Social capital and immigrant religion

Abstract

This article focuses on the emerging religious diversity in the West represented by new immigrant populations. It surveys some of the growing amount of research on immigrant religions within the sociology of religion, and argues that much of this research lacks concern for systematic theory. On this basis, it explores and discusses the concept of ‘social capital’ as a possible approach in the study of immigrant religions. By looking at religion as a source social capital, it elaborates on three themes: 1) The nature and limits of religion as a source of social capital, 2) contextual factors under which social capital is generated, and 3) negative social capital. In spite of the critique of social capital theory, this approach offers some promises in studies of immigrant religious communities and their role in society.

Key words: social capital, immigrants, religion, Pierre Bourdieu, James S. Coleman, Robert D. Putnam, United States, Nordic countries

Introduction – research on immigrant religious communities

During the past thirty to forty years, most Western countries have experienced a growing religious diversity. Immigration from non-Western countries to Europe and the United States in the 1960s and 70s altered the ethnic and religious landscapes in the host societies. Around the turn of the millennium, Islam had become the second largest religion in several European countries, including most Nordic countries (Furseth Forthcoming), and it had become the third largest religion in the US, after Christianity and Judaism. In addition, there was an array of Christian immigrant churches. These fundamental changes in the religious landscape offer challenges for research within the sociology of religion.

In the United States, there is a long tradition of studying immigrants and their religious traditions\(^2\). In the 1940s, W. Lloyd Warner studied the religious roots of different ethnic groups (Warner 1963/1941–45, 1949). Two decades later, church historian Will Herberg described the religious changes that were taking place among immigrants and their children and grandchildren in his book Protestant-Catholic-Jew (1960). In spite of the changing religious landscape due to immigration, most social scientific studies in the 1980s tended to stress the social, economic, and political aspects of immigration. However, the following decade witnessed a growth of studies on migration and reli-
A large portion of the literature focused on Muslims in Europe and the United States (Haddad 1991; Kepel 1997; Nielsen 1995). Later, studies appeared that attempted to provide an overview of different world religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam, or the growth of these religions in various countries, as for example the United States (Eck 2001), Norway (Jacobsen 2001), and Denmark (Warburg and Jacobsen 2007).

During the 1990s, scholars also began to study immigrant religious communities. The term «immigrant religious communities» refers to new religious communities founded by immigrants as well as established religious communities that receive large groups of immigrant members. This research trend first appeared in the United States. Some studies analyzed different communities, such as Muslim Communities in North America (Haddad and Smith 1994), whereas others focused on several Islamic organizations and institutions in an urban area, for example Chicago (Schmidt 2004).

The first attempt within the sociology of religion at comparative studies came with R. Stephen Warner and Judith Wittner’s (1998) collection of ethnographies that analyzed different immigrant religious communities across the US, such as Hindus, Iranian Jews, Voodoo and Haitian Catholics, Latino Pentecostals, and Muslims. More systematic comparative studies were conducted in the Houston area, led by Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000), which included Indian Hindus, Vietnamese Buddhists, Chinese Christians, multi-ethnic Catholics, and so forth. This project went a step further and analyzed the transnational ties that these congregations had at various levels (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002). The transnational aspect of immigration also appeared in a study on migrants who traveled back and forth between the Dominican Republic and the US (Levitt 2001). Another large comparative project was conducted by Michael W. Foley and Dean R. Hoge (2007), who surveyed 200 immigrant religious communities in Washington DC, and conducted ethnographic field studies of 20 communities, including Catholic and Protestant churches, Buddhist and Hindu temples, mosques, and Sikh communities. Indeed, several studies of immigrant religions have appeared in the United States during the past few years. Some have focused on the changing American religious life (Holdaway et al. 2005; Levitt 2007), whereas others have compared the new religious pluralism connected to immigration in the United States and Europe (Casanova 2007; Foner and Alba 2008). There are also studies of the role that religious communities play in fighting for immigrant rights (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007, 2008).

