

# Stand for Peace

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## UNPACKING THE TROJAN HORSE

Islamism, Gender Equality  
and Multiculturalism Policy

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Two global Islamist movements – Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood – speak for an extremely small proportion of British Muslims, but have managed to obtain considerable influence over educational institutions and public understanding of British Islam. This paper examines Islamist attitudes and behaviours towards girls’ education and gender equality in Britain. We will examine these networks’ public statements and private practices, the manner in which these attitudes fit into British Islam as a whole, and attempt to answer how it is that relatively insignificant political movements have exerted such a powerful influence over the lives of British Muslim girls.

An analysis of the attitudes displayed by British political Islamic groups towards girls’ education and women’s rights demonstrates that British Islam is not one homogenous bloc, but a diverse community of differing religious sects and political movements. Although prominent Islamic groups aligned with Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood, such as the Muslim Council of Britain, are largely responsible for setting the standards by which British Muslims are taught in schools, surveys indicate that as few as 4% of British Muslims believe such groups represent their views.<sup>1</sup> Islamist publications on the education of Muslim children are reliable for our research question precisely because they seem an unreliable means to gauge the prevalent attitudes of British Muslims.

What has caused the disparity between the liberal ambitions of many British Muslims and the hardline ideals of Islamist community leaders? Certain aspects of gender inequality within British Islam perhaps came about as unintended consequence of Britain’s multiculturalism doctrine, which, the academic Lorenzo Vidino writes, “traditionally relied heavily on community leaders who act as trusted intermediaries between the community and the state, to whom the latter can delegate the administration of various services.”<sup>2</sup> By virtue of their political nature and ambitions, certain Islamist movements – able to organize themselves in a manner with which traditional cultural Muslim groups could not compete – were perceived by the authorities as community representatives, and thus became the bridge between government and Britain’s Muslim citizens. Consequently, gender inequality has been painted, in the eyes of others, as a problem of the entire Muslim community.

Although a large body of scholarship has already examined the conditions for Muslim women in Britain, these writings generally refer to a single Muslim or South Asian community. The debate over gender equality within British Islam should, in fact, be far more nuanced. Moreover, the varying approaches towards gender equality pursued by different British Islamic movements suggest that,

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<sup>1</sup> Munira Mirza, Abi Senthilkumaran and Zein Ja’far, *Living apart together: British Muslims and the paradox of multiculturalism* (London: Policy Exchange, 2007), accessed March 9, 2015, [http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/living apart together - jan 07.pdf](http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/living%20apart%20together%20-%20jan%2007.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Lorenzo Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 135.

because of the manner in which Britain's Muslim community is organized, the much-discussed issue of apparent gender inequality within British Islam is not necessarily a theological question, but rather a political problem.

## **Defining British Islam**

There have been few works published on the question of women's rights under particular Islamic political movements in Britain. Conversely, and unsurprisingly, there is a large amount of literature that examines the question of gender and schooling within British Islam as a whole. Much of this existing literature falls into the same trap occupied by much of the media and public commentators: the dogmatic presumption that British Islam is a single homogenous community. On the other hand, some research has been published about global Islamist movements' attitudes towards women's rights and education.

The prevailing work examining women's rights and "gender identity" among British Muslims has strongly focused on educational institutions. Much of this research, however, has utilized the terms "Muslim" and "South Asian" interchangeably. The academic Claire Dwyer, for example, conflates the religious and cultural backgrounds of young women interviewed for her studies of "diasporic identities," notwithstanding her passing acknowledgement of a competing "supranational Muslim identity."<sup>3</sup> Tahir Abbas suggests that even Muslim parents of "young working-class South Asian Muslim women in...schools... had confused Islam with South Asian culture."<sup>4</sup> Tehmina Basit tackles the complications of British Muslim identity by arguing: "While British Muslims are not a homogeneous group, a collective Muslim identity transcends the regional and sectarian differences when living in a non-Muslim country which is their adopted homeland."<sup>5</sup> My own research suggests otherwise, and that sectarian differences exert a powerfully divisive effect among British Muslims. It appears that ethnicity, culture and religion are all confusedly invoked by academics studying the education of Muslim girls in Britain.

Much of the existing scholarship has found a positive attitude towards girls' education among British Muslims. Tehmina Basit addresses the influence of Muslim parents, but does not write of Islamic movements' influence over educational institutions and practises; this may be because, at the time of

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<sup>3</sup> Claire Dwyer, "Negotiating Diasporic Identities: Young British South Asian Muslim Women," *Women's Studies International Forum* 23 (2000): 477.

<sup>4</sup> Tahir Abbas, "The Impact of Religio-cultural Norms and Values on the Education of Young South Asian Women," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24 (2003): 421

<sup>5</sup> Tehmina Basit, "I Want More Freedom, But Not Too Much," *Gender and Education* 9, no. 4 (1997): 437

Basit's writing, there were only a few Islamic schools in Britain. "The main objective of the parents," Basit writes, "seems to be to enculture the girls to become effective members of British society, without losing their Islamic religion."<sup>6</sup> The notion that British Muslim girls are pressed into to certain gender roles, Basit claims, is false: "Parents are helping their daughters to construct a British Muslim identity by means of a subtle combination of freedom and control."<sup>7</sup> The gradual introduction of segregated Islamic schools, academics such as Kaye Haw have argued, is a result of both the "unsolvable problems" of anti-Muslim racism in Britain as well as the desire by Muslim parents to provide an education for their children that allows for an Islamic identity.<sup>8</sup> These pieces of research do explicitly acknowledge the diversity of the South Asian population in Britain, but fail to expand upon the label of "Muslim." Tahir Abbas writes that, "All young South Asian women had supportive parents who actively encouraged them in education, irrespective of religion."<sup>9</sup> In the case of Islam, Abbas argues that Muslim parents in particular regard single-sex education as "fundamentally important" for their daughters, and "viewed education positively."<sup>10</sup> Although Abbas acknowledges the influence of Islamic identity over girls' education, and concedes the diversity of South Asian ethnic heritage, he does not explore the diversity of Islam – that is, the influence of external religious groups or political movements: "Religion appears especially important for young South Asian Muslim women who perceive their experiences of education almost entirely from the point of view of the religio-cultural domain in which they live."<sup>11</sup>

Not all previous research, however, has ignored or discounted the influence of fundamentalism within Muslim schools. In 1992, Saeeda Khanum published an account of her conversations with Muslim pupils at a school in the Northern English city of Bradford, and concludes that, "the education of Muslim girls has less to do with schooling than with the exercise of control by Muslim men over the lives of women in the family and wider community."<sup>12</sup> The establishment of Muslim faith schools, Khanum argues, was a result of the furore encouraged by political Islamic movements in response to the publishing of Salman Rushdie's book, *The Satanic Verses*: "Muslim schools are seen as the ideal way of maintaining a cultural cohesiveness, but demand for such institutions remained relatively

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<sup>6</sup> Basit, "I Want More Freedom, But Not Too Much," 436

<sup>7</sup> Tehmina Basit, "I Want More Freedom, But Not Too Much," 436.

