



'Bridging' Social Capital Seminar Series

Seminar 2: Social capital and dimensions of equality

31 July 2008, at Carnegie UK Trust (London)

Background

This is the second in a series of seminars jointly organised by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Carnegie UK Trust Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK & Ireland. The aim of the series is to improve the understanding of the dynamics of social capital by exploring its operation in a number of different contexts.

The seminars will provide an opportunity for practitioners, academics and policymakers to share insights into how 'bridging' social capital is generated and how it can enhance the effectiveness of civil society associations and organisations committed to change and contribute to a more inclusive and socially just society.

The remaining seminars will look at the following themes: Diversity and social cohesion (September); Intergenerational connections (October); Bridging the learning divide (November) and A more civil society (January).

Objectives for the seminar

To explore the relevance and limitations of the social capital concept to issues of equality and diversity.

- To explore the interdependence of bonding, bridging and linking for enabling/inhibiting voice and empowerment.
- To identify how various communities, organisations and groups have successfully been able to enable various sub-groups to bond, bridge and link both within and between community/organisation/group.

Some questions addressed at this seminar were:

- How can organisations and communities with multiple internal groups enable different voices to be articulated and heard?
- How do the different processes of social capital contribute to enabling and inhibiting marginalised and/or different voices?
- How useful is the concept of social capital in addressing questions of social and economic inequality? How can bridges be built between groups and individuals with unequal power or resources?
- What processes and policies have been identified that ensure that:

1. bonded internal groups do not become more alienated and marginalised from the mainstream?
2. an emphasis on bridging and linking does not enforce homogeneity, or stifle different ('other') voices?

Speakers

The speakers at the seminar were:

- *Sughra Ahmed* (Islamic Foundation) who presented reflections on social capital and Islam in the UK with specific reference to the '*Women in Faith*' project, a project training British Muslim women from across the UK on interfaith skills.
- *Zohra Moosa* (Fawcett Society) who presented findings from the recently published report *Routes to Power*, a research study on ethnic minority women leaders.

Tim Joss from the Rayne Foundation chaired and facilitated the seminar.

In a nutshell

Summary of Sughra Ahmed's presentation

- The faith sector is seen as a key enabler of social capital; within Islam the concept of *assabiya* [social solidarity] is important.
- The Muslim community in the UK has very strong bonding dynamics but relatively weak bridging and linking mechanisms.
- The Muslim community is not as internally cohesive as is often portrayed. For instance, in Leicester the Muslim community is made up of the more established communities of Gujarati, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and more recent migrants from Iraq, Somalia and Turkey.
- Mosques are a key focus for the generation of social capital in Islam; however, they create bonds between men – women and young people are much more marginal. There are too many patriarchal Islamic organisations.
- Feminine discourses are beginning to challenge the traditional caring / nurturing role of women – education is playing a key role in this.
- Many groups have been conceived outside the Muslim community, for instance, The National Muslim Women's Advisory group (NMWAG) was set up by government. These groups are creating debates within UK Islam but they do meet a natural resistance from within given they have been initiated by the state. Other examples include - The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) and the Young Muslims' Advisory Group.
- There are specific cultural and social challenges for women in the UK Muslim community in trying to generate bridging social capital. Women need particular support and funding to enable them to 'un-ravel' the patriarchal tradition and release their potential.

Summary of Zohra Moosa's presentation

- *The Seeing Double* programme (Fawcett Society) looks at the interface between race and gender with a focus on BME women in the UK. The key question was where are BME women in senior decision making positions? It chose to focus on those BME women who were 'high-flyers' to explore their experiences.
- The research found that there is severe under-representation of BME women in senior decision making positions – this is a familiar pattern across the public, private and third sectors.
- BME women are active in middle management levels or junior levels but were not getting to the top.
- Those BME women who have been successful in politics, business, law etc have been unable to use bonding social capital as a career strategy. Their family networks normally provided no contacts that could be professionally useful and in addition, given they were pioneers in the field there were no other people like them to network with in their field/organisation.
- Therefore, the only social capital processes they can take advantage of were either bridging or linking.
- BME women have key skills that are often ignored by organisations – especially bi-cultural competencies. If they are appreciated they are often channelled into 'diversity' work 'type-casting' these women and this is often resented.
- Opportunities often stemmed from linking social capital relationships – senior white males mentoring or encouraging them to take up opportunities. These opportunities did not therefore stem from their own social networks.
- In addition, many of the pioneer BME women did not follow typical career trajectories so they often did not go to the same schools and/or universities as their colleagues and did not have similar experiences. This excluded them from conversations with colleagues.
- Organisations have much to do if they are to tap into the potential of BME women.
- Competencies and skills should be prioritised over the type of person an organisation is looking for (from personalities to competencies)
- Exit interviews need to be analysed to find out why the ceiling for BME women is lower than the ceiling for white women – the discretionary powers of senior managers needs to be more closely monitored to understand who gets the lion's share of opportunities from discretionary decisions.
- Mentoring, sharing experiences, role modelling are all important for the BME women now in the workplace. Fawcett Society will be developing the case studies and women's biographies from this study so that others can read about their experiences.

