone religious practice. It also emphasises that much of the motivation for Muslim schooling reflects the desire of some Muslim parents who embrace it as means through which to instil some sense of Muslim heritage in all its heterogeneity.

It is worth noting, however, that there is no entirely coherent view amongst Muslim parents on faith schooling[1] and, since over 97 percent of Muslim children are educated in state schools, most Muslim parents who pursue religious continuity for their children have had to do so within relatively inflexible educational contexts. It is this realisation that has made schooling a "major area of struggle for equality of opportunity and assertion of identity" (Ansari, 2004: 298), and an area where "in the face of major opposition from broad sections of . . . society" (ibid). Muslims have succeeded in having some basic 'needs' recognised, e.g., provision of *Halal* (Kosher) meals (Meer et al., 2009). This

has informed – and been informed by – a parallel debate about the schooling of ethnic minority children which has been raging since the 1960s: the role and content of the school curricular, and parental rights (Crowther, 1959; Newsom, 1963; Plowden, 1967; Coard, 1971; Bagley, 1973; Rampton, 1982; Swann Report, 1985; Burnage Report, 1989; Basit, 1997; Cantle, 2001; Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007). For British Muslims, whether parents are advocates for separate schooling or not, educational empowerment means access to options parallel with choices available to other groups. The onus is then placed upon the state to accommodate Muslim communities, parents and children as they have other faiths.

The validity of this rationale, that Muslim minorities who mobilise for Muslim faith schooling are simply seeking an expansion of the faith schooling sector, is rejected by prominent figures in both anti-religious *and* anti-racist camps alike. Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, for example, argues that

> . . . we're heading towards a catastrophe unless the government change their policy . . . The more Christian ones they create, the more the clamour becomes for Muslim schools to be created and I think it's a disaster because the only way that we're going to break down barriers between people is to bring them together at a very early age and this government is going in com- pletely the opposite direction to that.
>
> (Interview with Terry Sanderson, 8 June 2007)

In less apocalyptic but equally strident terms, Dan Lyndon, director of the 'black history 4 schools' project and a member of the Black and Asian Studies Association (BASA), voices similar objections on the grounds of separatism and in-egalitarianism:

> I am worried about the development of faith schools because I think that just encourages separation . . . Personally, I would never teach in a religious school. Whatever religion, absolutely fundamentally, no.
>
> (Interview with Dan Lyndon, 13 June 2007)

This is not, of course, a universal view amongst anti-racists, not least because some have, in the past, also endorsed the need for 'black' schooling. To this end Lee Jasper, former race equality advisor to the London mayor, clarifies his own position that

> it's quite proper to expect the teaching staff and governors to reflect that local community. When majority black churches want to get together and do that they should be able to do so. That doesn't extend to creating an apartheid regime within education but it does extend to creating the choice for minority communities.

(Interview with Lee Jasper, 26 July 2007)

Perhaps the most nuanced and historically informed objection to an expansion of the faith sector to include Muslim schools is offered by Tony Breslin, Director of the Citizenship foundation:

> The starting point of the first generations of faith schools were much more monocultural societies. Faith schools, it seems to me, offer a lot in terms of ethos and all the rest of it. I just wonder whether non-faith schools can do the same thing and whether we should seek to get them to do that. . . . Part of the debate clearly about faith schools at the moment, is not really about faith schools, it's just the specificity of Muslim schools, and I think people should be more honest about that. . . . I don't think that because a particular group was granted the right to build a faith school 50 years ago, it is a rationale to grant that to a different group now or another group in 50 years time. I think it's about saying, where is our society at.
>
> (Interview with Tony Breslin, 12 June 2007)

Breslin is undoubtedly correct to highlight the historical dimension of faith schooling against which contemporary arguments concerning parity are often made, as well as the centrality of Muslim mobilisations to these arguments. Yet, whilst it may be true to say that Muslim communities have been the most vocal in seeking inclusion in the faith schooling sector, it is not the case that this has *solely* been premised upon the issue of parity for other factors too have been salient.

