

Nets, backyards and the bush: the clashing cultures of nature on the Georges River

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ABSTRACT

Parklands are places of social interaction as well as habitats for complex non-human ecologies. These two processes – interacting with natural environments and with social groups – are connected and need to be considered together. In this paper I explore how cultural diversity and historical change have shaped the ways in which different groups of people perceive and act towards landscapes and animals in parklands along the Georges River and the National Park which surrounds it from Voyager Point downstream to Alford's Point. The various groups considered are Anglo-Irish, Aboriginal and Vietnamese Australians, all of whom have experienced the natural environment in their everyday activities like fishing and making a living. In doing so, they have interacted with each other, often expressing social conflicts through interactions about wildlife and nature regulation. I argue that we cannot understand how groups will relate to their natural environments unless we try to understand these inter-group political, cultural and historical conflicts.

Key words: Georges River, Aboriginal, fishing, Vietnamese, everyday multiculturalism.

Introduction: thinking about nature between cultures and across time

The bush we see in our parklands – and the animals we care about – are so solid and real to us that it is often hard to recognise that they can be understood – in fact even 'seen' or noticed – in very different ways, depending on the cultural expectations we bring with us. Such expectations change over time – and for that reason, this paper argues that we need to consider both cultural difference and history when we try to understand how people can be in conflict over their very understanding of 'nature'. Taking the example of the Georges River National Park and its surrounding landscape, I try to explore such differences by looking at some very 'everyday' and 'taken for granted' things in our lives. The first is backyards, and our understanding of how the 'domestic' or 'tame' relates to our idea of 'native'. The second is about fishing, and the way some very simple technologies used in that everyday pastime have come to carry some very heavy baggage.

Listening to the presentations from dedicated zoologists at this symposium has confirmed my sense that as a historian I'm sadly lacking in the zoological knowledge which would help me to trace out these relationships between people and nature. So this is an invitation to all of you as zoologists to assist us who are working in the area of history and the social sciences to engage much more effectively with the ways we understand how people saw nature and interacted with it. As scientists, you can tell us much about what was going on. My work already arises from a collaboration, although so far it is between disciplines usually understood to be within the social sciences. I am researching with another historian, Allison Cadzow at UTS; with Denis Byrne, an archaeologist from the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change, who works in culture and heritage and with Stephen Wearing at UTS, a sociologist studying leisure.

This paper opens with a map of Australia drawn in the 1840s (figure 1) because I think it suggests the questions I want to raise about perspective in the present day. The way we understand nature is dependent not only



Figure 1. 'The Indian Archipelago', drawn and titled by NSW Surveyor General, Thomas L Mitchell, 1848 in his *Journal of an Expedition into the Interior of Tropical Australia In Search of a Route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria*, Sydney, 1848. Electronic version available at: <www.gutenberg.org/files/9943/9943-h/9943-h.htm> viewed 8 November 2007.

on the material reality we are studying but on our perspective on it, our point of view. The conventional views of Australia, which we are used to, show a lonely and isolated continent dwarfed by the oceans on either side of it. This view is consistent with today's focus on Australia's links with the distant metropolitan centres of Britain, Europe and North America. But turn the map on its side. This is what the Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell was quite comfortable doing in 1848 when he looked across the diagonal from Sydney, north west to Bombay. Suddenly the land chain comes into view. This map emphasises connections rather than lonely isolation: it shows Australia to be tightly integrated in a chain of countries – and people – around the shores of the Indian Ocean. Mitchell saw a very different relationship between Australia and India than the more conventional Eurocentric view, which leap-frogs over Asia to see only Britain. In a period when most sea routes and administration flowed to Sydney through Calcutta, Mitchell was pointing to the geological, trade and political routes which linked these continents. He saw his journey into the interior of tropical Australia to be a journey to fulfil the potential of what he called 'The Indian Archipelago'.

I will focus this talk on this work we have done on the Georges River, an area in south western suburban Sydney with which many of you will be familiar. It is actually many rivers, as this recent map

shows (Figure 2). Salt Pan Creek and Mill Creek are two freshwater streams, draining water from their surrounding catchments into the saline lower stretches where they join the tidal Georges River. These streams are estuarine in their lower reaches, as is the Georges River up to the weir at Liverpool. There are parklands of many different designations along its length, all under differing jurisdictions and rules, including the recently expanded Georges River National Park. Yet the proportion of parkland to residential area is actually very small: this is an area which many of you will know as having very densely populated centres off the river, like Bankstown, since the early days of the settlement, and increasingly since the beginning of the 20th century on the northern side of the river.

