<u>**Commission on Integration and Cohesion**</u>

Submission by Women Against Fundamentalisms and Southall Black Sisters January 2007.

Introduction

This is a joint submission made by Women Against Fundamentalisms and Southall Black Sisters.

Women Against Fundamentalisms is a feminist organization consisting of women of many ethnic and religious backgrounds. It was established in London in 1989, at the height of the 'Rushdie affair', to counter both the religious fundamentalisms and the racisms that dominated the discourse of that 'affair' The re-assertion and reinforcement of religious affiliation as a central principle of identity politics is a global as well as local phenomenon and is partly due to global economic developments and partly due to the rise in religious fundamentalism. From the outset WAF has clearly stated that resistance to racism and fundamentalism in Britain – two of the most divisive trends in British society - involves a struggle for secularism. Secularism is defined as the separation of Church and religion and is one of a number of preconditions, though not a guarantor of a more plural and equal society.

SBS is black feminist organisation that has been in existence since 1979. From the outset, the group adopted a secular feminist identity based on a shared history of racism and patriarchal control. In 1983, SBS set up a not for profit, advice, campaigning, resource and advocacy centre for black and minority women, with a particular focus on the needs of South Asian women. Whilst based in west London, an area with a large South Asian population, it has a national reach. The casework of Southall Black Sisters has highlighted flaws in the multicultural model. At the same time, it has pointed to the need to counter racism, gender and class discrimination simultaneously.

We make this submission because we have been addressing for many years, together and separately, many of the issues that the Commission is focusing on in the consultation document.

We do not intend to follow the question/answer format of the consultation document but instead wish to raise questions that arise from the underlying assumptions and themes of the debate on cohesion and integration.

Problematic assumptions

Our starting point is that the many of the assumptions behind the terminology of the commission's terms of reference are extremely problematic since it obscures an honest and open debate about divisions in our society and the causes of segregation and the rise in communal identification and fundamentalism. Why for instance is there no mention of human rights principles and racism in the terms of reference? This submission also proposes specific points of action and policy that WAF and SBS believe should be urgently addressed by the Commission and the government.

Integration of whom?

We are concerned about the wider underlying assumption maintained throughout the consultation document - that it is the immigrant communities as opposed to the settled communities that need to be 'integrated'. This implies that immigrant communities are somehow malfunctioning cultures whose values are intrinsically opposed to the so called 'British' way of life. New Labour politicians such as Blunkett, Brown and Blair, have often referred to the values of human rights, democracy and fair play - the basis of a shared British culture. Immediately the assumption is that there are a set of fixed and given (unchanging) 'British' values that are superior and to which all those who enter the country must subscribe.

While these values are certainly important, they are, by no means exclusively British, or even western, nor should they be seen to be so. Otherwise, they become markers of exclusion rather than of inclusion. This then generates the view that it is the immigrant communities with their negative and alien values that are responsible for

divisions and are harmful to the stability and 'cohesion' of the country. The discourse and assumptions around immigration and asylum for instance has always started from this premise.

In addition, we are concerned that Tony Blair's speech (December the 8th) on multiculturalism and integration entitled 'The Duty to Integrate: Shared British Values' at an event hosted by the Runnymede Trust, appears to have pre-empted the results of this consultation by signalling the direction of policies on these issues.

We like our diversity. But how do we react when that "difference" leads to separation and alienation from the values that define what we hold in common? For the first time in a generation there is an unease, an anxiety, even at points a resentment that our very openness, our willingness to welcome difference, our pride in being home to many cultures, is being used against us: abused, indeed in order to harm us. '

He invokes a country that is 'at ease with different races, religions and cultures' and celebrates that fact that the country has the most 'comprehensive panoply of anti-discrimination legislation in the world'. He then goes onto suggest that racism is all but eradicated.

'Racism has, for the most part, been kicked out of sport. Offensive remarks and stupid stereotypes have been driven out of public conversation. The basic courtesies, in other words, have been extended to all people.'

Tony Blair puts forward a vision of society in which integration occurs at the point of shared common unifying British values, as citizens with rights and duties. Yet there is no mention of how many are excluded from exercising their full rights as citizens by amongst other things, racism, poverty and discrimination. Concentrating on the 'integration' of Muslims, obscures the fact that a vast layer of white and other working class communities feel disenfranchised by the political process.

The Prime Minister suggested that only Muslims display anti-democratic and de-stabilising tendencies as opposed to other minorities who are well integrated into British society. The statement explicitly ruled out the impact of fundamentalism in

other religions including Christianity. This reinforces the distorted and dangerous view peddled by many in the media and western governments and mirrored by fundamentalists, that the battle lines are between the West and Islam. There is no recognition that many Muslims themselves are involved in challenging anti-democratic and anti- human rights elements within their own communities and countries. Integration is not the issue when, as WAF has long argued, it is young Muslims who are both 'integrated' and attracted to fundamentalist ideologies and networks far more then their parents. Moreover the renewed rhetoric on 'assimilation and 'integration' obscures the promotion of fundamentalist networks and 'leaders' by various branches of the UK government at local and national levels… It is this relationship that is now creating the foundations for a deeply fractured and unequal society, a point that the Commission must urgently consider. (This is discussed further below).

The direction that is indicated by the Prime Minster is a move from a multicultural to a multi-faith society which appears to draw boundaries between a public world of shared 'British' values and a private world of autarchic religious communities who are being encouraged to play a greater part in shaping public life and policy. Notwithstanding some welcome but contradictory comments on the failure of multiculturalism to address issues such as forced marriage and the rejection of religious personal laws, the drift to multi-faithism is evident and will impact on the rights of those that are least powerful in our society.

In view of the above, we ask why the terms of reference of this consultation focuses on 'integration' and 'cohesion' as the goals rather than equality and non discrimination? We are deeply concerned that the view here is that human rights and democratic ideals are western notions to which minority communities make no contribution.

Community?

'Communities' are considered to be the natural building blocks of society. However, we consider this notion to be problematic in several different ways. Firstly, not all members of society consider themselves as members of specific communities, ethnic

or local. Secondly, not all members of communities relate to their communities in the same way, nor are the boundaries of these communities stable or uncontested. Thirdly, the inclusion of 'communities' in the political process is usually via their unelected 'leaders' in a way that reinforces, rather than weakens differential power relations among minorities, and encourages an exaggeration and fixation of cultural and religious differences. We would argue that in order for people to be better integrated in British society, they need support to organize at grassroots levels – preferably across communal lines and for 'leaders' to be recognized as advocates rather than as representatives of these communities unless democratically elected. The State needs to enable communities to develop democratic methods of accountability rather than reinforce undemocratic systems through the recognition of local or national leaders

We are also very critical of the problematic way in which the notion of 'the community' is used since the assumption is that changes, (those that de-stabilise) the wider society, are caused primarily as a result of the arrival of new people to them. This diverts attention away from any proper analysis of racism and its impact both in legislative and policy terms towards ethnic minorities. This is most apparent in the direction in which immigration, asylum and education policies have gone, and the failure of the State to learn the lessons of seminal enquiries prior to the civil unrest witnessed in northern towns and cities in 2001 which prompted the debate on integration and cohesion. We have in mind the Stephen Lawrence inquiry[1] and the Burnage Report[2] to name but two. It would appear that lessons from such inquiries are being ignored. In short those elements of government policy and practice as well factors which increase segregation need to be examined.

Integration?

The term integration has been revived recently. It had fallen into disuse with the adoption of multiculturalism as a counter to previous assimilationist policies towards the post WW2 immigrants to Britain, mainly from the new Commonwealth countries. In recent years, however, the term integration was introduced (by Trevor Philips, the

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[1] *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* Macpherson, Sir, William (1999) (Macpherson Report). London: HMSO.
[1] *Murder in the playground. The Burnage Report* Macdonald et al Longsight Press 1989.

head of the CRE and others) as a counter notion to multiculturalism and in effect has been a cover for assimilationist policies which recognizes that people come from different origins and cultures but view knowledge, adjustment and acceptance of the majority culture and values as a precondition for their acceptance in Britain. The meaning of this term is clearly contested within the government and the cabinet as is the meaning of 'diversity'.

