About Runnymede Community Studies

In reflecting on the changing nature of ethnic diversity in Britain, it becomes increasingly clear that we have to move beyond binary notions of white and non-white to explain the ways in which racisms operate, identities are formed and people live out their lives. The societies in which we live are becoming more diverse and will continue to diversify as migration patterns change, and the impacts of globalization are reflected in labour markets as well as in transnational movement of capital.

This series of community studies aims to promote understanding of the diversity within and between different ethnic groups. Our intention is to build up a collection of studies which focus on communities; their demography, links to civil society, and key political and social issues. We hope that over time this will provide a rich resource for understanding how diversity is lived and experienced away from the necessarily crude ethnic monitoring form, in a vital and dynamic multi-ethnic society.

To find out more about the Runnymede Community Studies series, please visit: www.runnymedetrust.org
Moroccans in London at a Glance

Population and Geography

- The exact size of the Moroccan community in Britain is not known, although some unofficial sources suggest the number of 65,000 to 70,000.
- A large part of the British Moroccan population lives in London. However, Moroccans have settled in other parts of Britain as well, such as Edinburgh, Slough, St Albans, Crawley and Trowbridge.
- Within London, the largest Moroccan settlement is to be found in the Royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea.
- Moroccans were among the pioneers in Manchester where they made up a sizable proportion of the Sephardic community in its early years.*

Migration

- Moroccan migration to Britain can be divided into four phases.
- The first started in the 1960s and consisted of unskilled workers, mostly from northern Morocco.
- The second phase – family reunification – followed from the early 1970s onwards. A large number of women also came as independent migrants. Often they were pioneers of migration and the main breadwinners, yet this is rarely acknowledged.
- The third phase started in the 1980s, and was made up of young semi-skilled professionals and entrepreneurs, mostly from Casablanca and other larger cities.
- The fourth and most recent migration wave started in the early 1990s with the emigration of highly skilled Moroccan professionals, both from Morocco itself and from France.

Networks and Cohesion

- Partly as a result of marginalisation, Moroccans have become a very ‘close-knit’ community, especially in North Kensington, and a strong and proud Moroccan identity continues to be one of the hallmarks of the community, even amongst the second and third generations.
- Largely as a response to unmet needs, numerous Moroccan community organisations have emerged to fill gaps in mainstream service provision.
- Formal involvement of Moroccans in organisations is heavily concentrated in the North Kensington area, mostly through educational groups and other Moroccan organisations.

Civic Engagement

- Moroccans in North Kensington display high levels of civic activity and community involvement.
- Barriers to participation in the wider society – because of prejudice, hostility or institutional discrimination – may lead Moroccans to search out social capital within their own minority community.
- Interview data suggests that British Moroccans are engaged with political processes, particularly on a local level. Voting is common, and amongst those who do not vote, this was due to political disillusionment rather than apathy.
- The level of individuals’ knowledge of, and interaction with, the local authorities was highest amongst Moroccans living in North Kensington.

* Collins (2006)
Introduction

There is a long-standing and well established economic and diplomatic relationship between Morocco and Britain that goes back to the thirteenth century. Thus, it should come as no surprise that Moroccan migration to Britain has a long history, and dates back to at least the nineteenth century. However, this migratory movement, along with its stories and lived experiences, remains one of the most ‘invisible’ and least researched in Western Europe. Indeed, little is actually known about British Moroccans. Yet a walk down Golborne Road in London – commonly known as ‘little Morocco’ – reveals a myriad of Moroccan-owned cafés, restaurants, grocery stores, mosques, supplementary schools and community organisations. The presence of a thriving Moroccan community could not be more evident. Nonetheless, this community remains officially and statistically invisible. The exact size of the Moroccan community in Britain is not known, although some unofficial sources suggest they might number 65,000 to 70,000. In this sense, Moroccans are part of Britain’s invisible migrant groups, unidentified by the British Office of National Statistics in the 1991 and 2001 censuses, which collapses ethnic, racial and national identities. What is clear, however, is that Moroccans have made a permanent impression on parts of the UK with their presence that spans decades.

Interview data gathered for this study indicate that Moroccan migration to Britain can be divided into four phases. The first started in the 1960s and consisted of unskilled workers, mostly from northern Morocco – specifically the Jbala region, especially Larache, Tetouan, Tangier and the surrounding areas, with a smaller community from Meknes and Oujda. The majority of these immigrants settled in cities such as London and Edinburgh, with smaller concentrations in towns like Slough, St Albans, Crawley and Trowbridge. The second phase – family reunification – followed from the early 1970s onwards. The third phase started in the 1980s, and was made up of young semi-skilled professionals and entrepreneurs, mostly from Casablanca and other larger cities. The fourth and most recent migration wave started in the early 1990s with the emigration of highly skilled Moroccan professionals, both from Morocco itself and from France. Many of these recent immigrants currently work in the finance sector in London.

The first phase of Moroccan migration remains the most significant in terms of numbers. This was driven largely by individual initiatives and encouraged by social networks of friends and relatives. This illustrates one of the first distinctive traits of Moroccan migration to Britain in contrast to other Western European countries with bilateral labour movement agreements, such as France, the Netherlands or Belgium. Family ties and social networks thus played a key part in shaping the migration of many individuals who came to Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Partly as a result of this, Moroccans created ‘close-knit’ communities throughout the UK. In London, a significant number of Moroccans settled in North Kensington, in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The boroughs of Westminster, Hammersmith, Lambeth and Croydon also have a sizeable presence of Moroccans.

