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'A - part of the community'?

The politics of representation and a Muslim school's application for state funding¹

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Introduction:

This paper is a case study of how Feversham College, an independent Muslim girls' school managed by the Muslim Association of Bradford, set about representing itself to the authorities in an effort to gain state funding in 1994.² Formerly known as Bradford Muslim Girls' Community School (BMGCS), the school was established in 1984 to provide an education for Muslim girls whose parents were opposed to their daughters attending co-educational state schools. Like the twenty-five other independent Muslim schools in Britain (Parker-Jenkins: 1995: 12), Feversham College is in near continuous financial crisis as it struggles to survive on a limited income from parents' fees which are supplemented by donations from local and national Muslim benefactors. In May 1994 it submitted an application to the Secretary of State for Education in an attempt to become the country's first Voluntary-Aided (VA) Muslim school.³ Had the bid been successful, Bradford Local Education Authority (LEA), which backed the application, would have covered all of the college's running costs and 85% of its capital costs.

At present, around one-third of state schools have VA status (Parker-Jenkins: 1995: 11). The vast majority of these are Church of England and Roman Catholic schools but there are also a growing number that are Jewish.⁴ Given that these other faith groups have their own schools, Feversham College's application, like the submission from Islamia school in Brent before it,⁵ can be seen as a test-case of the state's willingness to accommodate the parallel concerns of a new, much maligned and structurally deprived minority.⁶ However Feversham College's application proved unsuccessful. On 16 February 1995 its submission was rejected by the Secretary of State for Education. This prompted a great deal of concern and speculation in the Muslim press about Islamophobia⁷ in the government. It also reinforced a widespread Muslim perception that they are routinely imagined as a constituency set apart from, and not an equal part of, the British nation (Q-News: 24.02.95).

This study of Feversham College's VA status application begins with an examination of the different ways in which the prospect of state funded Muslim schools has been received in Britain. Among other things, I note that proposals for such schools have provided a key focus for contemporary debates about the maintenance and reproduction of both majority and minority cultures in pluralist Britain. My ethnography starts with a short account of the early history of what was then BMGCS, illustrating how at this early stage in the school's development there were important discrepancies between what parents and the state represented as a 'good' education. I then move on

to an assessment of how and why by 1994, Feversham College was able to mobilise the local state and civil society in support of its application. I consider two factors in particular. First, I establish that the acceptability of the application has to be understood in the context of political developments in Bradford itself. Notably, it was the importance of Muslims as a political constituency in the city, combined with specific difficulties relating to educational provision there, which prompted the local state to support Feversham College's submission. Secondly, I show that the governors' approach to representing their institution to civil society also played a crucial role in establishing a consensus about the school's application. Above all, they quite deliberately set out to contest dominant constructions of Muslim schools as necessarily 'separatist' in intention, and in so doing, attempted to bring Feversham College into line with Bradford LEA's expectations about the need for all schools to reflect the cultural pluralism of wider society. Hence a political moment emerged when all were able to agree that the school was a part of, not apart from, what was represented as 'the local community' of Bradford.

Finally, I draw my paper to a close with some brief reflections on the rejection of Feversham College's application, enquiring why it was that such a strong local accommodation between the school and the local authority failed to deliver success. In so doing, I underline the extent to which the decision to refuse funding was made by a national government whose political interests and educational agendas differed strongly from those of Bradford Council. In short, I conclude that the erosion of local democracy in Britain over the last decade or so has had important implications for the efficacy of Muslims' representational strategies and, moreover, given the failure of Feversham College's reformist representations, that Muslim leaders may choose to adopt more radical approaches to their petitioning of the British state on the matter of VA schools.

'Separate' schools? hegemonic and contested representations of British national culture

Education has been shown to be a key arena within which powerful majorities seek to reproduce their own dominant versions of national culture (Bourdieu and Passeron: 1977). Similarly, education has also been seen as a terrain of contestation on which the marginalised in society seek to resist the imposition of such hegemonies (Willis: 1977). In recent years Muslims' applications for state funding have more than adequately illuminated these two theoretical postulations, for although the 1944 Education Act quite clearly enshrines the right of religious minorities to apply for VA status for their schools, arguments about the desirability of such schools and about their continued failure to materialise, have not focused simply on educational issues per se. Rather they have been a focal point for broader debates about what it means to be British.⁸

A dominant representation of Muslims' demands for VA schools which emerges especially in the popular press, produces 'them' as a 'problem minority' that demands special treatment and yet is reluctant to integrate with the so-called 'norms' of British society (Dwyer: 1991). The implication of these representations is that Muslims want to be 'separate' because they insist on being different and that they are illegitimately challenging the integrity of the established order. Proponents of Muslim VA schools

have responded by arguing that the mainstream system of education is eurocentric and that it does not adequately address Muslim parents' concerns about such issues as single-sex schooling, religious, moral and cultural development, racism or academic 'underachievement' (CRE: 1990). Nevertheless as Dwyer and Meyer (1995: 48) have shown recently, some Muslims maintain that such schools would actively promote integration and produce "confident individuals secure in their cultural and religious backgrounds in a truly multi-cultural society". These discrepant representations of the Muslim schools debate serve to illuminate the different ways in which both majority and minority groups struggle over ideological representations of the British nation.

Despite all these arguments, the fact remains that the vast majority of Muslim children still attend state schools. In his discussion of the emergence of educational provision for minorities in Bradford, Halstead (1988: 47) describes how the local authority's policies there have gone through three stages of 'multi-culturalism' since the 1960s: integrationism, accommodationism and separatism. He typifies policies during the 'integrationist' phase as promoting the idea that 'the public good' could be best served by treating all children in school equally regardless of cultural or religious differences. In this model the school was represented as the primary arena of social integration, where all children would learn how to participate in the British nation by acquiring its language and culture. Hence the dispersal or 'bussing' of minority children among the LEA's schools was begun in 1964, in the hope that increased contact with white children living elsewhere in the city would generate a 'mutual tolerance' that would translate into social harmony in wider society. Policies during the integrationist stage then, clearly placed the burden of adaptation upon minorities themselves and entailed no challenge to the majority's settled mono-cultural representations of what it meant to be British.

The move to more accommodationist educational provision in Bradford during the 1980s is described by Halstead (1988) in terms of a shift to more explicitly plural representations of the good society in Britain. "A new concept of integration emerged" which maintained that "so far as it is compatible with individual needs, the provision of services will at all times respect the strength and variety of each community's cultural values" (Halstead: 1988: 49). Within such a framework it follows that each segment of the 'community' in Bradford had as much right to reproduce and maintain its culture and identity as did the majority. It was in this context that the Bradford Council for Mosques (BCM) was established by the local authority in September 1981, first as a council-funded, and then as a Manpower Services Commission-sponsored, attempt at instituting a forum for the representation of Muslim concerns in the city (Lewis: 1994). Education was a major arena for BCM activity and as a result the local authority made a number of 'concessions' to Muslims' concerns during the 1980s; these included provision for a multi-cultural curriculum, halal meat and alternative dress codes. However the emergence of these more accommodationist strategies can not be seen as an act of sheer altruism by the local council. Rather, widespread uprisings by disaffected and increasingly assertive 'black' minorities in the inner-cities of London, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds during 1981, reinforced a fear that without a change of policy, such uprisings might also occur in Bradford.

