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**Media, Home and Diaspora**

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## **Media, Home and Diaspora**

John Budarick

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates the role of Australian media in feelings of home and belonging amongst the Iranian-Australian diaspora. Drawing on data from in depth interviews, the paper argues that the 'local' and broadcast media of the country of settlement can play the dual role of encouraging feelings of belonging and not belonging in the wider Australian society for Iranian-Australians. This duality highlights the media's role beyond mere representation, and extends to the way media is used by consumers in order to negotiate their social surroundings. The article begins by discussing the meaning and role of 'home' in studies of media and diaspora, whereby it is emphasised that home is something made and desired. Then, the way local and broadcast media is used in the essay is defined, and the possibility of media use leading to feelings of both belonging and not belonging is discussed. Finally, feelings of home and belonging amongst Iranian Australians are analysed by drawing on a series of in depth interviews with Iranians on their media use.

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## INTRODUCTION

The lexicon of diaspora studies, as well as studies of the media use and production of those deemed to be in diasporas, involves differing evaluations of home and belonging. What it means to feel a sense of home and belonging, where home lies, and how it comes about, are just some of the issues debated in literature on diasporas. Avoiding ideas of essential primordial ties means questioning notions of a stable, reified 'homeland', a country of origin as the natural home. 'Home' is rather thought of as an experiential construct, constituted less by simple physical or geographical location than by the meanings, practices and memories that are inscribed in a certain place (Massey, 1994).

This article focuses on the media's role in feelings of home and belonging amongst the Iranian-Australian diaspora. I propose that the role of the media of the country of settlement in the formation of a place of belonging be brought to the fore in more diaspora research. The article begins with a review of some of the main theoretical currents in the literature on diaspora, home, belonging and media. This includes literature that focuses on the homeland, that which analyses the spaces between home and host, and finally studies that examine the management of the new host-land. It will be argued that amongst the various ways in which a feeling of home or belonging is achieved, the use of local symbolic resources is an under examined area. I will argue that a focus on the consumption of the local and broadcast media of the country of settlement allows an appreciation of the ways in which members of diaspora negotiate their everyday environment and actively construct, or attempt to, a feeling of home and/or belonging in diaspora.

The pivotal role of the media of the country of settlement in this process is related to the way home is being approached in this article. Questions of home in this study refer to the nation of Australia, and whether participants feel a sense of belonging to the country. A useful distinction to draw upon is that between the German terms *Heim* and *Heimat*. The *Heim* is the domestic home, the intimate sphere. *Heimat* refers to home at a broader level, such as a native land. While home at the domestic level involves intimate others, home at the level of the nation involves strangers, meta-narratives, and the 'imagined community' of the modern nation state (Hobsbawm, 1991; Anderson, 1991).

The *Heimat*, then, as an essentially collective social construction, depends on mediation between people, processes and objects. The reason the host-land media must be focused on is precisely because it is one of the key ways people, including migrants, are enabled to imagine the nation as home. The imagination of a national homeland requires broadcast and to a degree local media for its constancy, whether this media is printed novels or broadcast radio and television (Anderson, 1991; Scannell, 1996).

At the same time, media also play a key role in defining who lies outside of the nation. Just as media can bring a diverse audience into a coherent whole, addressing various people as familiars, so too can they exclude others by not including them in their terms of address. Media are vital to the way we access, understand and feel connected to, or alternatively excluded from, the surrounding social environment. Thus, the way Iranian-Australians draw upon the media in Australia in an attempt to make it a home (land) will be analysed.

As part of this analysis, it will be shown that mediated symbols are drawn on by participants as symbols *of* and *for* reality (Carey, 1989). In the first instance, media represent an underlying social reality. In terms of representing the reality of migrant lives, media is often critiqued for portraying a simplistic and negative image of migrants as a threat to dominant norms and standards (Alghassi, 2009). In the second case, media are seen as constructing the very reality they represent and as constitutive of the social world, rather than just representative of it (Carey, 1989). Drawing on data from a series of in depth interviews with Iranian Australians, I will argue that the role of local media as both representations *of* and *for* reality is present in the responses of participants, and that these media contribute to feelings of home, belonging and not belonging in diverse and overlapping ways.

