

## Exploring the Equalities Weave

Throughout the year we will focus on each of the equalities 'strands' in turn to explore how they link up with each other through a gender lens. This presentation aims to establish an idea of what the equalities big picture might look like.

It is hoped by March 09 we as a group of women would be in a position to develop a model or map of how equalities weave together into our social fabric. Or should I say how inequalities weave together ...

To start this process I am going to present to you a model or map of how I think it works, i.e. the 'world' according to me'. I am not saying it is THE way to see things, but it is where I have got to so far in trying to make sense of things. It is not an easy thing to map since the intersections are multiple and very complex. I want to go beyond looking at intersections of this plus that, such as 'what is it like for black women, or disabled women, or even what it is like the for the '70 year old, black, lesbian, disabled woman'...beyond what is experienced, to explore why and how?

In order to understand how equalities [inequalities] weave together into our social fabric there is a need to first understand how inequality and systemic discrimination works in sexism, racism, heterosexism, disablism, ageism and in relation to religion, faith and belief.

One model that has worked for me in all my work on inequality and systemic discrimination, whether I was working on to race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability or mental health is a model describing systemic racism developed by Ashok Ohri of OSDC [Organisation and Social Development Consultants]. Originally designed to describe systemic racism it is a really robust model that that can be applied to any 'ism' and that is where its beauty lies. Because of that it can enable us to see and acknowledge the common elements in each 'ism', the systemic processes that enable injustice and exclusion.

So, I will start off by introducing this model.

We make all sorts of assumptions as we go through the world. We generalise, distort and delete information to make sense of things based on knowledge, learning and past experiences. The top centre of the model recognises that we

go through the world making assumption about each other, we put people into boxes, 'girls are like this', 'black people do this', 'disabled people can't do the other', we stereotype people. Then we prejudge them based on these on stereotypes.

Attitudes  
Assumptions  
Stereotypes  
Prejudices  
Values

Now if we walked through the world stereotyping people and putting them into boxes, just making assumptions in our heads it's not very nice, but it becomes even more problematic if we find ourselves with the power to act on our assumptions, because then we can act out our prejudices and discriminate.

Where does this power come from? It comes from further assumptions about a set of shared values that say it OK to believe that, judge in that way.

Attitudes  
Assumptions  
Stereotypes  
Prejudices  
Values  
+  
The Power to Act  
=  
Discrimination

Once we have the power to act we can discriminate in various ways:

**Directly** - one of the most obvious examples would be the way black people were discriminated against in South Africa, for example, not being allowed to go into specific public spaces, not being allowed to study maths, not being allowed to have a job higher than a nurse or a teacher.

**Indirectly** - such as systemic racism or sexism that is wrapped up in institutional practice, the norms, the way things work. Such as paying more attention to black youths when they are shopping because 'THEY are more likely to steal'; or passing young women over for promotion because 'THEY are likely to have babies and take time out so are a riskier investment' [Whilst the language of institutional racism has been used more openly since the Steven Lawrence Inquiry it is still rare to find acknowledgement of institutional sexism].

**Inaction/collusion** – How many times have we stood by and witnessed discrimination without talking action? Laughed at a racist, sexist or homophobic joke? Accepted portrayals of women that embody them as sexual objects, without challenging it? Made excuses that the system made you do it, “its how things work”? A friend of mine says that “if you sit on a log and float down the river of racism, keeping you feet up and dry, you are still part of the problem. Unless you are paddling like hell the other way, you are colluding.”

And last but not least...

**Victimisation** – such as blaming young black men for being violent when they react to injustice, or women for ‘nagging’ when they articulate their inequality; or young women for being raped because they were wearing ‘revealing’ clothing or had too much to drink!