One of the issues over which the LEA and BCM effectively consummated their new accommodation was the issue of Muslim VA schools. In January 1983 an organisation called the Muslim Parents' Association applied to the LEA to have five state schools - two first schools, two middle schools and a single-sex girls' Upper school - assume VA status (Khan-Cheema: 1985). One of the parents prominent in the organisation was Riaz Shahid who in 1973 had responded to the LEA's refusal to admit his daughter to a single-sex school by temporarily leaving the country. In 1983 he represented his reasons for making the submission in the local press: "Muslim children are being systematically transformed and indoctrinated into a British way of life, and are losing their identity" (The Yorkshire Post, 10.05.83). However the BCM took a rather different view, as their role in undermining the MPA's proposal illustrates. By voting not to support the initiative - although it was made quite clear that this was not a rejection of the desirability of Muslim VA schools in general - the BCM called into question the legitimacy of the MPA's claim to represent the concerns of Muslims in Bradford. In return for re-establishing the consensus, the BCM demanded that the LEA delivered on its promised commitment to multi-cultural 'concessions' including the retention of single-sex schooling in the city (Lewis: 1994: 148). Yet although the main plank of Bradford LEA's refusal to support the submission in September 1983 was that the MPA did not have popular support in Bradford, this also had a major strategic benefit. It allowed officials to avoid all mention of a key factor in constructions of the issue elsewhere: the dangers of minority separatism. It was such a fear that lay behind the representations of teachers at Belle Vue Girls school - the single-sex girls' Upper school named in the application - who asserted that they would rather resign their posts than teach in a Muslim VA school (Halstead: 1988: 241).

In his assessment of these events, Halstead concludes that the council was unwilling to denounce the MPA's project as 'separatist' because of a reluctance to alienate Muslim political opinion in Bradford. However he also observes that in reality the council was doing little to arrest a gradual slippage into a policy of de facto separatism itself. This presages the third phase of Halstead's typology: namely the fact that many of Bradford's inner-city state schools had effectively become 'black', 'Asian' or 'Muslim' as a result of the numerical predominance of such pupils. Halstead considers that as a result, the council had effectively recognised that there could be no one, inclusive, and uncontested definition of shared values in British society, or indeed what it meant to be British, the very assumptions that had so powerfully underpinned the first phase of integrationism. Even so, he also emphasises that a formal institutionalisation of this emerging separatism would be regarded as politically unacceptable by the white majority: "For many people, it appears that the call for the establishment of Muslim voluntary-aided schools marks the limit of what can be tolerated in a multi-cultural society" (1988: 45).

Certainly Halstead's assessment of the possibility of Muslim schools being given VA status in Britain would seem to be a fair reflection on the Swann Report's (1985) argument that so-called 'separate' schools would necessarily contradict the cultural-pluralist ideal of "Education for All". Hence while Swann began from an accommodationist position, contending that calls for VA schools would diminish if overall multi-cultural provision was more comprehensively and determinedly implemented in

British schools, the final report remained committed to the idea of an overarching canopy of essential shared values that unites British society. The limits of Swann's fragile liberal consensus were exposed by one evaluation of the report by a Muslim collective (Islamic Academy: 1985).⁹ This welcomed Swann's point of departure which understood all minorities to be a part of pluralist democratic British society, but vigorously objected to its insistence that a minority community might preserve its identity only in so far as it was commensurate with what were represented as 'commonly accepted shared values' (Swann: 1985: 4-5). They reminded the committee that the basis of such values were contingent and could not be seen as 'value free'. Rather what Swann represented as 'commonly accepted' was in fact understood by the Muslims to be the legitimation of "cultural domination by the secularist anti-religious majority" (Islamic Academy: 1985: 5).

Swann was also criticised for its "extremely partial attitude" in applying the terminology of 'separate schools' to the aspirations of Muslims alone (Islamic Academy: 1985: 7). Indeed as Khan-Cheema (1985:19) remarked at the time, it seemed to assume that "Muslims are incapable of running a school which can provide an enlightened form of education with a pluralist perspective". The implication that Muslim schools would in effect be 'racial' schools was also much resented, and they countered that "existing voluntary aided schools were set up because of religious denominational differences, not because of racial differences" and that Islam comprises "many races and nationalities" (Islamic Academy: 1985: 8).

However these arguments did not lead to the development of a wider critique of the implications of such racialised representations of the 'separate' schools issue. What Swann's assumptions clearly underline is the extent to which representations of the British nation are racialised. While in the past there was strong opposition to the proposed state funding of both Irish Catholic and European Jewish denominational schools, that has now fallen into abeyance. Irish and Jewish people were once represented as racial-cultural inferiors of English Protestants (Solomos: 1989), and were therefore excluded from articulations of what constituted Britishness, but more recent shifts in narrations of the British nation have allowed both groups to be conceptually integrated into a (fictitious) vision of white, British homogeneity; hence the use of the 'ethnic' (sic) category of 'white' in the 1991 Census.¹⁰ To represent the VA status applications of racialised and ethnicised minorities as alone 'separatist', as Swann did, is simply to reproduce their essential 'difference' from very powerful imaginings of the ideological unity of the rest of the (white) nation.

In the wake of the Rushdie Affair in 1989 the issue of state funding for Muslim schools has become inextricably entwined with what has been represented in the West as the problem of 'Islamic fundamentalism'. The burning of a copy of The Satanic Verses by the BCM in an act which subverted their accommodated status and Khumayni's fatwa¹¹ calling for the death of Rushdie, prompted a liberal establishment discourse which dichotomised the irrational, fanatical and intolerant Muslim outsider and the rational, diplomatic and civilised British state. These same dichotomised representations of 'fundamentalist' Islam and liberal Western society also emerge in objections to Muslim

VA schools, most often in debates about the gendered nature of the issues. While it has been generally argued that a single-sex education may improve the achievement of girls in school, when it comes to a discussion of Muslim girls' education these contentions routinely take second place to the deployment of neo-Orientalist stereotypes which produce Muslim girls as necessarily the confined bearers of tradition and honour in contradistinction to the goals of a democratic and secular society.¹²

However the fact that many of the Muslim schools that are in a position to submit applications for VA status are indeed single-sex schools for girls has prompted a more penetrating critique from feminists such as the Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF) collective. In their volume Refusing Holy Orders (1992) Saghal and Yuval-Davis offer a critique of the situation that Halstead (1988: 51) described above as de facto separatism. They argue that because multi-cultural policies imagine minority constituencies as culturally bounded groups, they have often succeeded only in opening a space for 'fundamentalist' leaders to represent their essentialist patriarchal claims to cultural authority within communities in a way that has been particularly detrimental to the empowerment of women. For example, writing about these issues after a visit to BMGCS itself in the early 1990s, Khanum (1992: 138-9), concluded that 'separate' schools represented,

“an attempt to stifle dissent and exert absolute control over the lives of women in the community. It is no accident, nor is it an act tinged with racism, that Muslim religious schools are referred to not as 'Islamic denominational' schools but as 'separate'”.

