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# The media and social cohesion

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Social cohesion as a concept suggests that societies need some sort of glue to sustain them over time, some broadly shared orientations to the world among their populations, and ways of testing the commonality or divergence of ideas and values. It is a contentious concept because it can produce a very simplified model of society, denying important dimensions of social conflict. Social cohesion has one locus in which it can be negotiated and experienced: the terrain of 'the public sphere', which can provide the opportunities for discursive engagement among the many social groups that make up contemporary societies (Habermas 1989). The public sphere is in part constituted through the mass media, which in all their diversity accommodate the sweep of the social in today's open societies. The public sphere is a space of the mind as well as the body, a space where creative energy is invested in 'imagining communities' (Anderson 1991) as well as enabling face-to-face interaction, engagement, negotiation, accommodation and resolution.

As public concern about social conflict intensifies (in part due to media influences) (Jakubowicz 2005), so the media increasingly address the factors perceived to lie beneath disengagement, violence and intergroup antipathies. In complex societies there are always processes that tend to bring people together, and others that may deepen divisions, what some have described as the building and demolition of social capital. Social capital contains two elements: bonding processes that build links within groups, and bridging processes that build links between groups. How would we assess the performance overall of the Australian media in building these links and deepening social cohesion? How much does the concept of social cohesion necessitate a unitary system of values, and how much can it encompass diversity? What roles have the media played in forming public attitudes to these questions? Indeed, 'what functions might we expect the media to fulfill in multi-ethnic societies?' (Husband 2000: 199).





## Context

The media provide the major avenues for the working through of debates about the acceptable cultural parameters of Australian society. Indeed, if we consider societies as frameworks for social relations that are held in place through cultural networks, then the media offer a national and international platform for the negotiation, production, circulation and consumption of meaning. Because the media so strongly define the public sphere in modern societies, they guard the points of access to and privilege within wider circles of social power. In the sense that they provide the major pathways for communication in complex societies, the media are the primary machinery in the promotion of both social cohesion and social conflict (Curran et al. 1996).

The media are centrally involved in the articulation of the core elements in the Australian values debate. This proxy for modelling social cohesion in everyday discourse relates to the sharing or divergence of values among a culturally differentiated population.

While radio, television and the Internet play important roles in enabling cultural exploration of worrying social issues (talkback radio being the most potentially volatile location), these questions are more likely to be dealt with in a sustained manner by the print media. In Australian terms the News Limited stable of newspapers – *The Australian*, the *Adelaide Advertiser*, the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, the Melbourne *Herald Sun*, Hobart's *Mercury* and the Brisbane *Courier Mail* – sits on the political Right, backing Prime Minister Howard's cultural crusade. This crusade contains many elements that address Howard's 1988 warning about the threat multiculturalism and non-European immigration present to what he called at the time 'social cohesion'. In 1988 few had any illusions that social cohesion was anything other than a proxy for White Australia, and reflected the then opposition leader's belief in a fundamental societal breastwork of Christian values and British-derived political institutions (Howard 1988).

The Fairfax stable occupies the centre of the political spectrum. Its major imprints – Melbourne's *The Age*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian Financial Review* – adopt a more liberal position, willing to test the claims of the cultural warriors, and offer occasional ridicule of what they perceive as the more reactionary nostrums of the national government.

## Reading the media

In order to 'read the media', that is, decipher the underlying parameters that frame media behaviours, we need a model of media operation and effects. Media studies offers a wide range of analytical frames; for my purposes three main approaches convey the dilemmas generated for us in answering my opening questions about the role of the media in social cohesion. Social cohesion, I would argue, is least threatened and simultaneously most enhanced when everyone within a society experiences a sense of their own legitimacy and is afforded positive recognition of their contribution.