In the early 1970s the Moroccan community was relatively small. There were no community centres, or even a mosque, for Moroccans. However, many of those who made a home in London had known each other back in Morocco, or knew someone who knew someone. Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square became their meeting points, where they would usually gather to help each other write letters, meet friends, exchange news about Morocco and welcome recent arrivals. Ever since the first major wave of Moroccan migrants in the 1960s, Moroccans have worked hard to establish their own religious and social facilities, such as mosques, Koranic and Arabic classes for the younger generation, and spaces for various community activities. These efforts have not been fruitless. In London alone there are now more than fifteen Moroccan community organisations catering for the needs of their local communities. Many organisations provide advice and support in accessing services, especially to the first generation, which still remains relatively

1 Belmahi (2006); Rogers (1990)
2 Hilliday (1992); Hayes (1995)
3 Goulbourne (2001)
isolated because of the language barrier and lack of knowledge of the intricacies of the British administrative system. The majority had few qualifications when they arrived. The 2001 Census data indicates that this picture is still relevant. Of Moroccans living in London, 48 per cent have no qualifications, 29 per cent have lower-level qualifications and only 22 per cent have higher-level qualifications. The relatively low educational and skill levels have served to relegate Moroccans to the margins of British mainstream society, a position from which they find it difficult to move. Many first generation respondents felt unable to fully engage with the host country as they lacked the intellectual tools to decode the system. Partly as a result of this feeling of being on the margins, Moroccans have become a very ‘close-knit’ community, especially

in North Kensington, and a strong and proud Moroccan identity continues to be one of the hallmarks of the community, even amongst the second and third generations.

This report endeavours to highlight some of the challenges and achievements of British Moroccans. It forms part of a larger body of work, based on extended fieldwork within the Moroccan community in London. An extended theoretical and empirical analysis is available elsewhere, but here the focus is very much on real lives and real people. The voices of British Moroccans are placed at the fore, in the hope that the richness of their narratives will evince the richness of their experiences, as well as the important economic, social and cultural contributions that Moroccans have made.


12 interviews were conducted with third-generation Moroccans.

Thirty life-history testimonies were collected from first-generation men and women who came to Britain in the 1960s. The oral history approach is valuable in capturing the living memory of the first-generation Moroccan migrants and highlighting their personal experiences. Through this method, aspects of their lives that could not have been depicted through other research methods can be revealed, and was as such deemed to be the most methodologically sound way of ‘reconstructing’ the missing parts of Moroccan migration history.

In order to complement the data generated by the life-histories – particularly in relation to Moroccans’ achieved levels in educational and occupational mobility – 45 complementary semi-structured interviews were conducted with community workers, youth workers, local councillors and MPs, schoolteachers and others. This set of interviews provided a more thorough picture of how the Moroccan community identifies itself and also how it is perceived by ‘others’.

In order to build a profile of Moroccan community organisations, a short questionnaire was designed and distributed. The data collected was then supplemented by semi-structured interviews with representatives of organisations, as well as participant observation.
Networks

Transnational Mobility and Networks

The majority of interviewees, particularly in West London, go back to Morocco at least once a year. It has become an essential part of what it means to be a ‘Moroccan living abroad’, and applies equally to first-, second- or third-generation Moroccans. Responding to a question about where he lives, Soufiane (14), a third-generation Moroccan, replied almost instinctively: “My name is Soufiane, I was born in London, I live here ten months a year, and two months in Morocco during the summer time”. His words reflect a sense of belonging to both London and Morocco, but also reveal how this multiple sense of belonging has become an intrinsic part of how he identifies himself and his place in the world. For the first generation, the yearly visits to Morocco are an essential trip to visit immediate family members who stayed at home. This ‘summer ritual’ is also an essential tool for parents to attempt not only to instil in their children a love for Morocco, but also to transmit a ‘Moroccan identity’:

Any Moroccan will not be able to forget his country [...] In our case, the first generation, there is no risk that we forget our country of origin, our efforts are concentrated towards the second and third generations that might risk to forget about Morocco, that’s why we end up going there almost every year (Mustapha, Male, 61 years old).

Regular trips back to Morocco become a medium for second and third generations through which they construct a new, shared identity with other Moroccans living abroad. The regularity of the trips and the length of stay is in itself an indicator of ‘Moroccanness’. When asked whether they go back to Morocco, many interviewees were surprised, almost as if posing this question cast doubt on their degree of ‘Moroccanness’; nevertheless, going to Morocco means going back to the home town of their parents, where most of the extended family lives. Only a handful of the interviewees travel around the country and visit other cities. Thus, the definition of Morocco is closely tied up with the home town of parents, the place second and third generations know best.

In many ways, this localism translates over to London. In Larache, for example, the young generation of Moroccans’ circle of friendship is often limited to relatives – often cousins – or local neighbours, who sometimes happen to be the same neighbours in London. This is particularly the case with families who live in North Kensington.

Well, I’m from Larache so everyone here is from Larache, so like it’s normally yeah my friends from here. Coz they all live next to me. It’s like I walk out, Smail lives over there, Yasmine lives over there [...] It’s the same, like almost the same difference between my house and my friends’ houses here [Ladbroke Grove] is the same there [Larache] [...] and the beach, there’s only one beach in Larache, so we usually end up together, but my cousins are normally with me fil Magrib [in Morocco]. They’re cousins so we are with other Moroccans as well (Amira, Female, 16 years old).

Interestingly, the affinity for their local places of origin also takes a transnational form, and when many second- or third-generation Moroccans expand their circle of friends, it is often with their counterparts in other European countries, especially in the Netherlands.

I don’t have friends from Morocco, I have friends from all over Europe, because they all go down during the summer [...] I have friends from France, I have cousins from Holland, family in Spain. My best friend is in Holland, he lives right next to me in Larache, we go to the beach and do stuff together, I’ve known him since I was small (Soufiane, Male, 14 years old).

