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Communities and responsibility: Narratives of place-identity in Australian bushfire landscapes

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Introduction

Since the 2009 Victorian 'Black Saturday' bushfires, land and fire management agencies in Australia have emphasised shared responsibility for bushfire (wildfire) risk management. This development has been supported by policies that have in practice effected a shift toward greater government management agency control over all aspects of the emergency management process – risk reduction, readiness, response and recovery (McLennan & Handmer 2012). The onus of community protection requires management agencies to take control of the technologies of risk assessment and mitigation and to allocate task responsibilities to communities. However, as Neale *et. al.* (2016) argue, technologically driven risk mitigation strategies frequently overlook the social dimensions of management and in particular the roles of residents' narratives and other ways of knowing. Nevertheless, many studies of community responses to natural hazards are framed by the technological assumptions made by governments and their natural hazards management agencies about the determinants of risk, and expected community behaviours associated with (notionally) sharing responsibility for managing risk. Effectively, this establishes a deficit model in which local community knowledge is measured against standards applied by external experts, ignoring how everyday lived experience may constrain or enable people's capacities to respond - response-*ability* (Koksal *et. al.* 2018, Paschen & Beilin 2016, Eriksen & Gill 2010). The significance of the links between people's practices of home- and place- making and their ways of living with, and managing, bushfire risk have been established (Anton & Lawrence 2015, Reid & Beilin 2015). Place-making practices such as walking in the neighbourhood or local parks, ecological restoration, or planting indigenous species extend the concept of home into the broader landscape. Furthermore, physical elements of the landscape such as hills and creeks or iconic tree species also form part of the imaginary of home. These imaginaries of home create a continuum between domestic spaces and the wider landscape and consequently strongly influence public responses to the maintenance of public spaces by land and fire management agencies (Reid & Beilin 2015).

In this paper, we build on previous research findings by exploring the complex interplay of (a) landscape and social memory, (b) place-making and place-identity, and (c) notions of responsibility sharing in natural hazard preparedness and response. We acknowledge that the idea of local community has multiple constructions that may be deployed for differing purposes (Lukasiewicz *et. al.* 2017). For example, in the context of disaster risk landscapes,

Australia's National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR) promotes (a) shared responsibility between government agencies and communities, and (b) community empowerment through engagement, volunteering, and a professed respect for local knowledge in decision-making processes (COAG 2011). However, while the NSDR envisages empowered communities as having full access to information, the purpose is to enable individuals to conform to the directions and expectations of government agencies (Lukasiewicz *et. al.* 2017). The on-ground reality is that the discourse of empowerment is subordinate to what Welsh (2014) describes as "government at a distance, technologies of responsibilisation, and practices of subjectification that produce suitably prudent autonomous and entrepreneurial subjects in a world of naturalised uncertainty and crisis" (p.16). The dilemma for communities is that at the same time as they are being expected to take greater – and largely unspecified (Lukasiewicz *et. al.* 2017) – responsibility for hazard preparedness, there has been a corresponding withdrawal of resources. Power is being consolidated away from small communities into the larger regional centres, and State-based natural resource management agencies are being withdrawn from rural communities (Argent 2011, Singh-Peterson *et. al*. 2015). The shaping of place and the spaces of community are also extensions of individual identity in relationship(s) to the physical landscape in which they are situated (Beilin & Reid 2015, Reid & Beilin 2014, Reid & Beilin 2015). A sense of the local and place-identity are constructed through landscape and social memory enacting specific local forms of community. The aim of our research is to understand how this combination of interacting community processes of on-ground mobilisation of the local and community meet in place in the landscape. The fluidity of these processes is the source of community adaptability. We argue that community – both of place and of interest (Twigg 2009) – is not a permanent or fixed entity. It emerges in a diversity of forms in response to disturbance via the social memory of participation in multiple everyday acts, as for example through neighbourliness or support for, or from, others.

We describe a theoretical framework drawing together scholarship in the fields of landscape, social memory and place, and our methods and case study. Our findings point to community interpretations of risk and responsibility as being closely associated with making and maintaining local place-identity and not always congruent with the interpretations of land and emergency management professionals. The work of maintaining place-identity is passed on or consolidated in the narratives of social memory. Finally, we highlight the implications for community-agency relationships in relation to hazard management and future research needs.