Materialist/Marxist theories of media and society postulate that the media on the whole are part of the legitimating apparatus for the social order (Thompson 1995). Their owners (in the private sphere) tend to be wealthy individuals or families, or often transnational corporations, with economic interests shared with other capitalist enterprises. In societies where the ruling elites are drawn from a single ethnic group or cluster of cognate groups (as is true for the most part in Australia), ethnic power and economic power will coalesce into a set of ethno-political institutions. The media, whose owners will be part of the ethno-cultural dominant cluster, will have a worldview similar to the other key institutions, and demonstrate practices primarily geared to the interests of the elite and the maintenance of the socio-economic order.

A second view assumes that the media as a whole have no particular set of political relationships and that these remain in the realm of individual proprietors or governments. Echoing our opening discussion, the media in sum provide the conditions under which a public sphere can emerge, and prosper. In this sense the media are truly embedded in social relations. The very differentiation of the media – by ownership, by technology, by mode, by location, by audience – ensures a robust public debate and a responsive and flexible terrain of communication. In this perspective, society is made up of interest groups rather than elites and masses/non-elites, each of which compete for resources and pursue their own interests. The media operate at a meta-level to ensure the conditions for social cohesiveness – widespread stakeholder engagement.

The third view also points to an engaged media, but argues that the media represent the interests of the masses against the elites; the unorganised populace against bureaucracy, corporations and the political class; and the common people against the privileged echelons. The essential values of the society are found among those without power, those whose daily lives are determined by political and corporate decisions over which they have little influence. The media knit the ordinary citizen into the fabric of society, ensuring they are part of the economic processes of production and consumption, giving them access to the furthest reaches of their aspirations and dreams, providing them with information they need to make their everyday decisions.

## Media practices and social cohesion

While the media may have many effects on social cohesion, it is useful to realise that those effects we can readily identify may operate in different directions for different groups at different times. We can see this more clearly if we examine four interconnected ways in which the media process social information, and communicate it to audiences: marginalisation, stereotyping, mobilisation and fragmentation. Each of these processes is open to interpretation from each of our three perspectives.

Table 13.1 identifies modes and examples of media practices in relation to social cohesion, providing a summary description of how different theoretical understandings of the media intersect with different media practices. These categories show how a focus on different points in the process chain reveals specific



**Table 13.1 Modes and examples of media practices**

| Theory/Process | Marginalisation | Stereotyping | Mobilisation | Fragmentation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Media as instrument of control | Sustains dominant ethno-cultural groups; represents dominant worldview | Selectively simplifies and characterises threats to interests of dominant cultures | Directs society against those seen as threat | Limits participation of marginalised groups; supports fragmentation of minority media |
| Media as public sphere | Seeks to facilitate expression of diverse worldviews | Acts to undermine stereotypes by portraying contradictory and complex realities | Supports the expression of culture and opinion by multiple publics | Supports participation and group interaction |
| Media as populist hero | Supports expression of populist 'real values' against perceived elites | Operates on crude stereotypes that differentiate 'mainstream' from others | Mobilises masses when perception that threat to core values not acted on by elites | Only allows mainstream views; seeks to fragment and exclude 'others' |

issues and problems. It also demonstrates how assumptions about the role of the media can produce somewhat normative versions of social cohesion.

Marginalisation refers to the presentation of social groups as outside society, as sitting on the edge and disconnected from the cohesive centre. In its study of social distance in the late 1980s (McAllister & Moore 1989, 1991), the Commonwealth government's Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) proposed that every ethno-cultural group in Australia had a broad mind-map of the society on which it could locate itself and other groups. Proximity indicated warmth and willingness to interact, while distance exemplified exclusion and reluctance to interact. The OMA researchers concluded there was a series of circles of acceptable groups in Australia, with white Europeans at the core, and Muslims and Aborigines on the periphery. Interestingly, while different ethnic groups located themselves in different relationships to each other, there was clearer unanimity about the distance from Muslim and Aboriginal Australians (that is, Muslims were most like everyone else in their attitudes to Aborigines; Aborigines were most like everyone else in their attitudes to Muslims) (Holton 1997). Current debates about the relation of Muslim Australians to the wider society fit into this dynamic; similar sorts of perspectives were widespread in the immediate postwar period in Australia in relation to Jewish refugees, and have applied at various other times to Italo-Australians and Vietnamese Australians, even well after their arrival and settlement (Jakubowicz 1994). In particular, marginalisation refers to moral appraisals, examining whether the social group under discussion can possibly ever 'cohere' with the rest of the society they are entering.

