Muslim Matters: An Examination of the Educational Needs of Muslim Children in Contemporary Britain

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The recent publication of *The Satanic Verses* has helped to unmask Muslim discontent in British society. Athough the initial outrage directed at the author seems to have subsided, advocacy by Muslims living in Britain who are concerned about their children's educational needs will not disappear. This paper addresses the difficulty of making adequate provisions for Muslim children in the maintained (i.e., public) school sector as well as the call for separate and publicly funded schooling. Attempts to modify certain aspects of schooling (i.e., physical education) are discussed, as is the movement towards scrutinizing the entire curriculum to ensure that it reflects cultural diversity. The extent to which the common school curriculum can accommodate all pupils is also explored in light of statutory requirements imposed by the National Curriculum. Finally, administrative adjustments and the resulting implications for schools trying to meet Muslim needs are discussed, as are the legal alternatives to state education available to Muslim parents.

Muslims are the third largest religious minority in Britain today; Roman Catholics and Anglicans are larger in number (Ashraf 1986). While multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual in nature, they are united by a religious dimension within their lives (Nasr 1975). The powerful Islamic revival among Muslim populations, which the West views as "Islamic fundamentalism," has deeply affected the thinking of Muslim minority groups in the "unsympathetic" West (Anwar 1982; Hulmes 1989; Qureshi and Khan 1989). Indeed, Islam can be seen as a religion, a social and moral code, and "as a bulwark against modern atheistic concepts" (Union of Muslim Organisations 1976). While some view Muslim communities as cores of resistance in liberal democracies, Muslims see themselves as fighting a tide of secularization. Beneath this rather superficial description, however, lie major issues concerning social cohesion, cultural diversity, and the extent of minority rights in a democracy.

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The education system has not escaped criticism by Muslims who see an incompatibility between the values taught at home and those at school (Qamar 1980; Anwar 1982; Sarwar 1983). In this instance, the debate over the role of education revolves around two fundamental issues: encouraging the child's rational autonomy and the role of religion. For Muslims, the curriculum—both explicit and hidden—ideally should reflect an Islamic orientation (Anwar 1982; Hulmes 1989). During the last decade, there has been an increasing number of calls for the establishment of separate Muslim schools along the lines of the voluntary-aided status presently afforded to other religious institutions (Halstead 1986). Areas with dense Muslim populations provide a variety of supplementary or mosque schools for teaching the Qur'an in the evenings or during the weekend (McLean 1985). It is estimated that approximately 90 percent of all Muslim children aged between five and twelve attend such schools at some time (Hussain 1990).

Separate but Equal Education Provision?

Some Muslims believe that the ideal environment for promoting the Muslim identity and faith is to be found in a separate school system. They maintain that such schools are not intended to disunite society, but rather to preserve the student's Muslim identity. The voluntary-aided Muslim school would be permeated by Islamic studies supporting their "unshakable faith" (Halstead 1986). Muslim children, it is argued, would be better British citizens as a result of such schools, for they would be able to provide a moral compass and instill a new sense of morality into society.

There are now twenty-two independent Muslim schools in Britain serving the needs of those children whose parents are financially able and willing to pay (Islamic Party of Britain 1992). Meeanwhile, many Muslim children are caught in a "cultural clash": their families feel that the whole ethos of British state schools and educational policy is inconsistent with their Muslim way of life. Sarwar (1983) has stressed the importance of cultural identity for Muslims and the fear that any undermining of cultural consciousness threatens their community. As voluntary-aided Muslim schools are not yet a reality, there remains a basic problem: Muslim parents aspire to keep their children faithful to Islam in the face of perceived Western materialism and permissiveness. Thus, those who remain within the state school system may choose to have their needs advocated by more assertive parents and community leaders.

The Extent of Cultural Diversity

Various issues with profound implications for educationalists emerge from an analysis of Muslim communities. The significance of Islam and the impor-

tance of the Qur'an in education lay specific responsibilities on Muslim parents and, accordingly, mandate certain rights and duties for their children (Karim 1976; Iqra Trust 1991[a]). While cultural diversity in Western societies has provided ample opportunity for teaching to reflect different perspectives on the family, the home, and the place of religion, many Muslims view this approach as a *competing* perspective that challenges and undermines their own identity:

> ... text books and courses and even methods of teaching are creating doubts in the minds of students about the fundamental tenets and assumptions of Islam instead of reinforcing faith in God and purifying the sensibility by removing confusion and contradiction (Ashraf and Husain 1979, 3).