Landscape, remembering and place: a theoretical framework

We concur with de Certeau (1980) that memory, identity and landscape are co-constructed in the practice of everyday life. In this section we first discuss the concept of landscape – how people understand their landscape and how it shapes them and they shape it. We then briefly explore literature addressing the practices of social remembering and describe how memory is embodied in the landscape through everyday routine practices. Finally, we draw the links between landscape, memory and place identity, specifically in the context of emergent sense of being and enacting 'community' within the context of disaster landscapes.

Landscape

Following Olwig (1996) we conceptualise landscape as "a place of human habitation and environmental interaction" (p.630). Landscapes are "the sum of our pasts" – imbued with memories and generational experiences (Schama 1995, p.574). However, the visual cues in the landscape at once express but also mask the sum of our pasts and the history of land use practices. The way a landscape looks in the present creates an expectation of how it 'should' be managed and these expectations become reinforced in everyday practice and embedded in social memory (Cosgrove & Daniels 1988).

Ingold (2000) describes the pattern of human activities undertaken in the landscape as the 'taskscape' and that because "the activities that comprise the taskscape are unending, the landscape is never complete: neither 'built' nor 'unbuilt' it is perpetually under construction" (p.199). Arguably among the most significant activities being undertaken in the taskscape are practices associated with imbuing the landscape with memory – remembering and forgetting – and recognising and reinforcing visual cues, crucial to the construction of place-identity. In the following paragraphs we review literature that conceptualises social memory as a process (social remembering), and the entanglements of memory and landscape.

Remembering and Landscape

Remembering (and forgetting) is closely associated with the creation of narratives that help collective sense-making. For example, according to Linde (2009), institutions and members of institutions use narrative to rearrange past experience and memories and decide what is to be retained and what is to be omitted. Active remembering is a creative process that involves

using imagination to both fill in gaps and resolve inconsistencies in past experience and, significantly, to make a sense of the future (Keightley and Pickering 2012).

In our study of local communities and memory we are primarily concerned with 'vernacular' or first-hand and locally specific memory. Vernacular memory is often distinguished from official memory or so-called historical 'facts'. Dellios (2015) rejects this distinction, arguing that vernacular and official memory are mutually constitutive. Similarly, Olick and Robbins (1998) dismiss the supposed dichotomy between history (as fact) and social memory. History itself is "written by people in the present for particular purposes, and the selection and interpretation of "sources" are always arbitrary" (p.110). An important part of social remembering is the practice of social forgetting. Forgetting and forgetfulness are not necessarily failures of memory – a disremembering – but are inherent in the work of memory (Connerton 2008, Plate 2016). Some events, or parts of events (Reid & Beilin 2014), are remembered and others are forgotten – active remembering requires actors or institutions to define and keep alive notable events – relationships of power and control play an important role (Fine and McDonnell 2007). Furthermore, social memory implies a form of remembering (and associated forgetting) that is at least partly accomplished in the routine practices of moving about in the landscape, both physically and mentally. Therefore, imagining the landscape and inhabiting it through the taskscape would contribute to memory that is "passed on as an incorporating practice" (Haskell & Stawski 2017, p.621). Memory is incorporated into the integrated mind-body through the routine of everyday practices. A place therefore is "at any one time, the sum of its recollected and… planned-for events and the social and landscape entanglements of those events" (p.620).

One such social and landscape entanglement that has emerged as important in this study is the construction of place identities within communities. 'Place identity' is dynamic and open to change as cumulative understandings (eg. 'social and landscape entanglements') disrupt prior thinking. In communities facing withdrawal of resources and loss of power over local decision making in relation to hazard preparation "place-identities vary as globalising forces construct, or challenge the ability to construct, a unique or authentic character and its representation to 'others'" (Carter *et. al.* 2007, p.757). Place is also likely to be experienced variably by different types of residents (for example long term residents and recent in-migrants) and the environment. As such, diverse place attachments are likely to significantly influence community resilience (Zwiers *et. al.* 2018). In summary, we encounter

remembering and identity as multiple and fluid constructions that emerge as communities narrate their diverse and changing understandings of everyday living within and across these landscapes.