In his series of studies of the Australian media and Islam, the Middle East and Arabs, Peter Manning suggests that a deeply embedded 'orientalism' (after Edward Said's use of the term as a category of exclusion; Said 1995) infects the media's deep structures of thought and representation. Through careful and detailed examination of the language, images, and narratives of the media,

Manning concludes that they offer a sustained picture of an unapproachable and unassimilable Other, thereby serving the effective role of protecting the political, economic and cultural power of the dominant ethno-cultural and class groups in Australia (Manning 2004, 2006).

Treating the media as a public sphere, a space in which publics are formed, a space between government and the terrain of economic relations, so a conduit for 'civil society', focuses our attention on processes of inclusion, of the constitution of bridging social capital, and the pressure towards greater social cohesion through intergroup engagement. This view recognises those deeply entrenched historical orientations towards traditions and social order, but moves beyond this recognition to examine points of mutual acknowledgment and intercommunication. Such views are exemplified by interest in the transformation in the Australian media over recent decades, such as through the emergence of minority journalists and entertainers in the mainstream, and the much greater public acceptance of cultural diversity through society. In this perspective tolerance rather than intolerance becomes the benchmark, where barriers are seen as challenges rather than obstacles. Thus marginalisation is perceived as one such challenge, and efforts are made to widen the field of participation in media discussions.

One example of such a process can be found in the permeation of commercial television by the panel-format discussion of issues of public concern in relation to social cohesion. This format has long been the mainstay of the SBS television program *Insight*, which brings people and the general public into a situation of interaction around a matter of contention. SBS of course has been chartered to develop a multi-ethnic public space, so its involvement makes a positive if minority contribution. The commercial Nine network has also provided some such opportunities, where for instance *Hypotheticals* moderator Geoffrey Robertson has posed ethical dilemmas for a cross-section of stakeholders in a program about Australia under attack (from Islamic terrorists) (Robertson 2005). Another Nine network panel session addressed the question of social cohesion head on, proposing that the good Muslim/bad Aussie dyad has 'been the question at the heart of passionate debate, prejudice and violence. The answer is overdue and needs to be addressed' (National Nine Network 2006). That program generated in turn a highly critical major discussion on a Muslim discussion list (Muslimvillage.net 2006).

In the wider media (that is, away from the television programs whose main and small audiences are drawn from the more educated and cosmopolitan groups in Australian society), the openness of the dialogue, while less evident, still exists. Two Arab Australian journalists, Nadia Jamal and Taghred Chandab, authors of a non-fiction collection for young adults, *The Glory Garage* (2005), have also been able to write for the popular tabloid press, and do so in an inviting and non-confrontational manner. Their presence is more than tokenistic, but they still represent a small minority of print and electronic media reporters and writers. The blogosphere may also be read to represent an emerging public sphere of comparatively unencumbered communication within communities of interest. Contributors to an Australian Muslim blog express a range of attitudes to the Jamal/Chandab representation of Muslim female modernity – ranging from the most positive affirmation of integration to the strongest condemnation of their seduction away from true Islamic practices (Muslimvillage.net 2005).