## **APPROACHES TO DIASPORA AND MEDIA**

Influential approaches to diaspora have emphasised dispersal from a homeland, both in terms of defining the concept as well as in a way that places the trauma of movement at the forefront of the diaspora experience. The homeland – defined either as the nation state or simply as a distinguishable set of bounded cultural practices – as a point of reference from which departure constitutes diaspora, is a common but contested basis to many definitions (Clifford, 1994; Brubaker, 2005; Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991). Thus, when Safran (1991) defines diaspora based on six criteria, the first is the dispersal from an original centre to two or more peripheral regions.

This focus on the homeland has cast a shadow over analyses of the practices and experiences of diasporic groups. The homeland has acted a priori as a baseline against which diverse behaviours and practices are compared and understood (Aksoy and Robins, 2000). Although the spectre of homeland has hardly led to an ignorance of diasporic practices in their spatial-temporal contexts of settlement (see Clifford, 1994), it has none-the-less been re-evaluated in terms of new definitions of diaspora and new understandings of cultural practices. According to Fortier (2000) the experience of diaspora is about more than the ‘homeland’ people come from and the host land they arrive in, there is more than just ‘here’ and ‘there’ to diaspora. At the level of conceptualisation, then, critiques of the primacy of displacement in definitions of diaspora have occurred (Fortier, 2000).

An important anti essentialist position has emerged which questions the prevalence of collective identity and the nation state as objective categories in the diasporic consciousness (Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1993; Anthias, 1998; Aksoy & Robins, 2000; Sreberny, 2001). As Sreberny points out, the use of the term diaspora itself is caught up in attempts to move past ethnic essentialisms and notions of a singular ethnic identity (Sreberny, 2001). There have thus been attempts to evaluate diasporas beyond ethnicity and race (Anthias, 1998) and to think about diasporas beyond the sounding board of the nation state as a standard point of nostalgic attachment (Aksoy & Robins, 2000).

Although terms such as ethnicity and diaspora still imply some sort of 'homeland', there has been a concerted effort to look beyond roots to 'routes', to look at the area 'in-between' and to avoid notions of essential territorial belonging (Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993). As Sreberny (2001: 1) says: 'Our groupishness is not yet post-national although it is increasingly transnational'. She further argues that there needs to be a focus on the diasporic space of movements, a dynamic space between stable nodes which cuts across borders and is made all the more visible through communications technologies.

In terms of diaspora and media, the spaces between nations, places and identities, and the gazes through and across these spaces, are often studied through a focus on what Naficy (1993) calls narrowcast media (see also Cunningham & Sinclair, 2001). This is the media aimed at and consumed by, or produced by, a diasporic group, such as Iranian television from Los Angeles, the consumption of Turkish satellite TV by European Turks, the consumption of Croatian videos amongst Croats in Perth, or the consumption of Bollywood by Indians in London or Fiji (Naficy, 1993; Aksoy & Robins, 2000; Kolar-Panov, 1997; Gillespie, 1995). This media – satellite television, internet, radio, film and print – is often focused on for its utility in maintaining links over time and space with imaginatively constructed homelands and other nodes in a diaspora network, as well as its role in the negotiation of identity in diaspora (Naficy, 1993).

However, this media, while being aimed at a certain migrant group through linguistic and cultural modes of address, is not simply geared towards a single primordial point of origin or a homogeneous diaspora community. The various flows of this media across and between the different nodes of the diaspora network, including the country of origin, go toward forming complex networks of cultural consumers that cut across locations and are shaped by various affiliations and social biographies.

As well as the in-between spaces of diaspora, several studies have looked at how various cultural texts and practices are used in the attempt to recreate some sense of home in the country of settlement. The notion of a definable place as home, a place wherein meanings and

values are inscribed and everyday routines and practices carried out, is still vitally important in diaspora studies. The rejection of the a priori prominence of a primordial 'homeland' in diaspora consciousness requires neither the abandonment of the country of origin as an influential factor nor the idea of 'home' as a relatively stable site of daily life (McAuliffe, 2007).

Thus, the stabilization of the rupture of migration and the maintenance of some sort of cultural continuity have been studied by several authors. Davidson (2008), Lalich (2008), Brah (1996), Naficy (1993), Cunningham & Sinclair (2001), Aksoy & Robins (2000), Gillespie (1995) and Fortier (2000) all discuss the use of trans-national media, the continuation of cultural ties and symbols, and the performance of collective memories and identities through rituals and ceremonies, in the formation of a place of belonging for diasporas.