This is the area where we have been working, not only in the DECCW (Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW) managed areas of the National Park but in the many different types of park along the river. By going beyond the cadastral boundary of any one type of park, we are able to look at the broader picture. We are taking a landscape perspective to understand how people move across and value different parts of the whole region, including the different ways in which people see the animals, the wildlife, around them. I'd argue that this involves not only zoology – which is much more important than historians have been able to make it – but also culture and history.

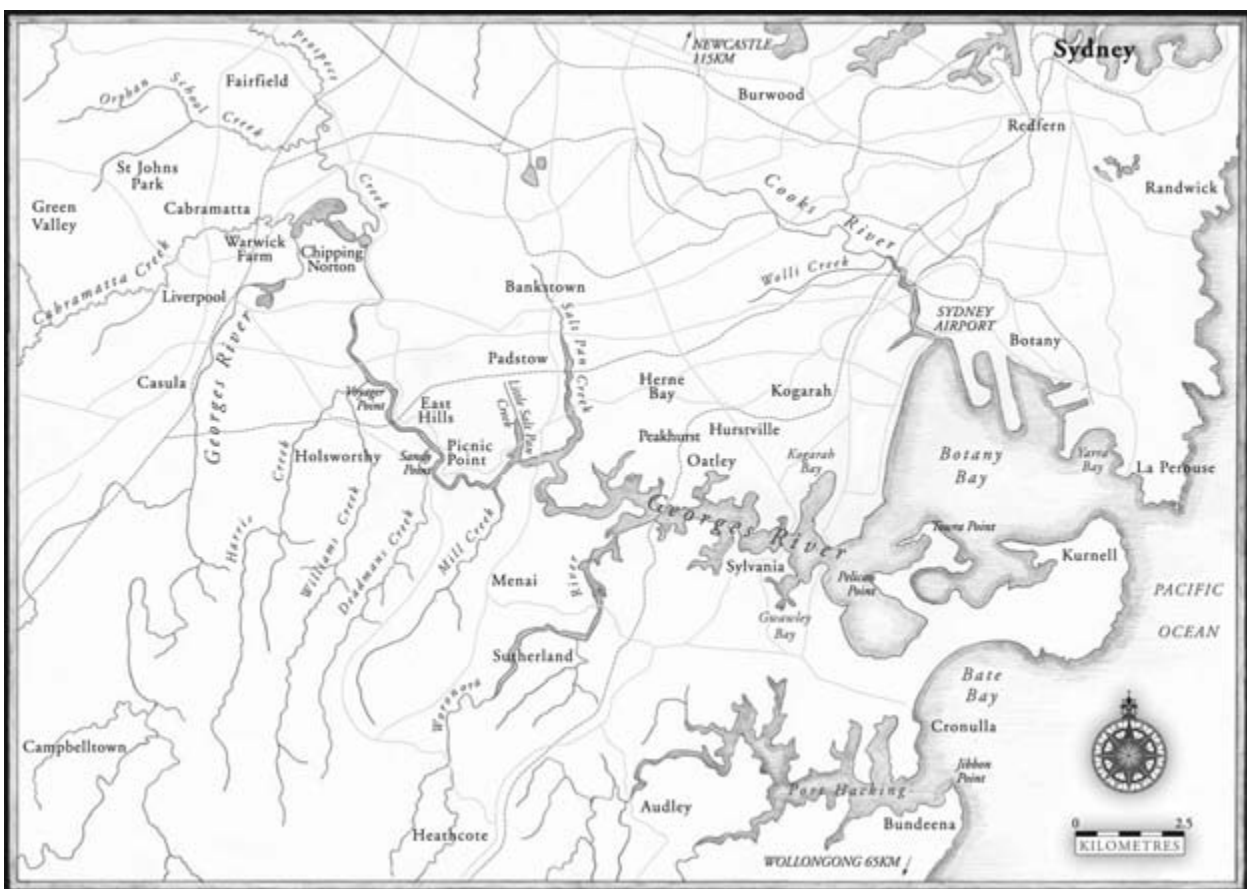


Figure 2. Rivers and coastline, south western Sydney. Cartography, Ian Faulkner, for Goodall and Cadzow: *Rivers and Resilience*, 2009, pp 6-7.

