Commission on
Integration&**Cohesion**

COMMUNITY COHESION & DEPRIVATION

A DISCUSSION PAPER FOR THE COMMISSION ON INTEGRATION AND COHESION

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b:RAP

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

While the Commission believes that interaction between people of different backgrounds is central to promoting cohesion, it also believes there is a case for examining the relative merits of measures aimed at increasing interaction as opposed, say, to ones specifically aimed at reducing inequalities.[1] Is there a direct relationship between cohesion and inequality? Does pronounced inequality *erode* cohesion? Does greater cohesion actively *reduce* inequalities?

We believe it is particularly important to be clear about these relationships because in the past there certainly has been a tacit assumption that cohesion initiatives can help address deprivation and inequality. We consider the Commission is absolutely right in wanting to be clearer regarding both the legitimate expectations we can have of cohesion, as well as its limits.

In this paper we examine three inter-related issues. First, we look at whether evidence exists to indicate that deprivation has a direct impact on cohesion – i.e. by eroding or reducing cohesion. Second, we examine whether evidence exists to suggest that improved cohesion can actively reduce deprivation and inequality. And third, we look at the prospects for rethinking cohesion in light of the proposal contained in *Fairness and Freedom* that a new 'capabilities approach' should be used as the framework for measuring inequalities.[2]

In writing this paper, we drew upon a range of academic and policy documents from the UK and beyond. We also drew upon experiences of the Lozells disturbances in Birmingham in late-2005 to exemplify national issues in a local context. That being said, this paper has been written as a 'think-piece' and as such contains reflections based on b:RAP's own experiences of working on issues of equality and cohesion.

1 In its *Interim Statement*, the Commission says: 'One thing we want to resolve before we make any recommendations on this issue is the relative importance of interaction to improving integration and cohesion compared to, for example, reducing inequalities. This is by no means a straight trade off. But given limited local authority budgets, we need to be able to identify the different value of interactions.' *Our Interim Statement*, Commission on Integration & Cohesion, 2007.

2 'The Review has considered different approaches to the concept of equality. We accept CASE's [the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion] recommendation that a definition of equality should be based on the capabilities approach developed by professor Amartya Sen and others over the past thirty years.' *Fairness and Freedom: The Final Report of the Equalities Review*, Annex A, p.125. Communities and Local Government publications, 2007. Full report and summary at: http://www.theequalitiesreview.org.uk/publications.aspx

About b:RAP

b:RAP is a Birmingham-based strategic agency working on equalities issues. While 'race' equality remains central to what we do, we have for some years now been working to actively extend the boundaries of equalities work and in particular are interested in the potential for 'cross-strand' equalities working and human rights approaches to equalities.

b:RAP is a partnership organisation and includes some of Birmingham's largest public institutions on its Board as well as key voluntary and community sector organisations. We are especially interested, therefore, in partnership working that enables and reinforces institutional and organisational change as one key component in promoting equality.

CHAPTER 2
The arguments

2.1   SOME BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Before further examining the relationship between cohesion, deprivation and equality, we should perhaps begin by setting out what we see as being some of the problematical issues associated with the notion of cohesion itself.

We have already noted that current definitions of cohesion do not help us to understand the relationship between cohesion and equality and this is a key problem. But nor does 'cohesion' particularly help us to understand what precisely it is that communities require in order to flourish, nor what makes them flourish. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, the concept of cohesion has been informed and shaped by wider debates about multiculturalism, including concerns about immigration and poor integration. But in the wake of the London bombings of the 7th July 2005 the cohesion 'agenda' has also become dominated by concerns about alienation and radicalisation, especially amongst young Muslims.

Given this background, it is not surprising that the focus of cohesion has been largely on the issue of interaction and relations between people from different backgrounds. But this is a narrow and in any case partial view of cohesion that largely omits other factors, such as class, wealth, gender and age, to name but some. This has a further knock-on effect, in that current definitions of cohesion are not inclusive. And in some instances – in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, and more recently in Lozells, Birmingham – the public perception that equality and cohesion strategies have been primarily concerned with addressing the needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities at the expense of White British communities has played a significant part in further eroding cohesion and causing inter-community tensions.