To what extent can, and should, education reflect cultural differences in society? Is it still possible to provide a common core curriculum acceptable to all children?

The 1980s witnessed a plethora of texts on multicultural education: Craft (1984); Jeffcoate (1981); Banks and Lynch (1986); Tomlinson (1984); Verma (1986); and Troyna (1987) to name but a few. Extended debate centered on the concepts of assimilation, integration, and cultural pluralism. Policies on equal opportunity and antiracism found expression in statements at both the national and the local government levels. Major reports were published on multicultural issues: the Rampton Report (1981) on underachievement, the Scarman Report (1981) on civil disturbances, and the Swann Report (1985) on the education of children from ethnic groups. Schools responded by adopting a variety of approaches to teaching.

However, to many Muslims multiculturalism has come to mean that the liberal approach to multicultural education does not adequately address the convictions of the religious adherent or, in other words, that the secular has survived at the expense of the sacred (Qureshi and Khan 1989). Significantly, there is a real danger emerging that such multicultural education as there is may become marginalized as the implications of the Education Reform Act and local school management become apparent. Added to this is a discernible lobby which is reacting against a perceived preoccupation with multicultural teaching and is instead invoking the doctrine of a common British citizenship (Hayes 1990). It may well be that for some schools, 1990 portends an era in which "beyond multiculturalism" (Troyna 1987) lies not antiracism but a return to a more restrictive definition of what it means to be British: a case of Honeyford revisited.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty of future developments in multicultural teaching, the growing political consciousness of Muslims in Britain may in-

creasingly be felt by the school system as their criticism of existing provisions becomes more vocal. The dilemma remains, however, that educationalists must seek to satisfy these needs within the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum and in the presence of competing group demands. *The Satanic Verses* not only provoked moral outrage among Muslims claiming that it was blasphemous, but also allowed old grievances to surface in political agendas across the country. Needs are now being expressed as demands, and to ignore them is to delay the inevitable confrontation. Finally, there is a certain irony in the fact that just as the 1980s was the decade in which "equal opportunity" policies were pursued, the 1990s might well see this concept redefined by the parents and not by the educationalists.

The Way Forward

In order to avoid or diminish possible confrontation with parents, schools in Britain are being encouraged to develop greater administrative and organizational flexibility towards Muslim pupils. These adjustments may be appropriate for schools with a sizeable Muslim student population or for those interested in developing further the idea of multiculturalism. To make progress in this area, the most suitable method is to confront problems experienced by Muslim children, to consult with the local Muslim community or appropriate advisers, and then to attempt the implementation of appropriate solutions. The focus should be on exploring opportunities for flexibility in the school's timetable and dress code, developing support for community networks, and finding the right balance between indigenous and minority cultures as expressed in the curriculum.

Religious Obligations: At the top of the list of grievances for many Muslims is the lack of opportunity to practice their faith in accordance with Islamic principles. This is clearly difficult in some countries where the traditional policy of church-state separation has resulted in a purely secular educational system, as in the United States. The British situation is somewhat different, for the coexistence of denominational and nondenominational schools has long been a feature of the British educational system (Barnard 1971).

Muslims are required by their faith to pray five times a day, an obligation that does not cease on school days. The prayer times vary according to sunrise and sunset, but the early and late prayers usually do not conflict with the school day. However, the midday and the midafternoon prayers do present potential difficulties (Rahman 1979; von Grunebaum 1976). In order for Muslim students to observe these two prayers at the proper times, some flexibility on the part of the administration is required. For example, the midday timetable could be altered or the Muslim students could withdraw for several

minutes to a prayer room provided by the school. Adjacent washrooms would also have to be taken into account, as ritual ablutions are required before each prayer. The provision of running water or containers of water would be sufficient to meet this need (McDermott and Ashan 1980). As the Friday afternoon prayer is especially important, an extended lunch break or an early finishing time would allow Muslim pupils to attend services at a local mosque. Some schools in Bradford and Tower Hamlets have already implemented policies along these lines, demonstrating quite clearly that state education can be responsive to the needs of non-Christian pupils.

