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# **POLICE ENGAGEMENT WITH MUSLIM COMMUNITIES: BREAKING OUT, BREAKING IN, AND BREAKING THROUGH**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article considers the character of engagement between UK police forces and Muslim communities and citizens. It examines, from the perspective of police personnel, a range of factors that prevent police organisations from ‘breaking out’ of constraints that currently hinder their engagement with Muslim communities, limit police officers from ‘breaking in’ to Muslim communities in ways that would improve engagement, and facilitate police officers in ‘breaking through’ barriers between them and Muslim communities. The aim of the article is to offer a critical insight into engagement between police officers and Muslim communities and citizens that may aid and enhance such engagement in the future. Enhancing positive engagement between the police service and Muslim citizens is vital in the context of contemporary concerns about Muslim communities being the focus of a multiplicity of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies and, as a result, Muslims citizens retreating from participation in public life.

## **KEY WORDS**

Faith and Religion, Islam, Muslim communities, Neighbourhood policing

## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last three decades there have been concerted efforts in the UK to promote the participation of Muslim citizens and communities in state institutions and public life. This has been especially notable in respect of policy arenas relating to community cohesion, equality and discrimination, and security. However, establishing and maintaining the participation of Muslim communities and citizens has not been straightforward in a social context characterised by controversies about the rationale for engagement, the appropriateness of the mechanisms designed to facilitate engagement, and the benefits claimed to be created by increased engagement. Such controversies have intensified as Muslim communities and citizens have, following the ‘7/7’ terrorist bombings in London in 2005, become the focus of a multiplicity of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies (Spalek et al, 2009). It has been suggested that, as a consequence of this, Muslim citizens are now retreating from participation in state institutions and public life (Citizens UK, 2016).

In this article we focus on one area of engagement between the state and Muslim communities and citizens in the UK: that which takes place in the context of public policing. Understanding such engagement is important because it is arguably one of the most critical ways in which religious faith and the state intermix. Public policing forms the ‘coal face’ at which many contemporary questions about and practical solutions to issues relating to religious freedom and human rights are negotiated. Moreover, successfully facilitating the participation of Muslim citizens (and those of other religious faiths) in policing is now seen as a vital means by which community cohesion is achieved and maintained (McFadyen and Prideaux, 2011). The aim of this article is to offer a critical insight into engagement between policing and Muslim communities and citizens that may aid and enhance such engagement in the future.

### **MUSLIM PARTICIPATION IN STATE INSTITUTIONS AND PUBLIC LIFE: A SHORT HISTORY**

The 1980s saw the start of major changes in respect of the engagement of Muslim communities and citizens with state institutions and public life (Vertovec, 2002; Gilliat-Ray, 2010; O’Toole et al, 2013). Up until the 1980s the engagement of Muslims, as people of faith, with state institutions and public life had been marginal and reticent. Muslim

engagement with the state was comprehended and structured as a form of engagement based on ethnicity rather than religion (Vertovec, 2002). Moreover, dominant Islamic legal opinions discouraged the participation of Muslims in non-Islamic political systems and, although such opinions were keenly debated, this resulted in some Muslims choosing on principle not to engage with state institutions and public life (Hussain, 2004: 378). Since the late 1980s, however, there has been a growing consensus in the UK and elsewhere in Europe that Muslims should be viewed as full citizens of plural, democratic states (Hussain, 2004). Indeed, the participation of Muslim citizens in state institutions and public life has become seen as vital to secure the successful future of European states (Hussain, 2004). As a consequence, by the end of the 1980s many Muslim citizens had integrated into state institutions and public life and discussion of matters relating to Islam were treated like those of any other minority, 'special interest' group (Vertovec, 2002). Significant shifts in debates in the UK Parliament can be seen as indicative of this social change: whereas Islam and Muslims were infrequently mentioned in Parliament in the three decades prior to the end of the 1970s, during the 1980s there was a dramatic increase in discussions about the Islamic faith and Muslims in Britain that has continued to the present day. Although the increase in attention paid by parliamentarians to British Muslims during the 1980s was inexorably tied to concerns about 'Islamic fundamentalism', it became increasingly common to hear senior politicians express the view that 'Britain has the fullest respect for Islam and for Moslem communities here' (John Wakeham MP, Leader of the House of Commons, HC Debate, 2 March 1989, vol. 148, col. 404).

Since the 1980s religious faith, as distinct from race or ethnicity, has increasingly been recognised as a facet of individual identity around which political engagement activities should be oriented. Moreover, from the late 1990s UK governments have increasingly sought to engage with Muslim communities and groups (O'Toole et al, 2013). Such engagement has been viewed as necessary in the context of a range of disparate national and international occurrences such as the controversy surrounding the 1988 publication of 'The Satanic Verses' by Salman Rushdie, the campaigns for law prohibiting discrimination based on religion or belief, the debates regarding state funding of Islamic faith-based schools, and the participation of the UK in international conflicts such as those in Bosnia (1992–95), the Gulf (1990-1991), Iraq (2003-2009), and Afghanistan (2001-2014) (Smith, 2002; Vertovec, 2002; Hussain, 2004; O'Toole et al, 2013). Engagement between the state and Muslim communities and citizens has also been propelled by wider debates about the extent to which Muslims

have been and should be assimilated into ‘mainstream’ British society (for a discussion, see: Lewis, 2007). These debates have themselves been recently intensified by concerns about Islamic radicalisation and the involvement of Muslim citizens in political extremism and terror (O’Toole et al, 2013). Moreover, the evolving political landscape of the UK has motivated and mobilised Muslim citizens and communities to become more vocal in articulating their views on and demands for change of the activities of state institutions (Hussain 2004).

However, the increased participation of Muslim citizens in state institutions and public life should not be understood merely as the outcome of periodic crises, grievances, and security concerns (O’Toole et al, 2013). Rather, it should be seen in the context of the mainstream political agenda of encouraging engagement between state institutions and Muslim communities and citizens in order to strengthen local governance and foster democratic renewal (Dinham and Lowndes, 2008; O’Toole et al, 2013; see also Putnam, 1995; 2000; Giddens, 1998). In this sense, the participation of Muslim citizens in state institutions and public life can be seen as one outcome of the broad commitment of UK policymakers to encourage people of faith to play a greater role in key aspects of civil society (Dinham and Lowndes, 2008; O’Toole et al, 2013). Faith-based organizations, in particular, have been viewed as having an important role to play in the realisation of policies aimed at promoting social inclusion, improving community cohesion across ethnic lines, facilitating partnership working, accessing hard-to-reach minority communities, and renewing democratic structures at the local level (Dinham and Lowndes, 2008). Indeed, engaging faith-based organizations in the delivery of government policy has been a vital part of the broader ‘third-way’ government strategy of mobilizing the resources of civil society in pursuit of citizen well-being and better governance (Dinham and Lowndes, 2008: 818).