Muslim motivations for faith schools

Holistic education

The first and arguably broadest factor stems from the desire to incorporate more faith-based principles into an integrated education system, so that the 'whole person' can be educated in an Islamic environment (AMSS, 2004; Hewer, 2001). This would *presuppose* faith rather than treat it as something extraneous to education and external to its major objects (Ashraf, 1990). For example, one recommendation emerging from the First World Conference on Muslim Education stated that "education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personal- ity through the training of spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily senses" (cited in AMSS, 2004: 12). Two approaches proposed by the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) in their position paper on Muslim schools include the Steiner and Montessori approaches, both of which encourage personal and team responsibility while "the child's creativity is also given full freedom for expression" (ibid: 19). Hence the objective is to encourage intellectual, spiritual and moral development within an Islamic setting. Thus, at Islamia School, Abdullah Trevathan states that a key curriculum objective is to prevent sources of Islamic guidance from becoming extrinsic to educational development. In his view, children will only properly know, explore and evaluate knowledge presented

> There are two types of views of the divinity in theological perspectives: in classical terms one is *tashbih* which is like Allah's nearness, immersion in our daily life or divine interventions in daily affairs, and the other is *tanzih*: the incomparability or what they call negative theology, the absolute omnipo- tence, distance from the individual . . . Now I believe what we're trying to do in this school is to return to a more *tashbih* . . . it's very important that they're [the pupils] exposed to the classical *ussal al-fiqh* . . . basically the methodology of applying principles to different situations, rather than taking or transporting rules or regulations out of another time and another place . . . literally.
>
> (Trevathan, Interview)

Perhaps surprisingly, given its pragmatic emphasis upon the present, this pro- ceeds through an introduction to classical Arabic, presented as a conduit through which this holistic immersion can take place:

> We teach classical Qu'ranic Arabic. We think it's fundamental to the flow- ering of Muslim culture that the language of its philosophy, the language particularly of its spirituality is taught. And also there are key concepts such that if you've got the Arabic you immediately have access to that nuance, that feeling that the word evokes!
>
> (ibid)

Islamia School is not alone in this view, for it is common to find the teaching of Qur'anic Arabic listed on many Muslim schools' curricula and mission state- ments (IHRC, 2005). This manner of incorporating faith-based principles into an integrated education system, as opposed to a more straightforward approach of teaching genesis or religious history, for example, is also the preferred approach of the Association for Muslim Schools (AMS). To this end, Idreas Mears describes how a child's understanding of the interpretative traditions within Islam is akin to wielding a powerful educational 'tool' that is simultaneously spiritual and educative:

> Muslims are people that bring down a meaning to an event: we're creatures of meaning, and a Muslim expresses real meaning by *ibadah* because we see that the ultimate meaning is to be a worshipper of Allah but then bringing that down onto the axis of events changes how you act in the world. So I think the most important for Muslim schools is to give young people that as a tool in their hands that they can pick up and run with.
>
> (Mears, Interview)

It is important to stress that this view is not advanced naively by Mears. In a measure of increasing confidence, critical self-evaluation and institutional net-working, the AMS has been at the forefront of creating an interfaith 'inspector-ate' to monitor the content and standard of different faith-based schooling. This is informed by the recognition that whilst areas of numeracy and literacy are strin- gently monitored by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), religious instruction is rarely so. Mears elaborates:

> The AMS has made an application to the DfES to deliver inspection services for OFSTED inspections of independent Muslim schools. . . . As well as looking at the areas that are necessary in the OFSTED criteria . . . we will be looking at how the school is delivering the religious ethos, because up until this point we accept that Muslim schools are Muslim schools because they say so. There's no real inspection of that and there can be a whole spectrum of people delivering *nothing* about Islam at all, but instead being a cultural protection zone for children. . . .
>
> (Mears, Interview)

Lending some support to Jacobson's (1997) "religion-ethnic culture distinc-tion", which argues that ethnicity is increasingly peripheral amongst some British Muslims, Mears is at pains to stress the distinction between a school premised upon an ethnic origin conception of Islam, driven by a desire for 'cultural protection zones' and an Islamically driven environment that moves outward to build upon evaluative criteria already established and in place.