The current emphasis cohesion has on relations between people from different backgrounds, rather than on relations between *all* people – i.e. between *human beings* – may also inadvertently reinforce cultural difference. The emphasis cohesion places on 'the other', it might be argued, may in part be responsible for eroding the very thing it seeks to promote: good community relations.

We would argue that the need to rethink cohesion and its purposes has some parallels with the thinking now evident in the most recent equality review, *Fairness and Freedom*. In developing a framework for measuring equalities that is inclusive and applies to everyone – i.e. that identifies the things *we all need* in order to flourish – the Equalities Review Team is seeking to move beyond equality strategies that encourage the kind of 'ethnicised' responses we have grown used to over the

past twenty years or so, responses that primarily address the culturally delineated needs of particular ethnic groups. How this is used in practice of course remains to be seen. There will no doubt be challenges in how as a society – on a 'whole community' basis – we take account of all our shared needs, without at the same time failing to address the entrenched, historical disadvantage and discrimination that has left some groups worse off than others. But even allowing for this reservation we are convinced that the Equalities Review does mark a genuine attempt to adopt a more progressive notion of equalities practice.

2.2　DEPRIVATION: ITS EFFECT ON COHESION – THE EVIDENCE

Following the disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001, and the report of the Independent Review Team under Ted Cantle,[3] diversity and a lack of interaction between community groups were seen as the primary factors in eroding community cohesion. Implicit in many of the analyses which followed publication of this report was the belief that it was 'excessive' diversity and a loss of shared values which were the primary drivers creating a breakdown in community cohesion; significantly less attention was paid to deprivation as a particular factor.

But more recent evidence suggests that people do feel there is less cohesion in more deprived areas. A Citizenship Survey, conducted on behalf of the Department for Communities & Local Government in 2006, concluded that '…as deprivation increases, there is a fall in the number of people who agree that people from different backgrounds get on well together; and a fall in the number who agree that residents respect ethnic differences between people'.[4] But how does this happen?

There are a number of different factors at work. Professor Richard Wilkinson's pioneering research demonstrates that low status and a lack of control over one's life have a dramatic impact on health and wellbeing, especially when coupled with inequality.[5] Indeed, Wilkinson has concluded that it is not poverty *per se* nor local neighbourhood inequalities that have the most detrimental effect on a nation's well-being, but rather *the scale of inequality across whole countries*, where income differentials determine the size and importance of social class differences. This is demonstrated in numerous studies looking at life expectancy, health and levels of violence.[6] Low status and wealth inequalities also reduce participation in civic activities and local democracy.

[3] Cantle, T., *Community Cohesion: A report of the Independent Review Team*, Home Office, 2001.

[4] *Citizenship Survey, Topic report: community cohesion*, Communities and Local Government, 2006

[5] Wilkinson, R., *The Impact of Inequality: How to Make Sick Societies Healthier*, Routledge, London, 2005.

[6] Wilkinson, R., Picket, K., *Income Inequality and Health: A Review and Explanation of the Evidence*, in 'Social Science and Medicine', 2006. See: http://research.nottingham.ac.uk/NewsReviews/newsDisplay.aspx?id=239

Socio-economic conditions are also a major determinant of relations between new immigrants and receiving populations. The evidence suggests that community tensions do not necessarily arise as an inevitable consequence of new immigration or increased ethnic diversity, but rather from high levels of deprivation. Such deprivation increases competition for scarce resources and fuels animosity between local people, especially where resources – or services, or 'political' influence – are perceived to be distributed on the basis primarily of ethnicity and to the advantage of one particular section of the community.[7] Even if such perceptions are mistaken (or deliberately stoked by mischievous propaganda), they can cause lasting damage. Indeed, this latter factor was identified as playing a major role in the Lozells disturbances in inner-city Birmingham during late-2005.