In the Nordic countries, social scientific studies of immigrant religions have also experienced growth. In Sweden, empirical studies have been conducted on the religious faith of immigrants from Chile (Nordin 2004), on Muslim converts (Roald 2004; Sultán Sjögqvist 2006), and on Islam in Sweden (Samuelsson 1999). In Finland, there are studies on various immigrant religions in local society (Martikainen 2004), as well as Muslim women (Tiiilikainen and Lehtinen 2004). Denmark has witnessed studies on Russian Orthodox congregations (Hvithamar 2007), Muslims and Muslim converts (Jacobsen 2007; Østergaard 2004), mosques (Kühle 2006), as well as Hindus (Fibiger 2007) and Buddhists (Borup 2005). In Norway, studies have been conducted on Muslim children (Østberg 1998) and youth (Jacobsen 2004), as well as mosques and Islamic organizations (Vogt 2000).
There are at least two striking differences between the American and the Nordic studies. Whereas many American studies have been led by established scholars, most Nordic studies have been conducted by doctoral students. The Americans scholars secured a relatively generous funding, whereas the Nordic students had more limited means. As a result, the American scholars were able to develop a broader scope and conduct comparative studies, whereas the Nordic studies are singular and there is a lack of comparative studies both across religious traditions and across countries.

Nevertheless, by looking at these studies, the American as well as the Nordic, the overall drawback is the lack of concern for systematic social theory. Most studies of immigrant religious communities tend to have a relatively descriptive format. They provide an overview of various communities, their organizational structures, size, ethnic and national makeup, the transformation of their religious traditions, gender roles, and generational conflicts. The lack of theoretical concern is not only characteristic for research on immigrant religions, but has been a weakness in much migration research. The reason might be that there has been a need to provide necessary documentation to map the landscape. However, the question is if this new knowledge will be useful for the social sciences in general. It is, therefore, important that sociological studies of immigrant religious communities draw upon and help develop relevant sociological theory.

In the existing studies of immigrant religious communities, few attempts have been made at examining the impact of these communities on society. One exception is the study conducted by Foley and Hoge (2007), which focuses on the civic and social incorporation of immigrant religious communities. In doing so, they apply the concept of «social capital.» This term has become popular during the last decade or so, especially in studies of civic associations and their role in democratic societies (Smidt 2003: 4). It has also been used in studies of the incorporation and political mobilization of ethnic minority groups (Rogstad 2007). Yet, as noted by Cuban American sociologist Alejandro Portes (1998: 2), the term does not really imply a new idea to sociologists, and I would add, to sociologists of religion. The idea that participation in groups can have positive effects for the individual and the community dates back to Durkheim and often lies at the center of much thought within the sociology of religion.

In the following, I will first present some theories of social capital. The focus is on the principal authors associated with the term, especially Robert Putnam, including some of the critique raised against his theories. Then, I will consider the relationship between religion and social capital formation. Based on mostly American studies of social capital and religion, we will see how religion may play a role in the formation of social capital. Some reflections taken from studies of immigrant religious communities are also included. The focus is three-fold, namely the interrelations between social capital, religion, and immigrant minorities.
Theories of Social Capital
Several recent analyses of civil society or associational life and its political impact have focused on what has been termed «social capital.» The concept of civil society is much wider than that of social capital, and social capital can be seen as something that originates in, but does not constitute, civil society. Whereas civil society refers to associational activity, social capital refers to features of social organizations, such as friendship networks, norms, and resources that facilitate working together and cooperating for a common good. Thus, these two concepts are interrelated as they are concerned both with the extent and quality of social interaction and the kinds of relations that build and sustain moral commitment (Smidt 2003: 5).

The concept of social capital
According to Portes (1998: 3), the first systematic contemporary analysis of social capital was presented by Pierre Bourdieu. In fact, it took some time before Bourdieu’s work on this issue gained attention in the English-speaking world. Bourdieu first treated the concept in some «provisional notes» published in French in 1980 (Bourdieu 1980). Six years later, in a text on the sociology of education, he defined social capital as

… the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition (Bourdieu 1986: 248).

For Bourdieu, social capital is one of several forms of capital, such as economic, cultural, as well as spiritual capital (Bourdieu 1979; Verter 2003). He uses a structural definition, where the emphasis is on resources. These resources can be used instrumentally by individuals, who benefit by participating in groups. His emphasis is also on the conscious construction of social networks for creating this resource. For Bourdieu, social capital consists of two elements. The first is the social relationships that enable individuals to access resources, and the second is the amount and quality of these resources (Portes 1998: 3–4).

