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## Representations of Disability in Qur'anic Narratives

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### ABSTRACT

In some Muslim cultures disabled people are ridiculed, abused and face social injustice. Whilst there are texts which examine the representations of disabled people in a range of legal, social, religious, and cultural Muslim documents, there is a paucity of literature which analyzes the representations of disabled people in the Qur'an. Applying critical discourse analysis, this study interprets two well-known Qur'anic stories. Through the application of thematic analysis, the phrases, clauses and sentences of these two stories are analyzed in order to present patterns of meaning which challenge ableism from a scriptural Islamic perspective.

### KEYWORDS

disability; equality;  
Qur'an; religion and  
culture

### Introduction

There is a considerable body of literature which examines the representations of disabled people in a range of legal, social, religious, and cultural Muslim documents. For example, Al-Aoufi et al. (2012) explored the representations of disabled people in Muslim culture, highlighting how labeling and stereotyping is similar across cultures. Focusing on the impact of disability on identity, family and social life, Hasnain et al. (2019) explored the representation of disability for those living with leprosy; and Morad et al. (2001) analysis of Islamic scriptures points to societies' responsibility to provide equal opportunities and life chances to disabled people. There is however a paucity of literature which analyzes the representations of disabled people in the Qur'an, and how these portrayals can be interpreted to challenge disability stigma within Muslim communities. Addressing this gap, this article critically analyzes the depiction of disabled people in the Qur'an, focusing specifically on Sura Taha and the Abbasa. Through analysis of the language used to represent people with speech and visual impairments, this paper challenges the ridicule and stigma that disabled people can face in Muslim families, communities, and societies. As the

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Qur'an (49:13) states, "people should not make fun of each other and call one another unpleasant names—in the sight of God these are some of the most disliked acts". The implications of this analysis provide Islamic leaders and educationalists with interpretations of disability which call on them to counter ableism, create equal opportunities, and advocate for equal participation in socio-political life.

### ***The Qur'an as a source of guidance***

Muslims believe the Qur'an is the word of God, and it was revealed upon the prophet Muhammad fourteen hundred years ago in Hijjaz (now a part of Saudi-Arabia) (Riddell and Cotterell (2003). The Qur'an has thirty parts, with one-hundred-and-fourteen chapters which are arranged approximately in decreasing order of length. Although the chapters are not in chronological order, it is generally agreed the knowledge of the contexts, situations, and circumstances in which they were revealed has an impact on its interpretation (Wansbrough & Rippin, 2004). These chapters carry different themes, narratives, and descriptions of many individuals, communities and societies. The major focus of the Qur'an is on teaching people about the oneness of God, sharing the stories of different prophets, their relations with the communities, the challenges they faced and their struggle for social justice (Faḍl-ar-Rahmān, 1980). The prophets and messengers in the Qur'an are depicted as role models, whose obedience is imperative on believers. As the Qur'an says, "whoever obeys the Messenger has truly obeyed Allah. But whoever turns away, then 'know that' We have not sent you 'O Prophet' as a keeper over them" (4:80). Similarly, the Qur'an also states, "Follow God and his messenger so that you earn His mercy and grace" (3:22). The majority of Muslims follow and relate prophetic stories to the situations in which they live and work, making sense of their own experiences through prophetic struggle and endeavor.

### ***The Qur'an on equality and human dignity***

A recurring theme in the Qur'an is the treating of people with fairness and respect and the provision of equal opportunities irrespective of individual's backgrounds. The Qur'an advocates for the rights of marginalized communities and urges people to strike justice and not transgress against them. God says, "Stand up firmly for justice, as a witness to God, even as against yourselves or your parents or your kin, and whether it be against rich or poor" (4:135). Before Islam, women and orphans were treated unfairly in Hijjaz. The Qur'an instructs believers "that you stand firmly for justice towards orphans" (4:127). Furthermore, the unfair treatment of orphans has been declared as a rejection of faith, "Have you not seen the

one who rejects faith? That is the one who repels the orphans” (107:1-2). Similarly, fair treatment of women has been emphasized in many verses of the Qur’an. The fourth chapter is dedicated to women, urging society to grant marital and economic rights to women, including inheritance. The Qur’an is committed to challenging the stigma, abuse and harassment of marginalized communities and declares that people have worth and must be treated fairly and with respect. God asserts:

O mankind, indeed, we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted (49:13).