Fortier (2000), for example, calls on Avtar Brah's concept of a 'homing desire' when discussing the places of belonging amongst Italians in London. The notion of homing desire is about the construction through cultural practices and texts of a place of belonging. It is about the desire for home and belonging, 'not so much about the connection with a country as it is about the creation of a sense of place, which is often uttered in terms of 'home' (Fortier, 2000: 163). Processes of homing include the construction of the local and the creation of habitual and habitable spaces through collective memory, tradition and ritual. It is about a desire *for* home, rather than a desire to *return* home (Brah, 1996).

As much as they are about leaving and the journey in between, diasporas are also about settling down, 'putting roots 'elsewhere'', which brings to the fore the processes and discourses through which a group becomes 'situated' (Brah, 1996: 182). The question of home then becomes one not tied to primordial bonds of origin, yet not free from attachment to place of origin, or for that matter place of settlement (Brah, 1996).

## **HOME AND BELONGING, OR INCLUSION AND INTEGRATION?**

Home as socially constructed and desired, rather than simply based on geography, also allows an appreciation of the distinct but related work on migrant inclusion and integration into multicultural host societies. While home can be constructed and imagined in various places, issues of inclusion and integration revolve around the country of settlement. Debates on integration and inclusion involve questions of political rights, citizenship, cultural and economic wellbeing and the attainment of practical skills, such as language, in the host country (Morley, 2000; Zhou and Cai, 2002; Keshishian, 2000). Media is often studied for the way it does, or does not facilitate integration or inclusion of migrants into the dominant norms and practices of the host society (Zhou and Cai, 2002).

I have chosen here to focus specifically on home and belonging, rather than inclusion and integration, for several reasons. For example, participants in this study do not hold a strong desire to return to Iran to live. Nor do they draw very much on Iranian media products to imagine that country as home. While this does not mean that Iran does not feature as 'home' in many participants' responses, it does mean that, by necessity, they are also engaged with the task of making a home in Australia. Participants are engaged with Australian based media not just in terms of inclusion or integration into Australian society, but in forming a sense of home and belonging in the country in which they, by and large, imagine themselves living out their lives (Brah, 1996). Thus, rather than focus on the issue of inclusion into a pre-existing host society, what is more interesting is the role of the media and the diasporic consumer in forming a sense of home in the country of settlement.

The active work of participants is brought to the fore here. Rather than aim to achieve certain levels of cultural and linguistic competency, the formation of a feeling of home requires the construction of a place of belonging. Home is about practices, symbols and values that are intrinsically tied to a feeling of belonging in a place. Home then is a site of belonging, yet home and belonging are not necessarily reducible to each other. One can conceivably feel a sense of belonging, even if temporary, whilst not feeling completely at home. Yet it is hard to imagine someone feeling at home, without feeling that is where they belong. A feeling of belonging is a necessary prerequisite to a feeling of home, even if the former does not always lead to the latter.



## **LOCAL AND BROADCAST MEDIA**

The acknowledgement of feelings of home and belonging as involving the construction of a sense of place, rather than a primordial attachment to place, means that the practices and symbols of place making come to the analytical foreground. Thus, much of the work of diaspora involves the re-creation of an alternative space of belonging alongside and amongst pre-existing mappings – a re-territorialisation. The rhythms, resonances and habits that make a place home, a *habitat*, are re-embedded. ‘Diasporas (re)create home by instilling such resonance into the spaces they occupy: they do it with their languages, customs, art forms, arrangements of objects and ideas’ (Karim, 2003: 10). The importance of this process of re-embedding must not be underestimated, as the search for a secure home relies on the appropriation and negotiation of local symbols as well as the use of symbols from the homeland. Indeed, in increasingly phantasmagorical places and localities defined by external information flows, the negotiation of media becomes vital. Space becomes place when it is familiar, lived in, understood and invested with meaning, making local symbolic resources – such as local or national broadcast media – continually important in a desire for home (Moore, 2005; Brah, 1996).