In making this argument, I have found it valuable to read the papers from past Royal Zoological Society forums. It was particularly interesting to look at the work of Dan Lunney and his colleagues in the paper from last year's forum, (Lunney *et al.* 2007) which asked us to think about overabundance at the same time as we think about threatened species and to look broadly at the way we consider managing them. In that paper, like a number of others, there's a very strong injunction for all of us to be thinking about the human perceptions of the environment and of wildlife: 'abundance' and 'threat' are both relative terms and each is heavily burdened with emotion and assumption. That's exactly what we're working on the Georges River project: how do people *see* the animals around them? Do they notice them at all? How do they think about them when they do see them?

I think that the official Coat of Arms of Australia (Figure 3) makes clear, better than anything else, the *symbolic* investment which Australians have made very heavily into native fauna and flora. The desire to signify Australian identity by representing it with Australia's unique wildlife was developed particularly strongly as the nation was created around the end of the 19th century. The Coat of Arms shows just this sort of symbolism: in the local flora, from wattles and bottlebrushes to waratahs, and just as obviously in the distinctively 'native' fauna. Historians often fail to recognise the environment when they consider development in urban areas. As Cronon, Griffiths and many other historians have now pointed out, while we have been eager to explain how human societies have shaped nature, we have failed to consider the way that the political and social developments are shaped by our environments (Cronon 1992, 1996; Griffiths and Robin 1997). My argument as a historian, however,



Figure 3. Australian national crest shows the flora and fauna seen as iconic and representative on Federation, 1901.

goes further than this.

I argue that social and political conflicts are enacted through and about the environment – which is not just used as a backdrop. Our relationship to the

environment itself is one of the ways that we position ourselves, that we identify ourselves. We may see ourselves as being in harmony with the natural world, as its defenders, or as its masters. This means that this is also one of the ways in which people position themselves in relation to other people: the way they depict others in the social conflicts that develop around them. These constructions change over time. This is a key finding of our project and I will move on to discuss very briefly two case studies from the Georges River. There are other case studies from our work which relate to species which are identified as being abundant or overabundant. The two case studies described here, I would like to suggest, are situations where the wildlife involved are perceived *locally* to be threatened, although overall the figures have not justified that designation. But it's the perception that I'm interested in.

Pets, backyards and the bush

The area on the Georges River catchment that had the most dense population at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th was around Bankstown and this has been our major study area. Parish maps over the 19th century show that this whole landscape was alienated completely into private ownership in the first 30 years of European settlement (Figure 4). There was no public land. There was no parkland. It was all privately owned. But in fact, what happened was that the geology of the area made it impossible to develop areas agriculturally on the riverbanks, and so areas remained open bushland. These areas were not subdivided, they didn't become agricultural land and they were often regarded as 'wasteland'. Increasingly they came to be thought of as if they were a public common, a *de facto* common on private land.

Public land was clawed back around the turn of the 20th century, but the sandstone areas along the riverbank continued to be essentially a *de facto* common where the continuing Aboriginal populations and the incoming settler populations utilised the whole array of resources. These sandstone areas were certainly used for hunting and for access to fishing but also for a whole range of other things - illicit sex, gambling, greyhound racing, growing vegetables. Such diverse uses continued right up until the middle of the 20th century and to see why, it's important to understand the process of development in the area. Where the sandstone predominates, you have high escarpments with a heavy eucalypt and angophora woodland. In the lower gullies you have substantial salt marsh. One of the remaining areas is around Mill Creek, and you can see there today not only the salt marsh vegetation, the old mangroves, the marsh grasses and the glowing red succulent, the samphire, but you can also see the wallaby tracks going through the grasses and reeds (Figures 5 and 6).

The southern side of the river is Darawal country and one of the extraordinarily important records we have in the first case study is of the continuity of Aboriginal residence in this area. Biddy Giles was a Dharawal woman whose descent