Social capital: British Muslim women *Sughra Ahmed, Islamic Foundation*

The current perception of social capital amongst many groups and indeed government policy is a positive one; social capital can contribute to educational attainment, community growth, decreasing criminal activity and generally a higher economic growth. The faith sector is seen as a key area in social capital; religion can act as a vehicle in enabling its followers to produce common good. However, this formal recognition of faith communities being instrumental as key 'containers' of social capital has both its opportunities and challenges.

Ibn Khaldun promoted the concept of *assabiya* (social solidarity). Individuals must be involved in good deeds such as establishing social justice should they want to establish a strong and good community leading to becoming an honoured nation. Social solidarity would lead to social capital in the coming together and engagement of groups and individuals. In Islam, individuals are accountable to their Creator, but that individual success can only be achieved through collective efforts of *assabiya* (social solidarity).

Social solidarity involves **enabling and inhibiting** which essentially can create a public benefit in people coming together enhancing the capacity of a group [sorry I don't understand this sentence]. Social capital has been criticized by theorists as being elitist and exclusive for example social capital that is created on the golf course is limited in its membership and therefore is inaccessible by the majority of people, especially women. Putnam has given us 3 concepts which contribute to social capital. These are bonding, bridging and linking.

A research project identified that just over half of the 240 faith based organizations in the city of Leicester were administering 443 faith led social projects (including youth club provision, assistance for asylum seekers, counselling etc.).

The Muslim community has strong bonding forces, but relatively weak bridging and linking forces. If we go down a few levels in bonding and take a look at the internal community, we can see that a cohesive community is not possible as in the case of the ethnically diverse Muslim community in Leicester where the established groups are the Indian Gujarati, Pakistani and Bangladeshi (size of group in that order) and the more recent Iraqi, Turkish and Somali groups. If we understand bonding to mainly occur in the mosque setting (especially Jum'ah prayer) then we must also understand that certain mosques attract particular ethnicities and therefore are more likely to enable bonding amongst people who share their ethnic background and possibly life experience. What on the outside can seem a strong cohesive community is in reality a heterogeneous group of communities – hence often we cannot speak of 'a' community.

Mosques provide a growing opportunity for social engagement and capacity building particularly in the case of some of the larger mosques in London that provide fitness clubs, learning support and youth services and therefore tend to attract a larger pool of people from the local community.