Overall, little thought is given to how the wider society can also enhance values and ideas learnt from the settled as well as the new migrant communities. Nor are the struggles to establish democracy, secularism and emancipation for women in many societies being clearly understood as the basis of common values.

Cohesion?

'Social cohesion' is a term that was used by the Cantle Report after the 2001 riots in northern England, where it was seen as the missing ingredient in the local society in the post Rushdie Affair era.[3] It is also a term that has been widely used in other EU countries in relation to their local, especially Muslim, migrant communities. In all these texts, social cohesion or the lack of it, is used to both describe a certain social reality – of harmonious social relations among the different members of local and national communities as well as to signify a normative precondition for people's integration into the society. There is a certain tautological tinge to the notion of social cohesion, since it is pointed out that people who are suffering from social exclusion are not included in the cohesive society. Exclusion in this context is considered to be based on cultural and sometimes geographical grounds. Again, economic disadvantage and especially racism are not usually mentioned. In the Cantle Report., for instance, racism is mentioned only as a symptom, rather than as a possible cause of the lack of social cohesion.

There are many factors that cause tensions among different groups in our society, locally and nationally. It is not possible to isolate local communities from the general national or global picture. The effects of a neo-liberal economy, the closure of local

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[3] *Community Cohesion: A report of the Independent Review Team Ted Cantle.* Home Office 2001

industries, the denial of proper funding to local authorities by the central government, the partial demolition and privatisation of the welfare state – all play a role in decreasing local resources and increasing competition among individuals and groupings. The government's promotion of specific networks as representatives of various minorities and of a 'faith-based agenda' is one of the causes of segregation inequality and discrimination rather than a solution to it. The role of the media, as well as of other political discourses, which construct the situation in terms that blame the newcomers, is also critical in fuelling these tensions. It is in this context that questions of segregation and cohesion must be understood.

What follows is an examination of some central features of British society that has contributed to the creation of parallel and separate communities in the UK. We seek to show how the 'cohesion' and 'integration' strategy while apparently 'assimilationist' produces a separatist agenda which works against the existence of a secular and plural society underscored by the ideals of democracy, human rights and equality.

The 'War on Terror and anti-Muslim Racism

The impact of Britain's disastrous foreign policy in Iraq and elsewhere and the so called 'War on Terror' has had two broad consequences . One is the massive pressure being experienced by Muslims who are called on to demonstrate their loyalty as well as bear the brunt of many discriminatory anti –terrorist measures. The other, far less remarked, is the search for Muslim allies among violent fundamentalist groups such as the Jamaat i Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood and their various British associates. Many Muslims, the youth in particular, are arbitrarily targeted by the police and security services and subjected to indefinite detention, oppressive raids and surveillance operations. The rule of law is frequently suspended or under threat by the State's operations both within and outside its national borders and yet the irony is lost on politicians who call for Muslims in particular, to respect the rule of law. But, the measures do nothing to counter genuine terrorism. Instead they curtail civil liberties and deny many Muslims and other minorities basic civil rights and access to public services. At the same time, Salafi- Wahabi ideologues have been found to denounce terrorism in Britain, but not necessarily abroad and have been given the space to promote communal and fundamentalist agendas. British Muslims must be subdued by

corralling them into a submissive fundamentalist identity. Nothing could be more disastrous to a democratic or secular formulation of 'social cohesion' than this plank of the British government's soft counter-terrorism measures.

Immigration and asylum

Harsh and discriminatory immigration and asylum laws have always tied the question of immigration and settlement in this country to the question of national stability, race relations and integration. This is of course a European phenomenon since debate about the enlargement of Europe is always accompanied by discussions on European integration and the free movement of labour within an expanded EU. But while many feeling persecution including from those countries that have been most severely affected by the 'War on Terror' are denied refugee status, others who have promoted terrorism have been given safe haven in Britain.

It is therefore impossible to discuss racism without also acknowledging the impact of the immigration and asylum system. The two discourses are inextricably linked For example, The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act of 2002 was preceded by a white paper entitled 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity.' The assumption being that internal stability can only be guaranteed if the borders of the country are policed to prevent the influx of (undesirable) migrants and refugees. Immigration and asylum laws and polices have provided the basis for racism to flourish at an institutional level and on the streets.

Differential citizenship rights including the right to work and marry affect minority populations of this country even if they are otherwise seen as 'integrated. Discrimination was also institutionalised through such legislation as the Nationality Act 1981 and the introduction of the 'primary purpose' and 'one year rules'. This affected citizenship rights including the right to work and marry. There were very few black and minority families who had not been negatively affected by the immigration and nationality laws.

SBS has for example campaigned for years to end the double standards in protection against violence against women due to the existence of the 'Two year rule' and the

'no recourse to public funds requirement' in immigration law which has the effect of excluding minority women who do not have secure immigration from the protection (welfare services and housing) available to other women who experience domestic violence in the wider society. The routine response that is given to demands to abolish the 'no recourse to public funds' is that the 'integrity of the immigration system' cannot be undermined. In other words, the human rights (integration?) of certain categories of people who are already marginalised in our society cannot take priority over the need to control migration. It goes without saying that such an approach exacerbates poverty and inequality.

In the late 80s and 90s successive asylum laws and increasingly the 'managed migration policies' have been geared towards excluding certain categories of people from citizenship rights. Human rights and so called 'managed migration' have been successfully de linked in the UK by successive governments. In essence many of the policies directed at asylum seekers and refugees are discriminatory, coercive and punitive. They are subject to intense surveillance and those who cannot fit the stringent requirements are incarcerated like criminals and ruthlessly expelled.

Human rights advocates from Bangladesh and Algeria have pointed out that Britain has become a home to numerous individuals who are accused of committing serious crimes, amounting in some cases to war crimes or crimes against humanity. These individuals could be investigated and charged under legislation permitting universal jurisdiction for serious crimes such as genocide, torture or war crimes. But most have never been charged and probably not even investigated. Indeed, some have emerged as major 'community leaders' with government sponsorship, while there is concern that others may have received a measure of protection from MI5 because of their usefulness as informers.

For the majority of asylum seekers however, asylum policies have prevented them from entering the country legally and from working. They are denied a fair hearing access to social care, welfare and housing and are excluded from health and safety protection at work.. They are rendered destitute and vilified by the media. The media have concentrated on abuses by asylum seekers rather than the abuses committed against them.

In a survey documenting the death of asylum seekers, the Institute of Race Relations has catalogued the deaths of 221 asylum seekers and migrants who have died many of as a consequence of immigration policies, some by taking their own lives.

The numbers of deaths recorded are probably a gross underestimate since many have illegal status and their deaths are probably unreported in the media.[4]

Asylum seekers are also forcibly dispersed to areas where they have no networks of support. Many face intense isolation and racism. In the last five years, there have been a number of deaths (suicides and racially motivated murders) in the main dispersal areas such as Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Bristol.

The high levels of discrimination and inhumanity extends to immigrant and asylum seeking children. Damning reports by the Inspectorate of Prisons show that detention centres are often not appropriate places for the detention of vulnerable adults, let alone children.

As the report of Anne Owers, the HM Inspector of Prisons (HMIP) shows – at Harmondsworth detention centre, bullying, hate, humiliation and discrimination of detainees by staff were common. The report found that there was an over –emphasis on physical security and control; the use of force was high as was the use of temporary confinement in segregated units and detainees were denied the right of contact with the outside world. Mental degradation, depression, self harm and attempted suicide were a daily occurrence. [5]

The Inspector also raised concerns about children's welfare at the Oakington Immigration Reception Centre in Cambridgeshire. She stated that the procedures for safeguarding children were not 'sufficiently robust'. There was no independent social services assessment of children staying longer than a few days, though files showed some children were suffering distress. The older children were receiving little or no education.[6]

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[4] *Driven to desperate measures* Harmit Athwal. Institute for Race Relations. September 2006
[5] *Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre – 'Not fit for purpose'* NCADC January 2007
[6] *Concerns over detained children.n*ews.bbc.co.uk November 2004

Other reports have shown how local authorities in the UK are flouting the law on the care and protection of children in order to save money. For example, the Children's Commissioner, Aynsely-Green has expressed serious concerns about unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The commissioner alleged that Hillingdon Council is failing to carry out assessments on the basis of each child's needs, as required under the Children Act 1989. Instead they are being removed from care. He stated that the Council's approach was also highly discriminatory in other areas concerning schooling and accommodation. [7]

Perhaps the most damning part of the Commissioner's concerns is that UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is being flouted and applied in a discriminatory manner. The Comissioner's report would suggest that integration is not its goal where asylum seeking children are concerned.