God urged the believers:

Do not let some ‘men’ ridicule others, they may be better than them, nor let ‘some’ women ridicule other women, they may be better than them. Do not defame one another, nor call each other by offensive nicknames. How evil it is to act rebelliously after having faith! And whoever does not repent, it is they who are the ‘true’ wrongdoers (49:11).

That said, in many Muslim cultures, disabled people are ridiculed, abused and face social injustice. For example, in the South Asian culture, disabled people are given nicknames based on their disability such as Langra (lame), kaana (blind), goonga (mute), etc. (Syed-Sabir, 2004). Through understanding and interpreting Qur’anic representations of disabled people, this paper challenges cultural stigma and social injustice.

### ***Interpretations of disability in literature: impact on policy and society***

Research by a range of academics (for example, Adomat, 2014; Briant et al., 2013; McAndrew et al., 2020; Wilde, 2022) has highlighted the correlation between ableist literary representations of disability and discrimination, including low self-efficacy. Whilst the challenge of addressing ableist representations of disability in literature is beyond the scope of this article, it should be noted that the application of disability studies is argued to support the development of more sophisticated views of disability and contribute to a more just and inclusive society (Barton, 2018). Furthermore, regarding policy development, Thill (2014) points to the principle of hearing disabled voices, as challenging ableist representations of disability. In relation to Islam specifically, some classical theologians and Jurists have taken steps to describe disabled people in non-ableist terms, setting out principles to make disabled centered policies and practices. For example, by focusing on disabled people’s representations within Arab society, Noumani (2016, p. 192) critically analyzed the policies of Omer Bin Khattab (the second caliph of Islam, in power from 634 to 644

AD) pointing to the impact of these policies on the lives of disabled people. Ash-Shurunbulali (2015) stated that Imam Shafi, Ahmad Bin Hanbal, Abu Hanifa, and Imam Malik developed Shaira rules, which determined the rights of disabled people and the responsibilities of the state and communities.

Exploring the works of several Muslim theologians and philosophers, Ghaly (2010) concluded that Muslim jurists were supportive of disabled people (avoiding ableism) when they encourage disabled people to offer prayer in a seated position, exempt from prostration; for example, performing physical rituals, including bowing down and prostration by indications. In Ghaly's (2010) analysis, these theologians highlighted how God created everyone as equal with disability as non-determinant of a person's identity. It is however unfortunate, that the Jurists of present times have largely restricted the role of disabled people in the process of leading prayers or taking the role of lead Imams (Qadri, 2019). Thus, disabled Muslims still face stigma, harassment, and injustice, which Adomat (2014), Briant et al. (2013), McAndrew et al. (2020), Qadri (2019), and Wilde (2022) all point out causes depression, anxiety, and self-shame. As a counter to these kinds of negative feelings and isolation, social inclusion has been argued to be an important strand in the development of well-being for people with disabilities (Buntinx & Schalock, 2010). Defined by Simplican et al. (2015), social inclusion requires a broadening and deepening of disabled people's interpersonal relationships in the community, and this includes the categories of religion and culture. The breadth and depth of disabled people's access to mainstream religion occurs on a number of levels, from congregational presence right through to strategic leadership. A further point to note is the extent to which disabled people's community participation facilitates bonding relationships which are built from authentic reciprocity, and bridging relationships which bring disabled people into contact with a diverse range of individuals.

To better understand the cultural narratives of disability in Islam, Hasnain et al. (2008) undertook case-study research in South-Asia which focused on disabled people's experiences within society. Providing examples from Pakistani culture in the Urdu language, Hasnain et al. (2008) drew attention to the labels used to categorize and other disabled people. For example, "Paagal" as a general word for intellectual or cognitive disability, or "Goonga" or "Goongi" as a word for describing people who are deaf or having a hearing loss. This study also found that in South-Asia, those with a learning disability and/or social emotional mental health needs are labeled as "faqir", meaning they are the special creation of God.