Separation of sexes

The criticism that Muslim schools can serve as cultural protection zones is some-times made through pointing to the evidence of Muslim parents' preferences for single-sex schooling. Through an interpretation of Islam which posits that "after puberty boys and girls should be separated" (Hashmi, 2002: 14), there is certainly a desire to develop 'safe' environments, and in this regard single-sex schooling undoubtedly appeals to Muslim parents (Hewer, 2001). The reten- tion of single-sex schools was recommended by the Swann Committee (1985) and their increasing non-availability may also influence Muslim parents' interest in faith schooling. According to Hussain of Al-Hijrah School, a school which maintains separate teaching rooms, the motivation for single-sex schooling is "to ensure that they [pupils] are more focused on their studies . . . it is primarily about their learning." Elsewhere, the Muslim Parents Association (MPA) formed in 1974 on this single issue, and continues to support the creation of a number of independent single-sex Muslim schools. In addition to Al-Hijrah, the creation of Feversham College in Bradford was to some extent modelled on Catholic faith schooling (Halstead, 1988) by employing separate teaching rooms (Haw, 1998). It is important to note, however, that this is not a policy desired for primary schooling and is contradicted by some existing co-educational Muslim schools that employ mixed teaching classes.

Specialist training

A third factor informing the Muslim interest in faith schooling is the current lack of specialist training in Islamic religious sciences, the provision of which might allow young people to "be educated to serve their communities as potential reli- gious leaders" (Hewer, 2001: 518). This includes the desire to have more British trained theologians capable of discussing theological issues with a contemporary resonance to the lived experiences of *being* Muslim in Britain. The immediacy of this requirement is illustrated with the example of unsuitable religious instruc- tors, including non-British imams that are unfamiliar with the particular contexts and experiential lives of Muslims in Britain. Trevathan elaborates:

> [T]here's a vacuum here because the mosques just aren't set up to deal with the problems of modern people. If you import an imam from Egypt or from Pakistan and somebody comes to them with a problem which is within a modern European context, it would often be things that the imams would have never encountered in their lives and so have no means – or the wrong means – of dealing with it.
>
> (Interview)

The dynamics informing the balance that schools must achieve in off-setting the desire for 'home-grown' religious instructors, with broader and more wide- ranging programmes of education, are traced out by Alam:

> There are schools that do actually give more curriculum time to more tradi- tional sciences, you call it theology but I would call it traditional sciences to do with *Sunnah* and *Hadith* and those sorts of subjects . . . but they also do English, maths and science . . . they just don't allocate as much time to these subjects as they would if the school was funded by the state. So there you have the flexibility as an independent institution so, currently, all those that are state-funded couldn't have the luxury of being able to do that. I think schools would say that yes they would like more time but there's not enough time to deliver the national curriculum, which is a requirement, as well as devoting adequate time to really focus properly on some of the traditional sciences and subjects as well. So there's a trade-off, I suppose, and a debate about the balance in each school.
>
> (Alam, Interview)

Muslim educationalists thus point to an inevitable limitation in the scope to incorporate, into the state sector, schools that do deliver a greater proportion of theological education and training:

> If a school wants to retain an emphasis on teaching traditional sciences, and for them that's important perhaps, then they may well be reluctant to receive funding because they then have to teach the national curriculum and

> compromises have to be made on other things such as teaching the Qu'ran and Islamic history to a level they would like and so on. So some of those institutions that specialise in these areas are not going to come into the state sector, because if they did they'd have to drop everything else and change the nature of their institution to a very large degree and that's not what they're about.
>
> (ibid)

The enthusiasm for, or hesitation at, becoming co-opted into the state sector should not therefore simply be assumed, but taken on a case-by-case basis.

Ethnocentric curricula on Islam

Fourthly, in order to impart more accurate knowledge of Islamic civilisations, literature, languages and arts, there is a desire to see broader aspects of Islamic culture embedded within the teaching and ethos of school curricula. In their study, Douglass and Shaikh (2004) found that throughout commonly used text-books, Islam is rarely portrayed in the ways its adherents understand but more through the ethnocentric perspectives of editors who frame their commentary for textbook adoption committee audiences. Common examples of the sorts of inaccuracies include the portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad as the 'inventor' of Islam, rather than a messenger or prophet, as well as an artificial separation of Islam from other monotheistic faiths. This has led Ameli, Azami and Merali (2005: 26) to argue that "it is difficult to escape the conclusion that textbooks deliberately downplay or exclude connections between Islam and Abraham in order to maintain neat partitions among the symbols, beliefs and major figures." This complaint feeds into the broader charge that Local Education Authorities (LEAs) have only "tinkered with the largely ethnocentric curricula, leaving Muslim children feeling alienated and with damaged self-esteem" (Ansari, 2002: 22).

