

# “Whispers on the wind”: social inclusion and the media

A discussion article

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## **Abstract**

What is the relationship between the growth and expansion of various forms of the media and chronologically coterminous social movements? This paper deliberately sets out to raise more questions than it attempts to answer. Two key ideas are examined: what is meant by social inclusion and how the term is being used in this paper to refer to the breakdown of exclusionary practices. A continuum of policies is suggested which range from recognition to inclusion. The growth of the media is explored, located in the West and Australia. The term media is not closely examined; I use it to refer to the usual suspects- print, radio, television, the new electronic media. The paper is essentially an historical overview from the 17th century to the present day, linking social movements and developments in the transmission of information through the ephemeral practices of the media.

**Key words:** Social Inclusion, Social justice, Literacy, Media, Social Policy

The idea that the media may be connected or intertwined with social movements is not new, and this paper seeks to examine some questions that arise from thinking about the history of the media in the Western world. There are a range of questions that demand exploration with the conflation of the two discourses: Has the media enabled, demanded or actively created a space for the inclusion of varying groups in society and how has this been done? Is it that the movements would have existed without the transmission of their central ideas through the media? Have those

organs of information actively supported (even while condemning) revolutions through which sectors of society have become integrated into the mainstream?

The particular issue that I am concerned with is the notion of social inclusion which has been recently embedded in government policy in developed nations. There are several questions which I explore: what is social inclusion? what is the relationship between the growth and expansion of various forms of the media and social movements which emerge simultaneously? Has the media enabled, demanded, opposed or actively created a space for particular groups that previously had no place within the accepted society? Is there such a thing as the mainstream of society into which some groups become included as a result of media intervention or are those marginalised elements of society merely identified but not actually included?

This paper is divided into two sections. In the first I explore the conceptualisation of social inclusion as policy and as the philosophical examinations of the balances between social inclusion, social exclusion, tolerance and acceptance. The second section is an overview of the rise of the contemporary media from its foundations in the fifteenth century in Europe, which seeks to examine the ways in which practices of inclusion have been engaged.

### **Social Inclusion**

Since 1996 the United Kingdom, Europe and latterly Australia, have all been embracing the notion of social inclusion at a policy level. In the UK, the policies are aimed at specific targeted groups that have previously been seen as marginalised or socially excluded (Brown et al 2008, Allan 2003, Edwards et al 2001, 2011). The Equality Act in the UK was passed in 2010 and brings together all previous legislation into one<sup>ii</sup> document, identifying groups and indicating that all possible attempts be made to change their status from social exclusion to social inclusion. These groups include those with disabilities or mental illness, refugees, homeless and offenders.

In Australia the policy (DEEWR 2009) on social inclusion is based upon the EU experience, and draws upon Levitas' (2003 cited in DEEWR 2009) paper to indicate three significant elements of "exclusion": 1, the ability to participate in the "customary life of the society", i.e. poverty; 2, entry into the labour force; and 3, the problems associated with specific outsider groups. The establishment of a Social Inclusion Board in 2009<sup>iii</sup> set out a framework of aspirations and approaches, and clearly indicated the parameters that the government body saw as indicating "social inclusion": access to jobs, services, community, being heard and crisis management. There have been critics of the policy, such as Ian Goodwin-Smith (2009) in Australia, and others in the EU (Allan et al 2003, Huxley and Thornicroft 2003). Usually these critics are concerned that the policies do not go far enough in terms of inclusion of specific groups.

What most interests me is the underpinning theoretical frameworks. It seems that after generations of Marxist analysis, the policy makers have abandoned the older ideological terms for exploring difference (worker/capitalist), but have taken for granted that there is a division with society along the lines of those who fully enjoy the "customary life of the society" and those who do not. Labonte (2004:117) identifies the list of the excluded as being: "women, racial minorities, the poor and the sick, those with disabilities, children and youth"- a list that recurs, with some variations, frequently in the literature.

So what do these terms mean? What is social inclusion? Can it exist without social exclusion? What are some of the theoretical implications of the polarity? Is there another position- and what does that look like?

### **Theoretical issues**

The discourse of social inclusion as policy is a broad one and offers a range of positions. The common thread seems to be that of the exercise of power. Labonte asks (2004:p117):

“how does one go about including individuals and groups in a set of structured social relationships responsible for excluding them in the first place? Or...to what extent do efforts at social inclusion accommodate people to relative powerlessness rather than challenge the hierarchies that create it?”