In the English-speaking world, sociologist James S. Coleman presented a systematic analysis of social capital in the article «Social capital in the creation of human capital» in 1988. Here, Coleman emphasizes that social capital refers to the capital or potential that «inheres in the structure of relations between actors» (Coleman 1988: S98). In his book, Foundations of social theory (1990), he states:

Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of the relations between persons and among persons. It is lodged neither in individuals nor in physical implements of production (Coleman 1990: 302).

For Coleman, social capital is also a structural variable, something that only exists between and among certain individuals in a particular context. Social capital might entail various elements, which he lists in Foundations of social theory (1990: 311–313). He says:
Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence… For example, a group whose members manifest trustworthiness and place extensive trust in one another will be able to accomplish much more than a comparable group lacking that trustworthiness and trust (Coleman 1990: 302–304).

According to Coleman, the following elements of social relationships include social capital. First, social obligations and expectations that help forge trust that is inherent in social relationships. As an example, Coleman explains: «if A does something for B and trusts B to reciprocate in the future, this establishes an expectation in A and an obligation on the part of B» (Coleman 1988: S102). Obligations and expectations are often enforced by a second element of social capital, namely norms and sanctions. For example, an important form of social capital found in a group is the norm that one should forgo self-interest and act in the interest of the group (Coleman 1990: 311). Third, sanctions are applied if the norms are not followed (1990: 311). Finally, social capital is tied to voluntary associations, because such group involvement tends to produce obligations and expectations, as well as social trust (1990: 311–313). For Coleman, social capital can be viewed as a set of «moral resources» that result in increased cooperation among individuals.

Common for Bourdieu and Coleman is that they conceive social capital as neither a social-psychological nor a purely social-structural phenomenon. Rather, they consider social capital as inhering between these two levels of analysis, in the networks of relationships that connect individuals and institutions in society (Wood 2003: 70). These theories of social capital focus on relationships between actors or between an individual actor and a group. Within these analyses, social capital can be positive or negative, a topic I will return to later.

However, Bourdieu and Coleman also differ. Bourdieu seeks to understand the processes whereby inequalities are sustained. His emphasis is on resources, which vary in quality and accessibility for individuals. Therefore, Bourdieu is oriented towards conflict. For Coleman, social capital is a more relational phenomenon. He emphasizes social trust, which he sees as inherent in social relationships. In this way, Coleman stresses cooperation and consensus.

American political scientist Robert D. Putnam and his followers draw upon Coleman, especially in their focus on social trust, although they do not quite follow his conceptualization of social capital. For Coleman, social capital is socially embedded in particular relationships. In contrast, Putnam sees social capital as an individual phenomenon, a transportable resource that an individual takes with her- or himself in entering a new relationship.

In Putnam’s work from 1993, Making Democracy Work, he defines social capital as features of social relations that enable individuals to cooperate and attain collective goals. Here, he defines social capital as «features of social organization … that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions» (1993: 167). Yet, in his book Bowling Alone, Putnam argues that «social capital has both an individual and a collective aspect» (Putnam 2000: 20). When he stresses the individual aspects of social capital, he focuses on attitudes of «generalized social trust» or perceived norms.
of reciprocity. When social capital is understood this way, it becomes something that is transportable, something an individual can take with her or him from one relationship to another.

Whether social capital is viewed as a structural or an individual variable has consequences for how one sees the relationship between social capital and human capital (Smidt 2003: 9). When social capital is viewed as a structural variable, it is seen as something different from human capital. Human capital might constitute of educational level and organizational skills. When individuals leave a social context, she or he takes their human capital with them. In contrast, social capital represents resources that reside in specific social relationships in which individuals are imbedded. When social capital is viewed as an individual variable, it is seen as one form of human capital along with education and organizational skills.

The importance of social capital is related to its capacity to transform autonomous self-interested individuals into members of a community expressing shared interests and a sense of the common good. For Putnam, «spontaneous cooperation is facilitated by social capital» (Putnam 1993: 167). Why does social capital have such a transforming capacity? According to Putnam, trust constitutes «an essential component of social capital» (1993: 170). It facilitates and lubricates cooperation, and increased trust leads to the likelihood of increased cooperation.