This emerging empirical evidence signals a departure from analyses that focus primarily on the effect of ethnic diversity on cohesion. Increasingly, deprivation is being treated as an equally important factor in shaping cohesion and this is reflected in the increased prominence given to issues of structural inequality and deprivation in the Government's most recent community cohesion policies.[8] This is a development to be profoundly welcomed in public policy.

And yet we still have not made a complete transition in our thinking. In a recent examination of British community cohesion strategies, Dr Derek McGhee of the School of Social Sciences, the University of Southampton, concludes that the principle aims of UK cohesion policies have more to do with containing radicalisation and extremism amongst minority religious groups – and especially Muslims – than they do revitalising citizenship, volunteering and civic action.[9]

So, while public policy increasingly is taking account of deprivation as a 'cross cultural' condition, 'remedies' aimed primarily at BME groups and especially Muslims remain the norm, prompted firstly by the desire to address radicalisation and extremism, and secondly by the fact that deprivation in the UK does disproportionately affect BME groups.[10] It is now more apparent than ever, however, that a failure to address the deprivation and inequality *of all social groups* runs the risk of driving some in the most deprived white working class communities into the arms of far-right political parties that are only too ready to exploit inter-communal tensions.

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7 Robinson, R., Reeve, K., *Neighbourhood experiences of new immigration: Reflections from the evidence base*, JRF, 2006. See http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/details.asp?pubID=761
See also Marschall, M. J., Stolle, D., *Race in the City: Neighborhood Context and the Development of Generalized Trust*; in 'Political Behavior', vol. 26, 2006 pp. 125-53.

8 See: *Strength in Diversity: Towards a Community Cohesion & Race Equality Strategy*, Home Office Communication Directorate, 2004; and Improving Society, Strengthening Opportunity: The Government's Strategy to Increase Race Equality and Community Cohesion, Home Office, 2005.

9 McGhee, D., *Moving to 'our' common ground: a critical examination of community cohesion discourse in twenty-first century Britain*, in 'Sociological Review', 51, (3), 2003, pp.376-404.

10 Letki, N., *Does Diversity Erode Social Cohesion? Social Capital and Race in British Neighbourhoods*, forthcoming in 'Political Studies'.
See: http://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/Politics/papers/2005/NLetki_social%20capital%20and%20diversity_final.pdf

The available evidence does suggest, then, that deprivation is a significant factor in eroding cohesion. As well as producing material conditions that are detrimental to health and well-being, it also offers a breeding ground for prejudice, intolerance and other attitudes that destroy cohesiveness. But even here, some qualifications must be raised. For example, the correlation between deprivation and poor cohesion depends to some extent not just on how we define cohesion, but also on how questions regarding cohesion are formulated and the degree of subjectivity involved in answering these. For example, in the 2005 Citizenship Survey, interviewees were asked:

• Whether they enjoyed living in their neighbourhood;

• Whether people in their neighbourhood pulled together to try and improve it;

• How safe they felt walking alone after dark in their neighbourhood;

• How many people they felt could be trusted; and

• How strongly they felt they belonged to their neighbourhood.

In addition, for the first time in 2005 respondents were asked three new questions:

• Whether people in their neighbourhood were willing to help their neighbours;

• Whether they lived in a close-knit neighbourhood; and

• Whether people in their neighbourhood shared the same values.

The potential for widely differing interpretations of these questions is evident, as is the likelihood that responses will tend to be highly subjective.[11]

2.3   COHESION: ITS EFFECT ON DEPRIVATION

But, what of the reverse? Can cohesion *reduce* deprivation or ameliorate its effects? It is important to be clear about the nature of that relationship, particularly if we consider the way in which some cohesion initiatives in the past have been associated with and sometimes conflated with approaches to reducing deprivation and inequality.[12]

There is a relative paucity of evidence on this issue, but we did identify relevant research in the areas of mental health and criminal justice. Poor mental health, for example, is significantly associated with area-level income deprivation, but one recent study concludes that in areas where deprivation is marked but social cohesion is *high*, then the effects of deprivation on mental health are ameliorated.[13]

11 See: *2005 Citizenship Survey*, Communities and Local Government, June 2006. The Community Cohesion Topic Report is available at: http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1501048

12 See for example, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, Home Office, 2001: "Community cohesion is a term that has recently become increasingly popular in public policy debates. It is closely linked to other concepts such as inclusion and exclusion, social capital and differentiation, community and neighbourhood. In this way it has indirectly been the focus of a number of policies and initiatives aimed principally at reducing social exclusion."