Collective acts of religious worship have always been seen as part of the school day in Britain, and section 25 of the 1944 Education Act reaffirms this aspect of the curriculum (subject to withdrawal on conscientious grounds). This principle was incorporated into the 1988 Education Reform Act: "... all pupils in attendance at a maintained school shall on each school day take part in an act of collective worship" (DES 1989[a], part 1, section 6). The new legislation adds that such an act of worship "shall be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" (section 7). Where there is a sizeable proportion of non-Christian pupils, schools may request permission to hold alternative acts of worship by applying to the local Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). Religious *instruction* is likewise countenanced in terms of Christianity: "any agreed syllabus shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian" (section 8 [3]). This clause goes on to say "... whilst taking account of the principles and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain," a provision that appears to have received rather less attention in the current debate than the overall concern with sections relating specifically to Christianity.

These religious clauses of the 1988 Act have a direct impact on Muslims and other minority groups. The Muslim Educational Trust has suggested that Muslim parents have four options: allow their children to take part in the "orthodox Christian worship and thereby commit a heinous Islamic sin," invoke the right to withdraw the child, request that the headteacher apply to the local SACRE for alternative worship at the expense of the local education authority if Muslim pupils are in the majority, or withdraw the children for Islamic worship at the expense of the local Muslim community (Lodge 1990). Some Muslim parents may feel that Christian-oriented worship is unacceptable and exercise their right to absent their children. This is evidenced by the withdrawal of thirty-three children from an Anglican school in Eccles because their request for instruction in Islam was denied (TES 1990).

The new legislation has also been widely criticized because the idea of a predominantly Christian assembly totally ignores, in the view of many non-Christians, the reality of a multicultural Britain. Furthermore, Muslim and other minority groups may well interpret the new legislation as suggesting

that Christianity is superior to, rather than equal to, other faiths. The spirit—if not the letter—of the law appears to be conveying this message. Some schools, notwithstanding legal complexities, have continued to present collective multifaith acts of worship guided by representatives from resource centers and local authority advisers. The Bradford Inter-Faith Centre is one such body which may well experience increased demand as schools grapple with the religious implications of the 1988 Act (Lodge 1990).

Another Muslim practice that needs to be dealt with is the fast of Ramadan. Secondary school pupils may wish to observe this fast, and providing a non-dining area room for them is a possible concession. The Muslim celebrations of 'Īd al Fiṭr and 'Īd al Aḍḥā may each require a day off from school (von Grunebaum 1976). This would be in line with the tradition of permitting days of absence for religious celebration, pursuant to section 39 of the 1944 Education Act. This provision has been taken up by pupils of other minority faiths in Britain, such as those of the Ukrainian Catholic churches.

Withdrawal from class because of unacceptable or offensive curricula is another area in which Muslim sensitivities may need to be accommodated. This may not be educationally desirable, as it flies in the face of efforts to foster multiculturalism, but it may be impossible to satisfy the religious convictions of all parents. It is not uncommon, for instance, for both religious and nonreligious parents to consider sex education classes contrary to their wishes. Other activities which can present problems are physical education and swimming. There is a general taboo against such mixed group activities from the onset of puberty, a practice that has obvious implications for secondary school administrators (Karim 1976). Standards of modesty are applied to *both* males and females, so while physical education may need to be arranged on a single sex basis, individual rather than communal showers are required.

School Dress: In their dress, Muslims are expected to practice a level of decency in all activities (McDermott and Ashan 1980). Muslim girls are required to cover their entire body (with the exceptions of the face and hands), even for athletics and swimming. Many schools in Britain have therefore permitted the use of tracksuits and leotards. At other times, secondary school girls may need to wear the *shalwār* or trousers in place of a skirt. Muslim parents prefer that their daughters cover their heads. Werbner (1981) notes the significance of dress among Muslim women and the connection between the traditional cloak-like garment (*burqā'*) and social class. There is a variety of attitudes among Muslims themselves on whether it is correct for females to cover their heads, and for some the *burqa* is associated with economic status and educational attainment rather than religious identity. Palmer (1990, 45) posits:

> [I]t is at least worth asking whether some of the indignation expressed by Muslim parents about their daughters' dress and conduct at school relates to the meaning these things have in the social and cultural spectrum of their own cultures.