To be sure in any majority or minority (including Muslim) constituency there are hegemonic representations of community that emerge in the essentialist representations of leaders (Werbner: 1991). Nevertheless the problem with Khanum's perspective is that it is surely problematic to begin by assuming that there is a) some homogenous cultural entity 'out there' called 'the Muslim community' or that b) it might be possible to generalise about the ends to which Muslims might employ discourses of Islam. The fact is of course that Muslim constituencies - like all other constituencies - are social constructions. They have no essence, rather the idea of essence is deployed by leaders as a symbolic representation to aggregate and mobilise people of often quite different subject positions in a common cause during particular political moments.

In this section I have attempted to illustrate that when the established system of schooling insists on devaluing minority cultures as a function of reproducing its own hegemonic worldview, it should surprise no-one that minorities will attempt to set up alternative institutions which positively rather than negatively evaluate a non-white, non-Christian or non-English ethos. However I have not argued that Muslims have been unconcerned with debates about what it means to belong to Britain. On the contrary, the Muslim response to Swann considered here showed that minorities in Britain are ready to intervene in and contest hegemonic narrations of the nation. Indeed it is important to see the calls that some Muslims' are making for state funding of their schools as representing a claim on British citizenship and an indicator of the sorts of investments that they have made in Britain. In the next section I begin my ethnography of one such a

school with an account of the early years and development of BMGCS, later to become Feversham College. What I think is important to take forward from the foregoing discussion is the recognition that all representations of belonging - be it to hegemonic notions of a nation or counter-hegemonic ideas of a community united in resistance to exclusion - are the product of extensive temporary alliances made in particular, politically contingent, contexts (Werbner: 1991). It is this understanding of the operation of the politics of representation which informs my case study of how a coalition encompassing the school, local state and civil society was mobilised in support of Feversham College's application for VA status in 1994.

From BMGCS to Feversham College: the early history of a Muslim school in Bradford

The initial driving force behind the proposal to open Bradford Muslim Girls' Community School (BMGCS) was the Muslim Association of Bradford which is based at Howard Street mosque, the city's first Muslim centre of worship. Founded in 1959 it is now controlled by Pathans and Panjabis from Chhachh in Pakistan, rather than the city's Azad Kashmiri majority. The mosque serves as a centre for the activities of the sober Islamic revivalist movements from South Asia, the Deobandis and Tablighi Jamaat, whereas the majority of Azad Kashmiris practice a more sufi-oriented, Barelwi Islam (Lewis: 1994). The BMGCS school was opened in September 1984 in a former chapel in the West Bowling area of Bradford. It was established as an independent, English-medium, upper school by the Muslim Association of Bradford to provide a single-sex secondary education for Muslim girls aged 13-18. The aim of those involved in setting up the school was to provide education for girls from families reluctant to see their daughters enter mainstream co-educational schools where they would mix freely with boys.¹³ A recent school brochure is quite explicit about these motivations. It argues that the school was established because otherwise, "The majority of parents would send their daughters 'back home' so as not to be forced by law to attend a non-Muslim school", thus recalling the case of Riaz Shahid and other Muslim parents who were unable to persuade the LEA to accommodate their daughters within single-sex schools during the 1970s. Initially then parents' commitment to a Muslim school was framed around the concept of *izzat* (honour). They were concerned to 'protect' the 'safety' of their daughters. Therefore it was arguments about the perceived moral insufficiency of the established system which prompted the foundation of the school.

When BMGCS opened in 1984 it had just 24 pupils. The number of students attending the school since then has been erratic. However in recent years numbers have increased: for example, 43 (1991), 76 (1992), 178 (1993). As an independent school, BMGCS has relied heavily on the fees that it charges parents, of whom up to 70% are unemployed (Bradford Telegraph and Argus: 18.02.94). Nevertheless the school's fees had to be increased from £300 per pupil per year in 1984 to £700 in 1989 just for it to remain open. This caused numbers to plummet from 90 to 36. However the fees were then reduced to £500 in 1990 because of parents' difficulties in paying the increased charge. Indeed 15 students in 1993 were given complete exemption from payment by the governors. The fees have never covered the cost of running the school so the continued support of its patron the Muslim Association of Bradford and other Muslim

organisations such as the UK Islamic Education Waqf (Trust) and the Islamia Schools Trust, has been crucial.

BMGCS also found itself in difficulty in 1986 when a visit from Her Majesty's Inspectors (Department of Education and Science: 1987) produced a report that was critical of the education that the school delivered. The limits of the school were measured in terms of the lack of intellectual challenges offered to its students and its inadequate general facilities. Moreover not all teachers at the school were qualified and few were full-time. Such circumstances reflected the fact that at this early stage of its development the school did not enjoy the support of Bradford LEA. Indeed in a press release following the HMI report in 1986, the governors challenged Bradford LEA and the DES (Department of Education and Science) to do more than criticise what they represented as an attempt by low-earning Muslim parents to provide what they defined as a good education for "some of the most vulnerable members of our community" (BMGCS: 1987). While the question of improving the quality of the school's education was understood by the governors to be essentially financial in nature, it was also clear that there were important discrepancies between what parents and the state defined as a 'good' education. Nevertheless, the school's governors concluded their press release with a request for help from the LEA in their long term goal of applying for VA status.

The school's attempt to bring itself up to a standard where it could apply for VA status, began in January 1989 when qualified staff were employed for the first time. By March 1990 the school had received official registration from the DES. The impact of these changes on the quality of education available at the school was perhaps most strikingly illustrated by the thoroughly respectable public examination results that BMGCS achieved in 1993. Not only did 56% of pupils at BMGCS achieve 5 or more GCSE grades A-G - which was broadly competitive with many Bradford LEA schools - but when it came to points scored for 2 or more A levels, the BMGCS average of 13.7 was better than many inner-city schools in Bradford. Moreover a number of parents have been persuaded to allow their daughters to attend university or college. In 1993 three took up places in higher education (The Observer: 13:03:94). So while BMGCS's examination results need to be put into context regarding the school's past performance, its class sizes and its ability to keep the best students, the results of 1993 do speak positively about the efforts of the school's staff to gradually improve the quality of education on offer. In 1993 BMGCS was, at the very least, able to challenge those who have maintained that Muslim schools necessarily deliver a worse education than those within the state sector.