Putnam moves from a micro- to a macro-level. He argues that the trust generated in face-to-face-settings, where people know each other, develop into a more generalized social trust that have profound effects on large-scale modern societies. Social trust is generated in complex societies through two different but interrelated means, networks of norms of reciprocity and networks of civil engagement (Putnam 1993: 171). The first mean, norms of reciprocity, refers to a cultural component. Norms of reciprocity refers to the idea that good deeds will be rewarded, if not in the short term, they will be repaid some time in the future. Acts of kindness rest, in part, on trust in others that they will reciprocate such actions. The second mean, social networks, refers to a structural component. Putnam argues that social trust is also generated through networks of civic engagement. The argument is that participation in voluntary associations fosters interactions between people and generates trust. Group activity broadens the minds of the participants, making public matter more relevant to them. Thus, the argument is that civil associations, first, socialize individuals and teach them norms for behavior that are necessary for maintaining a healthy democratic society and second, foster engagement in politics through greater public awareness and broadened interest.

The social capital framework stresses the socialization of individuals that takes places in associations, which will instill shared norms and encourage collective action. The focus is on the alleged beneficial effects of relationships that occur primarily through face-to-face interactions. People who interact with each other on a regular basis in such settings supposedly learn to work with each other to solve collective problems, and they learn to trust each other and develop norms of reciprocity. This forging of interpersonal trust has consequences for the political system because such trust «spills over» into a «generalized trust» in others as well as a trust in the government more generally (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999: 13).
Just recently, Putnam (2007) has begun to focus on ethnic diversity. In an empirical study based on a large nationwide survey and 41 different American communities ranging from large metropolitan areas like Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston and Boston to small towns and rural areas like Yakima, rural South Dakota and others, Putnam concludes that in the long run immigration and diversity will have important cultural, economic, fiscal and developmental benefits. However, in the short run immigration and ethnic diversity reduce social solidarity and social capital. In ethnically diverse neighborhoods, fragmentation rules and trust, altruism and community cooperation is rarer. In the long run, he argues, successful immigrant societies have overcome such fragmentation by creating new, cross-cutting forms of social solidarity. Religious institutions are used as one example of how Americans have become comfortable with diversity.

Critique
Theories on social capital have been met by critique. This article will not attempt to provide an overview, but single out a few relevant issues. One argument is that the concept is vague and the subject is treated in different ways. Whereas some scholars view social capital as trust, others emphasize social networks and resources. Some treat social capital as something possessed by an individual and others treat it more as a relational phenomenon. A second claim is that it suffers from logical circularity. This is particularly evident by looking at some of Putnam’s work, where social capital becomes simultaneously a cause and an effect (Portes 1998: 19). According to Putnam, social capital leads to positive effects, such as a generalized trust. Yet, the existence of social capital is inferred from the same outcome (generalized trust). In his study on Italy (1993), for example, the argument is that cities that are well organized and have a good economy do so because they have high social capital, whereas poorer cities lack social capital. In this way, cities with high social capital are civic and do civic things, whereas cities with low social capital are uncivic and do uncivic things (Portes 1998: 19–20).

The lack of clarification between cause and effect is also evident in his study of diversity (2007). Even if there is a statistical correlation between ethnic diverse neighborhoods and individual trust of neighbors, this correlation may occur for many reasons. The question is whether preferences that produce low trust are correlated with choices to live in diverse neighborhoods. The choices to live in these neighborhoods can be related to other factors, such as preferences and beliefs about a person’s own future or the future of the neighborhood, as well as constraints, such as prices, borrowing capacity, availability of loans, etc.

Critique has also been directed against social capital theory that it ignores gender and power relations (Franklin and Thomson 2005). Bourdieu’s approach emphasizes social inequality and struggle for resources and power, which may be useful in feminist research. The theoretical assumptions that infuse other social capital concepts, especially those of Putnam and his followers, are neo-functionalist, based on nostalgic,
communitarian perspectives. Although feminist theory as well as social capital theory focus on affective relationships, their approach is different. Feminist theory places affective work within structures of inequality and power, whereas social capital theory tends to see affective work as «the missing link that holds society together» (Franklin and Thomson 2005: 163).