<sup>8</sup> Kaye Haw, "Education for Muslim Girls in Contemporary Britain: Social and Political Dimensions," (PhD Diss., University of Nottingham, 1995)

<sup>9</sup> Abbas, "The Impact of Religio-cultural Norms and Values," 411

<sup>10</sup> Abbas, "The Impact of Religio-cultural Norms and Values," 412

<sup>11</sup> Abbas, "The Impact of Religio-cultural Norms and Values," 413

<sup>12</sup> Saeeda Khanum, "Education and the Muslim Girl," in *Refusing Holy Orders*, ed. Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval-Davis (London: Women Living Under Muslim Laws: 2000), 136.

mented until the Satanic Verses affair catapulted British ‘Muslims’ into the headlines.”<sup>13</sup> The writer Kenan Malik echoed this argument in his book, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, in which he writes that as a result of the politicisation of the Muslim community and the authorities’ introduction of multiculturalism policies, Bradford became “convulsed” with “demands for separate Muslim schools and for separate education for girls.”<sup>14</sup> Further to the Saeeda Khanum article in 1992, a few British think-tanks have examined gender equality within Muslim education. In 2009, the academic Denis MacEoin published a report entitled, *Music, Chess and Other Sins*, in which he examined segregation in British Muslim schools. This report is one of the few pieces of research that takes a look, albeit a cursory one, at the origins of hard-line Islamic values in schools. MacEoin notes the influence of scholars from the South Asian Deobandi sect of Islam over British schools such as the al-Jamiah al-Islamiyyah Darul Uloom, who argue that “men are more intelligent than women” and that girls should remain in the home rather than study.<sup>15</sup>

These emphases on fundamentalism, however, seem to be the exception rather than the norm. Most existing research focuses closely on the question of religious and cultural (or ethnic) identities. Katherine Brown writes that although there is a small amount of opposition among British Muslims to the concept of women’s education, “more debated with regard to the right to education within Muslim communities in the UK and in the British popular press is the nature of that education and the setting in which it should take place. In the research I conducted, Islamic single-sex schools and the issue of Muslim girl’s school uniforms in state schools as ways of fulfilling educational rights were commonly referred to.”<sup>16</sup> A number of academics claim that academia’s seeming obsession with Muslim clothing is itself discriminatory: Claire Dwyer writes of “patriarchal discourses” that “use young women’s dress as a marker for the boundaries of a collective religious or ethnic community.”<sup>17</sup> The academic Denis MacEoin has argued otherwise, suggesting that schools in which schoolgirls are forced to wear Islamic clothing such as the hijab or full-face coverings are evidence of “hardline Puritanism,” which should be scrutinized more closely.<sup>18</sup> Aside from a few discussions of the origins of particular clothing, however, there appears to be little written about the influence of political Islam over women’s rights. The academic Geoffrey Walford has acknowledged: “As with followers of any religion, Muslim parents vary in their orthodoxy. ... For a variety of reasons, some of which may be related to the failure of schools to

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<sup>13</sup> Khanum, “Education and the Muslim Girl,” 136.

<sup>14</sup> Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2009), 78

<sup>15</sup> Denis MacEoin, *Music, Chess and other Sins: Segregation, Integration, and Muslim Schools in Britain* (London: Civitas, 2009), 82

<sup>16</sup> Katherine Brown, “Realising Muslim Women’s Rights: The Role of Islamic Identity Among British Muslim Women,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 29, no.4 (2006): 426.

<sup>17</sup> Claire Dwyer, “Veiled Meanings: Young British Muslim women and the negotiation of differences,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 6, no.1 (1999): 11

<sup>18</sup> MacEoin, *Music, Chess and other Sins*, 79

effectively challenge racism...a small proportion of parents...have started their own private Muslim schools. ...It is inevitable that they will tend to be more orthodox or fundamentalist.”<sup>19</sup> In the same essay, Walford’s ultimate sentence notes: “Very little is known about [Islamic] schools, and this is certainly one of those areas where there is a clear ‘need for further research.’”<sup>20</sup>

Walford was writing in 2003. Why has so little research been conducted since? As we shall see, it is perhaps because media and academia continued to treat British Islam as one homogenous group, and thus failed to investigate individual schools or groups whose attitudes towards the education of Muslim children were of concern. It was not until 2013, in fact, that the media reported with apparent shock that schools across the country were seemingly inculcating their students with extremist views, and a government inquiry uncovered a “co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained action...to introduce an intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos into a few schools in Birmingham.”<sup>21</sup> That such revelations do not accord with the findings of previous academic studies that relied on conversations with Muslim pupils suggests a wide gulf between the ordinary expectations of British Muslims and the political ambitions of the Islamist movements that established and manage British Muslim education.

This literature review serves us in one very crucial way: it confirms that British Islam is not a homogenous bloc, and that by treating it as such, we risk ignoring the influences of particular actors within British Islam, and leaving undiscovered the realities of gender inequality.

## **The Trojan Horse Plot**

In 2014, a government inquiry uncovered a “co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained action...to introduce an intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos into a few schools in Birmingham.”<sup>22</sup> The inquiry was established after British media, including the BBC and the *Sunday Times*, revealed that police and local government in the British city of Birmingham had been handed a letter containing “strategy documents,” purportedly written by hardline Islamists, “outlining ways of ousting head teachers in Muslim areas of the city in order to establish schools run on Islamic principles.”<sup>23</sup> The documents of

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<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Walford, “Muslim Schools in Britain,” in *British Private Schools: Research on Policy and Practice*, ed. Geoffrey Walford (London: Woburn Press, 2003) 168.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools Arising From The ‘Trojan Horse’ letter* (London: House of Commons, 2014), 96, accessed March 9 2015, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/340526/HC\\_576\\_accessible\\_-.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340526/HC_576_accessible_-.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Kerbaj, “Islamist Plot to Take over Schools,” *Sunday Times*, March 7, 2014, accessed on April 18, 2015, [http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk\\_news/Education/article1382105.ece?CMP=OTH-gnws-standard-2014\\_03\\_01](http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/Education/article1382105.ece?CMP=OTH-gnws-standard-2014_03_01)

the Trojan Horse Plot – as it became popularly known – detailed a five-step strategy to remove head-teachers and take control of state-funded schools, and included a list of schools in which this approach had been deemed successful.

Much of the media debated the authenticity of the documents, which laid out the methods of conspiracy in such brazen terms. On March 11, 2014, in fact, the *Sunday Times* suggested the Trojan Horse letter was a crude forgery. Government investigations and further media investigations, however, concluded that while the validity of the leaked documents might be called into question, the Trojan Horse plot itself, and the threat posed by hardline Islamist influence in schools, was very real. On April 15, 2014, Britain’s Education Secretary Michael Gove appointed Peter Clarke, the former head of counter-terrorism at the Metropolitan Police, to investigate the allegations of “extremist views” in Birmingham schools. Clarke’s report, published a few months later, concluded that, “there are a number of people, associated with each other and in positions of influence in schools and governing bodies, who espouse, endorse or fail to challenge extremist views.”<sup>24</sup> At Park View School in Birmingham, Peter Clarke reported allegations of: Al Qaeda material being shared; derogatory references made to non-Muslims; assemblies led by extremist preachers; “peer and staff pressure on girls to cover their heads”; the removal of girls’ sports teams from local tournaments because of “the presence of external male staff”; and “gender and faith discrimination in the treatment of staff.”<sup>25</sup> In the course of Clarke’s investigations, messages from a private discussion group between teachers at the Birmingham schools were discovered. 3,235 postings detailed teachers and officials’ propagation of conspiracy theories, hatred for other Muslim sects, diatribes against homosexuality and support for gender segregation.<sup>26</sup>

As the allegations surrounding the Trojan Horse plot consumed national debate, concurrent media investigations found that the problem of extremism in schools was not limited to Birmingham. Some of the focus fell upon the question of gender equality – the treatment of young Muslim girls and the imposition of clothing deemed Islamist rather than Islamic. At the state-funded Al-Madinah School in the city of Derby, female teachers lodged complaints with their trade unions after being ordered by school governors to cover their heads and shoulders with a *hijab*. Nick Raine, a regional official for the National Union of Teachers, told a local newspaper that, “There are worries over practices concerning the discrimination between male and female pupils in the school, with the girls being told to sit at the back of the class regardless of whether they can see the board properly.”<sup>27</sup> Further investigations found

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<sup>24</sup> Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools*, 52.