Elsewhere, cuts in English classes suggests that the government actually fears the integration of migrants more than it supports it.[8] On 18 October 2006, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) announced that it would no longer fund basic 'English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) classes. These free classes were massively oversubscribed and were used by a variety of people including asylum seekers, migrants and refugees. Far from seeing the cutting of English classes as contradictory to the integration agenda, we would agree with those who argue that 'ESOL funding cuts are wholly consistent with a doctrine of 'managed migration', asylum policies of deterrence and deportation and increasingly stringent citizenship requirements'[9]

While refugees and asylum seekers are denied fundamental human rights protections, an altogether more sophisticated approach is taken to address the more settled immigrant communities, especially in response to the so called 'Muslim terrorist threat'. The dual approach to minorities involves attempts by the State to co-opt a layer of 'moderate' Muslim leaders as allies for the War on Terror.

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[7] Ay*nsley-Green accuses Hillingdon of flouting law on care of minors* www.communitycare.co.uk.
January 2001
[8] *Enforcing the language barrier* Jon Burnett IRR November 2006
[9] Op cit

The State claims to address 'terrorism' and 'extremism' by engaging so called 'moderate' Muslims. After the July bombings the state established focus groups and task forces on preventing extremism. These task forces themselves contain few people who have worked on problems solving in the issues that affecting British Muslims such as health, education, housing, employment or schooling. There is no recognition of the links between the so called 'moderates' who often themselves promote fundamentalism or violence abroad through funding and other links, even if they profess to support values of democracy and human rights in country. A daring report from the Policy Exchange for example reveals that the British State, contrary to popular belief has and is flirting with radical Islam. It shows how the State's relationship with organisations such as the Muslim Council of Great Britain (MCB) which claims to represent British Islam has compromised the agenda on preventing extremism. As the author of the report points out, The MCB has its origins in the sectarian and political Islamic politics of Pakistan and Bangladesh[10]. Yet the influence of the MCB and others like it is now strongly felt throughout policy development in Britain. The report demonstrates how the attempt by the State to recognise as interlocutors those who shout the loudest and claim to be the most 'authentic', represents serious failings with the State's approach to Muslims and indeed to all Asian communities. The State is listening to and co-opting those who seek to impose their agenda by threat, intimidation and censorship. This is discussed further in the section on 'Faith Communities'.

Multiculturalism and anti racism

Even before racial tensions exploded on the streets of Oldham and Bradford in Britain in 2000, Bradford Council had already commissioned a report to examine how and why segregated neighbourhoods and divisions between different racial groups in Bradford were allowed to form.[11] The Ouseley report attacked the segregation of communities along ethnic and religious lines and criticised schools for doing little to promote racial understanding. It made a series of recommendations based on findings of low academic achievement in schools, little understanding of other cultures and above all the need to confront all white and all Muslim schools about their lack of

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[10] *When progressives Treat with Reactionaries* Martin Bright Policy Exchange July 2006
[11] *Community pride not Prejudice* Bradford Council. July 2001

contribution to social and racial integration. It also castigated the leaderships of communities for being socially conservative, timid and incapable of real leadership. The assumption being that 'traditional' leaderships had maintained a stranglehold on their communities. Recommendations included the need for strong political and community leadership and the creation of programmes that bring communities together under the banner of 'social cohesion'. What was absent from the discussion however, was an understanding of economic disadvantage, racism and the rise of fundamentalist religious identity operating through municipal and community politics, all of which contributed to the segregation.

More recently, the rejection of multiculturalism coupled with a failure to dismantle divisive social structures and policies, has encouraged assimilation of some aspects of community life but not others. Religious leaders are being co-opted at all levels of the State, whilst at the same time, faith based schools are promoted. (See below). Thus ironically, both State and community leaders are actively engaged in strategies that increase segregation of the more settled communities, despite the rhetoric of 'cohesion' and 'integration'

Since the 70s, when assimilation as an official policy was discarded in favour of multiculturalism, some of us worried about how it was being divested of its more progressive dimensions in certain social policy areas and was instead being perceived as an end in itself. Much of the previous failure of anti racist and multicultural policies is due to the fact that the reality of racism, structural inequality in employment, education, housing and the delivery of welfare services was not addressed and that local democratic structures capable of addressing the needs of all disadvantaged groups were eschewed. Multiculturalism and anti- racism was simply translated into the need to recognise cultural diversity and to promote a certain layer of community leadership. It was precisely such flawed multicultural thinking that contributed to the creation of ghettos of both white and other minority communities in the most deprived areas of the country and accelerated the process of 'White flight'.

We have argued that not all aspects of multicultural policies in Britain have been negative. In the education arena especially, multiculturalism has played a positive role in recognizing diversity and promoting pluralism. Nevertheless even here, it has also

tended to construct differences in a stereotypical manner. Fixing and reifying boundaries of community affiliation and homogenizing notions of culture and ethnicity. The multicultural approach views members of ethnic minority as 'Others.' and the more different the 'Other' is from the majority, the s more 'authentic' it is perceived to be.

A recent study of multiculturalism in three secondary state schools conducted by SBS and Working Lives Institute based at the London Metropolitan University, [12] found that even in schools, the practice of multiculturalism and anti-racism has lapsed into a form of identity politics which actually draws upon and gives political life to very one dimensional, conservative, ethnicist and religious identities.

Whilst the heads of all three schools expressed a firm commitment to multicultural education, their understanding of it was often problematic. The findings of the study reveal that minority communities are being constructed in different ways within state schools. Some (South Asian and Middle Eastern) communities tend to be viewed through the lens of religious affiliation and are addressed accordingly, whilst others are regarded as more secular and political. This is nowhere better exemplified than in the way in which in the main, assemblies and RE have become the main forums in which the diverse religions and perhaps cultures (mainly food and dress) of Asian communities are celebrated. This is in sharp contrast to the way in which Black History Month has been established to show case the political, musical, artistic and literary achievements of African-Caribbean communities.

Multiculturalism in the schools does not address institutionalised racism instead it appears to accommodate demands for greater recognition of religious identity. Although all the schools had racial equality policies in place, it was recognised that schools generally have not adequately addressed issues which go to the heart of racial inequality and the reduction of life chances that go with it. This view is also echoed in a damning high level government report, in which institutional racism is blamed for

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[12] See attached

the fact that 'black pupils are three times more likely to be excluded than white, and five times less likely to be on the official register of gifted and talented students. [13]

Multicultural policies have also triggered a backlash from white parents from mainly deprived backgrounds who have also felt that their own cultures and values have been ignored. Moreover, the differential allocation of resources based on identity, rather than disadvantage or need, has led to many within the white working class communities to become progressively influenced and attracted by extreme right 'racialised 'common sense' views. It is this sense of not being 'included' that has led to white parents to withdraw their children from schools where other ethnic backgrounds dominate.(The white flight phenomenon) We believe that the study shows that increasing emphasis on religion by the State has created conditions for segregation, leading to mutual distrust, hatred and ignorance.

A different model of multiculturalism in schools can have a central role to play in fostering unity based on respect for diversity and human rights. Yet the current promotion of faith schools or the 'over accommodation' of religious identity in all areas of school life is contributing to tensions witnessed in the wider society. Many teachers want their schools to reflect diverse backgrounds. They see Black History Month for example, as an invaluable forum for the recognition of the rich social and political traditions of a range of diverse backgrounds. At a time when the more established minority communities in Britain are harbouring resentment and prejudice towards the new migrant communities, a reiteration of shared histories of migration, colonialism and experiences of racism has an important part to play in dealing with these tensions.

Issues of integration and cohesion therefore need to be seen in their proper political and cultural contexts. Moreover, they need to be assessed in an intersectional manner, taking into account gender, race and class dimensions.

