

Muslims and the Educational System in Great Britain: a Trojan Horse or a Parade Pony?

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Introduction

European states approach Islam according to their laws and traditions regarding religion. In Britain the Anglican Church has a privileged position and the constitutional status makes it the state church. When it comes to education, the 1944 Education Act had set the foundations of the system and the 1988 Education Reform Act provided a framework whereby education was placed in the hands of Local Education Authorities (LEA) with a substantial autonomy handed over to the individual head teachers. Nielsen (2004, p. 56) notices that the 1944 Act was a compromise between the state and the churches and needs to be read in an appropriate context (for instance remembering that compulsory primary education was introduced in Britain only in 1870). This compromise enabled the state to take over the responsibility for education in exchange for continuing commitment to teaching religion within the secularised system. The 1944 Education Act also stipulated that the nature of Religious Education (RE) would continue to be Christian and Bible-based.

At the same time, for some thirty years multiculturalism has been a trademark of the British educational system. Cultural pluralism was endorsed and, at least on paper, integrated into the curricula. This chapter examines recent developments in the educational system in the UK with regards to multiculturalism and the controversies it evokes. On the one hand, it is claimed that multiculturalism does not have a meaningful and influential form and as such resembles a pony paraded around for the sake of appearances. Other approaches indicate that it has a harmful effect on the educational system and the society at large. In fact, it is both due the fact that education in Great Britain lost vision and allowed for the 'ideals' to be replaced by the 'ideology' resulting in a fundamental disagreement regarding the purpose of education. After providing a brief overview of the multicultural education in Britain, the chapter moves on to contextualize the main argument analysing the case study: operation 'Trojan Horse' – a plot to take over of city schools by the Islamists.

Historical overview

When sketching the timeline of multicultural education in Britain, one needs to venture 50 years back in time when an influx of migrants prompted changes in teaching

and thinking about teaching. It needs to be noted that the burst of immigration in the 1960s caught everyone by surprise; the system was unadjusted, schools and individual teachers entirely unprepared. As early as the 1970s, some practical concessions were made to accommodate the needs of Muslim children signalling the dawn of the multicultural era. The listed matters included concerns regarding RE, school worship, uniform dress-code (including issues connected with physical education and swimming) and dietary requirements (provision of *halal*¹ food). At that point parents were directly approaching individual schools which made independent decisions in each of the submitted cases. The biggest progress was made with regards to the school meals, but also the school uniform policy has been relaxed to allow Muslim girls to wear scarves. These changes went hand in hand with general restructuring of the educational system (e.g. substantial reduction of single-sex schools) that was also undertaken in this period and continuing demographical transformation of British society. Already by the end of the 1980s across Britain there were numerous schools with Muslim majority reaching, in some cases, up to 90 per cent.

Initial schools' response towards the educational challenge posed by Muslim pupils was concentration on English-language teaching and/or transportation services to even out the proportion of children with foreign backgrounds in schools. Nonetheless, the constant underachievement of the minority children opened the door to the concept of multicultural and anti-racist education. This was based on an assumption that a monocultural and occidental teaching inhibits pupils with foreign background. This process was highlighted by the *Education for All* report produced by Lord Swann commission.

Undoubtedly, by that point a growing community of children adhering to religions other than Christianity was present at schools. What is more, for them and, perhaps more importantly, for their parents and community leaders, religion was a significant identity marker and a potent symbol of belonging. The new RE syllabus was introduced in 1975 recognizing the multifaith nature of the modern British society and met with a growing disquiet among Muslim leaders. The improved RE syllabus was published in 1984 and this edition was rejected both by the teachers and the Muslim community. While the former objected that it is educationally unacceptable because it comes close to nurturing faith, the latter regarded objectionable the secular foundations of the syllabus rendering all religions equally valid. Interestingly, *Education for All* report praised RE for truly multicultural approach to teaching already signalling lack of mutual understanding pertaining to the constitutive foundations of education and not merely to its implementation².

Already then the first try to get the schools under Muslim control could be observed. Muslim Parents' Association in Bradford made an unsuccessful attempt to change five schools with a large Muslim majority into voluntary aided schools under Muslim control. The application was made through official channels and was a natural bid on the Muslim part to have educational establishments of similar status as the Church of England or

¹ Halal (Arab.) – lawful and/or allowed; in accordance with Islamic rules.