To summarize, though there is a range of Western literature focused on the representations and narratives of disability (Adomat, 2014; Briant et al., 2013; McAndrew et al., 2020; Wilde, 2022), it is also essential to

investigate the representations of disabled people within Holy Quran. Whilst there is a considerable body of literature which examines the representations of disabled people in a range of legal, social, religious, and cultural Muslim documents, this article addresses the paucity of literature which analyzes the representations of disabled people in the Qur'an. Critical analysis of the stories of the Prophet Moses (PBUT) and Umme Maktoom, will challenge forms of othering as pointed to in the work of Hasnain et al. (2008), helping Muslims to recognize the potential of disabled people, and support people from other faith or no-faith to better understand the Qur'an's stance on disability.

### ***Depiction of disability in the Qur'anic stories***

According to Bazna and Hatab (2005), the concept of disability, in the conventional sense, is not found in the Qur'an. Through Arabic language analysis, Bazna and Hatab (2005) posit that the "Qur'an concentrates on the notion of disadvantage created by society and imposed on those individuals who might not possess the social, economic, or physical attributes that people happen to value at a certain time and place" (Bazna & Hatab, 2005, pp.5-6). Their analysis of the Qur'an can be interpreted therefore, as sharing an ontological parity with the social model of disability, which shifts attention away from impairment and toward the disabling nature of the environment (Oliver, 2004). Although it should be noted that the nexus between Buzna and Hatab's (2005) analysis of the Qur'an and the social model of disability is not explored within their paper. Drawing on Buzna and Hatab's (2005) analysis of the Qur'an and the social model of disability (Oliver, 2004) as an ontological framework for interpreting disability, this paper directs attention toward:

- the removal of barriers provided by God to Moses (PBUT) to communicate his message effectively and clearly;
- and the eventual recognition given to Umme Maktoum as an important teacher and spiritual leader.

When reading or analyzing Qur'anic stories it is important to note they are not written as conversational narrative, but are understood to be a conversation between people, or between people and God (Qadri, 2018). The Qur'an has three different ways of telling stories: some resurrect the history of past prophets and messengers and their communities; some of the stories are used to establish a moral conduct; and some are used to convey legal and social positions or focus on an aspect related to a specific individual (Sattar, 2014). In other words, the goal of this Qur'anic storytelling is to appeal to human hearts and minds, help people to understand

and reflect on their own actions, and explain the world to people in an accessible way (Sattar, 2003), the stories told in the Qur'an employ a number of literary and linguistic approaches (Skreslet & Hernandez, 2006). Muslim Imams then draw on these stories, focusing on the way they are told, to try to reach the inner most feelings of the recipients of the text and inspire them for good causes (Zubir, 1999). Thus, the Qur'anic stories are used to improve the environment, people's attitudes, behavior, and wellbeing.

The stories which seek to establish legal and social positions are often written in dialogue style. This style leads to precision, and for clarity a simplification of reality, making issues understandable to those who seek guidance, whether they are the prophet or people of God, they each get an opportunity to put their messages across (Sattar, 2003). The dialogue style portrays a live and dynamic picture of the existing phenomenon, and it allows the reader to live and experience the situation as the character within the story did. It also allows the reader to experience the narrative, its deeper connections and atmosphere. The Qur'an arguably therefore portrays a lively picture of the message in real life situations, which readers can relate to within their own time and space. The stories chosen for this study are people-centered and issue-focused (addressing the removal of barriers to communication for Moses (PBUT), and attitudes toward visual impairment and employment for Umme Maktoum).