The wearing of headscarves (*ḥijāb*) by Muslim girls in state schools has recently prompted heated debate in Europe. In Britain, a Cheshire grammar school refused, on the basis of health and safety, to allow two Muslim girls to attend school while wearing scarves (Spencer 1990). This issue is presently being resolved with the possible suggestion that students wear their headgear tight enough so as to prevent accidents. In France, however, the issue has gone beyond what might be considered a trivial matter of choice in dress on religious grounds. A political storm has developed in several French schools which have placed a ban on the *ḥijāb* without, at the same time, raising any official objection to Jewish skull-caps or Catholic crosses (Follain 1989). In school districts around Paris, Montpelier, Avignon, and Marseilles, Muslim girls have asserted their right to wear the *ḥijāb*. Initially this sparked an angry response among teachers, some of whom petitioned the Ministry of Education for a resolution of the perceived problem of various religious groups asserting themselves by flaunting their religious identity (ibid.).

There have been mixed messages from the Ministry of Education over the past years as to the extent of tolerance for religious dress. At the center of the debate is the growing agitation of an increasingly more politicized and assertive Muslim community. This has now prompted response from a variety of fronts: right-wingers urging "common respect for the norms of state," left-wingers fearful of religious domination of education, feminists critical of female submission, and the National Front maintaining that the issue signals a Muslim attempt to destabilize and undermine French society (ibid.). Politicians, educationalists, and ethnic associations have become involved in what is perceived to be France's difficulty at coming to terms with a sizeable and ever-growing Muslim population. In the meantime, some Muslim girls in Europe are being denied their "right to education" unless they compromise their religious convictions and modify their dress.

Community Networking: The question of networking within and beyond the school must be addressed. In her study of the interaction between the Muslim community and Birmingham schools, Joly (1989) highlights the enormous interest and respect that parents from the Indian subcontinent have for education. However, due to their lack of knowledge of the British educational system as well as of the English language itself, many parents have in the past been isolated from mainstream school life. Networking has been facilitated between Muslim parents and schools through organizations that are frequently

based in the mosque. The situation was summed up by a member of the Muslim Liaison Committee thus: "[N]ot many parents are aware of their rights, ourselves we were not aware until we organised!" (as cited in Joly 1989, 19).

Furthermore, Muslim organizations have become more informed about problems inherent in attempting to bring about change within the education system. A local education authority memorandum in 1982 noted:

> It is clear that the basic problem lies not with individual headmasters or teachers but with the curriculum itself which does not allow for the needs of Muslim pupils and which has caused so much difficulty (ibid., 11).

Accordingly, Muslims in Birmingham, London, and Bradford have been prepared to express their concerns at both the school and the local government levels.

Enlisting parental support is an important aspect of any attempt to accommodate Muslim needs in the school system. This can be made easier if the school recruits Muslim teachers who satisfy national and/or local regulations and if it seeks advice from multicultural advisers. Muslim teachers may perform pastoral and academic roles and offer guidance on issues of dress, religion, and the nature—both formal and "hidden"—of the curriculum. They are an important source of reference for students and may serve as positive role models and as part of support networks (McDermott and Ashan 1980).

The school's attempt to encourage Muslim parents to attend parent/school conferences may require the assistance of interpreters, sending correspondence to a student's home, and assisting parents in discussing the educational welfare of their children. The Iqra Trust (1991[a]), formed to promote knowledge of Islam in Britain, suggests that home-school links can be fostered by the formation of liaison teams in schools with a large number of Muslim pupils, and recommends the appointment of a teacher with special responsibility for Islamic understanding. The Trust also advocates increased Muslim participation at all levels of the consultative processes (1991[b]). Encouraging imams or religious leaders to become involved in school governance or to act as liaison officers for the school would provide administrators with useful counsel. Halstead (1988) documents the initiatives already taken by the local education authority of Bradford, which has sought to address the need for religious observation on Friday afternoons and to invite imams into schools to conduct the early afternoon (*dhuhr*) prayers.