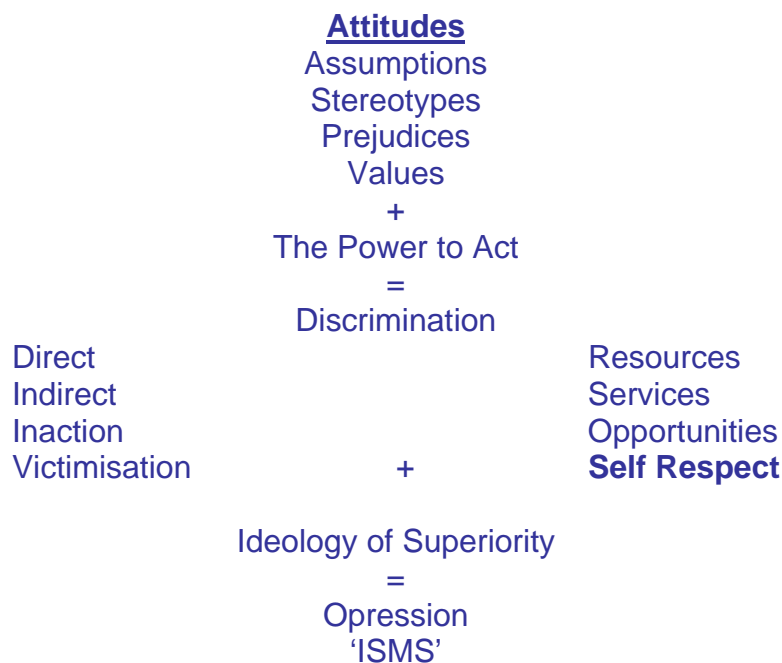
When we discriminate we deny people resources, opportunities and or services, and along with those self-respect, always self-respect.



This discrimination is built on a common belief that men are better and more valuable, than women, or that heterosexual men and women are better and more valuable than lesbian, gay and bisexual people, or that men and women are better and more valuable than transgender people, or that white people are better and more valuable than black people, or that able bodied people are better and more valuable than disabled people, or that middle aged people are better and more valuable than children, youth and older people, or that one belief system is better and more valuable than another, on an assumption of superiority. This does not only define one group as superior but also establishes a system that sets the ‘superior’ groups values and attributes as the norm against which the ‘other’ will be measured.

Once this assumption of superiority is supported by social and institutional mechanisms to reinforce the idea that one group is superior to another it becomes an ideology of superiority. People who are discriminated against by the 'superior' or 'dominant' group feel the force of this as oppression – racism, sexism etc. Whilst women can be discriminated against men, and black people against white, what men and white people experience is not sexism or racism because it is not reinforced by the weight of the system that defines them as other than the norm. They are not experiencing systemic discrimination.

In order to discriminate and exploit other people without guilt the oppressor has to dehumanise or subjectify the people they oppress. Dehumanising and subjectifying groups of people e.g. black people, women etc makes it easier to exploit them and feel OK about it. For stark examples think of the stereotypical images, myths and lies that are conjured up about black people to excuse slavery and colonialism, and stereotypical images, myths and lies that are conjured up about women to excuse commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking and rape. Although there are, of course, more subtle and insidious forms of systemic discrimination, such as the messages we receive that black African mothers don't feel the same pain and white mothers when their children are abducted. Just compare the reporting styles on child abductions from Darfur in Sudan against those about the abduction of Madeleine McCann!



The values that underpin the ideology are built into the structure of our society and institutions and systematically reinforce the assumptions and stereotypes that feed discrimination.

Values  
Education  
Media  
Language  
Legislation

History  
Culture  
Social / Political  
Economic Exploitation

For example:

- As a nation we don't **value** and measure the health and wellbeing of our population as an indicator of success, we measure Gross Domestic Product. So success is measured in £££'s, this does not acknowledge the value and role of the social reproductive economy, primarily a women's domain. Investment in care is seen as a 'benefit' GIVEN to or bestowed on 'beneficiaries'.
- In our **education** system there is a 'norm' and there is the 'other'. For example: there is black history month - the other eleven months spent on the 'real' history, black history is an add on and in the UK focuses on the civil rights movement in the USA as if we don't have our own black history. Then of course there is LGBT MONTH, and then women's DAY and associated lessons on suffrage when they tell HERstory not HISstory. HIS story takes up the other 364 days.

Beyond the messages in education, the structure and systems of the institutions focus on creating elites that rise to the top through academic compliance and then reinforce their position in exclusive professional bodies and the Royal Colleges of this and that, etc.