### ***Research process and methods***

Living in the United Kingdom (UK), the authors of this paper have applied the definition of disability set out in the UK Equality Act, 2010, which describes a person as having a disability if they have "a physical or mental impairment" that has a "substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities" (Equality Act, 2010, Part 2, Chapter 1, Section 7). "Substantial" is defined in the Act (Part 16, 212.1) as "more than minor or trivial", and "long term" refers to an impairment that has/or is likely to last twelve months or more (Schedule 1, Part 1.2.1). Whilst the meaning of "normal day-to-day" activities is not defined in the Act, Advance HE (2020, paragraph 6) suggests the phrase means "things people do on a regular or daily basis, for example eating, washing, walking, reading, writing or having a conversation". The Act utilizes this definition of disability as the legal basis of duty, requiring organizations and individuals to make adjustments that remove barriers to disability wherever reasonable.

Applying the definition of disability set out in the Equality Act, 2010, in the first phase of this research the authors selected four Qur'anic stories from the different prophets which dealt with illness and impairment: the

stories of the Prophet Moses (PBUT), Umme Maktoom, Jacob and Ayub (see [Table 1](#) below).

Of these four stories, the stories of the Prophet Moses (PBUT) and Umme Maktoom were chosen for analysis because they were people and issue focused and these stories illustrate the challenges disabled people face and the attitude of the community toward them and can be linked to the social model of disability. In addition to which, Prophet Muhammad and Moses (PBUT) are two of the most significant Islamic prophets, alongside Jesus and David (PBUT). It is also worth keeping in mind that Qur'anic text is written in a language spoken fourteen hundred years ago in Hijjaz. Although the Qur'an is a preserved book, and its text has not change throughout its history, Qur'anic Arabic is not spoken even now-days in Saudi Arabia. Rather Islamic scholars learn Qur'anic Arabic as a second or foreign language and its interpretations differ depending on interpreters' social, cultural, and linguistic capital. This paper draws on English translations of the Holy Qur'an. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of the selected verses, the authors engaged with four translations of the stories: Irfan ul Qur'an, Tafhim ul Qur'an, Zia ul Qur'an, and the Noble Qur'an. For the purposes of this paper, the authors have chosen however, to quote from the noble Qur'an translation due to its wider accessibility.

### **Data sources**

The two stories used in this paper are from the two chapters Taha and Abbasa; recited in Muslim congregational prayer, these are well-known chapters—a chapter in the Qur'an is referred to as a Surah. Regarding the first story Taha, as-Sakhawi stated, the name Taha is also Kalim, Kalimullah being Moses's (PBUT) title—the title meaning a communicator (Ibn Kathir, 2014). The significance of this chapter is heightened by the prophet Muhammad (narrated by Abu Hurraria—peace be upon them—PBUT) who said, “Fortunate and blessed are the people to whom this Surah will be revealed and blessed are the chests which will preserve (memorize) it and blessed are the tongues which will recite them” (Ansari, 2017. p. 200). This Surah is argued by Shibli Dogrul to be so powerful in essence, that

**Table 1.** Stories from the Qur'an chosen because the prophets dealt with illness and impairment.

Qur'anic Story	Reference to illness and/or impairment
1. Story of Moses (PBUT)	Remove the impediment from my tongue so people may understand my speech (20:27–28).
2. Story of Umme Maktoom	He frowned and turned 'his attention' away, simply because the blind man came to him 'interrupting' (80:1–2).



Umer who wanted to harm the prophet Muhammad, changed his mind after listening to it. First revealed in Makkah, where the people of the time are reported to have cared little for the destitute and those in need of support (Zaidi, 2004), this Surah tells the story of Moses (PBUT) who lived with stuttering and was tasked by God to stop the transgressions of a tyrannical reigning Pharaoh. Moses (PBUT), who required the removal of barriers to communicate in spoken form, asked God to “remove the impediment from my tongue so people may understand my speech” (Quran 20:27, 28). Furthermore, he added “And grant me a helper from my family, Aaron, my brother, Strengthen me through him” (Quran, 20:29, 30). God listened to Moses’s (PBUT) concerns and provided him help by appointing his brother Aaron as a deputy to make his task easier and they achieved the mission together.

