'Islamic Capital' and Family Life: The Role of Islam in Parenting
Michela Franceschelli and Margaret O'Brien
Sociology published online 17 February 2014
DOI: 10.1177/0038038513519879

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://soc.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/02/17/0038038513519879

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:
British Sociological Association

Additional services and information for Sociology can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://soc.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://soc.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
‘Islamic Capital’ and Family Life: The Role of Islam in Parenting

Michela Franceschelli
Institute of Education, University of London, UK

Margaret O’Brien
Institute of Education, University of London, UK

Abstract
Much sociological research using Bourdieu’s theory to analyse intergenerational reproduction tends to focus on the educational rather than the familial aspect of this process. Instead, this article explores habitus and the family field within South Asian Muslim communities in the UK as the site of intergenerational transmission and seeks to understand how these parents pass on values to their children. Based on 52 semi-structured interviews with 15 South Asian Muslim families, the findings suggest that Islam was mobilised by parents to inform the transmission of a sense of morality, support children’s education and reinforce family ties. The concept of ‘Islamic capital’ was developed to add specificity to Bourdieu’s ideas of family spirit and cultural capital in order to capture the dynamics between parents and their children. In the context of multicultural Britain, these findings shed light on the diversity of parenting to inform family support grounded in the understanding of different communities.

Keywords
Bourdieu, cultural capital, ethnic capital, habitus, Islam, parenting, religious capital, South Asian British Muslim families

Introduction
The application of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory to advance understanding of family life has not been a central focus of research or conceptual development in sociology despite his
early foundational scholarship (Bourdieu, 1996, 1998). Even though Bourdieu considered family and education as the two main channels for the reproduction of socio-economic status across generations, the focus of many research studies using Bourdieu has been on the educational rather than the familial aspects of transmission (e.g. Ingram, 2011; Reay et al., 2009, 2010). An exception is the ethnographic work of the sociologist Annette Lareau (2011), which has provided an empirical application of Bourdieu’s theoretical model to the specific context of American family life. Her concepts of ‘concerted cultivation’ and ‘natural growth’ have contributed to an understanding of the differences between middle- and working-class parenting as aspects of habitus and of its transmission (2002, 2011).

Becher’s (2008) study of South Asian Muslim family practices provides a more specific analysis of intergenerational transmission with references to Islam. Based on semi-structured interviews with Bangladeshi families in London, Becher’s research captured the centrality of negotiating tradition and change to family life and therefore how maintaining religious traditions was occurring alongside adaptation to opportunities and challenges posed by British society. From a different perspective, the analysis of intergenerational transmission of religion often focuses on the internal cognitive mechanisms underlying the passing on and learning of religious concepts (Barret, 2000). Whitehouse (2002) argues that the frequent and constant ‘repetition’ of verbal teachings and rituals is a key strategy in the transmission of many different religious creeds. Cognitive approaches often involve claims about the universality of these inner mechanisms, whilst this article focuses on the contextual and cultural factors shaping intergenerational transmission. Based on a secondary data review of the two strands of the Home Office Citizenship Survey for adults and young people, Scourfield et al. (2012) found that, unlike other religious groups, Muslims from lower socio-economic backgrounds and with lower qualifications were more successful in passing on their religion to the next generation. Scourfield’s analysis sheds light on the complexity of religious transmission in different family contexts and provides the basis for further qualitative exploration within Muslim families. This current study seeks to understand this process of transmission from a specific theoretical perspective: Bourdieu’s theory of social practice and cultural capital, which particularly captures the interplay between individual agency and the social world.

Muslims have grown in demographic significance in the UK over the last decade, making up 5 per cent of the population in England and Wales in 2011, an increase of over one million compared to 2001 (ONS, 2011). South Asians, including Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, still account for the majority of the UK’s Muslim community (ONS, 2005). As Meer (2008) pointed out, Muslim identity is constructed in interplay with British social and political contexts where intergenerational tensions can be amplified as parents and youth experience different migration legacies with implications for identity. Unlike ethnicity and race, religious identity has often been perceived as an individual choice rather than something ‘given’ and therefore it has not been subject to the same level of legal protection (Meer, 2008). In this article, Muslim identity is self-defined by participants in order to capture its multiple dimensions and the intergenerational differences that characterise it: respondents prioritised different aspects of their self-definition as Muslims from believing, to practising, but also Islam as a legacy, source of values and behaviours.
The Theoretical Grounding of ‘Islamic Capital’: Bourdieu’s Cultural Capital, Habitus and Field