Those who see the media as populist defenders of the underdog might view media involvement in marginalisation rather differently. Part of this debate is captured in another blog, in this case one from Sydney University (Thinking-culture 2006). The interchange was initiated by 'Ann', who was publicising a Suvendrini Perera piece (Perera 2006) on Cronulla as an instance of race terror. Perera argues that the media in the broad, and specific media figures in particular (mostly associated with the journal *Quadrant*), have advanced what is to her a race war against those who are not of the elite or the core culture. One of her antagonists, Dr Jim Hull, seeks to demolish this position by arguing that there is a naturalness about the Cronulla locals' defence of their space, and that media accounts and analyses by commentators such as Keith Windschuttle (*The Australian*, 17 December 2005) simply defend that 'truth' and show up the prejudices of the academics, who are not willing to grasp its importance.

Stereotyping has been a continuing focus of argument in discussions of the media. Teun van Dijk has demonstrated the ways in which racism can be fuelled by media management of the news process. Van Dijk (2000: 34) argues that racism is constructed discursively, that is 'expressed, enacted, and confirmed by text and talk'. Racism is reproduced through two major discursive fields: a component that occurs in everyday discrimination and other social practices, and a cognitive component, which involves 'knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values' (ibid.: 35). In effect the media discourses on minorities and on racism are presented as consensual, the one containing embedded racist assumptions and practices, the other denying such biases are present. The dominant culture's media entangle marginalisation, stereotyping, (de)mobilisation and fragmentation as recurrent modes of reporting minority issues – or more specifically, minority issues that are perceived to threaten majority or dominant interests.

## Cronulla case study

A New South Wales police report (Clennell 2006) specifically identified the role of media personalities, in particular three talkback radio hosts (Mediawatch 2006), as a major factor in the communication of information that helped draw the crowds to the scene that hot Sunday in December 2005. Cronulla lends itself therefore to understanding something about how the media relate to social cohesion.

The Cronulla whites/locals discourse was carried in the first few days, and indeed fed, by the popular media; it reflected and reinforced the sense of unease that the locals had about their space being invaded. The narratives in the blogs, and vox pops drawn on by newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph*, began from the assertion that young Australians had been trying to enjoy their traditional lifestyle on Cronulla beach. Over recent years groups of Muslim Lebanese young men had been visiting the beach in packs, ogling the young Australian women there, while describing them loudly and lewdly in demeaning ways, reflecting their supposedly well-known sexist and chauvinist attitudes to women (a view reinforced by the Prime Minister when he said, 'there are within some sections

of the Islamic community, an attitude towards women which is out of line with the mainstream Australian attitude' (Howard 2006).

The media stories continued with the 'localism' narrative, a perspective both advanced (Barclay & West 2006) and empathetically critiqued in academic commentaries (Evers 2006). Muslims stayed fully dressed on the beach, and did not use the waves – or if they did, they soon got into difficulties and had to be rescued. They did not surf, and if they tried to, they would be repulsed from waves long taken as for locals only.

The supposedly alien values of Lebanese Muslims had been paraded to the public over the previous four years or so, in the media reporting of the lurid trials of a small number of Lebanese and other Muslim men convicted of kidnapping and raping a number of teenage 'Aussie' women (Hartley & Green 2006). Cronulla locals felt the presence of these men to be intimidating and malevolent, and when the men were finally confronted and told by local lifesavers – the epitomic representatives of Australian heroism – that their behaviour was intolerable, the intruders reacted violently. On a hot day, with a lot of anger, alcohol and resentment around, the invasion by the MEAs was just too much – and in defence of place, history and the inviolability of their women, the local boys stood up to their enemies, and war began. Then, in a cowardly riposte, the MEAs returned over the next two nights in darkness, in their chariots – hotted-up cars – to destroy the place. Here was a sure sign that they were not truly Australian, and they were acting out of tribalism, a value-set communicated by the popular media as being totally un-Australian.