In the context of Australian bushfire landscapes, the complexity of local social memory of local ecologies can interrupt the flow of bushfire information from management agencies to communities. For example, the interplay between local environmental knowledge, time, experience and place attachment must be taken into account in community outreach programs (Eriksen & Gill 2010). One of the key difficulties with communicating bushfire risk to diverse communities is an over-estimation of the extent to which new information will be incorporated into individual's existing body of knowledge. Such knowledge is developed and consolidated over time through "dynamic relationships and interaction with land, nature, events and people" (Eriksen & Prior 2011, p.621). Therefore, standardised approaches to bushfire management that lack local context and focus on individual "things" in the landscape don't align with the ways people live in landscapes – where place meaning emerges from living and working in the landscape as a whole (Paveglio *et. al.* 2016, Beilin & Reid 2015). Furthermore, landholders in bushfire landscapes may have an understanding of humans as merely small parts of the overall context of living with bushfire and that "the locus of control is constantly, and sometimes unpredictably, changing" (Edwards & Gill 2016, p.1092). An additional layer of complexity that we explore here is how the construction of local place-identity significantly impacts how individuals and communities respond to education and engagement programs about bushfire. We observe active resistance within communities to being identified by outside agencies predominantly on the basis of an imposed relationship to bushfire risk.

Finally, we acknowledge that this study is based upon settler-colonial understandings of bushfire in Australian landscapes. For traditional owners, the management of fire continues to be "a central expression of their co-constitutional relations with place and a meaningful cultural connection to ancestors" (Neale *et. al.* 2019, p.342). The displacement of traditional owners from their land, and history of exclusion from meaningful roles within land management agencies means that Indigenous ways of knowing are frequently absent from settler landscape imaginaries.

Methods

This paper reports findings generated as part of a wider study into community resilience, community engagement and shared responsibility in Australian bushfire-prone rural and peri-urban communities. The overall scope covered in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals or small groups living in townships in the States of Victoria and Tasmania designated by bushfire management agencies as being at heightened risk of bushfire. Participants were recruited purposively via multiple networks to encompass a range of ages and experiences – nominations were sought from regional fire management agency personnel and volunteer fire brigades; city councils; invitations were sent to existing community groups (eg. local history groups); and attendance/leafletting at community events (eg. farmers' markets). At Pioneer Valley participation was invited community-wide via our primary contact. Participants self-selected by attending the group interview. A total of 42 community members were selected based upon diversity of experiences with bushfire. They included current members of volunteer fire brigades (3 women and 5 men) and residents who demonstrated the complexity of ways that people engage with bushfire and anticipated bushfire. The kinds of experiences included volunteering during incidents by supporting firefighters away from the fire-ground, being notified of warnings for their street or neighbourhood, contributing to community planning for bushfire and emergencies, community leadership (eg. shire councillors, township action committees), or participating in the retelling of local fire history narratives. Interviews were conducted between June 2016 and October 2017. They focused on participants' accounts of those experiences with bushfire, local meanings of 'shared responsibility' and 'community resilience' and expectations of living with bushfire in the future.

Data in the form of interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis (Reissman 2008). Each interview transcript (narrative) is analysed as a separate case, with the aim of identifying common themes across the cases. In the first phase of analysis, we identified the stories told and sense-making at the individual (or small group) level. The second phase identified common themes (or anomalies) from across the case study to gain a sense of collective story-telling, social memory, place identity and landscape constructions. A major theme emerging from that analysis was the significance of place-identity as core to the construction of narratives of landscape, risk, and responsibility in relation to living with bushfire. We demonstrate this finding by a deep and focused analysis of the narratives of six

individual and group interviews. All place and person names used in results and discussion are pseudonyms.