It is almost as though there is a continuum with social exclusion at one end, modified by Galleotti's “recognition” (cited in Laergaard 2008) through the practices of toleration (Habermas 1998) and acceptance to a social inclusion in which specific groups are still identified but permitted to participate. The fatal step beyond into assimilation in which the identifying differences are obliterated seems to be one that contemporary policy makers are keen to avoid with their forebears having already experimented with it in the twentieth century.

Policies of social exclusion are easy to recognize historically: they are those practices which isolate, expel and exterminate those classified as Other (Habermas 1998), the outsiders who are not permitted to taint the polity. All of the genocides and inquisitions fall into this category. Recognition, (Laergaard 2008), is the driving force to acknowledge that a formerly diffuse and unacknowledged element of society actually has commonalities which demand that the political perception becomes one of a group. The women's movement and the demands that the broader society acknowledge and invest as citizens is an example of the way in which recognition creates policy.

Toleration is where the differences are visible and yet permitted (Thomassen 2006). Religious practices are the most commonly cited because they often a demonstrations of distinctiveness, and frequently are highly visible in terms of dress codes or public meetings. The practice of public toleration, which enables differences to be accepted, further requires explicit acknowledgement and an admission that there are visible similarities between the majority and the visible minority. The multiculturalism policies of the late twentieth century are instances of the attempts at toleration.

The current social inclusion policies retain the identification of specific groups with the aim of offering all the opportunity to be fully functioning citizens, more as a result of contemporary liberalism (cf Rawls) as the underpinning ideology of the developed world (Laergaard 2008:295): “This means that it is the responsibility of the liberal state, as a matter of justice, to secure that all members of the state have equal rights and opportunities”.

The issue is one of identification as groups of the Other, i.e., not part of the Self (Fabian 1983, Habermas 1998, Marcus and Fisher 1988). The distinction is not only oppositional; it tends to support extant ideological positions. In the French philosophical discourse, deriving from Hegel and finding later expression in Husserl, Sartre and Derrida, the concept of the Other is used to enable the Self to be defined. The Other is everything that the Self is not. The use of the polarity to distinguish between social and cultural groups has become a significant analytic tool, as Habermas shows: (1998:224) “inclusion means that the political community stays

open to include citizens of any background without confining those *Others* within the uniformity of a homogeneous national community”.

Labonte (2004:117) points out that the term social inclusion removes the blame from the target groups and locates it in the relationships of power that dominate society; however he adds a cautionary note (2004:118): “Uncritical use of social inclusion can blind us to the use, abuse and distribution of power”. For Iris Young (Young 1997, Falbo 2008), the key to inclusion at the broadest level is the communicative model of democracy which demands access by all to the means of political decision-making; a view also held by Asgarkhani (2007).

One of the more interesting elements of the current legislative drive to social inclusion is the use of Sen and Nussbaum’s (1993) conceptualisation of “capabilities” which emphasize potential and opportunity rather than outcomes. Labonte (2004:119) makes the point that the tension inherent in the divide between social inclusion and social exclusion is a parallel of the polarised norms of social justice where the emphasis shifts from equality of opportunity to equality of outcome.

The creation of policy is a purposeful and conscious act on the part of lawgivers or rulers, and the range of policies that cover the continuum from social exclusion to social inclusion have all been developed as a result of deliberation and application of current thinking. There is, however, another aspect to social inclusion which does not derive directly from the seat of power. This is the paradigm shift that occurs within the community or through organs of the society that may be embedded within the structures of power, but which have claims to independence from the lawmakers. I am particularly concerned with those changes in the collective consciousness (Durkheim 1982) that reframe the location of a group within society from being Other to part of the Self.

This is the context in which I want to examine the role of the media, as agents of change, whether deliberately or not, over the past four centuries. How has the media contributed to shifts in social inclusion? Where have these shifts demonstrated an element of the continuum?