Some scholars call for paying more attention to the important role that institutional structures, particularly the state, have in the formation and continuation of associational life (Smidt 2003: 7). This has been particularly important for Nordic scholars, as the Nordic welfare states often play an active role in this area. Whereas Putnam emphasizes horizontal trust, some political scientists (Rothstein 2004; Rothstein and Stolle 2003; Wollebæk and Selle 2007) stress the importance of a vertical form of trust that is related to the citizens’ trust in key institutions, such as the state. The differentiation of various kinds of trust has, for example, proven important in a Norwegian study of political mobilization of ethnic minority groups (Rogstad 2007: 148). Whereas vertical trust, i.e. trust in institutions, proves to be important for the political mobilization of ethnic Norwegians, horizontal trust, i.e. trusting other members of minority groups, seems to be the most important factor for the political mobilization of ethnic minorities.

The question remains how important voluntary associations are in the formation of social capital. Putnam seems to argue that associational life is the key to such production. Some scholars (Smidt 2003: 10) claim that one would be hard pressed to argue that formal memberships in voluntary organizations serve as the only basis for generating trust. Trust is more likely to emerge in response to experiences and institutions outside the small associations (Levi 1996: 48). Coleman (1988: 109–116), for example, emphasizes the importance of family and school in the development of social capital. Putnam (1995: 667) has actually admitted that the family serves as the most important form of social capital and that education constitutes the strongest correlate of social trust and associational membership. Thus, the voluntary sector may serve as only one of several possible sources of social capital.

In addition, it is unlikely that all types of associational membership are equal in terms of social capital formation. Not all associations are likely to foster social capital in the same ways or to the same extent (Stolle and Rochon 1998: 49). Social capital can also have beneficial as well as negative effects (Portes 1998). For example, the former East Germany boasted a dense network of associations with face-to-face interactions, but this dense network of civic associations was used by informants and thereby facilitated the surveillance state (Herbert 2003: 64). In this way, dense civil networks can diminish trust and democracy. It is also likely that the purpose of the organization will affect social capital formation. For example, it is reasonable to believe that al Qaeda and the Salvation Army will foster social capital in different ways. In addition, the relative inclusiveness and exclusiveness of the organization may affect the level and extent of social capital formation. For example, there might be a difference in social capital formation between the Jehovah’s Witnesses and a Buddhist association.

In *Bowling Alone* (2000: 22), Putnam acknowledges that there are different forms of social capital, as he begins to differentiate between bonding and bridging forms of social capital. On the one hand, bonding social capital has beneficial aspects by
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«undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity,» but it can simultaneously have certain negative consequences, as it can foster antagonism towards outside groups. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, serves to «generate broader identities and reciprocity» (Putnam 2000: 23). The problem is, however, that groups cannot neatly be described as either bonding or bridging, because «many groups simultaneously bond along some social dimensions and bridge across others» (Putnam 2000: 23). Associations and their social networks may vary along the bridging and bonding dimensions in several different ways. Factors that may affect the pattern are the social composition of their membership. Are they homogeneous or diverse? Also, not all homogeneous associations promote the same civic action and cooperation. Ideology is another factor that can differentiate between the types of social capital they generate.

In spite of the critique, few scholars dispute the idea that involvement in civic associations serves to generate interpersonal trust, cooperation, and norms of reciprocity and create expanded social networks. A crucial question is, however, which associations do so, under what circumstances, and with what effects for the polity? (Foley and Edwards 1998: 15). This question raises empirical questions regarding the nature, cause and consequences of social capital (Smidt 2003: 11).

Religion as a source of social capital

Up until Corwin Smidt’s edited volume, Religion as Social Capital (2003), little systematic attention had been given to the relationship between religion and social capital formation. Although the subject is treated in different ways in this volume, the common focus is the role that religion plays in social capital formation and democratic life in the United States. A shortcoming of Smith’s volume is that the research only focuses on Christian churches. Nevertheless, it can still be useful in our discussion of social capital, religion and immigrant minorities. Of particular interest for our purpose is the study of immigrant religious communities conducted by Foley and Hoge (2007). Rather than using Putnam’s approach and focus on social trust, they use Bourdieu’s definition of social capital and analyze the various resources that are available to individuals through their participation in immigrant religious communities. They attempt to see if these communities provide «resources for support, mutual aid, and access to jobs and other benefits» (Foley and Hoge 2007: 30). Foley and Hoge also argue that such social capital embedded in religious communities may contribute to social incorporation. True to their Bourdieuan approach, social inequality relating to the members’ socioeconomic status becomes important, as this affects the types of resources available in the various religious communities.