While there is some movement towards uniformity and integration on a global media scale (in terms of cross ownership and conglomeration), local television stations, radio stations, publications and broadcast programmes are still based on the idea of a definable place, with place related points of reference. By referring to the ‘local’ and broadcast media of the host-land I mean those media products which refer to environments that could be conceivably seen as local, as definable places wherein much of everyday life is experienced. Thus, publications based on suburban or council areas refer to the immediate geographical region where much of life is carried out, from news of new developments to changes in parking conditions. Radio may also refer to the city as a bounded site (the city being where many migrants settle) with news of political decisions, traffic conditions and cultural events.

Though broadcast media contains many global elements (with shows from overseas in abundance in many countries), free to air television, through news, sport, mediated events, and fictional shows that re-enforce myths of place, also refer to and construct a bounded site of social life at various levels. Thus, geographical and architectural landscapes, cultural mores and standards, accents and colloquialisms, jokes, media identities and personalities, political controversies, cultural events, weather, traffic conditions, governmental policy changes, changes in road rules, changes in employment services, news of language services and other such minutiae are all communicated through both local and broadcast media. Media thus distributes common symbols and narratives to a dispersed and heterogeneous audience. The complex nation is simplified, organized and given coherence in local and broadcast media.

## **MEDIA, INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION**

The connections between media and a place of home or belonging have been discussed in various different ways (Moore, 2006, 2007; Scannell, 1996; Anderson 1991; Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992). Scannell (1996), for instance, argues that the key role of broadcasting is to link the private and the public in a shared calendar of broadcast events. The outer boundaries of the nation, defined by broadcasting's reach and mode of address, are tied back to the everyday lives of household members through the television and radio. Through its modes of address, its temporal structure, its predictability and safety, broadcasting allows a conversation to take place by incorporating all citizens into a common dialogue. The media facilitates a form of cultural citizenship, a resource for the exchange of views based on a common source of information. Broadcasting, then, is a mode through which the increasingly challenged borders of the nation state and its increasingly diverse citizenship can be held together and allowed to imagine themselves as part of a community (Scannell, 1996; Anderson, 1991).

As well as demarcating the borders of the nation state, including who lies inside and outside of them, media are also involved in the articulation of what it means to belong, what it means to be a cultural citizen. Media are thus part of the everyday imbedded routines and practices that go toward understanding a place as home, which, phenomenologically speaking, immerse the body into its taken-for-granted time-space routines (Moore, 2006, 2007). Media are also involved in feelings of home and belonging through their role in the myths, histories and traditions that are part of this everyday life-world. Media make a place distinguishable, give it a certain character and reinforce its norms of citizenship and belonging. In this sense, media play a role in the construction, from the inside out, of what Fortier (2000) calls a 'space of belonging'.

At the same time, however, in looking at local and broadcast media, one must be aware that in speaking to a nation, city, or a locality, it is probable, even necessary, that media create obstacles to the access of diasporas into a shared space of media representation. Many migrant groups, including Iranian Australians, hold an inferior position in the scale of 'belonging' as compared to white, European Australians. In the context of official processes such as migration policy and citizenship tests, through to informal instances of discrimination and racism, Iranians in Australia may feel that local and broadcast media are talking to a highly select, ethnically homogenous audience, rather than to them. David Morley (2000: 110-111) sums up this position well:

By the very way (and to the very extent that) a programme signals to members of some groups that it is designed for them and functions as an effective invitation to their participation in social life, it will necessarily signal to members of other groups that it is not for them, and, indeed, that they are not among the invitees to its particular forum of sociability.

The role of media in the search for feelings of home and belonging, then, involves exclusions and a lack of recognition for those in diaspora. The media's role as the most powerful symbolic shapers, reflectors and managers of the broader national society place them in a central position in terms of who is positioned outside of that same national home. This dual role of Australian media differentiates it from Iranian diasporic media, which is smaller, less widely distributed and less able to tap into national myths and discourses and command national attention (Turner, 1994).

I now turn to an analysis of the engagement with local and broadcast media amongst Iranians who reside in Australia, looking specifically at the role of this media in feelings of home, belonging and not belonging. The data drawn upon is derived from a study currently underway into Iranian Australians' feelings of home and belonging, and the role of media in these feelings. In this study, participants were asked about their consumption of all media, whether narrowcast or broadcast, mainstream or alternative, Iranian or English language. What emerged from the data was that Australian based media played a key role in the lives of Iranians in Australia. Most participants said that they did not trust Iranian state run media, and many said that diasporic media simply did not relate to their lives in Australia. Thus, Australian broadcast and local media were vital for the management of life in a new country.