The case study sites

Research was conducted as a case study encompassing three communities in diverse geographic locations. The case study sites were selected in consultation with land and fire agency research partners based on bushfire history and predicted future vulnerability. The selected sites are not intended to be representative of Australia as a whole. The reported findings are expected to contribute to theory in regard to community and individual identity formation in places designated by agencies as being notably at risk of bushfire, and implications for agency management. Our theoretical findings can be further tested by future case studies in additional communities.

Dianella is located near a highway and railway approximately 170km (or a 2-hour drive) from Melbourne, the capital of the state of Victoria; population at the 2016 census was 874. It is set in an agricultural landscape with a European history of logging and dairy. Over one third of the current population is aged 65+ (not uncommon in rural and regional Australia), while 13% are children aged under 15. The percentage of population in the 20-44 age groups (17.4%) is considerably lower than the Australian average (34.6%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019). While Dianella has been threatened by bushfire in recent history, it has not been directly impacted.

Pioneer Valley is a very small settlement in the state of Tasmania. According to the 2016 census there are 40 residents (60% male), however our research respondents claim a population of 80-100. Residents are surrounded by forest reserves (some World Heritage listed) in an enclosed mountain valley. The one road into the settlement is unsealed, narrow, overhung by rapidly growing regrowth trees and may be unpassable under some environmental conditions (smoke, for example). The World Heritage listing bestows a high and increasing tourist value leading to seasonal population fluctuations. This may amplify the complexity of issuing warnings and evacuating visitors and residents during bushfire conditions.

Golden Gully is a township of approximately 738 people. It is located approximately 160km from Melbourne, Victoria and is adjacent to a major regional city. Many residents commute to the larger town for work, shopping and recreation. The township was directly impacted by major bushfire incidents in 1998 and 2013 and was also threatened in the summer of 2006.

The narratives of identity – Dianella

This first case illustrates how place-identity is strongly linked to landscape and reflects recent landscape changes largely driven by increasing centralisation of local and state government services. What emerges is the reconstruction of what 'community' means, intertwined with a sense of loss of identity. The narratives expose the centrality of place-based community and individual identity in the ways that people respond to bushfire management. A consequence for land and fire management agencies is to recognise the importance of framing community engagement around the ways each community functions within and as part of its landscape, rather than a singular focus on potential bushfire impacts.

(1) John's story

John is a lifelong resident of Dianella who occupies a leadership role in the local volunteer fire service. He described degradation of local infrastructure particularly roads and rail that he attributed to state government policies resulting in short term, limited or withdrawn funding. *"They've let the rail system go to pot…they're complaining about too many trucks on the freeway but there's no rail left to cart all the grain and stuff".* The *"hundreds of thousands of tonnes* [of grain] *under big tarps"* is a visual reminder of the disconnects in the system when the state government has abdicated its role as director – a landscape signifier that the town has become isolated from previously known networks. While blame may be attributed to the state government, it is largely at the local government level that the effects manifest. Even the council itself has become other-than-local, *'because we used to have the Shire of Dianella...when* [1990s state premier] *took away all the shires, I think it took away a lot of towns' individual identities.* All the shires were *'lumped together'* for an administrative convenience that assumed there was nothing unique about each community or the landscape and environmental history that shaped it. However, one outcome has been that towns have reimagined their local sense of place. Commenting on his and other towns in the district John notes that:

> *"I think that's what I like about each town creating its own identity…the 'action group' and stuff like that has created the town's identity.* [This town] *is its own individual place again and I think that's really good, and I think people are proud of that. And because they defend that, that creates resilience as well."*

John appears to construct his place-identity in relation to changes in the landscape that indicate disruption to the established social order (Carter *et. al.* 2007) such as the visual cue of mountains of grain under tarpaulins; and also in relation to the community identity formed collectively within the towns' action group. In his response to the changing landscape John reinforces his identity as a responsible actor within that landscape and as a contributor to creating and maintaining place-identity. His actions also become part of the collective (the action group) as contributing to the well-being or appearance of the town. The work of creating an identity for the town and maintaining the narrative of identity, and most importantly enacting (defending) the identity is both a source of pride and of confidence in the community's ultimate resilience. Collective construction of a new identity for the town may not alter the physical landscape, but empowers residents with a sense of agency. In the following interview we elaborate on how this community achieves this in practice.