² Later, the Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education were established to advise on the teaching of RE. They comprised of representatives of religions that reflected principal faiths in the area. In the 1990s, these councils started working on new RE syllabus with each faith group being able to determine the content related to their religion. This enabled biased views to be taught. For instance a draft on “Teaching about Islam in Primary School” present Muslim beliefs as objective facts, e.g. statements reads “The Qur’an is the word of Allah revealed to Muhammad”, instead of “Muslims believe that...”.

the Roman Catholic communities (each had around 2,000 of voluntary aided schools). It should be noted that the Church of England staunchly supported these demands with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Rochester voicing their support (BBC News, 2003). The latter observed that the state-funded Muslim schools would be an example of Christian-Muslim co-existence (Garner, 1998). The authorities' refusal was motivated in terms of the danger of social segregation and presumably poor quality of the education. The latter argument was based on the fact that newly founded private Muslims schools were badly staffed and suffered constant financial shortages, while the former pointed towards integration as a key factor promoting tolerance, achieving understanding between various communities, and enhancing social cohesion (BBC News, 2001). A conclusion that such schools would contribute to a separatist 'ghetto' mentality (BBC News, 2003a) determined the outcome of the decision-making process.

This failure to obtain denominational schools funded by the government did not dissuade the Muslim community. Another attempt to influence the educational establishment was undertaken by the Bradford Council of Mosques which started a campaign against a local head teacher, Ray Honeyford, who had written an article against multicultural and anti-racist education. It resulted in a successful removal of the head teacher who agreed for an early retirement (Scruton, 2014).

Throughout the 1980s further concessions were made towards Muslim pupils. These differed from one place to another, and in some cases the cooperation was less successful, in other more productive. Already then the City of Birmingham set up a Muslim Liaison Committee to obtain as much as possible from within the educational system to benefit the biggest number of Muslim pupils as oppose to investing in endeavours which, aiming at creating a separate system, would serve only a minority. It resulted in the official guidelines advising how to meet religious and cultural needs of Muslim pupils including the issues of prayer facilities, dietary concerns, uniform issues and problems concerning school curriculum, especially pertaining to RE, drama, music and sex education. The city council surmised that if not for this proactive approach, more radical demands for voluntary aided schools would be put forward. Authorities' goodwill based also on the understanding that such cooperation would open up a space for dialogue and mutual understanding and prevent covert attempts at implementing Islamic values into the educational system.

In 1988 the *Education Reform Act* was passed and it established a framework which helped to change "the educational arena into the battleground" (Nielsen, 2004, p. 162) instead of helping alleviate the communal divides which have been exposed for at least two decades. In the first place, the role of parents and the local community was considerably strengthened with the board of governors being in control of the school budget. Thus, the influence of Parents' Association and a board with a substantial proportion of Muslim members and/or chaired by a Muslim parent was very pronounced and a factor to reckon with already in the 1980s.

Communitarisation, if not ghettoisation, as Roy (2004, p. 138) observes, accentuated the end of the 1990s. This phenomenon, whereby religious values are enacted by social pressure, was enhanced in the UK by faith schools which contributed to the deepening of cultural differences and widening the social gap. When in 1997 the Labour government came to power it further emphasized the importance of multicultural policies and approaches without a sound examination of the foundations they were built upon. In

fact, multiculturalism became a Parade Pony for the authorities; a phenomenon very pronounced on the narrative level, yet not very meaningful in the daily praxis. These trends only progressed throughout the first decade of the new millennium. Especially, in 2000 Parekh, one of the prominent proponents of multiculturalism, who has made significant contributions for multiculturalism to flourish in the UK, published the *Parekh Report* which looked into the future of multi-ethnic Britain. Finally, the *Ajegbo Report* from 2007 proposed greater diversity within English education (Race, 2012).

Multicultural Education in Britain

2011 Census revealed that White population in Britain decreased to 86% (48.2 million), palpably illustrating that the ethnic minority population in the UK has been on the rise. According to gathered data, about 2.7 million Muslims live in Britain what renders Muslim community the largest religious minority group (ONS, 2012). Approximately one million of all Muslims in Britain are South Asians, thus Abbas (2005) argues that South Asians, and particularly people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, represent the largest Muslim ethnic minority. More specifically, Pakistanis are the largest and dominant Muslim ethnic community and account for 43% of the British Muslims.