## **MUSLIM PARTICIPATION IN POLICING**

Within the broader context of debates about the participation of Muslim citizens in state institutions and public life, there have been calls for the greater participation of Muslim citizens in the organization, implementation, and governance of public policing. These calls are closely linked to criticisms about constabularies being unresponsive to and detached from the communities they serve, as well as to concerns about racism in policing (for example, Scarman, 1981; Macpherson, 1999). Consequently, constabularies have increasingly been

expected to consult, promote interaction, and engage with Muslim citizens and communities in order to improve the quality of the services they provide and (re)establish their legitimacy in providing those services (Scarman, 1981; Macpherson, 1999; Jones and Newburn, 2001; Bullock, 2014). This has resulted in a proliferation of formal police-community meetings, informal networking, social research, and, more recently, the use of social media to communicate and interact with Muslim citizens. The primary aim of such engagement is to elicit views about current priorities for crime control, generate information and intelligence about crime and criminal activities, and promote police-community collaboration in responding to and resolving crime and social problems (Jones and Newburn, 2001; Bullock, 2014). Because of the predominance of the concern to address racism in policing, a focus on questions relating to race and ethnicity in police-community engagement with Muslim communities has sometimes obscured the relevance of religious faith to policing (Chakraborti, 2007) but religious faith is formally established as a dimension of communities that constabularies are expected to engage with (NPIA, n.d.).

Police engagement with Muslim communities and citizens needs to be understood within the context of the growth in police-community consultation that has characterised the development of community policing since the late 1970s. Community policing has become a dominant policing paradigm, rhetorically and organizationally, in the UK (as well as in other European states and the USA) and is designed to bring citizens, communities, and constabularies together by prioritising foot patrols, police-community partnerships, and collaborative problem solving (Alderson, 1979; Manning, 1984; Kelling and Moore, 1988; Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux, 1990; Fielding, 2005). Community policing has, more recently, become a major component of anti-terrorism policy in the UK. Whereas counter-terrorism policies have traditionally emphasised 'hard' policing tactics (such as covert surveillance and the use of informants) to generate intelligence, 'soft' community policing models (which stress interaction, engagement, and partnership) are now dominant (Briggs et al 2006; Innes, 2006; Lowe and Innes, 2008; Innes and Roberts, 2008; Bettison, 2009; Spalek and Lambert, 2010; Spalek, 2010; McFadyen and Prideaux, 2014). It has been argued that grounding anti-terrorism work in soft community policing models may be more effective than utilizing hard policing tactics because the former builds up trust through the establishment of long-term community ties, breaks down suspicion of the police, and is responsive to community defined problems (Innes, 2006). Community policing, which attempts to facilitate greater police-community interaction, is said to promote information exchange and generate

intelligence that is vital to policing terrorism (Innes et al, 2006; see also Newman and Clarke, 2008; Lyons, 2002).

Police engagement with Muslim communities and citizens comprises both ‘general’ and specialist anti-terrorism policing strategies. However, such engagement has not been without problems. Previous research has drawn attention to the practical problems which have arisen in the implementation of community policing initiatives because of, for example, the lack of representativeness in the Muslim groups consulted, the absence of clarity in the breadth and scope of engagement activities, and the inability of some communities to meaningfully engage (e.g. Briggs et al 2006; Innes, 2006; Spalek et al 2008). Other problems have been more ideological in nature. For example, a perceived or actual conflation of general community engagement with anti-terrorism policing has made some Muslim citizens suspicious of the police – with the so-called ‘war on terror’ being viewed as a proxy for a ‘war on Islam’ – and soft community policing interventions have therefore been undermined by their association with hard anti-terror interventions (Spalek and Imtoul, 2007; Spalek, 2010; Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011). Consequently, whether as the result of a deficit in police legitimacy, or practical problems, it has proved challenging for the police to engage with Muslim citizens and communities.

## **METHODOLOGY AND OVERVIEW OF OUR ANALYSIS**

In the remainder of this article we consider, from the perspective of police personnel, a number of factors that influence, enable, and inhibit the engagement of Muslim citizens and communities with the police service. In so doing, we draw on qualitative data derived from research on the role of religious faith in policing. The research was carried out in three randomly selected constabularies in England between 2015 and 2016. All three constabularies granted and facilitated access to their personnel and premises. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity we do not name the constabularies. The constabularies are regionally diverse (all three are county forces in England, with one in the south, one in the midlands and one in the north) and comprise a mixture of urban, suburban and rural policing contexts. All three constabularies have relatively low crime rates compared to the average for England and Wales.

The research comprised 21 qualitative interviews with a mix of officers and police staff. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity the roles of the participants are not revealed in the analysis that follows. The participants were drawn from neighbourhood policing teams, counter-terrorism units, and diversity directorates and all have extensive experience of engaging with faith communities. As ‘key informants’ or organizational ‘proxies’ (Parsons, 2008) these research participants were selected because of their unique insight into the role of religious faith in the work of their constabularies. Participants were asked to discuss the nature of their role and how it brought them into contact with Muslim communities and citizens, to reflect on the nature of their interaction with Muslim communities, and to comment on the organizational benefits of such interaction. They were asked to identify any problems or difficulties they faced when attempting to encourage engagement between Muslim citizens and the police service. Furthermore, participants were asked to discuss what mechanisms existed to facilitate interaction between police and faith groups, to what extent the constabulary was engaged with issues relating to faith and how other officers perceive engagement work. The participants were not asked explicitly about their own faith and the role that this may play in operational policing, although a minority of them did discuss this. Since personal religiosity has been shown to influence day-to-day police practice (see Prideaux and McFadyen, 2013) we consider this issue, where relevant, when discussing our findings (see also: Bullock and Johnson, 2016). Moreover, whilst the issue of counter-terrorism was not a specific focus of the interviews – because the primary aim of the research was to consider the relevance of religious faith to policing more broadly – participants did identify counter-terrorism policing as an influence on their engagement with some, predominantly Muslim, faith-based organizations and, accordingly, we consider this in our analysis.