The countervailing discourse, presented by a few academic commentators (Poynting 2006) and minority community representatives, argued a very different scenario. For them, the Cronulla beaches had been the protected space of young white males, where they could ride their surfboards, ogle the blonde young women on the sand who reciprocate by fawning at their heroes, and indulge themselves in various more or less recreational drugs. When men of Middle Eastern appearance and their families appear, they are viewed with suspicion, made to feel unwelcome, and hectored until they depart. Their women, sometimes dressed in hijab, are offensive and threatening. The northern part of the beach had long been staked out by the locals, and anyone, especially 'hooked nosed monobrows' as one Lebanese blogger described himself, are resented.

One hot day this got out of hand and young men of 'Middle Eastern appearance' attacked some young off-duty lifesavers who had made disparaging remarks about Muslims (to wit, that they couldn't swim and would drown and have to be rescued) – the epitome of white male arrogance. The white boys rallied their clan; a week later some 5000 white youths, with help from some white women, heavily lubricated with alcohol, egged on by the recently obscure but now neo-fascist groups grasping for the limelight, beat the MEAs in full view of the TV cameras, following a week of SMS texting and talkback radio-sponsored demands for vengeance. These events form part of the omnipresent harassment and intimidation of Muslims in Australia, a residue of the policies and mindsets of White Australia, a *weltanschauung* ('the "we grew here, you flew here" brigade') that cannot cope with the presence of the Other. The Anglos behaved as they would in expressing their white power– especially given their heavy use



of alcohol, forbidden to Muslims. The events at Cronulla called forth a repressed anger at this treatment, and while the reactive violence and property damage by Muslim youth cannot be justified, their behaviour was at least comprehensible in the heat of the moment and in the face of the assault on their honour.

The first two discourses were repeated in the media, and in more flamboyant forms, filled the blogs and listservs of white, and Muslim, cyberspace (Tremayne 2007). At the same time an official government and police discourse was immediately put into place, seeking both to defuse the conflict and also to marginalise the participants, so that their claims to representing true Australianness on the one hand, and Lebanese superiority on the other, would not be legitimised. The government was also worried about the massive international publicity given to the events.

The aim was therefore to depoliticise the definitions of the situation. It was crucial for the government that rising hostility against Muslim communities not be fed by the media barrage, and at the same time alienation from the government among both Muslim communities and the broader society not be intensified by their apparent failures to act. Yet given the strong history of commitment to Australian values and lifestyles by the national government, it could not be seen to be deserting its heartland and core supporters.

The role of the media in communicating and reinforcing ideas about folk devils, through the creation of moral panics, is well documented (Ball-Rokeach 2001; Cutcliffe & Hannigan 2001). Amplification of apprehension on all sides, polarisation of views and mobilisation of action all required active media involvement. In the Cronulla case, the expansion of digital technologies magnified the process. While it is important to distinguish between technologies used by the general population to communicate (mobile phones, CB radios, emails) and media with editorial managers deciding what was to run (newspapers, talkback radio, television, online newsletters, websites, blogs), the speed of transmission of information soon meant that they were inextricably intermingled.

Thus newspapers were trawling blogs looking for comments, while blogs sucked down content they agreed with and wanted to argue with from the online versions of the mainstream media, while radio was reading out SMS messages (some 270 000 SMS messages were sent in the days before the riots, according to a police report). Some mainstream commentators also ran blogs attached to their columns, which were linked in convoluted strings of assertion and response. Talkback radio hosts, a number of whom stoked the hysteria by calling on listeners to respond to the SMS messages being circulated – reading them on air a number of times – played a central role, both in mobilising the Anglo-Australian masses, and conveying their views on events to politicians, with whom they were very influential. Brian Wilshire, 2GB radio late-night talkback host, would capture the whole range of factors identified above in his 15 December 2005 broadcast:

> Brian Wilshire: We Australians do not have to apologise for anything. The surfies that rioted in a drunken riot, they have to apologise, that's fair . . . My anger is reserved for the politicians and bureaucrats who conspired to bring in people who were guaranteed to be incompatible and have demonstrated that in every country into which they have moved . . .