British Muslims live predominantly in cities and industrial areas, they also tend to concentrate in certain neighbourhoods. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2012) the main regions that host British Muslims are Tower Hamlets, Newham, Blackburn with Darwen and Luton. Additionally, more than half of the British Muslim population is under the age of seventeen (i.e. school age) and the youngest age figure of all religious groups in England and Wales belong precisely to the Muslim community (Peach, 2005). This clearly indicates that the future of education in Britain is connected to Muslims. In fact, the school pupil population of England in 2011 was as follows: White (80%), Mixed (4%), Indian (2%), Pakistani (4%), Black (5%) and Chinese (0.3%) (Boyle, Charles, 2011). Furthermore, according to the 2011 school census results (Maylor, Rock, Rollock, 2006), 20% of school population is from ethnic minorities and almost half of these pupils (about 700,000) speak a first language other than English.

The education system in the UK, aside from having some differences rooted in decentralization, mostly follows the European Union model. Accordingly, British educational services are realized on three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary, of which the first two are compulsory, whereas the last stage is optional. In England, free of charge statutory and full-time schooling is offered for all pupils aged five through 16³.

Due to the changes discussed above, British multiculturalism, which has undergone several developments (Parekh, 1998), has quickly gained currency in the United Kingdom as a response that opts for symbiosis and synthesis rather than dichotomies and polarities (Selby, 2008). A multicultural society is a society in which several distinct ethnic, religious,

³ Further details pertaining to the educational system in the UK can be found in S. Schneider (2008). The application of the ISCED to the UK's educational qualifications. In S. Schneider (ed.). *The international standard classification of education (ISCED-97): an evaluation of content and criterion validity for 15 European countries* (pp. 281–300). Mannheim: Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung (MZES).

and cultural groups attempting to find ways of preserving their identities and maintaining their lifestyles. Simultaneously, society needs cohesion and a sense of common belonging in order to survive, and education is often invoked as a means to achieve this end.

Undoubtedly, in today's post modern environment, education is one of the most effective ways to promote community cohesion and to prepare citizens for political, social and economic life. In this context, education is also regarded as a key 'domesticating' factor for ethnic minorities. Without a sufficient level of education, ethnic minorities face both poor qualification as well as discrimination, and subsequently, they may experience marginalisation (Blackstone, 1998).

Since the 1970s, multicultural education gained currency in Britain, especially through conferences, research, publications, parents' advocacy, community lobbying, and the media (Figueroa, 2004). It needs to be emphasized that although multiculturalism in Britain is typically recognized as a demographic fact, it has not been formally affirmed in any constitutional, legislative or parliamentary sense. As far as the educational system is concerned, by the early 1990s, most local boards had integrated multiculturalism into their curricula (Multicultural Policies: United Kingdom, 2014). Up until recently, UK schools have been perceived as a place where community cohesion, tolerance and inclusion are promoted and flourished among the families, pupils and teachers. However due to recent developments, they have been also accused of fostering racial segregation, religious, class or ethnic discrimination (Wilson, 2012). These trends were so pronounced as to prompt some scholars to claim that the whole issue of multicultural education has ceased to exist in any meaningful or influential form (Russell, 1998).

Ideals versus Ideology

Nielsen's analysis of British education with regard to Muslims leaves no doubt that the question of religion was at the eye of the educational storm. On one hand the *Swann Report* approached Muslims in terms of ethnicity and/or culture rather than as a group professing distinct religious principles and values. For this reason, the report concluded that RE was one of the few subjects which espoused the multicultural nature of British society. On the other, Muslim community renounced its relativist nature, revealing simultaneously a much deeper rift, i.e. a fundamental disagreement regarding the purpose of education. In other words, Nielsen (2004, p. 58) summarizes the general aim to "create an autonomous and critical individual was decried as being a refusal to accept the absolute of the divine".

Whereas the state was understandably concerned about academic underachievement of Muslim children, it envisaged solutions different from those proposed by the Muslim community for whom the answer was to provide more Muslim state-funded schools and introduce reforms to the curriculum to account for Muslim sensibilities. While, it is hardly plausible that establishing more faith schools that teach more about Islam would solve pupils' educational problems, two trends are palpable:

Firstly, it became apparent that some Muslim schools are not educating pupils in line with accepted standards, thereby depriving the children of developing abilities necessary for effective citizenship (English, 2004) and fail to teach them about the responsibilities

and obligations to British society or to encourage them to respect and appreciate other cultures (Garner, 2005). It can also be observed that the most active in the educational area are those organisations and communities, whose agenda was set on prevention of assimilation of Muslim children into British society like the Muslim Educational Trust (the oldest Muslim educational organisation in Britain, founded in 1966), which in fact belongs to the Jama'at-i Islami⁴ network. Another example is al-Muhajiroun⁵, whose representatives compared secular schools to 'slaughterhouses'⁶ or Hizb ut-Tahrir⁷ whose two members were the main catalyst for the Shabina Begum case⁸. Commenting on this, Boris Johnson (2014), the former Mayor of London, said that it "wasn't even about religion, or conscience, or the dictates of faith. At least it wasn't primarily about those things. It was about power. It was about who really runs the schools in this country, and about how far militant Islam could go in bullying the poor, cowed, gelatinous and mentally spongiform apparatus of the British state." Arguably, religious emphasis on the educational process changes school into seminary-like establishments. An example of such approach is Iftikhar Ahmad of the London School of Islamics who proposed for the Muslim majority schools to be placed under control of Muslim educational trusts and charities (ISIC, 2005, p. 91).

In 2011 there were some 7000 faith schools in England, including approximately 12 Muslim schools⁹; the Imam Muhammad Zakariya School in Dundee (Scotland) was the only Muslim school in the UK outside England, until its closure in 2006. The British faith school system stands in a clear opposition to the French one, where the number of Muslim faith schools is negligent in comparison to the UK. At the same time, France has one of the largest Muslims populations in Europe. But it needs to be remembered that Britain, as opposed to France, has a long tradition of faith schools so it is only natural that Muslims adopt the traditions of given country.

Having said this, Sookhdeo (2007, p. 181) warns, many Muslim parents are unhappy with sending their children to secular schools. The reason for this is the fact that while

⁴ Jama'at-i Islami, (est. 1941 by Abdul Ala Maududi), an Islamist political party and conservative movement with an ideology very close to that of Muslim Brotherhood.

⁵ Al-Muhajiroun ('religious migrants'), a radical movement in Britain, banned in 2010 under the UK Terrorism Act 2000.

⁶ Glenn Owen, Religious row erupts over school scarf ban, *The Times*, 28 January 2004.

⁷ Hizb ut-Tahrir (Liberation Party), a movement with a political goal of establishing caliphate by non-violent means advocating simultaneously that there can be no compromise with any non-Islamic government. It eschews application of Sharia as its top most priority and has a bottom-up approach.

⁸ Shabina Begum (at that time, aged 16) a UK citizen of Bangladeshi origin was a pupil at Denbigh High School in Luton; educational establishment with a diverse pupil community. In accordance with the multicultural approach, apart from uniforms incorporating trousers or skirts, female pupils at Denbigh High School are also offered a uniform based on the traditional Pakistani garb called *shalwar kameez*. This was decided upon via consultations with the local community. For two years, Shabina attended the school without complaint, but in September 2002, accompanied by her brother, Shuweb Rahman, and another young male (both connected with Hizb ut-Tahrir), she demanded to be allowed to wear the long coat-like garment known as the *jilbab* arguing that *shalwar kameez* is not compliant with the requirements of modesty and Islamic dress prescribed by Sharia law. Shabina refused to attend the school for three years and issued a claim for judicial review on the grounds that the school had interfered with her Human Rights to manifest her religion (Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights) and her right to education.

⁹ All data available from: <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school/faith-schools>.

mainline British society has accepted the positive aspect of secularism, which includes separation of religion from the state, most Muslims do not accept such division.

The list of arguments against secular schools put forward by the Muslim community is extensive. Sookhdeo (2007, p. 181) summarises the claims as the set of requirements is consistent across the cases. They can be divided into two broad groups: pragmatic concerns and underlying causes. Pragmatic concerns are focused on specific arrangements allowing Muslim children for rigorous observance of Islamic rules. They refer to mixed-gender education, diet (lack of *halal* food provision), dress (uniform dress-code as well as 'immodest' dress at PE lessons), lack of Muslim prayer facilities, problems with the assemblies (Christian components in school assembly), collective worship, Muslim holidays and observance of Ramadan, as well as lack of Muslim teachers who could be role models for the children (The London School of Islamics Trust, 2014).