Interview data were thematically analysed in light of the aims of the study and extant literature in the field. This involved a process of data familiarisation, generating codes, forming initial themes, and reviewing and refining those themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Given the sample of participants from which the data were generated – police personnel – the thematic analysis must be understood as an interrogation of police perceptions of and attitudes toward the relationship between Muslim communities and the police service. The thematic analysis does not, therefore, definitively determine whether such perceptions and attitudes accurately represent the beliefs or experiences of Muslim citizens. Rather, it provides an insight into how police personnel, informed by their operational experiences,

construct a certain ‘reality’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) in respect of Muslim communities and how this, in turn, forms a basis for their professional decision-making.

The thematic analysis of the qualitative interview data is presented below in three sections which each explore different aspects of engagement between constabularies and Muslim communities and citizens. In the first section, ‘breaking out’, we explore factors that are perceived to emanate from constabularies which make engagement with Muslim communities and citizens problematic. In the second section, ‘breaking in’, we consider certain problems and concerns relevant to Muslim communities that officers must be able to deal with in order to gain access to them. In the third section, ‘breaking through’, we examine factors that might facilitate and enhance engagement between the police service and Muslim communities and citizens.

## **BREAKING OUT**

In this section we explore a number of factors that emanate from within constabularies that are understood by the police personnel that we interviewed to make engagement with Muslim communities and citizens problematic. We consider how the current organization and delivery of particular police services can generate suspicion and mistrust amongst Muslim communities, and go on to explore how this can encourage a culture of non-engagement between Muslim communities and constabularies which, in turn, may result in Muslim citizens choosing to adopt forms of self-policing.

### **Police work breeds suspicion and mistrust**

Suspicion and mistrust of the police was a major concern of the police personnel we interviewed. As we explore below, our participants identified a number of policing policies, organizational behaviours, and officer attitudes, that they regarded as undermining trust in constabularies and stifling engagement with Muslim communities.

### ***Counter-terrorism and ‘Prevent’***

Our participants expressed the concern – reflected in previous research (Briggs et al 2006, Spalek and Imtoul, 2007; McFadyen and Prideaux, 2014) – that British counter-terrorism

policing has raised suspicion, undermined trust, and depressed engagement between the police and Muslim communities and citizens. Participants tended to agree that this is because those in Muslim communities may feel that counter-terrorism officers are ‘spying’ on them or asking them to report on the activities of their peers or families. As an example of this, one of our participants described how persuading those in Muslim communities to give officers information about religious radicalisation was made difficult by suspicions that such information would be used to target specific individuals:

So, it’s about building up a trust. Trust within the community. To say, ‘Listen, if you give us some information, it’s not going to lead to an arrest, it’s going to lead to other work which is more around the safeguarding world.’ So that’s what we do. But it’s been a real challenge with community, getting community referrals. (INT9)

In light of such problems, and in order to alleviate community anxieties, the bulk of police engagement work with Muslim communities is conducted under the remit of neighbourhood policing rather than being linked explicitly to counter-terrorism policing (McFadyen and Prideaux 2011). However, in spite of this, participants drew attention to how the problem remains that many Muslim citizens are suspicious of what they regard as the ‘real agenda’ behind police engagement work. As one participant described it, many Muslim citizens respond to the engagement work carried out by neighbourhood police officers by saying: ‘You’re doing [something] tactically to us under the pretext of something else and we [...] don’t trust you’ (INT6).

Suspicion of the police among Muslim citizens may stem, in part, from the introduction and allocation of specific government funding designed to promote cooperation between the police and Muslim communities. The allocation of such funding to particular projects in Muslim communities – which has been organized on the basis of direct applications by Muslim faith-based organizations (usually Mosques) to constabularies – has been dependent on those who have received the funding engaging with ‘Prevent’ activities. Prevent is one aspect of the UK Government’s counter-terrorism strategy, ‘Contest’, and, although it is not uniquely a police programme, ‘understanding and cooperation between police and communities’ is at the heart of the Prevent strategy (HM Government, 2011, para 3.43). Participants regarded tying the allocation of resources designed to promote engagement with Muslim communities to Prevent to be an approach that risked alienating the very people the

funding is designed to win over (see also: Kundnani, 2009). For one, such an approach has ‘reinforced some of those beliefs, that actually it’s a bit smoke and mirrors here’ (INT6). Similarly, other government funding programmes related to preventing terrorism was seen to raise suspicion in Muslim communities. For example, in respect of a policy initiative announced by the former prime minister David Cameron (BBC News, 2016), which linked funding for English language classes for Muslim women to terrorism, one officer stated: ‘He [Cameron] made in his speeches the connection between that and terrorism, so straight away a certain community said why is terrorism and English and being Muslim all in the same sentence?’ (INT16).

It has been recognized from the outset that a potent criticism of Prevent is that its anti-extremism agenda has been formulated by government rather than communities and that this, in turn, leads Muslim citizens to be suspicious that the Prevent agenda serves only the interests of state actors, such as the police, rather than themselves (Briggs et al 2006; Spalek and Imtoul, 2007; Innes et al, 2011). A focus upon policing potential extremism and terrorism in Muslim communities fails to acknowledge that these communities are often socially and economically deprived, that citizens are concerned about a wider range of problems other than terrorism, and that communities often require the police to help resolve these problems (Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011; Spalek and Imtoul, 2007; Spalek and MacDonald, 2010; Innes et al, 2011; O’Toole et al, 2013). Indeed, although the state has increasingly sought to engage with Muslim communities on the basis of an anti-terrorism agenda, many Muslim citizens view the priorities for state action at the local level in very different ways (Spalek and Imtoul, 2007; Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011; Innes et al, 2011). Our participants drew attention to this tension and stated that problems important to Muslim communities must be acknowledged and addressed if people in those communities are to be encouraged to turn their attention to matters of interest to the state:

[I]n order to deal with one issue you need to deal with other issues [...] [W]hat I mean by that is in order to deal with preventing violent extremism, actually the public want you to deal first of all with dog fouling and social behaviour, and the car which was damaged outside the mosque, and when you’ve done that, they actually might talk to you about something else. But you’re going to deal with these issues first. (INT14)

Such a view concurs with previous studies that have shown that many Muslim citizens feel that they are viewed by the police as members of a ‘suspect group’ which is itself the primary object of anti-terrorism policy and surveillance activities (Awan, 2012; Briggs et al, 2006; Chakraborti, 2007; Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009; Spalek, 2010; Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011; Spalek and McDonald 2010; O’Toole et al 2013). Therefore, as our participants explained, it is important for police officers to demonstrate that they are interested in helping to solve the wide range of problems experienced by many of those in Muslim communities: ‘it is difficult to engage with communities who have been tarnished or feel they are being victimised’ (INT16). The strong and enduring feeling of victimisation was seen by our participants to create a number of problems in respect of police engagement work. First, participants stated that many Muslim citizens and community organizations put up ‘barriers’ when officers seek to engage in respect of *any* subject:

There’s definitely barriers as a police officer, because people are suspicious. So there might be barriers in relation to the media, there’s so much going on, there’s so much stuff in the media about terrorism, Islamophobia. So if you go to a mosque they’re so suspicious. (INT15)

Second, participants agreed that the existence of barriers between the police and Muslim communities could lead to Muslim citizens being less likely to call on the police when they are victims of crime: ‘Because of everything that’s on the media, you know, we get the backlash, because we get basically painted with the same brush, “all the Muslims are terrorists, all the Muslims are this”, and they go, “well what can the police do?”’ (INT17). Third, participants stressed that, given the social context in which policing operates, most officers are anxious not to make problems worse: ‘Although the engagement is great, and any intelligence is great for the wider picture, we don’t want them to make their community feel even more in the spotlight’ (INT9).

### ***Illegitimacy and racism***

Barriers between the police and Muslim communities and citizens need to be understood within the context of the long-term legacy of accusations of police racism (Scarman, 1981; Macpherson, 1999). Our research participants, although critical of claims about the continued existence of racism in policing, believed that much police work is interpreted by Muslim

citizens through the lens of racism and that this can influence their willingness to engage with officers. Therefore, as Chakraborti (2007) notes, irrespective of the legitimacy of claims about Islamophobia in policing, the perception of many Muslim citizens that policing is inherently discriminatory has implications for their relations with the police (see also Tyler et al, 2010). In this respect, participants drew attention to how the characterisation of constabularies as bastions of ‘institutional racism’ (Macpherson, 1999) continues to cast a long shadow: ‘once you’re branded with that kind of name, “institutionally racist”, then everybody thinks, “Oh my god, the police are racist, I can’t possibly go to them for help, because they’re racist”’ (INT17). One officer described ‘battling, day in, day out’ with the idea that constabularies are institutionally racist but, despite this constant ‘battle’, expressed the view that perceptions of racism continue to taint the service and make engagement work difficult (INT8). As this officer elaborated: ‘[...] all the police force, all police service, is tainted. We’re racist and we’re useless. No we’re not, that’s ridiculous [...] And that’s what we’re facing’ (INT8).

The belief that the police service is racist can lead to problematic perceptions of the legitimacy of police actions. In turn, perceptions of whether police actions are legitimate have been shown to influence whether citizens cooperate with the police (Tyler et al, 2010). In this respect, participants drew attention to how some Muslim citizens, especially younger citizens, view the actions of police officers as illegitimate and that this influences their willingness to engage and, moreover, may influence the willingness of others in their social networks to engage. As one officer explained: ‘if I give somebody a ticket for not wearing a seatbelt, lo and behold they aren’t going to be too chuffed [...] they go into the mosque or place of worship and they are talking [and] it has a ripple effect.’ (INT16) Similarly, another officer describes how ‘one thing happens to one person, and it’s amazing how quickly that information, or misinformation, is then passed to the rest of the community members’ (INT7). These are examples of how routine police actions, such as the issuing of a fixed penalty notice for a driving related offence, can produce a ‘ripple effect’ in Muslim communities and cause the spread of ‘misinformation’ about the police. The key concern of our participants is that the essence of the ‘information’ that ‘ripples’ out is that the police service is racist.

### *Under policing and being let down*

Although concerns about the impact of over policing – especially by way of counter-terrorism activities – were a strong characteristic of our participants’ accounts of police engagement with Muslim communities, some participants also expressed concerns about the problematic impact on engagement work created by the under policing of Muslim communities. These concerns are perhaps unsurprising given that Muslims communities often suffer from high levels of victimisation – especially in respect of religiously motivated hate crime – high levels of fear of crime, and low confidence in the police (Chakraborti, 2007). Such problems have been exacerbated by the events of ‘9/11’ and ‘7/7’ which have had the effect of increasing fear of victimisation, strengthening perceptions of vulnerability, and reducing well-being in Muslim communities (Chakraborti, 2007). Our participants drew particular attention to the police response to religiously motivated hate crimes committed against Muslim citizens – which they recognized had not always been satisfactory – and how this has influenced the attitudes of Muslim citizens towards the police and created a lack of willingness to engage with officers. For example, when talking about the sudden disbandment of a specialist hate crime unit in one constabulary – which reportedly happened without consultation and no explanation from senior officers – participants drew attention to how ‘a lot of the community were quite angry about it, and we got the brunt of that’ (INT11). This officer stated that the consequence of the closure of this ‘specialised unit who could oversee officers and advise officers’ was that ‘all that skill and knowledge is gone’ which, in turn, means that

if you’ve got an officer who goes to a person who’s a victim of hate crime, they, they’re limited to what support they can offer them, and they perhaps don’t have the full knowledge of the impact of that crime on that individual. Because it’s a very personal crime, if someone calls you names because you’re white or black or because of religion, people don’t comprehend why they’re being targeted. (INT11)

This officer, like other participants, pointed out how under policing, illustrated here by the withdrawal of specialist services, can make communities ‘quite angry’ and that this can result in individuals being less willing to engage with the police.

### *Foreign nationals*

The problem of suspicion and mistrust of the police in Muslim communities was seen by our participants to be particularly acute among non-British nationals. This is because, as many participants explained, foreign nationals may have negative perceptions of policing which originate from their experiences of law enforcement in jurisdictions beyond the UK. To illustrate this, noting that perceptions of the police ‘depends [on] what area they’ve come from’ and ‘what kind of experiences they’ve had’, one officer stated: ‘It’s not a problem with us, but what their ideas are and what they think’ (INT7). Or, as another officer put it when describing ‘distrust of the police’: ‘people migrated to Britain from Pakistan, and there’s very little trust in the Pakistan police force, and they bring those prejudice over, and transfer them to the British police force’ (INT9). These negative perceptions of British police officers, born from cultures of policing in other jurisdictions, were seen to potentially make engagement work with non-British nationals in Muslim communities extremely difficult.