Low educational attainment

Finally, there is concern over the lower educational attainment of some Muslim children, Bangladeshi and Pakistani boys in particular, and the belief that increased accommodation of religious and cultural difference will help address this and pre- vent further marginalisation from taking place. According to Office for National Statistics (2004) data, nearly 50 percent of men and women of Bangladeshi ethnic origin and 27 percent of men and 40 percent of women of Pakistani ethnic origin hold no academic qualifications (see also Haque (2002)). Educational outcomes amongst young Muslims in relation to this general ethnic breakdown are simi- larly concerning. Only 30 percent of young males with Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic origin, according to some sources, achieved five GCSEs[2] at grades A*–C, compared with 50 percent of the national population as a whole.[3]

According to Halstead (2005: 136), these figures indicate a "sense of alienation and disaffection felt by many young male Muslims at school," an assertion given

empirical support in a study undertaken by the IQRA Educational Trust (see Pye, Lee and Bhabra (2000), and which was also raised by the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (CMEB) (2000: 152) in its recommendation that government implement targets to decrease the number of school exclusions currently experienced by some Muslim groups. While it is accepted that parental education and social class play an important role in shaping these educational outcomes, Halstead (2005: 137) lists a host of other issues that are *perceived to be relevant by Muslims themselves*: "religious discrimination; Islamophobia; the lack of Muslim role models in schools; low expectations on the part of teachers; time spent in mosque schools; the lack of recognition of the British Muslim identity of the student" (see also Coles, 2008). According to Alam, Muslim schools sensitive to these experiences can help elevate educational outcomes

> On the whole the Muslim schools are performing pretty well; they're better than their like for like in state sector . . . In terms of the focus they provide for their children, and the dedication, and quite often many of the teachers in these schools are not even qualified teachers, yet their students get better results than people who are qualified! You do get examples where Muslim schools in the independent sector perform badly, but they're resource issues really, to do with under-funding and not really anything else . . . shoestring budgets and you can't really do anything on those. Barring those sorts of schools, and there are a few around, the vast majority of schools in fact – if you take into account the student budgets that they operate on – what they do is in fact quite remarkable.
>
> (Alam, Interview)

The academic achievements of Muslim schools Alam is pointing to include the examples of 100 percent of GCSE entrants from Al-Furqan Community College (Birmingham), Leicester Islamic Academy, Madani School (Tower Hamlets), Tayyibah School (Hackney) and Brondesbury College (Brent) achieving five or more passes at grades A*–C, along with Feversham College (Bradford) achieving 53 percent of such passes, higher than the national average (and well above the Bradford average).

The form and structure of Muslim schools

Where Muslim parents have opted out of the state sector, these desires have resulted in the creation of over 100 independent schools with a Muslim ethos, educating over 14,000 pupils from ethnically diverse communities in predominantly inner city areas. These institutions deliver both 'secular' and Islamic edu- cation, and are best described as Muslim schools with "the goal of living up to the standards of Islam, rather than implying its achievement" (Douglass and Shaikh, 2004: 8). Typically established in homes, mosques and similar build- ings by groups of concerned parents and community activists (Hewer, 2001: 518), the vast majority are low-fee schools in poorer quality buildings which,

unsurprisingly, lack many of the facilities common to state schools (Walford, 2003). The main reason for this is financial insecurity. Since they rely upon community support and are seldom purpose-built, they may open and close depending upon the resources and stability afforded by the local Muslim communities themselves. Thus every school is, according to Trevathan, "a microcosm of the society around it," which means that despite being private institutions, they are better thought of as 'community-based schools' since they rarely operate commercially. A fascinating illustration of these schools' community focus can be found in the example of pastoral advice to pupils' parents, as Trevathan describes:

> One of the things we've realised frequently is that first of all we're not just a school – we're much more. In many ways, we're educating parents as much as we're educating children and frequently we get a request for an appointment to see me and they'll insist that it's something personal, and then they'll come in and they won't be parents or prospective parent, but a married couple having relationship problems. So myself and Sheikh Ahmed, who is the imam here, would – if we could – give some marriage counselling. And we will do that if the parents are of *our* children because it's part of our responsibility to the children as educators.
>
> (Interview with Meer)