<sup>26</sup> Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools*, 56-74

<sup>27</sup> Zena Hawley, “Teachers at Derby’s Muslim school 'ordered to wear hijabs',” *Derby Telegraph*, September 25, 2013, accessed on April 17, 2015, <http://www.derbytelegraph.co.uk/Teachers-Derby-s-Muslim-school-ordered-wear/story-19822232-detail/story.html>

that teachers at the school who opposed these measures were “bullied out of their jobs.” Along with a strict dress code, musical instruments were banned. Teachers, quoted anonymously by journalists, revealed: “On a school trip to Drayton Manor Park zoo, girls queued up for all the rides, only to have to cede their places to boys and male teachers when they got to the front of the queue.”<sup>28</sup>

At Tauheedul Islam Girls' High School, a state-funded school in Blackburn, schoolgirls were ordered “to wear the hijab outside the school and home” and “not bring stationery to school that contains un-Islamic images.”<sup>29</sup> Visitors to the school included the Saudi cleric Sheikh Abdul Rahman al-Sudais, who has referred to Jews as “pigs” and “scum of the human race.” Al-Sudais has blamed the “sins” of women as the cause for natural disasters, such as “unveiling, mingling with men, and being indifferent to the hijab.”<sup>30</sup> At the Jameah Girls' Academy in Leicester, girls as young as eleven are required to wear the *niqab* (the full-face covering). The schools' patrons have included Mufti Muhammad ibn Adam Al-Kawthari, a cleric from the Deobandi sect of Islam who has ruled that women should not leave the home, cannot refuse their husbands' demands for sex, and must be stoned to death if they commit adultery.<sup>31</sup> A number of schools, such as the al-Islah School in Blackburn, even require girls as young as four to wear the hijab. In 2009, Shifa Patel, a teacher at al-Islah, was forced to resign after parents found photos of her on social media with short hair and wearing trousers. The founder of the school accused her of “behaving like a man,” while others accused of secretly being male. To no avail, Patel even underwent a medical examination to prove her gender.<sup>32</sup>

Since the Trojan Horse plot was first uncovered, dozens of schools all across Britain have since been accused of similar “extremist” behavior. At the Cathays High School in Cardiff, students were taught that “free mixing” between boys and girls was “not permitted in Islam.”<sup>33</sup> At the Carlton Bolling College in Bradford, the BBC reported that boys and girls were segregated, with special school trips offered only to male students.<sup>34</sup> In Luton, school inspectors found books at the Olive Tree Primary

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Kerbaj, “No Fairy Tales or Singing for {upils,” *Sunday Times*, September 22, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Sian Griffiths, Richard Kerbaj and Georgia Graham, “Pupils Ordered to Wear Hijab Out of School,” *Sunday Times*, September 29, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> John Bradley, *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 170.

<sup>31</sup> Denis MacEoin, *Music, Chess and other Sins: Segregation, Integration, and Muslim Schools in Britain* (London: Civitas, 2009), 84.

<sup>32</sup> Simon Johnson, “Secretary Forced Out of Muslim School by Parents who Thought She Was a Man,” *Daily Telegraph*, June 13, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Gilligan, “Mosque Hardliners Gave Extremist Lectures at School,” *Daily Telegraph*, June 27, 2014, accessed on March 22, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/10932166/Mosque-hardliners-gave-extremist-lectures-at-school.html>

<sup>34</sup> “Bradford School Governors 'Promoted Islamic Agenda',” *BBC*, June 10, 2014, accessed April 18, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-27779832>



School that promoted “stoning and lashing as appropriate punishments,” failed to “promote equality of opportunity between boys and girls,” and encouraged parents to beat their children if they failed to pray.<sup>35</sup> The head-teacher of the Olive Tree Primary School is Qadeer Baksh, a Salafist activist who has declared that in an “ideal” Islamic state, homosexuals would be put to death.<sup>36</sup> The Olive Tree school is part of the Luton Islamic Center, where Qadeer Baksh is also chairman. The Center’s website, named Call to Dawah, contains sermons that claim: “The jews strive their utmost to corrupt the beliefs, morals and manners of the Muslims.”<sup>37</sup> Another Call to Islam publication, titled “Characteristics of the Female Hypocrite,” states unveiled women are “displaying themselves out in public as if they are pieces of meat selling themselves to the onlookers who want nothing more than to defile them.”<sup>38</sup>

The exposure of young Muslim children to extremist views is evidently far-reaching. In 2012, a briefing document written by officials in the Department for Education, and leaked to the *Daily Telegraph*, revealed “there are concerns about 118 ‘socially conservative’ independent faith schools - the vast majority of them Muslim - where pupils may be encouraged to cut themselves off from mainstream society.”<sup>39</sup> In 2015, the *Sunday Times* reported that 100 teachers were facing bans from working in schools as a result of their links to the Trojan Horse scandal.

## **Islam or Islamism?**

Gender inequality and the prevalence of “extremist views” among British Muslims is a contentious question in contemporary Britain – one that has occupied a great many newspaper column inches and hours of parliamentary debate. The schools and Islamic educators at the centre of this question, placed under the media’s microscope, however, represent minority movements within British Islam.

Particular Islamist sects have been linked to particular cases. In Birmingham, the ringleaders of the Trojan Horse plot were inconsistently identified as either “Salafists” or “Islamists”; the above-mentioned Siddeeq Academy, shut down by the British government in early 2015, was linked by the media to Al-Muhajiroun, a banned British terrorist group; schools run by the Islamic Shakhsiyah Foundation have been described by Prime Minister David Cameron as “front organizations” for Hizb

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<sup>35</sup> “School report: Olive Tree Primary School,” *Ofsted*, June 9, 2014, accessed April 16, 2015, <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/files/2391277/urn/131825.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Richard Adams, “Michael Gove calls for further schools investigations after Trojan Horse affair,” *The Guardian*, May 21, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Abdul Azeez Bin Baaz, “The Ideological Attack,” *Call to Islam*, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.calltoislam.com/pdf/The%20Ideological%20Attack%20-%20Shaykh%20Abdul-Aziz%20Bin%20Abdullaah%20Bin%20Baaz.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> “Characteristics of the Female Hypocrite,” *Call to Islam*, accessed April 12, 2015, <http://www.calltoislam.com/pdf/Characteristics%20Of%20The%20Female%20Hypocrite%20-%20Shaikh%20Muhammad%20Musa%20Nasr.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Duncan Gardham, “Extremism Unchecked In Schools, Secret Briefing Reveals,” *Daily Telegraph*, December 31, 2012.

ut-Tahrir, a global Islamist network.<sup>40</sup> There is very little the government can do to stop Islamist political sects establishing private schools, unless criminal activity is discovered. Within the public sector, however, investigations into the Trojan Horse scandal found that state-funded schools in local Muslim areas – some dedicated faith schools and others ostensibly open to all – were under the grip of Islamist operatives, who used taxpayers money to instil hardline views in young children. Who exactly was behind these efforts? And how has such a situation come about?

In order to analyze the attitudes displayed by British political Islamic groups towards girls' education and women's rights, the most important primary source for this task is, evidently, the opinions openly expressed by these groups themselves. One document in particular, published by a umbrella group managed by activists from both the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami, is the most prominent source available – as determined by the controversy it has caused, the perceived legitimacy of the publishers as a leading British Muslim organization, and the reports' reputation as the most comprehensive guide to education articulated by a British Islamic movement.