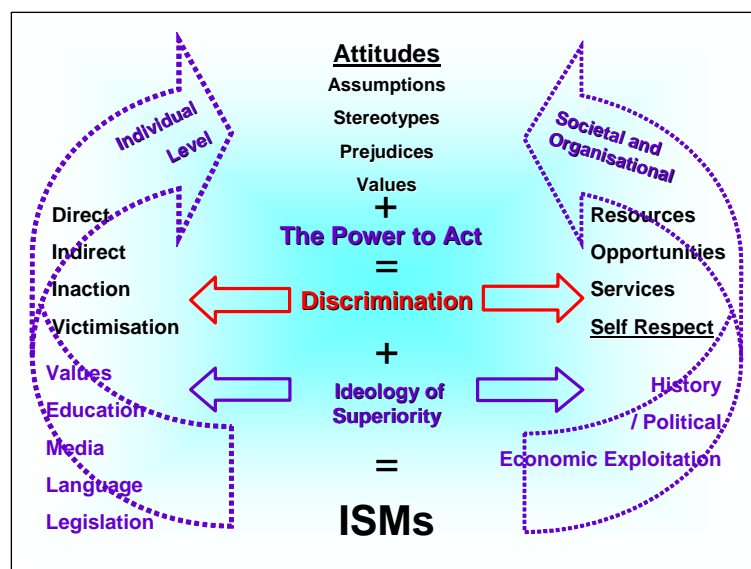
- The **media** feeds stereotypes and prejudice objectifying women and demonising black youth and Muslims etc.
- It is in the **language** we use to empower or humiliate and other [verb] - bitch', 'butch', 'bent' 'straight', 'hoodies', invalid [not valid] etc. It is in the dominant languages of the world, languages linked with economic power that consolidates our post colonial hold over impoverished and marginalised [verb, it is done to them] nations.
- Whilst there are moves towards developing equalities **legislation** it is has been hard fought for by the discriminated groups...yet 30 years of the equal pay act and do we have equal pay? No. Race equality? Where? 3% rape conviction rates in Scotland? Hmmm?
- **HISstory** is told. Universities, cities and public offices are full of statues and pictures celebrating dead white men [usually from the elite].

- It is in our **culture**, in the patriarchal structure of our families and in the export of a 'superior' culture that others should aspire to. It's in the way we do things, in 'our norms'. 'They will be developed if they have party democracy like ours'. 'Women are welcome into the work place as long as they fit into the way 'we' [men] do things.' 'Immigrants are welcome here as long as they change their ways and learn English.' 'Lesbian and gay people are Ok if they start acting like 'us' [heterosexuals] and settle into family units and have children.'
- It is in our **social and political structures** – thus in Scotland we only have 20% women Councillors, 33% women MSPs and no black women MSPs.
- It is in **exploitative economic policies** globally, at home and in the home and such as unjust trade terms, exploited labour in impoverished nations; poorly paid women in the 5C sectors [care, customers, cooking, cleaning and cashiers]; and unpaid women caring for our children, older or sick relatives.

The ideology of male superiority values the market economy, a primarily male domain and devalues social reproductive economy, the one that produces and cares for people [children, the family, the elderly, the ill, the disabled ...and men], a primarily female domain. Work in the market economy is paid, jobs in the social reproductive economy are generally unpaid and even when it is paid it is paid poorly [e.g. care workers]. Women have moved into the market economy but remain undervalued and underpaid. Men have not moved into the social reproductive economy in any great numbers because it's so poorly paid, if at all. We pay more per hour to care for our boilers than our children, it says it all!

Not to mention misplaced assumptions that disabled people are useless because they cannot be exploited economically and doubts about their effectiveness in the social reproductive economy.

Because these ideologies are built into the way we work and the way we organise ourselves they make up our social fabric. The media, education and legislative systems, history and culture, and social, political and economic systems continuously feed the assumptions and attitudes that enable discrimination to continue. It is systemic, we don't have



to do anything for it to continue, it is self-perpetuating and will continue as long as we do nothing.

And, if you live a lie long enough you start to believe it yourself. Many women, BME people, LGBT people, disabled people, young people, older people and religious groups assimilate the stereotypes about them and start living up to them. The system, on one level, rewards them for compliance. We [oppressed groups] buy into it, we use the language, we victimise and de-humanise our peers.

Many interventions that claim to work against discrimination are short-term stop-gap approaches that smooth over injustice with aid and benefits, instead of giving them equality in services, resources, opportunities and self-respect. They do not challenge the status quo.