Challenges

1. Mosques create strong bonds between men, but women are almost non-existent, young people tend not to enter as regularly as the elders, extra efforts are made during particular times where an increase in bonding across generations is more likely rather than throughout the year. Networks are closely linked and have shared norms and habits of trust and reciprocity that provide a foundation for mutual co-operation and understanding. The mosque has denser networks and therefore higher levels of trust. Barelwi mosques are better at creating space for women and encouraging them to become a part of the congregations, however a position on the decision making board known as the Committee is still very unlikely.
2. Patriarchal organizations which tend to have the mindset whereby women are either unwelcome, or in the case of the more 'progressive' are welcome but are given marginalized roles (i.e. in charge of women related projects - a project for women only - or are responsible for the women's wings. Although small changes are being made by community organizations where women are becoming the Vice Presidents and constitutions enable women to become Presidents.
3. Feminine discourses are challenging the traditional caring and nurturing roles of women. Education is playing a key role in this as young girls are achieving better in mainstream education compared with their Pakistani and Bangladeshi male counterparts who, until very recently, were the greatest under-achievers at school. Currently there is a significant imbalance in the levels of qualification between young men and women and this will in itself mean women will be employed in better jobs and perhaps earn more money than their brothers or husbands. The economic constraints on us today means the priority in many households is to ensure bills are paid and mortgage payments are met and this necessitates the highest earners in a family to work. What will this mean for the future of traditional Muslim families who face such circumstances? Social capital is creating change as power balances are shifting as women are networking better and are stronger in both mainstream and increasingly faith based education.
4. Religious education is also enabling this change as the instant availability of modern day understandings of both traditional religious teachings and Islam in the modern, western context is being explored by women such as Asma Barlas, Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi. We need to see British Muslim women entering and contributing to such debates.
5. Groups are challenging the status quo through initiatives such as NMWAG/MINAB/YMAG and more recently the Muslim Theologians. These initiatives are creating debate and shifts within Muslim communities, although how much impact they are having is unknown as yet. All of these have been conceived outside of the Muslim community and meet a natural resistance. On the surface these things can seem to be a manipulative way of government working with the Muslim communities. Sometimes however they can unblock elements of society by creating discussions through a wider range of voices, otherwise power rotates amongst the same group of people. But it is a balancing act, there is a fine line between helping and imposing. It is not a simple matter of being critical.

Social capital and bridges

You can have a community which is financially strong, but socially introverted which dramatically reduces its social impact and possibly even anonymises it. Unless you are able to influence through bridging and linking, bonding can decrease. As society becomes increasingly atomized and less collective, those who are comfortable and don't need to express disagreement through protests and demonstrations gradually detach from such democratic processes. This can become problematic if in their disconnection other groups / communities lose out. Therefore economic measures cannot be used as a yardstick to measure social cohesion; we need to factor in social capital or a socially constructive society.

Bridges

Several players need to become involved in order to create meaningful bridges. For example **Women in Faith** began as a course over 2 years ago and came about as a result of collaboration between different players (see slide). There are many challenges for Muslim women and their relationship with social capital. These challenges can be overcome, and we have looked at some of the ways in which the Muslim community is building social capital. It is useful to look at the investments which need to be made in order to overcome some of these challenges for the key 'containers' (the women) to be maximized in their contribution to religious and civic associations.

Education and enablement are part of a wider strategy which is required in order to encourage Muslim women to become part of the fabric of social capital. Structures such as the mosques and madrasahs are not as open and inclusive as they potentially could be. Many mosques around the UK only cater for men and young children. Those that do so conform to Bourdieu's theory on social capital becoming 'exclusive' rather than inclusive; women are often the excluded.

Funding and support are two opportunities in which some of the key challenges facing British Muslim women can be overcome. Funding is often a key factor in the successful enablement of social capital, particularly in light of the often marginalized groups – the voices less heard, for example women and young people. With funding and support by way of education, encouragement and invitation, Muslim women have the potential to create social capital both within and beyond their own communities. The potential power of women as peace makers, leaders, mentors, holders of strategic positions is vast. Their ability to influence and change social situations in light of contemporary dynamics is yet to be fully explored.

Currently without such funding and support Muslim women across the country are taking steps to enter the public domain increasingly through various vehicles such as employment (regional women's officers), interfaith initiatives, religious education, becoming intrinsic within Muslim organizations (Zareen in BMF and ISB) and so on. Imagine then the potential these women (and those who are not yet participating) have in terms of increasing social capital with the appropriate support.

Courses designed around **confidence building, up-skilling**, empowering and enabling are necessary. Perhaps we need to take a step further and think of Muslim women in terms of key contributors in associational life and social capital. Often these are just the basics, yet frequently this is as far as most engagement with Muslim women goes. They need to become key figures in organizations as a norm and not the exception. At times

this can be through self direction by such women but it is more often the case in women only organizations.

For many decades Muslim women have been told their place is in the community, in the home, possibly only in domesticated roles. This patriarchal tradition which has become the norm requires an element of '**un-ravelling**'. Muslim women now need to be encouraged and sought to step out of the traditional conjugal roles. Perhaps a small part of this will begin to happen naturally due to the unequal levels of educational attainment between boys and girls of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage.