Indigenous versus Minority Culture: The choice of language instruction must also come under review, as it is estimated that about two hundred different languages are used by the students. Such linguistic diversity is clearly an asset

to both the individual and the community (National Curriculum Council 1991). Under British law, the Education Reform Act stipulates that a modern language must form part of the compulsory foundation subjects for all students aged eleven through sixteen. While French, German, or Spanish are the traditional second languages taught, schools are being encouraged to offer Urdu, Gujarati, or Arabic, as these might be more relevant to Muslim students. Indeed, it has been argued that for Muslims "Makkah, not Brussels, is the centre of the world" (McCrystal 1990). Prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum, Urdu and Ukrainian were offered for the General Certificate in Secondary Education, and it is this kind of initiative which should be maintained. This is in keeping with the Bullock Report (1975) on minority educational needs which stated that "no child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of the home as he crosses the school threshold." Furthermore, a provision for mother-tongue education is contained within a directive passed by the European Economic Community in 1977 which places a commitment on Britain to effect suitable measures (Liell and Saunders 1984).

Changing the formal curriculum to reflect an Islamic dimension is part of the continuing debate in education. It is contended that science, for example, rarely includes any mention of the Islamic contribution. History teaching is far from content-neutral, and a greater inclusion of Asian and Afro-Caribbean history is seen as crucial for fostering multiculturalism. The Swann Report (1985), entitled "Education For All," made clear that sufficient instruction in the history and geography of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean region is essential not only for schools with a high percentage of pupils of different ethnic backgrounds, but also for all-white schools, if students are to be adequately prepared for adult life in a multicultural society.

Multicultural teaching in Britain has been severely criticized of late for its fragmentary approach. Cynics harshly describe it as the "bells, smells, and steel bands" approach which does not go far enough in providing a policy to attack institutional and individual racism (Leicester 1989; Stone 1980). Nor does this approach confront racial bias in teaching materials. Accordingly, there needs to be a curricula selection that reflects the cultural heritage rather than the perceived tokenism of festival celebrations grafted onto an ethnocentric syllabus. In this regard, Islamic studies could be provided to all students, thereby providing a more balanced curriculum.

But how much scope is there for multicultural teaching within the National Curriculum, and what is the likelihood of conflict between Western and Islamic values? The National Curriculum Council was instructed to take account of ethnic and cultural diversity, and there is a potential scope for the inclusion of non-Western perspectives. In history, for example, the final report of the National Curriculum History Working Group (1990[a]) maintains that "we have placed British history at the centre of our proposals, but that does

not mean that it is, or has to be pivotal" (section 4.26, p. 17). That seems to be contradicted, however, under the heading of multicultural education: "In our view an ethnically diverse population strengthens rather than weakens the argument for including a substantial element of British history within the school curriculum" (section 11.25, p. 184). Further, where the history of non-Western nations is outlined, it is part of the *optional* rather than the *core* program. For example, Islamic civilization up to the early sixteenth century and Indian history from 1526 to 1805, both of which are *options* at Key stage 3 for children aged eleven to fourteen, are set within a compulsory core of British history study units.

In addition, the proposals of John MacGregor, former secretary of state for education and science, may further diminish the multicultural input. The primary school curriculum is mainly concerned with British and European history. At the secondary level, Key stage 3, it will be possible to ignore such options as "Islamic Civilization," "Black and Native Peoples of the Americas," or "Imperial China," in favor of "The American Frontier 1650-1900" and "The American Revolution." At the Key stage 4, aimed at pupils aged fourteen to sixteen, it is also possible to avoid studying non-Western history. If his proposals are accepted as part of the Statutory Order effective as of September 1991, it will be possible for a pupil to pass through primary and secondary school without exposure to any multicultural aspects of history.