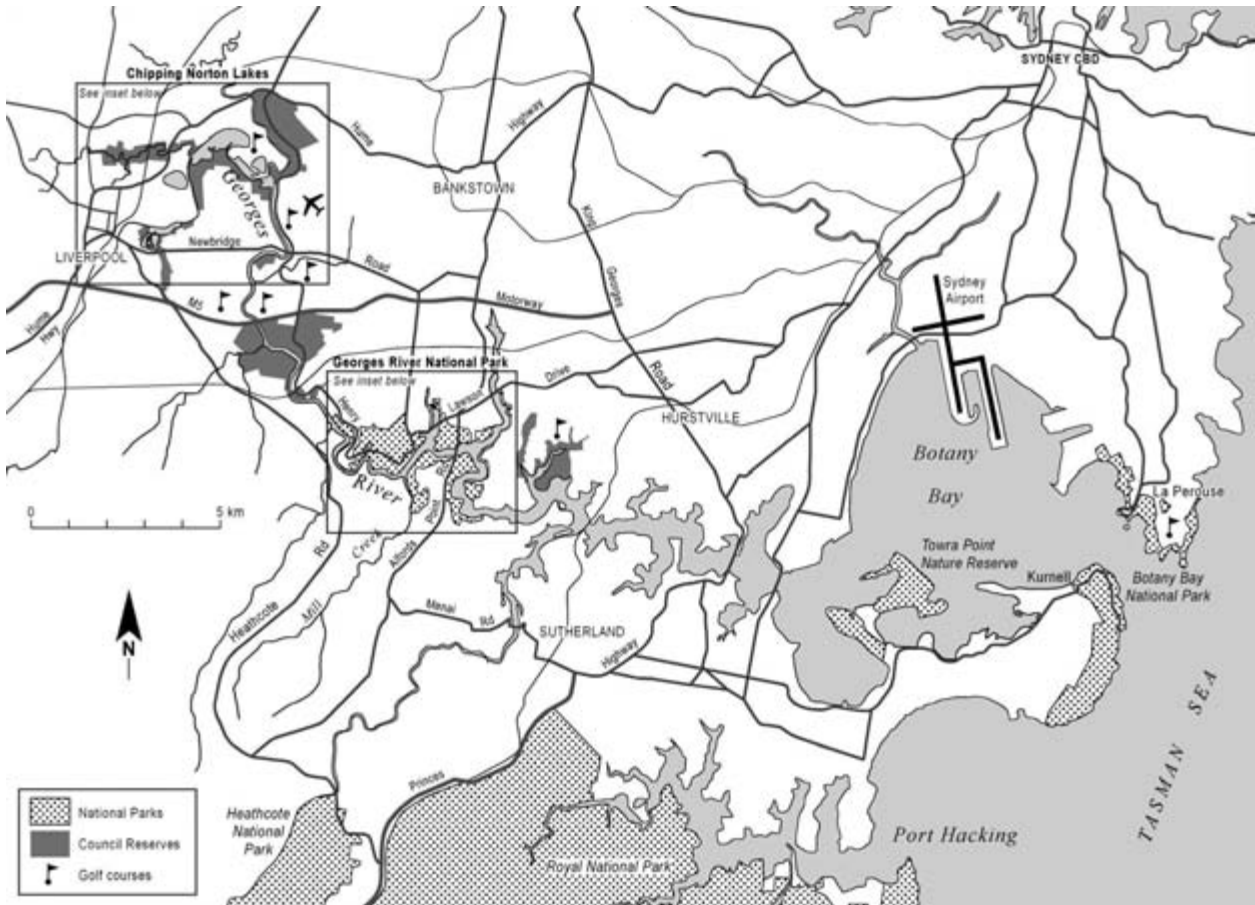


Figure 4. The Georges River parklands, cartography by DECCW, 2006, for Parklands, Culture and Communities Project, UTS & DECCW.



Figure 5. Salt marsh on eastern shore, Mill Creek, photo Heather Goodall, 2008.



Figure 6a. Samphire, Mill Creek salt marsh, photo Heather Goodall, 2008



Figure 6b. Swamp Wallaby tracks across salt marsh grasses, Mill Creek, photo Heather Goodall, 2008.

we can trace from earlier than the 1850s. She was a key person about whom we have many records because she ended up being married to a white man, Billy Giles. She and Billy operated what was more or less an early ecotourism arrangement. Many white men, but also some women, came from the settled areas of Sydney out to where Billy and Biddy lived seeking a fishing or hunting adventure. Biddy introduced all of them to her country, showing them where the best fish were, explaining many stories about the creation and the history of the country which she had learnt as a youngster, and taking them hunting for game. Some of these tourists left memoirs and from them we know not only about Biddy but about a number of other Aboriginal people living along the river, few of them named, but at least made visible and described in these stories about Biddy. So there were Aboriginal people right along both the southern and the northern sides of the river. From the memoirs, we can map out the areas where Biddy took these travellers and the sorts of things she was showing to them. These show her confident movements all along the country on the southern shores of the Georges River and Botany Bay, up to Kurnell and Jibbon Point.