Multiculturalism and women

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[13] See *Getting it. Getting it Right'*. Department of Education and Skills. December 2006.

The most problematic aspect of multiculturalism, however, where women are concerned, is the question of community representation.

Multiculturalism has provided the space for unelected community representatives, usually male and from religious groups, but also from the business classes, to determine the needs of the community and to mediate between the community and the state. Needless to say, such leaders have little or no interest in promoting social justice or women's equality. Although the interests of the community are often articulated in the name of anti-racism or human rights, this very rarely includes recognition of the individual rights of women or other sub groups within the community. Most have vested interests in representing only the dominant and often orthodox versions of culture and religion.

We have argued that power relations within minority communities as well as within society as a whole need to be taken into account and that it should not be assumed that all people of particular ethic or religious origin have the same degree of attachment to their culture or indeed share the same interpretation of the cultures and traditions as espoused by community leaders. Nor is it helpful to regard all minorities as being members of the same community. Multicultural policies have seldom recognised the political, secular and complex histories of migrant communities; instead they have been reduced to stereotypes and caricatures.

We have been warning of the complicity, in the name of multiculturalism, between state agencies, such as social services, the judiciary and schools and fundamentalist and other non representative so-called 'community leaders' to the detriment of women and other marginal elements within minority communities in the UK.

Women and others who have historically been powerless and vulnerable in minority communities have no voice both within and outside their communities. The recent Fawcett Report on minority women confirmed the 'massive inequalities faced by Asian women' in many areas of their lives.[14].

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[14] Black and Ethnic Minority Women in the UK. The Fawcett Society. February 2005.

The nature of state intervention in the family in minority communities has often led to a cultural relativist approach. In an effort to appear 'culturally sensitive' and 'tolerant of diversity', the welfare and legal system often ignore the rights of women. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the response that is routinely given to women and children escaping violence and abuse from their partners or families.

In addressing issues such as domestic violence, suicide rates (up to 3 times the national average), rape and sexual violence, honour crimes and forced marriages within the Asian communities in particular, SBS has had to challenge multicultural policies for their effect in reinforcing rather than challenging such abusive practices. Recently, they thought they had made some inroads in redefining multiculturalism so that women's needs are not ignored. For example, in the debates on forced marriage in 1999 and 2000 held by the Home Office Working Group on forced marriage, the then Home Office Minister, Mike O'Brien, acknowledged that 'multiculturalism cannot be an excuse for moral blindness'. Echoing their concerns, he advocated a 'mature multicultural' approach which demands that violence against women and other oppressive restrictions on women needed to be understood as abuses and violations of women's fundamental human rights, irrespective of the cultural or religious contexts in which they occur. Unfortunately, instead of promoting 'mature multiculturalism' and building on the concept, this government has since taken several contradictory steps in the direction of greater segregation.

The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism

Any understanding of the fractured nature of British society must place at its heart an examination of the rise of religious fundamentalism world wide. In the UK, The relation between the British State and minorities characterised by the politics of multiculturalism has created spaces for fundamentalist leaders to flourish and claim ownership of their 'communities'. The ways in which the British State has privileged Christianity at the same time as operating discriminatory policies, has contributed to the rise in fundamentalist identity within minority religions. More generally, the failure to embed a democratic and human rights culture within social institutions and community relations has in our view, given all religious fundamentalists the

confidence to make demands which encourage the construction of parallel communities.

Fundamentalist movements have been defined as essentially political movements that use modern means of communication to assert a version of religion that is believed to be the 'literal' interpretation of the text. Religious fundamentalism aligns itself with different political trends in different countries and manifests itself in a variety of forms, sometimes as a form of orthodoxy – the maintenance of traditional values and sometimes as a radical phenomenon, dismissing impure and corrupt forms of religion to return to the original source. [15]

The controversy around the Rushdie Affair in Britain in 1989, led to a public debate which was grossly distorted as a battle between Islam and the West (Secularism). The media homogenised Muslims into a community which they claimed to have 'discovered' in places such as Bradford and Tower Hamlets. Despite the fact that there were many different views amongst Muslims themselves, only the views of certain militant Muslim youths or community leaders who supported the fatwa against Rushdie were heard. Another problem with the discourse around religious fundamentalism was that it became synonymous with Islam, thus diverting attention away from the nature of the British State and its relationship with religion.

In the West, the rise of Christian fundamentalism and its increasing influence on state institutions has been ignored. Yet Christian fundamentalism has been at the heart of the 'moral right' in the USA and to a lesser extent, has wielded considerable influence in shaping the UK's law and policies on a range of social issues.

The secular nature of the British State was always a fragile assertion since trends in a number of social surveys have shown that the majority of the country always identified themselves with the Established Churches. This is why assimilationist policies were popular and implemented in the early 60s and 70s. This was the context in which the Powellite notion of Englishness expressed in his 'rivers of blood' speech has to be seen.

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[15] *Refusing Holy Orders* Nira Yuval-Davis and Gita Saghal Virago Press limited. 1992

However the British State as a Christian State is a constitutional fact. It is anchored in the law which means much more than the status of the queen as a symbolic head of the Church of England and Scotland. Firstly, the church hierarchy participates in the House of Lords. Secondly, the blasphemy law protects the Church of England from offensive attacks which are legal against other religions. Thirdly and most importantly in contemporary political debates, is the fact that under the 1988 Education Reform Act, all State schools are required to have a daily act of broadly Christian worship. This amendment came about as a result of intense Christian fundamentalist lobbying. Indeed in the UK, the influence of Christian fundamentalism is perhaps most evident in the field of education.

The re-assertion of Christianity as the main signifier or characteristic of 'Britishness' was also reiterated by Tony Blair in his speech on multiculturalism and integration:

The national curriculum needs to stress integration rather than separation. The 1988 Education Reform Act states that religious education in all community schools should be broadly Christian in character but that it should include study of the other major religions. There is currently a voluntary agreement with faith schools on this basis.

The result is that Christianity is given an affirmed legal status as the ideological cement of national culture at the same time, almost by way of compensation; there is also recognition that other religions are the cement of their own community cultures. Another problem with this position is that there is complete silence about the fact that parents have a legal right to opt out of RE. At the same time, teachers and parents also have a right to opt out of the religious part of school assemblies. [16]

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[16] Guidance regarding the right of the parent to withdraw their child from religious education can be found in the Department for Education Circular 1/94 paragraphs 44-49. This relates to the 1988 and 1993 Education Acts. It gives guidance on the meaning of the terms 'worship' and 'Christian'. Worship is defined as honouring a divine being and predominantly Christian as giving special status to the person of Jesus Christ. The Circular also contains guidance on the right of withdrawal from collective worship and Religious Education. It allows parents to withdraw their children from collective worship and/or Religious Education either in part or completely. Parents do not have to give a reason for their withdrawal.

In the light of Tony Blair's position, all manner of religious groups are given the green light to shape educational policy. It is no surprise then that education has become a battles ground for the State and fundamentalists alike. A number of reports for instance highlight the mobilisation of parents by religious organisations in order to encourage parental withdrawal from school assemblies and RE. Others show how religion is influencing the teaching of a number of subjects within schools.

For instance, in a document circulated to the Department for Education and Skill, Muslim so called 'educationalists' have recommended that provision should be allowed in the teaching of Islam to Muslim children who are withdrawn from statutory worship and RE.[17] Clearly the message here is that it is entirely legitimate for children to be segregated so that they are not exposed to each other's beliefs and values. It is argued that the focus in all schools instead, should be on pupil's learning about their own faith.

This kind of lobbying is not limited to Muslim groups. The academic Parita Mukta revealed that Hindu fundamentalists[18] in the UK have attempted to gain legitimacy by putting out materials on religious education in order to influence the school curriculum and multiculturalism generally. A leaflet entitled *'Explaining Hindu Dharma: A Guide for Teachers'* was published without any awareness on the part of publishers or teachers of the anti-Muslim and communalist or separatist politics of its background. The text propounds the notion that India belongs to Hindus only. Implicit in this is the denial of history and the rich hybrid culture that has evolved. It also contains conservative notions of women and sexuality. Parita Mukta warns that:

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[17] Muslims on Education: A Position Paper by The Association of Muslim Social Scientist and Forum Against Islamaphobia, and FED 2000 (For Education and Development) The Muslim College.