This reflects different generational approaches to transnational mobility. For the first generation, it is intended to harness existing family and friendship networks. For the younger generation, on the other hand, transnationalism is an opportunity to build friendships that are not physically confined to Morocco. Most of the younger generation of
British Moroccans enjoy the ‘freedom’ they are granted in Morocco. With their lives limited to school and home, and with any other extra-curricular activities closely monitored by parents, or to some extent ‘the community’, it is a freedom that they are unable to enjoy in London. This sense of freedom is a reflection of the trust that parents have in other Moroccans and in the local neighbourhoods. But equally importantly, it is also a reflection of an increased trust in their children themselves, as Moroccan communities living abroad are often seen by those in Morocco to adopt a more conservative attitude towards bringing up children.

The Significance of the Neighbourhood

The neighbourhood is an important venue in which social relations take place. Over the years, individuals across generations have developed local social networks, which are often their primary source of mutual help and support. Interviewees were asked a number of questions regarding neighbourhood connections, and the willingness to move from or stay in the area where they live. The interview accounts provide an indication of the shape and extent of the culture of cooperation in a local area as well as the degree to which individuals and families are connected to their local community.

Families living in North Kensington were asked if, given the choice, they would consider moving away from their area to other parts of London. The majority said they would not want to do so, as the following quotes from Soumaya, a first-generation woman, and Rashid, a second-generation man, illustrate:

No, I can’t move out from this area, I have everything I need here plus there are a lot of Moroccans and other Muslims in the area […] I don’t want to feel isolated in another area. I was given a bigger house in a different area, but I refused to take it. The market is near me, the mosque, everything […] It’s also important for my children to grow up in such an area. I have two of my children who are wearing Nikab and I don’t want them to have problems (Soumaya, female, 56 years old).

No I wouldn’t. I don’t know what it is, this is home…very strange… most of my social networks are based here, my friends and colleagues are here, but if I have to move, I wouldn’t want to move outside W9 or W10. I wouldn’t move out too far, as long as I can always come back […] partly because of the Moroccan community. I don’t know what it is but I wouldn’t leave this area (Rashid, Male, 30 years old).

These two accounts demonstrate how differently the generations understand and experience the importance and meaning of locality. First generation Moroccans tend to emphasise safety, as described by Soumaya, as well as the practicality of having the local mosque and the market nearby. For these reasons, she finds it difficult to imagine herself living in another part of London. Rashid, however, highlights his social network, made up of his friends and colleagues in his area. Both have developed connections in relation to their local community, but where Soumaya values it as contributing to her and her children’s safety, Rashid sees the area clearly as his own ‘home’ and prefers not to uproot himself from it.

For younger British Moroccans living in North Kensington, it is essential to maintain the links that they have developed within their local community, which in turn create a sense of ‘home’. Some interviewees identified themselves in relation to their local neighbourhood, as a ‘Portobeller’ or a ‘Grove girl or boy’, referring to Portobello and Ladbroke Grove. This reflects a strong sense of belonging to two social arenas. On the one hand, it highlights the importance of the geographical location of their local community, because of their existing friends and family networks. On the other hand, and no less important, this also echoes the extent to which it is important for them to be part of a ‘Moroccanised’ local community:

I am a real Portobeller!! […] since I was born in the area, I went to Bevington School just off Golborne Road. I can’t imagine living anywhere else. It’s really hard; I can’t imagine living anywhere else […] I’ve got my mum and dad who
live up the road (laughs). My sister lives to my right and my brother still lives with my mum and dad (Mostafa, Male, 32 years old).

No I wouldn’t like to move out from here because when you walk down Golborne Road, it is like walking down a street in Morocco, there are Moroccan shops … everything … it’s a well-known area […] I’ve lived here fifteen, sixteen years. I don’t live exactly in Golborne, I live in Latimer but still it’s the same thing. It’s still Moroccanised. It doesn’t have that many Moroccans but it still feels like Golborne anyway (Kawtar, Female, 16 years old).

Some interviewees implied that the degree to which their local community is ‘Moroccanised’ determines how much it feels like ‘home’. Indeed, to 20-year-old university student Amal, there was even a major difference between the areas of Ladbroke Grove and Latimer Road, which are only one stop away from each other by train:

I would like to move to Ladbroke Grove, because Latimer Road is quite different […] it’s not really Moroccanised like in Ladbroke Grove […] but it’s a nice area […] I wouldn’t go to an area where there are no Moroccans, because I need to know at least someone there from my country […] I also feel safe in this area […] I know them, and it feels a bit like Morocco […] this is my home (Amal, Female, 20 years old).

For others, the greatest attraction of North Kensington is the sense of ‘community’, made up of family members who live in the vicinity, friends, neighbours, or sometimes the presence of other Moroccans and Muslims. They all contribute together to creating the sense of ‘community’ and a feeling of being at home, which can alleviate feelings of big city isolation. Houda, who lived in East London at the time of interview, explains that during religious festivals she feels isolated whilst, she assumes, those who live in Ladbroke Grove ‘feel’ everything because there is a shared spirit and atmosphere of celebration.

I would like to move near; like in Ladbroke Grove where there are more Moroccans […] Everybody knows everybody and they visit each other. You feel Eid, you feel Ramadan, and you celebrate things that Muslims celebrate, but around here it’s different, its mostly white people that live around here, apart from my next-door neighbour who’s Pakistani. I would prefer to live in a Moroccan area […] I don’t think you would ever feel lonely (Houda, Female, 26 years old).