Therefore although conjugal roles may be changing slowly, it is important to highlight the fact that funding and support over and above the traditional 'confidence building' type of learning and the leadership of women only organizations or women's wings in larger organizations is necessary to unleash the potential of Muslim women in bonding, bridging and linking.

[Although, care must be taken for policy engagement to shift beyond merely dealing with Muslim women (and Muslims as a whole) through the eyes of prevention of extremism, radicalization and violence, but instead as a community dealing with socio-economic challenges, patriarchy and accountability.]

Routes to power: social capital & ethnic minority women

Zohra Moosa, Fawcett Society

The Seeing Double Programme run by the Fawcett Society looks at the interface between race and gender with a focus on BME women in Britain. One of the first areas of work we wanted to look at was Governance – so BME women in senior decision makers. We found, unsurprisingly, that there is under-representation of BME women, a virtual absence, in some areas and severe under-representation in other areas. This is a familiar pattern across the private, public and voluntary sectors.

This lack of power results in a particular type of exclusion. Women are active in middle management levels or at junior levels but they are not getting up to the top; resulting in certain types of conversations they are not privy to and certain types of decisions that they do not get to make or contribute to. We are particularly interested in what this type of exclusion means for the organisational outcomes and goals.

BME women comprise about 4 to 5 % of the population. On all the indicators showed a disproportionate under-representation that can not be explained away by things like 'they are not trying' or 'they do not have the capacity' or 'they are not sufficiently educated' or 'they don't speak English' or 'their cultures are really oppressive and they are not allowed out of the house' and those kinds of things.

- 2 Members of Parliament (0.31%)
- 8 directors in FTSE 100 companies (0.83%)
- 1 in the senior judiciary (0.52%)
- 0 chief execs/chairs of top 50 charities (0%)
- 489 public appointments (2.3%)

Britain has only ever had 3 BME women MPs and never had an Asian woman in Parliament. Out of 961 Directors of FTSE 100 companies less than 1% were BME women, only 8 were of non-European descent, none of them are Black women. Only 1 woman in the senior judiciary, none of the top 50 charities had a BME woman as a chair or a chief executive. The public sector is better and is interesting to look at because positions have to be nominated and so you can see the difference when you have a deliberate plan to get people in positions and then look at the outcomes from that.

Research Methodology

On the back of this quick review Fawcett decided to find out more about why this was happening; why were these women not making it to the top especially when we knew they were active at lower levels. The way we decided to do this research was to meet women who had been successful (i.e. women who were in Parliament and/or the House of Lords or chief executives) and to talk to them about their trajectories.

We wanted to explore the barriers they had faced and the strategies they had employed to get to their successful positions. We held local level focus groups of councillors to see how local leadership developed. We also did one with women who were working for grass-roots organisations but were pioneers in some way, so either they had started their own organisation or had helped an organisation through a difficult period. We held a final focus group with women who had taken on public roles such as Magistrates. We also did 23 1-to-1 interviews with some of the most successful BME women in the UK . These women had a mix of backgrounds and experiences;

- Some were born outside of the UK
- From different class backgrounds
- Mix of ethnicities
- Very different family types [from the very big to lone parent families]

I think it is important to note that many of the women we approached declined to participate because they did not want to talk about some of the experiences they had been through. People were self-selecting to some extent, so it might be that some of the discrimination reported in this report may be under-representative of what was actually happening. A lot of the women only participated after several assurances that they would not be tied to any particular quote and data would be anonymous.

What the Research Explored

- Their background (family, class and education)
- Their professional trajectories (companies they worked for, their first big break)
- Strategies and solutions (what worked for them)

Findings

The reason social capital is relevant is that most of these women are the first of their kind in their particular fields. For instance, Baroness Amos is the first and the only black woman in the House of Lords. It was impossible for these women to rely on bonding when they arrived in their professional posts as there was no one to bond with in their institution or organisation. There is no a black women's network for senior executives they simply do not exist. Therefore the only social capital processes they can take advantage of are the bridging and linking types.

Most of the women talked about the importance of family and the difference that made to their lives. Sometimes this extended to community – so some important bonding relationships – but the key ingredient that made the difference was a stable and loving family. This helped them through discrimination at school level. For instance, many black women felt that their teachers had very low expectations of what they could accomplish; they tried to stream them into particular occupations and professions but family provided a buffer against that. About three quarters of the 23 women were from what they described as middle class backgrounds but not necessarily in terms of income levels because many of them had migrated here. What they emphasised instead was middle class aspirations and values; a heavy emphasis on education as the key that would unlock potential. Where their parents had no networks for them to access the importance of education in building future networks was crucial. Education is a good way of providing networks if your community or family do not have them.