In 2007, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) published a document titled: *Towards Greater Understanding: Meeting the needs of Muslim pupils in state schools*. The publication sparked a great deal of debate, media coverage and accusations of religious intolerance – one tabloid headline exclaimed: “Muslims tell us how to run our schools.”<sup>41</sup> The report was written, its author, Tahir Alam, claims, to discourage “hostility towards religious faith,” and in response to “an increasing number of inquiries that we were receiving from schools and parents requesting more detailed national guidelines.”<sup>42</sup> The report “is intended to be used, as a source of reference by schools when reviewing their policies and practices in relation to meeting the needs of their Muslim pupils.”<sup>43</sup> A wide range of topics is covered by the guidelines. “Sex and relationship education,” for instance, is a compulsory requirement of Britain's national curriculum. Tahir Alam writes that the MCB is wary of the “implicit and explicit messages and assumptions that underpin the teaching of [sex education].”<sup>44</sup> Alam explains that, “girlfriend/boyfriend as well as homosexual relationships are not acceptable practices according to Islamic teachings.” The MCB does not state outright opposition to sex education, but explains some concerns: “Some schools may also use objects or graphic diagrams depicting private organs in order to teach pupils about contraception such as condoms. Muslim parents would consider such

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<sup>40</sup> Edward Malnick, “Islamic Schools Condemned by David Cameron Receive State Funding,” *Daily Telegraph*, March 18, 2014

<sup>41</sup> Gabriel Milland, “Muslims Tell Us How to Run Our Schools,” *Daily Express*, February 21, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Tahir Alam, “An Agenda for Integration,” *The Guardian*, February 28, 2007, accessed March 9, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/feb/28/tahiralam>

<sup>43</sup> Tahir Alam, *Towards Greater Understanding: Meeting the needs of Muslim pupils in state schools* (London: Muslim Council of Britain, 2007), 9

<sup>44</sup> Alam, *Towards Greater Understanding*, 47.

demonstrations as well as distribution of contraceptive pills and condoms to young people in schools to be completely inappropriate and encouraging morally unacceptable behaviour.”<sup>45</sup> The report further argues that school trips should be made single-sex “to encourage greater participation from Muslim pupils”; in music classes, the Koran should be recited in lieu of musical instruments; in art classes, “three dimensional figurative imagery of humans” is not allowed;<sup>46</sup> library books on Islam should not be written “by non-specialist or unfriendly authors.”<sup>47</sup> All gender-related instruction pertains to “modesty” or segregation between male and female pupils. At no point, however, does the MCB state its opposition to the right of education for Muslim girls. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that its author, Tahir Alam, has argued for such a proscription.

The author Tahir Alam is worth examining. Seven years after the MCB report was published, in 2014, Alam was identified by a government inquiry as the “prime mover” behind the Trojan Horse plot.<sup>48</sup> Some actions of which Tahir Alam was accused, however, do not accord with his own written guidance in the MCB’s report – which, although extremely conservative, is unlikely to be perceived as fanatical. The MCB report, then, does not just afford us the opportunity to examine attitudes displayed by British Islamic groups; it also allows us to contrast theory and practice – leading to further questions about disparities between British Muslim groups’ public and private statements on girls’ education.

Tahir Alam is a veteran campaigner for the MCB. In 2008, Alam testified, on behalf of the MCB, before the UN’s high commissioner for human rights on the question of Islamic education: “I would caution against advocating that desegregation should be ‘actively pursued.’”<sup>49</sup> Alam is also chairman of the Muslim Parents Association, a group that, the government’s investigator found, advised Islamist school governors on “how to influence the appointment of SLT [school leadership team] members, remove children from religious education ... and modify the curriculum.”<sup>50</sup> In early 2014, the *Daily Telegraph* reports, Alam denounced the teaching of sex education in schools at a meeting of the Muslim Parents Association – in strong contrast to his more measured comments in his MCB report of 2007. On top of all that, Alam is also vice-chairman of the Association of Muslim Schools. One of the reasons that Islamist influence in schools grew unchallenged for so long, writes the journalist Andrew Gilligan, is because the British government’s school watchdog, Ofsted, handed responsibility for the inspection of dozens of Islamic schools to a special “faith schools watchdog” named the Bridge Schools

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<sup>45</sup> Alam, *Towards Greater Understanding*, 48.

<sup>46</sup> Alam, *Towards Greater Understanding*, 53.

<sup>47</sup> Alam, *Towards Greater Understanding*, 54.

<sup>48</sup> Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Tahir Alam, “Testimony before UN Human Rights Council,” *Forum on Minority Issues*, December 15, 2008, accessed on April 19, 2015, [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/docs/statements/experts/Tahir\\_Alam.doc](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/docs/statements/experts/Tahir_Alam.doc)

<sup>50</sup> Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools*, 26.

Inspectorate. However, the Bridge Schools Inspectorate, Gilligan reveals, is managed by Tahir Alam's very own Association of Muslim Schools.<sup>51</sup> Another group connected by the government inquiry to Tahir Alam and the Trojan Horse plot is the International Board of Educational Research and Resources, an educational body whose website describes Islamic schools as "one of the most important factors which protect Muslim children from the onslaught of Euro-centrism, homosexuality, racism, and secular traditions."<sup>52</sup> The chief executive of the group, Akram Khan-Cheema, is also an inspector for Ofsted.

The former head of counter-terrorism, Peter Clarke, wrote, in his report into the Trojan Horse plot, that all these various groups, centered around Tahir Alam and the MCB, "appear to stem from an international movement to increase the role of Islam in education... [which] provides practical advice and religious legitimisation to those who... seek to 'Islamise the provision of educational services.'" Of Tahir Alam's report for the MCB, Peter Clarke writes, "some of its recommendations have been exceeded in the schools investigated; others can be seen in place, or in embryo."<sup>53</sup> What is this international movement? And what and whom exactly does the Muslim Council of Britain represent?

The MCB was founded in May 1997, by Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami activists brought together in the wake of protests and book-burnings of Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*. Although the MCB is, nominally, an umbrella organization for hundreds of various Islamic sects, movements and mosques across in Britain, the global security expert Lorenzo Vidino explains that, "the leadership of the organization has traditionally been dominated by individuals from the Mawdudist [Jamaat-e-Islami] network."<sup>54</sup> British Muslims agree with this perception: *Q News*, a prominent British Muslim magazine has stated that, "a closer look at the Central Working Committee [of the MCB] shows that the majority belong to or have sympathies with a UK organization which is a side-kick of the Jamat-e-Islami in Pakistan."<sup>55</sup> Chetan Bhatt, a British academic, describes the MCB as one of several "front organisations for the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood."<sup>56</sup> Azzam Tamimi, a former spokesman for the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood and prominent Islamist activist in London, has claimed: "in the West you have Brotherhood members who have become active in wider-ranging organisations like the Muslim Council of Britain."<sup>57</sup> Over the last few decades, leading

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<sup>51</sup> Andrew Gilligan, "Extremists and the 'Trojan Horse' Approach in State Schools," *Daily Telegraph*, March 9, 2015

<sup>52</sup> Andrew Gilligan, "Ofsted Praises Islamic Schools Which Oppose Western Lifestyle," *Daily Telegraph*, November 6, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools*, 48.

<sup>54</sup> Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood*, 122.