The other story selected for analysis is from chapter eighty, known as Abbasa. This Surah is about Umme Maktoum who came to the Prophet Muhammad to learn his faith, Muhammad (PBUT) was at the time engaged in conversation with an influential party from the Quraish tribe whom Muhammad wanted to support first. God however did not like it when he neglected Umme Maktoum (a man with a visual impairment) (Azharī, 2011), in favor of speaking with the influential party. Umme Maktoum who was unable to visually read the situation, continued to interrupt Muhammad (PBUT) asking for his attention. Following Umme Maktoum’s repeated requests, Prophet Muhammad (PBUT) got angry and frowned at him. God did not like Muhammad (PBUT) showing anger to him, explaining that one never knows who might be purified more, drawing Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUT) attention toward the lack of consideration he had shown to a person with a disability. After the revelation, Muhammad (PBUT) paid undivided attention to Umme Maktoum, taught him the revelation and later appointed him to lead prayers in his absence.

The significance of both these stories being, the trust that God put in Moses (PBUT) (a man with a disability of speech) to address a problematic issue of the day, and the challenge God raised with the Prophet Mohammad when he became agitated by a disabled man who wanted to learn from him.

## ***Data analysis***

### ***Critical discourse analysis***

Critical discourse analysis is used to understand pressing social issues (Van Dijk, 2006, p.252), and is particularly relevant when wanting to understand the function of language in the process of constructing, transforming, and transmitting social reality (Faiq, 2018 ; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). It is also used to examine contrasts between what a text meant in the past, compared to what it now means in the present; thus, critical

discourse analysis points to the ways meaning can change, from one context to another, historically (Brown & Yule, 2012; Gee, 2014). Critical Discourse Analysis is also used to discuss issues of power and justice and the way different power structures maintain their position (Le & Short, 2009). When analyzing Islamic texts, it is important to note that within Muslim theology, discourse takes on four specific constructs—a conversation between: the prophet and God; a particular community and God; between an individual and the messenger of God; or between a group of people with any background and the messenger of God (Abdul-Raof, 2020). In order to understand the representations of disabled people present within the data sources, micro level analysis was considered appropriate for this study. This meant that the analysis was performed on small units of discourse including phrases, clauses, and sentences. These small units carry meaning within the Arabic language and are used to create agency, voice and affect (Jaszczolt, 1999). It is worth considering that Arabic grammatical structure is different to English structure, and one verse may carry more than ten clauses whilst also being relatively short, such as “Ha, Meem”. Furthermore, the language of the Qur’an is rhetorical, and God uses several rhetorical strategies including similes, metaphors, alliterations and analogies, etc. to convey ideas which are difficult to comprehend.

### ***Thematic analysis***

Thematic analysis involves reading through the data and identifying patterns in meaning across the data (Fulcher, 2010). Howitt and Cramer (2010) state that in thematic analysis researchers make meaning from their sources through active engagement with the data based on their personal and professional situated experiences. In thematic analysis, a researcher identifies, analyzes, and reports new insights and concepts derived from engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this study, a theme is an idea that recurs in or pervades the two stories chosen for the analysis. As this research involves two different Surahs, it was important to take each story in turn, thus attempting to do justice to each narrative as a distinct and divine text. As far as possible, the authors tried to bracket the ideas emerging from the analysis of the first case while working on the second, this meant that key themes emerged whilst reading both the first and second text. Initial analysis of the two stories revealed the following broad themes: benevolence, disabled people’s voices, representation of support services, and the state. Closer reading led the authors of this paper to reflect on the ways disability was represented in the stories and gain a deeper understanding of disability and society from an Islamic perspective. After further familiarity with the data, the key points associated with each theme were derived.

### **Contextualization**

For this study, the researchers analyzed the themes by considering the context of these narratives especially the socio-political situation. Smith (2013) stated that attending to socio-cultural narratives in the process of thematic analysis is essential for clarity. Schorsch (1994) argued that with the change of context, the interpretations and meanings of the texts also keep changing. For example, verse thirty-four of chapter four is interpreted differently across different cultures and contexts. Therefore, the researchers did not consider only the context in which the Qur'an was revealed but also the context in which the Qur'anic text was analyzed.