The families who live in other parts of London have developed a sense of belonging to the area where they live, but not necessarily a shared sense of ‘community’. The networks that they have developed are very heterogeneous, as Sofia explains here:

There is no kind of sense of community here really, this feels like home yeah but there is no community […] I would never however consider going to Ladbroke Grove. I just think it’s again a bit claustrophobic […] I am comfortable with being an outsider, whereas there I would not be, I would fit perfectly in that community, my parents came in the sixties, my story is the same as every story there (Sofia, Female, 37 years old).

Sofia appreciates being different in the area where she lives and not ‘melting’ into the crowd. Others, like Hanane, feared the opposite. For her, it was not just the Moroccan presence in North Kensington that was important, but also the Muslim one. The fear of standing out in a ‘white’ area explains her attachment to the neighbourhood she lives in.

You don’t want to be somewhere where you are alienated […] You want to stay somewhere where there is a community, where you know people and you have something in common with them. Yeah, there is a masjid [mosque] around here, a school around here, Muslims around here. You know, kids won’t feel isolated,
especially now, the bad image about Muslims everywhere. To go and live somewhere where there are no Muslims you will be like [...] the black sheep (laughs) (Hanane, Female, 32 years old).

In many cases, fears like those voiced by Hanane have been justified, especially following the substantial increase in hate crimes and physical or verbal abuse against Muslims after 9/11 and 7/7. Living in an area where there is a majority of Muslims can help to enhance a sense of safety. The ‘community’ is considered as a real and reliable source of protection, almost like an extended family that looks after its members. Many parents feel safe in a neighbourhood where there is a majority of Muslims and Moroccans, which explains their desire to stay in North Kensington. Parents often expressed the importance of their children growing up in a Moroccan environment, as Hajj Abdellah explains:

I’ve never moved away from Westminster [...] I’ve lived here since 1974 until now in the same accommodation [...] they [the council] have sent me several letters in the past offering me alternative accommodation, but I refused. I cannot live so far away from the Moroccan community, I don’t want my kids to mix with the rest, I don’t have the energy to look after them all the time [...] One has to check the kids’ behaviour (Hajj Abdellah, Male, 62 years old).

For Hajj Abdellah, it is essential to have people he trusts check and monitor the behaviour of his children. A ‘closed network’ will enable the younger generation to behave within the ‘norm’ set by the community. He believes strongly in this shared responsibility between members of the Moroccan community and often tries, in a spirit of goodwill, to correct other Moroccan children’s behaviour by talking to them. However, his good intentions can often be interpreted differently, as his daughter explained:

I was walking with my father the other day and some kids were being naughty, and my dad doesn’t know these children, so I said ‘Dad, leave them, you’ve got good intentions but they will tell you it’s none of your business’. Because where my dad grew up they were allowed to tell each other’s children off because they were looking out for the community, and they still think they have to look out for the community. And I said to him ‘Dad times have changed it’s not like that anymore’ and he was sad because he said times have gone bad (Selma, Female, 25 years old).

In spite of the many positive aspects to living in a close-knit community – such as solidarity and feeling a sense of ‘home’ away from ‘home’ – there are also drawbacks to having a small community in a geographically defined area. There is a danger that the community builds few networks outside its geographical boundaries. This is particularly true for the first generation. As a result, people can develop a degree of over-dependence on other members of the community. Furthermore, while the presence of other Moroccans can help to monitor the behaviour of members of the community, not just the younger generation, this norm can be overbearing and ‘intrusive’ to individual freedom.

As behaviour is so closely monitored, members of the community – particularly the younger ones – are acutely aware of the wider effects of their actions and how they might be perceived by other community members. This community ‘norm’ is a mixture of various elements, but an important part is the emphasis on preserving Moroccan culture and tradition, and a resistance to total assimilation within ‘Western’ culture. At the extreme end, this type of ‘ethnic solidarity’ can exacerbate social exclusion and, in some cases, lead to the development of a new sub-culture for younger generations. As Alejandro Portes argues, restrictions on individual freedom and a downward levelling of norms can eventually lead to situations where group solidarity is cemented by a common experience of adversity and opposition to mainstream society. The resulting downward levelling of norms operates to keep the numbers of a subjugated group in place, and force the more ambitious to escape from it.

7 Portes (1998)
Civic Engagement

Civic engagement can refer to a wide range of actions, efforts and activities, and can take many different forms. This is as true about civic engagement amongst Moroccans in Britain as it is for other groups, but for the purposes of this report, the focus below is on three categories: 1) community involvement, in the shape of informal, personal social relations; 2) membership in an organisation, particularly formal group-based membership; and 3) voting and public engagement. Below, levels of civic engagement are compared across generations and by location of Moroccans in different parts of London.

Volunteering and Active Citizenship

Interviewees were asked about their level of informal and interpersonal involvement with their local communities, involving unpaid work that would benefit other individuals rather than themselves or their immediate family, such as visiting an elderly or sick person, or participating in a local event. Unsurprisingly, throughout the four London areas studied, Moroccans in North Kensington displayed the highest level of community involvement, even amongst the second generation. This suggests that social capital is activated to compensate, to some extent, the lack of certain forms of formal support. Members of minority ethnic groups often respond to needs by establishing group solidarity. Furthermore, the sense of ‘community’ in North Kensington can also be seen as generating a shared responsibility towards its members, where norms of reciprocity dominate.

Yes, I do help people, I also help in the mosque cleaning and fixing things […] I help my neighbours out if they need something to be fixed etc. There was a neighbour that I didn’t know once and she asked me for help and she was quite surprised that I accepted to fix things for her without asking for money (Mohammed, Male, 63 years old).