Second group of pragmatic demands is directed at the curriculum (Kepel, 1997, p. 109–111) seen un-Islamic and, depending on the case, entrenched either with Christian or secular values. Accordingly, protests against sex education, especially in mixed classes are put forward. Teaching of music, drama and art, which some consider un-Islamic is criticised. Some parents point to the fact that all these practices prevalent in British secular schools amount to various forms of institutionalised racism, cultural imperialism in action or islamophobia (ISIC, 2005, p. 91). Teaching about Christianity in RE is deemed redundant. Sometimes Urdu or Arabic lessons are asked for (BBC News, 2002). In all cases it needs to be underlined that, Muslims are concerned with religious rather than academic aspect of the teaching.

While schools and authorities concentrate on pragmatic issues, the underlying concerns show altogether a different pattern. The objections imply that only Muslim schools would enable Muslim pupils to develop a true Muslim identity protected from the influences of the permissive secular society. This Islamic ethos would in turn provide the children with a strong sense of belonging and make them better British citizens.

The underlying causes inhibit not a desire to improve educational achievements of Muslim children, but to insulate them from the influence of mainstream society and the British culture. Hence, repeated appeals for an environment which would allow the pupils to develop a Muslim identity and prevent cutting off the cultural roots are relatively common. Furthermore, protection from the influences of the secular society and avoidance of the culture clash is welcomed (Parker-Jenkins, 1999). Sense of belonging and peace of mind are in this context necessary for active learning and hence successful integration demands that state schools must change to meet Muslim expectations (Mirza, 1996). At the root of all the underlying causes one can find the source of all the troubles, i.e. the phenomenon of 'anglicising' (Dosanjh, Ghuman, 1996) Muslim children which creates identity crises and other social problems.

One needs to distinguish between the seemingly reasonable responses to real needs of minority groups and those measures which offer Islam a privileged position within the school system like it was in the case of "Official Guidelines on Meeting Religious and cultural Needs of Muslim Children" issued by LEA in Birmingham. Firstly, the city of Birmingham never has been so responsive to the sensibilities of Hindu, Sikh, Jewish or Christian children and secondly, it did not stop the radical element from taking over state schools during a plot also known as the operation "Trojan Horse."

A Trojan Horse

As evident from this brief overview, before the “Trojan Horse” plot was conceived, several attempts by groups of Muslims taking over state schools using the cultural diversity as a cover had already been undertaken. Initially those were conducted via official means and channels, and failed. Subsequently, unofficial but open mode of operation was adopted like it was in case of the campaign targeting Ray Honeyford. Eventually, more and more covert tactics were employed. It could also be observed that the same educational establishment was targeted more than once, Washwood Heath Technology College in Birmingham bring the prime example. In 2002, the headmaster and over half of the teaching staff resigned claiming that a clique of Muslim governors was undermining them (Swingler, 2002). As a consequence, huge scandal followed and the situation was normalised. However, not for long, since the Washwood Heath Technology College was also one of the schools connected to the operation “Trojan Horse.” Thus, the ‘novelty’ of the Trojan Horse is not the nature and direction of proposed educational developments, but rather their scale, breadth and the level of coordination between schools.

Operation “Trojan Horse” refers to an organised and coordinated attempt to introduce an Islamist ethos into several schools in Birmingham (Wintour, 2014). The name, based on the Greek mythology, refers to the wooden horse dragged by the Trojans within their city. The horse was in fact a trap full of Grecian soldiers, who sneaked out at night, slew the guards, opened the city gates and set fire to Troy, thus conquering the city not in an open fight but rather by covert operation and trickery.

In March 2014, a letter was leaked to the press detailing how to wrest control of a school, introduce Islamic teaching ethos and speculating about the possibility of expanding the scheme to other cities (BBC News, 2014a). As the investigation progressed (Clarke, 2014), Tahir Alam, the chairman of the Park View Educational Trust which runs six schools in Birmingham, was found to have written a 72-page document for the Muslim Council of Britain in 2007 detailing a blueprint for the Islamisation of secular state schools (Gilligan, 2014b). There was clear evidence of coordinated action by Islamist hard-liners to remove secular head-teachers and impose an intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos on pupils.

