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Social Capital as a Lubricant for Exercising Rights: a Case Study of Selected Muslims in North East England

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Abstract

This article explores how social capital acts as a lubricant to create good interactions and relationships to help Muslim communities exercise their rights, buttressed by support systems. An exploratory case study involving 24 participants is conducted in North East England. Findings reveal that good social capital assists participants in communicating beyond their communities, and creates mutual understanding and acceptance within Muslim communities and with other locals. Muslim community organisations and support systems help them exercise their rights and practise religious obligations. Thus, social capital is a lubricant that helps the Muslim community exercise their rights and be accepted as locals.

Keywords

human rights – social capital – Muslim community – community development – interaction – support system

1 Introduction

The Muslim community is the fastest-growing faith community in the UK, and there are an estimated 10,000 Muslim millionaires in the UK (Travis 2008, cited in Jamal and Shukor 2014: 243). They are the second-largest religious group in England and Wales, constituting 4.8% of the population, according the Census for 2011, and make a substantial contribution to society in a wide range of ways (MCB 2015: 22). As one of a number of religious groups, Muslims'

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contributions to society are made within the context of longstanding and ongoing debates in the UK and across many other countries over religious diversity and social interaction.

Despite some misleading characterisations of all Muslims as migrants, census figures show that in 2011, 47% of Muslims in England and Wales were born in the UK (MCB 2015: 16). Similarly, while 67.6% of Muslims characterised themselves as of Asian ethnicity in the 2011 Census, Muslims also self-identified as belonging to a wide range of other ethnic groups (MCB 2015: 16), and they have various first languages (Hussain 2012: 626). In the UK, Muslims interact with people who have different values, norms, cultures and religions. This situation is increasing the debate on how people from diverse cultures and religions might interact positively within increasingly heterogeneous societies (Sacks 2002).

Within such contexts, debates have been widespread over how the rights of different groups might be protected within democratic societies (Parekh 2006). These debates are exacerbated by continuing controversies over how concepts of rights and relationships relate to policy discussions in fields such as discrimination, migration, the delivery of social services and security, and what role religion may play in the public sphere, which some argue is becoming secularised in various ways (Davie 2007; Dinham, Furbey and Lowndes 2009; Cherry 2014).

Peter Jones (1999) argues that human rights are the rights of human beings and, self-evidently, each human being is an individual being. Some groups may have rights, but they cannot be human rights, and human rights must be rights borne by human individuals. Human rights are attributed to everyone. According to Andrew Clapham (2007), the logic of "all rights for all people" and traditional assumptions about constituting proper human rights still persist. This can create crises between different communities. In James Griffin's (2008) view, however, sometimes no conflict can be found after all, and this situation is known as "pseudo-conflict".

Based on this premise, there are a lot of possible interpretations of rights, such as the need for acknowledgement from other people and validation by an authority to confirm a right. At the same time, we should consider Jim Ife and Lucy Fiske's (2006) contention that rights cannot exist in isolation but only when people are in interaction. This means that it is meaningless to talk about 'my rights' in the absence of interactions with other people.

As defined by Adi Syahid and Amir Zal (2018), social capital relates to the interactions, relationships and engagement between humans. In detail, they explain that social capital involves elements of mutual trust, respect and dependency, and these elements manifest as part of human nature in social

situations. It is common for humans to interact through different networks (Dale and Sparkes 2008). Through social capital, people connect with different peoples or groups from other communities (Agnitsch, Flora and Ryan 2006) and are able to access things inside and outside of their communities (Putnam 2000; Dale and Sparkes, 2008).

However, social capital is not a community's goal but a medium or tool to fulfil the community's interests (Amir Zal, 2018). There are things or resources that are not possessed by them but are possessed by other people. When something is possessed by other people, that is their right. From interactions, communities will know their own rights and others' rights. However, there is a tendency to create tension in claims for rights. Regarding the nature of rights, according to Caroline Walsh (2012), human rights belong to humans and exist to protect the human interests of all persons everywhere, regardless of individual factors, including ethnicity, gender and cultural affiliation.