<sup>55</sup> Faraz Mohammed, "MCB: Dad's Muslim Army," *Q News*, April 1998, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood*, 127

<sup>57</sup> Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood*, 53

officials of the MCB have expressed support for the terrorist group Hamas (the Gaza-based affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood), boycotted Holocaust Memorial Day, and have faced criticism for their collaboration with anti-Jewish, homophobic and pro-terror preachers. In 2009, the government severed relations with the MCB after its deputy chairman, Daud Abdullah, signed a Muslim Brotherhood document – known as the Istanbul Declaration – which advocated attacks on British troops and Jewish communities around the world.<sup>58</sup>

Although the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) was founded in Egypt, while Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) was established thousands of miles away in South Asia, within the Muslim diaspora in the West, they often operate, in effect, as one global movement. Qazi Ahmad Hussain, head of JeI in Pakistan, has declared: “We consider ourselves as an integral part of the Brotherhood and the Islamic movement in Egypt ... Our nation is one.”<sup>59</sup> Several British Islamist groups also illustrate this kinship. The Islamic Foundation, for example, is a leading publisher of Islamist tracts in Britain. The two dining rooms at its headquarters were originally named the Abul ala Mawdudi and Hassan el-Banna rooms – named after the founders of JeI and the MB respectively.<sup>60</sup>

Ideologues of JeI and the MB have published tracts on women’s rights and education. As with the MCB, there appears to be an important gulf between public ideals and private realities. The writings of Abul Ala Maududi, the founder of JeI, are published by a number of leading Islamic organizations in the UK involved with running schools and other educationalist institutions, and whose members openly identify as members of this global Islamist network. Mawdudi, the academic Irfan Ahmad writes, argued that women should not step outside of the home and must veil themselves from head to toe. Ahmad explains: “Maududi noted the need for women’s education. But he considered only that education legitimate which made her a perfect mother and housewife....Maududi regarded women inferior to men. He thought it, ‘impossible that even a single person of the stature of Aristotle, Avicenna, Kant, Hegal...would be born in the fair sex.’”<sup>61</sup> Irfan Ahmad, however, argues that in the 1970s onwards, “members of the Jamaat began to critique Maududi and offered an alternative reading of Islam. They argued that women could indeed leave the home, assume key economic and political roles...”<sup>62</sup> This schism over the question of women’s rights within Jamaat-e-Islami appears to continue in the present-day.

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<sup>58</sup> Hazel Blears, “Our Shunning of The MCB is not Grandstanding,” *The Guardian*, March 25, 2009.

<sup>59</sup> Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood*, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Allah in the West* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997), 132.

<sup>61</sup> Irfan Ahmad, “Cracks in the ‘Mightiest Fortress’: Jamaat-e-Islami’s Changing Discourse on Women,” *Modern Asian Studies* 42, no.2-3 (2008): 556

<sup>62</sup> Ahmad, “Cracks in the ‘Mightiest Fortress’”, 557

Disparities between ideals and practice complicate things. Hassan Al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, advocated the “segregation of male and female students” and for “private meetings between men and women...to be counted as a crime.”<sup>63</sup> In 1995, however, the global Muslim Brotherhood published a treatise on the “Role of Muslim Women,” in which the movement affirmed “equality between men and women,” and issued a “call for the education and the enlightenment of both women and men.”<sup>64</sup> Emily Dyer, an analyst at the Henry Jackson Society think-tank in London, argues, however, that in practice, this Islamist movement, when given an opportunity to put its ideals into effect, disregards its more modern proclamations in favour of the puritanism of its founder: “During the post-Mubarak elections, the [Muslim Brotherhood] declared its intention to help women prepare for their prescribed role ‘as wives, mothers and makers of men.’ ... Al Banna’s belief that schools should be segregated, with new curricula devised for girls, was put into practice under Muslim Brotherhood rule in Egypt.”<sup>65</sup>

Within South Asia, the apparent duplicity – or at best, vacillation – displayed by Islamist groups on the question of gender equality is the consequence, argues Elora Shehabuddin, of “the twin pressures... of operating in a functioning, if often imperfect, democratic polity; and of competing with more secular organizations for the hearts, minds and votes of impoverished women.”<sup>66</sup> In the West, perhaps, the apparent deception of groups such as the MCB, on issues such as women’s rights, is the result of competing with other Muslim groups for political dominance over British Islam, an ambition that state multiculturalism policy has seemingly encouraged through grants of government monies and effusive political backing.

Whom does the Muslim Council of Britain represent? Not, it seems, British Muslims. Although the MCB is, undoubtedly, politically influential, it appears to command extraordinarily little authority. A 2007 survey by Policy Exchange, a prominent British think-tank, revealed only 6% of British Muslims believe the Muslim Council of Britain represents their views.<sup>67</sup> A similar survey in 2006 put that figure at only 4%.<sup>68</sup> In 2014, a study by Mehmood Naqshbandi, a Muslim advisor to the City of London police, concluded that of the 1,740 mosques in the UK, only 51 were affiliated with Jamaat-e-Islami,

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<sup>63</sup> Emily Dyer, *Marginalising Egyptian Women*, (London: Henry Jackson Society, 2013) 24

<sup>64</sup> Muslim Brotherhood, *The Role of Muslim Women in Islamic Society According to the Muslim Brotherhood*, (London: International Islamic Forum, 1995) 20

<sup>65</sup> Dyer, *Marginalising Egyptian Women*, 24

<sup>66</sup> Elora Shehabuddin, “Jamaat-i-Islami in Bangladesh: Women, Democracy and the Transformation of Islamist Politics,” *Modern Asian Studies* 42, no.2-3 (2008): 578

<sup>67</sup> Munira Mirza, Abi Senthilkumaran and Zein Ja’far, *Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the Paradox of Multiculturalism* (London: Policy Exchange, 2007), accessed March 9, 2015, [http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/living apart together - jan 07.pdf](http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/living%20apart%20together%20-%20jan%2007.pdf)

<sup>68</sup> Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood*, 127.

and only 8 with the Muslim Brotherhood. According to these calculations, then, the two Islamist networks combined manage a paltry 3.4% of British mosques.<sup>69</sup> The MCB has styled itself as an all-encompassing umbrella group, and boasts of a diverse range of affiliates from across the Islamic spectrum. “Superficially, these affiliates appeared to be a diverse bunch,” writes the BBC journalist Innes Bowen, “...but the reality was that a majority of mosques in Britain had either boycotted the MCB or had just not bothered to join.”<sup>70</sup> The British academic Chetan Bhatt argues that front organizations for JeI and the MB pursue an agenda “strictly based on the politics of the Islamic radical right, it doesn’t represent the politics or aspirations of the majority of Muslims in this country.”<sup>71</sup> JeI has never, in fact, achieved popular support in South Asia. Yet it has claimed itself as the leader of Britain’s Muslims. In 2007, when the MCB published its report on the teaching of Muslim children, Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui, from the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, exclaimed that, “there has been no discussion on these issues in the Muslim community.”<sup>72</sup> Other Muslim umbrella groups, such as the Sufi Council of Britain, claim to represent the “silent majority” of British Muslims, and have argued that the MCB’s guidelines for schools misinterpret key tenets of Islam.<sup>73</sup>

It is also clear that operatives involved with the Trojan Horse plot do not seem to include clerics or other religious figures. It would appear, instead, that political operatives have shaped the treatment of Islam in schools. That activists tied to the Muslim Council of Britain appear to offer relatively moderate – albeit conservative – views on girls’ education in public, but promote hardline Islamist values behind closed doors, is, to some extent, in keeping with other criticisms levelled at the MCB. When, in 2009, the MCB’s deputy-secretary general, Daud Abdullah, signed the anti-Semitic and pro-terror Istanbul Declaration, he and other MCB officials were also often to be found at prominent interfaith dialogue events with senior members of Britain’s Jewish community. Similarly, one of the MCB’s founders is Chowdhury Mueen-Uddin, a leading advocate of interfaith dialogue in Britain, who has worked closely with prominent politicians and other faith leaders. In November 2013, however, the Bangladeshi War Crimes Tribunal sentenced Mueen-Uddin to death *in absentia*, for his role, as part of the Al-Badr killing squad, in the mass-murder of journalists and intellectuals during the 1971 Liberation War.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Mehmood Naqshbandi, “UK Mosque Statistics,” *Muslims in Britain*, October 19, 2014, accessed on April 22, 2015, [http://www.muslimsinbritain.org/resources/masjid\\_report.pdf](http://www.muslimsinbritain.org/resources/masjid_report.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> Innes Bowen, *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (London: Hurst, 2014), 90

<sup>71</sup> Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood*, 127.