There appeared to be a correlation between parent involvement with the local communities and that of their children’s involvement, especially amongst families in North Kensington. Some members of the second generation, however, found themselves under pressure from their parents to continuously engage with all the various community activities, which they may not have been overly enthusiastic about themselves:

My dad, he makes me involved in everything […] sometimes he’s like zidi [go ahead], I have to be involved in a lot of things coz he makes me. Like he makes me go to supplementary school, when there’s something to do with Morocco he makes me go. When there’s a demonstration, he makes me go. When there’s a demonstration, he makes me go, like he really wants me to be Moroccan and I am really Moroccan, and I support his ideas whatever but I prefer to keep a distance sometimes (Sabah, Female, 26 years old).

Many parents considered involvement with the local Moroccan community to be a way of reinforcing their sense of Moroccan identity in their children. In practical terms, it also facilitates their access to important support networks, such as access to free supplementary school classes.

Community Organisations

Measuring the extent to which people are attached to formally constituted social groups of one kind or another is a method frequently employed for the measure of group-based relations in social capital research. This approach is not without its critics, but does nonetheless provide useful insights into the significance of membership in community organisations. The formal involvement of Moroccans in organisations is heavily concentrated in the North Kensington area, mostly through educational groups and other Moroccan organisations. However, the engagement of other Moroccans, living mostly in South and North London, is virtually non-existent. This contrast begs explanation.

In North Kensington, Moroccan community
members mobilise in order to compensate for weak provision or an absence of services (for example translation services or educational support classes); to reinforce an existing group identity; or to pass on their ‘heritage’ to their children, and to instil in their children Islamic values:

Yes, I’m helping out and for me it’s a way also to help my country, not only Moroccans who live here. It’s a duty for us to teach these young people religion and love for their country, so that they can learn how to behave with other people, keep them away from drugs etc. By filling up their time, they won’t get into trouble (Mohammed, Male, 63 years old).

In the absence of sufficient and adequate services, members of the Moroccan community mobilise to create and tap into immigrants’ social capital. Moroccans with a different social status living in other parts of the capital have access to a ‘mainstream’ type of social capital. There are two possible reasons for the differentiated patterns of involvement in organisations. Firstly, individuals may become involved in a group, association or community organisation if they perceive that doing so gives them access to valuable resources. This implies that, for immigrants, social capital is more readily available within their community than in the larger society. The perception of being in the same circumstances in a new social, cultural and institutional environment can foster a sense of constituting ‘a community of fate’, a feeling which is reinforced for those with limited language skills. Secondly, the barriers to social capital in the wider community – because of prejudice, hostility or institutional discrimination – may lead members to search out social capital within their own minority community. There is a predisposition to draw on social capital within the ‘ethnic enclave’ amongst immigrants who have a hard time adapting, as well as amongst members of minority ethnic groups who suffer discrimination and face severe barriers to full participation in the institutions of the wider society.

**Voting and Engagement with Political Processes**

Academic understanding of individuals’ and groups’ political pro-activity and awareness is informed by their voting and involvement with local authorities. Voting is a clearer and more explicit measurement of political participation than local involvement, which is harder to measure, but both are important. Engagement with governmental institutions such as the local authorities, and with MPs and local councillors, is also suggestive of levels of ‘institutional trust’.

Most of the first-generation members with the right to vote, did so, which suggests a positive indication of civic engagement. Many interviewees showed an understanding of the importance of voting. Some argued that voting makes them more engaged in their local neighbourhoods, and that they gain some form of representation, both locally and nationally. For others, like Labour Party member Ali, involvement represents a long-term investment in the future of the local community as well as that of their children.

The benefits of the community, because we need to be involved for the benefit of our children [...] (Ali, Male, 64 years old).

Yes, I vote in England, the next one is on the 10th of June; the day after tomorrow [...] I try to tell all my friends to make sure they vote too. I believe we must vote in order to have a voice in this country (Zohra, Female, 38 years old).

The majority of the second generation interviewees of voting age also voted in the 2005 general elections, although the rate of abstainers is higher amongst the second generation than the first. Importantly, however, the meaning they placed on their voting rights differs considerably from that of their parents. Demonstrating a high level of political awareness, those who voted stressed the importance of their vote, and explained why they choose very carefully how they cast it.
Yeah, I make sure I vote now [...] When the Conservatives were in power I used to always vote for Labour but now I make sure the Conservatives don’t get my vote, I vote Liberal Democrat. I don’t understand their policies and stuff like that but it’s either that or I don’t vote. I make sure I vote because they say every vote counts [...] next time inshallah I’m going to vote Respect (Noura, Female, 36- years old).

Quite a few years ago I think, I remember my mum used to scare me, ‘If you don’t vote, you will get a £400 fine’, and I’d say, ‘Don’t worry, I’ll pay it!’ (Mohammed, Male, 31 years old).

The international events prominent in the news at the time of fieldwork, particularly the war in Iraq, made several second generation interviewees become very selective in whom they vote for. However, there was a clear sense that none of the political parties represent their interests, which makes it a difficult choice.

Yes, I’ve only been able to vote twice as there have only been two general elections since I’ve been eligible to vote. And I voted in the local elections. But at the moment I’m a bit disillusioned, I don’t know who to vote for. It’s quite difficult, so now in the local election, I just look at the manifesto and see what suits me. I look at local issues, council tax and the congestion charge. Before I used to think about foreign policy but now everybody seems to have the same agenda (Samia, Female, 29 years old).

Apart from illustrating a strong sense of disenchantment with foreign policy developments, this shift of focus from foreign policy to domestic policy suggests a renewed interest in their local neighbourhoods and a reinforcement of their local sense of belonging. However, amongst those who abstained from voting, a feeling of disillusionment prevailed, especially as far as foreign policy was concerned. Moreover, while the first generation are sometimes concerned about the consequences of not voting, the second generation are confident about their right to chose not to vote.