If you don't address the inequality in the underpinnings of the ideology you won't get change. Providing services, resources and opportunities without changing the status quo will not change anything. I call them sticking plaster approaches. A prime example is women's refuges, they are an outrage! Why should women have to run away, hide and live in fear because as a society we are unable to control men? Refuges are sticking plasters on a deep and ugly wound, gender inequality that lays women bare to abuse. Why can't we deal with the cause – gender inequality?

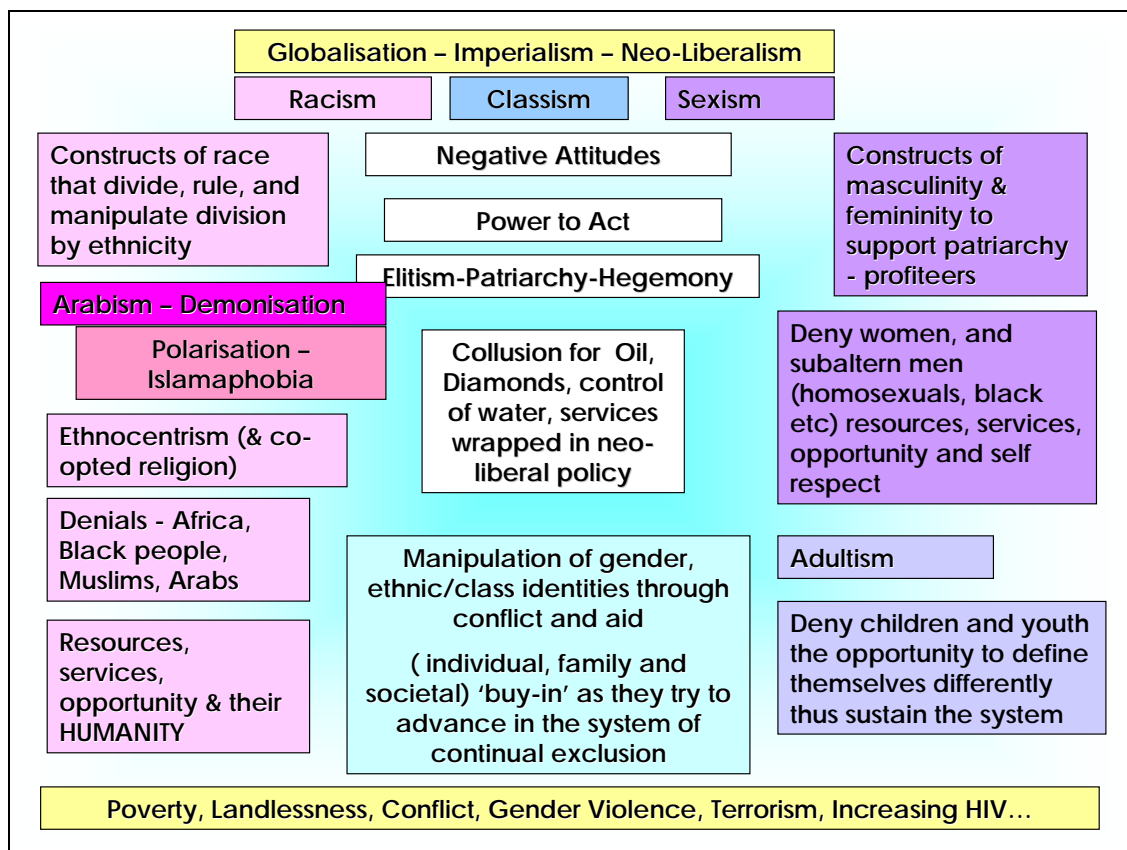
In any 'ism' the power relations have been established over a very long period of time – it is about historic, systematic power of one group over another:

### **ISMs – Systemic social, economic and political exclusion**

- Power relationships had been built over a long period of time
- Economic exploitation is systematic**
- Many problems are a consequence of unbroken power by powerful groups over less powerful ones e.g. white over black; men over women etc
- It has entered the culture of both groups (men/women; black/white; old/young; heterosexual/LGBT etc)**
- To some extent it has been internalised by all groups
- It helps the oppressors to feel good about themselves**
- It is self-reinforcing if not fought against actively

Over the years I have worked to bring together an understanding of the relationship between the different 'isms'; in Uganda in the context of colonial legacies, unfair trade, 'famine', ethnocentrism, anti-nomadic stances, conflict, displacement, gender based violence and AIDS; in Sudan in the context of women's seclusion, female genital mutilation, Islam and nomadic culture; in Namibia in the context of apartheid, ethnic divisions, bonded labour and ethnic hierarchies, child abuse, violence against women and homophobia; And across Africa in the context of post colonialism, globalisations, slavery and impoverishment.