The ‘golden nugget’ of the investigation was a series of messages on the Whatsapp instant messaging site in which teachers at the centre of the plot, attacked non-Muslims, described gay people as “satanic animals” and said that women’s “perpetual role” was “in the kitchen”. These and other similar remarks displayed in an objective and irrefutable way, what the plotters think and what values they espouse in an environment they regard safe and not under scrutiny. The two key teachers in the plot, Mohammed “Mozz” Hussain, head of Park View School, and Razwan Faraz, deputy head at Nansen Primary School, have been suspended.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OfSTED) chief, Sir Michael Wilshaw, accused Birmingham City Council of a “serious failure” in protecting children from extremism. Simultaneously, Birmingham’s leader, Sir Albert Bore, said that the Council accepted the OfSTED findings that schools in the city were failing pupils (BBC News, 2014). Birmingham City Council’s report found no evidence of a “conspiracy” to promote “violent extremism or radicalization” values, but was still highly critical.

OfSTED and the Education Funding Authority in 21 schools in Birmingham confirmed (Gilligan, 2014a) it had found evidence of an organised campaign by Islamists and that head teachers had been “marginalised or forced out of their jobs” (Pidd, 2014). The inquiry found evidence of religious extremism in 13 schools as school governors and teachers tried to promote and enforce radical Islamic values. Within next month, Birmingham City Council admitted that it had received “hundreds” of allegations of plots similar to those illustrated in the letter, some dating back over 20 years (Elkes, 2014). Simultaneously, a number of governors and the Muslim Council of Britain dubbed the reaction of authorities to the plot a “Islamophobic witch-hunt,” while some have dismissed the plot as a “malicious hoax” (Muslim Council of Britain, 2014).

Among the many schools involved Golden Hillock School, Nansen Primary School, Park View School (all run by the Park View Educational Trust), and Oldknow Academy and Saltley School were placed in special measures after inspectors found systemic failings including the schools having failed to take adequate steps to safeguard pupils against extremism. Another school under investigation, Alston Primary, was already in special measures. A sixth school was labelled inadequate for its poor educational standards and twelve schools were found needing of improvements. Three schools were commended (Mctague, 2014). The government terminated its funding arrangement with three of the schools (BBC News, 2014b). Birmingham City Council imposed a temporary freeze on the appointment of school governors after probes into Operation Trojan Horse were announced (Hiles, 2014). OfSTED subsequently expanded their investigation (Paton, 2014) into schools in East London, Bradford and Luton over concerns regarding a limited curriculum (Islamisation of teaching) and pupils’ detachment from the wider community (insulating the children from mainstream British culture).

In terms of educational practices and the general ambiance at schools, the inquiry has found that children were taught that all Christians are liars and attempts were made to introduce Sharia law in classrooms (e.g. single-sex classes). For instance, a detailed summary of evidence suggested that there was an attempt to introduce Sharia law at the Al-Fuqan school, and when a woman was recommended for a job, it was suggested a “man with a beard” was needed. Posters warning children that if they did not pray they would “go to hell” were displayed in schools. Christmas and Diwali celebration were cancelled and children were not allowed to use a doll to represent Jesus in a nativity play. At the Oldknow academy, children were told at an assembly that they should not send Christmas cards and that Mary was not the mother of Jesus. Children were asked whether they believed in Christmas and encouraged to chant “no we don’t”. Moreover, the plotters who Islamised the secular academy, ran subsidised Muslim-only trips to Mecca. At the Golden Hillock School a teacher was reported to have advised the children during an assembly “not to listen to Christians as they were all liars”, while another also reportedly told pupils they were “lucky to be Muslims and not ignorant like Christians and Jews”. At Nansen School the study of French was replaced by the study of Arabic and Islamic religious assemblies were reinstated. A total of 28 female teaching assistants were dismissed and girls at the Park View Academy were taught that women who refused to have sex with their husbands would be punished by angels “from dusk to dawn”. Girls were taught that a “good” Muslim woman wears a headscarf and ties up her hair (Swinford, 2014).

In the wake of these findings, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, agreed that “protecting our children [was] one of the first duties of government” (McSmith, 2014) and announced proposals to send OfSTED to any school without warning, saying that the schools in question had been able to stage a “cover-up” previously. Sir Albert Bore, Birmingham’s leader, said that the authorities “have previously shied away from tackling this problem out of a misguided fear of being accused of racism” (Sparrow, Adams, 2014).