13 See Fone, D., *Does social cohesion modify the association between area income deprivation and mental health? A multi-level analysis*, in 'International Journal of Epidemiology', February 2007.

Similarly, there is some evidence to suggest that levels of crime are lower than expected in areas that are disadvantaged but otherwise have high levels of cohesion. Robert D Putnam, Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University, is categorical in his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse & Revival of American Community*. Drawing on the work of earlier scholars, including the writer/activist, Jane Jacobs, and US criminologist, Robert J Sampson, Putnam concludes: "In the decades since these influential studies, many other scholars across a range of disciplines have elaborated the basic insights. The conclusions of this work are straightforward and just as Jacobs and the early criminologists would have predicted: higher levels of social capital, all else being equal, translate into lower levels of crime."[14] While the precise role of 'social disorganisation', including poor cohesion and low levels of social capital, in fuelling (or failing to contain) crime remains widely contested, it is a debate that is critically relevant again today in the wake of the recent gun and knife killings of under-16s in London and elsewhere during the first few months of 2007.

In a similar way, a recent Home Office report suggests that strong community cohesion can transcend factors of public disorganisation, such as deprivation, which have traditionally been seen as the strongest predictors of crime.[15] But there is an important qualification to be made here too. The correlation between community cohesion and crime appears stronger the narrower an interpretation one takes of cohesion. So, judged from a 'social control' perspective – i.e. with community cohesion measured in terms of norms of behaviour that must be adhered to in order to remain within the community – the correlation is quite strong; but when taking a broader view of cohesion that emphasises 'respecting diversity', 'political trust', and 'sense of belonging', the correlation is minimal.

By and large, we found only very limited evidence to support the idea that cohesion can actually *reduce* deprivation and inequalities. We would argue that this is unsurprising for two main reasons.

First, because cohesion, rather than being a positive force capable of reducing inequalities, is more a description of how communities *respond to* their deprivation and the impact this has on community relations.

And second, because of the relatively narrow definition of cohesion that has emerged from the past two decades of multiculturalist policies, the concept tends to be literally interpreted as being primarily about respect for other cultural practices and traditions. While respect for other cultural traditions would appear, at least on the surface, to be unquestionably positive, this becomes more questionable if the traditions and values we most readily recognise are culturally conservative ones that conform to the cultural stereotypes we have grown comfortable with.

14 Putnam, Robert D., *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, p.308. New York, 2000; Touchstone edition, 2001.

15 Wedlock, E., *Crime and Community Cohesion*, Home Office Online Reports 19/06, 2006: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/rdsolr1906.pdf

This multiculturalist tendency to value 'cultural conservatism' (the often unchosen cultural and religious identity and affiliations that derive from the community into which one is born) rather than 'cultural freedom' (the personal ability and social 'permission' to exercise choice in determining one's cultural affiliations, practices and identity) has been widely written about by the Indian economist and philosopher, Amartya Sen.[16]

If, as Sen and others argue, the past two decades of multiculturalist policies have indeed emphasised the culturally conservative values of 'closed' communities rather than the cultural freedoms and personal autonomies associated with more open, fluid communities, then it is unsurprising that multiculturalism has made little contribution to a sense of shared values.