The application of Bourdieu’s theory of social practice and cultural capital to the study of internal family dynamics relies on the idea that the family provides the social context where resources of different types, such as social standing and economic capital but also values, aspirations, skills, religion and languages, are passed on from parents to children. In this context, the concept of capital as ‘the product of an investment which can secure a return’ (Moore, 2004: 446) involves the ‘capacity to reproduce itself, produce profits, expand and contains the tendency to persist’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 241–3). Even though Bourdieu did not specifically focus on internal family dynamics, his sociology is particularly relevant to an understanding of how parents strive to maintain or improve their social position and that of their children (Lareau, 2011), so enabling an exploration of the content and the process of transmission. In this article we introduce and develop the concept of ‘Islamic capital’ to extend Bourdieu’s social theory and understand intergenerational family practices in South Asian Muslim families.

Firstly, Bourdieu’s cultural capital, as the content of what parents pass on to their children, underlies the idea of ‘Islamic capital’. Generally, when transmitting cultural capital parents are mostly concerned with the investment in education measured by its quality and duration, which can also shape outcomes in the economic domain (Geert, 2001). Cultural capital also includes the wider body of knowledge and values that parents acquire and develop throughout their life experiences. More specifically, Bourdieu defined cultural capital as a resource with multiple (triple) dimensions:

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state i.e. in the form of long lasting disposition of the mind and the body; in the objectified state, in the forms of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries …) which are the trace realization of theories or critiques of these theories etc.; and in the institutionalised state … as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications. (Bourdieu, 1986: 243)

In addition to cultural capital, Bourdieu also theorised about other forms of capital amongst which ‘religious capital’ was of particular interest. In the ‘Genesis and structure of the religious field’ (1991, first published in French in 1971), Bourdieu affirmed that religion is an autonomous social field, which involves the production, reproduction and diffusion of religious goods. However, while Bourdieu used ‘religious capital’ to explain the formation and maintenance of structural and institutional relations of domination, this article focuses on religion in the context of family dynamics and as a resource for intergenerational transmission.

Secondly, together with exploring the content of intergenerational transmission in terms of cultural capital, it is important to address the question of how cultural capital is passed on from parents to children and thus how, according to Bourdieu, class relations are reproduced. Bourdieu’s habitus, ‘a system of durable and transposable dispositions … which generate organized practices and representations …’ (1990: 53) is used in the article to describe this process of transmitting cultural capital. Bourdieu’s Logic of
*Sociology* (1990) outlines different stages of this process, which lead to reproducing habitus – and therefore social status – across generations. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital is imprinted and encoded in the habitus starting from childhood through learning (1984). The habitus acts as what is familiar and ‘what we are comfortable with’ (Lareau, 2011: 361) and in so doing it shapes individual actions. Through social interaction in different social fields, individual actions inform social practice and, by doing so, they reproduce or transform the social structure. This circularity between cultural capital, habitus and the social structure is developed further in *Distinction* (1984), where Bourdieu addressed the consequences associated with the transmission of cultural capital in terms of reproduction of structural inequalities.

**‘The Family Spirit’: Family between Habitus and Social Field**

The third relevant element within Bourdieu’s model of intergenerational transmission is the concept of social field. Parents transmit their body of resources, or cultural capital, to their children in specific institutional settings that Bourdieu defines as social fields (1990). Fields are the social arenas where different groups compete, as in a game, for different ‘volumes of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: xxi). Amongst different social fields present in society, the family has been a primary focus of this research. The idea of the family as a social field is concerned with the exchange processes and power relationships within family members. Therefore, the family has a decisive role in the maintenance and reproduction of a certain social order through the accumulation and transmission amongst its members of different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1996). As a social field, the family is not culturally neutral but influenced by specific historical and socio-economic conditions, which determine both strategies and content of transmission (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006). Therefore, the family also exists as part of the social structure, which creates both social expectations and the social understanding of family itself in terms of the reciprocal obligations bonding the members.