## **Media**

The beginnings of the media in the West are often traced to the invention of the printing press (Briggs and Burke 2005, Stevenson 1995) although printing using blocks had been known for some time, and indeed in China for several centuries. The Gutenberg innovation of using a modified wine press, combined with platens that contained movable type, revolutionised the dissemination of information throughout Europe, and later, the New World as well. The most significant impact that the printing press had was upon the control of literacy, which prior to that time had been firmly held in the hands of the Church. Even the aristocracy were beholden to the Church for education, and usually had to employ clerics to teach their sons to read, and to carry out administrative duties for them. It is not too extravagant to say that the printing press made the Protestant Reformation possible in the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century as books, particularly the Scriptures, no longer cost the equivalent of one year’s work to produce, but could be reproduced in significant quantities, and for the first time, in the languages of the people. The movement towards creating texts in the vernacular had begun in the thirteenth century, with people like Petrarch, Boccaccio and Chaucer, but to be able to access the Holy books in the peoples’ languages gave Luther and other reformers a foundation for their religious ambitions. As Weber (1930) pointed out, the Protestant Reformation was inextricably bound up with the rise of two other significant institutions: Capitalism and Bureaucracy. For

capitalism to grow, there was a need for the development of a class of the literate because merchants needed to keep records and communicate with each other for trade purposes. Foucault (1991) reflected on the growing needs for data about the population as the nature of the state changed from the principalities of Macchiavelli's day to the nation states which emerged over the next three centuries. This change in governance of the polities was largely given impetus in Europe by the growing dissension between Protestant and Catholic states, as divisions began to become apparent upon lines of common languages and territories held by those who shared common beliefs. It was also supported by the growing investment in a capitalist economy in many of the emerging states, especially the Protestant ones, while Catholic nations tended to cling to feudalist agriculture as the source of the state wealth. As the nation states emerged, the means of controlling and managing their affairs became more and more invested in the hands of a growing bureaucracy. This was not unique to Europe, as Weber also pointed out (1929); it had already been the case in China for over a millennium.

From the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the religious and political shifts in Europe demanded the growth of two new literate groups- the bureaucrats and the bourgeoisie, or the clerks and the capitalists, if you will. Almost entirely composed of men, and usually from families which were neither peasant nor aristocrat, these literate servants of state and money broadened the base on which power could be built. In previous times, the only means of social inclusion for most was the Church. The access to information, texts, and materials written in the vernacular, opened the door to a wider range of experience and influence than ever before. The first newspaper was established in Venice around the mid sixteenth century (Ackroyd 2009), and gave its name- *La Gazzetta*- to thousands of imitators over the next five centuries. Venice was particularly well suited to this innovation: as a mercantile city, with a democratic oligarchy that lasted over a thousand years, a tradition of literacy that encompassed most of the population and an inherent fascination with both secrets and gossip, the invention of both newspapers and investigative journalism seemed inevitable.

The eighteenth century, which has been seen as the source of the modern media (Briggs and Burke 2005, Curran 2002, Stevenson 1995) with the emergence of the periodicals, did provide an opportunity to develop a wider audience in the English-speaking world, however, the problem was that the limitations imposed by the lack of education meant that the core of people with access to information remained quite small. The journals of the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, in both Europe and the New World, were largely available only upon subscription which meant that there was a class limitation to the readership (Downie 2008, Goff 1998). Some politicians saw the opportunity to create public opinion (Targett 1994, Downie 2008), particularly Walpole in England and Franklin in the emerging United States, later Australia produced David Syme and J F Archibald who strove to shape the nation. This was a theme which was to be repeated until the present day, when a handful of owners of media corporations attempt to choose world leaders, dispose of others and interfere in political process without any apparent curbs or constraints.

There were some exceptions to the costly subscriptions: newssheets, lampoons and even some early newspapers did make access more available with lower prices, and this in turn led to the movement for the Penny Press in the nineteenth century (Briggs and Burke 2005, Curran 2002, Friedman 2005, Nerone 1987). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the literate mainstream of European societies included males of the capitalist and bureaucratic classes,

together with the aristocracy and a few women who were privately educated. The movement towards providing a press which would be unassailable by the government of the day and cheaply accessible to the masses was following a political and social ideal, which was in tune with the reforming movements that were attempting to prevent children working from very young ages, developing sanitation for cities, and finding philanthropic outlets for salvation by those who had made vast fortunes in the Industrial Revolution. Intriguingly, it is quite late in this reforming zeal that characterised particularly the British in the early nineteenth century that thought was given to universal education.