2 The Issue of Muslims Exercising Their Rights

The practising rights of Muslim in Europe in the context of social capital have not really been debated by scholars. Muslims have different levels of social capital. They are far from homogeneous, coming from different countries and different traditions (Lebl 2013). Exercising rights with different levels of social capital is challenging because each person's social capital involves different values, religious aspects, cultural considerations and other features. Different religious and ethnic and cultural factors create different foundations and interpretations of rights (see for example, Donnelly 2003). Thus, it is not easy to maintain harmony in society because of the various frameworks of values, especially between majority and minority groups (Berry and Kalin 1995).

In order to maintain positive perspectives towards various communities, there are four main prerequisites. First, there should be general support for cultural maintenance by immigrants, and intercultural contact and societal participation by all groups. Second, there should be overall low levels of prejudice and intolerance in the population (no discrimination). Third, various ethno-cultural groups should have positive attitudes towards each other. Finally, there should be a degree of attachment to wider society, without derogation of its constituent ethno-cultural groups (Berry and Rudolph Kalin, cited in Schalk-Soekara, van de Vijvera and Hoogstederb 2004: 534).

In another aspect, when there are cultural differences, these appear to divide the human rights in a community (Ishay 2004). If this is not well managed, it will create a double standard in exercising rights (Ife 2012) or, worse,

will give rise to tensions in the religious and public spheres and in governance (Just, Sandovici and Listhaug 2014), including creating misogynistic oppression and denying women access to public spaces (Hancock and Mobillion 2019). For example, Muslim women are vulnerable to intimidation, violence and harassment, which can increase their feelings of insecurity and vulnerability (in either online or offline contact), thereby diminishing their sense of belonging, confidence and willingness to integrate into society (Awan and Irene Zempi 2016).

However, this situation depends on many factors, such as location (Kunsta et al. 2012), ideology (Molsa and Jetten 2014), how a community interprets information from the media (Strabac and Listhaug 2008), and so on. Previous research has found that the media was seen as a driving force behind negative stereotypes about Muslims, and this resulted in pressure on Muslims to present themselves to others in non-threatening and welcoming ways, despite being subjected to covert and overt discrimination, which they felt in various contexts (Pihlaja and Thompson 2017). For another example, the media was responsible for negative portrayals of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA, the murder of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam, the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London, controversies about cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in Denmark and the Pope's speech in Germany (Strabac and Listhaug 2008). The rights issue also causes some groups to respond negatively, as reported by Frank Molsa and Jolanda Jetten (2014): populist right-wing parties manipulate this issue to advocate anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiments openly to the public.

The situation became worse when British polling after the terrorist attacks of 7 July 2005 revealed that 26% of Muslims identified as having no loyalty at all to Britain (Schulman 2009). This information created prejudiced feelings and thoughts towards Muslims, and generalisations were extended to all Muslims in Britain. This certainly led to various kinds of religious discrimination, including Islamophobia, as reported by the Runnymede Trust Commission (1997). This term has been increasingly used to describe fear of Islam and of Muslims as a social group and as an umbrella term to cover various types of stigmatisation of Muslims (Kunsta et al. 2012).

In addition, the Muslim community has also faced difficulties in terms of policy, frequently facing multi-level policy challenges (Hussain 2012), and the UK continues to encounter problems in balancing security and human rights (Hillebrecht 2012). Moreover, Muslims have been targeted, demonised and alienated from the socio-political sphere as a result of the British domestic counter-terrorism policy (Bonino 2013).

In the face of these challenges to exercising their rights, Muslims really depend on social capital and support in various aspects. Their identity is especially tied to their religious identity, which creates a special bond between Muslims known as *umma* and is a responsibility to strengthen their unity (Schotter and Abdelzaher 2013). However, they have tried to adapt to the different situation in the UK, including covering their Muslim identity. They aspire to balance multiple identities, retaining religious and cultural elements in the definition of the self while endeavouring to integrate into wider society (Stuart and Ward 2011).