Bourdieu dedicated two articles, ‘On the family as realized category’ (1996) and ‘The family spirit’ (1998), to the discussion of how the notion of family fits with the rest of his theory about the circularity between habitus, social fields and social structure, and defines family as:

> A principle of construction that is both immanent in individuals (as an internalized collective) and transcendent to them, since they encounter it in the form of objectivity in all other individuals. (1996: 21)

The emphasis on explaining this circularity is mirrored by the ambivalence of the ‘family spirit’ as both ‘an objective social category (a structuring structure)’ and ‘a subjective mental category (a structured structure)’ and therefore as a social field which generates individuals’ habitus as well as being generated by the habitus of individuals (1996: 21, 1998). In this context, Bourdieu’s ‘family spirit’ becomes part of the process by which socio-economic inequalities are produced and reproduced.
Ethnic Capital and the Development of ‘Islamic Capital’

Bourdieu’s theory of forms of capital has influenced Baker and Miles-Watson’s (2010) analysis of religious capital, as the formal and institutional expression of faith, and spiritual capital as personal faith and beliefs, which guide and motivate individual actions. The idea of capital here explicates how both religion and spirituality can be regarded as distinct but widely diffused commodities operating in different fields. Similarly, central to the report Faithful Cities (CULF, 2006) is the concept of ‘faithful capital’ underlying communities and congregations of faith in urban environments. Whether these concepts have been relevant for the development of ‘Islamic capital’, the specific context where they are mostly applied is quite different from our focus on the intergenerational transmission of values. For instance, Verter uses spiritual capital to theorise about how religious knowledge, competencies and preferences ‘are goods exchanged in a competitive symbolic economy’ (2003: 150).

Our concept of ‘Islamic capital’ was also influenced by Modood’s idea of ethnic capital (2004). Based on a review of literature about social and cultural capital, Modood developed the concept of ‘ethnic capital’ to explain an over-representation of some minority groups in the British higher education system. He argued that ethnicity acts for some minorities as a body of resources negotiated between the family and the wider community as ‘the family is an integral part but clearly does not exhaust the contribution of ethnicity’ (2004: 101). Modood suggests that ethnic capital can blur Bourdieu’s distinction between social and cultural capital and becomes ‘cultural-social capital’ (2004: 101). In this sense, ethnic capital reflects the interplay between cultural capital, acquired through the family, and social capital resulting from interaction and social relations in the community (Shah et al., 2010).

This article builds on the concepts of cultural and ethnic capital and applies them in the new context of how the religion of Islam is deployed in the specific family field of South Asian Muslims. The concept of ‘Islamic capital’ is an attempt to create some specificity to cultural and ethnic capital in order to capture the particular dynamics of resource transfer between South Asian Muslim parents and their children. ‘Islamic capital’ was developed from interview data with parents and young people and is defined ‘as a body of convertible resources originating from Islam and used by parents as support for their children’s upbringing’.

Methodology and Sample

The article draws on qualitative insights emerging from a wider mixed methods study which adopted a sequential design. Firstly, an exploratory survey was conducted in three secondary schools in an inner London borough and one Sixth Form College in the North West of England (NW) with young people aged 14–18 (N=560) who belonged to a variety of ethnic and religious groups. The survey aimed to provide a descriptive snapshot of some of the key issues related to their identity and sense of belonging. It also sought to collect comparative data across a range of different ethnic and religious groups and to identify a preliminary sampling frame for the following qualitative interviews. Secondly, the subsequent stage provided the primary source of data and involved 52 semi-structured...
The mixed-method approach has enabled the capturing of micro and macro aspects of identity, conceptualised as multi-layered and developing in the interplay between social, individual and structural conditions. The macro categories such as ethnic, national and religious identification have been the object of the in-class survey, while individual experiences were addressed by the interviews.

The final sample was recruited through the school-based questionnaire and a combination of snowballing techniques. Whilst most of the young people were second-generation UK born (23 of the 25), 22 out of the 27 parents were first-generation migrants; three families were Pakistani, five Indian and seven Bangladeshi. Based on parental employment status and qualifications, seven families were classified as middle class and eight from a lower socio-economic status. The analysis of the qualitative data was carried out with NVIVO software using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) and themes were identified by a hierarchical step-based approach, which brought codes together into accounts and then linked them into wider analytical thematic areas. The analysis involved a detailed exploration of selected themes and was built up through several levels: the individuals (young person, mother and father separately), the family group (young person, mother and father together), all young people, all fathers and all mothers. The article is based on findings emerging from interviews with both young people and parents.

**Reflexivity and the Research Process**

In conducting, analysing and reporting we reflected on both the advantages and the limitations of the researcher being a white European woman and therefore an ‘outsider’ accessing South Asian Muslim communities.