<sup>72</sup> Gabriel Milland, “Muslims Tell Us How to Run Our Schools,” *Daily Express*, February 21, 2007.

<sup>73</sup> Oliver King, “Criticism for New Muslim Organisation,” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2006

<sup>74</sup> Syed Chowdhury, “UK Muslim Leader Chowdhury Mueen Uddin Sentenced to Death in Bangladesh,” *The Independent*, November 3, 2013.

The MCB is, by no means, the only Jamaat-e-Islami or Muslim Brotherhood group in Britain that issues guidelines on education or is involved with running British schools. The UK Islamic Mission (UKIM), for example, has “been lobbying for single-sex education since the late 1960s.”<sup>75</sup> Today, UKIM has “forty-fix branches, including several with Islamic schools where roughly five thousand British Muslim children are enrolled.”<sup>76</sup> Although UKIM was originally established by senior Jamaat-e-Islami leaders from Pakistan, today its officials claim: “We belong to the international Islamic movement, neither to Jamaat[-e-Islami], nor to Ikhwan [Muslim Brotherhood]...but all of them are our friends.”<sup>77</sup> Peter Clarke’s report revealed UKIM was “promoted in the discussions” between key leaders of the Trojan Horse plot.<sup>78</sup>

Other Islamist organizations have also issued guidelines on the education of Muslim children. In 2004, the Muslim Welfare House published a set of guidelines titled, *Understanding the Educational Needs of Muslim Pupils*. Similar to the MCB report, the Muslim Welfare House’s report proscribes musical instruments, artistic representation of humans, performances of Christmas plays, and the mixing of genders in certain classes, sports and dancing.<sup>79</sup> The report claims schools “adopting these strategies will...tackle attitudes of Islamophobia.”<sup>80</sup> The Muslim Welfare House has served as “the London base” of the Muslim Brotherhood and is a prominent affiliate of the MCB.<sup>81</sup> In 2010, the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Masry Al-Youm* reported that the Muslim Welfare House was laundering funds for the Egyptian Brotherhood movement.<sup>82</sup> The founder of the Muslim Welfare House, in fact, is Kamal Helbawy, a prominent Muslim Brotherhood operative who has warned of “satanic programs led by Jews” and expressed support for Osama Bin Laden.<sup>83</sup> In an interview with BBC News in 2011, Helbawy was questioned on his manifesto for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which sought to exclude women from becoming the head of state.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain Since 1800*, (London: Hurst, 2004), 315.

<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims: The State's Role in Minority Integration*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 92

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools*, 69.

<sup>79</sup> Mujib Miah, “Understanding the Educational Needs of Muslim Pupils,” *Muslim Welfare House*, November 2004, accessed April 26, 2015, <http://mwht.org.uk/downloads/Understanding-the-Educational-Needs-of-Muslim-Pupils.pdf>

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Bowen, *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent*, 103.

<sup>82</sup> “The Muslim Brotherhood,” *The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center*, June 19, 2011, accessed April 27, 2015, [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/pdf\\_11\\_033\\_2.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/pdf_11_033_2.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> John Ware, “Time to Wise Up to the Muslim Brotherhood,” *Standpoint*, July/August 2013, accessed April 27, 2015, <http://standpointmag.co.uk/node/5082/full>

<sup>84</sup> “Brotherhood Statements Foster Confusion,” *Investigative Project on Terrorism*, February 4, 2011, accessed April 27, 2015, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/2565/brotherhood-statements-foster-confusion>



Similarly, the Muslim Educational Trust has published a number of publications on Islam in the West, including a pamphlet titled *British Muslims and Schools*. A number of Bangladeshi groups accuse the chairman of the Muslim Educational Trust, Ghulam Sarwar, of complicity in Jamaat-e-Islami's mass murder of Bangladeshi journalists and intellectuals during the 1971 Liberation War.<sup>85</sup> In *British Muslims and Schools*, published in 1994, Sarwar issues similar guidelines to that published by Tahir Alam in his report for the MCB over ten years later. Art, music and gender mixing are declared forbidden for Muslim students.<sup>86</sup> Such proscriptions were necessary, Sarwar argued, because "Muslims face discrimination from all quarters," and should not be expected to "assimilate and lose our identity."<sup>87</sup> This pamphlet, and others written by Sarwar, also taught that politics and religion cannot be separated under Islam, and highlighted Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood as working for the "establishment of Allah's law in Allah's land."<sup>88</sup> The Muslim writer and ex-Islamist Ed Husain writes that, "[Sarwar] was the brains behind the separation of Muslim children from school assemblies... Their key message was that Islam was not merely a religion but also an ideology that sought political power and was beginning to make headway."

Another Muslim Educational Trust publication, titled *What Does Islam Say?*, makes further demands on Muslim education and women's rights. The author, Ibrahim Hewitt, argues that, "Faith schools, and Muslim schools in particular, form a vibrant part of the overall education provision in Britain that allows for parental choice and a degree of religious pluralism that speaks well of traditional British values."<sup>89</sup> In the same book, however, Hewitt declares that, "in the quest for 'equality', the destabilising effect this is having is plain for all to see: ... non-acceptance of the supposedly 'traditional' roles for men and women ...combined with sexual 'freedom' as part of women's liberation', such liberal attitudes are having a devastating effect on society with corresponding increases in abortions, schoolgirl pregnancies and sexual deviancy."<sup>90</sup> Hewitt affirms that, "Education is a right for women as well as men and all should have the opportunity to study at the highest levels," but adds that "the Islamic guidance on dress and the limits on free-mixing with strangers must be observed and

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<sup>85</sup> "The Leading Collaborators of 1971 and Their Present Whereabouts," *Liberation War Museum*, accessed on April 22, 2015, <http://www.banglagallery.com/LWM/collabo.html>

<sup>86</sup> Ghulam Sarwar, *British Muslims and Schools* (London: Muslim Educational Trust, 1994), 14-15

<sup>87</sup> Sarwar, *British Muslims and Schools*, 30.

<sup>88</sup> Ed Husain, *The Islamist* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 21

<sup>89</sup> Ibrahim Hewitt, *What Does Islam Say?* (London: Muslim Educational Trust, 2004)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

preserved.”<sup>91</sup> Hewitt also advocates killing apostates and adulterous women, and demands homosexuals suffer “severe punishments” for their “great sin.”<sup>92</sup>

As with Tahir Alam, it is worth looking at Ibrahim Hewitt himself. In addition to his work for the Muslim Educational Trust, Hewitt runs a charity called Interpal, which has been designated a terrorist organization under U.S. law. More importantly, Hewitt founded the Association of Muslim Schools, the group named by Peter Clarke as working at the heart of the Trojan Horse plot. Hewitt also runs the taxpayer-funded Al-Aqsa school in the British city of Leicester, at which girls are segregated from boys from the age of seven, and female teachers must have their faces covered.<sup>93</sup> As with the MCB, and as demonstrated by past academic studies into British Muslim education, as cited earlier, these Islamist bodies evidently do not oppose the concept of women’s education; they do, however, impose hardline beliefs on what pupils are taught, and hardline restrictions on the manner in which girls may be educated.