[18] The promotion of Hinduism and the 'Hindu' identity has been led by Hindus who have links with right wing Hindu nationalists in India. The very same group who were instrumental in the genocide that took place against Muslims in Gujarat in February 2002 and who have been in the forefront of a new wave of pogroms against Muslims since 1992. The agenda of right wing Hindus in India is to assert Hindu majority rule by political and violent means. Hindu organisations in the UK have supported the nationalist and fundamentalist agenda directly and indirectly by providing services and funding to the movement

'If due care is not taken, the RE world may well find itself implicated in the production and dissemination of knowledge by vested groups who form part of the new religious movements and who have a lamentable record on human rights' [19]

More recently, The Guardian newspaper exposed the attempts made by Christian Fundamentalists to influence the teaching of science in secondary schools. The paper states that dozens of schools are using creationist teaching materials such as the DVDs put out by the 'Truth in Science' group of Christian fundamentalists to support the science curriculum. Although condemned by the government as not appropriate in the teaching of science, it has nevertheless been used by some teachers to provide an alternative to Darwinism. One science teacher justified its use by stating that:

'Just because it takes a negative look at Darwinism doesn't mean it is not science. I think to critique Darwinism is quite appropriate' [20]

Whilst the government has been prepared to make clear that the 'Truth in Science' materials should not be used in science lessons, there is no acknowledgement of the fact that its own policies and initiatives in fostering 'faith communities' is giving religious groups greater access to schools which in turn allows them to promote a particular version of their beliefs.

The study by SBS and Working Lives Institute for example, shows how the wider context, in which religion is shaping the development and delivery of social policy, is also reflected to some extent in state funded secular schools. We witness a creeping accommodation of religion in such schools across a range of activities and are concerned that this could potentially squeeze out the secular nature of educational spaces. Indeed the central argument made by many religionists, that the education system should not compromise issues of faith, appears to be heard.[21] Demands for separate prayer rooms and dress codes in many instances are accommodated if not

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[19] *New Hinduism: Teaching Intolerance, Practicing Aggression* Parita Mukta. Journal of PCIRE Autumn 1997

[20] *The Guardian* 27 November 2006.

[21] *Muslims on Education*: A Position Paper by The Association of Muslim Social Scientist and Forum Against Islamophobia, and FED 2000 (For Education and Development) The Muslim College.

institutionalised. Workplace organisations such as teaching unions have also been responding to such demands along the same lines. [22]

The impact of the 'over accommodation' of religion in state secular schools, has important implications for girls and young women in particular.

Evidence from the study suggests that increasingly, girls from minority communities are being withdrawn from the social aspects of sex education teaching and mixed residential trips and even PE, which is not questioned except by some committed teachers and Heads. The study suggests that the Every Child Matters agenda is being disapplied when it comes to addressing the needs of minority girls. The result is that emotional development is curtailed and they are denied the opportunity to develop the social skills necessary to participate in the outside world on an equal footing. The study also reveals that there are major contradictions in the way in which on the one hand, government policy places pressure upon schools to tackle teenage pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections but on the other hand, gives parents the problematic right to withdraw their children from these discussions

More generally, evidence suggests that in state secular schools, teachers often struggle to ensure that they meet the needs of young girls when faced with some parents who use schools for another agenda – to control their sexuality. This is especially relevant in the way in which all too often, schools readily accede to demands which essentially attempt to remove girls from public spaces or restrict their access to knowledge and debate. Our concern is that if this is taking place in state schools, what must be happening in faith schools?

In constructing a new vision of multicultural (multi-faith) Britain, Tony Blair does not address the flaws that WAF, SBS and others have pointed out over the years. Instead his construction is based on the absence of Muslim terrorism and the maintenance of religious identity with the support of Muslims and other minorities.

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[22] See for example *The Muslim Faith and School Uniform.* NUT Guidelines March 2006. It should however be noted that the guidance came out before the judgement in the Shabina Begum case.

'It is a new and virulent form of ideology associated with a minority of our Muslim community. It is not a problem of Briton, of Hindu, Afro-Caribbean, Chinese or Polish origin…Nor is it a problem with the majority of the (decent law abiding) Muslims…the reason I say that this is grounds for optimism is that what the above proves, is that integrating people whilst preserving their distinctive cultures, is not impossible. It is the norm. The failure of one part of one community to do so, is not a function of a flawed theory of a multicultural society.'

'Faith communities'

Since 9/11 and the growth of religious fundamentalism, minority groups have demanded the right to lead parallel lives in private and in public to be governed in accordance with their religious identity. New Labour has accommodated this demand by formulating policies that encourage the growth of 'faith communities' with their separate faith schools and welfare provision.

'Faith communities' have been specifically identified by the State as important sources of social capital. There is increasing recognition in official policy that the experiences, resources and networks of people based on religious identity have been neglected. To correct the situation, strategies and programmes are developed to give faith communities full opportunity to participate in society. [23] This development also fits neatly into a wider neo conservative agenda in which the privatisation of what were once considered to be vital state functions, such as schooling and welfare provision, is essential.

Under the 'faith community' model, notions of citizenship and models of citizenship based on respect for individual human rights are replaced by notions of social cohesion and integration involving adherence to 'core British values'. Adherence to core values does not result in the loss of cultural or religious identity. In fact, the faith based approach encourages segregation. It also encourages the substitution of the

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[23] *'Faith as social capital'* in Findings. March 2006. This is a summary of a major study by sociologists on the contribution that can be made by 'faith communities' as 'social capital'. It is an example of the high level of academic activity that is now devoted to improving the participation of faith based groups in civil regeneration. Such research is encouraged by the State and feeds into social policy development towards minority communities.

demand for equality with the demand for greater recognition of diversity and 'religious literacy'. That is, the need to understand diverse theological values as espoused by religious leaders, but not recognition of the various liberal religious or cultural traditions within a community.

As far as the State is concerned, civil society is now split into two types of groups – those which are faith based and those which are secular. As religion is deemed to be a key element in self identity, 'faith communities' are given as much if not greater opportunity to be reflected in all manner of central and local policy developments, irrespective of whether or not there is any experience of the issues being addressed.

To promote engagement with 'faith communities', the government set up a specific 'Faith Communities Unit' at the Home Office (now moved to the Department for Communities and Local government and renamed Race, Cohesion and Faiths Directorate) which commissioned an unprecedented report setting out how 'faith communities' should be drawn into decision making at the central and local levels. The report entitled 'Working Together'[24] has made a number of interesting, indeed extraordinary recommendations, for example, the need for structured consultations, removal of obstacles to participation and extra resources to facilitate and strengthen faith communities:

- *Recognise that capacity is a key issue and consider allocating resources to allow faith community bodies, which may lack infra structure or resources to participate fully in consultations;*

- *Pursue " faith literacy and participate in internal faith awareness training";*

- *Involve experts and tap into their knowledge and expertise. Discuss plans for engaging with faith communities with the Home Office Faith Communities Unit;*

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[24]'Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities'. Home Office. February 2004 and August 2005.

- *Faith Communities Unit to map the extent to which faith communities are benefiting from funding programmes designed to support Voluntary and Community Sector and Black and Minority Ethnic infrastructure, capacity and projects, and take action to address any deficiencies which emerge;*

At the same time, to minimise the problem of segregation, the State looks for ways of encouraging faith communities to relate in some way to each other to promote 'cohesion'. One obvious example is the proposal to twin schools so that children from different backgrounds can be exposed to different cultures. Far from heeding the many critics including the majority of teachers and Heads who reject the idea of faith schools in favour of local, state funded, secular, multicultural schools, New Labour has opted for segregation in education. The message clearly being that it is ok for schools to be mono-cultural as long as there is a little contact with schools with children from other backgrounds. But even the twinning of schools is a concept too far for some religionists who argue that exposure even from a distance, to other cultures and faiths is not necessary. [25].