This article analyses in greater detail this link between the media of the country of settlement and the lives of those in diaspora. I draw here on a sample of 11 interviews. Participants are both male and female, include Baha'is, Muslims, atheists and Christians, and have lived in Australia for time periods ranging from 4 to 20 plus years respectively.

Participants were asked the question "where is home for you now days?" They were also asked questions about the media's role in this feeling of home, and the media's role in feelings of belonging in Australian society. Additionally, participants were asked "can you think of any media that has made you feel excluded from Australian society?" None of the eleven participants discussed below hold any desire to return to Iran to live. I want to begin, then, by analysing participants' responses to the question "where is home for you now days?" As will be shown, conceptualisations of home are not complete or even necessarily solid, but are still largely under construction, making the appropriation of local media an important aspect of study.

## **NEGOTIATING THE NEW THROUGH LOCAL AND BROADCAST MEDIA**

In terms of feeling like Australia is home, there are a variety of responses from participants. While many say that Australia is their home, most participants also speak about the tensions between Australia and Iran, and about the continuing doubts they have regarding Australia as home.

**Table 1:** Feelings of home, the role of media, and a desire to return to Iran

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Australia as Home</b>	<b>Role of media in feeling of home/belonging</b>	<b>Media exclusions</b>	<b>Desire to return</b>
<b>Afsoon<sup>1</sup></b>	<u>YES:</u> With qualifications	<u>POSITIVE:</u> Inclusive comedy	<u>YES:</u> Yes, newsreaders reading too fast	<u>NO</u>
<b>Dariush</b>	<u>NO</u>	<u>POSITIVE:</u> Belonging through local knowledge	<u>YES:</u> Yes, media doesn't deal with his interests.	<u>NO:</u> Not to live
<b>Mehrab</b>	<u>YES</u>	<u>POSITIVE:</u> Cultural knowledge/inclusion	<u>YES:</u> Can be excluding of all Middle Easterners	<u>NO:</u> Not to live
<b>Taher</b>	<u>YES</u>	<u>POSITIVE</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>NO:</u> Not with current regime in power.
<b>Azin</b>	<u>YES</u>	<u>POSITIVE:</u> Reminder of freedoms.	<u>NO</u>	<u>NO:</u> Not with current regime in power.
<b>Hesam</b>	<u>YES</u>	<u>POSITIVE:</u> Yes, freedom of choice.	<u>YES:</u> Yes, commercial stuff	<u>NO:</u> Not to live
<b>Farrin</b>	<u>NO:</u> 'I am homeless'	<u>POSITIVE</u>	<u>YES:</u> Yes, through general racism	<u>NO:</u> Not with current regime in power.
<b>Kamal</b>	<u>YES</u>	<u>POSITIVE</u>	–	<u>NO</u>
<b>Javeed</b>	<u>NO:</u> Has two homes.	<u>NEGATIVE:</u> Can help, but mostly do not	<u>YES:</u> Yes, all migrants are excluded from media	<u>Y/N:</u> Yes, but whether permanently or not he is not sure.
<b>Mehta</b>	<u>YES:</u> But still in between.	<u>POSITIVE:</u> Belonging through local knowledge	<u>YES:</u> SBS, too high brow and multi-cultural	<u>NO:</u> Not to live.
<b>Marjan</b>	<u>YES:</u> But is still in between.	<u>POSITIVE</u>	<u>NO:</u> None she remembers	<u>NO:</u> Not to live.

### *The Project of Home*

As can be seen in Table 1, all participants included in the sample who consider Australia as home see the media playing some role in this feeling. In terms of direct responses to the question of what makes one feel at home, most participants speak in terms of family, everyday life, and understanding their social surroundings and the people around them. This displays the importance of every day, non-mediated environments when it comes to feelings of belonging and security. Home is still a work in progress for the vast majority of respondents.

Three participants do not see Australia as their home. One (Dariush, a male Muslim) does not *feel* at home in Australia, another (Javeed, a male Christian) is in a painful in-between position in regards to Iran and Australia, and the other (Farrin, a female of no religion) says she is homeless. Two of these participants (Farrin and Dariush), however, say that their engagement with media does still provide them with a sense of belonging in Australia. The sample, then, although small, covers a wide range of feelings in terms of attitudes towards home and media.