Ed Husain writes that, “Today, in British schools,” Muslim Educational Trust publications “[continue] to be used in classrooms.”<sup>94</sup> Why have the views of the Muslim Educational Trust been allowed to propagate within British schools? Why have groups such as the MCB, despite their lack of support among British Muslims, been able to exert such influence over the lives of British Muslim children?

### **Multiculturalism Policy and Islamist Imposition**

Thousands of miles away from Britain, in his very last moments, Abdul Waheed Majeed, a British Muslim suicide bomber fighting for an Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, was asked to record a few words in Arabic in front of a camera. Hesitating, Majeed nervously explained: ““Sorry? I can't speak. Everyone asks me that...”<sup>95</sup> Majeed, like the vast majority of British Muslims, did not speak Arabic.

Approximately 70% of British Muslims, in fact, are originally from South Asia.<sup>96</sup> A mere 6-7% are believed to be of Arabic descent.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Hewitt, *What Does Islam Say*.

<sup>93</sup> Tom Worden, “Private School Chief Linked to Islam Trojan Horse Plot Says: Stone All Adulterers to Death,” *Daily Mail*, April 19, 2014

<sup>94</sup> Husain, *The Islamist*, 21

<sup>95</sup> Josie Ensor, “Terrorist Group Releases British 'Suicide Bomber' Martyrdom Video,” *Daily Telegraph*, February 14, 2014.

<sup>96</sup> David Voas, “Census 2011: Muslims in Britain,” *British Religion in Numbers*, June 8, 2013, accessed April 27, 2015, <http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2013/census-2011-muslims-in-britain/>

Yet, back in Britain, at schools linked to Tahir Alam and the MCB, “pupils were encouraged to study Arabic to reflect their background and provide greater access to their religious and cultural heritage.” The MCB, the Muslim Welfare House and the Muslim Educational Trust made such recommendations in their published reports. In addition, discussions among staff and officials implicated in the Trojan Horse scandal featured “proposals for teaching about Saudi Arabia to be included in the citizenship curriculum.” As Peter Clarke notes, “very few, if any, pupils have a Saudi Arabian background.”<sup>97</sup> Both in South Asia and in Europe, Islamist networks such as Jamaat-e-Islami have openly fought to purge Muslims of their South Asian heritage. JeI’s founder, Abul ala Mawdudi, claimed that Muslims should instead be part of the “Arab nation,” and that cultural miscegenation destroys the “inner vitality” of Islam.<sup>98</sup> How have these Islamist bodies with little support among British Muslims managed to impose a curriculum at state-funded British schools that is not geographically or culturally relevant to the majority of British Muslims?

The answer, some critics claim, lies in state multiculturalism policy. Dedicated Islamist influence over schooling in the public sector was born in the 1990s. At the time, multiculturalist theories had been discussed among academics for decades – but with only limited application by local government bodies. The author Kenan Malik argues the threat of increasing racial and religious strife in some British cities encouraged the British government to introduce multiculturalist policies, and afforded Islamist groups the chance to assume control over Muslim communities – with segregated schools at the forefront of their demands.<sup>99</sup> The academic Lorenzo Vidino observes: “The British multicultural model has traditionally relied heavily on community leaders who act as trusted intermediaries between the community and the state, to whom the latter can delegate the administration of various services. No such class existed among the masses of poorly educated South Asian immigrants in postwar Britain. The situation created the opportunity for the Mawdudists [Jamaat-e-Islami], thanks to their superior resources, organizational skills and good understanding of the British political system to surpass other groups in the competition for the role of community leaders.” The government thought it could use Islam as an “antidote to social malaises that plagued the Asian community.” The funds Islamist organizations received from government allowed them to “significantly alter the balance of power [within the Muslim community] as secular organizations struggled to compete.”<sup>100</sup>

In 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron gave a controversial speech in Munich. For the first time, a European leader acknowledged the shortcomings of multiculturalism policy: “Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each

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<sup>97</sup> Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools*, 52.

<sup>98</sup> Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, 105.

<sup>99</sup> Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, 78.

<sup>100</sup> Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood*, 135-137.

other and apart from the mainstream. ...We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values."<sup>101</sup> This was a distinct about-turn in government policy. Just a few decades ago, in the wake of riots against Salman Rushdie, Kenan Malik writes that politicians were desperate to find "credible Muslim leaders to whom they could talk....The MCB was soon accepted by both central government and the national media as the authentic voice of the Muslim community."<sup>102</sup> The government embraced the MCB so tightly that, as the journalist Martin Bright revealed in 2005, Britain's Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, and the MCB leader Iqbal Sacranie (a leader of the anti-Rushdie riots) even shared the same speechwriter. For several years, Muslim organizations could not receive government support for projects without a stamp of approval from the MCB. Consequently, gay Muslims were refused platforms, and female Muslim artists who did not wear headscarves were excluded from cultural events. "There is nothing wrong," Malik writes, "in government ministers talking to Islamist, or even jihadist groups. But the British government went further: it presented such organizations as authentic representatives of British Muslims and used its financial muscle to force independent Muslim bodies to deal with its pet projects."<sup>103</sup> To the detriment of Britain's diverse Muslim community, "Britain's multicultural bargain created the space for radical Islamism."<sup>104</sup> The Indian economist Amartya Sen suggested that the British government had been too desperate to communicate with minority communities, and thus embraced unelected leaders without a second glance. Consequently, Sen argues, "It is ... not surprising at all that the champions of Islamic fundamentalism would like to suppress all other identities of Muslims in favour of being only Islamic."<sup>105</sup>

British state multiculturalism subcontracted its dealings with British Muslims to groups dominated by Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood. The establishment and funding of Muslim schools and issuance of guidelines for the teaching of Muslim children, then, was partly left to such deputation. Hence – when the MCB published its report on Muslim schooling in 2007, a senior government advisor attended the launch and promoted the report. The Muslim Welfare House's report, meanwhile, was sponsored by the British Home Office, despite the publisher's links to the Muslim Brotherhood and the violent views of its founder. The government appeared keen to absolve itself of responsibility for the welfare of Muslim children. Key officials believed this approach was crucial to discouraging intolerance. In 2004, a report produced by the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia argued that a failure to show "greater sensitivity to the concerns and needs of Muslims" in the

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<sup>101</sup> David Cameron, "PM's Speech at Munich Security Conference," *British government website*, February 5, 2011, accessed on April 20, 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference>

<sup>102</sup> Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, 126-7

<sup>103</sup> Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, 128-9.

<sup>104</sup> Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, 130.

<sup>105</sup> Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 14

education sector would lead to greater levels of Islamophobia.<sup>106</sup> As we have seen, groups such as the MCB and the Muslim Welfare House made use of this claim while attempting to promote their guidelines as standard texts.

Other prominent British politicians have lent their support to the MCB, and much of the media has portrayed the group as the voice of British Muslims – all because state multiculturalism policy offered the MCB dominance over British Islam and drowned out the myriad of other Muslim voices. For Muslim schoolchildren, and on the question of gender equality for Muslim girls, the guidelines produced by Islamist groups such as the MCB and the Muslim Welfare House were the government's only resources – a monopoly of its own making. The MCB also enjoyed legitimacy offered by academia. As the studies cited earlier demonstrate, academia failed to understand the Muslim community as comprising more a single bloc. Some prominent academics have served as vocal supporters of the MCB, despite its promulgation of intolerant views. Sophie Gilliat-Ray, an academic at the University of Cardiff, for example, argues that eventual government disenchantment with the MCB was not because other groups were “any more representative than the MCB, but simply because they are regarded as less openly critical of government foreign policy.”<sup>107</sup> Gilliat-Ray offers no evidence for such an assertion.