All independent schools are now required to register with the Department of Education and Skills under *The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations* (2003). Failure to do so invites the prospect of closure and since the criteria are not dissimilar from the conditions that must be met before a Voluntary Aided (VA) status can be achieved, it *was* feared that these guidelines would have a disproportionate affect on Muslim schools. It is therefore surprising that these guidelines were viewed by the AMS as a process necessary to raising the basic standards of all would-be Muslim schools. This is evident in Mears' account:

> There always was a history of starting up and then not managing to continue. . . . Now if they get through the registration process they're prone to grow very quickly. At this point I actually welcome anything that makes Muslim schools more rigorous in their own standards and it doesn't just have to be about the registration and inspection process which looks at the gen- eral criteria of education. Now, where they do come into existence, they're stronger schools than they would otherwise have been.
>
> (Interview)

Of course the incentive for official registration is the accompanying professional inspection and advice, with the long-term aim of becoming co-opted into the state sector under the status of VA school. This process has often been coordinated by organisations such as the AMS and the Islamic Schools Trust (IST), which facilitate many schools' dialogue with LEAs and central government. So these are some of the issues involved in the *processes* but what the discussion thus

far has not addressed, however, is how Muslim educators respond to some of the key arguments against Muslim schools. These range from a principled philosophi- cal opposition to all faith schooling through to more focused arguments concern- ing the nature of Muslim schools in particular.

The argument for autonomies

One of the most commonly held views of education is that it should cultivate the development of rational and moral autonomy. This position opposes all forms of faith schooling and strenuously argues that all autonomy-supporting socie- ties *must* guard children from "believers who wish to impose on them a non-autonomous conception of the good life" (White, 1990: 105). This is a central argument contained within the Humanist Philosophers' Group's (HPG) (2001: 10) influential report, *Religious Schools: The Case Against*. This begins by charg- ing faith schooling with 'indoctrination', characterised as limiting the autonomy of a child by implanting beliefs that neither empirical evidence nor rational argu- ment might change.

The implication of this perspective is that young people in religious schools are denied the opportunity to develop the competencies in making informed choices, specifically because such schools are predisposed to indoctrinate and proselytise. There are two very interesting and equally challenging responses to this argu- ment. The first begins by rejecting the *a priori* assumption that faith schools are necessarily out to indoctrinate and proselytise. For example, Muslim educators view their schools as a place of holistic education, and argue that "if the teacher speaks about something and says that within this understanding there are other views which he or she or 'the Muslims' may not agree with for such and such a reason – then you're presenting the child with a fuller picture" (Trevathan, Interview).

This might potentially be viewed as an example of what Terrence McLaugh- lin (1992: 123), the late education philosopher, described as one of a multiple launch pads for autonomy, in which "a legitimate starting point is from the basis of experience of a particular 'world view' or cultural identity; a substantiality of belief, practice or value, as in (say) a certain sort of religious school." This offers a more contextual comprehension of how a child's autonomy may be developed and is more comfortable with competing conceptions of education amongst dif- ferent cultural constituencies within a multicultural context that is not hostile to the wishes of religious peoples (Modood, 2007; Spinner-Halev, 2000). In this way, it is plausible that faith schools could adopt an educational approach that is *relatively* neutral – such as those favoured by the AMS and mentioned earlier. Thus, and because children have to accept many things on trust in order eventually to progress to autonomy (and possibly reject those things later), religion could be treated no differently. The HPG rightly questions, however, whether indoctrination can ever be avoided, given the difficulty of teaching religion in such a way that children can grasp and appreciate it in any depth without necessarily accepting beliefs which are difficult, if not impossible, to revise or reject

when one has reached an adult age. This is an important criticism which leads to a related debate about the nature of religious knowledge and the conditions under which it can be acquired.

Of course the Muslim perspective eschews the idea of reason being tainted by 'The Fall' since in Islam humanity is brought into the world in a state of innocence (*fitra*) much like a blank sheet (*tabula rasa*). This means, "the concept of 'original sin' as presented in Christian theology is non-existent in the newborn child" (Hussain, 2004: 319). What we should take from Ahdar and Leigh (2005) is the implication that unless a child acquires this knowledge at a sufficient depth of understanding, they will not be able to exercise valid consent anyway, so that from their perspective the goal of autonomy is already thwarted. Accordingly, the curriculum and environment of the religious school may be essential to the achievement of a level of understanding that makes informed consent (and thus autonomy) possible.