Black women had particular experiences in regard to their education as opposed to south Asian women who often had quite the reverse. For instance, a couple of south Asian women emphasised that their teachers were really supportive and this contrasted with the restricted expectations that the teacher wrongly supposed their family held; nonetheless, the teacher was crucial in them being able to access opportunities.

But the women also had very different experiences in terms of the types of qualifications they had and the ways they achieved them, so except for the lawyers and the bankers, a lot of them had varied educational backgrounds. Almost none of them went to what they described as high-flying red brick universities most went to polytechnics and colleges, then later got their MBAs, or began work and then got tertiary education. So these women did not pass through the classic trajectories for the top jobs.

In work, a lot of organisations have taken on board that 'discrimination is bad' and 'diversity is good' but this has not penetrated to a very deep level; it has not shifted paradigms very much so that new forms of discrimination can appear as a result of people wanting to do the right thing. Two particular kinds were identified:

- **Tokenism** with organisations wanting to promote BME women into senior positions but not having the infrastructure there to support those women. Alternatively parachuting them in to a position and then putting a spotlight on that promotion which creates a different sort of pressure on the person in that position (any mistake she makes is broadcast and amplified extra loudly and any credit is absorbed by the organisation).
- **Type-casting** which represents a huge mismanagement of resources because many talked of the pressure they were under to be streamed into diversity roles even when their expertise was in a completely different area. For some this was fine but others resented it.

Barriers and challenges: links to social capital

Bi-cultural competences were highlighted as a key asset. Many of the women possessed strong cultural capital but they were not always able to use it. Most of the women had experience in community development and voluntary work and so had skills sets and access to certain communities, the kind of social capital that some organisations lacked.

The women reported having to over rely on links and bridges. For instance, many of the local councillors became local councillors because they were asked to after being active

locally. This highlights the role of mentoring and talent spotting; often a senior white male would see them and talk to them about their aspirations etc. This linking [not bonding or bridging] or access to power did not come from them but someone else approaching them and suggesting them for opportunities; it was not their own social networking that achieved this.

The role of discretion in organisations is crucial; how managers decide who gets opportunities, training, promotion, acting up etc. A lot of these discretionary powers are not mapped. The difference this can make is crucial; relationships with their managers are key to opportunities.

In terms of recruitment, organisations often have a picture of what person they want rather than what skills they need. The women in the study highlighted the need to flip this and encourage organisations to focus on skills and capacities.

Regarding pathways, there is a lot of emphasis currently on getting BME women into the workplace and we are seeing some changes here. There are more and more BME women getting into work but they are not making it to senior levels. Why is that? The ceiling for BME women might be different to white women this needs to be looked at. Exit interviews are one way of exploring this. Organisations need to monitor ethnicity and gender at all levels as having representation at the top makes a huge difference. The Seeing Double programme aims to address this.

Discussion

Rob Berkeley (Runnymede Trust)

I have been looking at social capital and ethnic diversity for a number of years and I am still struggling with it – so good luck with this...I am sceptical about it because it explains everything and if it explains everything then it is not that helpful explaining anything in particular. I wonder about the ramifications if we take an approach that says we think about social capital and not solidarity and social justice, equality, etc. I wonder in part because this links up to ethnic diversity and we end up in the social capital discussion putting people into groups saying this community thinks this and bonds in this way and behaves in that way – this is problematic – given people have multiple identities. One thing I do outside of work is chair the Black men's gay network that is less than 100,000 people in the country. All the meetings we have we do some bonding but actually it is much more about bridging because there are lots of different identities and lots of different ways of being black, male and gay. I wonder if we are closing down the space for people to be free and to be individuals by emphasising too much the notion of bonding and bridging because we have drawn up what the boxes are that need to be bridged. My question is what were the key things that the social capital approach gave you an insight to?