In the following, three themes are discussed: 1) The nature and limits of religion as a source of social capital, 2) contextual factors under which social capital is generated. These themes are central to the debate on religion and social capital (Smidt 2003). This article also adds an issue analyzed by Portes (1998), which is relevant in our discussion of social, capital and immigrant minorities, namely negative social capital.
The nature and limits of religion as a source of social capital

An important question is what types of religious associations, cultures, structures, and values foster what type of social capital. One study by Cnaan, Boddie, and Yancey (2003) concludes that American congregations tend to be actively involved in community life. In this study of six cities, 111 congregations reported 449 social programs, which mean an average of 4 programs per congregation. Studies of American mosques have similar findings. At an Islamic Center in the Bronx, routine activities include a blood drive, a food pantry, and help to connect members with city social services (Ammerman 2002: 100). In my own study of an Islamic Center in the greater Los Angeles area, I found that this mosque was also involved in community life. During Ramadan, members of the mosque would deliver food to soup kitchens and set up street health clinics for the homeless, where they would measure blood pressure, take tests and examine patients. They were also involved in other civic activities to help the poor and the homeless. In this way, both traditional Christian and immigrant Muslim communities seem to be producers of social and human capital in the US, a finding that is supported in other studies (Coleman 2003: 33).

Sociologist John A. Coleman (2003) asks whether congregations are the only vehicles by which religion generates social capital in American societies. Coleman reviews several studies that conclude that religion contributes to democracy by providing communitarian visions and civic skills. Especially the African-American churches play an important role here. However, not all religious communities play the same role. Putnam found in his study of Italy negative correlations between Catholic religiosity and civic engagement, and one study found that American Catholics exhibited less civic participation than Protestants. A differentiating factor lies between horizontal and vertical relations of religious authority. For example, traditional Italian Catholicism has hierarchical structures that foster vertical relations (between bishops and priests and priest and people) of passivity and subordination. Other religious communities, such as Protestant congregations and Catholic congregational styles, nurture horizontal relations between congregants in parish councils, lay leadership and so forth. Thus, only horizontal authority structures seem in general to generate social capital, concludes Coleman (2003: 33–36). However, religious communities with somewhat vertical religious authority, as the Nordic majority Lutheran churches, do not necessarily hinder social capital. For example, a study of Finns shows that religiosity and citizen participation correlate positively. Although the members of the majority Lutheran church in Finland prefer to volunteer outside their congregations, they believe that it is the teachings of the Church that motivate their volunteering (Yeung 2004).

Foley and Hoge found that immigrant religious communities varied in their abilities to provide social capital. It depended upon structures that encourage social interactions among members, or what they term organizational culture. Worship communities, as for example a Hindu temple, that function as houses of worship, where people just come to worship and then leave, foster little social capital. Likewise, large communities committed to building community among their members through varied activities, as for example large mosques, usually only reached a small portion of their member-
ship. Yet, some of these were successful in fostering bridging social capital. In contrast, most of the small, conservative Protestant churches, as for example Korean churches, were successful in fostering bonding social capital, but very little bridging social capital (Foley and Hoge 2007: 19, 111).

In addition, size is important in the sense that large religious communities that generate social capital tend to do so because they have small sub-groups. Foley and Hoge (2007: 95–96) found, for example, that a typical Korean Protestant church was an important source of social capital for newcomers, as it provided them with a place for making friends, locating job and business opportunities, finding housing, purchasing a car, etc. The most important mechanism for building social bonds was the cell group, consisting of only a few people who met on a regular basis (Foley and Hoge 2007: 95–96).

Another important factor is whether the congregations are oriented outward or inward (bridging vs. bonding). Coleman (2003: 38) found that conservative Protestants who were active in their churches were less likely to get involved in secular volunteerism. Some congregations had little interest in a civic, public role and others did not want to get involved in civic activities they did not sponsor. Yet, new interfaith connections have been taken in the US and Europe during the past decade that are more oriented outwards. These initiatives tend to stress the common heritage of, for example, the Abrahamic religions. They consist of a wide variety of events, such as dialogue meetings, protests, and interfaith worship (Ammerman 2002: 104, 107). In the Islamic Center in the greater Los Angeles I have studied, many informants attended interfaith meetings and protests. Some women even went on interfaith tours to the Holy Land, where American Muslims, Christians and Jews visited the religious sites of all three religions. Some women became friends and ended up attending their friends’ mosque, church or temple at religious holidays.