A separate review, commissioned by the Ministry of Education, written by Peter Clarke (2014), the former head of the Metropolitan police’s counterterrorism command, found evidence of “co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained” attempts to introduce an “intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos” in schools. Clarke found that the schools were trying to impose “segregationist attitudes and practices of a hardline and politicised strain Sunni Islam.” Contrary to the conclusions of the local investigation, the governmental report pointed towards “evidence that there are a number of people, associated with each other and in positions of influence in schools and governing bodies, who espouse, sympathise with or fail to challenge extremist views,” and indicated that there had been “co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained” attempts “by a number of associated individuals, to introduce an intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos” into schools in Birmingham. The report concluded that there was a “determined effort” by manipulative governors to introduce unacceptable practices, undermine head teachers and deny students a broad and balanced education (Swinford, 2014).

Governmental report seems to indicate that multiculturalism can indeed play a role of the parade pony. In certain circumstances, cultural diversity becomes an ideology on its own instead of being a value which contributes to the society’s wellbeing. In this context, the report found that the extremism went unchecked because the council disastrously prioritised community cohesion over “doing what is right.” More importantly, the report found that senior council officials and elected members were apparently aware of these issues, but dealt with them on a case-by-case basis rather than making “any serious attempt to see if there was a pattern,” though it is not clear whether this was due to “community cohesion,” an “issue of education management,” or appeasement (Clarke, 2014).

Interestingly, the investigator disclosed that even after his inquiry was established, officials and senior politicians in the area had denied all knowledge of the plot. In a press interview, the investigator confessed that very late in the inquiry his research team found an email buried in a mass of documentation submitted by the council which showed that the authorities “had known about it all along.” Such finding bears a close resemblance to the Rotherham child sexual exploitation scandal whereby British-Pakistani men were found guilty of a series of sexual offences against girls as young as 12 with the Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council failing to act effectively against the abuse. Also in that case an independent inquiry established that in some cases the authorities acknowledged that such practices were taking place, but refused to act based on the multicultural dogma¹⁰.

¹⁰ Further allegations of a cover-up, including the theft of documents from a council researcher’s office, were made in a Home Affairs Select Committee report in October 2014. Details regarding the inquiry can be found in: Jay, Alexis (21 August 2014). “Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham (1997–2013)”. *Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council* available from: http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1407/independent_inquiry_cse_in_rotherham.

Both scenarios reveal, in the words of the Home Secretary, Theresa May (Tran, 2014), a pattern of institutional political correctness. However, it is apparent that the investigation to the “Trojan Horse” plot has achieved is that it is no longer possible to immediately invoke islamophobia and racism, if anyone raises serious questions about issues pertaining to multicultural education (Gilligan, 2014c).

Conclusions

One must question whether the “Trojan Horse” was the last try to tamper with the multicultural ethos of British educational system. Amid indications that the plot was flaring up again and broadening its reach, Peter Clarke (2014) suggested that the affair in Birmingham was merely the “tip of the iceberg” when it comes to Islamist infiltration in British schools. He divulged that a huge amount of material did not appear in the final report due to lack of sufficient evidence which was impossible to provide in the time allowed for the investigation. Indeed, my analysis suggests that since it was not the only one attempt of takeover (Hiles 2014a), it would be imprudent to expect it to be the final challenge. Consequently, one must also probe what are the reasons of such self-perpetuating cycle.

Ten years ago Roy (2004, p. 164) claimed that there was a pronounced generation gap between immigrants and their children, especially with regard to education. While the parents were not educated at all, children were going through a state school system thus gaining academic credentials. These children, after graduating are not only better educated than the older generations but also find their approach to religion unsatisfying. The first generation migrants did not transmit their views on Islam; the subsequent ones do and believe it to be a crucial component of education. This is exacerbated by another issue. In the overall crisis of authority, Laqueur (2007, p. 45) argues, school has the least authority: “Many teachers do not succeed in imposing their authority, for if they dare to punish pupils for misbehaviour or make any demands on them, they are accused of racism and discrimination.”

In many aspects preparation of the educational system meagre at best, for instance, teacher population of schools does not concur with the student profile of the schools. According to Boyle and Charles (2001, p. 300), “in all of England’s school regions (with the exception of London) over 97% of the teachers are White (London has 83% White teachers).” Yet, Laqueur is only partially right; the school is not disrespected a priori and unreflectively. The distrust and lack of respect comes due to the fact that the school represents certain set of values and promotes specific attitudes that are not welcome in the Muslim community. Furthermore, it is obvious that majority of Muslim parents prefer schools where children will be taught Islam while deprived of the opportunity to be familiarised with other religions and that active promotion of multiculturalism is not within their interest at all. Laqueur (2004, p. 219–220) concludes that “the Muslim children come from patriarchal families, likely to be beaten for even light violations of the strict rules prevailing. Their encounter with progressive education must have been a cultural shock. The teachers know little about Islam and its way of life, and their antiauthoritarian training does not help in such an encounter.”