Being an outsider entailed that the researcher was perceived as ‘neutral’ and parents with poorer English language skills explained that they felt more comfortable talking to someone with a foreign (non-British) accent. Many parents also drew connections between their personal experience of migration and the researcher’s. By contrast, the main limitations associated with being external to the communities were gaining the trust of the interviewees and language barriers and these impacted on the length and richness of some of the interviews.
Finally, it needs to be considered that the researcher’s own position changed while conducting the fieldwork. The initial feeling of being an outsider was gradually replaced by an increasing understanding of the different cultural norms and religious values of the families.

### Islam as Resource for Parenting

In the study, Islam was perceived by respondents as ‘more than a religion, but a way of life’ in the sense that it forged not only such everyday practices as clothing and eating, but also social relationships and views of the world.

Interview accounts from parents and young people suggest that Islam was adopted in the process of intergenerational transmission to legitimise values and beliefs. It emerges that having an ‘Islamic upbringing’ meant that parents transmitted a sense of right and wrong based on their interpretation of the Islamic doctrine:

> My mother and father have tried their best to bring us up in an Islamic upbringing and it has only ever benefited us.

**What does ‘Islamic upbringing’ mean?**

> Like just teaching us and showing us what Islam is, what’s right and wrong, just the general rules and then just probably going into the background of religion and God and just spreading the message to us to say that ‘look kids this is the right way’. They have never forced us but we have all voluntarily chosen that path because we have seen the rightness in it. (Maria, 17, British Pakistani girl, NW)

Similarly, parents valued Islam as a support in promoting specific guidelines for behaviour which were distinguished from general ‘British moral standards’:

> The guidelines are Islamic guidelines that we have. I don’t expect them to behave as you’d see the classic English teenage girls do. (Sarah and Farooq’s father, Indian, London)

To reinforce the transmission of their moral teachings, some of the parents made references to ‘The Surah Al Fatihah’, the opening verses of the Qur’an about ‘keeping to the right path’, as Wajid, an 18-year-old Pakistani boy illustrates:

> Personally yeah I think it is through my religion because most of the rules that my parents say they always refer it to religion, they always say if I don’t do this then you won’t be a good Muslim, so whatever they say and whatever rules they follow I think it’s because religion is a big part of their life because obviously they are from Pakistan.

Together with transmission in the moral sphere, interviews suggest that Islam was mobilised to strengthen parental control:

> … So that’s another thing we tell our children whatever you do it’s going to reflect on this life and the next life, but also being aware that even when we’re not around you, someone else, God
can see you so instilling that in children we try to do that. (Sakina’s father, Bangladeshi, London)

In the same family group, this last point was reiterated by the mother who strongly believed in the crucial role of Islam in providing moral guidelines and defining the sense of self:

Even in religious education because Islam plays a vital role in discipline and upbringing your child and one’s behaviour and making one’s character, this is very vital and if I don’t know in Islam how one should be as a person to one’s self, to one’s family, to society, if you don’t know how to do it then how are you going to be a good person? (Sakina’s mother, Bangladeshi, London)

Importantly, several respondents drew a connection between Islam, perceived as enhancing a sense of duty, moral standards and parental control, and young people’s educational success:

There is a connection you see (between Islam and education), I think there is a connection, because Islam forbids you from doing a lot of things which are bad and obviously if Islam is forbidding you from doing bad things, you stay on the right path you focus on what you have to do. Your studies, education, you see and I think staying on the right path you learn differences between good and bad and I think Islam is a guidance for a better life yeah, so there is a connection there definitely I think there is … To do well in life yeah and stay out of trouble, etc. (Zahra’s father, Pakistani, NW)

Even though Islam was incontestable it was not static within generations and there were some differences amongst parents and children in the way it was perceived. Young people saw their religion as their main source of self-identification, in most cases, more important than their ethnic and national identities:

I feel that my religion shapes the person who I am and I don’t think my ethnicity where I’m from doesn’t really matter to me … (Being Muslim is) the values like they shape me who I am, so I can have like compassion and mercy, so like I say if I do become rich I won’t be like some of the rich people that are greedy and selfish and being a Muslim makes me compassionate to people that are lower than me and does not allow me to be superior. (Asif, 14, British Bangladeshi boy, London)

Parents were aware of their children’s attachment to Islam and referred to it to support in-family solidarity and provide a common platform of values and practices:

It’s (Islam) a way of guidance for me and all my family. We all go together with it, follow it as one. (Hamid, 14, British Indian boy, London)

Yeah definitely because we all believe in Islam all our family, we quite firmly believe in Islam and we all participate in Ramadan together and everything. It’s like religion brings us all together into one. (Maria, 17, British Pakistani girl, NW)