(2) Susan's story

Susan's narrative is one of social memory used to construct a place-identity as a community that experiences some divisions in everyday life. For example *"we find it very difficult to engage the football club and the netball club with the mainstream of the community…we sort of worry a bit maybe they're a little bit separate".*

However, despite those everyday divides, it is in response to a crisis scenario that Susan sees a collective community identity emerge. This again demonstrates the interplay between individual and community identity – there is an individual imperative to create a sense of community collective that loops into an individual's embrace and enactment of the community identity they have constructed. Furthermore, place attachment as experienced through the diversity of individual residents (Zwiers *et. al.* 2018) is seen as a source of strength:

> *"Like…most small communities, when there's a crisis, we're really good at putting up our hands. So, all communities do that. But the thing that I think makes us different and strong, …it's that diversity. You know there's so many different people who have so many different skills."*

Like John, Susan describes the point of difference between her town and other towns, an expression of place-identity through diversity and inclusion – *"we are really good at embracing people who don't necessarily fit into that little square of normal or average."* Susan describes how some members of the community who don't fit within the box are made to feel comfortable, safe, loved and embraced by the community.

Part of the place-identity is constructed in the social memory of what the community learned about itself in a past 'crisis':

> *"That's what the community learned about itself through the* [campaign against the] *toxic dump. The community had one of those eureka moments where they realised they were powerful, and that has held the community in great stead over time… Our community has been really fortunate to have been shown a couple of times that we're really really good in a crisis and that's sort of self-perpetuating".*

Social memory is embedded in the taskscape through the entanglements between landscape, events (planned toxic waste dump), and the social (power of the community). Memory and identity in this scenario are passed on by the incorporating practice of organising a campaign to defend the local landscape, entwined with the well-being of the town (Haskell & Stawski 2017).

Reflections on Dianella

John's narrative of place-identity at Dianella suggests that withdrawal of municipal and state agency services and degradation of local infrastructure diminished the town's individual identity. In the context of community resilience, these narratives of threat to, or construction of, place-identity were prioritised over the potential hazard of bushfire. It is clear from our data that the present and on-going disruption to the identity of the town is an existential threat, and that identity is closely associated with the everyday viability of the town. Implications for community engagement practice – for all agencies – is the importance of

embedding bushfire management into the everyday concerns of residents, rather than positioning bushfire as the singular, central concern.

Pioneer Valley

The four participants in this case are part of a loose collective of four residents who have been working with a member of the state fire service's community development team to enact a local community response for their bushfire management. The participants identify their action as a one-off project demonstrating the ephemeral nature of community connection in response to living in an uncertain landscape and to engagement with the fire service. The case highlights the construction of place, identity and landscape through narratives of personal identity, specifically the personal identity of respondents as preservers of the wilderness. More tangentially it describes community formation in response to uncertainty that finds ways to be defiantly landscape specific on the one hand, and yet pliable enough to acquiesce to the fire management agency's model of preparedness and risk management. It frames resilience as a process of becoming aware of limitations (of place, landscape, self, others) as well as imagining belonging and responsibility (for forest, self and others).

While participants are physically isolated in this landscape, they see it as part of a connected whole whose protection has been their life work. There is an interplay between the physical landscape and the way it is lived in and imagined by residents, – the taskscape – and in the interactions between residents and the visitors who come to experience 'wilderness'. (Visitors were viewed by our participants as important to the future viability of the landscape in economic terms and also for the legacy of protecting the forest constructed as wilderness). If there was a bushfire, emergency management vehicles are remote from the settlement and may not be able to gain access. It also means that the residents may not be able to leave safely and as a consequence would face having to fight a bushfire without agency support, and probably as individuals on their more or less isolated properties.

It is their identity as defenders of wilderness, manifest in the isolation from settlement, in being 'off-the-grid' and consequently needing to be independent among the mountain forests that drew our research participants to live in this landscape. They describe themselves as *"settlers"* having individually chosen to live in this place, rather than having historical or family connections. Collectively they identify as:

"fiercely independent private people… you can't say we've got a really strong community cohesive unit here".