It is against this backdrop, then, that we have seen the cohesion debate begin to revolve around a new discourse of what constitutes 'Britishness'. But as a means of defining values that we share and around which society can cohere, 'Britishness' is at best a blunt – and at worst discriminatory – concept. This makes it harder rather than easier to reinvigorate a civic space in which potential conflicts and disagreements can be 'defused' through discussion, mediation and negotiation. Indeed, the reinforcement of British *cultural* values, with an emphasis on language, the history of the Royal family and British institutions, is seen by many as regressive – a step back from an environment of mutual respect where different cultural traditions can 'rub along' together, complementing and if necessary challenging each other.

The proposal contained in *Fairness and Freedom* for a new 'capabilities approach' to measuring inequalities offers an opportunity to rethink equality while also reframing cohesion as a broader and more positive concept. We investigate one possible reframing of cohesion towards the end of this paper, but first let us focus on why the capabilities approach is potentially so important.

2.4   A 'CAPABILITIES APPROACH' TO EQUALITY

The 'capabilities approach' has its origins in the work of the Nobel Prize winning economist and philosopher, Professor Amartya Sen, and is rooted in his and others' analysis of welfare economics, human development theory, famine, aid and poverty. Essentially, the core idea of the capabilities approach is that the aim of development should be human wellbeing in the widest sense – physical, mental, emotional, economic and social – rather than merely economic objectives such as growth or

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16 See Sen, A., *The Uses and Abuses of Multiculturalism: Chili and Liberty*, in 'The New Republic', February 2006: "One of the central issues concerns how human beings are seen. Should they be categorized in terms of inherited traditions, particularly the inherited religion, of the community in which they happen to have been born, taking that unchosen identity to have automatic priority over other affiliations […]? Or should they be understood as persons with many affiliations and associations, whose relative priorities they must themselves choose (taking the responsibility that comes with reasoned choice)? Also, should we assess the fairness of multiculturalism primarily by the extent to which people from different cultural backgrounds are "left alone," or by the extent to which their ability to make reasoned choices is positively supported by the social opportunities of education and participation in civil society? There is no way of escaping these rather foundational questions if multiculturalism is to be fairly assessed."

Gross National Product (GNP).[17] The notion of 'capabilities' refers to the freedoms that people need in order to realise their full potential and flourish, rather than to inner abilities or skills.

Rather than focusing on limited and restricting notions of 'equality of outcomes' or 'equality of opportunity' – typically represented by measures such as the numbers of BME people in this or that kind of employment, or educational attainment expressed in terms of 5 GCSE passes – the capabilities approach takes into account that people require more of a say in how they define the opportunities and freedoms that they should be afforded. Freedom *and* social choice are central to the capabilities approach, but so too is the notion that how we exercise our personal freedom is contingent on the effect this has on the freedoms of others. This is personal freedom within a framework of mutuality, then, rather than merely a freedom of the free market.

The approach recognises two important issues that are of relevance here.

Firstly, that the wider social, economic and political circumstances of people's lives affect their ability to both define and exercise particular freedoms. In addition, people will not only value different freedoms, but will also require different things in order to achieve the same outcomes as others. For example, because of a wider environment of gender discrimination, a woman who achieves an MBA at university does not necessarily have the same opportunities as her male peers in terms of getting a job she values.

Secondly, a capabilities approach recognises the need to create a space where people feel they can have a say in identifying what they need in order to do or be what they most value. That space should also enable the discussion, mediation and negotiation of what we might call 'necessary inequalities' – the inequalities which will always be with us as long as resources are finite and limited.

The Equalities Review recommends a core list of universal 'freedoms' – the things that make us capable of living fulfilling lives – basing these on human rights principles and wider public consultation, especially with groups that are at a high risk of disadvantage. These core freedoms are identified as:

• Longevity, including avoiding premature mortality.

• Physical security, including freedom from violence and physical and sexual abuse.

• Health, including both well-being and access to high quality healthcare.

• Education, including being able to be creative, to acquire skills and qualifications and having access to training and life-long learning.