Islam was important both as a transmitting strategy and as part of the content of transmission. It emerged that some of the parents felt in charge of transmitting religion to their
children by talking about the key messages of Islam as exemplified in the ‘Five Pillars’ (Schimmel, 1992) but also by practising and praying as a family group:

So like when I was younger the first experience of Islam was just praying with her (the mother), just wearing the scarf and sitting down and praying with her and how she used to tell me about Islam and beliefs and heaven and hell and things like that and so you know when you’re younger you accept it more, because whatever your parents say to you, you believe it. (Sakina, 18, British Bangladeshi girl, London)

Praying was particularly valued by some of the parents as a way to bring the family together. In Hania’s family, parents and children prayed together every Sunday, while Hamid’s family gathered for the evening prayers and prayed five times a day at the weekend. In some cases, when asked about whether they were practising, respondents referred to whether they were praying five times a day:

Yes (my family) is religious. My mum and my dad they are religious, they pray five times a day. (Amina, 15, British Bangladeshi girl, London)

As part of the content of transmission, Islam was also relevant for those parents who were not fully practising but who still felt the duty of transferring Islam to their children:

… We will ask them we will remind them to pray at least once or twice a day, in the morning when they get up have a shower, takes two minutes to do your prayers, in the evening we’ll say that the human weakness is my own weakness which is I don’t do it, but I want my children to be better than me so I will encourage my children to do something I don’t do. You can call that hypocrisy but I’m trying to practise the tenets of my religion which is to teach my children about Islam and the practices that they should follow. (Tania’s father, Indian, South Coast)

Importantly, in transmitting their cultural and religious capital, parents passed their knowledge of Islam as affected by South Asian cultures and heritage. In several cases, the parental role in the transmission of religion was mainly concerned with the less theological aspects and often more involved with the values, beliefs, moral teachings and everyday practices attached to Islam.

These emerging themes illustrate how Islam functioned both as habitus, thus as the process of transmitting moral values, guidelines for behaviour and aspirations, and as part of the content of intergenerational transmission. In this sense, parents adopted ‘Islamic capital’ to pass on their values, guide young people’s behaviour and inform practices.

‘Everything in Moderation: Never Have Too Much of Anything’

The accounts about moderation by Omar, an 18-year-old British Pakistani boy from London, and his mother reflect well how Islam informed and supported intergenerational transmission. The issue of moderation is an important topic in Islam and a recurrent theme in the Qur’an:
O People of the Book, do not be fanatical in your religion except in truth. Do not follow the whims of people who strayed before, and made many stray, and stray once again from the right path. (2008: 5:76)

Global events, particularly since 9/11, have negatively affected the public perception of Islam in many western countries, with depictions of Muslims as radical and extreme (Morey and Yaqin, 2011; Morgan and Poynting, 2012). However, as exemplified by these verses, the Qur’an emphasises the importance of being moderate and, in this instance, it connects moderation with the concept of the ‘right path’.

Omar’s mother highlights the importance of moderation as ‘the way to Islam’ which, she explained, promoted a way of life that seeks to avoid extremism and enhance balance:

Islam is such an easy religion. It is such an easy religion. That’s what people make it to be, fanatic. We do not believe in that. We are Islam in fact says fanaticism is not allowed. You are not to be obsessed with anything. Even love too much is bad for you. Too much food is bad for you, too much sleep everything moderate. And I try to teach my son the same and I try to practise the same, be moderate. Not too much either, not too much of anything.

This idea of moderation was elaborated through the relationship between the mother and Omar and illustrates how elements of the structural sphere were internalised and then reproduced by individuals to affect their system of values and everyday practices, as described by Omar’s account:

… As much as it might be good or fun to do all of those things (such as drinking) it’s only to moderation that you can enjoy them at best. That’s another thing my mum taught me always moderation …

Moderation, never have too much of anything. So you always have things, enjoy what you have but don’t expect too much of it or if you’re enjoying yourself enjoy yourself but … you can’t always enjoy yourself enjoy the moment. So it’s sort of like that sort of have everything in moderation so not too much of anything and not too little of everything.

The empirical ground where moderation seemed to be particularly relevant for Omar and his mother was the issue of drinking alcohol. Omar spoke extensively about his social life, going out, his 18th birthday party and drinking. He particularly looked for the reasons and rationale behind the religious prohibition of drinking alcohol, which he identified with the need to set boundaries for self-control.