### **Cultures of non-engagement and self-policing**

Whilst, as we noted above, there has been increasing participation of Muslim citizens in state institutions and public life in the UK, our research participants drew attention to what they regarded as an enduring culture of non-engagement between Muslim citizens and constabularies. In discussing this, participants frequently referred to what they regarded as the difficulties in engaging Muslim women: ‘You know, it’s far more complicated, you can’t just steam in like we do, you know, for the white British ladies, it’s just, it’s not as easy as that’ (INT18). One of the key reasons given by our participants for why ‘it’s not as easy’ to engage Muslim women was the difficulty of engaging with women through mosques. Participants described a wide range of obstacles that they had encountered when trying to engage with women who attend mosques in their constabularies. A female officer, for example, noted that whilst she had access to a small budget that could be used to organize crime prevention events for Muslim women, the process of getting access to these women via local mosques could be very frustrating (INT15). To illustrate this, she described how she might find it difficult to gain access to the contact details for those leading the women’s groups at the mosque and, even if she acquired such information, how she might then be asked to request permission from the mosque committee. The mosque committee, she said, might ask her to speak to the imam who, in turn, might request that the women’s husbands were consulted.

The outcome of these negotiations, this officer told us, may be influenced by the gender of the officers engaging with the mosque. In this respect, she stated, male officers may be more likely to gain access to women's groups in mosques because the mosque committee will say 'actually, you're probably better getting [a male colleague] to speak to the imam, to ask permission for you to go to the women's group' (INT15). However, if a male officer manages to negotiate such access he can then subsequently encounter difficulties when attempting to communicate directly with women. For example, a male officer told us: 'as soon as I walk in and there is ladies straightaway covering their faces, and they turn their backs to me and that kind of thing, that is a lot more difficult to break down, because that is a cultural difference' (INT20).

Officers, both male and female, regarded the restrictions they face at mosques to be frustrating but they told us that they put their personal views aside in order to achieve the desired outcome of gaining access: 'you know, we get that, we get in there and I get that level of service, then I have to put my own frustrations aside' (INT15). This officer noted that, even when access is gained, there are some crime-related matters, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) or domestic violence, which those in mosques may be especially resistant to discussing with the police:

[I]t's very hard to go into groups and say, 'I'm here, I'm from the police, one of the things we are interested in talking about is FGM' [...] and through a traditional cultural background, if the husbands know that that's what the talk is about, that's what the group is about, it won't engage (INT15).

The only way of dealing with the limitations imposed by 'traditional culture', as this officer told us, is to build up trust and confidence in policing over time: 'For me, I think the most important [thing for] people is to have that, a little bit of confidence, and by having confidence is a bit about knowing you and seeing, actually seeing, somebody' (INT15).

Although building confidence in policing through engagement with mosques is regarded as vital, officers are aware of the need to be constantly 'sensitive' when dealing with particular crime-related problems. For example, one officer described how she would be very careful when giving a talk about domestic violence to a group of women in a mosque:

You have to pretend it's... I didn't say it was domestic violence when I went to do the talk. 'Healthy relationships', I think, or I don't even think I termed it quite as... I can't remember what I termed it as, because if for a minute the men thought the women were going to that, that is family honour, we're done, so. (INT18)

'Family honour', as this officer notes, is a cultural matter that officers must be sensitive to if they are to engage with Muslim women in respect of crimes such as domestic violence. Participants were clear that officers must find ways of persuading Muslim women with 'traditional' views that matters relating to 'family life' fall within the ambit of public policing. Participants acknowledged, however, that this is extremely difficult because for reasons such as honour, pride, embarrassment, and fear, 'they will try to sort it out within their mosque' (INT20). The response of Muslim citizens and their community organizations to attempt to 'sort out' crime-related problems themselves means that, according to our participants, Muslim citizens are engaging in forms of self-policing. One officer explained such self-policing in the following terms: 'I think that's born out of they think maybe the police won't understand or sometimes it can almost be a little bit of embarrassment that this issue is happening in our community, we will deal with it ourselves' (INT15). Our participants saw it as incumbent on the police, therefore, to 'go out there in the community and speak to these people and try to build their confidence and their trust' (INT17) in order to encourage Muslim citizens to engage with constabularies. This continued engagement is vital because, using the example of attempting to persuade Muslim women to report domestic violence, one officer explained:

I've been to enough domestics in my time where I've seen they've been whipped with belts but they haven't talked to me, they've kind of gone and they've shown me [...] I just think that's dreadful, I think it's dreadful that domestic violence full stop is..., but I think the fact that they don't feel they've got access, they don't trust us necessarily. (INT18)

However, building confidence and trust in the police service among Muslim citizens in this way was seen as far from straightforward. To illustrate, participants stated they felt a constant conflict of interest between building trust and facilitating engagement on the one hand and, on the other hand, following constabulary guidelines and enforcing the criminal law. For example, positive action policies in respect of domestic violence encourage officers to arrest

a criminal suspect where such action can be justified (HMIC, 2014). However, our participants believed that following such a policy might make women less likely to engage with the police in the future. This leaves officers, as they told us, in a ‘Catch 22’ situation because their attempt to positively protect Muslim citizens can frustrate their attempts to build up trust. Such a situation can be compounded when Muslim citizens – women in particular – are made vulnerable as a consequence of social isolation, unclear immigration status, and poor English language skills.

## **BREAKING IN**

In this section we explore a number of factors that our participants say must be negotiated in order for successful engagement between the police service and Muslim communities to take place. We consider the ‘risk’ that participants associated with working with Muslim communities, the importance they attached to officers’ understanding of religion, and the significance they placed on the personal commitment and longevity of officers working with Muslim communities.

### **Officer conception of ‘risk’**

Previous research has shown that matters relating to religion, as one aspect of the diversity agenda within British policing, are often understood by officers to give rise to ‘unpredictable’ or ‘unreasonable’ risks (McFadyen and Prideaux, 2014: 608). Our participants identified a range of risks that officers associated with religion, many of which relate to officers’ anxieties about engaging with Muslim citizens and communities in ways that might be deemed ‘wrong’ and liable to get them into trouble. Many participants drew attention to how officers were frightened of offending Muslim citizens. To illustrate, one officer noted: ‘We’re often scared because we don’t want to offend, or we don’t want to say the wrong thing’ (INT10). For another: ‘Well, I think officers are frightened when it comes to dealing with certain communities. I think there’s a culture of the fear of doing something wrong’ (INT9). As McFadyen and Prideaux (2014) argue, such fear appears to be, in part, motivated by diversity agendas in constabularies that stress that officers must avoid causing offence to and demonstrate sensitivity towards minority communities. In attempting to observe diversity agendas, officers fear that ‘doing something wrong’ may lead to disciplinary action and this, in turn, creates anxiety and a reluctance to engage.