A great deal will depend on what themes teachers choose from these optional units. Their own familiarity with European and American history, along with a lack of suitable resources, may cause them to avoid teaching non-Western programs of study. Schools which in the past have initiated some multicultural teaching within the field of history will find fruitful avenues to develop the areas within the scope of the National Curriculum guidelines, while those unable or unwilling to accelerate this part of the curriculum will find the door open to perpetuating a Eurocentric bias.

Similarly, the interim report on Geography 5 to 16 (1990[b]) is open to teacher interpretation. Minimal guidance as to how multiculturalism can be achieved is apparent, but presumably the issue can be addressed through themes such as "developed and developing world" or examining "the distribution of ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups within particular areas," as suggested for Key stage 4. Proposals for geography teaching are akin to those for history in that they appear to be Eurocentric and clearly do not ensure in any systematic way that multicultural/antiracist teaching will be forthcoming.

The National Curriculum orders for science are similarly disappointing, since the multicultural dimension is absent and only appears as *guidance* in the non-statutory guidelines (Dennick 1990).

While there *is* scope to interpret the National Curriculum guidelines in a way that is responsive to the reality of a multicultural Britain, there is also an

opportunity to maintain an ethnocentric bias and focus on values that may conflict with those of Muslims or other minority groups. Clearly, teacher discretion will be of paramount importance in this instance if there is to be an avoidance of the colonial mentality of cultural imperialism in teaching content. As Grinter (1990, 26) states:

> The national curriculum documents to date, with very few exceptions, are drawn up in an assimilationist spirit .... Further, the place for anti-racist education of the whole child through study of his or her life experience and of issues that relate to the whole human situation, is being marginalised by fragmented curriculum development, deliberately isolated in subject compartments.

Reluctance to publish the report by the Task Group on Multicultural Education, set up by the National Curriculum Council and finished in 1990, adds to the feeling that this dimension of the curriculum is not being valued (Tomlinson 1990). The only hope, therefore, is to "make the Act work for anti-racist education" as Eggleston (1990, 11) advises, by using every means "to adapt it, modify it, exploit it and make it happen" in order to fulfill the moral obligation to all children presently in the educational system.

In addition to evaluating the formal curriculum for racial bias, the hidden curriculum and teaching methodology must also be scrutinized. One argument frequently put forward is that teachers make stereotypical assumptions of Asian students, i.e., they are perceived to be strong in mathematics and weak in poetry. Further, an Asian pupil may be viewed as so passive and deferential to authority that he/she is virtually invisible in the classroom. The relationship between teacher expectation and academic achievement has been noted by Coard (1971) and Verma and Bagley (1975). More recent evidence provided by the Rampton (1981) and Swann (1985) reports and the Policy Studies Institute (1989) suggests that the underachievement of ethnic minority children is attributable to several reasons, including that of low teacher expectation. Institutional racism as well as individual prejudice is also a concern. The Commission for Racial Equality (1990, 10-11) expresses the issue thus:

> Many members of the ethnic minority communities experience British society as a hostile environment in which prejudice, discrimination and harassment are rife. For many parents, the education system is not seen as one which adequately addresses these issues or actively promotes equality of opportunity.

Teacher expectation of students and teacher-student interaction are, therefore, areas of current research that seek to address these issues. In the interim,

some local education authorities have tried to confront the sensitive and controversial issues of stereotyping and prejudice within the school by organizing in-service training on race awareness. Nottinghamshire County Council (1990), for example, has recognized the very serious issue of racial attacks and is developing an integrated approach by using several groups to address the problem.

Early initiatives in multicultural teaching will need to be defended if the impetus for multicultural education is not to be lost with the advent of the National Curriculum. There is sufficient scope within the guidelines of the 1988 Act to maintain the momentum, by virtue of cross-curricular themes, attainment targets, and programs of study (DES 1989[b]). As the National Curriculum is open to interpretation and does not have to be delivered in prescribed subject boundaries, only continued teacher commitment to the furtherance of multicultural education will ensure that the advances of the last two decades are not lost in a bid to become assessment-led in educational practice. As recent legislative reform is based on "entitlement" and "good practice," it is arguable that good practice in education is synonymous with an entitlement to satisfactory multicultural and antiracist teaching.

