☐   (johnbudarick@hotmail.com) has recently submitted his PhD, analysing the media use of Iranian –Australians, in the department of English, Communications and Performance Studies at Monash University, Melbourne. He has been published in *Journal of Sociology*, *Journal of Communication Inquiry* and *Colloquy: Text, Theory, Critique*. His research interests include media and social theory and the role of media in everyday life.

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John Budarick

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

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 dias

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 relativ1 (189 (a -4(')(i)17 (o)) -219 (n) -2 (en) (r) 2 (a) -4(t)

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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

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).

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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

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 Au -105 (p) -2 , usb

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

knowledge and culture, but about feelings of exclusion also. The 'homing desire' of

media exposure towards a final perfect state of mind in which a person is sure beyond doubt

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

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.

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