The Qur’an mainly addresses the issue of alcohol in three separate verses and links it with Satan, sin, and the need to avoid intoxication when praying:

O Believers, wine and gambling idols and divining arrows are an abhorrence, the work of Satan … (5:90)

They ask you about wine and gambling. Say: ‘In them both lies grave sin, though some benefit, to mankind. But their sin is more grave than their benefit.’ (2:219)
O Believers, do not come near to prayer when you are drunk until you know what you are saying … (4:43)

When applying moderation to the context of alcohol, Omar explained that the Islamic principle about being moderate signified ‘to be able to drink but never get drunk’. Through moderation, Omar showed how he managed to feel at ease with his friends rather than a ‘social outcast’, as he described the feeling of exclusion attached to not drinking. At the same time, he conformed to his parents who both admitted drinking occasionally but ‘only moderately’. Omar’s idea of moderation particularly reflected the pattern of transmission emerging from his mother’s interview, which also talked extensively about the issue of drinking alcohol:

So he said I know my limits. I can’t stand people who are drunk. I despise people who drink a lot. I’m telling you that is something you will never see in my life and I hold you to it. I said, well, I’m going to hold you to it. Because if I ever see you drunk Omar you will lose all respect for me … when I say my prayers I pray to God that you are allergic to alcohol. He said that’s nasty. For your own good son. So you know you have to do these things and I said Omar if you become drunk like all these children who drink and get drunk and throw up and he said mum, I detest it …

The case of Omar illustrates how mother and son used moderation for different purposes: while the mother saw moderation as a parenting strategy to set out moral boundaries, Omar adopted it as a way to reconcile Islam with practices typical of British society such as going out and drinking.

**Gender, Social Class and ‘Islamic Capital’**

Islam provided a framework for the legitimisation of a range of internal family roles in particular how mothering and fathering were shaped in specific social class contexts. Mothers were often acclaimed by their children as having a special, rather essentialist value:

My religion says a lot about the status of a mother as well. Our prophet, he said that in our religion that paradise lies under the feet of your own mother and so can you imagine heaven and how much of a status that your mother has and that alone just makes me think that my mum is my main aspiration. (Hania, 18, British Bangladeshi girl, NW)

Another young Bangladeshi girl, Sakina, also referred to the centrality of mothers according to Islam and spoke about her close relation with her own mother:

Yeah because my mum obviously she had to grow up really quickly. At such a young age obviously when she married my dad and she had my sister straight away. As well and the things she has been through in life and the things, the stories she has told me about how hard it was growing up and the things that have happened to her. We are more best friends than mother, daughter and sisters and it’s like we will do everything together at the same time and I just think wow.
Sakina had been accepted to a prestigious medical school and had to negotiate her career aspirations of becoming a doctor with respect for her mother’s more traditional values about gender-separated roles in the family, which imply women’s main function as mothers and children’s educators:

Women who have a role to play in society because you are going to be a mother and if you are not a good mother obviously you are going to fail society. If your children are not good, what society you create? We believe that mothers are the foundation of children’s education. … There is a saying ‘if you teach a woman then you teach the whole nation’. Because like I say the mother is the first teacher for the child and you know like in some communities they understand the value of having a mother who is educated and understands everything. (Sakina’s mother, Bangladeshi, London)

Most young respondents attributed assumptions about gendered family roles to what Omar defined as ‘religious culture’ or, in other words, the consequence of parents mistakenly ‘mixing’ South Asian cultures with religion:

I don’t think that my mum or my parents feel that it’s particularly true about that women should be treated differently like should be treated less equally. I don’t think they believe in that at all because I think most of the women in my family do work. I don’t think they believe in that. I think it’s more because it is the religious culture in those countries and because they are the first generation to be leaving that country [so] some of that will stick behind with them. Whereas since I am growing up here it’s much more sort of cosmopolitan city where everything is going on and so women have as much right in the workplace as men do, and I think that it’s not just say Islamic or religious that causes this sort of women not having an equal place. It’s true I think if you look back in even in British sort of like history that women don’t get an equal place in society as men do, so I think it’s something more to do with worldwide society rather than just religious countries that this sort of, that this occurs.