Legal Remedies: Clearly, adjustment along these lines causes expense and inconvenience to the school administrator. Although some school managers make what they consider to be major accommodations, some Muslim parents may still remain disaffected with the school and look to legal remedies. Under section 36 of the 1944 Education Act in Britain, it is the duty of the parent of every child of compulsory school age to cause him/her to receive an efficient full-time education suitable to his/her age, ability, and aptitude either by attendance at school or otherwise. The term "or otherwise" refers to home tutoring or education within the private sector. Instances have arisen where Muslim parents did not send their daughters to school because of an ideological opposition to coeducational schooling, and court proceedings have ensued (Barrell and Partington 1985).

Single sex education remains a major goal for Muslims, who see the phasing out of such schools as contrary to their interests. In Bradford, the Muslim Parents Association was formed in 1974 to represent Muslim interests. Since then, several single-sex Muslim private schools adhering to Islamic principles (ibid.) have been founded. They have tried, unsuccessfully, to attain voluntary-aided status and to become eligible for public funding. This status would remove them from the jurisdiction of an unsympathetic local education authority and place them within the auspices of the national government, which has traditionally interfered hardly at all in the running of such schools.

Private Muslim schools, which boast long waiting lists, increasingly are demanding public funding along the lines of other denominational schools in

Britain (Halstead 1986; Islamia 1992). In a 1989 policy statement on multicultural education, the opposition Labour Party, which traditionally looks to the ethnic vote, signaled its support for this goal. Also, Baroness Cox has attempted, unsuccessfully, to introduce the Education Amendment Act (1991), which would extend eligibility for public funding to independent schools providing an alternative religious ethos to existing state schools. If Muslim schools enjoyed this status, they would be placed in the same category as the more than seven thousand Anglican and Catholic schools and the twenety-one Jewish institutions currently receiving government funding equal to 85 percent of their running costs and 85 percent of their capital costs (CRE 1990).

The relevant clauses of the 1944 Act provide for different levels of support according to whether a school is classified as "voluntary-aided" or "controlled," but they do not specify *which* denominational groups are to be included. Hence, Jewish schools have been established through the procedure of obtaining voluntary-aided status, and Muslim as well as potentially Sikh, Hindu, and other minority groups also wish to avail themselves of this right. Presumably, provisions contained in the Education Reform Act, as well as the implications of "falling rolls" and "open enrollment" in schools, could work in these parents' favor. For example, an area with a sizeable Muslim population might choose to opt out of local education authority control and seek grant-maintained status. Presently, there are sixty-two state schools in Britain with a Muslim intake of 90 to 100 percent, and 230 such schools with a 75 percent Muslim intake (Islamia 1992). By changing their status, they would then be in a position, as Cumper (1990) suggests, to make the schools more responsive to Muslim needs. The concept of equal opportunity may thus be defined by the efforts of parents rather than government policymakers.

The thorny issue of granting voluntary-aided status to Muslim schools is that, unlike previous denominations, this new group is a predominantly visible minority. Racial segregation, as well as religious apartheid, appears to contradict the government's rhetoric on fostering multiculturalism. Notwithstanding the issue of "voluntary apartheid" (NUT 1984), while even funding is not forthcoming for minority-faith schools, Britain can scarcely boast that all of its subjects enjoy equality before the law. There is a disparity of social justice in this instance, but once conferred "rights" are difficult to remove. While the legal and ethical debate continues, the government no doubt feels that choice in schooling has an elastic quality and questions how far diversity in education is politically advisable.

From the author's ongoing research into Muslim matters, ethnic factors in the choice of schooling center on single sex education, religious ethos, geographical location, and academic achievement. As to the winners and the losers, it appears that, in Britain, options in schooling are restricted on the basis of finance. Equity in the British education system is clearly absent, for

Muslim schools lack the opportunity to flourish without the government funding traditionally given to religious institutions. A critical reevaluation of the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act, with a view to dismantling all denominational schooling, is therefore a possible solution to the problem as raised in previous studies (Swann 1985; CRE 1990).