On 9/11 when the World Trade centres were attacked I was in London working on a project to understand globalisation and its impact of Africa. That day I developed this map [below] to try and make sense of how things were fitting together? What assumptions were being made? How people were reporting on it?... it is not great, it was a thinking tool ...



In international development there was little discussion about the relationship between racism and sexism, or ethnocentrism and economic exploitation. Despite the obvious divide and rule through the manipulation of ethnic and religious patriarchies to enable exploitation [the harvesting of oil, diamonds gold etc]. Conflicts were being described as tribal or religious wars, as identity wars

rather than as reaction to a long history of economic exploitation and manipulation.

So on the pink side of the map I saw that: The manipulation of ethnic patriarchies lead to struggles for power among hegemonic patriarchies who use sexual violence as a weapon of war to emasculate other men, raping 'their' women, making family males rape 'their' own and kidnapping women and young men to use as cannon fodder and 'wives'.

What gives people and states the power act power to act in these ways? On the one hand, elitism in terms of political power, education and economics [market patriarchy] and on the other power struggles between patriarchal hegemonies [dominant groups of men at the top of different ethnic groups or religious groups fighting each other for power and control].

These patriarchies once divided and ruled by more powerful patriarchies continue struggling with each other in wars and conflicts to work out the power relationships/hierarchies between them. These ethnic and religious hierarchies change in relation to global processes and interventions. External states feed the conflicts by arming both sides whilst continuing to harvest the diamonds, oil etc. Even when states were not involved in fuelling conflicts directly they do little or nothing to address the underlying causes, preferring inaction and victimisation.

After 9/11 Arab peoples were demonised, de-humanised, the public was terrorised through the media and fed Islamaphobia. The whole ethnocentric discussion turned to co-opting religions to support assumptions about the 'other'.

The media and politicians fed negative attitudes of Muslim men in particular to the public; they were all terrorists and to be judged for the way they treated 'their' women [unlike our patriarchy that gives 'its' women freedom?Hmmm?]. [*This racialised sexism and Islamaphobia later provided an excuse for the invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq under the guise of their not being just patriarchies because of the way they divided and ruled and treated their women*].

Which takes us to the mauve side: Constructs of masculinity and femininity abound all over the world that deny women and subaltern men [*i.e. men lower down the hierarchy – homosexuals –people who weren't seen to be good for the social reproductive economy (lesbian and gay men don't produce babies therefore they aren't useful to the system)*] opportunity, services, resources, self respect and sense of humanity. They are all much the same, sexism is a global construct.

Sexism also denies children and young people the opportunity to re-define themselves and coerces them to abide by gendered social norms, so that they buy into our vision of the world and maintain the system of gender inequality. I

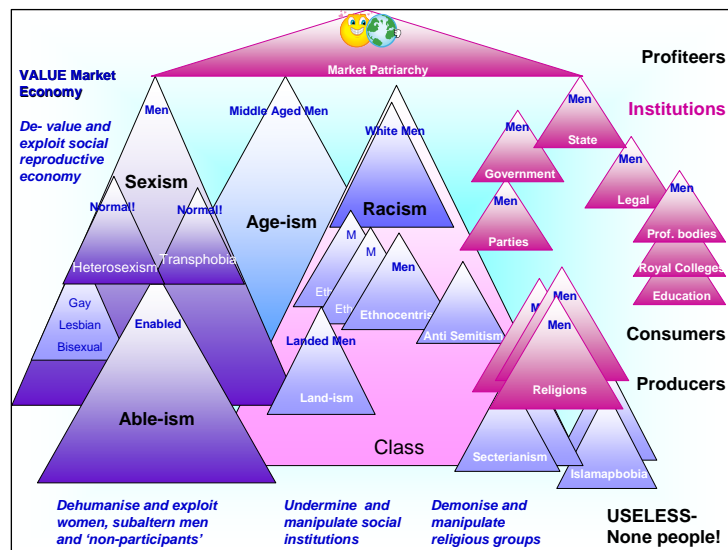
find myself selling my daughter a story of fear 'don't do this, don't go there, don't wear that.... Or the nasty man will get you.' What am I doing?