### **Reflexivity**

To ensure the quality of the research, the authors of this paper followed four principles laid down by Yardley (2000): sensitivity to context, commitment to research community, following processes and procedures, and commitment to a clear rationale. Starting with the former, the researchers showed sensitivity to the context in which the stories were revealed, and to the context through which the text was interpreted. This was achieved by remaining attentive to the socio-cultural milieu and the existing literature on the topic. Secondly, the researchers showed commitment to the Muslim community through the process of their interpretation of the Qur'anic verses, making sure they respected the texts and avoided actions which would cause offense. Thirdly, the researchers explained all the stages of selecting data and its analysis with coherence and transparency (for example, detailing the four versions of the data which were drawn upon, and the data source presented in this paper). Fourthly, a rationale was provided regarding why the two stories were chosen for this research project.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Verses type and issues**

Of the verses identified for critical discourse analysis (see information provided in Table 1), twenty out of twenty-five are issue driven, and five are personality driven. The issue driven verses focus primarily on the topics of speech impairment or speaking/stuttering, and on visual impairment. The role of the organization, state, and personal assistant are referred to within the text. The personality driven verses focus on the personal qualities of people including Moses, Aaron (PBUT), and Umme Maktoom.

The topic in Moses' (PBUT) story covers numerous themes including stuttering, disability support, equal opportunities, rejection of ableism,

removing barriers and the making of reasonable adjustments. On the other hand, the topic of the story of Umme Maktoom addresses the issue of negligence, indifference and attending to the needs of disabled people, the role of support services, and the role of the state (within the Islamic system, authority and power belongs to God, and the people act as vice-gent of God). Most of these verses are issue based and offer insights into the phenomenon of disability, disabled people's experiences, their needs, and the prejudice they may encounter in different places and contexts.

### ***God's depiction of disability***

Two of the verses from the data provide God's perspective. In these verses God acts as an agent of power and authority. In verse twenty-four of chapter twenty, God assigns a political task to Moses (PBUT), commanding him to stand against the oppression and transgression of the Pharaoh as he said:

Sentence: Go to Pharaoh, for he has truly transgressed 'all bounds' (20:24)''

God responded by saying:

Sentence: All that you requested has been granted, O Moses! (20:36).

In the second verse which provides the divine perspective, God responds to Moses's (PBUT) making reasonable adjustments for Moses (PBUT) by appointing his brother Aaron as his deputy to support with the achievement of the task. The rest of the verses deal with the voice of people with disability and the representation of support services. They highlight the challenges Moses (PBUT) and Umme Maktoom face in the process of accomplishing their set targets or managing their day-to-day activities, which are 80% of the data, for example:

Sentence: Uplift my heart, remove the impediment from the tongue (Quran 20: 27-28)

The divine voice is present as a support system and symbol of power in the data. In the second story, God's voice is loud and clear, challenging prophet Muhammad's (PBUT) unintentional indifference and lack of attention toward Umme Maktoom, explaining how people with disability or visual impairment can perform better in learning than others.

### ***Disabled people as agentic and significant***

Through the story of Moses (PBUT), the Qur'an depicts disabled people as assertive, vocal, and expressive. For example, in six verses, Moses (PBUT) demands God to:

Clause: Uplift my heart (20: 25).

Phrase: Make the task achievable (20:26).

Clause: Remove the impediment from my tongue (20:27).

Clause: Grant him a helper from my family (20:28).

Clause: Strengthen me through my brother Aron (20:29).

Clause: Let him share the task (20:30).

In these verses, Moses (PBUT) is not passive but actively seeks help from the services of God. Without the removal of barriers (through the help and support of another individual), Moses (PBUT) had reduced ability to accomplish the huge task of challenging a tyrant. Moses (PBUT) used direct language and demanded the support he required, articulated through use of the verbs: “uplift”, “make”, “remove”, “grant”, and “strengthen” (20:24-35). These verbs are demanding words that centralize Moses’ (PBUT) voice as a disabled person and reiterate his right to access the necessary adjustments. The imperative construction of the clauses draws attention to Moses’ (PBUT) right to raise his voice and be heard and valued by the supreme authority (God). In this example, Moses (PBUT) did not shy away from expressing his needs, but rather uses direct and concrete language to articulate his requirements. It also shows the close relation between Moses (PBUT) and God and the circumstances under which Moses (PBUT) communicated to God. In English, we can soften the imperative by using the words please, but in Qur’anic language these types of construction do not exist, rather this is achieved by the speaker through the stating of God’s relation to them, “O my Lord”, etc.