Biddy's daughter Ellen later came to live on the northern side of the river, not too far from Mill Creek, on the eastern bank of the Salt Pan Creek. She and her husband, Hugh Anderson from the Murray River, were able to buy a block of land and their home became a nucleus of many families and individual Aboriginal people by the 1920s. This was a time when the pressure of government, through the Protection Board, was falling heavily on Aboriginal people living on reserves: children were being taken away, independent family farms were being broken up as the Board claimed all profits from the land and its managers were enforcing draconian penalties for disobeying Board directives. Many Aboriginal people began to move around the state, fleeing from Board control and seeking safe places to live. Salt Pan Creek was one of those places: on freehold and common land, it had no government supervision. By 1926, there were thirty people living on or nearby the block which Ellen and Hughie had bought and there were many other families scattered around the area on both sides of the creek. Just as important, due to the lack of government surveillance, all the people living there were involved not only in the cash economy, but could make a living from hunting - certainly swamp wallabies and other animals - and actively fishing the rivers. By the late 1920s you have a strong and sustaining Aboriginal population on free land. We have some pictures from this period: one of Ellen and Hugh Anderson, and one of a group of camp children and their school friends taken at Salt Pan Creek (Figure 7 and 8). You can see what a complex heritage these children had already. There were not only kids who have a non-Aboriginal background, but there were Aboriginal people now living in this community from all over New South Wales, some of them from Queensland, some of them from areas that had become Victoria.

This was an extraordinarily vibrant community because it wasn't on reserve land. People were openly involved in political activity against the government in that area. This was also an area that was being well used by Europeans, on those de facto commons. With the increasing encroachment of subdivision and settlement



Figure 7. Ellen Anderson (right), Biddy Giles' daughter, with her husband Hugh at their home on Salt Pan Creek, c. 1925, now Charm Place, Peakhurst. Reproduced with permission Mitchell Library Small Picture Archive.



Figure 8. Children at Salt Pan Creek, including Ellen Anderson's two young grandchildren in front row, Ellen (jnr) and Tom Williams (jnr), c. 1925. Note lack of mangroves on creek shoreline. Reproduced with permission Mitchell Library Small Picture Archive.

of the 1920s the pressure was dramatically increased on those Aboriginal communities. That led to many attempts to shift the Aboriginal community, but it also undermined the habitat of the wildlife in the area, particularly the salt marsh and the swamp wallaby in the area.

In the centre of that period of rising pressure to move, Ellen's son, Joe Anderson - who was Biddy's grandson - spoke out. Taking the name of his grandfather, Burruga, Biddy's husband, he was actually filmed for Cinesound News Review in 1933. He made a plea for the defence of the community against the pressure to move them off. They were being told they were unsightly, they were noisy. Their white neighbours were saying they weren't the sort of community that should be there where there was an emerging suburban society. But Joe Anderson argued that it is their right to live on their country - explaining that his ancestors are both traditional people and people from other areas of New South Wales. He argued that it is their right to live on their country, based on their understanding of it, on their hunting and gathering of the wildlife resources, but as well on their capacity to interact and to share. He said they were demanding 'the right to live' and he made it clear they had a right to live there, in the middle of the developing suburb.

The reason that this is an important case study is because one of the final factors which is used to explain and to rationalise forcing this community off their land at Salt Pan Creek was an incident in 1938 where Joe Anderson was caught hunting a wallaby and local whites complained to the RSPCA, suggesting that the animal was rare and endangered (Figure 9). We just have fragmentary pieces of documentary evidence, but there is a rich resource of oral history from this whole period, including wonderful stories from Aboriginal people whom I've interviewed who lived there on this independent camp. They knew that hunting wallaby was one of the things that everybody in that area, black and white, had been doing for many, many decades. For the Aboriginal people there, it was of course a traditional food as well.



Figure 9. Joe Anderson, Dharawal grandson of Biddy Giles, during 1938 conflict about wildlife conservation, domestication and Aboriginal hunting rights. Reproduced with permission Mitchell Library Small Picture Archive.