In promoting the construction of 'faith communities', no thought given to the fact that much of religious institutional life in minority communities has yet to go through the process of liberalisation or democratisation that religious institutions have been forced to undergo in the wider society. In minority communities, religious institutions are dominated by fundamentalist, conservative and even misogynist and homophobic religious agenda, and although there are liberal strands within minority communities, their voices are silenced or marginal. For example in March 2006, the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain brought out a report on child abuse in madrassas (Muslim religious schools), which remain unregulated as do other minority religious schools. Yet neither the State nor the so called 'moderate' Muslims to which the State constantly refers, have addressed the issues or taken up the recommendations made[26]

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[25] *Muslims on Education: A Position Paper* The Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMISS UK), Forum Against Islamaphobia and Racism (FAIR) and FED 2000 (For Education and Development) The Muslim College UK

[26] *ChildProtection in Faith – Based Environments* _A Guideline Report. Muslim Parliament of Great Britain. March 2006

The faith based approach to multiculturalism, has gathered momentum, especially in the deprived regions of the UK where urban renewal has been elusive. It has to be said that the fractured nature of secular institutions within minority communities has made it much easier for the state to seek out faith based groups which have ready made networks and institutions that can be accessed. However, even if 'faith communities' are not fully formed, the emphasis is on supporting the creation of an infra structure within faith based groups rather than to build capacity within secular groups even if they have experience and expertise.

The increasing promotion of 'faith communities' provides the space for the politics of identity based on religion to flourish. Fundamentalists and anti-democratic elements in particular have utilised the language of racism to great effect in the maintenance of religious values and identity which encourages separation. So faith based campaigns for legal tolerance, cultural rights, freedom from discrimination and access to public resources, gain momentum. Only some such demands are borne out of experiences of alienation and exclusion due to racism; others are borne out of the perceived need to maintain religious identity, such as demands for separate religious based schools, dress codes in secular state schools, personal laws (especially family law governing matters including marriage, divorce, custody of children and inheritance), legal protection against religious discrimination or incitement to religious hatred.

The result is that the various religious leaderships within minority communities are drawn into policy considerations which strengthen their hand considerably and bring within their domain areas which hitherto have been addressed by progressive secular, anti-racist and feminist groups, including issues such as domestic violence, child protection, and the rights of black and minority offenders in the criminal justice system.

In his recent speech, Tony Blair's stated that funding of religious groups will be conditional upon their commitment to 'cohesion' and 'integration' because in the past public money had been too easily handed out to organisations 'tightly bonded around religious, racial or ethnic identities'. However, we fear that instead of focusing on religious groups, the government will restrict funding to those black and minority groups that have formed autonomously to address inequality and racism. The

statement makes no distinction between secular groups such as SBS which formed to address the invisibility of black and minority women as a result of racism and inequality and those that use faith to scramble for resources on the basis of identity and not needs. The statement also fails to take account of the fact that other parts of the State are actually encouraging segregation through the promotion of 'faith communities'

The basis of multiculturalism and the slide to multi-faithism has opened the way for more fundamentalist and authoritarian religious political networks and organisations to take over as interlocutors with the government, and other bodies such as the Runnymede Trust which recently published a report commissioned by The Hindu Forum of Britain about Hindus in Britain.[27] The Hindu Forum is an organisation which claims to speak on behalf of all Hindus in Britain. The Report was sponsored by the Cohesion and Faiths Unit formerly of the Home Office and now part of the Department for Communities and Local Government and is endorsed by Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. The Report claims to uphold human rights and considers itself progressive on a number of issues, but it is clear that human rights is being used to further so called 'Hindu' interests. The proclaimed commitment to human rights in the report should not mask the fact, that like other religionists and fundamentalists in the UK, the Hindu Forum aims to consolidate its power and influence within the State. In the process it is contributing to the creation of a climate of intolerance and intimidation which now prevails in the country.

We are also concerned to note that one of the commissioners of the Commission for Integration and Cohesion, Ramesh Kallidai, is himself the secretary general of The Hindu Forum, which, following the example set by Muslim and Sikh fundamentalists, recently forced the closure of an art exhibition by the renowned Indian painter M.F. Hussain in London in 2006, on the grounds that he offended Hindu sensibility by depicting naked Hindu female deities. Together with a shadowy 'Hindu Human Rights Group' the Forum led a protest outside Asia House which housed the exhibition. By doing so, the protesters followed in the footsteps of Hindu nationalists

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[27] *Connecting British Hindus; An enquiry into the identity and public engagement of Hndus in Britain* Department for Communities and Local Government.2006

and fundamentalists in India who had previously threatened M. F Husaain with his life, attacked his property and hounded him out of India. Interestingly, in their press release the Hindu Forum did not take it upon themselves to distance themselves from the threats made on M F Hussain's life by Hindu fundamentalists in India. Instead, they focus only on the 'hurt' he has caused to 'Hindus worldwide'. [28] Quite apart from the fact that it is difficult to know exactly whose sensibilities have been offended, since Hinduism is a religion littered with thousands of cultural interpretations ranging from the orthodox to the irreverent, by calling for censorship in the name of 'Hindu' human rights', they and other fundamentalist Hindus claim to be the custodians of so called 'Hindu' morality, and in doing so, deny other Indian cultural and religious voices.

Historically, this country has helped to legitimise forces both here and abroad which are undemocratic and violent. For instance the government has through its foreign policy promoted the Muslim fundamentalist organisation, Jamaat i Islami in Bangladesh and in communities in the UK.

In Tower Hamlets, despite the anger of many Bangladeshis who have campaigned long and hard for members of the Jamaat i Isalmi to be tried as war criminals for their complicity in the murder of thousands of Muslims during the Bangladeshi war of independence in 1971, the local council has embraced the Jamaat i Islami as spokespersons for the community and has involved them in a range of community projects. One such project on forced marriage, has developed a partnership with the East London mosque which is controlled by the Jamaat i Islami who have positioned themselves in Britain as a leading 'moderate group', appearing to be progressive on social questions such as forced marriage in the UK, but like the Hindu Forum, maintain silence or have dubious links with fundamentalists abroad.

Of course, not all tensions among groups are caused by the state's policies. For example, the (welcome) enactment of legislation to address discrimination towards gays and lesbians has led to tensions caused by resistance from various conservative and fundamentalist religious organisations. The current attempts by the Church of

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[28] *Hindu Forum asks Asia House to withdraw M F Hussain Exhibition.* Hindu Forum of Britain May 2006.

England and the Catholic Church to force the State to give religious groups exemptions from gay rights laws in relation to the adoption of children, demonstrates the extent to which religion is on course to clash with a range of equality and human rights principles that relate in particular to the most marginalised groups in our society. On the other hand, the growing public presence of these organizations is also a result of the State's cultivation of religious communities as participants in the political arena.

Faith schools

We have described above, many features of the British State that has encouraged the growth and influence of religious fundamentalism. The continuing funding of faith schools is perhaps the clearest example of how the State fosters s religious, class and race segregation in our society. Faith schools remain a central plank of the government's education reforms which is considered to be necessary to increase 'parental choice'. Contrary to evidence that faith schools create segregated and insular communities, the New Labour government has pushed ahead with more faith schools based on flawed evidence that religious schools achieve better educational standards. The fact that many can cherry pick their students, apply strict admissions criteria to reflect same faith and more stable (well off) backgrounds, is ignored by those who feel that religious schools are necessary for the delivery of high quality education.

Schools have literally become the battleground for fundamentalists and the State. It is no coincidence that following the Rushdie Affair, state funding for Muslim schools became a major demand and as these demands grew, others religions also joined in. This was perhaps inevitable given that fact that most of the voluntary aided schools in Britain were Church of England or Roman Catholic with a few Jewish schools. The existence of the Education Reform Act 1988 which established Christianity as the dominant ideology in all state-funded schools created further impetus for Fundamentalists and conservatives alike, to demand religious schools for other minorities.