This has led to their adopting various identities (see, for example, Hutnik and Street 2010). They have four different identities, namely: 1) rooted in ethnic minority identity; 2) rooted in bicultural identity; 3) rooted in national identity; and 4) confused ethnic and national identity. Parveen Akhtar (2014) states that, as a result of this reality, the religious experience, rituals and practices of Muslims (from a Pakistani context) in the UK have undergone substantive changes. This has happened not only because they have adapted to their environment but also because they hope to be accepted by other local people. Considering these problems, this study focused on two factors, namely: 1) social capital and interaction in communities; and 2) support systems for practising Islamic obligations.

3 Methodology

This research was conducted using an exploratory case study design, so the findings cannot be generalised to the entire population. This section explains the research concept and how it was utilised in the study. The research was conducted in North East England, covering Durham, Newcastle, Sunderland and Middlesbrough.

The location was chosen on the basis of two criteria. The first was the population size: according to the Office for National Statistics, quoted in the Muslim Council of Britain's (MCB) Census report (MCB 2015, 25), the overall population of North East England was 2,596,886. The Muslim population was 46,764, or 1.8%. The overall Muslim population in the UK was 2,706,066, so the North East Muslim population represented 1.73% of the total UK Muslim population. If we compare the Muslim population in the North East with that in other locations excluding Wales (London, the West Midlands, the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, the South East, the East, the East Midlands and the South West), it is 1.7% of the overall population, the same as in Wales.

The second consideration was the Muslim population North East England represented only 1.8% of the region's population. Given such a small percentage, they may well experience discrimination with respect to their rights. The biases of majority group members shape their actions towards minority group members; minority groups will possibly be systematically disadvantaged, not only by the wilful acts of individuals but also because the prevailing system of opportunities and constraints favours the success of one group over another (Pager, Devah, and Hana Shepherd, 2008). Thus, Muslims, perceived as a minority group will experience discrimination (see for example Connor and Koeni 2015. Although this is a general view of how a minority group in a majority society is predisposed to being discriminated against, this research adopted this view when selecting North East England as the location for the study.

The study looked at two groups from different generations of British Muslims, namely first and second generations. The rationale for involving these groups was based on the literature review, which found that some scholars had stated that different generations have different views and experiences of life. Involving different generations was important for this study to ensure that we could understand the problem in detail. The first generation refers to Muslims with British citizenship who had children born in Britain (who were the second generation). The study involved 24 participants from different locations, as follows:

TABLE 1 Location of study, sample size and coding

City	First generation and coding	Second generation and coding	Total
Durham	3 persons (DA)	3 persons (DB)	6 persons
Newcastle	3 persons (NA)	3 persons (NB)	6 persons
Sunderland	3 persons (SA)	3 persons (SB)	6 persons
Middlesbrough	3 persons (MA)	3 persons (MB)	6 persons
Total			**24 persons**

Each respondent was coded differently, depending on their location and generation, with the sample for Durham coded as 'D', Newcastle as 'N', Sunderland as 'S' and Middlesbrough as 'M', while the first generation was coded as 'A' and the second generation as 'B'. This study adopted multi-stage sampling, in which

two different types of sampling were used sequentially, namely purposive and snowball sampling.

We adopted an in-depth interview method because of its capacity to explore and achieve the research objectives. The interviews were carried out in English and used a semi-structured protocol. This protocol enables two-way conversation between the researcher and the participant and a participant-centred approach, producing rich and detailed data. Each interview took less than an hour and the questions were asked consecutively, based on the interview protocol. We interviewed the participants in a comfortable space to create an environment that was neutral, confidential, comfortable, quiet and free from distractions. However, to ensure the researcher's safety, the interviews were not conducted in private spaces but in public areas, such as a mosque or café. Each interview was recorded by a voice recorder. After obtaining the data, the researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim.

4 Findings

The findings relate to interactions and social capital being a lubricant for the participants to create rapport with other people. Consequently, the findings relate to the acceptance of the participants as local people by others and the reality of the support systems for practising Islamic obligations in North East England.