Another young boy challenged the assumption about Islam underlying gendered roles instead attributed to South Asian cultures:

… Islam says you can’t force a person to marry unless the woman and man agree you can’t get married. They use the culture as agreement to back themselves up. They say it was religion but it wasn’t religion … The main problem attacking Islam now is people’s tradition. They don’t know Islam and the traditional cultures was wrong and against women so they’re using patriarchal ideas they think that’s Islamic and that’s not Islamic. Everyone who is not a Muslim thinks that’s an Islamic idea so they keep attacking Islam but it’s not. It’s tradition and culture, nothing to do with Islam. That’s probably the biggest thing that attacks Islam. (Saleem, 18, British Pakistani, NW)

Even though amongst respondents patriarchy was hardly ever attributed only to Islam, there was still the perception that religion was, in some instances, mobilised in order to justify the division of gender roles:

So is this idea about the different roles of men and women related to Islam?
Personally I think it is because you know if it wasn’t for religion they (parents) wouldn’t have that thing which you said that women and men having different rules because there would be no rules to follow because of religion.

*Is this because of religion or rather is it about how people interpret it?*

It’s more different for people who are more religious because people who are more religious they believe that it’s more stricter on women than it is but if you are not as religious you do still care but you don’t put emphasis on religion do you? (Wajid, 18, British Pakistani boy, NW)

Ultimately, the combination of Islam and South Asian cultures affected gender roles as reflected by family practices and it implied that some fathers withdrew themselves from everyday aspects of child-rearing, seen as a traditional responsibility of mothers, and focused on overseeing and providing for the children’s education:

Yes for him (husband) education is very important. He wants them to be career girls. That is his priority. He feels that’s all he can give them. He doesn’t like to take help from anyone. Whatever he does he likes to do on his own and that is why he feels that is all he can give them is education and he does feel bad that he doesn’t have the finances to put them through private education in very good universities. (Zahida’s mother, Pakistani, London)

However, internal family roles were not defined uniquely by culture and ‘Islamic capital’ but rather negotiated with other factors including employment pathways and the time parents spent at home. Changing family roles in South Asian British Muslim families partly reflect more general global trends concerning fathers’ involvement (United Nations, 2011) as well as the effects of migration and settling in a new country (Ambrosini and Molina, 2004; Erel, 2010). In line with Pels’s (2000) findings about the changes of gender roles within Moroccan families migrating to the Netherlands, some middle-class mothers in the study were the main earners while other fathers, with better English language skills, took up some of a mother’s traditional responsibilities of everyday child-rearing.

Despite its influence on gender roles in the family, mothers and fathers appeared to adopt ‘Islamic capital’ in their parenting quite interchangeably and therefore both parents used Islam to pass on values to the children. In some families, like Sakina’s, the mother was the one mostly in charge of religious teaching and used ‘Islamic capital’ to guide her daughter’s behaviour in reference to modesty and the hijab:

(In Islam) Women are supposed to cover themselves after they have gone through puberty so when a girl has seen her period, so they have developed. So I said to my daughter you know that you have to wear a hijab and I showed her evidence in the Koran and the Prophet’s narration where he says what the wisdom is behind covering yourself and she said ‘okay mum’ and she understood it. (And I explained) she knew why and it was just to protect herself so that no men can gaze at her and to cover her modesty because she knows it is for her husband, she can uncover herself in front of her brother, uncles, grandparents, dad but when we go outside or someone comes to us or strangers to us then she covers up. (Sakina’s mother, Bangladeshi, London)
By contrast Asif, a 14-year-old British Bangladeshi boy, described his mother as less religious than the father who was also more knowledgeable about Islam and therefore in charge of religious teaching.

Even though the importance of Islam for transmitting values was a common theme across all the families in the study, there were some differences in the ways and the extent parents used ‘Islamic capital’ to instil a sense of morality in their children. The analysis suggests that less-educated parents from a lower socio-economic background tended to refer more closely to Islam, whilst higher-educated parents felt they needed to integrate and support religious explanations with other sources of evidence. Sarah’s parents, from a middle-class background, referred to themselves as religious and as practising Muslims. However, they explained that Islam was a fundamental part but not the only means they used to transmit a sense of morality to their children:

*How do you explain to your children what is right and what is wrong?*

I’ve always told them what my sisters have gone through, you know, I’ve always given them … examples … yeh about life, you know … Yes, so they know the consequences and they know what’s happened … I’ve always told them the reason … this is what’s happened in the family and they realise it and they are aware of it and they know these situations happen, so I hope it’s like a guideline for them so that they don’t get into the same situation.