Sughra Ahmed

It is very damaging to create these boxes and make people fit into them – and if they don't there must be something wrong with that group of people rather than the box itself. But in the case of bonding it is a very natural process – no-one tells you to go to certain place your space is your own. And when you are naturally drawn to certain institutions or people that creates an interesting dynamic based on a strong sense of trust and an

understanding that this person understands me and my life experiences, my challenges and where I have come from. The Women in Faith course lasted a year and had 6 weekends where 40 women from around the country came together in Leicester spending time together – complete strangers – and to see that bonding process occur was very inspiring. This was the basis for us creating a network as we did not want them to go off and disappear after the initiative as single individuals as would have happened, The network is there for them to draw strength and support and advice from one another.

Margaret Harris (IVAR)

I want to follow up this point about people being put into boxes – being forced to put yourself into a box often to access funding or in fact even in order to respond to researchers' questions! Two questions about that

- *Sughra I am really interested to know whether there is any emerging sense of self-conceptualisation about being a British Muslim or being a Muslim woman – I mean you did it for this presentation but is it real for people?*
- *Zohra for you a reverse question because a lot of what you said – you were talking about ethnic minority women and a lot sounded very familiar from women generally in business – I have heard it all before but not in relation to BME women. Were you able to distinguish between experiences of being a woman or experiences of being an ethnic minority or the combination of the two or whether that doesn't really make any sense any more?*

Zohra Moosa

Yes, there is a difference between BME women and other women and that is what Seeing Double is about - looking at the intersection of race and gender. So for instance the typecasting as one type of organisational discrimination described it would be very particular to that woman's background – so South Asian women are perceived to be meek and docile; Black women are aggressive – that kind of thing. By asking women to take part in this study, yes we did ask them to politicise themselves as BME women and some of them may not have done that naturally. But once we got into it, they did talk about particular examples of how being a BME woman was different to what other women's experiences. So one woman described having to make her case by demonstrating the most obvious competencies like she can speak English and she has cultural reference points that would make sense having lived in Britain. A white woman would not be asked to demonstrate competencies in English.

Sughra Ahmed

What I sense from that question is the whole area of identities and hyphenated identities. That is a subject that other people have been concerned with predominantly since the Rushdie affair of the late 1980s. We often speak within the community of the subject in relation to young people but never in relation to women – British Muslim women themselves would not identify themselves in that way is the short answer. It is not a natural thing to do at a grass roots level and would be quite pretentious to do this. However does that mean that they do not feel British or that they do not feel Muslim? No not at all. There is this engagement at the local level where they feel very at home, very comfortable. They encourage their children and the young people in the community to participate in social institutions and become much more active this would not happen if they felt that this was a temporary blip in their lives and they were going to go somewhere else that investment in the future would not occur. So although they do not consciously see themselves as British Muslim women they would certainly feel that.

Zohra Moosa

A new study coming out from the GLA found differently and found that they are politicised as British Muslim women, but it is a bit chicken and egg. It is unclear whether that came from British Muslim women first or elsewhere, and that they are now responding to this.

Sughra Ahmed

In my research when I have asked young people that questions they respond with – why are you even asking me that question? It is not us but other people talking about this point. At this point I need to try and delicately get an answer from them anyway for the purpose of the research but where did it come from is an interesting question.

Christina Schwabenland (London Metropolitan University)

I have a question for Sughra about those organisations that have emerged due to government interventions. I am curious whether that really matters if it is the government saying it is these types of organisations we want you to found rather than people from the community or communities saying these are the organisations we want.

Sughra Ahmed

In terms of the organisations that were listed on the power point none of them have been conceived from within the Muslim community although they have a significant involvement by their very nature from the Muslim community. They were conceived very much from within Whitehall and then taken out to the Muslim community. For the National Muslim women's Advisory Group, key women who should be a part of that were identified. In the region of 15 women are members and they have a broad range of experiences, in terms of their working environments, their ethnicity, and all sorts of different dynamics creating a very eclectic mix to advise government. But they are also used as an interface with the Muslim community. The idea in theory is that they would harness trust from the Muslim community. Quite often within Muslim communities one of the very first questions asked when a new project starts is whether it is government funded. So these are the kind of challenges that exist for Muslim groups set up with government help.