The other eight participants consider Australia as home. However, there are varying degrees of conviction in their responses and almost all participants express some ambivalence about Australia as home. Even when Australia is seen as home, there is still a process in which 'home' is being worked on. The role of media in this process will now be analysed, beginning with responses that point to the role of local and broadcast media in facilitating a feeling of homeliness or belonging in Australia.

### **MEDIA AND FEELINGS OF HOME AND BELONGING**

The stories about local or broadcast media playing a role in feelings of home and belonging in Australia are diverse. They involve issues of local knowledge and an understanding of the surrounding social environment as facilitating some form of belonging. Participants also articulate media as aiding in feelings of home and belonging in ways that evidence the media's role in constructing shared cultural norms through the dissemination of powerful symbols, stories and narratives. Additionally, the responses by participants often contain evidence of the media's role as both symbols *of* and *for* reality.

In terms of the genre and types of media mentioned most, news and fictional television dominate. These genres often portray a universal image of 'Australian culture' and address a national or city wide audience. For example, Turner (1994) argues that the media construct

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<sup>1</sup> All names have been changed

an ‘Australian national character’, or a national type, which then stands for what is normal, what is acceptable and what is Australian. Hartley (1992: 207) points to the important role of news when he says, ‘The news media function, at the most general level, to create a sense of belonging for the population of a given city, state or country.’

Additionally, a feeling that one understands their immediate surrounding environment is vital to feelings of home. As Cohen and Metzger (1998: 52) point out, ‘to feel safe we need to feel we know what is going on in our world’, making news consumption about more than just a desire for information. Through knowledge and understanding some sort of control over the place one is in can be experienced, safe routines and rituals can be established and others can be engaged with. Additionally, local concerns become your concerns, and what was unknown and foreign becomes mundane and predictable.

Take this exchange between myself and Dariush. I ask him how much he thinks his use of media, currently, helps him feel like he belongs in Australia, and he talks primarily in terms of local mediated knowledge:

...the worst I ever feel is when I meet, I meet someone and they say ‘oh what about, what about the tunnel in Lane Cove [*Lane Cove is a suburb in Sydney*]?’ and I’m like, ‘I don’t know, what about the tunnel in Lane Cove?’... But ... you know that feeling of not belonging here, I feel that least when an Australian person randomly brings something up and I happen to know about it.

This participant sees Australia as his home, but says he does not *feel at home* in Australia. He is still in a position of liminality, of becoming, neither at home in Iran nor completely at ease in Australia, despite being here since 1991. The fact that local knowledge gained through local media can aid in feelings of belonging in Australia, however, evidences the continuing work that goes into the search for feelings of home. Even if one does not feel ‘at home’, momentary feelings of belonging can burst through, sometimes aided by media.

Reassurances through media do not just come through knowledge of the surrounding environment. The media can also play a role as symbols for wider public norms and values, whether these norms and values actually exist or are ideals. Thus, Hesam, a male Muslim, links media to an understanding of the nature of Australian society through the public enshrinement of certain political freedoms not enjoyed in Iran: ‘...that stuff really makes me feel, yeah, that’s Australia to me, being able to grill politicians like crazy, like give them a hard time, you know...Iran doesn’t have that’. This is a mediated version of Australia which the participant plays a role in constructing, maintaining and challenging when appropriate. Media symbols here act as representations *for*, playing a role in the construction of what Australia is to this participant (Carey 1989). Thus, it is not an objective Australian society being opened up to him, but a subjective one being formed by him through, among other things, media. The confidence, even if momentary, that he gains through his engagement

with media can be seen to aid in the construction and comprehension of a secure place, the freedoms and restrictions of which are, to a degree, understood. The boundaries of appropriate public expression to which the media contribute are part of the construction of habitable spaces in which one can feel at home (Brah, 1996).

As well as being potentially reassuring through the enshrinement of public freedoms, the media also trade in stories and narratives and are thus deeply connected to the culture(s) of the place in which they are produced, broadcast or received. Thus, several participants also mention, in general terms, culture and language when discussing media and feelings of home and belonging. As a male Baha'i, Mehrab uses little Iranian media and is firmly entrenched in Australian society, coming here as a child. Yet, when I ask him about the role of media in feelings of home and belonging in Australia he says:

...most of what I see on the media is...like everything from you know how Australians are, how the whole government is...all of that it, it makes you feel like you're part of Australia like everything you see...I guess in a way I just see all the successes in the media...if it wasn't for that you wouldn't actually form that identity so a lot of what happens in Australia like, I mean even, even things like *Neighbours* and you know all those, all of these things that you see in Australia just ... I guess just attaches you to, to the whole culture base ...