The amount of bonding and bridging capital may also be different for women and men. Foley and Hoge (2007: 99–100) found that social capital is strongly gendered in mosques, given the separation of the genders that prevail there. The men saw each other more often than the women did, because attending Friday prayers is obligatory for men but not for women. Yet, many men come, pray, and quickly take off to go back to work. Women tended, however, to be more involved in various volunteer activities in the mosques, such as fundraising, special programs, holiday celebrations, and so forth. Therefore, the women developed stronger social bonds among themselves than the men did.

In addition, the amount of bonding and bridging capital may be different at various levels within a congregation or religious group. One study of a Chinese Christian congregation in Oslo, for example, concluded that the social capital among the ordinary members had a bonding character, whereas the religious leadership demonstrated a more bridging social capital (Hansen 2007).

Finally, Coleman points to the limits of religion in fostering social capital. When faced with the major vehicle for determining social policy, namely the political party, religious communities tend to stand at the margin. He says about those who hope to renew American social capital by building on religious communities: «their hope rests on too thin a reed» (Coleman 2003: 46).
Contextual factors under which social capital is generated

There is a tendency in debates on social capital and civil society to focus on inter-personal relations and the behavior and beliefs of individuals. This leads to an emphasis on small, informal, voluntary settings, and a focus on individual moral sentiments. Thereby, the study of institutions and the distinctions among different types of social ties and different types of associations are neglected. For example, there is a difference between «thick trust» stronger, more personal ties and «thin trust» (more outward-looking ties are based on this trust – trust in the generalized other). The concepts of bonding and bridging social capital parallel these notions of thick and thin trust. Bonding social capital is inward-looking, reinforcing exclusive identities and homogeneity. Bridging social capital is outward-looking and encompasses a diverse group of people (Curry 2003: 140–141).

A study of the relationship between religious worldviews and social capital, based on small, relatively homogeneous, Iowa communities, showed that not all small communities were alike when it comes to bonding social capital (Curry 2003). Small, intimate communities with face-to-face relations did not necessarily lead to high levels of bonding social capital. The formation of bonding social capital was dependent upon the group’s particular religious worldviews. For example, individualistic groups (Quakers and German Reformed) were low-bonding but high bridging. In contrast, groups with communal visions of life (Mennonite and Latter Day Saints) were high-bonding. Nor did associational involvement necessarily lead to the social trust that was linked to social capital. Only communities that combined bridging social capital with sufficient bonding social capital, such as Dutch Reformed (Calvinist), were likely to form sustainable institutions. Similarly, Foley and Hoge found that religious tradition was important for social capital formation. For example, evangelical and Pentecostal groups tended to emphasize salvation via participation in small, close-knit groups and view civic participation as «worldly,» secular activities. Thus, they discouraged civic engagement (Foley and Hoge 2007: 51).

In addition, Foley and Hoge (2007: 41, 44, 111–113) emphasized the aspects of the immigrant group as an important factor in explaining why immigrants religious communities varied when it came to social capital. In particular, the socioeconomic characteristics of the membership proved to be an important factor in generating social capital and the type of social capital available to members. For example, the Hindu communities tended to have a relatively wealthy membership, but this did not translate into more care for less fortunate members, partly due to the loose structures of social relations in their house of worship. In contrast, communities with relatively poor memberships, such as Catholic churches with predominantly Latino immigrants, provided few opportunities for members to acquire civic skills or be mobilized as volunteers. If the membership was poor socio-economically, they were less likely to have the diversity of contacts and resources that a better-off group of members had. Therefore, these communities were unable in linking members to opportunities for advancement in society. Rather, they became a sort of ghetto for immigrants. Poor members also tended to join worship communities that were less likely to play a role as civic actors who min-
istered to the needs of people outside their group, whereas better-off members often joined communities that tend to the needs of people outside the religious community. Indeed, it was communities with a more diverse membership socio-economically that tended to mobilize resources for newcomers and members in need (Korean and Chinese communities). In this way, aspects related to the members’ immigration history, level of education, and labor market conditions affected the generation of social capital within these religious communities.

**Negative social capital**

In general, the research literature on social capital tends to focus on its positive consequences. However, sociability cuts both ways. Even Putnam admits that «social capital … can be directed toward malevolent, antisocial purposes, just like any other form of capital» (Putnam 2000: 22). Portes (1998: 15–18) lists several negative consequences of social capital at the individual level, consequences that can be relevant to include in studies of immigrant religious communities, as well as majority based Christian churches.