> BW: Many of them have parents who were first cousins, whose parents were first cousins, because of the culture – it's not a religious thing, it doesn't say this in the Koran – but it's a cultural thing for some part of the world to have parents who are very closely related. The result of this is inbreeding, the result of which is uneducationable people . . . and very low IQ. (Mediawatch 2006)

For Muslim youth the pages of the many Muslim online forums provided venues for their anger and frustration, where the various politico-religious tendencies in the communities struggled for positions from which they could 'explain' the situation, and either calm or inflame their followers.

## Media strategies for building social cohesion

While it could be concluded that the overall effect of the media serves to undermine social cohesion by devalorising minorities who do not accord with the core culture, we need to see a rather more contradictory scenario at work. The media in the broad clearly have an investment in a socially cohesive society, even if their short-term interests may lie in heightened social conflict that sells newspapers and attracts audiences.

The media as organisations clearly recognise some of their responsibilities in this regard. In Australia the commercial media operate under their own codes of practice, which specifically require media proprietors to be cognisant in certain cases of the impact of their publications and broadcasts. Over recent years major campaigns by government and community organisations have made an impact on media practices, particularly in regard to suicide and self-harm (most stories are not reported to reduce copycat behaviour), and mental illness (caricature, stereotype and stigmatisation issues are better recognised).

There have also been a number of rather more proactive attempts to moderate media practices in relation to ethno-cultural minorities. The Human Rights Commission Inquiries into Racist Violence and into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody both singled out the media as significant contributors to the conditions in which intergroup violence and self-harm occurred, arguing that they needed to be far more aware of their impact, and far more inclusive of minority perspectives (and participation). The impact of these recommendations has been limited by the reluctance of government to provide sustained resources to follow through on their implementation (Jakubowicz 2003a).

Both the industry and the national government have established formal mechanisms for complaints, which suggest that rights of reply and clarification should be normal media practice. The Press Council, a voluntary industry body for the print media, includes some community representation. It adjudicates on complaints regarding misleading press stories, but only does so if no formal legal action is being taken elsewhere (such as for defamation or to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission).

The electronic media have complaints procedures in relation to their codes of practice and guidelines, which require a direct complaint to the broadcaster; if the complainant is not satisfied with the response, the complaint can be referred



to the Australian Communication and Media Authority. ACMA (2006) registers the industry codes of practice and can also take complaints about Internet content. ACMA does have legal powers of compulsion, and can in extreme cases suspend or cancel broadcast licences. The national broadcasters have internal complaints mechanisms, with the ABC in particular facing a series of complaints about bias against conservative political perspectives, especially over the Iraq war (Jakubowicz & Jacka 2004). In late 2006, the ABC board introduced the office of editorial controller, to monitor 'balance' in all its programming.

As already suggested, there are other legal avenues for action, under both state and federal anti-discrimination law. Broadcasters tend to be rather more careful in relation to practices that might lead to major cases; most of the legal activity has occurred in relation to the Internet. In 2002 the Federal Court ruled in favour of an Executive Council of Australian Jewry application for enforcement of a 2000 HREOC determination that the Adelaide Institute's Holocaust denial site was in breach of the Racial Discrimination human rights law (HREOC 2002). A similar case for action under the *Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* was taken by the Islamic Council of Victoria against the Catch the Fire Ministries, an evangelical Christian group, alleging defamation of Muslims by the Ministries' pastors at a seminar that was recorded and then distributed. In 2005 the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal found in favour of the Council and imposed a remedy (VCAT 2005). A successful appeal had the decision returned to VCAT for rehearing.

Affirmative action is permitted but not mandated within Australian equal opportunity practice, and merit-based support for participation by underrepresented groups can occur. For the most part (except in relation to women and, for specific projects, Indigenous people), the media have not taken up the opportunities represented by these possibilities in relation to ethno-cultural groups. Major initiatives such as the UK employers' strategy for disability in the electronic media have not surfaced in Australia, with a reluctance by the media to address disability issues in any serious form (Jakubowicz 2003b). No strategies appear to operate in relation to ethno-cultural groups, though organisations such as the National Muslim Women's Network do have media action plans (<http://www.mwnna.org.au/aboutus.htm>), and do support seminars and forums on media issues.