This participant is not only talking about how media make him feel linked to Australian culture, but is constructing Australian culture based on that media. The two cannot be easily separated. There is no objective Australian culture waiting to be found. Rather his use of media goes towards constructing and finding his own place in the Australian socio-cultural landscape. It is again a case of media acting as symbols *for* an Australian society he feels a sense of connection to. The media here are part of the very reality he feels – at least momentarily – a sense of belonging in. This constructive appropriation of Australian cultural products is highlighted by his mention of *Neighbours*, a show with a highly idealized and fictionalized image of Australia sold overseas.

In the above examples, media and reality are fused into a complex and multi-layered space of belonging and home for participants. Participants draw upon media narratives and symbols in order to construct an Australia they feel a sense of belonging in. The complexities and ambiguities of wider Australian society are organized, simplified and understood through Australian media, leading to a positive sense amongst some participants that Australia is home, or is at least a place where they belong. However, as the next section shows, feelings of home and belonging are not permanent.

## **MEDIA AND NOT BELONGING**

For a certain audience to feel they are being addressed and spoken to by a media product, another group must feel they are being left out (Morley, 2000). The role of media in feelings of home is not just about the construction of a shared space of belonging through local knowledge and culture, but about feelings of exclusion also. The 'homing desire' of participants is not a one way process in which incremental steps are made with each new media exposure towards a final perfect state of mind in which a person is sure beyond doubt that they are home. Rather, it is a complex struggle in which media engagement can illicit various feelings.

Seven participants say that as well as their engagement with media helping them to feel more at home in Australia, it can also make them feel singled out, like this is not where they belong. There are several different ways in which participants articulated their feelings of being excluded through media. Afsoon (a female of no religion), for instance, describes feeling frustration and exclusion due to a news reader on the radio announcing the news too fast for her to understand: 'but she was so fast and I couldn't understand ... you're saying the news for everyone, for example Indian, Iranian and Arabic people, everyone that listen to you ... I couldn't understand the news so I don't feel it'. Broadcast news plays a key role in constructing and imagining the nation, and addressing an audience as national citizens (Anderson, 1991). For the participant above, a feeling that she is not being addressed by the news is concomitant with a feeling that she is not part of the national audience of citizens.

Others, such as Mehrab, lament the stereotypical presentation of much news about Middle Eastern countries and the homogenization of the region. As does Hesam, who says he feels at home in Sydney, yet, in the same breath as he explains the media's role in this process, he evidences its opposite role:

...Australian media has made me feel more Australian, but there's two sides to the coin there ... I watch ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] and SBS [Special Broadcasting Service] but at the same time there's shows like *A Current Affair* [a tabloid news program] or channel nine which kind of creates stereotypes that I don't like and that kind of makes me feel a bit uneasy about you know what people are getting fed you know

The dual role of media is evidenced here; media can reassure and trouble, can include and exclude, often at the same time (Silverstone, 1993). Thus, Hesam can feel 'more Australian' but an engagement with different content on the same medium (television) can lead to an 'uneasy' feeling. This is a classic example of the media's role as representations of reality, engaging in stereotypical representations of migrants, representations that undermine a sense of belonging to Australian society (Alghassi, 2009).



As well as negative representations, the work of constructing an Australian society in which this participant feels comfortable is also evidenced. As the following exchange shows, Hesam sees the role of media in constructing and defining what Australia 'is' – as being symbols *for* as well as *of* – in terms of a culture of acceptance or intolerance:

...especially with the Telegraph [*a tabloid newspaper in Sydney*], [what] is that headline they ran ... five months ago, 'Rudd, Rudd's going to make us learn Asian' ... it scares me that they can put a headline up there in a country like this.

The links between media and an understanding of where one is are again evidenced in the above exchange. Hesam finds it troubling that such a simplistic headline can be used 'in a country like this'. This young Muslim feels by and large at home in Australia, and has no great desire to live in Iran again. But again, the Australia he wants to live in is not a given, and his place in it is not confirmed. Far from it, it has to be worked at. As part of this work, the media can at times act as symbols which challenge his sense of the country he is living in.