In the Antipodes, the ideal of free, secular and compulsory education was embraced only in the 1870s, at precisely the same time as in the United Kingdom. In the United States, the tradition of the parish school, paid for by the parishioners, had been retained with the outcome that education remained a commercial venture, with those able to pay learning to read. By 1870 there were some 5000 newspapers in the United States<sup>iv</sup>, in Australia at that time every large city and many small ones had their own newspapers, and in the United Kingdom had around 200 newspapers and a range of periodicals, while it seems almost impossible to track how many were being printed in continental Europe.

Newspapers were not content however to simply spread the news- their editors and owners became engaged with the community through taking stands: political, social and religious. Famous editors were able to shape opinion or at least disguise the bias with which they wrote. JF Archibald, the editor of the periodical, *The Bulletin*, was very clear about his bias against the Chinese, the aborigines, the Pacific Islanders, women and almost all foreigners. The masthead "Australia for the White Man" clearly indicated who was and was not to be included in Archibald's society. Putnis (2010:153ff) argues that the time lag of obtaining the news from Europe and its reporting in local Australian news media actually contributed to the growth of Australian nationalism and a slow separation from the British.

1870 is a significant date for this study because it was also the year in which the *Telegraph* became a central feature of the dissemination of information (Winseck 1999.), across the Atlantic, across Europe to India and across Australia. The newspapers which had been the source of world information now had access to stories from across the globe, albeit at several days or weeks lapse from the event to the printing. This was the very moment in which the education of children was seen as having the potential to protect the future, and the core group of those who were literate was inexorably expanding.

Women were one of the first social groups to benefit from the education movement. While girls had been educated before, usually privately and within rich families or in convent schools, it was only when universal education became a driving reform that the girls were included, and brave souls like Emily Davies founded women's colleges like Girton (Steeves, 1987; Dicenzo, 2000). While the suffrage movement created their own journals and newspapers (Dicenzo 2000:115), notably *Votes for Women* (1907-1918), it was the next development of the modern media which was to have a significant impact on the inclusion of women within the social mainstream, or rather the parallel development of three distinct media. These were the invention and proliferation of radio, and the emergence of the technologies of film and the phonograph. While women had won the vote in Australia for Federation, in the USA, Britain and Europe they were still battling to be heard for another two decades. While many newspapers and journals expended a great deal of energy and money opposing female suffrage, the images of suffragists chaining

themselves to the railings or throwing themselves under the hooves of horses became available to the public at the same time as recordings and a few radio broadcasts of speeches crept into the living rooms of the nations. That these were real people, with real ideas and real passions came as a revelation, humanising both the suffragists and enabling the recognition that there could be reason to support their cause.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women became included rather than just tolerated as they became full citizens. What had been a core, a mainstream, that consisted of just middle and upper class men, now had to expand to make way for the inclusion of women and even the now-literate working class men. It did not mean that women had reached equality with men, either politically or economically, but it did mean that later degrees of inclusion were now possible. One of the early signs within the media of this inclusion was the proliferation in the early part of the century of print media, magazines, periodicals, journals and even newspaper sections, devoted to the interests of the "fair sex". The great survivor of the Australia print media, the now oddly named *The Australian Women's Weekly* (published monthly), carried women through wars and weddings, royals and celebrities, controversies and consequences, and managed to purvey effective advertising directly to the target demographic for over seventy-five years.

It took the next innovation within the media to open the doors to social inclusion of another group within society. The introduction of television in the years succeeding the end of world war two meant that news was being delivered directly, even to those who were not literate. Radio had taken up this challenge in the first half of the century, but television had pictures to make the events seem real. Despite Orson Welles and the War of the Worlds fiasco, there could be a sense of unreality when the news was on the radio, but the images of the flickering box changed that forever. The civil rights movement in the USA and even the Freedom ride in Australia were played out in front of the television cameras. These frightening "blacks" became people of colour; Martin Luther King whom we had seen give a speech which still inspires became a man whose point we could see. While there were many commentators who were violently opposed to civil rights, it was the images of the children splashing in the pool like any kids on a hot summer's day, the brave young girl going to an all white school in a far off country that pricked the collective conscience and opened the door a crack. The civil rights movement still continues, the social inclusion of people of colour is by no means complete within Australian or American societies, but the impact of those television images meant that the USA now has a black president, Australian television has several aboriginal led and produced programmes, and the society is stretching towards tolerance and eventual social inclusion.