When I interviewed the headteacher of BMGCS, Nighat Mirza (02.12.93),¹⁴ about the school she was keen to represent the school as much more than a place where girls were prevented from mixing with boys. She stated that her main aim at the school was to "produce articulate, confident and intelligent young women". She argued that "The majority do not think that this type of Asian young woman exists. The colour of the children's skin makes them 'different' despite their Yorkshire accents". A Chemistry graduate and qualified teacher, Nighat told me how she had found a pride, respect and status at the school that was not forthcoming when she had worked in the mainstream education system. Moreover her experiences of the institutional racism of the state

sector also underscored the lie of integrationism: 'her' children may have been 'Yorkshire' through and through but they were still outsiders because they were 'black', Muslim and of Pakistani heritage. To emphasise her point Nighat also told a story which illustrates how minority children sometimes have to struggle to see themselves in a nationalist curriculum devised in the language of the majority:

"The English teacher at BMGCS showed me some stories that the students had written. They were well written. But how did they begin? - with "John said" and "Nicola said". What was wrong with "Muhammad said" and "Rukhsana said"? I made it my business to see those children and tell them that they should see their own black faces in those stories and realise who they are and not just who the majority society wants them to be. Why change your name from Tariq to Terry other than to please the majority?"

Nighat explained that pleasing the majority had got her nowhere in the past. Hence she refused to assume the burden for cultural adaptation as integrationists insist. Nevertheless she wanted BMGCS to offer a mainline schooling in Islamic clothes: to be a school that evaluated a Muslim ethos more positively than the state system but aimed to achieve just the same academic success that mainstream criteria laid down.

By 1994 BMGCS had come to be seen as a moderate success story in Bradford. This gradual transformation of the way in which the school was perceived was a crucial preparation for its application for VA status on 10 May 1994. Almost eight years after the initial HMI inspection in 1986, BMGCS had put itself in a position to submit an application to the Department For Education (DFE) and it did so with the full support of the local council. In the next section I turn to an examination of the emergence of a set of conditions in Bradford which made it politically acceptable for the LEA to support the possibility of a state funded Muslim school in the city.

"A sea-change in public opinion"? the contingency of political representations

"The fact that we now receive support from the LEA without reservation is also an indication of their attitude towards the sponsors of this proposal and the quality of relationship and mutual respect between us" (MAB: 1994: 13).

"Those who have expressed concern about the possible consequences of establishing 'separate' schools have always encouraged us to co-operate fully with other schools and go for Voluntary-Aided Status in order to avoid 'ghettoisation' or alienation' etc. We are, therefore, delighted to be working closely with the LEA and other interested bodies in order to prepare and submit our application for Voluntary-Aided Status" (MAB: 1994: 33)

When Feversham College made its application for VA status it had already gained the unanimous cross-party backing of Bradford Council. Indeed it had been agreed by all parties, that no political capital would be made out of the issue, not least because local elections were coming up in May of the same year. Moreover, whereas in 1983 the local press had printed articles "strongly opposing the proposal" (Halstead: 1988: 240) from the MPA, this time around there was no such antagonism. With this sort of official

backing in place Akram Khan-Cheema, Chair of Governors, was confidently able to claim in the application document that there had been “a sea change in public opinion in Bradford” (MAB: 1994: 12) regarding the desirability of, and demand for, state funded Muslim schools in Bradford since the last application had been made in 1983. However U-turns and manoeuvres are of course the bread and butter of the politics of representation with the result that positions continually shift according to the contingencies of the day. So for example, in the wake of the MPA application back in 1983, Councillor Ajeeb, formerly Bradford’s first and only Asian mayor, argued “I don’t want separatism in any form...What we want is accommodation of our cultural needs, especially in the educational system” (quoted in Halstead: 1988: 52). However when I interviewed Ajeeb on 22.12.93 he pointed out that thinking on the matter had changed within the Labour Party since 1988 and that he now had no objections to Muslim VA schools. Ajeeb maintained that Labour could see the value of a single-sex education for girls and that while a socialist commitment to comprehensive co-education remained, Feversham College’s application for VA status was itself an opportunity to bring the school under the wing of the LEA.

With a consensus established between the political parties and the local press on side too, the actual VA status application process was in fact very low profile, indeed to such an extent that opposition to the proposal was publicly muted.¹⁵ Because Bradford’s white population could have been expected to object had the issues been more widely debated, the application relied not on the overt mobilisation of Muslim opinion but the co-operation of local state and community leaders, relationships that had been established since the emergence of accommodationist multi-cultural policies in the early 1980s. With the LEA’s help Feversham College had been working towards realising the specific standards laid down by the DES for some 18 months before the application was submitted. The school was also participating in the LEA’s in-service training for teachers and was on its mailing list. However the local authority’s support for the project was perhaps most tangibly evident in its decision to assist the school in its responsibility under the law to provide premises for the proposed VA school. The rationale for this decision was underlined in two statements from the minutes of a meeting of Bradford Council’s ‘Education Resources and Buildings sub-Committee’ on 12.10.93:

“Acquisition of the Feversham school building would allow expansion in the number of places for girls of secondary age in an area of the city where there is a shortage of places.”

“the future use of the site should pay heed to the need to improve educational provision, particularly in central Bradford where pressure for places is limiting the LEA’s ability to meet school preferences expressed by parents in the Upper School sector”.

It is clear from the minutes of the meeting that the decision to support the application of Feversham College was represented as a response to strains on educational provision within Bradford in terms of rising rolls and the need to respond positively to parents’ concerns about their choice of upper schools. However it is also worth speculating that

the issues were represented in this way so as to give Feversham College a better chance of persuading the DFE of its case. Islamia Muslim school in Brent, had been told by government ministers that its VA status application had failed because there were thousands of unfilled places in other local state schools. That the situation was very different in Bradford was an obvious and important point to make in the application process. Indeed the Feversham College application document (MAB: 1994: 12) argued that an increasing denominational demand for single-sex places in Bradford - the LEA school, Belle Vue Girls and the Roman Catholic girls school, Saint Joseph's, were oversubscribed too - necessitated further provision in this sector. It also maintained that, due to factors including "an acceleration in the rate of change in terms of attitudes of parents" (MAB: 1994: 18) regarding age of marriage and educational training, the current staying on rates of almost 100% would continue to apply at Feversham College. The difficulties that the LEA was facing in respect of rising rolls were perhaps most clearly acknowledged when one commentary on the application identified the fact that "Bradford expects half of its school population to be Muslim by the end of the century" (Times Education Supplement: 21.10.94).