The second potential response to the HPG's charge of indoctrination has two parts to it but begins by making a relational argument which contests the assumption that secular schools can avoid indoctrination by being a-religious. For example, Arnsone and Shapiro (1996) point to a sleight of hand in non-religious contexts where certain possibilities or options are only made available to adults because they have prioritised them to the exclusion of many others in childhood, e.g., develop- ing skills in certain arts or sports. As Ahdar and Leigh (2005: 228) argue, "The rigorous keeping of a child's future to maximise adult opportunities would, in effect, deprive the child of the possibility of becoming a professional ballerina or footballer. Could it not be argued that the same applies to religious upbringing?"

A much stronger objection is made by Grace (2002: 14), however, who laments the degree of bad faith central to the charge of indoctrination against religious faith schools. This is because secular schools are not themselves ideologically free zones, and carry "their own ideological assumptions about the human person, the ideal society" which "characteristically permeate the ethos and culture of state-provided secular schools and form a crucial part of the 'hidden curricu- lum'." The view that there is a bias permeating secularist charges against faith- based schooling is shared by some Muslim educators. Although this often begins by pointing to the inconsistency described by Grace (2002), if we follow Treva- than and Mears's response to this charge, we find a more qualified and nuanced insight than that premised upon the equivalence argument alone:

> I'm not arguing that indoctrination doesn't take place here; it's just that it also takes place everywhere else. Secular society continues to see itself outside of dogma and doctrine – but that's ridiculous because it uses both to indoctrinate a system of beliefs and values. Now, there is *reprehensible indoctrination* and I think that is when the child is not made free to make decisions concerning their own thinking. In the classroom, that would translate into the teacher telling them that such and such is the case and any other argument is false.
>
> (Trevathan, Interview)

> All schools are indoctrinating processes . . . I think there are stages of educa- tion that ought to make your understanding of that process more acute, and I don't think that enough emphasis is given in education to the play aspect, for too many formal learning processes are coming in too early.
>
> (Mears, Interview)

This then rehearses the objection to viewing non-religious schooling as a neutral enterprise, and simultaneously invites the different and equally broad objection to modes of political integration that try to separate public and private spheres in some liberal-civic convention (cf Guttman, 1994). The distinction is elaborated after a consideration of the relationship between these conceptions of autonomy and conceptions of 'good citizenship'.

Good citizens

There is a genuine and problematic tension between espousing an HPG type of radical autonomy argument against religious education whilst, simultaneously, holding the reasonable view that the education process should contribute to the cultivation of future 'good citizens'. This is epitomised by states' interest in ascribing and inculcating liberal or civic virtues, a point famously set out in Rawls's (1993: 199) formulation:

> . . . political liberalism . . . will ask that children's education will include such things as knowledge of their constitutional and civic rights so that, for example, they know that liberty of conscience exists in their society and that apostasy is not a legal crime . . . Moreover, their education should also prepare them to be fully cooperating members of society and enable them to be self-supporting; it should also encourage the political virtues so that they want to honour the fair terms of social cooperation in their relations with the rest of society.

This sort of thinking has permeated the drive in Britain for citizenship educa- tion (Qualifications Curriculum Authority, 1998), which entails a clear desire to engender a particular 'civic morality' amongst young people through imparting knowledge of political functions and historic practices, as one of the opening paragraphs of the report chaired by Sir Bernard Crick makes clear:

> We aim at no less than a change in the political culture of this country both nationally and locally: for people to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence in public life and with the critical capacities to weigh evidence before speaking and acting; to build on and extend radically to young people the best in existing traditions of com- munity involvement and public service, and to make them individually con- fident in finding new forms of involvement and action among themselves.

(Qualifications Curriculum Authority, 1998: paragraph 1.5)

This begs the question, however, as to when the impetus behind want- ing to form 'good' or 'active' citizens will actually conflict with the growing autonomy of the child. To put it another way: "at what point should he or she be free to reject liberalism and make mature, illiberal, choices of his or her own?" (Ahdar and Leigh, 2005: 231). The implication being that to make the objection to faith schools on the basis that they might curtail the child's autonomy can be inconsistent, given that the inculcation of any sort of civic morality can be subject to the same charge. This is an argument elaborated in Meer et al. (2009), but another way of stating it here would be to insist that education for citizenship must necessarily proceed with attention to the *social*, through the reciprocal balance of rights and responsibilities that confer upon its recipients a civic status that affords those pupils equal opportunity, dignity and confidence.