While some Muslim parents may therefore choose private schooling, as government funding and "opted-out Muslim schools" are not available, those not wishing to see their children educated in ideological isolation look to state schools to accommodate their needs. There is no coherent view among Muslim parents in this instance. Evidence from Taylor and Hegarty (1985) highlights the differences of opinion. The Swann Report, for example, cites Cypriot Muslims who are said to oppose separate schooling. Likewise Councillor Ajeeb, Bradford's first Asian Lord Mayor, is quoted as saying: "I don't want separation in any form ... what we want is accommodation of our cultural needs, especially in the education system" (Halstead 1988, 52). This conflicts strongly with the argument presented by organizations like the Muslim Education Trust, which maintains that there is a sizeable number of Muslim parents who want state funding of separate schooling (Cumper 1990).

Britain is a signatory of several human rights declarations that provide for the role of parental choice in education. The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child stipulates that "the best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents." The United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides for state respect of parental rights in education. Section 76 of the 1944 Education Act has a provision for parental choice in schooling, albeit one couched in terms of providing efficient education with "the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure." This was further expanded by the Education Act of 1980, which allows parents to state a preference as to choice of schooling for their children and to state reasons for that choice.

The European Convention on Human Rights requires the state to respect the right of parents to ensure education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. The impact of this document has already been seen in Britain's educational system (Parker-Jenkins 1988[a]). The requirement concerning parental wishes presumably could be applicable to the broad educational needs arising from the Islamic faith. Muslims may be inclined to litigate in Strasbourg in the future and to protest morally unacceptable curricula if they fail to find redress through domestic channels. Thus far, the government has shown itself unwilling to allow exemption from subjects other than religion and sex education. A recent example of this concerns the Brethren, a "fundamentalist" Christian group which has sent over one thousand two hundred letters of complaint to the secretary of state for educa-

tion and science on the grounds that new information technology courses made obligatory by the National Curriculum conflict with their religious beliefs. They also maintain that the use of computers, television, and video is strictly forbidden in the New Testament (NCC 1989). The government, while not allowing these students to withdraw from work involving computers, has suggested that they opt for private education (TES 1989). This is clearly impractical without financial support, and it does not address such key issues as parental concern over the extent of state domination of education and the right of parents to dictate the conscience of their children.

There are several aspects of the curriculum which could provide test cases at the European Court. Litigation takes an average of six years, by which time most pupils will have completed their secondary school studies. Despite the lengthy procedure, some parents are prepared to use the European forum on the grounds that their convictions have not been respected, as they eagerly did in the last decade over the issue of physical chastisement as a disciplinary sanction in schools (Parker-Jenkins 1988[b]). Ironically, a group of white, British-born parents in Dewsbury, Yorkshire, have petitioned Strasbourg with the claim that the predominance of Asian students in the only elementary school available to them has resulted in their children suffering cultural deprivation (TES 1987). Whether such advocacy for choice in schooling is racism by another name or a genuine desire to ensure a child is educated in "the British way of life" is a dilemma that has yet to be resolved (Parker-Jenkins 1987). Certainly, the Commission for Racial Equality has argued in a report of a formal investigation into the Cleveland Educational Authority (1989), parental choice in schooling based on racial grounds is a violation of the 1976 Race Relations Act.

Legal remedies may thus be sought by both Muslim and "British" parents seeking education in accordance with religious or philosophical convictions. Further, financial support will continue to be demanded for existing Muslim schools, although it is unlikely to be given unless there is sufficient political will to ensure parity of treatment with other denominational groups. A recent High Court ruling quashing the government's decision not to allocate public money to a Muslim primary school means that the secretary of state for education and science will have to review the situation (*Times Educational Supplement* 1992).

Conclusion

In the meantime, sensitivity to Muslim needs, updating the curriculum, and undertaking a critical inspection of teaching materials will continue to be at the forefront of this debate. There is a clear need to foster a multicultural perspective within discrete subject areas, particularly at the secondary school

level, and to boost the morale and identity of Muslim children. Muslim matters will not disappear from an administrator's frame of reference, but rather will find expression in parent dissatisfaction and community advocacy. It is far better to develop a policy that addresses areas of concern and provides enlightened school leadership while there is still time, so that the use of crisis-management techniques can be avoided.

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