4.1 *Social Capital and Interactions in Communities*

The participants explained that they had experienced no problems in their neighbourhoods and communities, so they had good relationships with them. Many factors had contributed to these positive experiences, such as the respondents being considered local because they had been born in the UK, having regular interactions and participating in all systems in the UK, creating mutual understanding among community members. All the participants had British citizenship and lived in North East England. They had participated in all the social systems in the UK, including the local education system, which had enabled them to identify and understand the local culture and other local people.

From the angle of language, other local people recognised them as locals because of their use of the local accent and slang. They realised that this recognition also depended on the regularity of their interactions with others in their neighbourhoods. According to the first generation, the first time they came to

the UK, interactions were difficult for two reasons. First, they were not fluent in English and their neighbours did not understand the participants' language. This situation limited their interactions, making it difficult to achieve mutual understanding. Because of this, the first-generation participants chose to live in neighbourhoods with their own communities.

They could not communicate with other communities from different backgrounds because of this constraint. This created another problem, as some parents might have had negative attitudes towards schools because they had no clear information about the school system. Fluency in English had helped the second generation to interact directly with the system and other community members. They had more understanding of the formal systems not only because they had been born in the UK but also because they had participated in the education, social and legal systems, and so understood the local norms and culture. This also created mutual understanding between the participants and the local people. Two-way contact not only caused the participants to become familiar with the systems in the UK but also highlighted their norms, culture and rights as Muslims.

In their daily activities, the participants reported that they had experienced no problems with others: they interacted harmoniously without experiencing violence or harm. The young Muslim participants shared that they had not been excluded by friends at school, despite having a different background, so they freely participated in associations or organisations at school or university without problems. They respected and were friends with non-Muslims, who often reminded the participants to fulfil their Islamic obligations (e.g. supporting them during fasting in Ramadan). Their friends had no issues with involving the participants in any activities at school or university, including activities outside the classroom. Their friends also respected them as Muslims and did not involve them in certain prohibited activities, such as drinking alcohol.

This situation was not restricted to the school system but also applied in the workplace, with positive interactions in business and job environments. The participants engaged in various forms of networking with people of different racial backgrounds, cultures and religions in their business activities. This was reflected in their finding jobs in which they were treated like everyone else if they were qualified. In the community context, they had also experienced a sense of togetherness in any activities or associations. Other local people had participated in groups formed by the participants, such as a group on human rights issues in Palestine. This point was voiced by Participant MB1:

> Yes, I have same rights. I could walk out in the street dressed like this (jubba) and I go to a meeting and sit down next to the minister and the

> Home Office or the foreign office like this without having issues. I go to meetings in the council, I go to meetings everywhere and I am treated with respect.

The participants gave another example: when some local people joined Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA) demonstration in Newcastle, other local people (from Muslim and non-Muslim communities) formed a counter-demonstration to reject that ideology. The reason was that members of the Muslim community were considered local people, not immigrants. This situation explains their togetherness and their closeness. The participants called this the "British spirit". This closeness manifests in the continuing interactions between the communities. Consequently, the participants had not felt awkward in expressing their beliefs and culture through their appearance, such as wearing a jubba or hijab.

However, the participants realised that creating mutual understanding and acceptance through interaction takes a lot of time across various media and needs formal and informal interactions between participants and other local people. Formal interactions were explained by the participants as interactions that happen through participation in existing systems or media, such as the workplace, school and so on, while, informal interactions were defined as everyday communication, such as in the neighbourhood and at shopping centres. They include non-verbal interactions—as simple as a smile. The participants argued that interactions not only form positive perceptions but also abolish wrong perceptions about Islam.

The participants stressed the importance of positive perceptions to their acceptance in the community. In fact, they had experienced that wrong perceptions had created "distance" between them and, worse, had created negative stereotypes and Islamophobic situations in the community. However, they emphasised that the element of interaction plays an important role in eroding wrong perceptions and avoiding negative stereotypes.