Nah, there’s no point in me voting in this country [...] Yeah, because of the candidates and the people in general, I believe it’s their country, it’s white people’s country! I haven’t seen one Arab politician, Moroccan Arab politician yeah having any say, anything, so what’s the point in me voting. What I’ll waste my time walking down to Barlby Road to put a piece of paper in so that that guy can give me a congestion zone later! Or something silly like that [...] they’re all the same anyway, they all add taxes and that, you know what I’m saying? I’m not really a voter, that’s pointless for me, I can’t see someone I’d vote for basically (Zakaria, Male, 23 years old).

Zakaria illustrates with great clarity the perspective of a disillusioned young second-generation Moroccan. However, he insisted that his refusal to vote is not due to lacking a feeling of belonging to Britain; rather, he maintained that it is entirely a question of absence of representative candidates.

Similarly to levels of community involvement, discussed above, the level of individuals’
knowledge of, and interaction with, the local authorities was highest amongst Moroccans living in North Kensington. None of the interviewees in South and North London even knew the name of their local MP. Families in North Kensington contacted their MP for two main reasons; housing or access to secondary school for their children.

The Hidden Significance of Civic Engagement
It is clear that levels of social capital and civic engagement in the Moroccan community vary in many different ways according to a range of factors. Most notably, there are important differences between first- and second-generation Moroccans in London. Furthermore, a comparison between members of the Moroccan community living in different parts of the capital also reveal differential levels of civic engagement as well as social capital. The dense formal and informal networks in the areas where Moroccans are concentrated suggest a high level of bonding social capital, and voting patterns and involvement with local authorities indicate substantial bridging social capital as well. These tight networks were less discernable in other parts of London, particularly in South and North London, where the families who took part in the study were of more affluent backgrounds.

This suggests that social capital – in the form of formal and informal civic engagement – amongst Moroccans in West London has developed largely as a response to unmet needs and gaps in mainstream service provision. This contradicts the explanation that a shortage of social capital within the Moroccan community – and minority ethnic groups more broadly – causes or contributes to their social exclusion. On the contrary, it is barriers to accessing mainstream services which generates social capital within the community. While this form of social capital may have developed out of necessity, the danger is that such a pattern is reinforced across generations. As a result, mainstream networks remain difficult to access, and barriers are maintained or exacerbated by pursuit of an ‘ethnic rights’ discourse and collective action on an ethnic basis.

Moroccan Community Organisations in Action
In the social capital literature, the creation and renewal of social capital is seen as intimately tied up with the voluntary sector,10 including ethnic associations.11 In order to evaluate their role as incubators for the transformation of ‘bonding’ to ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ social capital, ten Moroccan community groups and organisations were examined as part of this study, and their contribution to the development of social capital was assessed.

Community Involvement and Pro-Activity
Members of the Moroccan community dedicate a fair deal of time to volunteering in mosques, supplementary schools, mentoring projects and self-help groups. Much of this volunteering is linked to the informal voluntary sector and is therefore not documented. Volunteering seems to be prompted by gaps in the official service provision, or a communitarian spirit to keep often struggling community projects and initiatives in operation. At a grass-roots level, volunteering is an indispensable part of community projects’ functioning, but funding shortage is a constant issue which inevitably impacts on the training and development of volunteers.12

A common issue identified amongst small organisations is a reluctance of the founders and main activists to delegate tasks and responsibilities to others. As a result, respondents felt that some individuals may be acting in an individual capacity rather than acting on behalf of the group, which, in turn, can lead to a situation where a limited number of individuals are ‘gate-keeping’ the community. Little is done to encourage other people to become involved in key networks and consultative structures, causing networks to become highly vulnerable to fracture from staff turnover or ‘dropout’. More importantly, many respondents felt that this process keeps the involvement of new people to a minimum. Many interviewees voiced

10 Putnam (1993; 2000)
12 Begum (2003)
the concern that self-appointed and entrenched ‘community leaders’ were in many ways blocking the development of new and younger community activists.

The founder of one of the first Moroccan associations in London explained how community involvement was in itself a proof of Moroccan integration into British society.

[…] there was a point where I said that the Moroccan community needs professionals. There are two ways of getting into the system; the first one is through the professional way, while the second one is through political participation. In terms of the professional way, I thought that was the most appropriate at the time, because we had to build and create the environment and also to set up the system in place (Muhcine).

Interviewees conveyed a great number of examples of successful collective action and mobilisation over a common cause. One of the success stories frequently mentioned was the creation of the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre, which exemplifies the potential strength of collective community action for a strong common cause. Despite all their differences, members of the Moroccan community and all the different parties collaborated in the planning, fundraising and building of the Centre.

Nonetheless, interviewees were generally pessimistic about each other’s willingness to contribute to addressing collective problems. Many felt that their compatriots were individualistic, and concluded that they lack the capacity to organise, lobby and influence the local authorities. Language barriers, low literacy levels, and a lack of confidence and self-esteem were mentioned as factors which impede people from vocalising individual concerns or collective problems.

More than one project has been hi-jacked from the community, for example the Spanish college was offered to the community, because local authorities wanted to help the community. It used to be ours, the Spanish used to have one room. We had the ground floor, the first floor and the second floor. We used to gather ten pence from members of the community to organise events and things […] If we kept on that level we would have had a much bigger institution for Moroccans, but there was a conflict between some organisations and they ended up missing that opportunity […] Unfortunately there are no pressure groups within the community, and those who were capable ended up giving up because of tensions between individuals etc. (Abdulali, Community Development Worker).