"We're all eccentric and all out here for our own reasons. We don't like rules and regulations in a lot of ways…"

While identifying as defenders of the forest, for these participants 'wilderness' still represents a landscape of continuous change and regeneration.

"It was heavily logged by five sawmills in the 20th century but now it's a regrowth forest. There are some old tracks that are growing over and all the signs of forestry activity are being grown over. So it's a changing landscape and now it's World Heritage it's likely to stay that way without any interference."

Their fierce independence and lack of enthusiasm for rules and regulations would suggest that this settlement is not an ideal candidate for a state-run bushfire preparedness project. In a way, they are acting radically and not conforming to agency expectations of 'acting responsibly'. And yet, something about living in the same (potentially dangerous) locale, has motivated them to respond collectively. While working together on a project, our participants do not consider themselves a "*group"*, but "*interested individuals working on a project"*". The project is *"the latest attempt at trying to have a sort of focus point…that we can congregate, we can call meetings, we can have a common purpose and maybe get a few people that tend to hide up in the hills, there's a reason to become involved."* They have worked together with the fire service community development officer to meet the requirements of bureaucracy – specifications and standards, funding and approvals for them to locate two shipping containers in the landscape and roof them over to house a firefighting tanker trailer. This 'fire-shed' is intended as part of their bushfire preparation but also as a meeting point. The extent to which other people in the community will become involved is an unknown – as one of the participants noted *"my biggest fear is that the community won't use it."* The role of the fire service officer is acknowledged – not necessarily that the project was undertaken at all, but the manner in which it was undertaken:

"There were several of us that thought just stuff the council, we'll just go and put it [fire-shed] there, put the roof on and you can stick it up your whatever, and they

wouldn't have done anything. But we have had public money put into this thing [from Fire Service engagement budget], we have to have a nice squeaky clean public image… I think it would've choked us if it hadn't been for [Fire Service Officer], I'm not sure, or we'd have just done it in which case we'd have been in trouble somewhere along the way."

The implication is that if they act independently, are self-organised then they are not being compliant and therefore not good and responsible citizens. Nevertheless, their independence was set aside to accomplish the project. In part they justify this by situating the project in terms of their individual properties (and there is strong stated attachment to their homes because most of them built their own houses) and to the landscape by which they identify. But the interplay of place-identity, landscape construction and social memory has produced a fluid social connection necessary to create a viable working space for a collective. We argue that these individuals' current project is also grounded in social memory (Haskell and Stawski 2017). Their taskscape involves on-going action to protect the landscape as forest, memory is passed on by adapting their practice in the context of a landscape that is perpetually under construction (Ingold 2000). At the same time, the history of logging is being actively forgotten – the regeneration of the forest is erasing the memory cues from the landscape. Furthermore, we suggest that the project represents a way of asserting their power (over the Fire Service) to control the narrative and social memory entwined in their landscape (Fine & MCDonnell 2007).

"Our preparedness is trying to be pre-emptive on our own properties at least in burning off and creating a situation where a fire can't travel very well on our own properties, and in so doing we preserve the world heritage as well because we don't want fires escaping private property to get onto world heritage. However, if it comes our way it'll be through world heritage. So the stakes are fairly high."

In the past our respondents campaigned for the forest to be preserved rather than logged and to the extent that there is a collective community it is this common experience that brings them together, while not undermining their narrative of individual identity.

"I think the cohesiveness in this valley from past, most of us are green… and my experience in 40 years, the thing that's brought us together is defending our space, like [from] the Forestry Commission. I'm proud of the hills that we, as far as I'm

concerned, preserved, and how we've got world heritage, on and on and on, but it's a special place."

Participants construct a physical landscape imagined as isolated and surrounded by mountains, a forest that is not interfered with other than by managing as a World Heritage area visited by bushwalkers. The social landscape is constructed as lived in and protected by individuals who share a common interest in this place as wilderness, and a history of 'green' activism. They construct their identity from the physical landscape and that process guides the social interactions they intend to have with others.