In the case of schools under the management of Tahir Alam and other parts of the MCB network, an unintended consequence of state multiculturalism was to deliver the welfare of Muslim children into the hands of Islamist groups. Not only had Tahir Alam's report seemingly been endorsed by government, but – as mentioned earlier – the government's school watchdog, Ofsted, handed responsibility for the inspection of dozens of Islamic schools to a special faith schools watchdog partly managed by Tahir Alam's own organization, the Association of Muslim Schools. Multiculturalism policy had promised to preserve the diversity of a heterogeneous population. But in Britain, the result appears to have instead been the homogenization of the Muslim community and the silencing of Muslim voices in favour of Islamist demands. The Muslim writer Ed Husain and Indian economist Amartya Sen have argued that “25 years of multiculturalism” has not produced “multicultural communities,” but “plural monoculturalism.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Richard Stone, “Islamophobia: Issues, Challenges and Action,” *Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 2004), 1

<sup>107</sup> Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 110

<sup>108</sup> Ceri Radford, “Multicultural or Monocultural?” *Daily Telegraph*, October 23, 2007, accessed on April 27, 2015, [http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/ceriradford/3641541/Multicultural\\_or\\_monocultural/](http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/ceriradford/3641541/Multicultural_or_monocultural/)

## Unpacking the Trojan Horse

Tahir Alam, the MCB, Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood are not the only actors within fundamentalist Islam who are imposing hardline values on Muslim schoolchildren. As explained in some detail above, the growth of extremism in schools is a wide-ranging problem with a wide range of architects. Gender equality is perhaps the first to suffer in all instances. But whereas other Islamist networks have mostly established private schools, Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood are predominantly exerting influence within state-funded schools – including institutions that are ostensibly open to all students, regardless of pupils' faith. Nor is the MB or JeI wholly distinct from other Islamist networks. As with other political movements, there is often overlap between various groups. Tahir Alam, for example, was originally part of a Salafist network before he involved himself with Jamaat-e-Islami groups such as the MCB. Moreover, the ringleaders of the Trojan Horse plot promoted Islamic preachers described by Peter Clarke as part of the “Salafi, Deobandi spectrum.”<sup>109</sup> The Trojan Horse letter, although its authenticity is disputed, discussed utilizing “Salafi parents” as part of Islamist infiltration of schools.<sup>110</sup>

Even if other Islamic movements are involved, however, Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood nevertheless appear to be the prime movers behind the growth of extremist thought within British schools and the consequent damage to gender equality. The role of JeI and the MB, as a stepping-stone to other forms of radical Islam, is found in other instances. Within counter-terrorism thought, for example, the “conveyor belt” theory holds that “non-violent extremists” such as the Muslim Brotherhood serve both to introduce recruits to radical Islam and then push them further to commit violent acts.<sup>111</sup> In 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron said that, “As evidence emerges about the backgrounds of those convicted of terrorist offences, it is clear that many of them were initially influenced by what some have called 'non-violent extremists', and they then took those radical beliefs to the next level by embracing violence. ... Some organisations that seek to present themselves as a gateway to the Muslim community are showered with public money despite doing little to combat extremism. As others have observed, this is like turning to a right-wing fascist party to fight a violent white supremacist movement.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools*, 68.

<sup>110</sup> Clarke, *Report into Allegations Concerning Birmingham Schools*, 5.

<sup>111</sup> J. Scott Carpenter, Matthew Levitt, and Michael Jacobson, “Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism,” *Journal of National Security Law and Policy*, Vol. 3, 303, accessed April 26, 2015, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/opeds/4aca6941foec7.pdf>

<sup>112</sup> David Cameron, “PM's Speech at Munich Security Conference,” *British government website*, February 5, 2011, accessed on April 20, 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference>

Within political discussion, British multiculturalism policy has long been portrayed as a tenet of the progressive Left. Kenan Malik argues that this is a distortion: “Where once [it was] argued that everyone should be treated equally, despite their radical, ethnic, religious or cultural differences, now it pushed the idea that different people should be treated differently *because* of such differences.”<sup>113</sup> In fact, the academic Lorenzo Vidino associates modern multiculturalism with British colonial policy in India, which relied upon “useful middlemen between the British colonialists and the Muslim population...Muslim leaders guaranteed the British that order would be maintained inside the community and spared them the unwanted and resource-consuming task of administering its daily life.”<sup>114</sup>

Modern British multiculturalism policy embraced groups such as the MCB because politicians perceived its leaders as representative of British Muslims. British multiculturalism policy allowed groups such as the MCB to shape and regulate the education of Muslim children because politicians heedlessly deemed the political orthodoxies of Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood to be suitable for the relatively apolitical, cultural traditions of British Islam. Evidently, there is a clear gulf between the public pronouncements made by Islamist networks and the private practises they covertly introduce. That these Islamist networks genuinely appear not to oppose women’s right to education is, perhaps, partly welcoming. But if the cost of their contribution is the degradation of gender equality in schools, as well as the growth of extremist views, it is little surprise that British media and the government eventually realized that such an arrangement cannot be allowed to continue.

The unravelling of the Trojan Horse plot and the subsequent media investigations into extremism in schools have exposed the fallacies of extant academic study and former media and governmental conceptions of British Muslims – that British Islam is not one homogenous bloc, but a diverse array of peoples and beliefs. There is a clear disparity between the liberal ambitions and expectations of young British Muslims, as evidenced in academic studies, and the political ideals of unelected leaders of Britain’s Muslim community. Furthermore, the notable absence of clerics or other religious figures from the Trojan Horse plot strongly suggests that the challenges for gender equality in schools is primarily a result of political impositions rather than theological shortfall.

Although media furore and swift government action exposed the presence of Islamist networks within British schooling, it has not, by any means, eradicated its influence. For that to happen, evidently, broader reform is required. There is no evidence to suggest that the MCB’s guidelines on the teaching of Muslim children have been withdrawn – Tahir Alam’s report is still recommended for schools on a

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<sup>113</sup> Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, 130.

<sup>114</sup> Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood*, 135.

number of government websites.<sup>115</sup> Prominent Muslim activists have lamented the fact that moderate organizations, such as British Muslims for Secular Democracy, have produced alternative guidelines on schooling to those of the MCB, but appear to have been ignored. It is clear that British Islam displays a wide variety of beliefs, that multiculturalism has dampened this diversity, and that government policy served to absolve politicians of responsibility for the welfare of their citizens. Ultimately, gender equality in British schools requires freedom of identity. There are political movements that seek to squash such expression and impose their own. If cultural and religious expressions of British Islam are to challenge these orthodoxies and further the quest for gender equality, they must be unburdened from government deputation.

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<sup>115</sup> “Guidance for Schools with Muslim pupils,” *Ealing SACRE*, 24, accessed April 27, 2015, [http://www2.ealing.gov.uk/ealing3/export/sites/ealingweb/services/council/committees/agendas\\_minutes\\_reports/advisory/sacre/15may2007-19may2008/05.06.07/item\\_10\\_-\\_appendix.pdf](http://www2.ealing.gov.uk/ealing3/export/sites/ealingweb/services/council/committees/agendas_minutes_reports/advisory/sacre/15may2007-19may2008/05.06.07/item_10_-_appendix.pdf)



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