The system manipulates of gender, ethnic/class identities and relationships through conflict (as you continue to cream off the diamonds) and aid. There is a lot of that going on, "you won't get development aid unless you do things our way". Indeed it goes as as "structure you family more like 'ours' and you will be more developed". And whilst there are people who fight against the system many of us 'buy-in' on all sorts of levels, as individuals, families and societies as we try to advance in the system. Why? To be included and escape continual exclusion, we collude all the time. I get in my car, I fill it with fuel... I know the cost to people in Iraq in Afghanistan and elsewhere but I still do it.

The result - Poverty, Landlessness, Conflict, Gender Violence, Terrorism, and Increasing HIV...

This brings me to the last slide where I try to map how the different 'isms' weave together into a social fabric.

Sexism – at the bottom of the of the triangle we have women serving the social reproductive economy. In the middle we have-subaltern men [not seen as useful to the market , nor social reproductive economy]. At the top defined by the market economy – Men. There are some women at top but not many and mainly white, middle/upper class.



Within sexism we have another triangle for Heterosexism, at top 'normal' men and women and then 'other' [gay, lesbian, bisexual]. Even within heterosexism, the negotiation for space within the political arena has been dominated by gay men which has very much defined the agenda; There is hierarchy within the LGBT 'community' with men at the top. Although bisexual people are often alienated regardless of being men or women because they are seen as 'not making their minds up and taking advantage'.

Also within sexism there is transphobia – where you have 'normal' men and women at the top and the 'others' who aren't quite 'normal' lower down.

None of these hierarchies are as easy as 'black' and 'white' there are shades of grey and they overlap, it is very complex.

The power at the top of the triangles comes from a value given to the Market Economy and a de-valuing of the Social Reproductive Economy. Caring is under-valued, even if it's paid work it is undervalued. Men don't work in it because it impacts on their sense of self, their masculinity, they have to be successful in terms of work, in terms of money. Being caring doesn't make you a good man, being wealthy makes you good man.

Then there is ableism, disableism, disability what language shall we use to talk about that? The idea that people are disabled by society not by their disability /impairment per se. (Tom Shakespeare's research is now looking at how the social model of health works against people with disabilities, there is a whole debate around that you might want to have). At the top of the triangle people are defined by being 'normal' and able, again in terms of being valued by the market economy. "Can the actually go to work and deliver?" Further down they are also defined by whether they can serve a function in the social reproductive economy.

Each of these triangles represents a hierarchy, a patriarchal hierarchy. Ashok's model describes the systemic processes working within each triangle or hierarchy that maintains the status quo, which allows the top to exploit the bottom and seduce the bottom with notions that they can, if they collude. also get to the top.

The next big triangle is of course Racism, you've got white people at the top and black people at the bottom, and it overlaps with sexism since white women are in the middle, black men just below them and black women at the bottom. Then within that you've got all the ethnic hierarchies – ethnocentric patriarchies juggling for power one over the other. I don't understand the struggles between all the different ethnic groups across the world but certainly in Africa they are being manipulated by outside influences through trade and the sale of arms to both sides so that they fight each other for position in the global hierarchy of patriarchies, Patriarchal Hegemonies i.e. where ethnic groups led by men fight each other for power and money and resources. Then inside each of these ethnic hierarchies there are still men at the top – each is a sexist construct, a patriarchy.

The tips of each patriarchy [men] negotiate economically, politically and through war with other men and form collusions of patriarchies to secure control over resources.

Apartheid is a clear example, which is not only created hierarchies of race but of ethnicity. If you stop any Namibian on the street and ask them to list of the ethnic groups by power hierarchy they can, and it will always be in the same order. But

apartheid also went deeper to physically divide community and family units, sending men off into mines, women and the elderly into the homelands and children off to centralised school hostels to 'educate' them. You could say that was just convenient, it wasn't – it was structured that way to undermine the family, the patriarchy as its root. Indeed rebuilding families and communities after apartheid has been problematic for Namibia and South Africa – resulting in extraordinary levels of gender violence.

The relationship between racism and sexism is very complex but intrinsic to our understanding.