In chapter eighty, when the Prophet Muhammad (PBUT) does not respond and becomes irritated by Umme Maktoom’s requests for teaching, the supreme authority (God) intervenes, calling to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUT) and highlighting the indifference he initially showed to Umme Maktoom as a disabled person. In this instance God stepped up for Umme Maktoom, becoming his advocate, and expressing displeasure with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUT) for being more attentive to the significant others. Aligning with Buzna and Hutab’s (2005) analysis of the Qur’an, and the social model of disability (Oliver, 2004), this narrative highlights God’s rejection of ableism and displeasure when witnessing marginalization and exclusion from teaching and education (O’Loughlin & O’Loughlin, 2012).

In Moses’s (PBUT) story, after the removal of barriers Moses (PBUT) is portrayed as appreciative and enthusiastic. This is evident when Moses (PBUT) says to God:

Clause: We may glorify you (20:34).

Phrase: Remember you much (20:35).

The two clauses showing that Moses (PBUT) acknowledged the support made available to him and expresses his gratitude to God. Moses (PBUT) also argued that:

Sentence: You (God) have always been overseeing us (20:35).

Through analysis of this sentence in its context, and with a commitment to respect the Muslim community (Lucy, 2000), it is interpreted as the authorities are aware of Moses's (PBUT) work and needs. Thus, the researchers take the view, that God represents the state or the government as the state is vicegerent of God. In chapter eighty, God reprimands the Prophet Muhammad (PBUT) for his indifference to the needs of a disabled person and draws attention to the enthusiasm and ability of Umme Maktoom regardless of his visual impairment. As Umme Maktoom later becomes an Imam and leads Muslims in prayer, the Surah emphasizes the significant contribution of Umme Maktoom, including his selection for this role over other non-disabled, wealthy leaders who did not meet Muhammad's expectations.

### ***Disabled people as leaders***

From a linguistic perspective, disabled people are featured in the Qur'an as actors and leaders who transform society, freeing people from oppression and injustice and leading them spiritually. For example, the Qur'an portrays Moses (PBUT) as agentic and capable:

Clause: Go to Pharaoh, as he has transgressed (20:24).

Thus meaning that the Pharaoh has committed an injustice and created a hostile environment. In this instance, the role of the disabled person is to establish the authority of the state or supreme power and save people from the Pharaoh's transgression, thus showing that a disabled person can play his/her role as a politician or lead an army of people to fight against injustice and end societal chaos. This interpretation mirrors the work of Chanboon et al. (2012) who highlighted the ability of disabled people to participate in a social movement and challenge existing inequalities, thus ensuring that disabled people are not excluded from taking an active part in leadership roles and political life (Navarro, 2014). In both stories, the level of Moses's (PBUT) and Umme Maktoom's community participation is significant, and this deepens and broadens their relationship bonds with others and creates bridges into new communities (Simplican et al., 2015). The Qur'anic verses analyzed in this paper, also point to the importance of moving beyond tokenism and assigning disabled people to authentic

leadership roles, a point identified by Mackelprang and Salsgiver (1999) as a significant area for disability equality.

### ***Responsibility to provide support services***

The supreme authority featured in this research is the protector of disabled people's rights, giving them the freedom to express their needs. If there are circumstances when a disabled person cannot access the environment around them, then the state must step up to meet the disabled person's needs or viewed through the lens of current UK legislation, remove barriers and make reasonable adjustments (Equality Act, 2010). As the supreme authority reprimanded Prophet Muhammad (PBUT) for not paying immediate attention to the disabled person, it can be argued that the Qur'an places an emphasis on swift action. This type of intervention and accountability, also requires the enhancement of sustainable care (Austin, 2010).