In addition to the issue of rising rolls, Bradford LEA also had to be seen to be doing something about the matter of parental choice as its policy on the allocation of upper school places had been challenged, if unsuccessfully, in the High Court during the summer of 1993. Catalysed by the results of new Policy Studies Institute (Jones: 1993) research about the underachievement of Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic minority children and the publication of league tables indicating schools' academic performances (Department for Education: 1993), a group of 30 parents from the inner city ward of Manningham argued that the LEA's allocation policy was discriminatory because it reduced the chances of Asian children living in the inner-city areas of Bradford 8 and 9 attending the schools that their parents had chosen for them. In short, white children from the suburbs had the pick of the popular schools with the best academic records. Hence the Manningham parents, who were mostly Bradford-Bengali-Muslims, refused to send their children to what had been shown to be one of the worst schools in the area, Fairfax Upper. Notably, Fairfax Upper was the one Bradford LEA school to do worse than BMGCS on all counts in the secondary school performance tables of 1993.

The local authority's support for Feversham College's VA application therefore reflected the raw politics of a local context in Bradford where neither the Labour nor the Conservative parties could afford to alienate a minority constituency that is both growing in number - hence the rising rolls in Bradford schools - and assertiveness - the action of the Manningham parents can be set in the context of a long line of mobilisations including the Honeyford and Rushdie Affairs. At one very fundamental level then Labour and the Tories supported the application because they have both, since the early 1970s, been overwhelmingly concerned with keeping Asian votes. However this sort of politics needs to be a finely tuned balancing act which takes account of both non-white and white constituencies. For example Peter Gilmour was the only Tory councillor to lose his seat (Keighley North) to Labour in the local elections of 1984. Given that he was a leading figure in the institution of multi-cultural 'concessions' to Muslims and others, Khan-Cheema (1985: 17) has reasoned that it was white reaction to these policies which secured his defeat.

As a former education inspector and adviser with connections in Bradford LEA; as a consultant to the Association of Muslim Schools of the UK and Eire; and as someone who has connections in inter-faith dialogue circles which have facilitated his entry into making multi-cultural television programmes for the BBC, Akram Khan-Cheema, Chair of Governors at Feversham College, understood these issues concerning the politics of representation very well. His wide-ranging experience of the formalities of British society's institutions informed him of what sorts of representations of the school's application for VA status were appropriate in what circumstances. He recognised that even if the LEA was prepared to support Feversham College's VA application for its own reasons, the school itself had to be presented in such a way that it was broadly acceptable to the wider society that councillors were responsible to. Reflecting on the rejection of the MPA's application for Muslim VA schools in 1983, Khan-Cheema (1985: 17), had himself noted that their representations had been too aggressive and that they had failed in their public relations strategy. Moreover, recalling Halstead's (1988) earlier remarks, Bradford LEA could not be seen to be institutionalising de facto separatism. So, long before a VA status application was eventually submitted in 1994, Akram Khan-Cheema had realised that if any Muslim school wanting state funding was to have a chance of success, it would need to create a public image which contested dominant representations of all Muslim schools as necessarily 'separatist' in intention. In the next section I show how he mobilised a coalition of support for the school and the way in which he represented the school's activities whilst doing so. To secure funding from the state it would be necessary to show the white liberal establishment that Muslims were capable of providing a schooling which operated within an 'open' cultural-pluralist framework. Hence a rather radical project - establishing an alternative to a mainstream British institution - had to be dressed up in reformist clothes.

“Special but not separate”: establishing Feversham College as a part of the ‘community’

“The school has considered it essential to take every opportunity to make links with the community at large. The school welcomes a regular stream of visitors who engage the students, the staff and the parents in discussions which offers everyone an opportunity to rectify mis-perceptions, whilst fulfilling the need to disseminate accurate information about Islam generally and what this particular Muslim Girls' School is all about” (Muslim Association of Bradford (MAB): 1994: 7).

“The Board of Governors believe that the Muslim Girls Community School has developed a curriculum over the years which offers a healthy balance between the requirements of the National Curriculum as it is phased in and the special but not separate Islamic perspective demanded by the Muslim parents for their daughters” (MAB: 1994: 14)

Having secured the support of Bradford Council and Bradford LEA the next hurdle that the school faced in the application process was to prove that it had the backing of that most polyvalent of constituencies, 'the community'. To this end the intention of the

school to apply for VA status was published, by the Chair of the Board of Governors and the Chair of the Muslim Association of Bradford, in the Bradford Telegraph and Argus on 26 March 1994 and the Urdu medium Ravi newspaper on 2 April 1994. The publication of these notices marked the beginning of a two month period of public consultation during which any objections to the proposal could be addressed to the Secretary of State. However within this two-month consultation period which ended on 30 May 1994 (The Guardian: 31.05.94) no objections to the school's proposals were submitted. The fact was that for some time Akram Khan-Cheema had been busy in civil society making the sorts of alliances that were required to construct a consensus which agreed that Feversham College was a part of, and not separate from, 'the community' in Bradford and beyond.

A broad spectrum of advocacy for the school's proposal was evidenced by the clutch of around forty letters of support that formed an appendix in the application document. Muslim support was demonstrated with letters from the following: the leading campaigner for Muslim schools and co-sponsor of the application Yusuf Islam at the Islamia Schools Trust; Al-Furqar Muslim School (Birmingham); Madinat-Uloom and Islamic Centre Jamea Mosque; the Bengali Tawak'kuliah Islamic Society, Bradford; and Bradford Council for Mosques, whose figurehead Sher Azam, is also a prominent member of the Muslim Association of Bradford which founded the school in 1984. Non-Muslim organisations as diverse as Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK), Bangladesh Porishad, Methodist Church Overseas Division, Indian Womens Organisation, and the Roman Catholic Leeds Diocesan Commission for Christian Unity all wrote in support of the school, often on the basis of relationships grounded in the inter-faith movement in Bradford. Local educational establishments such as the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, Bradford and Ilkley Community College, The Grange School and Lorne First School had all also written to the school to express their support for the application.

