

FIRSTDRAFT



THE AUSTRALIAN
Baha'i Community

REIMAGINING THE AUSTRALIAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

ROUNDTABLE 1

Concept Note

TOWARDS OUR COMMON HUMANITY

A thought piece for reflection and dialogue

Any reading of society will recognise the many complex and nuanced challenges we currently face. While we are increasingly aware of our diversity, ideological forces are perpetuating a disintegrative rhetoric of “us and them”, giving rise to competing interests, shaping notions of cultural supremacy and eroding our sense of civility in the public sphere. Through the prevalence of technology, we are globally connected more than ever, testing both legal and media systems in an age of digital disruption while broadening our sense of social responsibility towards collective well-being.

As a reaction to injustice and in striving to hold power to account, media narratives predominantly highlight the shortfalls of society, often resulting in a stream of negative content. This has the potential to further divide and highlight difference, making fertile the grounds for declining levels of trust towards our social institutions, raising levels of outrage, and giving rise to the observation that we are living in an age of heightened anxiety, social isolation, news avoidance and fatigue.^[1]

The horrific attack against worshippers in Christchurch on 15 March 2019 shocked society to its core and left newsrooms “to rethink the way they work, whose voices they amplify – and why.”^[2] This assault to our humanity took advantage of media and technology systems and made us bear witness to the destruction and pain inflicted by prejudice. From a place of grief, this gave rise to an urgent need to foster a culture of ongoing reflection about the implications of media content on the social fabric of society and the agency and civic responsibility of the media as a social institution situated at the epicentre of the public sphere.

Examining the many disintegrative forces at play has generated a desire, shared by many, to reimagine the media landscape towards our common humanity and to foster constructive narratives that shed light on experiences that have helped to overcome social divides and the hopeful possibilities ahead. With this objective in mind, the following concepts are offered for dialogue and reflection to help facilitate an exploration that draws on the insights and experiences of all participants.

A shared sense of identity

Although it is important to acknowledge, honour and foster respect towards our diversity, the notion that we are members of one shared humanity is a helpful starting point. Identifying the values, qualities and aspirations we all share in common helps to foster constructive dialogue that can illuminate and affirm our common humanity. By placing focus on the attributes we share in common, we are given a vision that transcends physical representations of who we are, yet does not seek to undermine diversity as an asset of our humanity. Broadening the discovery of human identity to encompass higher susceptibilities including the capacity to love, to forgive, to be generous, to act altruistically, to share with and learn from others can help to engender positive tones in the public sphere. In recognising common values as well as our common aspirations, including the desire to participate, to belong and to contribute, there is great potential to cast light on a construct of identity we all share. This broader sense of human identity helps to overcome oppression and frees us from the many forms of prejudice and discrimination that have been

roadblocks to social progress and have inflicted much pain on the body of humanity. Identifying narratives that speak to our shared aspirations, without taking away from our diversity or seeking to impose uniformity, opens new horizons in reimagining who we are.

Questions:

Is there room in our journalism schools and in our newsrooms to discuss the way in which the media can acknowledge our shared humanity? Is this a discussion which can be had openly? Why/Why not?

How does reporting on the constructive ways we are overcoming social differences help to serve the public interest of a more informed society?

Could we particularly think of:

- *Language that helps build a sense of our common humanity whilst accommodating for the richness of diversity?*

- *Images that help to overcome prejudice, go beyond stereotyping and help to offer new ways of imagining our society, particularly in showing the best of who we are?*

Human solidarity and recasting notions of power

Recasting prevailing notions of power can help to foster a greater appreciation towards human solidarity. Conceptions of power tend to focus on the narrow pursuit of self-interests, how to compete effectively, to dominate, to manipulate, or to prevail over or against others. "It is often in terms of its most tangible physical, political, social and economic sources that people commonly think about power."^[3]

As an interconnected and interdependent social body, it is no wonder that adversarial expressions of power create an impediment to social progress. A deeper exploration of the sources of power available to humanity will appreciate the power of human solidarity, including the power of unity, love, integrity and generosity. Particularly in times of crisis, as most recently felt

by our country through the bushfires, one of our greatest capacities, as a collective, was the way in which we banded together to overcome adversity, through the many creative and generous expressions released into the life of society for the collective well-being and security of all. Is there not something hopeful about recognising the power of human solidarity, in shaping the story of who we are?

Questions:

Do journalists do enough to report on the power of collective action and/or collective diversity as a strength?

How can media systems be supported and strengthened to help identify, foster and cultivate hope towards our collective capacities as a society, particularly the power of human solidarity?

How does public interest journalism feed into social cohesion?

Could we particularly think of narratives that help us to transcend the countless permutations of "us" and "them" which define group identities moving towards a stronger recognition of our shared identity and further affirming the strength of our human solidarity?

The quest for truth and the role of the media

The desire to know more about who we are, to seek greater meaning and purpose, is one of the most profound yearnings of every individual. Making sense of the world around us is a human impulse. "Thirst for knowledge is one of the greatest forces that can shape one's purpose, and understanding is one of the most precious gifts a human being can possess. Amongst the greatest forms of oppression is that a person desiring knowledge and seeking the truth should not know where to find it and from what source to seek it."^[4]

In our search for truth and meaning, the media becomes a vital instrument for accessing information and civic conversation, lending great impetus towards the generation of knowledge. As a public good and pillar of our society, the media

thus falls at the centre of our pursuit of truth and in conceptualising the world around us, and can be further characterised as an avenue for education and understanding.

Questions:

What are the implications of media narratives on patterns of thought and behaviour; What attitudes and language are we fostering?

As a source of education, how can media content help to foster positive habits of thought, which affirm our shared identity and human solidarity? What are some examples when the media has gone beyond shining a light on the darkness of humanity and brought a spark of hope by shining a light on our common humanity?

How can we learn to separate fact from conjecture—to distinguish between subjective views and objective reality?

How can we foster dialogue within the public sphere which transcends debate, propaganda, and an adversarial method which propagates partisanship, and serves rather as an instrument which helps society to arrive at a consensus about the truth of a given situation and the wisest choice of action among the options open at any given moment?

What challenges lie in the way of the media in realising its full potential? What new pathways are required to advance such civic aspirations?

This is an ongoing discussion and opportunity for a new and visionary description in identifying our shared values today and into the future, and in highlighting how the media can help facilitate constructive change in the life of our society and foster dialogue about our common humanity. Through a process of dialogue, learning in action, and reflection in light of experience, we see this conversation as an iterative process, which we hope will be at the heart of a growing community of learning, joined by many.

REFERENCE LIST

[1] Fisher, C. et al., (2019) *Digital News Report: Australia 2019*. News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2019-06/apo-nid240786.pdf>

[2] Peacock C. (2019). The New Zealand mosque massacre: 2. 'End of innocence' for media and nation. *Pacific Journalism Review: Te Koakoā*, 25(1&2), page 18. <https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/pacific-journalism-review/article/view/490/682>

[3] Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (2009). *Advancing Towards the Equality of Women and Men*, page 7. https://www.globalprosperity.org/media/documents/ISGP_Advancing_Toward_the_Equality_of_Women_and_Men.pdf

[4] Ibid, page 4.