In the dispute, Joe Anderson was accused not of taking wild game, but of taking a native animal which was a local white person's pet. Joe Anderson denied it was a pet, and indeed denied it was a wallaby, asserting that he knew better than his accusers what type of animal was what. Naturalists tell us that there probably were only wallabies in that area, but one of the reasons that Joe Anderson may have been arguing about the type of animal was that he had been asserting hunting rights in the area. This is part of a defence about traditional rights to be there. The Europeans who complained about him to the RSPCA are arguing that this is a wallaby, which should be protected both because it was 'native' and because it was a tamed pet, that is, domesticated and owned. They were then positioning themselves as no longer the hunters as whites in the area previously had been, but were now the protectors of native game and indeed the protectors of the native environment. This was, just like they claimed the wallaby to have been, a *tamed and domesticated* environment, ready to serve the purposes of the national identity, to hold up that crest in the emblem of the nation.

Thus, there is a moving away from a productivist approach to landscape, in which people lived off its produce by hunting and gathering, to one in which the landscape was used to present an identity – as NATIVE and therefore to be protected – as long as it was tamed and controlled in order to serve as an icon of the new nation. This is what we see in working class movements which emerged along these working class rivers to conserve the environment in the 1930s and the 1940s which I've written about elsewhere. (Goodall *et al*, 2005) It is extremely important to recognise that this local conservation movement was working class, rather than made up of middle class professionals who are often credited with nurturing the environmental movement. But what the local working class conservation groups were doing was to develop wildlife - native wildflower reserves and sanctuaries - species by species. There's no sense of an ecology, a local ecology. But nor was there any sense that they're conserving a pristine environment. Without a second thought, they gathered wildflower species from Western Australia and other places to grow in a Floral Park which was developed in association with and positioned next to the Georges River National Park. As long as it was native, their capacity to domesticate and transplant such native plants, like the capacity to domesticate a wallaby, were signs of control over the indigenous environment. Only today, in very recent, twenty first century advertising for this park, now known as Sylvan Grove Native Garden, are there any signs of discomfort with the transplantation and domestication of native species from the far side of the continent – the species from distant places are now buried far down at the end of the brochure, while the local, endemic species of natives are highlighted at every opportunity. (Bankstown City Council: *Sylvan Grove Native Garden*)

When you compare the continuing Aboriginal community perception to the landscape of the Georges River – which was to see it as a productive landscape from which to live – with the rising nationalist view that native landscapes were to be domesticated and, because 'owned', could then be protected to form an emblem of identity, you have the conflicts between the two groups being played out through their different views of the place they both shared. You have two very different views about nature and native animals, and about roles of people in relation to those animals.

Nets and Fishing:

I will only refer to my second case study briefly here. The image I have to start with here is the NASA map of Sydney which allows you actually to see the physical environment that shapes Sydney (Figure 10). We often have trouble seeing it in our flat, two dimensional maps but if you cycle or walk or run around Sydney you get that sense of a rugged terrain which has been shaped by the flow of water. This is a city of rivers, of sunken valleys in which we have strong archival and oral history evidence about fishing and gathering riverine resources as being critically important for the survival not only of the Aboriginal communities described by Val Attenbrow at this forum, but about the settler communities as well.



Figure 10. NASA satellite image of Sydney shows widespread presence of rivers throughout high density city suburbs. PIA03498: Sydney, Australia, NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, NASA/GSFC/METI/ERSDAC/JAROS, and U.S./Japan ASTER Science Team, 11 June 2002. <http://photojournal.jpl.nasa.gov/catalog/PIA03498>

A whole range of resources were drawn on: prawns, mussels and oysters as well as fish. They were critically important for survival for all of those groups after settlement, just as they were for indigenous people prior to settlement. Each of these groups, settlers and Aborigines, used nets for fishing the river. Val Attenbrow has pointed out that there are no historical recordings of nets being used in the coastal areas of New South Wales but by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the city areas like Georges River contained, as I have discussed, Aboriginal people from a broad range of areas, and many brought with them a knowledge of the indigenous use of nets. Importantly, we have extensive evidence of Anglo-Celtic Australians - who continue to be predominant sector of the population in the Georges River - using nets. They used them for all sorts of things. They certainly used them for prawns but they used them also for fish. Some of them were commercial fishers but many of them were subsistence or recreational fishers, all the way along the river.