The governors of Feversham College were quite clear that this was evidence of "a sea change in public opinion" regarding the desirability of state funded Muslim schools and that this fact could partly be explained in terms of the school's own 'open' public relations policy:

"We believe that the good track record of the Muslim Girls Community School over the years (since 1984) and the obvious recognition of the good practice in terms of public relations which the Board of Governors and the staff have adopted must be a major influencing factor in bringing about this [sea change in public opinion]. " (MAB: 1994: 13)

Akram Khan-Cheema, was the main figure responsible for attempting to persuade wider society that multi-cultural Islamic schools, which offer an enlightened education within a pluralist perspective, can in fact exist. According to an article in Islamia, the National Muslim Education Newsletter, Akram announced that the purpose of BMGCS was to offer "the best quality of education within a secure Islamic learning environment" (Khan Cheema: 1993: 6). He explained how the school put a special emphasis on Islamic Studies with a timetable which provided for prayer at lunch-time and before the end of

school and study of the sources of Islam - qur'an (Muslim scripture) ahadith (traditions of the Prophet) and shari'ah (Muslim law). However he was also careful to emphasise that more contemporary issues appropriate to growing up as British-Muslims were also studied. The VA application document reinforced the idea that here was a school "giving the students the opportunity to understand how best to live as British Muslim citizens within a predominantly non-Muslim multicultural society" (MAB: 1994: 6). Moreover the fact that the language of instruction at the school would be English, that 70% of teachers were non-Muslim and that the National Curriculum was to be studied, were all underlined in an attempt to establish that Feversham College was proposing to become a 'special' part of the mainstream and not something 'separate' from it.

Feversham College's application also maintained that the school had taken every opportunity for da'wah (the invitation to Islam, part of which of course involves presenting positive images of the faith), seeing a policy of openness as a way of challenging stereotypes about Islam in general and their Muslim girls' school in particular. In recent years the governors and headteacher have themselves made a number of appearances on, or been the subject of, media programmes such as BBC Television's Public Eye, Everyman and the Late Show and local minority radio programmes on Radio Ramadan and Sunrise Radio. Moreover a wide range of (very often female) curious and concerned visitors, including journalists from the Observer newspaper and education researchers from Nottingham University, had also been welcomed to the school. Pictures of students in their burgundy and white uniforms have appeared on the front page of the The Times Education Supplement (21.10.94) and the title page of a well-known book about Muslims in Bradford by the Advisor to the Bishop of Bradford, Islamic Britain (Lewis: 1994). Indeed the school's glossy brochure shows photographs of active and enquiring young women studying chemistry, geography and science and playing netball. Such representations of the school were surely meant to assure a white liberal audience beyond those Muslim parents who send their daughters to the school as a matter of izzat. Paradoxically, however, such representations are remarkable only for the fact that they are scenes from ordinary, everyday life which is just one measure of the power of dominant discourses about Muslims in Britain to narrate their separateness from ideological constructions of the 'norms' of wider British society.

Nevertheless the necessity of Feversham College having to very deliberately present itself as being open to cultural pluralism was illustrated by the consultations that were had with the Church of England's Bishop of Bradford, David Smith. Under section 30 of the 1988 Education Reform Act the governors' application accounted for the admission of an agreed percentage of non-Muslim pupils into the school should the application be successful. That "the school would be open to non-Muslim children"...[and] be closely involved with the local community" (Bradford Telegraph & Argus: 18.02.94) was one of the conditions for the Bishop to give the school's application his backing. In his letter of support to the Chair of Governors, the Bishop stressed that a successful VA application could in fact promote the integration of Muslims in Bradford:

"After a recent meeting with the Headmistress and a member of the Governing Body I was pleased to learn that many of the staff of the school are Christians.

Confident in their own identity the girls also study Christianity in the context of religious education. These two facts speak volumes about the open ethos of the school. I was glad to be reassured by Mrs. Mirza that the school sought to take the community dimension in its name seriously.

Fears are sometimes raised that voluntary-aided status would further encapsulate the Muslim communities in the city...I am confident that such misgivings are groundless and would echo the sentiments of the Catholic Bishop of Leeds: 'The effect of separate schools for us [the Catholics] has been integration not divisiveness'¹⁶

The representations of Feversham College that I have recorded in this section produces an account of the possibilities of Muslim schools which contests dominant representations of such institutions as necessarily separatist. Moreover my study of Feversham College illustrates that the reality of the school has not simply been determined by its origins. Rather what the school stands for has been constructed and reconstructed in the ebb and flow of representations made in quite different contexts. What does stand out consistently however is the way in which Islamic discourse has been employed to legitimate quite different representations of the school's project. While on the one hand, Islam provided the vocabulary and symbols to articulate some parents' concerns to ensure that their daughters remained a 'safe' distance from the 'dangers' of the mainstream co-educational system of education, on the other hand, the gradual development of the school was also represented in the name of Islam. For example in the school's brochure the exhortations which litter the text claim an explicitly Islamic basis, occasionally endorsing a modernist, even feminist, reading: "Educate your children; they must live in a time different from yours"; "Learning is obligatory upon every Muslim, be she a woman or a man"; "learn what you will; but Allah will not reward you until you employ it". Moreover these readings of Islam sat easily with key child-centred educational language of 'opportunity', 'individuality' and 'freedom' that emerged in the school's application document (MAB: 1994: 24). So in the story of just one, small school, Feversham College, Islamic discourse was employed by Muslims in Bradford to legitimate the changing emphases of an evolving, indeed gradually transformative, social project.

Rejection: discrepant representations of Feversham College's failed application

Gillian Shepard has had an education. She's become something in life. Now its our turn to become someone or something in life. (student at Feversham College, quoted in The Muslim News, 24.03.95)

Despite the support that Feversham College's application was able to command locally, it was rejected by Gillian Shepard, Secretary of State for Education, on Thursday 16 February 1995, some 10 months after the application had been submitted. The school team that travelled to London to hear the decision had appeared quietly optimistic not least because they were accompanied by two Tory councillors (The Muslim News, 24.02.95). Nevertheless, inspectors had decided that the school's accommodation did

not meet the standard for health and safety necessary for acceptance into the state sector. They were concerned about means of escape from the first floor and fire protection in general. Moreover the school was told that its proposals for delivery of the National Curriculum had failed to give a sufficient commitment to the key component of technology, for it to meet the legal requirements.

Local reportage of the decision in the Bradford Telegraph and Argus argued that disappointment at rejection should be tempered by the Secretary of State's suggestion that if the problems described above were resolved, a re-submitted application would be welcomed. Indeed both the Muslim Association of Bradford and the Local Education Authority committed themselves to submitting another application in the near future.¹⁷ Mrs. Shepard was also quoted as saying, "I am very much aware of the strong local demand for single-sex places for Muslim girls and the wide support for the school among the Bradford community: support that is not confined to the Muslim community". Thus the twin issues of demand for denominational school places and the power of Muslim representation in the city were not officially denied. Mrs. Shepard therefore avoided questions about the ideological motivation of the decision, something that the local press did nothing to interrogate. Its presentation of the whole debate was totally de-politicised with attention focused instead on 'common-sense' issues such as the fabric of the school:

"The criteria should be the same for all schools, whatever the religious or cultural background of the pupils although if the education authority was supposed to be advising on the application, why did it fail to spot the problems itself?...providing the school meets the criteria in the areas outlined in her refusal, it would be extremely difficult for her to turn down its next application" (Bradford Telegraph and Argus: 17.02.95).