For the mosques it is of particular interest because the system is so devoid of women and young people in its structure. Is it only catering for the men? If it isn't, how will it then actually gain support of Muslim women from the community and how will they determine if that support is the most useful when they have not had the experience in that environment – that will be the most interesting thing to look out for but I think it is important that these types of government initiatives do take place. If the Muslim community itself is not mature enough or has not had the thinking to be able to do it for themselves or has not had the strength possibly to do it for itself then I think it is interesting that the government gets involved. It will have challenges and create furious debate naturally but it is important if the Muslim community is going to move forward.

Simon Teasdale (Crisis)

I have a question about the distinction between bridging and bonding. It is hard to make the distinction sometimes. The first presentation focussed on people bonding within a religion, the second about ethnicity and gender where you bond. I go to football and sit next to the same Muslim male every week and have done for 15 years and I bond with him over football or am I bridging?

Zohra Moosa

It was not about ethnicity and gender but more about power and access to decision making so that is where the difference was – that was where the difference is between bonding and bridging its about power. So for BME women they could not bond with other BME women but there might be other networks they might get into but they were generally the sole BME woman in that organisation vs. the communities they come from that would lack any real power compared to where they were at.

Bharat Mehta (City Parochial Foundation)

Both your presentations alluded in a sense to class but it is not something that either of you have decided to build on and so sometimes I wonder if there are a number of ways we can cut this cake - down race, religion, gender lines and then this old thing of class – and I wanted to take up Ian's point in the sense which is something we leave which is more about social justice. Where does that fit in? How do we go about addressing that? Because we can perpetuate the same thing. You know we can have more black women in positions of power but actually we have had this in independence struggles ages ago – are we going to replace colonial power with another of a different shade?

Zohra Moosa

I think it does make a difference that those different shades are in there. It does disrupt a paradigm – so I would not say just because a black woman happens to come from a middle class that she should not be there because she is not disrupting the class paradigm because she is disrupting the race paradigm.

Bharat Mehta

But where do we go from here?

Sughra Ahmed

I think your point about social justice needs a lot of work and a lot of emphasis on it as it transcends issues on ethnicity, class and gender but social justice has to be done in an honest and transparent fashion, so for example in the Muslim community it may well be that a group of well meaning men may take it on themselves to address some of the issues within the community in relation to Muslim women and if that is done in isolation that can often have a very damaging effect. So from their own world view they would be enacting social justice and equality but without really tapping into the mindset of the problem and why it exists and what are the challenges involved in it and actually getting people who have come from that experience to be involved in the process. It is very difficult to see how that will be successful. At Women in Faith' when we talk about other groups not necessarily along class lines but certainly on faith or non faith lines we invite those people to actually come and speak not just to us but actually to the network. That is the first step to enabling social justice rather than speaking on behalf of people actually engaging with people to appreciate and understand.

Zohra Moosa

We have commissioned a think-piece on how organisations accommodate difference. Some of it was about class; not having the language to describe the same kind of experiences; some of this was cultural and so is also about race and ethnicity and not all about class. It is about whole organisations shifting how they accommodate difference whether it is around language, values, culture, visible race, ethnicity or class and much

more subtle ways of discrimination – and move away from personalities to competencies.

John Griffin (University East London)

This is a follow up to Rob's original question and it is as much to the room as it is to the two presenters. I have found it a very rich exchange of information – when we have been talking about what actual men and women actually do. As soon as we get to the social capital concept it seems to me that the discussion disappears up its own fundament to put it crudely – that conforms to a pre-existing prejudice I have which I have to acknowledge – 20 years ago we could have had this discussion about actual things going on in the real world without mentioning social capital and I hope that in 20 years hence we might be able to have the same discussion without any mention of social capital. So the question is what is it we would lose if we were to do that, what would be missing or to put it the other way round what does the social capital idea add to the things we have been discussing?

Chair

Good question! Do you have an answer yourself? Are you saying it doesn't add anything at all?

John Griffin

I think my prejudice is clear!

Zohra Moosa

The important bits for me are about seeing how power operates, the importance of networks those kinds of things but it doesn't have to be predictive. Social capital is a paradigm

Chair

Sughra when you were doing your work your presentation used the concept of social capital a lot but while you were doing the work did you get frustrated with these concepts and say you know I keep getting taken off in directions that end in cul-de-sacs or not. So the key question is would you like to throw it completely out of the window or do you think it is a useful set of concepts that could be refined to get closer to reality because that is why these concepts have been introduced because a concept-less world would be a bit tricky. Is it a way of making sense of things?