For Moses (PBUT) and Umme Maktoom, the rejection of ableism portrayed by the supreme authority highlights the role of the state in ensuring equity and social justice for disabled people (Norberg, 2019). In particular, the inclusion of the following verse, which offers the reader an insight into the desirable actions of the state in meeting the needs of disabled people:

Clause: All that you requested has been granted (20:36).

Once the state has granted the removal of barriers, Moses (PBUT) and Umme Maktoum are both enabled to take an active societal role. This finding is similar to Patrick's (2012) and Trani et al. (2011) research concerning the participation of disabled people in physical and social activities when they have the right support. It is also interesting to note that in the story of Moses (PBUT), he was not labeled as having a disability. It was he who highlighted some of the communication challenges he faced, whereas in the story of Umme Maktoum, the supreme (God) portrayed him as:

Clause: A person who was experiencing severe visual impairment (80:2).

Drawing on the social model of disability (Oliver, 2004), this difference highlights the need to foreground impairment only for the purposes of highlighting and addressing discrimination. Whereas contrary to this, regarding Moses (PBUT) God focusses more on the barriers, "remove impediment from my tongue and grant me a helper" (20:27, 28).

As a final point, it is noteworthy that within the month of Ramadan many Muslim organizations raise funds for disabled people, but few voices are raised to challenge the stigma and discrimination disabled people face within Muslim societies. The data presented in this paper advocates for

the inclusion of disabled people into mainstream socio-political life, and it is thus reflective of a broadening and deepening social inclusion as set out by Simplican et al. (2015) and the broad principles of inclusion for all referred to in The Salamanca Statement (1994).

### **Limitations**

This paper focusses on the textual analysis of the Qur'an and does not include hadith literature. This limitation arises not out of a lack of suitable hadith literature to analyze, but rather from the need to format a paper with an appropriate word length. Secondly, the article does not include the voices of Muslim scholars, thus their perspectives on how they counter stigma is not a feature of this paper. Thirdly this paper, does not feature the voices of disabled Muslims, analyzing how they experience life as a disabled British Muslim. In future papers, the authors hope to address these limitations.

### **Conclusion**

Whilst there are texts which examine the representations of disabled people in a range of legal, social, religious, and cultural Muslim documents, there is a paucity of literature which analyzes the representations of disabled people in the Qur'an. Although the Qur'an states that people should not make fun of each other and call one another unpleasant names, it is acknowledged that in some Muslim cultures disabled people face ridicule, abuse, and social injustice (Syed-Sabir, 2004). When Muslim jurists make reasonable adjustments for those with a disability, such as encouraging disabled people to offer prayer in a seated position (exempt from prostration) it is acknowledged by the authors of this paper that this act promotes equality and inclusion. There is however a need to extend this act beyond its present boundaries and into the spaces where direct leadership occurs, and this includes the employment of disabled Muslims in socio-political roles.

Drawing on the Equality Act, 2010 and Simplican et al. (2015) construction of social inclusion, this article points to the ways in which two well-known stories from the Qur'an can be analyzed as a means to challenge ableism. Collectively the stories of Moses (PBUT) and Umme Maktoum provide Islamic teaching on the topics of: disabled people's agency, the responsibility of the state to challenge disability discrimination and to remove barriers/make reasonable adjustments, and the agentic socio-political capabilities of disabled people. The implications of this paper point therefore to a disjuncture between Muslim culture and Islamic scripture. For whilst Muslim culture can at times ridicule and other disabled people, the teachings



of the Qur'an demand that the human rights of disabled people are acknowledged and upheld. This paper points therefore to the role of Islamic leaders and educationalists (Muslims and non-Muslims) in interpreting the stories of Moses (PBUT) and Umme Maktoum from an equality perspective. Such a role, also involves utilizing the Qur'anic interpretations presented in this paper as the starting point for a community debate which unpacks and challenges cultural Muslim misrepresentations of disability. An implication of this paper concerns therefore the need to develop high quality continuing professional development (CPD) for Muslim leaders and educationalists (Muslims and non-Muslims). This CPD needs to be rooted in the Qur'anic scripture and disability studies, equipping leaders with the skills needed to lead on anti-ableist teachings and practice.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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