Since 1989, faith based schools have become a growth area. By 2001 for example, there were 6,384 primary faith based state schools and 589 secondary faith based state

schools. Of these, 4,716 were Church of England, 2,108 Roman Catholic, 32 Jewish, 4 Muslim, 2 Sikh, 1 Greek Orthodox and 1 Seventh Day Adventist.[29] At the time of writing we are aware of plans to set up two primary Hindu schools in Harrow and Barnet and 1 Sikh primary school in Ealing. We fear that the situation will get worse as proposals to let those from business and religious backgrounds become Heads of schools, are put into place. It is a well know fact for example, that many of the business leaders in minority communities are also the main patrons and source of funding of their religions institutions.

Despite the growth in demands for religious schools, it is also important to recognise that fundamentalist demands for religious schools do not always reflect the views of the communities that they claim to represent. The failure of Sikh fundamentalists in Southall to take local secondary schools outside of their local authority in order to turn them into Sikh schools failed because many secular and other Sikh parents recognised the real dangers that they posed.[30] They were alert to the fundamentalist threat to restrict the freedom of girls by attempting to gain control of the educational environment and thus access to knowledge. Similarly, attempts by Muslim parents to take control of a single sex girls school in 2005 in the same borough, was rejected by the governing body of that school which comprised of parents and others from an ethnically mixed background.[31]

Minority parents are not alone in their opposition to faith schools. In a Guardian/ICM poll published in 2005, 64% of the respondents stated that the government should not be funding schools of any kind. Yet at the same time, the government published proposals to make it easier for independent faith based schools to opt into the state sector, accessing millions of pounds in funding[32].

In response to the growing controversy over single faith schools, New Labour has made unsuccessful attempts to find other ways to minimise their exclusive nature. A proposal to ask faith schools to ensure that at least quarter of pupils are admitted from other faiths or no religions for instance was recently withdrawn following unanimous

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[29] *Facts about faith schools* The Guardian. November 2001
[30] See *Secular Spaces* in *Refusing Holy Orders* Yuval-Davis and Sahgal 1992.
[31] See Study by SBS and Working Lives Institute attached.
[32] *Two thirds oppose state aided faith schools* The Guardian. August 2005

opposition from all the major religions. Instead, the government settled for a voluntary agreement from the faith schools to be more inclusive in their admissions criteria.

The Catholic Church signalled outright opposition to such proposals and The Board of Deputies of British Jews expressed concerns stating that

The amendment to the education bill would be "nonsensical" if it prevented Jewish children from going to Jewish schools.

Not only are religionists and fundamentalists opposed to secular, ethnically mixed schools but also to any de-segregation measures which in their view, pose a threat to their cultural and religious autonomy.

'It should be recognised that mono-cultural schools are not necessarily insular and ignorant of other cultures. Culturally separate groups, communities and institutions do not have to be causes of social instability…some unease may be therefore felt at proposals for twinning or other forms of contact where they are imposed without the full agreement of all parties involved, including parents. Hence formulation of policy should be undertaken with reference to the views and opinions of those religious and cultural groups concerned, including Muslim, at the most local level'[33]

Many authoritarian religious groups across all communities share such sentiments and the desire to reinforce insularity.

In view of their reasons for remaining exclusive, it is difficult to see how faith schools, will abide by their voluntary agreement and so buck the trend towards more segregation and tensions.

Women and fundamentalism

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[33] Muslims on Education: A Position Paper The Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMISS UK), Forum Against Islamaphobia and Racism (FAIR) and FED 2000 (For Education and Development) The Muslim College UK

Since the publication of Satanic Verses, there has been a long history of attempts by fundamentalists and conservatives to prevent any form of dissent against orthodoxy, especially by women. It is no accident that following the furore surrounding the publication of Satanic Verses, many minority women have been policed for transgressions which threaten the religious identity of the community to which they belong.

In 1994, when Bhaji on the Beach, a film depicting the lives of Asian women who survive domestic violence, was shown at a cinema in Nottingham, it was surrounded by a group of predominantly Hindu men who intimidated women as they attempted to enter. In May 1999, in Southall, a photography exhibition at a community centre by and about Asian gays and lesbians was condemned by community leaders for causing offence and for undermining family and religious values. In 2001, many Hindus wrote to the BBC protesting against a storyline in Coronation Street which depicted a Hindu family forcing a woman into an arranged marriage.

In December 2004, we witnessed protests by many Sikhs against the play 'Behzti' (Dishonour) which dealt with issues of rape and abuse of power within a Gurdwara (Sikh temple). Whilst the protests led to intimidation and threats of violence from Sikh extremists, even so called moderate Sikhs felt that the play's author, Gurpreet Bhatti, had 'crossed the line' and caused extreme offence by setting her play in what is regarded by Sikhs as a 'sacred' place.

These are some reasons why legislation against incitement to religious hatred had been opposed by groups like WAF and SBS. We fear that had it existed at the time of the above incidents, the so called 'moderates' masquerading as Sikh, Muslim and Hindu human rights groups ,would have been the first to try and use it to ban any form of dissent especially by women and gays and lesbians.

Groups like SBS and WAF have been forced to challenge very specific fundamentalist and nationalist identities that have been fostered by the rise of religious fundamentalist movements in the UK and abroad. The reformulations of identity being imposed in these processes have direct political consequences for progressive, democratic, anti-racist struggles and for women's demands for freedom.

These movements demand absolute conformity to religious laws based on patriarchal notions of womanhood, as interpreted by male religious leaders. In the process countless variations in interpretations of religious/cultural practices that have evolved within different communities are denied.

For example, guidance on religious clothing requirement produced for schools by Tower Hamlets local authority contains very specific constructions of religious fundamentalist identity, especially in relation to Islam. The leaflet was written in consultation with community leaders including mainly Muslim men related to the Jammat i Islami mosques. Adopting an entirely prescriptive tone and without warning about the dangers of stereotyping, the leaflet informs that Christians, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism permit some variation from orthodoxy or have no specific dress requirements, but Islam does not. The need for pubescent girls to show modesty in dress is asserted forcefully in relation to Islam but only casually mentioned in relation to women from other minority religions. There is no hint of the different cultural or religious traditions of dress that exists within Islam and indeed within all minorities or that cultural and religious traditions are constantly being reinvented and resisted. [34]

The recent case of Shabina Begum[35], exposes the dangers of religious fundamentalism in a dramatic fashion. It shows how control of women's minds and bodies are very much at the centre of the construction of fundamentalist identity. The 2002 case concerned a challenge to the politics of fundamentalism and multiculturalism in a secular, mixed, state high school. It concerned a young 14 year old Muslim girl, Shabina Begum, who wanted to wear the jilbab rather than a salwar kameez and head scarf, which conformed to the school's uniform policy.

In 2006, the House of Lords, the highest court in the UK, delivered a judgment stating that Shabina's rights to manifest her religion or belief and her right not to be denied an education, had not been violated or if they had, then the infringement was

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[34] Tower Hamlets Guidance on appropriate clothing in schools. April 2005.Published by London

[35] R (on the application of Begum (by her litigation friend, Rahman)) v Head teacher and Governors of Denbigh High School. [2006] UKHL 15

necessary and proportionate for the protection and well being of the wider school community.

The judgment arrived at the correct decision by balancing Shabina's needs against the needs of other Muslim girls who were fearful of being labelled 'bad Muslims' for not wearing the jilbab. They needed protection from outside political influences which sought to impose a particular religious identity on young women. Nevertheless the judgement remains problematic in its reinforcement of a multicultural approach that centres on representations by community leaders. By endorsing wholeheartedly the school's attempts to reflect 'mainstream' Muslim opinion which confirmed that the uniform conformed to the Islamic dress code, it was implicitly stating that Islamic clerics and Muslim 'community leaders' were the proper representatives of Muslims in the area. It did not recognise how the practice of this version of multiculturalism can be incompatible with a secular school ethos, especially when multiculturalism is increasingly taken to mean reflecting multi-faith diversity.

The study on multiculturalism in secondary schools by SBS and Working Lives Institute[36] provides further examples of how the re invention of a 'pure' religious identity is taking place.

Many teachers in the study accepted uncritically, demands that attempt to divorce religious beliefs from cultural practices. This demand has come from many community leaders and authoritarian and fundamentalist religious groups who have promoted the separation of religion and culture in order to re-invent religious identity for clearly political purposes.