As with much voluntary and community activity in North Kensington, many Moroccan organisations operate in order to respond to social and welfare needs caused by poverty and disadvantage endemic in the area; needs that are often not met by mainstream service delivery. Rashid, a Youth Worker working for an organisation which tackles substance misuse in the area, explains the importance of their targeted approach.

They’ve done a lot of work in this area and they’ve changed people’s lives, literally […] The approach that they use is by encouraging young people to go back to religion works […] To tackle this problem is not easy. The good thing also about this organisation is that they teach young people how to behave properly and offer the youth an alternative youth centre that matches with their religious and cultural background.

### Effectiveness and Ability to Influence Decision-making

The capacity to participate in formal decision-making structures is an important indicator of bridging and linking social capital in communities, and allows individuals representing the community and voluntary sector to vet public decisions taken by external agencies.¹³

¹³ Begum (2003)
Some organisations were apprehensive and even cynical towards the Council’s motivations and commitment to creating and maintaining a partnership with the local community and voluntary sector. This scepticism was in many cases borne out of past disappointments, such as insecure and erratic financial support, or inadequate response to issues deemed to be of particular importance, such as community safety in the neighbourhood. The local authorities were committed, at least rhetorically, to the voluntary and community sectors. Nonetheless, many smaller organisations complained that the Council discriminated in their funding practices, favouring certain projects whilst blocking others’ opportunities to develop. These perceptions reveal the dark side of social capital; some organisations and ‘community leaders’ are in the position to encumber and exclude others that are less connected to political structures.

For some organisations, influencing decision-making was not particularly high on the list of priorities; they simply had little or no time to think about anything but providing basic services to their users. While some organisations engaged in some, albeit limited, lobbying activities, mostly at local level, others found it difficult to justify time spent lobbying and campaigning.

Connections and Partnerships

The organisations who took part in this study tended to have links with other local, regional as well as international institutions. The result is a great heterogeneity of networks through which organisations have developed various ties, varying in shape and strength according to the type of organisations involved. Some networks are narrowly conceived with relatively weak and circumscribed connections and networks with other agencies. Other networks, however, are multi-spatial, dense and overlapping. Residents may have constructed a narrow territorial identity based on locality and place, and membership and volunteering may be connected to a strong sense of place and a desire to get involved in the ‘local community’, but their involvement with other local groups showed links with external agencies such as statutory authorities and regional networks.

Working relations tended to be stronger between the local authority and larger organisations than with grassroots organisations. Partnership amongst the small organisations seemed to be often uneven and patchy, and relied on concerted efforts by key individuals from the organisations to facilitate involvement of local groups with each other. The smaller groups were comparatively isolated and unconnected to wider service provision.

There were a number of initiatives in North Kensington to address the invisibility and voicelessness of smaller organisations. Most notably, the National Neighbourhood Renewal (NRF) programme, led by neighbourhood facilitation teams, brought a dense network to the area and encouraged partnership-building. As a result of this initiative, contact between local authorities and the community and voluntary sector has increased in both quality and quantity. The Community Empowerment Fund (via NRF funding) – which has since been suspended – was a critical source of funding for smaller groups. However, the majority of applications received[14] from small community groups, including Moroccan groups, in Kensington and Chelsea were for small projects essentially geared towards service delivery. A small grant named ‘Networks and Partnerships’ was available, but few applications were submitted under that category. Most groups had a difficult time keeping their heads above water, and prioritised keeping the activities of their organisations running. Thus, they were reluctant to apply for the ‘Networks and Partnerships’ fund, in spite of being encouraged to do so. Furthermore, the issue of trust also discouraged small community organisations from working in partnership.

In terms of partnership projects it’s difficult for us to trust others, we can hardly trust each other let alone other communities, especially now after 9/11. But when we enter in partnership with other groups, we get involved with the idea of learning from others and getting a bigger picture about what is happening around […] (Abdulali, Chair of a grassroots organisation in West London).

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[14] The author was a member of the NRF grant panel at the time of research.
An important, but largely invisible, source of social capital within the Moroccan community is the informal networks of small self-help groups. These networks provided invaluable support and assistance unavailable elsewhere. In the absence of formally structured voluntary organisations, Moroccans in North Kensington rely on informal ties of sociability and mutual aid. Participation in community events, sports, and meeting people in community centres to chat and interact were considered to be the main benefits of involvement in voluntary organisations. These types of invisible and informal networks are of utmost importance to levels of social capital within neighbourhoods. At the same time, it is difficult to measure or even find a currency that demonstrates its value in terms of formal civic renewal strategies.15

Some organisations have succeeded in developing dense and overlapping networks with other ethnic organisations and statutory sector agencies. This has been partly due to a natural process of organisational growth, which encourages expansion of such networks and partnerships. However, these relationships tended to be dictated by a top-down approach, a condition imposed by the funder. Thus, the nature of the partnerships were often rather stilted and ‘formalised’ through funding contracts.

Not all Moroccan community organisations operate on a grass-roots level, and this study did include organisations which could be described as elitist. These mostly operate on a transnational level and have very few connections to other Moroccan organisations in London. One such organisation, which has been in operation for more than 30 years, has had no difficulties in reaching a significant level of bridging and linking social capital, both nationally and internationally. Significantly, however, its level of bonding social capital is almost non-existent in relation to working-class Moroccan migrants. This raises the question of class-based divisions and its relationship with ethnicity, where bonding only happens amongst ‘like-minded’ people which does not necessarily denote ethnic identity. Members of the ‘elitist’ organisations might be integrated within the mainstream society, but are excluded by, and exclude themselves from, the majority of the Moroccan community.