Indeed, our participants drew attention to how this type of anxiety tinges many aspects of operational police work. For example, the following extract illustrates how officers may be concerned about whether or not to take off their boots when entering Muslim households:

I've had examples of officers going on emergency work, and asking should they take their boots off when they go into someone's house. Now if you're on an emergency call, your safety is primary, and then the individuals you're going to is secondary. Taking off your boots negates both of those, and it's about officers feeling, having the confidence to say 'no, this is what I need to do'. They are quite frightened with dealing with certain BME communities. (INT9)

It is clear from this, and from other examples provided to us by our participants, that officers can be anxious about offending Muslim citizens and, as a consequence, this can sometimes lead them to behave inappropriately in certain crime-related situations. Our participants said that addressing the anxieties among officers about the risks associated with engaging with Muslim communities was therefore essential.

### **Understanding Islam**

Many of our participants stated that most police officers have a limited understanding of Islam and that this can create problems when they attempt to engage with Muslim communities. Our participants agreed that this limited understanding of Islam relates not just to scriptural matters but also to broader cultural issues relevant to diverse Muslim populations. This was seen to be problematic and participants were unanimous that it is necessary for officers to have at least some understanding of

the detail of the communities [...] and it's about, it includes things like where abouts they're from in Pakistan, the regions they're from in Pakistan and the differences that brings about culturally. The difference in their faith, different strands of Islam itself, so yeah, understand those complexities really. (INT10)

As the following extract indicates, understanding geo-cultural differences among Muslim communities in the UK was viewed as important for understanding differences between Muslim citizens at the local level: 'Just because they are Muslim doesn't mean to say they are

all going to get on. There is different sets within Muslims, and we have learnt that as well' (INT20). Being aware of these differences within Islam and between Muslim communities was thought by participants to help officers identify tensions and to navigate them in order to facilitate engagement.

Many of our participants stressed that being attentive to dimensions of 'culture' was paramount when trying to understand the dynamics of Muslim communities. To illustrate, when describing divisions among particular groups of people in Muslim communities one officer noted that: 'I think faith has played its role in those divisions but I think underpinning it all is culture and tradition' (INT16). Our participants were aware that many officers struggle to 'unpick' matters of culture and faith and that this

is an area where we need to do more work in policing, [...] to untangle and to make people feel more confident that sometimes it isn't a religious issue, it's a cultural issue dressed up as a religious issue, and therefore we are not being religiously insensitive or faith group insensitive by challenging something that is a cultural norm, that is also not acceptable. (INT2)

To expand on this, in respect of domestic violence, one officer explained that it 'is always an interesting issue, because in some faiths and communities domestic violence is seen as less of a taboo than in others, is sometimes seen as far more acceptable in some communities than others' (INT1). The perception that domestic violence may be 'far more acceptable' in Muslim communities was understood by participants, as the following extract illustrates, to generate a certain amount of confusion in respect of how best to respond:

[W]e had a case where a man had beaten his wife up and said, 'well, it's allowed in the Koran', and the officer was then in a bit of a quandary, because she didn't know whether what he was saying was correct, she didn't really know if that was a proper reason why you could hit your wife, and then she was also worried about offending the chap. And so that issue came up, and obviously, I'm not an expert on the Koran, but my Muslim colleagues will say no, the Koran doesn't allow that. (INT11)

Our participants saw improving officers' understanding of faith and its link to cultural relations to be vital to successful engagement with and policing of Muslim communities.

## **Personal commitment, longevity, and trust**

Previous research has shown that police engagement with Muslim citizens is often reliant on relationships built up between police officers and gatekeepers in Muslim communities over time (Innes, 2006; Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011). Our participants similarly stressed that police engagement with Muslim citizens is reliant upon trusted relationships being established between a small numbers of police officers and gatekeepers in Muslim communities – with gatekeepers usually being located in mosques. Such relationships were seen as important by our participants because they can help overcome negative perceptions of the police in the wider community and encourage citizens to engage with police officers (see also Innes, 2006). To illustrate, one officer stated:

I mean it's not just the Muslim culture, I'm sure it's all walks of life, but it's the classic thing of, 'oh the police are all a bunch of arseholes, but you're alright [officer's name], or you're alright [officer's name]', or whatever the case may be; 'you're not like the rest of them'. (INT12)

Many of our participants made similar statements and the importance of maintaining 'personal' relationships between key officers and Muslim communities was consistently stressed. Such relationships were said to establish the trust between officers and communities that is necessary to facilitate meaningful dialogue and the exchange of information.

Strong trust relationships between police officers and Muslim communities are generally forged over long periods of time: 'The key to my role is longevity, you can't, you can't knock up at a mosque, knock on the door and ask a question, because you'll get an answer of, "there's no problem here, the issue is somewhere else"' (INT9). This extract serves to illustrate the point, repeatedly made by participants, that officers who are unknown to those in mosques will face difficulties when trying to engage, whereas an officer who has a long-term relationship with a mosque will more easily gain access. For example, one officer explained: 'It [access] only works usually with continued engagement. If you go once or twice then they get to know your face a little bit, but if you keep going and going and going...' (INT20). This illustrates the point that repeated and consistent engagement with a community and its organizations is necessary to establish the relationships needed to facilitate information sharing. Consequently, as this officer explained to us, 'for an officer who goes

into neighbourhood policing and works six weeks and goes into another community, and then moves on, often it's very difficult to create those links, those partnership working and getting the trust from certain people out there' (INT19). However, several participants told us that the importance of maintaining long-term relationships was not well understood within constabularies. Participants explained that police service managers were often unable or unwilling (because of financial or other resourcing pressures) to maintain officers in particular engagement roles over long periods of time. As a consequence, participants described how some officers seek to maintain the relationships they have built up with communities 'in their own time', outside of their formal roles, because they regard these relationships to be of considerable importance.

Although participants saw close relationships between key officers and Muslim communities as essential for facilitating police engagement, they also viewed such relationships as potentially problematic. One problematic aspect identified by participants related to how those in Muslim communities might become 'over reliant' upon particular trusted individuals and willing to deal only with them (see also Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011). This, our participants noted, can be particularly problematic in emergency situations. For example, one officer described the problems that arose from one incident: 'There was a bomb threat made to the mosque, and that phone call came through to me. Thankfully I was working, because if I'm at home [...] my phone is off. But they didn't call the police because, to them, *I was the police*' (INT12). Because to those in the mosque this officer represented 'the police' they, faced with a bomb threat, contacted him via his mobile phone rather than dial 999 to ask for emergency assistance. This problem of over reliance on individual officers is exacerbated when individuals leave their posts in communities. In such cases, contacts are severed and, in the absence of a personal link to the police service, Muslim citizens may choose not to contact constabularies when they face crime problems.