17 For a wider discussion of capabilities theory, see Clark, D., *The Capability Approach: Its Development, Critiques and Recent Advances*, ESRC Research Group and the Global Poverty Research Group, November, 2005. At: http://www.gprg.org/pubs/workingpapers/pdfs/gprg-wps-032.pdf

- Standard of living, including being able to live with independence and security; and covering nutrition, clothing, housing, warmth, utilities, social services and transport.

- Productive and valued activities, such as access to employment, a positive experience in the workplace, work/life balance, and being able to care for others.

- Individual, family and social life, including self-development, having independence and equality in relationships and marriage.

- Participation, influence and voice, including participation in decision-making and democratic life.

- Identity, expression and self-respect, including freedom of belief and religion.

- Legal security, including equality and non-discrimination before the law and equal treatment within the criminal justice system.[18]

These indicators take a person's *situation* into account in the analysis of inequality and thus should enable a fuller examination of the *context* in which people aim to make use of their freedoms and opportunities. As such, it is hoped that they can also help identify the economic, political and social factors that limit people's ability to do or achieve the things they most value.

But using a capabilities approach of this type potentially also offers broader advantages too.

First, it offers a framework for measuring, discussing and negotiating inequalities that moves beyond the notion of entitlement based on 'cultural needs' and ethnic identity, as became commonplace under multiculturalist policies.

And second, it also offers an opportunity to think more clearly about cohesion and the limits to what this can achieve – in particular, by ceasing to use cohesion as an imperfect tool for achieving equality. In a scenario we explore fully in the next section of this paper, we advocate a 'model' in which cohesion would no longer be regarded as a 'surrogate' for broader programmes of equality and social welfare, but instead would be seen as playing a role in creating the social conditions of openness in which people can define and exercise their freedoms. This is explained below.

But we should also raise two important qualifications. Firstly, an evidence base and appropriate methodologies for assessing inequalities within a capabilities framework of the kind advocated in *Fairness and Freedom* will not happen overnight. It will be a gradual process – and one that will undoubtedly be accompanied by many compromises as the theory of capabilities slowly evolves into an operable 'system'.[19]

18 Fairness and Freedom, ibid – see Annex A, p.127.

19 A review of available literature about the relationship between ethnicity and deprivation indicates that we are some way from establishing a robust evidence base to measure progress against a list of capabilities. See for example, Platt, L., Poverty and Ethnicity in the UK, JRF, York, 2006. Also Vizard, P., Burchadt, T., Developing a Capability List: Final Recommendations of the Equalities Review Steering Group on Measurement, The Equalities Review, 2007.
See http://www.theequalitiesreview.org.uk/upload/assets/www.theequalitiesreview.org.uk/paper2capability.pdf

Secondly, we do not have a public culture that would enable discussion and negotiation of the kinds of freedoms envisaged in the capabilities approach to equality. However, this is precisely where a revised view of community cohesion could play an important role.

2.5   CAN COMMUNITY COHESION MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THE 'CAPABILITIES APPROACH'?

We have explained how previous ways of approaching equality have resulted in a rather narrow idea of community cohesion – one that has, in Sen's analysis, reinforced 'cultural conservatism'.

We do not see the purpose of cohesion as being the encouragement of interaction between different groups meeting for interaction's sake. Rather, we believe that a new role for community cohesion should involve nurturing and promoting the values of an 'open' community – as opposed to values more closely associated with 'closed' communities. So, for example, rather than 'whether people from different backgrounds get on', we might instead look at how open a community is to new settlers, and indeed, how open a community is to enabling its members to exercise choice and freedom, including (should an individual so choose) the abandonment of cultural practices most closely associated with that community.

In this scenario, then, cohesion would also emphasise:

• Skilling people to participate in equality.

• Ensuring that people's ability to exercise their freedoms and to make reasoned choices is 'positively supported by the social opportunities of education and participation in civil society'.[20]

• Intra- *as well as* inter-community interaction.

But a cohesion based on openness and freedom and on mutual respect for those freedoms would be only part of the answer. We must also utilise the strategies that community cohesion offers us to enable people to come together as equal citizens to think through, discuss and negotiate the freedoms they need. In short, a vital role for community cohesion should be to help build – and defend – a reinvigorated civic space in which these 'foundational questions' can be discussed and negotiated.