4.2 *Acceptance as Local People*

Acceptance as local people is defined by the participants as there being no awkwardness among community members, being able to interact normally without a sense of being outsiders, and feeling that they are treated appropriately by other people in the community. The findings show that the participants felt that they had been accepted by their communities. This was demonstrated in their daily communication. The participants explained that interaction with other people had made these other people understand their needs and requirements as Muslims, including in the workplace—their need

to pray was respected, especially for Friday prayers. Their employers also made it possible for them to perform *Salat* (daily prayers) by providing a prayer room in the workplace.

Similarly at school—they were allowed to perform Friday prayers if they requested to do so. This situation was interpreted by the participants to mean they were accepted by local people in performing their rights. In a different context, many local people respected Muslims' need to observe various prohibitions, such as eating non-halal food and drinking alcohol. This acceptance made the participants comfortable in practising their religious obligations whenever they wished.

This acceptance went beyond daily interactions and might also be observed in how members of communities relied on each other to solve personal, family and social problems. They often had casual conversations about life without prejudice. They helped each other and were involved together in social activities, such as charity events. Some of the participants worked as social workers, managing social issues including education and domestic and social problems. They had never experienced problems with being accepted by local people, despite their personal appearance as Muslims, such as wearing the Islamic hijab and having beards. One of the participants was a preacher who was constantly dealing with social issues; he was known locally to be active in Islamic organisations and was accepted by community members.

Acceptance was very important to the participants, but they said that the degree of acceptance depends on local people's exposure to Islam. The more diverse a neighbourhood or community is, the more local people will be understanding and accepting of the differences between them. However, in a remote area that is culturally homogeneous, the probability of understanding and acceptance of Islam is low.

4.3 *Support Systems for Practising Islamic Obligations*

This part presents how support systems work to aid Muslims in North East England in exercising their rights, especially to fulfil their religious obligations. In this section, "support systems" refer to two different groups: Muslim organisations and government organisations.

4.3.1 Support from Muslim Organisations

The participants said that the existence of Muslim organisations was important to them, and this support system included family and neighbourhood support. There were three types of support that the participants had received from such organisations: 1) social bonding with other Muslims; 2) the continuation of religious identity; and 3) sources for religious education. Muslim

organisations provided the participants with important social bonding opportunities, which enabled them to feel a sense of togetherness beyond culture and race. Thus, Muslim organisations play a major role in managing a different of backgrounds, showing how important social capital is to Muslim communities.

The participants recognised that many Muslims are more comfortable interacting with other Muslims from the same cultural or country background. The participants stressed that this is not a negative situation because it is a bond based on historical experience. According to the first-generation participants, when they arrived in the UK, the people who helped them were their relatives, who were of the same background. Previously, they had lived in houses with people of the same race; although this was not a comfortable situation, they initially had no choice, particularly in view of financial constraints. This simplified their daily lives a lot, especially as it provided mutual support the preliminary stages of settlement. Because of those memories of a situation that had involved a lot of sacrifices and support, when they had to move to different houses, they chose to stay in the same area. Their sense of togetherness was based not only on geographical borders but also on similarity of faith.

The role of Muslim organisations is to encourage broader interactions among Muslims, beyond race. Such interactions are both formal and informal. Formal interactions take place when Muslims participate in activities arranged by Muslim organisations, such as Islamic education classes and other social activities. These are usually organised by a mosque and provide an opportunity to interact with other people. Informal interactions take place during routine religious activities, such as praying together in the mosque and *Iftar* (breaking the fast) during Ramadan. Muslim organisations not only help them by giving support in practising their Islamic obligations but also strengthen social bonding between Muslims from different backgrounds. This was expressed by Participant DB2:

> We are from different backgrounds … Yes [we] include [ethnically different backgrounds]. So, the mosque was helping us to reduce [the] gap amongst us and help to know each other to strengthen our relationship.