Dariush also speaks about mediated exclusions in a way which goes beyond representation to the cultural character of the society in which he is living. In discussing the relationship of media to his feelings that Australia is not always where he belongs, he says that '...if I was in Iran, all the issues on the media would be Iranian related issues right? I, I don't ever follow cricket ... I don't even know the rules to cricket...'. This link between media, place and culture is further emphasized when he compares the situation in Australia to his imagining of life in Iran: '...but in Iran what would you hear, you would hear weightlifting, you would hear about football, you know soccer, so I miss that, I miss having my issues being the main issues ... so ... sometimes you're not in sync with the mainstream ... that's when you don't feel like this is your home, you know'.

In a paper on issues of home and belonging, Morley (1999) cites literature which argues that a reason why foreigners are so often seen as threatening is because they confront the taken for granted link between identity and geography, who we are and where we belong. Migrants highlight the contingent nature of place, belonging and identity, challenging the idea of a natural fit between our identity and our home. They are living proof that a place as home is not necessarily natural or permanent.

For Dariush, this process seems to be reversed. Here it is the migrant who is constantly reminded of the contingent nature of 'home' and identity. Media symbols are constant reminders of Australia as a host society. Indeed, for all of the participants discussed above, Australian media seems to play this role. The media discussed by participants above narrates, constructs and symbolizes what are seen by many to be the most important and meaningful aspects of Australian society. Yet this same media is seen not to address participants'

concerns, resulting in a feeling that many of their most important concerns, issues, worries and desires simply are not important in an Australian context.

Javeed is the one participant who sees his engagement with media as only leading to feelings of exclusion. Due to a lack of representation of Iranian people or issues in the Australian news media, he feels he simply does not exist in Australia's media and cultural landscape. Thus, the feelings of exclusion that he has boil down to 'not existing, to be quiet honest, not existing'. The link between Australian mass media and the society 'out there' is clear; feeling excluded from one is intertwined with feeling excluded from the other. Although for some participants broadcast television can make them feel more at home in Australia, for this participant it does the opposite; it makes him feel like he simply does not exist in Australia.

In terms of media reflecting, organizing and portraying a version of 'society' to audiences through stories, narratives and images, the participants discussed above connect a lack of coverage in media to a feeling of being left out of Australian society in general. According to Aksoy and Robins (2003), the reason that Turkish TV in London is not more influential amongst Turkish migrants is that it is not seamlessly connected to life on London streets outside of the TV screen. However, the flip side of this is that exclusion from media which does (or is perceived to) connect with the outside world, such as local and broadcast media, can be experienced as one in the same with exclusion from that world itself.

## **CONCLUSION**

According to Naficy (1993), drawing on Salman Rushdie, for migrants reality is not given but is a project. Home, too, is a project, one which involves the engagement with local symbols and narratives, the construction of habitable spaces and the understanding of surrounding environments. For participants in this study, a feeling of homeliness requires a feeling that Australia is where they belong. This is never a stable state of affairs, yet the data above points to the media's role in the continuous struggle between feelings of belonging and not belonging. This media is diverse, and includes fictional television dramas, music, and news media. Participants achieve a feeling of belonging through an understanding of their social environment, a connection to and construction of certain cultures, and an engagement with media in terms of publicly available symbols of freedoms of expression. In this process, media do not just represent an underlying Australia to which participants feel a connection, but also play a role in the construction of an Australia respondents feel more at home in. Media thus act as representations *of* and *for* Australian society at its various levels.

What is at stake here is more than the achievement of a level of social inclusion or integration into Australia as a host society. Participants in this study cannot easily imagine Iran as home, meaning that feelings of belonging are related to the search for feelings of home in Australia. Thus, when a feeling of not belonging emerges through engagement with media, it is home itself, as a social construct, that is in jeopardy. Additionally, the undermining of feelings of home does not simply emerge through the mediated signification and distribution of skills, values, and practices that the participants do not share. It emerges through the symbolic construction of an Australian society that does not include Iranian Australians within its boundaries. Participants must constantly negotiate local and broadcast media in their attempt to forge a space of home and belonging in Australia.

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