We would also argue, however, that the vision of a reframed community cohesion as outlined above would require a further ingredient – and this is the human rights principle of 'proportionality'. Proportionality is intended to enable an evaluation of whether one group's or individual's exercising of their rights conflicts with the rights of others in society.

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20 See Sen, A., *The Uses and Abuses of Multiculturalism: Chili and Liberty* – ibid.

What we are arguing is that community cohesion focuses not on how people from different backgrounds interact, but on how *people from all backgrounds exercise and negotiate their freedoms*. In this sense, we believe that community cohesion could be a key strategy for helping to develop:

- Robust local communities that have the skills and abilities to navigate through, and come to terms with, the most challenging discussions.

- Social and civic 'processes' and spaces that enable open, tolerant and informed choices to be made.

Let us consider two practical examples of where such a social climate was necessary – but sadly lacking.

Behzti

Firstly, consider the demonstrations against Gurpeet Kaur Bhatti's play, *Behzti* ('Dishonour'), by some sections of the Sikh community in Birmingham during December 2004. These demonstrations flared into violence, forcing Birmingham Rep to close the play and Bhatti, herself a Sikh, into hiding following death threats.

While the violence itself might be blamed on a few 'hotheads', the rapidity with which the demonstrations came to present a significant threat to public safety, and the absence of a viable means of discussion and mediation, indicate graver underlying problems. In these circumstances, the principle of proportionality could have offered a means by which all parties searched for a fair balance. A human rights approach would have involved far greater public discussion about the relative weight of the right to freedom of religion, the right to freedom of expression, and the author's and theatre company's right to assembly, safety, and security. Although this was an extraordinarily emotive case, a human rights approach offers a framework to dissect and understand the freedoms at stake in situations like these.

Lozells

Similarly, let us examine whether a new model of cohesion might have helped defuse the events which led to rioting, dozens of injured people and the murder of a young man during late-October 2005 in the inner-city Birmingham ward of Lozells. Firstly, let us recap the known facts. It was rumoured that a young African-Caribbean girl, caught shoplifting in a Pakistani-owned beauty products shop, had been raped by a gang of Pakistani men. The rumour, broadcast on local radio, served as the spark to ignite a longstanding smouldering animosity between the area's Asian and African Caribbean communities.

Subsequent media coverage of the events fell broadly into two categories. Some saw it as 'inter-communal strife', two ethnic minority groups divided by increasingly irreconcilable religious and cultural differences. The other school of thought tended to see it as the consequence of 'economic grievances', two ethnic minority groups bitterly contesting the socio-economic divide that had emerged between them. These

were by no means mutually exclusive analyses and, on the ground, one tended to find both of these views, often jumbled up together with a hefty dollop of gang and youth rivalry thrown in. Lozells defies neat classification.

But what of the bigger picture? Lozells is the fourth most deprived Ward out of the forty that make up the city of Birmingham. Over four-fifths of residents are from an ethnic minority background. The Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities make up over half the total population. The African Caribbean community is 17.5% – about the same as the white ethnic population. Proportionally, Lozells has twice as many Pakistanis as Birmingham, three times as many Indian and African Caribbean residents, and almost six times as many Bangladeshis.

In addition:

- Less than half the ward is economically active.

- There is 20% unemployment – more than twice the Birmingham average.

- Over 40% of children live in households with no adult in work.

- Less than 10% are in professional or managerial positions.

- Over 25% are semi-skilled or unskilled.

- Over 25% are in receipt of benefits.

- Almost one-third have no qualifications.

- Almost one-in-five has a limiting long-term illness.

- Over 25% are in receipt of state benefits or are unemployed.

- Mortality rates are 10% higher than the District and 6% higher than the city.