With regard to identity persistence, Islamic organisations had helped the participants to understand what the Islamic identity is. For the first-generation participants, their cultural and religious identities were closely related, while for the second-generation participants, their cultural and religious identities were different. For example, Islamic values determine Muslims' personal appearance—specifically how Muslim men and women must cover their

awra, an issue in which different cultures have different traditions. Islamic organisations had helped the Muslim participants to comprehend such issues.

The second-generation participants expressed slightly different difficulties in relation to their religious identity. In some cases, they had experienced dilemmas over how to practise their religious obligations when they were with non-Muslim friends. In these situations, Muslim organisations played a role in strengthening their Islamic identity by providing practical advice to inspire them to keep practising their Islamic obligations. For example, covering the *awra* is important but is not compulsory to follow their culture. They can wear whatever clothes they wish as long as the *awra* is covered, and this includes the possibility of following a fashion or trend. Muslim organisations had enabled the participants to practise their religious obligations in flexible ways.

The most substantial form of support acquired by the participants from Muslim organisations was educational support. The participants explained that they had a few way to gain Islamic knowledge, namely through formal and informal educational activities. Formal education is provided by Muslim organisations through mosques or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Mosques provide classes for both children and adults. For children, they provide basic knowledge on jurisprudence, theology, morality, Arabic language, information and communication technology, history and other subjects. Children usually attend classes regularly to follow a set syllabus. These classes are taught by volunteer teachers or others appointed by the mosque and are conducted after formal schooling. Islamic education classes are also offered for adults in a form appropriate to their maturity level. These classes are based on a specific syllabus and are taught by a certified instructor. Religious education systems are not recognised as “formal education systems” but as “supplementary systems” for Muslim educational activities. This reality was represented by Participant NB3:

> We got an Islamic knowledge from the mosque. We were lucky, my father was busy, and he doesn’t have time to educate us with religious knowledge. I got it from the mosque.

There are also Muslim NGOs that provide education to Muslim communities and also help Muslim communities by dealing with various local and global issues. However, not all cities in North East England have Muslim organisations that offer such activities. In Durham, for example, Muslims rely on university student societies for Islamic educational activities. As these societies are managed by university students, their activities are limited. Their main focus is on Friday prayers, *Iftar* and *Eid Salat*.

4.3.2 Support from Government Organisations

This part presents the findings on how support systems from the UK government had enabled the participants to practise their religious obligations in various ways. This concerns the UK legal system, the government, local authorities and local police departments.

The first-generation respondents were aware of the changing legal system in the UK, which is regularly improved and supports them in practising their religious obligations. For example, policies related to discrimination and racism had helped the participants to exercise their rights without distress. Thus, in cases where Muslims are insulted or discriminated against on religious grounds, the offender may face punishment under such policies.

Generally, the UK government enables Muslims to practise their religious obligations, build and renovate mosques, register Muslim associations and organise other activities. This includes the availability of some government funding for Muslim schools and does not restrain Muslims from promoting Islamic knowledge to others, as long as it does not disturb the public peace.

However, a recent issue was raised by the participants about a security system that will directly impact the Muslim community in the UK. This is about the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. Most of the participants were not comfortable with the Act and felt that they were always being observed by the government and even that they were victims of negative perceptions, which had affected their ability to exercise their rights. Participant SB3 explained this situation:

> Seems to me the media has created this perception of Muslims as being nuts and as a people who engage socially with street fighting … Also try to relate you with a terrorist. So, they were using the word terrorist as synonymous with Islam and use it to insult you.

The support from local authorities was explained by the participants in many ways. Specifically, the participants said that local authorities engaged in inclusive discussions with local Muslims on all aspects of community issues. For example, in the process of opening a new mosque, the participants explained that the local authority had given valuable advice on avoiding controversy in the local community. A participant mentioned an example in their city, where a local building had been purchased by a local Muslim for conversion into a mosque. However, this was objected to by some members of the English Defence League who come from outside the local area. The Muslim community received advice on this matter from the local authority about how to secure planning permission. The participants believed that local authorities

always try to ensure that members of the Muslim community are able to exercise their rights and are not discriminated against in practising their religious obligations.