However that the application had been a symbolic test of Muslims' equal participation and inclusion in the British nation was given more emphasis in the national press where headlines mentioned that Muslims had been angered and irked by the decision. For example Ibrahim Hewitt from the Association of Muslim Schools, argued that:

"The Government has missed an opportunity to show the Muslim community that it values what they are doing for their daughters...Their decision not to is a violation of the Muslim community's human rights" (The Independent, 17.02.95).

Labour Councillor Mohammed Ajeeb was reported as being annoyed that the Education Department had not advised the school of certain necessary improvements during a visit to the school during September 1994 (The Guardian: 17.02.95). Indeed this point was taken up in the Muslim press where the DFE were implicitly accused of double-standards.

"when it comes to other faith communities the DFE goes out of its way to please them. In May 1991, the Jewish community in the London borough of Enfield was given a green light for state funding even though they had no premises, that is

they were given money to help them purchase premises for their school“(The Muslim News: 24.02.95)

Speaking in the Muslim press Akram Khan-Cheema continued the theme of social justice setting his concerns in a European context:

”It is unfortunate that the UK remains out of step with Europe...Republic of Ireland, Denmark and the Netherlands already have state-funded Muslim schools. We look forward to the day when we as British Muslims can also claim to have equitable treatment from our government “ (Q-News: 24.02.95)

He was also incredulous that the so-called problems with the schools’ accommodation represented a real threat to students’ safety. ”If we were not safe then how is it that we have been allowed to operate for so long? Why has the local authority not shut us down?“. This point was backed up by chair of Bradford LEA’s education committee, Councillor Berry, who set this issue in the broader context of Bradford’s other schools, many of which struggle with some degree of disrepair: ”We’d have to shut down an awful lot of schools if the standards were applied that rigorously“.

This suspicion at the explanation for the decision prompted some to turn to more conspiratorial theories about anti-Islamic voices in the Cabinet (Q-News: 24.02.95). However, perhaps the most compelling contrast between majority complacency about the decision which suggested that ‘everything would be all right next time’ and real minority frustration that once again Muslims found themselves excluded from participating equally in the British nation, was evidenced by the interventions of the young women who attend Feversham College. Throughout the application process they had been produced as intelligent and lively young women, representations that contested stereotypes of Muslim womanhood as necessarily docile and passive. In that tradition of engagement with the world outside their school, one week after the decision they wrote letters to The Muslim News (24.03.95) outlining their feelings about the rejection of the application:

”I feel rejected, upset and unequal...in what non-Muslims call an equal community. I hope all brothers and sisters will stick together in their sorrow“

”They wouldn’t give it to us because we are Muslims, and they wouldn’t like to see the Muslims getting the best education“

”If you think we are going to give up just like that you’d have to be joking“.

Conclusions:

Having documented Muslim disappointment and frustration at the rejection of Feversham College’s application for VA status, it remains to enquire why the strong accommodation between the school and the local authority nevertheless failed to deliver a successful application. One crucial observation is that the decision as to whether state funding for Feversham College would proceed was made by a national government with rather different political interests and educational agendas to those of Bradford Council.

An interesting way of pursuing this line of enquiry was suggested by a Muslim commentator in the wake of the decision. He argued that the rejection of Feversham College's VA status application in fact reflected the government's own concern to promote Grant Maintained (GM) schools (Q-News: 24.02.95). GM schools were established by the 1988 Education Reform Act which provided for state schools to opt 'out' of LEA control, or independent schools such as Feversham College, to opt 'in' to state control. Such schools therefore differ substantially from VA schools only in that they operate through direct liaisons with central government at Whitehall rather than with local authorities. As an indication of the general undermining of the power of local authorities during the last decade, the promotion of GM schools can be seen as just one strand in a general process of increased governmentality by a national state intent on increased centralisation and control. My point is that this in turn must have crucial implications for the representational strategies of minority constituencies such as Muslims with power bases in localities like Bradford.

The suggestion that GM status might provide Muslim schools with an alternative route to state funding has not been taken up with any great enthusiasm by Muslims. While Muslims have of course attempted to take advantage of the emphasis on 'parental choice' in recent Tory education policy-making, it is not surprising that they should want to persist with battles for the state funding of their schools on a local level. As I have demonstrated in my paper it is at the local level that their strength as a political constituency is located. Support for Feversham College's campaign for VA status was couched in long-standing political relationships between Bradford Council, LEA and local Muslim leaders, relationships that were born of the emergence of accommodationist multi-cultural funding initiatives during the early 1980s. My argument in conclusion is that what the case of Feversham College's application for VA status would seem to indicate is that localised strategies that have been successful for Muslims (and indeed other minorities) in the past can no longer necessarily be relied upon to deliver empowerment as local democracy is itself eroded.

This is a point taken up by Moeen Yaseen (1993), spokesman for two national Muslim education organisations. He has argued that Muslims and other minorities in contemporary Britain must organise Parliamentary lobbies at a national level which integrate to some extent with the dominant political culture if their concerns about social justice are to be heard. He therefore develops the position of Akram Khan-Cheema who skilfully established a local consensus about Feversham College in Bradford and rejects the separatism of the Muslim Parliament which denies that the status quo will ever deliver access to power for Muslims in Britain. Moeen reports that The Muslim Education Forum's lobbying of the 1993 Education Bill was "a novel, fruitful and liberating experience" (1993: 410) because the organisation led an alliance of Christian, Hindu and sympathetic secularist groupings, on the basis of a shared interest in a more justly pluralist Britain. Underlining my main argument in this paper that Muslim educational concerns are by no means necessarily separatist, he observed that "Lobbying involves the politics of pragmatism and necessity and the avoidance of oppositional politics" (Yaseen: 1993: 410).