Sughra Ahmed

During the project itself, no to be honest because you are working as a human being first and foremost and everybody that comes into the room comes with that same asset. So when watching people bonding and seeing bridging working, you do not naturally think, oh there is a bit of bonding going on there you just don't. And people do not see it either, this is where the concepts come in because this is where bonding is at its best; reliance, reciprocity, trust because it's a very natural process. Going back to government interventions if government then intervenes in that process and tries to harness social capital is it still social capital? Because it suddenly becomes an artificial mechanism and if you look at social capital, it is that at the heart of it? No, it's actually a very human thing to do to make friends to go to football and share with someone who is not your faith or ethnicity a bonding experience is possible. We would be robots if we didn't.

Chair

Can I ask Rob because when you were asking your question you were talking about things that sounded by the tone of your voice which were much more important – solidarity, social justice. Are you of the 'lets boot the whole concept out' school? Where would you stand?

Rob Berkeley

I have not made my mind up I suppose but I guess that it can be useful to think of interactions in terms of bonding of bridging and linking but I don't think you can split them up or know precisely when you are doing one or the other and if you have a view that people bond within particular identities then you are constraining people to those identities and that is the danger of going down this route.

Tony Breslin (Citizenship foundation)

I guess I share some scepticism about bridging and bonding capital but I kind of welcome it in that it actually gives us an opportunity to look at where things like class, faith, ethnicity and so on rub up against each other and what is going on there? When I hear about the experiences of these high achieving women I am thinking about the similar experiences that those from other identities and sex also experience – the working class kid who goes to university and has similar experiences of isolation and not having quite the codes that other people in a seminar have etc. And I wonder if there is work out there or work to be done on this. I am going back to Kinnock's question 'why am I the first in a line of my family to go to university?' and it links to a programme I used to work on supporting first generation university applicants quite often from BME communities. How can we bridge people from different identities but who share the of loneliness of the first generation achiever across class, ethnicity etc.?

Sughra Ahmed

In relation to Muslim women, it is particularly unique position – security / 7/7; feeling the spotlight on them; questions about what is it in Islam that drives people to do things like 7/7. These are frightening questions. Often people have never had an interest in investigating their own faith but are now propelled to by external forces and are challenged to justify concepts that are beyond their own thinking. It is a very, very difficult scenario. These women would share a lot with other BME women no doubt, but there is a unique element in each of those communities and particularly within the Muslim community it is about this emphasis on them via policy via media via other communities that sense of distrust that is created at grass roots level I think it is therefore very important to be able to look at this community and looking at how to unlock the capital within this group.

Zohra Moosa

About supporting the isolation against being a first generation pioneer – the women in this research have requested to be able to meet each other because the report highlighted shared experience. So we're trying to facilitate that through Fawcett. We have also put case studies and the women's biographies onto our website to help with role modelling and mentorship for other women who are not in the study but are in similar positions or for women about to make that leap and who would like to hear about other women's experiences so they know they are not the only ones.

Biographies

Zohra Moosa is Senior Policy Officer Race & Gender at the Fawcett Society where she runs Seeing Double, a national campaign on the experiences and needs of ethnic minority women. She is the editor of the recently published report Routes to Power, a research study on ethnic minority women leaders. The Fawcett Society is the UK's leading campaign for equality between women and men.

Sughra Ahmed is a Research Fellow in the Policy Research Centre of The Islamic Foundation. Her area of research is young British Muslims. She is working with a number of organisations to consider the issues young people face whilst growing up in the UK and the impact of this upon wider British communities. She led a year long training program 'Women in Faith', a project training British Muslim women from across the UK on interfaith skills – both theoretical and practical. Sughra is also a trainer in Diversity and Cultural Awareness; her programs involve training personnel in the public arena on areas such as beliefs and practices, understanding women in the Muslim community, and contemporary debates etc.

Tim Joss was appointed Director of the Foundation in 2005. Previously he was Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Bath Festivals, Bournemouth Orchestras' Senior Manager, an Arts Council Music & Dance Officer and Assistant Administrator of Live Music Now. He is a board member of the London Sinfonietta and Richard Feilden Foundation. Other activities have included Chairman of the British Arts Festivals Association. He is a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.