Regarding protecting their rights, the participants recognised that the UK police had helped them a lot, including by protecting mosques and Muslims when they had received threats. The police had defended them and provided security when needed it without any prejudice, discrimination or favour towards any group. The police had briefed them clearly about the standards of operation that they would follow in certain scenarios and had also been open to the participants in engaging in discussions when the participants needed to seek opinions or solve problems. The police had also attended any activities or community meetings when invited. The participants explained that the UK police act professionally and are ready to give support to any positive Muslim community activities.

5 Discussion

The findings show that the participants had good relationships within their Muslim communities and with other local people, indicating high social capital. The factors affecting this included the presence of support systems, fluency in a local language and a high frequency of interacting with others, all of which created mutual understanding and respect. Dilwar Hussain (2012) has found that young Muslims identified themselves as British and English, which aligns with Ryan, Kofman and Banfi's (2009) finding that most of the Muslims in their study felt a sense of belonging and attachment to their local neighbourhood and "felt like Londoners".

Muslims (particularly young Muslims) have been found to have no hesitation in declaring "I love the Queen" because they are part of the UK's systems and interact with others (Pihlaja and Thompson 2017). Similarly, Muslim communities, especially younger generations, have been found to aspire to balance multiple identities but retain religious and cultural elements in the definition of the self while endeavouring to integrate into wider society (Stuart and Ward 2011). However, this situation sometimes presents Muslims with a dilemma about whether to maintain their cultural identities or to develop Western cultural identities (Akhtar 2014). Muslim communities have no problem engaging positively with other communities, but, at the same time, they need other people to understand their difficulties in maintaining their identities in a new environment.

Hannah Lyons (2018) has explained in depth that, in the view of Muslim women, the headscarf is a key object in the navigation of both religious and national identities, working as part of a messy set of components and both shaping and resisting feelings of "Britishness". Individuals need to resolve any conflicts between their religious and national identities and social capital is a crucial factor in this that can act as a lubricant to ease the exercise of their rights for Muslims in the UK. However, this can only be realised through consistent interaction, supporting Jack Donnelly's (2003) finding that interaction can encourage active respect and objective enjoyment.

In the case of language, it is undeniable that this is a major problem among first-generation immigrants (Ahmed 2009). According to Akhtar's (2014) findings, some the early generations of Pakistani immigrants in the UK had some formal education, but others were illiterate. The lack of formal education affected their ability to interact with other local people, and this made them choose to stay with people who had the same backgrounds as themselves. The women in particular socialised along lines of family and kinship because they felt not only safe and sheltered from the fear of racial harassment but also able to build communities (Akhtar 2014).

Muslim communities have no problem in declaring themselves to be "locals" (see for example Ryan, Kofman and Banfi 2009; Stuart and Ward 2011; Hussain 2012; Pihlaja and Thompson 2017; Lyons 2018), but this may not be how other local people perceive them. To be accepted as a local is not easy, even for those who have British nationality, and many factors need to be considered. The most important factor is stereotyping based on negative perceptions. Analysis has shown the media to be a driving force behind negative stereotyping of Muslims, which has resulted in pressure on Muslims to present themselves to others in non-threatening and welcoming ways, despite being subjected to covert and overt discrimination, which the participants felt in various contexts (Pihlaja and Thompson 2017). Such discrimination can create misogynistic oppression and may deny women access to public spaces (see Hancock and Mobillion 2019) and give rise to hate crimes against Muslims (Awan and Zempi 2016).

Further factors that influence discrimination may be a community's background and how frequently they in communicate with other communities, as illustrated in the case of xenophobic attitudes among low-skilled workers in Germany (Cornelissena and Jirjahn 2012).

Negative stereotypes and perceptions are barriers to acceptance and to creating good relationships (and thus developing social capital). They can also restrict interactions with other people: more-positive attitudes towards

Muslims reduce support for restrictions on their religious freedoms, and vice versa (van der Noll 2014). For example, British Muslim women working as cultural producers in media and fashion are finding strategies for challenging stereotypes and resisting socio-economic exclusion (Warren 2019). Through interaction and the development of social capital, negative stereotypes and perceptions can be reduced in a positive way. Again, the acceptance of different cultures in a society is important, and this needs active support by both majority and minority groups (see Berry and Kalin 1995).