Undeniably, increasing polarisation on ethnic and religious issues could be observed throughout the years. In the words of Nielsen (2004, p. 57), among English parents grew a sentiment against the perception that the minority children had increasingly been taking precedence over those of 'white' majority. This is confirmed by Laqueur (2007, p. 182) who, commenting on the educational practices in East End London, reminded how the "Local schools have received special allocations for helping Bangladeshi schoolchildren (under a regulation called Section 11), and this has created the impression among white parents that it has become the priority of teachers to fail white children so that the school will be seen as doing their jobs helping the minorities – and getting more allocations." The indigenous community, Nielsen (2004, p. 60) reminded, were concerned about Muslim children outnumbering pupils from the majority groups and trying to prevent 'Asian take-overs' of traditionally 'white' schools or to try to allocate their children in 'white' schools as opposed to those classified as 'Asian'.

The decisive importance of education with regard to young Muslim generations has been emphasized by many authors (Laqueur, 2007, p. 207) stating that "Educators in Europe who have closely followed the education of young Muslims believe that the older ones...are largely a lost generation" and that the emphasis should be on education of the younger ones. On the other hand, the "Muslims on Policy Reform" report published in 2004 went as far as to claim that the state education system was failing Muslim pupils (The Daily Telegraph, 2004). The above analysis elucidates that the British example of dealing with the 'moderate fundamentalists' as if these were the only authentic representatives of the Muslims community has not been a great success since it only led to strengthening the anti-Western elements in the educational system.

In the wake of the findings of the "Trojan Horse" investigation, Michael Gove, the Education Secretary, announced that all schools in the country will have to promote "British values" of tolerance and fairness and said that teachers will be banned from the profession if they allow extremists into schools (Hope, 2014). Supporting this position, Dan Hodges (2014), former Labour MP, stated that "It was Islam that was being used as the Trojan Horse in these cases, not the schools. And attempting to brush that under the carpet helps no one". This led him to believe that "All faith-based schools are Trojan Horse schools".

Such conclusion was nothing new and similar voices are abound. Already in 2002, Frank Dobson, a Labour MP and former Health Secretary, in an open letter to the Guardian proposed to open the faith schools to students of other faith (Cf. Roy 2004, p. 138), while his colleague, Ann Cryer (Herbert, 2002) accused mosque schools of subjecting their pupils to outdated forms of discipline like beatings. Two years later, chair of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee in the House of Commons reinforced this position claiming that faith schools are divisive and isolate different communities from each other and from the wider society (Curtis, 2004). After the "Trojan Horse" had been revealed, almost 40 leading academics, peers and clerics called for a sweeping inquiry into the role of religion in British schools. Schools' impact upon the cohesiveness of society is profound say parts and this chapter showed how elements of the British education system are becoming insular and divisive. In this context, clear rules about how far faith groups should influence schools are urgently needed particularly that the place of religion in schools has not been properly debated for 70 years, since the 1944 Education Act (Bingham, 2014). However, issuing a call for a sweeping inquiry into religion in education

should not be equated with a campaign against the faith schools in general, as these over many years have greatly contributed to the excellence of British education. Such move would mean throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

As a consequence of the rapidly growing population of immigrants in the British society and schools, Britain started to recognize itself as a multicultural nation (Figueroa, 2004). In the past ignorance and fears of other cultures was prompting Muslim parents to send their children to schools where they would mingle exclusively with pupils from their own ethnic and cultural background. At present it seems that a desire to insulate them from the mainstream British society seems to be a decisive factor catalysing the processes which culminated in the “Trojan Horse” plot. The underlying causes identified in this chapters need to be removed in order to disable the drive to create a parallel educational universe. While schools must intensify their efforts to help minority children, there is also need for parents, ethnic and religious communities and the local public bodies involved to change the attitude to education in general.

Unfortunately, heretofore it looks like the main bulk of Muslim activity in the educational sphere aims at educating Muslim children in Muslim schools isolated from the mainstream influence and creating a parallel society. Furthermore, radical elements are often at the forefront of such endeavours. To justify proposed developments, these are presented under the pretences of multiculturalism. Nonetheless, should these trends continue, they could insulate communities and radicalise young generations by reinforcing divides and prejudices.

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