While media organisations appear to vacillate between seeing themselves as any one of our three models – elite servants/savants, democratic communicators or populist heroes – one group is squarely concerned with advancing the idea of media practitioners as agents of the public sphere. The Journalism Education Association (<http://www.jea.org.au>) sees one its aims as the promotion of freedom of expression and communication, promoted in part through its Australian Journalism Review. Thus new generations of journalists and other media workers, exposed to these ideas, might be more aware of the importance of inclusive media practices.

Media literacy refers to the development of a set of skills that allows audiences to identify key media practices, understand their causes and likely trajectories, and apply an analytical and reflective mind to the consumption of media product. Media literacy requires curriculum, resources, trained teachers, and education

systems that view it as a significant skill base for future citizenship. While organisations such as the Australian Teachers of Media have made important advances in arguing such a case, the culture wars have also drawn media literacy into some heated debates about 'facts' and 'fashionable ideology'. A New York report by the Free Expression project, reviewing world debates including those in Australia, concluded that 'critical thinking is an essential skill for all citizens in a democracy, whether they are evaluating a TV ad, an action movie, or a news report of a politician's speech' (Heins & Cho 2003).

Our brief overview reveals the somewhat controversial and often contradictory tendencies in the media's role in relation to social cohesion. In reflecting on the range of these approaches to dealing with consequences of this situation, we can deduce that a social cohesion that is based on democratic and equitable participation is probably more stable and productive than one enforced through hegemonic ideologies or threats of violence and practices of exclusion.

## Conclusion

Social cohesion remains a term with many connotations, ranging from a monocultural hierarchy of strict order to a landscape of egalitarian 'tribes' linked only by a shared space over which they agree not to fight. A European Union report has reviewed a number of models, including:

(a) Five parameters: i) belonging/isolation in relation to shared values; ii) inclusion/exclusion in relation to opportunity; iii) participation/non-involvement; iv) recognition/rejection of pluralism; v) legitimacy/illegitimacy of mediating institutions;
(b) Mapping: i) ties that bind; ii) differences and divisions; iii) networks of association;
(c) Social capital: i) absence of social exclusion; ii) interactions between groups; iii) shared values and group interpretations.

The author concludes that

> the concept of social cohesion incorporates mainly two societal goal dimensions which can be analytically distinguished:
> (1) The first dimension concerns the reduction of disparities, inequalities and social exclusion.
> (2) The second dimension concerns the strengthening of social relations, interactions and ties. This dimension embraces all aspects which are generally also considered as the social capital of a society. (Berger-Schmitt 2000: 3–4)

If we return to Charles Husband's interrogation of what functions we might expect the media to serve in our society, then these two goals set some valuable boundaries. In effect there can be neither a completely cohesive society – where there is no dissent, difference of opinion, or social stratification – nor can societies long survive without violence (of either the oppressed or the oppressors) if they are heavily stratified along lines where class, race, religion or culture reinforce the exclusionary effects of each other. The media can do something to reduce



disparities of access to the public sphere, inequalities of knowledge about the way society could work, and the four processes of social exclusion we identified: marginalisation, stereotyping, demobilisation, and fragmentation.

Second, the media can strengthen ties both within and across groups. Too dangerously, it is easier to build the bonds within groups by celebrating their best features, and denigrating the poorer values of their opponents, than it is to build bridges between groups, overcoming the deeply embedded prejudices bred from social exclusion. This argument works in every direction: minority communities face huge challenges in bridging into majoritarian situations, yet to withdraw from the interchange is as destructive for them as for the dominant communities.

The media cannot pretend they are not both part of the problem of social cohesion and part of the potential solution.