## **BREAKING THROUGH**

In this section we consider a number of our participants' ideas about how to enhance police service engagement with Muslim communities and address the complexities involved in doing so. We examine ideas relating to how better understanding of religion among officers might be generated, how to encourage officers to better interpersonally engage with Muslim citizens, and the role of Muslim officers in engagement work.

## **Generating understanding**

Our participants agreed that if engagement between the police service and Muslim citizens is to be enhanced, police officers must be equipped with an awareness of the key issues that concern Muslim communities. Police officers are currently provided with training, briefings, and opportunities to interact with faith groups as part of their probation and on-going training. However, our participants told us that there are limits to gaining knowledge about Muslim communities through formal, structured forms of training and that understanding of faith groups is most likely to be gained experientially (see also McFadyen and Prideaux, 2014). This is undoubtedly true since the issues facing Muslim communities are so broad and diverse that, as one officer put it, ‘if you try to cover everything [in training], it is impossible, when you look at all the different themes out there and all the different communities’ (INT20). Participants tended to see it as the responsibility of officers to educate themselves about Islam and Muslim communities: ‘it’s a bit like I imagine academia, you read for a university degree, you are not taught it’ (INT16). For this officer, then, what is important is that all police officers should have an ‘interest in picking up a national paper, watching the news, what’s on the Internet and so forth’ (INT16). Participants indicated, however, that many police officers are not generally motivated to ‘educate themselves’ about Muslim (and other) faith communities and that a continued lack of understanding amongst officers may undermine engagement between constabularies and faith groups.

## **Treating people with respect and delivering a service**

As we explored above, treating people with respect, sensitivity, and empathy was seen as essential in driving engagement between constabularies and Muslim communities. However, our participants also told us that officers must be willing to show an active interest in aspects of Muslim communities and, as such, should enquire and ask questions about faith. One officer put it like this: ‘There’s no point pretending you’re going to understand and know everything there is to know, so you just go and [...] be curious and ask questions’ (INT10). Or, as another stated:

It’s just really getting out there in the community [...] if you don’t go out and speak to people you’re never going to, you’re not going to understand what their issues are

within that community. It's alright you sitting here thinking or assuming what's going on, but until you go out there... (INT17)

In other words, engagement should be respectful but this should not be translated into a 'hands off' approach. Respect, participants stated, must be balanced with active engagement: 'we go along, we are quite open, we explain what we do, and if we need to ask a question we will ask it. And a lot of officers are sometimes a little bit frightened of doing that' (INT20). Our participants stressed that officers must be supported in overcoming being 'a little bit frightened' if engagement with Muslim communities is to succeed.

Our participants also stressed that engagement is more likely to succeed when constabularies deliver a 'good service' to communities, including Muslim communities, rather than a 'specific service'. Whilst awareness of and attention to certain unique cultural or social needs was viewed as important, it was seen as more important to ensure that Muslim communities, like all other sections of society, receive a consistent, respectful and good quality service from the police. In discussing this, participants stressed that short-term or 'gimmicky' interventions are best avoided. For example, one officer described what he regarded as the problem of encouraging officers to learn multiple conversational greetings in minority languages as a way of facilitating engagement:

I've seen senior officers, their solution was we should have a handbook and give it to every officer to greet somebody in Punjabi [...] or whatever and I think, well hang on a second, what about, are you going to tell them to speak in German, in French and greetings in whatever language, you are not really going to get to that because that book will be too big and officers won't be able to cope. (INT16)

As this quote suggests, such approaches were regarded as gimmicks, not long-term solutions, and, at best, merely a means of papering over problems and complexities.

### **Role of Muslim officers**

For participants, '[putting] your own house in order' (INT7) was one way of generating greater understanding of and engagement with Muslim communities. In this respect, improving the diversity of constabularies was seen to be of primary importance (see also

Macpherson, 1999). As a senior officer stated: ‘I just think to myself if we’re not fair, transparent and inclusive of people, be it faith, be it anything, any protected characteristic, then how on earth are we expecting our people to operate that way with the people they’re coming to terms with’ (INT1). Recruiting, encouraging, and supporting officers of faith was therefore seen as vital (for a discussion of the challenges involved in increasing police recruitment of Muslim citizens, see: Awan, Blakemore and Simpson, 2013). Participants drew attention to the importance of support networks and organizations for officers of faith, the need to facilitate and encourage the practice of religious rituals (such as prayer) whilst on duty, and the need to support liaison officers in raising awareness of matters of faith: ‘this is about recognizing that actually police officers have faith and police officers are part of that community, so why would we not be inclusive of that’ (INT1).

However, whilst increasing diversity and inclusivity in the police service is generally regarded as desirable, it is not necessarily seen to lead to more effective engagement with ‘hard-to-reach’ communities. Previous research has shown, for example, that there are both positive and negative aspects of deploying officers to carry out work with citizens on the basis of shared faith (McFadyen and Prideaux, 2011). Whilst the personal faith of an officer can be a resource on which he or she can draw when seeking to engage, it can also create challenges and conflicts of interest. For example, officers with a particular faith may be expected to experts in that faith, or to be the medium for all contact with a wider faith community, and, as a result, may become inappropriately or excessively utilized by constabularies (McFadyen and Prideaux, 2011).

Our participants were aware of the complexity surrounding the position of Muslim officers in their constabularies. They pointed out that some Muslim officers possess language skills, social experience, and cultural understanding that can facilitate engagement between the police service and Muslim communities. They also stated that Muslim officers might have an interest in working with Muslim communities. As one Muslim participant explained about her engagement work with Muslim communities: ‘I feel so passionate about it [...] I wanted to join the police to help the community [...] so I’ve kind of been lucky to fall into this role’ (INT17). However, this participant also noted that her faith did not guarantee her access to communities ‘because when you talk about Muslims or Hindus or Sikhs, when you start breaking it down, there’s different types of Muslims, different types of Sikhs and if you’re not part of that religion or that group you don’t really know’ (INT17) (for a discussion of

how diversity in and between ‘minority’ religious groups creates challenges for policing, see: Sian, 2013). This participant, like others, also stressed that non-Muslim officers can engage with Muslim communities under the right conditions – notably, as we explored above, when officers proceed sensitively, are willing to learn, and persist in a role over time. Indeed, the dominant view among our participants was that the way that officers treated people is more important than their own personal faith. Matching Muslim officers to Muslim communities was not seen as the panacea to breaking down barriers to engagement.