The first negative effect of social capital is exclusion of outsiders. When groups develop strong internal ties, there is a tendency to bar others from access. The dark side of bonding was, for example, demonstrated right after September 11th, where there were attacks on mosques and harassment of individual Muslims in the United States (Ammerman 2002: 104). The exclusive side of bonding can also be seen in the Nordic countries with large majority churches, where it seems that the majority churches tend to bar ethnic minorities from access.

The second negative consequence of social capital is excess claims on group members. The social capital of members of congregations and religious groups consist of privileged access to the resources of fellow members. However, members can also be met by demands and expectations that they should invest time and money in the group. Many religious communities have strong norms enjoining mutual assistance within the extended family and among community members. These demands may be excessive and demand too much of participants, pushing them to postpone education and pursue a career in order to invest in the religious group, or push them out or make them leave.

Third, group solidarity may also create demands for conformity. In several smaller immigrant religious communities, as for example in Oslo, many members know each other, one lives in the same neighborhood, one belongs to a small ethnic minority, one is related to other members, one shops in a member’s grocery or clothing store, and the children play together and attend the same schools. The level of social control is strong in such settings. The restrictions on personal freedoms can be quite strict. As a result, do many young and individual minded members leave? Studies of generational conflicts between immigrant parents and their children born in the West can be located in the old dilemma between individualism and community and point to the issue of pressures towards conformity (Jacobsen 2004; Nordin 2004; Østberg 1998).

Finally, in some situations group solidarity is cemented by a common experience and opposition to the majority. In these situations, individual success may threaten
group solidarity. The result is what Portes calls «downward leveling norms» that work to keep ambitious members of a group in place and prevent them from leaving, but also force some to escape. For example, the strong rule against marriage to outsiders can be interpreted as a norm to keep people in their place. To what degree is this form of cemented group solidarity present in immigrant religious communities?

All of these examples show that social capital can have the opposite effects of those often mentioned in the research literature. In some situations, solidarity and trust provide resources among some groups, but among others they may have an opposite effect. Social capital can be the source of public goods, but it can also lead to negative results. Religious leaders or groups that exclude others from being heard, religiously violent groups, religious communities that oppress women offer examples of how embeddedness in social structures can have devastating results.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to assess the growing amount of research on immigrant religions within the sociology of religion. It is being argued that much of this research is relatively descriptive and lack concern for systematic theory. Therefore, the concept of social capital has been explored as a possible approach in these types of studies.

By looking at religion as a source of social capital more closely, three themes were discussed. The first theme focused on the nature and limits of religion as a source of social capital. Studies showed that whereas some religious communities fostered involvement in community life, others did not. Differentiating factors were related to horizontal and vertical relations of religious authority within the religious community, the organizational culture and the size of the community in question, the amount of bridging versus bonding social capital, gender, the different levels within a religious group, and the limits of religious social capital when it came to political participation.

The second theme discussed contextual factors under which social capital is generated. Some empirical studies showed that a group’s religious ideology was important for whether it develops bridging or bonding social capital. Studies of immigrant religious communities also stressed the importance of the socio-economic make-up of the immigrant group for fostering social capital and the type of social capital available for members.

Finally, in the debate on social capital, some see it as a remedy for major social problems, whereas others point to different ways in which social capital also can have troublesome effects. At the individual level, dense social ties in religious communities can bring about greater control and restrict individual freedom. Even if immigrants religious communities can be good, they are not always so in all situations and for every participant.

Although the theory on social capital has been met by critique, the benefit of using the concept in research on immigrant religious communities lies in its versatility. Few scholars dispute the idea that involvement in civic and religious associations generates interpersonal trust, cooperation, norms of reciprocity, expanded social networks, and
access to various forms of resources. Social capital is an umbrella concept that can be used to analyze various elements of immigrant religious communities and their role and incorporation in contemporary society.

Notes
1 Thanks to Anne Birgitta Pessi and Pål Repstad for their comments to a previous version.
2 There is no attempt at giving a complete overview here.
3 This overview is not at all exhaustive and includes studies of immigrant religions in a wider sense than just immigrant religious communities.

References