Our interviewees talk about using a range of nets: some made their own nets. Many people strung hessian bags together to get prawns in Salt Pan Creek and other areas before the mangroves took over, making any sort of prawning impossible. Some used fine 'tattooing' to make their own nets, a skill which people often remember their fathers showing them when they were children in the 1930s. But the next group of people I want to talk about have been stigmatised precisely because of their alleged use of nets. These are the Vietnamese immigrants who are now Australians and who live in a series of areas along the northern part of the Georges River. They began to arrive after 1975 with the end of the American War, as the Vietnamese know it, and they brought with them a whole lot of ways to think about fishing. One of the few documentations of Vietnamese fishing is the 1997 report, *We Fish for the Future*, carried out by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council for RecFish. (FECC 1997) This report documented - and largely endorsed - a growing concern that Indo-Chinese

people fished inappropriately, indeed rapaciously, and so were contributing to the exhaustion of the resources. The methods by which they were said to do so were by gathering shell fish with large groups of people on rock platforms and by using nets to fish in rivers.

This is an important report, which we commend, because it gives us a great deal of detail that we would not otherwise have. But we have some reservations about it as well. In our research, we have been working with the Vietnamese communities along the river, drawing on oral history and memory from them as well as on their accounts of present day experiences. These lead us to argue that the RecFish report contains a number of assumptions which are simply not justified when compared to the detail in oral history and in the demographics of origins. These questionable assumptions are that Vietnamese migrants are collectively rural people; that they are locked into age-old practices of a subsistence agriculture; and that they are culturally resistant to learning about different environments and new methods and resistant to change.

As one example of the way such assumptions are brought into play, the report recommends using shame, both within the community and externally, to stop people fishing with nets particularly, on the basis that as a collectively-identifying group, peer disapproval will carry heavy weight among all Vietnamese. There is certainly a great deal of embarrassment among the most middle class Vietnamese migrants and those who are now second or third generation Australians, who are more affluent, but it seems to reflect class differences within the Vietnamese community, rather than an agreement with the criticism. Instead it is because middle class Vietnamese regard the criticised fishing practices as being some evidence of a hunter-gatherer mentality, a failure to fully acculturate to middle class affluence.

Another example, concerns the uses of nets, which have now largely been banned along the river as they are said to lead to overfishing and depletion of species and biodiversity. It is widely believed among Anglo residents of the area, in a view repeated in the RecFish report - although not supported with empirical evidence - that Vietnamese fishermen have overfished by using nets widely but secretly, in contravention of the restrictions and to the detriment of river species. This has essentially been an accusation that Vietnamese fishers were the cause for the loss of species in the rivers.

Such stigma has very concrete effects. We've interviewed a number of young white Australian men who talk about routinely harassing and sometimes physically attacking Vietnamese line fishers - who are not doing anything illegal - because they're convinced that because they are Asian, they must fish with nets after dark and in secret. The RecFish report documented similar unprovoked attacks. Vietnamese people we have worked with refuse to have their photograph taken with nets because they are so intensely aware of the stigma.

However, Vietnamese Australians, who have been facing such stigma from soon after they began arriving in 1975, had settled on a river which was still affected by massive, continuing industrial and sewage pollution. The Georges River had been so badly polluted in the 1960s that it had been closed to swimmers and fishing. The river continued

to face severe, measurable pollution long into the 1970s. The question of what is and is not safe in catches from the river today continues to be debated. The sharks, whose presence and predation are legendary, quit the river for many years, and have only just begun to return. Has it been reasonable then to blame Vietnamese people for reductions in river species?

Were those Vietnamese who arrived locked into old rural patterns of behaviour as the RecFish report was suggesting? What we're finding in our interviews is that, contrary to the Rec Fish assumptions, Vietnamese Australians were not agricultural people before they migrated. Nor were they rural migrants who had only recently migrated to Vietnamese cities before they came to Australia. Instead, they are largely urban people and have been for most of their adult lives in Vietnam. They are fishing in Australia not out of an inability to change. Instead for many of them it is out of nostalgia from a time they remembered being with their grandparents, when they were children growing up, and they went to visit rural areas (Figure 11). As well as a sense of nostalgia, they are fishing, sometimes with nets and sometimes by gathering molluscs, because that's a way of socialising with members of the community, which is incredibly important in insecure conditions of migrancy.

Of particular interest to us, the Vietnamese interviewees point out that they are actually fishing and gathering far more often in Australia than they ever did in Vietnam. There are a number of reasons for this. One is particularly about a sense of identity. When Vietnamese were often excluded through inexperience or prejudice from many recreational pastimes on their arrival, they had few ways to spend their time other than to fish, drawing on a practice they did know something about. And as more and more of their fellow immigrant countrymen took up the same pastime, it became an important way not only to socialise but to identify oneself with the Vietnamese community. How do you **BE** Vietnamese in Australia? One of the ways is that you fish, as do Huy Pham and his father in the Georges River National Park (Figure 12).