## CONCLUSION

This article has provided a critical insight, from the perspective of police personnel, into the considerable challenges that constabularies face in creating and sustaining productive engagement with Muslim communities and citizens. Such engagement, as we have shown, is fraught with difficulties and characterised by complexities. Indeed, although such engagement is now a dominant aspect of counter-terrorism policing in the UK, it has the potential to erect and sustain, rather than remove, barriers between constabularies and Muslim communities and citizens. Whilst it is clear that the importance of sustained engagement between constabularies and Muslim communities is acknowledged, too little has been done to support and integrate engagement activities into mainstream policing.

The difficulties and complexities identified by police personnel – which are multi-faceted and arise from both within and beyond the police service – must be comprehended and resolved if the laudable aim of improving police engagement with Muslim communities and citizens is to succeed. The perceptions of police personnel discussed in this article may, we suggest, provide the basis for a wider research and practice agenda in policing designed to improve engagement with Muslim communities. Although the findings presented in this article are based on research undertaken with a relatively small sample, which means they may not be representative of the entire spectrum of views and opinions of all UK police personnel, the police personnel who comprised the samples can be seen as ‘key informants’ or ‘organisational proxies’ who can be expected to have a good understanding of the issues discussed. Furthermore, as we noted above, whilst the perceptions and attitudes of police personnel may not reflect the beliefs or experiences of Muslim citizens, they nevertheless provide an important insight into how police personnel comprehend and approach engagement work. Understanding the challenges of police engagement with Muslim

communities and citizens from the standpoint of police personnel provides the basis for a number of recommendations, which we summarize and consider below.

First, to ‘break out’ of the constraints that emanate from within constabularies and make engagement with Muslim communities and citizens problematic the police service will need to find more effective ways of addressing suspicion and mistrust among those in Muslim communities. Indeed, there is a clear need to better understand what engagement strategies are effective in generating cooperation between police and Muslim communities. Similarly, there is a need to better understand how certain strategies might actively hinder engagement with certain citizens such as, for example, Muslim women, who have frequently been sidelined by existing strategies (Spalek et al, 2008). Crucially, then, the police service needs to focus on finding better ways of building the trust of all Muslim citizens in policing and, specifically, in counter-terrorism policing. There is a need to invest more resources in strategies that seek to reach out to and work in tandem with Muslim communities to develop and implement anti-terrorism policies and to understand how these operate. For example, the anti-terrorism agenda has been criticised for failing to understand the nature of Muslim identities in the UK and, as a consequence, perpetuating a problematic link between faith, extremism and radicalisation (Spalek and Imtoul, 2007; Spalek and MacDonald, 2010). An exploration of how it may be possible to engender a more socially inclusive approach among police officers that acknowledges multiple Muslim identities and facilitates a wider appreciation of diversity among Muslim populations would be welcome. However, it is clear that promoting trust in policing among Muslim citizens will only be achieved when constabularies are able to demonstrate the elimination of ‘institutional racism’ in the delivery of services more broadly. One key way this can be achieved is by ensuring the effective and consistent delivery of police services to Muslim communities. Building trust in policing through the ‘fair’ delivery of services to Muslim communities is necessary to combat cultures of non-engagement with constabularies. Officers therefore need to be encouraged and feel empowered to proactively engage with Muslim communities in order to enhance the belief among Muslim citizens that the police service can and will positively respond when crime or other issues arise. In addition, it must be understood that police engagement practices do not occur within a vacuum and issues arising from international socio-political events, as well as national changes in social and economic policy, influence whether Muslim citizens are willing to engage with the police. Although engagement is clearly influenced by a wide range

of social and political factors, little is known about, for example, how exogenous factors, such as war or foreign policy, influence street-level engagement between police and Muslim communities. Improving understanding of how such factors can undermine the generation of effective engagement would be welcome.

Second, to 'break in' to Muslim communities it is necessary for constabularies to address a strong perception among officers that engaging with Muslim citizens poses certain significant 'risks'. Officers are clearly hesitant, given the potential for their actions to be perceived as racist, to engage in situations where they feel they may make interactional mistakes. Constabularies therefore need to acknowledge such anxieties and positively encourage officers to overcome any 'risk aversion' they feel. One reason such risk aversion exists is because of a lack of understanding of Islam among officers. This lack of understanding is not confined to 'scriptural' matters but encompasses social and cultural issues specific to Muslim communities and, moreover, the ways in which religion and culture inform each other. Constabularies should also ensure that long-term links are developed and maintained between Muslim communities by, for instance, resourcing engagement officers to remain in posts long-term. Moreover, they should champion those officers who have the personal commitment to maintaining long-term engagement activities as a means of building trust in the police service and regard such championing as a means to encourage a similar commitment in others. Because trust between the police and communities appears to be dependent on relationships built between particular individuals, and because the success of these relationships seems to depend on the 'personality' and commitment of individual officers (Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011; see also Innes 2006), consideration should be given to the 'qualities' that police officers need to have in order to sustain engagement. Harnessing and extending those qualities within police engagement strategies among a greater range of police personnel could avoid those in Muslim communities over-relying on particular police personnel and feeling 'let down' when such personnel are not available.

Finally, to 'break through' barriers preventing engagement between constabularies and Muslim communities we think that there are a number of practical actions that constabularies can take. One key priority for constabularies should be to develop new strategies for encouraging opportunities for officers to gain greater understanding, through experiential rather than formal learning, of matters relating to Muslim (and other faith) communities.

Another priority should be to encourage officers to engage with Muslim communities in ways that balance respectful, sensitive and empathic interaction with quizzical and active interest. Officers need to be encouraged not to feel ‘frightened’ of showing to those in Muslim communities that they may lack awareness of a wide range of community-specific issues but are open and willing to learn. In other words, officers should be encouraged not to paper over problems or complexities that arise from interaction with Muslim communities but seek to confront them in an open and frank manner. Clearly, this already takes place in constabularies in a number of formalized ways but officers need to be encouraged to engage in candid communication in day-to-day operational activities without fearing they will offend. Constabularies also need to think critically about the role of Muslim officers, how to support these officers, and whether deploying Muslim officers to work in Muslim communities enhances engagement between the police service and Muslim citizens. Further empirical examination of the position of Muslim officers within police organisations and exploration of how their social and cultural capital enables them to build partnerships with particular sections of the Muslim population (Spalek et al, 2008) would be welcome. However, for reasons discussed in this article, there is evidence to suggest that rather than relying on Muslim officers to achieve such engagement, the police service needs to develop strategies to enable any officer to possess the knowledge and interactional skills that makes effective engagement possible.

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