Comparing the ten associations and organisations examined for this study, their networks and capacities, reveals a great variety in levels of bonding, bridging and linking social capital in relation to the Moroccan community, the host society and the country of origin. Amongst some community organisations in West London which display strong bonding social capital, this is to a certain degree divorced from both ‘bridging’ networks and from ‘linking’ relationships to mainstream agencies and organisations.

Other organisations, however, exhibit strong levels of bonding as well as bridging social capital, although the bridging is often generated by outside pressures, especially from funders. It is paramount that these types of organisation and mainstream ones develop more meaningful partnerships. Statutory and mainstream agencies must acknowledge their contribution as planners and service-delivery partners, rather than mere beneficiaries of funding that constantly need to justify their existence.

Finally, there are organisations which present high levels of bridging and linking, but weak levels of bonding in relation to the Moroccan community. In this context, the scaling-up process of social capital building needs to be reversed, whereby an exchange of expertise between the two extremes of migrant associations can strengthen reciprocal returns. Increased cooperation would be beneficial to both categories of organisations. The Moroccan associations in North Kensington could benefit by learning more about how to organise large-scale fundraising events that could help them in achieving their objectives. At the same time, the ‘elitist’ transnational organisations could become even more efficient in their charitable ventures in Morocco if they were involved with Moroccan associations and the voluntary sector in general in London.

15 Begum (2003)
Conclusion

The stories and narratives of British Moroccans reveal a rich history of migration, settlement and adaptation to new and novel circumstances. They tell of challenges and often adverse circumstances; but at the same time, they tell of how individuals overcome challenges and battle against adversity. The thrust of the argument is that a collective response is often the most effective way for marginalised members of society to deal with structural disadvantage. This is what this report has endeavoured to convey. Using the analytical tool of social capital, the analysis above demonstrates that Moroccan efforts to collaborate and help each other has not led to, or indeed been the result of, self-segregation.

The concept of social capital, of course, has entered policy discourses in often very simplistic and unhelpful ways. For instance, within the current debate about funding to groups who cater for single identity community organisation, such as Moroccans, the government has taken the line that ‘bridging’ activities should be encouraged, and that ‘bonding’ social capital should be discouraged. In other words, community organisations which are not able to prove that they are actively promoting community cohesion and integration by encouraging bridging between ethnic communities should not be considered for funding. As the Moroccan community demonstrates, there are good reasons to question this line of thought. Indeed, it could be argued that bridging and bonding social capital in ethnically homogenous groups is positively related. This is certainly the case for British Moroccans. There is therefore no foundation for policies that attempt to limit bonding (i.e. trying to prevent people from setting up their own cultural associations) on the grounds that this prevents them from reaching a level of bridging social capital to the majority or mainstream society. Instead, bonding social capital serves as a precursor to bridging as well as occurring alongside it.  

It is therefore clear that voluntary organisations are an important source of bridging and linking capital for migrant communities, not only bonding. One of the voluntary sector’s key functions is to connect different local groups and organisations and, most importantly, create a link between community organisations and official decision-making agencies. In general, black and minority ethnic voluntary and community organisations are expected to serve as a ‘cultural bridge’ which has many functions, the first of which is creating a safe space within which migrant communities acquire the socio-cultural capital needed to link with mainstream-dominant institutions. The ‘cultural bridge’ enables marginalised members of society to rephrase the unfamiliar codes of the culture of power. It also serves as a means to deploy personal and collective social capital in order to gain access to the networks of targeted mainstream-dominant institutions; and to integrate and affirm community cultural values, resources and rights. In the current political climate, public institutions make enormous demands of minority ethnic groups to acquire the cultural cues and knowledge of the dominant culture. But in order for this to be accomplished, the cultural assets and contributions made by migrant and minority ethnic communities must be recognised; without acknowledgement and acceptance of their presence, the authorities will not be able to gain their trust and forge constructive alliances.

While formalised community organisations have gone a long way to fill in the gaps of service provision for the Moroccan community, of equal importance is the development of informal networks and self-help groups, which reflect the willingness of individuals to help and support each other, especially in areas where mainstream services have failed to respond to the needs of the community. For many migrant groups, informal networks are vital for settling into life in the UK. These often take the form of friendship groups or family in the UK, or from friends or family of those they knew back in their country of origin. If formalised community organisations are absent or unable to fill all service provision gaps, these networks enable migrants to pool their resources and provide each other with mutual help and support in order to become established in the UK for things such as housing, national insurance numbers, bank accounts, employment,

17 Saegert, Thompson and Warren (2001)
18 Ibid.
as well as providing support in terms of social activities and childcare. However, the immense value of informal networks, and the role they play in promoting community cohesion, are not recognised in current debates about the ‘active citizenship’ of migrants and minority ethnic groups. Indeed, the government’s understanding of ‘active citizenship’ – as it should be imposed on migrants – negates all the positive benefits of informal volunteering. It reduces the concept of ‘active citizenship’ to volunteering for officially recognised organisations and ignores the many other forms of engagement and participation that make up real and meaningful active citizenship.19

Moroccans draw strength from each other, by offering mutual support, a sense of community and belonging, as well as being a source of protection against racism, Islamophobia and hostility. The entrepreneurial capacity of British Moroccans to organise themselves – by setting up strong formal community organisations and informal networks – should be commended. Increasingly, however, this kind of intra-group cooperation is deemed to be self-segregating, ‘bonding’ as opposed to ‘bridging’, and ultimately detrimental to community cohesion. As social dynamics in and around Golborne Road are testimony of, British Moroccans have by no means isolated themselves from the surrounding community. Quite the contrary, they have taken an active role in shaping the community for the benefit of all.

19 Runnymede Trust (2008)
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Since 1968, the date of Runnymede’s foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today.