Now while it is futile to deny that there are real tensions – then as now – between the Asian and African Caribbean communities in Lozells, the picture that emerges above is of a **structural inequality** that is shared by all of Lozells' communities – perhaps not equally, but shared nonetheless.

b:RAP argued at the time that what we saw in Lozells in 2005 was in fact a direct consequence of two decades of failed multiculturalist policies – policies that have encouraged minority ethnic groups to utilise their 'cultural identities' both as a means of securing public resources and of gaining some degree of social authority and as a result have systematically divided rather than united communities.

The Lozells example is a powerful argument for the view that cohesion is most damaged by inequality and deprivation rather than 'too much' diversity.

In one sense, of course, it is futile to ask whether a new, single answer exists to such complex problems as those in Lozells. Problems that have built up over generations and that are rooted in persistent and profound disadvantage and deprivation will not be solved simply by the adoption of a 'new process'. But what Lozells does illuminate

is not only the roots of some of those problems and the conditions – including poor public policy-making – that have perpetuated them, but also the factors that might to some degree help address them.

It is evident, as we have said, that public policy has done much to sow the seeds of inter-community rivalry. If one of the few ways of securing resources is the assertion of ethnic identity, then we should not be surprised when eventually the community fractures along ethnic lines.

But equally evident is the fact that once this fracture had begun to happen, there were no mechanisms – no social, civic or community processes or structures – with which to try and repair it that did not reflect and reinforce those divisions. This is because in Lozells, as in many other communities, the processes and structures that do exist tend to perpetuate community 'representation' along ethnic lines. Lozells would seem to offer a prime example of the need to develop not just 'processes' but also an overall climate in which competing claims and inequalities can be discussed and negotiated from a perspective of mutuality and proportionality, rather than 'ethnicised' entitlement.

While such a view of cohesion might seem optimistic, we would suggest that it actually represents a more pragmatic approach in which cohesion is seen primarily as a means of creating a social climate where potentially competing needs and entitlements can be discussed and balanced. Most importantly, this approach is also clear about the *limits* of cohesion. It allocates a clear purpose to cohesion strategies and in so doing should help us pursue those strategies without mistaking them for, or using them instead of, social programmes designed specifically to address systemic and entrenched patterns of inequality and deprivation.

CHAPTER 3
Concluding Remarks

If the Commission agrees that there is a case for redefining how we think about community cohesion, then the process of change will of course be a longer-term one, drawing on further work as well as lessons from elsewhere.

In this final section we suggest two areas of work the Commission might wish to consider.

The open city – assessing and utilising openness

Comedia, a consultancy and think-tank that focuses on the contribution made by innovation, diversity and creativity in the flourishing of cities, has been working with the support of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on a long-term project called the Intercultural City. Cultural openness – how it is promoted, measured and utilised – lies at the heart of this project and there might be a useful exchange that the Commission could have with Comedia.[21] The Commission may also wish to investigate the toolkit for 'cross-cultural co-operation' that has been developed as part of the Comedia project to see whether any of its principles can be adopted.[22] We would add, however, that additional work would be required to develop a set of indicators that measure the concept of cohesion outlined in this paper.

Negotiating 'necessary inequalities'

Inequalities of one type or another will always be with us as long as resources are finite and limited. Many public sector and voluntary sector staff are at the sharp end of decision-making regarding 'necessary inequalities' and the distribution of scarce resources. They are often in a position where they may need to resolve competing claims for resources and influence. The skills involved in managing and facilitating debates and decision-making processes are similar to those required by 'mediators' – the ability to show 'empathy' with a particular party in a dispute, for example, the ability to help parties explain what they need and potentially to unpick the relevance of ethnic identity in that assessment. Also mediators aim to keep dialogue between parties respectful and constructive – avoiding name-calling and stereotyping.

21 The Intercultural City project: http://www.comedia.org.uk/pages/news.htm#intcity
22 See Joseph Rowntree Foundation website at: http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/1950.asp

This is quite a complex skill base, particularly, the ability to help parties recognise and critically reflect upon the significance and relevance of their ethnic identity in shaping their needs. The Commission may wish to pursue development programmes at a Local Authority level to embed these skills.