Finally, we are finding that it is also a strategy for learning a new environment. Vietnamese Australians we have interviewed have talked about the ways in which fishing

allows them a common point of contact with other fishers along the river bank, a socially acceptable way to interact with each other but also to learn about how the environment works, to explore by using a skill one knows to see how it works in a very different place.

A changing mainstream way to understand 'nature' and 'native'

We argue that Anglo-Celtic and white Australians move to position themselves now as protectors of a **pristine, untouched** 'native' environment, rather than the **domesticated** and **managed** 'native' environments they claimed to be protecting in the 1930s. Since the 1970s, as ecology has become more widely known and understood, and white Australians are less dependent on fishing – and less likely to fish in polluted rivers – it has become easy to condemn newcomers who do fish. It's a very different position than the one they argued in the 1930s. In fact, what they are doing has been to express their anxiety and their hostility to Vietnamese people moving into the neighbourhood by complaining about the way they fish.

Our argument, as these two case studies show, is that people use their relationship to the environment to identify themselves but more importantly to position themselves in relation to other people. And this, we contend, changes over time. At times the heaviest emphasis for settler white Australian groups has been on who could be the most effective hunter or fisher, as it was with the white adventurers who sought out Bidy Giles. Somewhat later on, the local whites around Salt Pan Creek were claiming that they were not hunters but rather tamers and domesticators of the native environment, the successful transplanners of native flowers, for example, from one side of the continent to the other. Yet in this they still argued that they were the protectors whereas Aborigines were the predators and exploiters of the native fauna and flora. The position of protectors was clearly the high moral ground and was used to argue for the removal of the Aboriginal community.



Figure 11. Old couple fishing with throw net, Vietnam, 25 October, 2007, from public gallery, <http://picasaweb.google.com/jaemoon007/Vietnam2007#5162539054230731938>



Figure 12. Vietnamese-Australian and Georges River resident, Huy Pham, as a child in a family photo with his father, fishing at Georges River National Park, 1990. From online exhibition by Allison Cadzow and Heather Goodall: *Gold and Silver: Vietnamese migration and relationships with environments in Vietnam and Sydney*, online exhibition by Migration Heritage Centre: <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/goldandsilver/>

Later still, in the 1980s to the present and in relation to the Vietnamese Australian immigrants, white Australians have still argued that they were the protectors, but this time of a pristine and fragile wild native environment. Only white Australians, it is suggested, know how to fish responsibly or even how to refrain from killing by a catch and release strategy. And so only white Australians could call themselves 'at home' while others were intruders. At the same time, the Aboriginal and the Vietnamese Australians have been positioning themselves through the environment. The Aboriginal people were arguing they were owners and rightful harvesters in the 1930s, and so they represented fauna as game and resource, in support of an insistence on responsible ownership. In more recent times, Vietnamese people have themselves been creating a new identity through their relationship to the environment of their new home. I haven't even touched on the extraordinarily interesting religious and literary expressions about rivers and fish and nets that come from Vietnam itself, knowledge which is now active amongst Australians of Vietnamese background and non-Vietnamese background.

All of us need to gain a better understanding of the rich body of cultures and traditions about nature which are held by Indigenous and immigrant groups as well as by Anglo-Celtic Australians. Yet on the other hand, we need also to recognise the complex social dimensions of

relationships to the environment between ethnic and social groups. Both are important in charting a course for the future. It is all of these people who are going to be the park and river users - and hopefully the custodians of the environment - into the future.

The women and men who love biology enough to study it and make it their life's work, the zoologists and botanists, the geographers and ecologists, will not be able to foster a healthy environment for all species in the future unless local people are drawn into the process. There is clearly a great deal to be done: as this paper will have made clear, there is a lack of empirical data about how people actually utilise the resources of the river's environments, to test and interrogate the assumptions and mythologies about what they do. To achieve this, a collaboration between social scientists and scientists would be an important component, but it would only work in alliance with the local communities.

And to achieve an alliance like this, the social and cultural dimensions of the ways local communities understand and relate to the natural world need to be factored into the equations about how we go forward. These local people have a stake in this local landscape, the river quality and the wildlife that lives there. It's the alliances that we can all build across cultural lines which are going to be critically important to future ecological studies.

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