The 1970s also saw the media open a space for the awareness of other socially excluded groups. The Californian Gay Pride marches found media coverage, originally as news stories, and then, when Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras became an annual event, as regular features of normal viewing. The Mardi Gras parade dates from 1978, and is the centrepiece of a week-long festival of events, including film and writer's festivals. For over a decade the parade was broadcast by the national broadcaster and watched by large audiences. The level of homophobia in Australian culture may not have changed significantly, but the expression of it has certainly been reduced over the last three decades. The "love that dare not speak its name" that sent Oscar Wilde to prison in the nineteenth century, now sends greetings to gay lovers on Oscar awards nights to an audience in the billions. Does

this mean that the social inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons has now become assured, or is it that toleration has reached an unparalleled level as a result of the media allowing this group to collectively emerge from the closet and into the mainstream?

The development of the new media at the beginning of the twenty-first century seems to be having a significant effect on changing even the definitions of social inclusion, although Winseck (1999) argues that the development and stages of the control of the Telegraph in the nineteenth century offers an insight into the current situation. With the advent of the internet, the source of news or information on which to base opinions changed inexorably and irrevocably. Newspapers have been folding, or should I say, failing, at an alarming rate. The kind of literacy that demanded young people learn critical thinking along with how to read, has been surpassed by the speed reading, iphone and texting deciphering of the gist and then moving on to the next item. But what is remarkable is the new breadth of awareness that has been enabled by the technology. Users of facebook and social media networking sites have multiple “friends” that they may have never met, located in parts of the world they may never visit, and become aware of issues that may never have been presented to them in the newspapers of previous generations. There is a need to know, and a concomitant belief that everything is available to searching, a sense of privilege that is unquestioned which accompanies the internet generation. The real social exclusion in a globalised internetnetworked world is that of the digital divide- those who have and those who do not (Asgarkhani 2007). This is often on the basis of whole nations, states and peoples, rather than groups within a single society.

One group which is benefitting hugely from the new media is the previously socially excluded group of those who have disabilities. Many elements of the internet or digital technology have enabled these people to find a way into the mainstream, often without being recognised as being different (Goggin and Newell 2003, Stewart 2009). Services now exist to provide access to communication for those otherwise excluded from society on the basis of what they can or cannot do.

Another aspect of the media which contributes significantly to the discourse of social inclusion is that of community-based media initiatives, what Rodriguez (2001) calls “citizens’ media”. In a world dominated by globalised media conglomerates, the attempts that local or ethnic groups have made to demand inclusion have provided a counterpoint to the both the policies of lawmakers and the controlling influences of the oligarchs. Although the impetus in Australia for community and specifically ethnic broadcasting, was provided originally by the Whitlam government (Patterson 1984), the current range and impact of community radio is very extensive (Ewart, et al, 2008; Meadows et al, 2009). While the creation and maintenance of independent newspapers had long been a feature of print media, community radio and access television have really paralleled the emergence of the internet in the years since 1990 (Ewart et al, 2008). There are questions to be raised here about the interplay between the policies and the community practices: how have groups demanded inclusion in the “customary life of the society” through the uses of citizens’ media? And what impact on the policies of governments are these initiatives having?

## **Conclusion**

If the purpose of the policy of social inclusion is to allow access to the “customary life of the society” then the media has, over the past five hundred years, certainly

contributed means and occasionally motivation for those who were not automatically assumed to be included. That women, people of colour or ethnicity, the poor, children and youth, those with disabilities, have all gradually had the opportunity to participate as citizens in the affluent West, is certainly demonstrable. That there remain groups, identified and isolated, which do not have the certainty of inclusion is also unassailable. I have argued that there seems to be a recognizable continuum of policies that range from social exclusion, through recognition, toleration, acceptance to social inclusion. I have also suggested that social change occurs at two levels, through the deliberate act of creation of policy and through the amorphous effect of the influence of social movements and their access to the means of communication.

Social inclusion is by no means straightforward, either as policy or practice. The role of the media in social inclusion, or social exclusion, is also complex and often problematic. The question remains, however, where on the continuum from exclusion to inclusion have each of the media expansions enabled specific groups to become active citizens? More importantly, the question should be what can be done now? Should all media become "citizens' media", in the sense of contributing towards the fair representation of all elements of the society?

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iii <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>

iv <http://www.mediahistory.umn.edu/timeline/1870-1879.html>

### **Biographical Note**

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