Then you've got hierarchies based on ownership, like those that own property and land and those who don't, such as people who are gypsy/travellers, people who are nomadic, who don't value settling or owning land or property. They don't define themselves by the market economy and are excluded because they don't buy into the dominant economic system. "They want to live differently and so cannot be exploited." They are often described as an ethnic group, sometimes they are and sometimes they are not.

Behind all this is class a system built historically on systems of patriarchy -[who was related to who; who won land off of who; and religious affiliation]. This links directly to racism and ethnocentrism where social exclusion, political exclusion and lack of opportunity for BME people supports the market's need for an underclass.

Within the ethnocentric hierarchies you have relationships to religious hierarchy resulting in anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and sectarianism.

Within each religion there is a sexist construct, the majority of religions being male led, patriarchal. As with racism there are processes to undermine, demonise and de-humanise particular religious groups and manipulate others. This is not necessarily one against the other, sometimes it can be on mass for example generating a sense of 'the other' through the media among a whole range of white people with an assumed 'Christian' value base. This has resulted in high levels of Islamophobia grounded in ideological assumptions about gender, race and ethnicity. And also sectarianism, which is a structured class system where one religious group gets one level of jobs and another religious group gets higher better paid jobs, creating a division between the two. It's interesting how football and the whole commodification of sport reinforces this. Just think of the amount of money invested in creating our vision of the macho male footballer– a very particular image of what manhood is about - 'warriors' of different 'tribes' of men playing to prove themselves as better, using football as a metaphor if you like. But actually it's very real on the street when Celtic and Rangers meet.

At the top of this map is the market economy, where a few profiteers [in the main white men] benefit secured by the over valuing of the market economy at the expense of all else and supported by institutions that themselves are patriarchal hierarchies that actually enable all of these 'isms' to continue.

Lower down there the consumers (that's us) and below them the producers who are probably one and the same, and at the bottom [sorry about the language] but there is the notion that there are some useless 'non-people' down there who are totally excluded – they are deemed to be worth-less and are very oppressed. The less useful you are assumed to be to the system the more discrimination and oppression you will experience.

The institutions are political parties and the government [*in Scotland is male-dominated and predominantly white. We had a good crack at getting women in post devolution but now numbers of women are dropping*]; The State – *which is also male dominated (look at EOC's/EHRC's|Sex and Power Reports )*, very white male-dominated and if you look at who is at the top of all these pyramids, managing the social, political and economic environment it's white middle-aged men; The legal structure – *is still male-dominated, which is why it is very difficult to get justice for women for example in terms of rape*; In professional bodies, Royal Colleges, those sort of institutions it is still very male, they are structured patriarchal hierarchies.

So we have a vista of lots of triangles [hierarchies ] with white able bodies men at the top negotiating space and the terms and conditions of interaction, value and worth. And below at the base of the triangles, where we find the majority - women, different races and ethnic groups, transgender people, gay people, all the different people - we find people struggling to work somehow within the oppressive, exploitative system in the hope that they can climb up and out.

The tips of the highest patriarchies form a collusion of patriarchies, the market patriarchy if you like, where it is no longer about hegemony. It is more about negotiation between the wealthy global elites and how robustly they have secured control over resources based on the management, manipulation and exploitation of the other hierarchies through the manipulation of 'isms' and difference.

If the market patriarchy can keep these structures working and divided, they can exploit each of these different groups. As people aspiring to 'succeed' on their terms, they collude and work hard for the system that sends all the wealth up the way. What this system does not value, so does not measure at all, is quality of life, happiness, contentment, flourishing, well being, sense of personal integrity, equality and space to grow. These things are de-valued, so many of the things that our social reproductive economy delivers are not valued.

This map is intended as 'starter for ten'; I'd like feedback on all these assumptions (they are just my assumptions). Also reflect on which bits of this do we need to explore and unpick over the next year as Women thinking Equality?

It is quite complex to map. Maybe market patriarchy should be a great big triangle sitting behind it all rather than sitting on the top because it actually is part of all of it.

Each of these triangles, sexism, racism, heterosexism etc. have the same underpinnings in terms of what we need to address. Remember the bottom of Ashok's model - the legal system, education system and value system etc.

And more importantly remember that together all of the people at the bottom of the triangles make up the majority!