The civic inclusion of Muslim constituencies

This embedded reading of autonomy can be interpreted as a critique of liberal perfectionist thinking that is often too abstracted from the lived relations and real- world contexts in which Muslim schools seek to operate. It is an argument made by Parekh (2000: 202–3) when he contests the civic assimilationist approach, based upon a neat separation of public and private spheres, on the grounds that such a view fails to take account of institutions that encompass both:

> The school educates future citizens, and has a political dimension. However, since children are not just citizens but also human beings and members of the relevant cultural communities, their parents and cultural community have a vital interest in their education, which makes the school a cultural institution that belongs to private or civic realm. If we stressed the former, we would have to treat the school as a public institution subject to the control of the state and ignore parental choices and cultures; if the latter, we would reach the opposite conclusion.

Sympathy for this view would allow for the recognition of other, intersecting issues affecting the articulation of Muslim identities in Britain (Roy, 2004). The shape and impact of these issues are subject to debate, but amongst Muslims in Britain it is evident that there is an attempt to reconfigure what being a Muslim in the West means, and that part of this process is linked to the issue of schooling. As Johnson and Castelli (2002: 33) have argued: "Islam in the West is itself undergoing a change. As part of this change, Muslim schools are engaged in creating an identity for the school, the students and the larger communities associated with them." Many aspects of this argument are expressed both as a hope and objective amongst Muslim educators. This has already been elaborated in Abdulla Trevanthan's view that – if anything – Islamia School is about creating

a British Muslim culture, and which fits nicely with Mears's description of the same phenomena:

> I think that what is interesting is that a kind of British Muslim Identity is only just emerging. I think that's basically because the schools and communities were controlled by a framework led by the elder generation and that people still saw themselves as an immigrant minority coming together to protect their culture, and in a sense still relate to another place being home.

This argument returns us to the third issue motivating the desire for Muslim faith schooling. This is linked to the aspiration for more British trained theologians who could discuss theological issues with a contemporary resonance to the lived experiences of being a British Muslim. It is argued that such developments – if publicly endorsed – herald opportunities through which Muslim children would be able to confidently negotiate and reconcile the requirements of their faith with their rights and responsibilities as British citizens. This is substantiated in the words of Alam:

> You have to remember that the Muslim community is a very recent commu- nity in this country, we're a very young community, but I think the participa- tion levels within the last five years . . . and the vibrancy of participation has been very encouraging . . . There's a lot of work to be done of course, and this is a challenging situation that we find ourselves in. That we are under higher scrutiny than other communities, and how we respond to that and change wider society's perceptions perhaps will be essential to how the Mus- lim community develops.
>
> (Alam, Interview)

These relationships are, therefore, almost dialectical – an assessment made else- where by Hussain (2004: 322), who concludes that "Muslim schools are needed so that Muslim youth will be able to comprehend and contextualise Islam in *their* environment" (emphasis added).

Conclusion

The preceding analysis has explored how Muslim identities can inform the movement for Muslim schools, and specifically the various reasons that some Muslim minorities are seeking an incorporation and reflection of this Muslim identity within the arena of education. Where Muslim constituencies are granted greater participatory space in the shape of provisions for Muslim schooling, it is evident from the testimonies of Muslim educators that a synthesis between faith requirements and citizenship commitments is a first order priority. It is also evident that this movement is seeking out a negotiated, and reciprocal, British Muslim identity. As such the mobilisation for Muslim schools marks an important shift

in the movement for a self-constructed identity. An engagement with a range of established educational conventions, norms, regulations and precedents, suggests that Muslims in Britain are demonstrating a willingness and ability to contribute to the educational landscape something that is both novel and beneficial to society as a whole.

Notes

1. While there is no national survey of Muslim parents' desires on this issue, the *Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities* (1997) found that the *ethnic* composition of a school was more important for white respondents than it was for ethnic minorities, whilst preference for *religious* composition interestingly ranged from Catholics, who were the most inclined to desire faith-based schools, to Hindus, who were the least inclined for faith-based schooling, with Muslims and Protestants falling somewhere in the middle (see Modood et al., 1997 : 323).
2. The General Certifi cate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is the standard qualifi cation for students enrolled in compulsory schooling until the age of 16 years.
3. For a much fuller statistical summary, see Halstead's (2005) excellent discussion from which I draw.

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