In one school, a dance performed by a group of Kurdish girls at an assembly celebrating Eid was considered to be offensive by a Muslim parent who viewed dance as 'un Islamic'. The Head of the school was questioned by a parent who felt that it was wrong for such girls to be dancing in the presence of men when they should be conforming to the injunction to be 'modest' in their behaviour. The Head allowed the dancing to take place on the grounds that the school was a safe environment for

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[36] See attached

Muslim girls and that dancing was a 'cultural' and not religious expression. However, the ways in which religion is beginning to impact on the freedom of self-expression of those who have the least power to assert their own versions of culture and religion is extremely alarming. It denies lived experiences and encourages the view that Asian minorities should be ascribed only religious values.

The acceptance of a singular religious identity also lends weight to arguments that certain practices reflect a declining and malfunctioning culture which has nothing to do with religion. In this way issues like forced marriage are declared to have no justification in religion. This enables religious leaders to absolve themselves of responsibility for the continuation of forced marriage but it also enables them to assert a literal return to the text. In effect this approach ring fences religion so that it becomes a 'no-go' area as far as dissent is concerned.

Whilst Tony Blair's comments about forced marriage and other culturally specific harmful practices not being tolerated are welcome,[37] we remain very alarmed at his determination to promote faith as the main badge of identity.

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and other faiths have a perfect right to their own identity and religion, to practice their faith and to conform to their culture. This is what multicultural, multi-faith Britain is about. This is what is legitimately distinctive.

As women we see very welcome policies and laws (Forced Marriage Civil Protection Bill) which will empower women in minority communities. But on the other hand, laws governing blasphemy and incitement to religious hatred as well as other measures that entrench faith leadership will undermine the gains made elsewhere. We fear that whilst the future direction of multicultural polices is not necessarily about the enactment of religious personal laws as a parallel legal system, it is about reflecting religious and fundamentalist identity within state structures including the legal system.

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[37] See *The Duty to Integrate: Shared British Values.* Tony Blair December 2006

The construction of faith communities is accelerating the process of the communalisation of what were once Asian or even Black communities. One glaring example of this is the way in which the Muslim Women's Network set up in 2002 by the Minster of Women and supported by the Women's National Commission gave voice to only Muslim women through a series of closed focus group discussions.[38]

The report identified many issues such as violence against women, immigration difficulties, community pressures, racism and the lack of political representation-none of which are specific to Muslim women only. The State's strategy of isolating Muslim's needs as somehow 'different' from those of other Asian is deliberate and divisive. It plays into the fundamentalist segregationist agenda and denies the overwhelming success of secular Asian women's projects that have worked across religious and ethnic divides. It denies their long histories of organisation and experience and encourages groups to compete for resources and separate provision based solely around religious identity.

Increasingly, anecdotal evidence suggests that faith groups with or without links to fundamentalist groups are taking over the running of secular women's refuges (once run on secular feminist principles) that are facing financial crisis. Government policy on promoting the participation of faith communities has clearly facilitated this development and given faith groups the confidence to take over such resources regardless of whether or not they have any experience of the issue at hand. The wheel is being re-invented but in ways which are harmful to the gains that Asian and other minority women have made through joint projects that unify rather than divide marginalised groups.

The way forward?

- A national debate on the nature of secularism is urgently needed. Dis-establish the church and abolish all other measures such as the blasphemy laws which privilege Christianity.

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[38] *She Who Dispute; Muslim Women Shape the Debate* Muslim Women's Network. Women's National Commission November 2006

- A strategy which places structural disadvantage at the heart of its agenda for change must be evident. Solutions to these inequality and structural realities, which affect both newcomers and existing residents and can also be the reason for out-migration, should be central, not marginal to the discussions about helping 'changing communities'. Need to move away from a 'blame others' culture which is fomented directly and indirectly by the state and the media. At the heart of the strategy is the need to re-examine Britain's attitude to asylum seekers and migrants.

- Need to maintain those aspects of multiculturalism which have contributed to an understanding of diversity ,as part of that strategy which neither shies away from addressing issues of institutional racism nor other forms of disadvantage based on gender or class power relations. Such a model would not reinforce 'community leaders' as mediators between State and community and would extend the same standards of human rights and protection to all irrespective, of their religious or ethnic background

- A major reassessment of the multi-faith agenda as a primary cause of segregation needs to be undertaken to establish its impact on the privatisation of welfare provision and education.

- Funding of voluntary sector projects should be based on need and commitment to tackling racial, gender and other inequalities through a policy of inclusion.

- The government's own promotion of specific fundamentalist and religionist networks should be ended while social policies should not be based on communal agendas.

- No new religious schools to be established and existing schools to admit on local authority criteria, pending longer term decisions on ending state support to religious schools. State schools must maintain commitment to secular, anti racist education. This includes the following:

- End the imposition of Christian assemblies. Assemblies must include the voices of secular minorities and stress shared universal values based on human rights and citizenship.

  - End the use of text books on religions produced by fundamentalist organisations.

  - End contentious teaching such as 'intelligent design' as part of science curricular.

  - End the right to withdrawal from RE. Parents should not be able to withdraw children from RE since this has the effect of contributing to an already intolerant, segregated and racist society.

  - Do not allow parents to undermine the education of their children by allowing 'opting out ' of sex education or other aspects of curriculum.

  - Schools should be secular educational spaces which allow the teaching of all religions as beliefs and values system but does not prioritise any religion above others.

  - Promote the teaching of more language and literature such as Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Bengali and Arabic, which would encourage an understanding of other culture rather than simply promoting religious identities.

- Struggles against racism and discrimination should be conducted in ways that do not mark certain groups of people as their either exclusive victims or perpetrators. Instead of the Holocaust Memorial Day, we would much rather see days and months which are dedicated to memorializing genocides and slavery and celebrating the resistance to them in a generic way, which invites wider participation rather than exclusion and backlash.

- Primary and secondary schools should be encouraged to continue to teach a multicultural curriculum that includes world histories and most significantly histories from the contested perspectives of women and men who, in different ways and in different places, benefited from or were oppressed by British trade and Empire. Struggles for suffrage, for unionisation and against fascism and colonialism should be taught as part of the history of Britain.

- Develop effective strategies with a range of actors including schools, grass roots anti-racist organisations that address both institutional racism and forces that promote segregation in schools, housing, health, employment and elsewhere.

- Institute policies which focus on building multi-racial schools in areas that are ethnically mixed. Strategies to minimise separation such as twinning of schools should only be in place for schools which are mono-cultural due to the area in which they are located.

- Review the immigration and asylum system for its discriminatory and anti-human rights effect on all migrants and asylum seekers and counter more robustly, negative stereotypes of refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants.

- We deplore the practice of forced dispersal of asylum seekers and refugees. Forced dispersal of asylum seekers must be ended. We note, as good practice, the experience of the dispersal of refugees to ex miner's communities in Sweden. In that case, mixed training classes were provided for the mining communities and refugee communities together.

- Free English language classes that are accessible to women and men are essential. These may need to be offered at times and places when and where those working in the low-wage economy are able to access them. For example restaurant workers may need regular English classes when the restaurants are closed (such as 'work base' type ESOL initiatives where classes have been run on restaurant premises between 3pm and 5pm, or where office cleaners have been taught English at the end of their early morning shifts). High quality classes English language and other

appropriate vocational or academic classes need to continue to be made available to asylum seekers and refugees who are not working.

- Attempts to liberalise and democratise faith institutions from within must be supported. EG Muslim Parliament's report on child abuse in Muslim schools did not receive proper state attention. Other so – called Muslim leaders considered to be 'representatives' of Muslim communities were silent too.

- High quality children's services linked to education, health and social service departments must also continue. Translation services must be retained alongside English language classes to ensure that those who do not speak English are able to fully understand their rights and responsibilities.

- The issue of the out-migration of middle class homeowners to rural south-eastern and western England must be addressed. The phenomenon is forcing up the price of homes in those areas so that the existing rural residents or incomers who are not already home-owners are not able to afford to stay in or move to those areas.

- Public spaces where people from different backgrounds interact in their everyday lives should be cherished and invested in and not left to fall into disrepair when inevitably the newcomers get blamed for the lack of care (egg public parks, Turkish baths and municipal swimming pools, libraries, open markets).