Indeed what is notable about British-Muslim leaders since the Rushdie Affair in 1989 is the fact that in the main they have routinely adopted reformist rather than oppositional political strategies in their representations to the state.¹⁸ The purpose of this observation here in my conclusion is not to suggest that a new reformist approach to minority politics is emerging in a post-Rushdie context but rather to argue that, following Werbner (1991), seemingly contradictory strategies - between accommodationist reform and oppositional protest - are in fact illustrative of the general dilemmas of making counter-hegemonic representations to hegemonic state powers. The events of the Rushdie Affair bear out this observation. For example I think that it is important to recall that the book-burning in Bradford was in fact a reaction to the failure of a national campaign of Muslim lobbying which called for the book to be banned. The angry Muslim protests and demonstrations that ensued during 1989 must be understood in terms of one minority's frustrated realisation that reformist approaches to representation just were not working. What I want to suggest finally is that recalling the Rushdie Affair in this way may illuminate how the Muslim VA schools issue is represented in the near future. Given the rejection of Feversham College's application, an application which made great efforts to placate the hegemonic concerns of the majority regarding the issue of separatism, the continued failure of reformism to deliver access to power and self-determination may lead some Muslims once again to consider the possibility of more oppositional representational strategies as was the case during the Rushdie Affair.¹⁹

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¹ Since this paper was written in September 1996, a Labour government has come to power and two Muslim schools have been awarded state-funding. On January 9 1998, David Blunkett, the Education and Employment Secretary, accepted applications for Grant-Maintained (GM) status from the Islamia primary school in Brent, London and the Al Furqan primary school in Sparkhill, Birmingham. After, many years of campaigning, many Muslims were delighted to see their schools finally set to enjoy the benefits that Christian and Jewish institutions have known for some time. New Labour has been quick then to resolve an issue which stood for so long as a symbol of Muslims' continued disenfranchisement under the Tories. However, it is less clear whether the present government will be so quick to devolve real power to the local authorities with whom Muslim leaders in Bradford had such fruitful relationships in the early 1980s. That Muslim schools have been awarded GM status suggests that the Conservative party's policy of centralisation is likely to continue under Labour. As a result, there is likely to be ever more pressure on lobbyists to represent Muslims more effectively than they do now at a national, and especially parliamentary, level. At the same time, it is unlikely that even with state-funding under their belts, Muslim schools will cease to have the charge of 'separatism' levelled at them. The fight against Islamophobia continues.

² This paper is based on research towards a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology which was awarded by the University of Manchester in September 1997. I wish to thank the University and the Economic and Social Research Council for their generous support between October 1993 and 1996. The material here is based on a number of sources. I interviewed representatives of the school, Local Education Authority and members of the local Council about the application. While at no time was I given the opportunity to speak to the young women that attend Feversham College, I did visit the school for an open evening during 1994. I was also able to plot the progress of the submission through the application document itself; the minutes of meetings of Bradford Council and reportage in the local and national press. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Roger Ballard and Virinder S. Kalra, both of the University of Manchester, for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

³ Under the provision of the 1944 Education Act, religious denominations, having delivered the premises for a school, are allowed to apply to the state for support in financing their voluntary schools.

⁴ Department of Education and Science (DES) figures (January 1988) state that 32% of schools in England and Wales are VA status. It is estimated that pupils at such schools account for 23% of all pupils being educated in state schools. The majority of these schools are Church of England, but there are also 2,284 Roman Catholic and 23 Jewish schools (CRE 1990: 4).

⁵ For a thorough and lucid exposition of the case of Islamia School in Brent as well as the issues pertaining to the prospect of Muslim VA schools in general, see the work of Claire Dwyer (1991) For a

profile of one Muslim school, Zakaria Muslim Girl's school in Batley, which did not even succeed in getting the backing of its LEA see Islamia November 1993, issue no.22.

⁶ For an account of the way in which Muslims were maligned during the Rushdie Affair see Appignanesi, L. and S. Maitland (eds), (1989) *The Rushdie File*, London, Fourth Estate and Ahsan, M.M. & A.R. Kidwai (eds), (1993) *Sacrilege versus Civility*, Leicester, The Islamic Foundation. For an account of the structural deprivation of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims see Jones (1993).

⁷ The Runnymede Trust document "The Multi-Ethnic Good Society - Vision and Reality" (1996: 11) usefully defines such anti-Muslim sentiment in terms of the "ungrounded fear of, and hostility towards, aspects of Islamic faith, observance and culture".

⁸ For a discussion of the main pros and cons of Muslim VA schools in Britain see CRE (1990).

⁹ This collective included Akram Khan-Cheema, the chair of governors at Feversham College during 1994 and one of the six members of Swann to dissent on the 'separate' schools issue.

¹⁰ See the forthcoming critique of this aspect of the 1991 Census in Ballard, R. (1997) 'The Construction of a Conceptual Vision: Ethnic Groups and the 1991 UK Census' to be published in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, January.

¹¹ Fatwa; an authoritative opinion in Islamic law promulgated by a specialist, a mufti.

¹² For a study of the West's fascination with / abhorrence at the 'plight' of the female Muslim subject see, Kabbani, R. (1986), *Europe's Myths of Orient*, London, Pandora Press.

¹³ When I interviewed Akram Khan-Cheema (19.01.94) he indicated to me that there were as many as 472 Muslim girls being 'illegally' kept from attending school in Bradford at the time when BMGCS was set up in 1984.

¹⁴ At the time of writing Nighat Mirza was understood to have left Feversham College for a post at another Muslim school.

¹⁵ The only public arena in which I detected dissent was among callers to Radio Leeds' phone-in show, 'Night-talk' (May 1994). Opinions included: fears of separation and hopes for integration; objections to religion being taught in school but acceptance of Muslims equal rights; debates about whether a Christian would be given the same choice in a Muslim country; recognition that less than 10% of Muslim children would go anyway; arguments that a good religious education makes better British citizens; the contention that Islam is not a religion but a political system - "look at Iran - they're all basically looking for power"; others pointed to Muslim Spain as a paradigm of integrate approaches to education and tolerance; one confused Catholic caller maintained that if her denomination had to pay (they pay only 15% of capital costs) then why should Muslims not. Overall it was notable that those who objected to the idea of VA Muslim schools usually began with the assumption that Muslims are 'foreigners' without the rights of British citizens.

¹⁶ The Catholic Bishop's observations would seem very accurate in light of Mary Hickman's (1990) doctoral research on, *The incorporation of the Irish in Britain with special reference to Catholic state education*, n.d., University of London. She argues that the effect of state funded Catholic schools in Britain has been to de-nationalise the migrant Irish working-class and fit them for integration into British society. Indeed the reorganisation of Roman Catholic VA schools in Bradford at the time of Feversham College's VA application provides an interesting commentary on Muslims concerns about the reproduction and maintenance of minority identities. A number of RC schools were actually being closed, in the face of falling demand, in an attempt to prevent to large a proportion of their school places being filled by non-Catholics.

¹⁷ However speaking to Q-News recently (1-14 December, 1995) Akram Khan-Cheema said that a new application, which was being prepared around a new site with the help of Bradford Council, would not be submitted for some time. Indeed more recently Mr. Khan-Cheema announced his resignation from Feversham College's Board of Governors.

¹⁸ The arena of education is of course just one of the spaces within which issues concerning the social and political empowerment of a Muslim constituency in Britain have been contested in recent years. Other initiatives have included an attempt to extend 'race' relations legislation to those discriminated against on the basis of religion.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the dilemmas that the continued failure of reformist strategies encourages in an arena other than education see my recent paper, McLoughlin (1996).