The findings show the importance of support systems to Muslim communities in North East England. Community support is important to any community because it can reinforce the identity of the group, especially in a homogeneous community (see Putnam 2000). Holistic accountability, driven by religious values and mission achievement, is not separate from hierarchical accountability; rather, it forms part of the holistic accountability dynamic. Instantaneously, the Muslim community "live and breathe" their Islamic identity to ensure the sustainability of their activities (Yasmin, Ghafran and Haniffa 2018).

Stefano Bonino (2015) confirms that support from Muslim organisations is important for Muslim community members. He considers a "community" to be an organic and strong association that binds people through blood affiliation, kinship, language and shared mores. Religion is important for Muslim immigrants in the UK two key reasons: first, it offers a link to their former lives; second, it provides an anchor through which to navigate life in the UK (see Akhtar 2014). Moreover, as British Muslims come from different backgrounds in terms of race and country, they look for a mutual point to bond them, namely Islam as their religion.

Islam is a significant point connecting all Muslims in Europe to the *umma* (Lebl 2013) and Muslims in Europe identify themselves as belonging to a larger group: "Muslims living in the West" (see Schotter and Abdelzaher 2013). Additionally, Muslim communities are supported by Muslim organisations in developing their Islamic knowledge. Many Muslims rely on Islamic organisations to provide Qur'anic and Arabic classes (see Ahmed 2009).

The results also show that Muslim communities are supported by other local people, either by formal systems or by other communities. However, a lot of changes need to be made, including the adoption of community-oriented engagement in the daily interactions of government organisations with local communities. The government needs to adopt a community engagement approach, including documenting Muslims' voices, as the narratives that these individuals tell about their lives might provide critical understanding of the engagement process (as proposed in Spalek and Lambert 2008).

In order to achieve this, Rachel Briggs (2010: 972) lists three approaches that should be applied by the government. First, the government should adopt an all-or-nothing position in relation to partnership working: this needs to be underpinned structurally by new approaches to management and decision-making and culturally by new ways of working. Second, local authorities should invest in people rather than in projects to build their own community knowledge and contacts. They should not commission external consultants—people who are not usually local to the area and who take their knowledge and relationships with them at the end of the contract—to conduct community mapping and needs assessment. Third, the 'Prevent' strategy needs to be re-focused around downstream preventive and deradicalisation work and separated from broader, upstream community development.

In the context of police support for Muslims' daily activities, the participants in this study stated that they have appropriate support from and interactions with the police. However, this contradicts findings that Muslims in Birmingham have a lack of trust in the police, especially related to counter-terrorism policy (Awan, Blakemore and Simpson 2013). An explanation for this is that policy can impact negatively upon engagement because it serves to alienate Muslims and indeed is one of the most significant sources of anger within Muslim communities (Briggs, Fieschi and Lownsbrough (2006).

6 Conclusion

To conclude, the findings show the importance of social capital as a lubricant for Muslims exercising their rights in the context of North East England. Social capital is built through their consistent interactions with other local people, following the UK's systems and being involved in community activities. This not only generates mutual understanding but also leads to their being accepted and recognised as local people by others. Simultaneously, this creates a sense of belonging until they unhesitatingly declare themselves to be British. This manifests in their aspiration to balance multiple identities, retaining religious and cultural elements, to integrate into wider society (Stuart and Ward 2011).

This study also highlighted the importance of support systems both within and outside the community. Within-community support comes from family members and community organisations, such as mosques and NGOs. Outside support comes from government institutions, including the police, the legal system and government policies. Muslim organisations support British Muslims by providing social bonding environments, a continuation of identity,

a medium for Islamic education and a medium for practising religious obligations, while the governmental and legal system in the UK is being continually improved to support Muslims in practising their religious obligations.

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