*So, does Islam have any role in explaining what is right and what is wrong?*

Not so much. I think everything happens in life because of your situation, you know, your job happens not because of your religion, because of what you can do, you’re able to do, but Islam is a guideline not to go over the steps … (Sarah’s mother, Indian, London)

Omar’s mother and Yasmeen’s father, also from a middle-class background, pointed out that Islam was only one aspect of how to instil a sense of morality in their children and that ‘evidence’ was required including examples from their own lives:

We referred to our acts, as you do she will do it. When we wanted her to go to sleep at 8 o’clock we went to sleep at 8 o’clock to say this is bed time … but we won’t sit here and tell her 8 o’clock bed time go to sleep … If I am sitting here and watching television and telling her what time to go to sleep she won’t go. Right everybody is going upstairs, so it’s your act that teaches, you don’t have to say that this is right and this is wrong you just do it without saying it and she will know it. (Yasmeen’s father, Indian, NW)

‘Islamic capital’ expresses the complexity of parenting that draws from negotiating the influences of religion, culture and social class. In everyday family life, ‘Islamic capital’ was adopted differently by parents and informed multiple individual habitus.

**Conclusion**

Drawing from Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, this article has introduced the concept of ‘Islamic capital’ in the specific context of intergenerational transmission
as both a tool for transmitting and as an object of the transfer. The analysis suggests that ‘Islamic capital’ was a significant resource used by parents to exercise control over their children and reinforce their influence on the children’s future life chances.

‘Islamic capital’, in combination with other factors such as South Asian cultures, acted as a source of legitimisation for internal family roles and supported parenting in a range of ways: it informed the family system of values; and it was used to transmit a sense of morality and to control un-Islamic practices. The results show how the Islamic idea of ‘the right path’ became embedded in parental teachings and was assimilated by their children. In addition, Islam was employed to inform aspirations and to generate social capital by providing a common platform of values across generations. In this regard, Islam supplied parents with networks and resources for young people’s socialisation, including the community, the extended family and the Mosque.

The specific focus of our data on South Asian Muslim communities limits the extension of these findings to other ethnic and religious groups. This is why we have remained strictly concerned with the term ‘Islamic’ rather than more general forms of religious, cultural, spiritual or ethnic capital. In addition, ‘Islamic capital’ alone cannot explain the complexity of intergenerational transmission in the studied communities. Other factors including gender, culture and social class came into play. The socio-economic background of the families affected the use of ‘Islamic capital’, with families from a lower socio-economic and educational background relying more strongly on it. However, these variations in the use of ‘Islamic capital’ did not put into question the widespread recognition amongst parents that religion had a significant role in transmitting values to their children.

The use of a Bourdieusian framework has been productive in shedding further light on the intergenerational transmission in South Asian Muslim families living in the UK. Specifically, the article has highlighted the need for sociological research to deepen and extend the application of Bourdieu’s ‘family spirit’ to an understanding of family dynamics. In addition, unlike previous studies about families drawing from Bourdieu, such as Lareau’s ethnography (2002), the centre of this analysis has shifted from a strictly social class focus to incorporate religious and cultural dimensions as determinants of parenting. In this context, the article provides further evidence of the diversity of intergenerational transmissions within different communities and social milieus with implications for the development of family and young people’s support services, which are grounded in the understanding of different groups.

Acknowledgements

This work draws from a larger mixed methods research study, part of an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) CASE Scholarship (ES/G027323/1). We are deeply grateful to Dr Fatima Husain, a specialist on Muslim families, who has advised on the design and provided helpful feedback on our findings. We also wish to acknowledge Ali Ahmed, Shahid Ahmed and Ed Sonsino for their comments on the different drafts. Finally, we are most indebted to all the young people and parents who spent time talking to us, sharing their views and experiences.
Funding

The research is an ESRC CASE Scholarship in collaboration with the Family and Parenting Institute (Now: Family and Childcare Trust).

References


Michela Franceschelli is a Researcher at the ESRC Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKEs) at the Institute of Education, University of London. She is interested in the influence of religion, ethnicity and social class on youth, identity formation and on the related process of intergenerational transmission. She is currently working on three research studies: young people’s experiences of opportunities or barriers in the areas of education, employment and housing and their views on British society; the experiences of working-class adults born in 1958 who participated in higher education; and family case studies looking at the relationship between parenting, educational aspirations, ethnicity and social class.

Margaret O’Brien, PhD Social Psychology 1984 (LSE), is Director of the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London. Her research seeks to understand how fathers and mothers can work and care together for the welfare of children and gender equality. She has published widely in the field of fatherhood and work-family policy; fathers, parenting and family support; children, families and communities; children’s services and child wellbeing. Her current ESRC project is profiling 21st-century fathers at home and in the world of work.

Date submitted May 2013
Date accepted December 2013