"A lot of our properties are surrounded by it [the forest] so it's a threat to us and we're a threat to it if fires get away, and that's why we want to develop a sense of expertise in helping each other."

This is a justification for finding ways to work together and also, to work with the representative of the fire service (authority). This is creating a certain kind of collective (ie. those who are willing, for the greater good and in this case, for care of the forest, to work within the constraints of a regulated system). Clearly, there remains a majority of the residents who haven't participated, and an imagined community focussed around the locally built 'fire-shed' may or may not come into future existence.

"Y*ou're going along to someone and telling them what they need to do, even if you do it really subtly you're still telling them what they need to do and I think there's this private strong individual comes out and they go, "Stuff ya." So as to resilience, I don't know, I think a fire in the valley will test our resilience."*

The other party in their project is the state fire service and its community development team. To build those community connections in such an isolated and individualistic landscape is a significant achievement. These residents of Pioneer Valley are isolated but there are enough of them worried about defending the forest from bushfire to set aside their dislike of authority for long enough to negotiate an outcome acceptable to themselves and the fire management agency. In terms of making meaningful community connections, this case appears as a clearly positive outcome both from a fire management agency perspective and for the community members. It is unknown how the fire service at a state managerial level evaluates

the project outcomes, as one key assumed objective – a written community bushfire plan – had not happened at the time of this writing.

Reflections on Pioneer Valley

The narratives from Pioneer Valley demonstrate a landscape that is "perpetually under construction" (Ingold 2000, p.199). The participants have witnessed major and on-going change in the landscape – the now-protected native forest poses an ever greater threat of bushfire, and yet they also recognise that their presence is a major threat to the forest. Their taskscape has evolved from being activists defending the forest from logging to being landholders. This changed relationship with the forest requires new responses as their identities shift to encouraging and managing tourism that is sensitive to conservation values. The participants work hard to maintain their self-identity as fiercly independent and private, however they also recognise that it is the landscape itself ("defending our space") that has necessitated a form of community action. They have a changing relationship to place, triggered by their success in preserving the idea of wilderness, but also now being constrained by their own aging. Hence their identities are like the landscape, evolving. Arguably their shared commitment to green ideals and recognition of the timescale associated with the idea of wilderness as opposed to human life cycles also shapes their identity in connection to place.

Narratives of the 'everyday landscape'

Golden Gully

The first two cases presented narratives of place-identity intertwined with experience of landscape, memory, and responsibility for self, for place and in some instances, for neighbours. This third case builds on the first two by exploring individual stories about direct experiences of bushfires. The following individual stories are examples of active memory (re)construction of events to embed experience of the emergency within a narrative of everyday life, and of face-to-face caring interactions with neighbours that shape collective identity. The story that our participant – Glenda – tells is a real time recollection of her struggle between making sense of, and acting in reponse to an event as an individual and her expectation of what it means to belong to a community.

(1) Glenda's story

Glenda has resided in the township for 10 years making her a relative newcomer. She recalled in detail her experience of the bushfire in 2013. In the retelling, her first response to the threat was to fall back on the procedures recommended in the fire brigade community bushfire education program, and was packing her car ready to leave.

> *"As I was driving [home] this sort of mental list was going through my head, you know, the stuff that you learn in the community awareness program. So by the time I got home I kind of just went into auto pilot and just started getting it all in the car."*

Before she was able to complete this action, a neighbour with a long history in the landscape called by to check on her (demonstrating neighbourly care and responsibility).

> *"He said "I think we're actually fine because the direction of the wind is taking it away from us…I'm just going to jump on my motorbike and have a look"…And then he came back and he said "No, I reckon we're fine." But at that stage it was probably only 5kms away and I was still a bit like "Yeah but what if it changes again?" but he's grown up in that landscape and he was like "Nah, don't worry about it. We're fine!"*

It is in the face-to-face interaction between Glenda and her neighbour whose experience and understanding of the landscape she trusted, that the local context overtook the fire brigade training as the basis for Glenda's response. Glenda then describes how her heart stopped racing and she managed the situation by monitoring the bushfire on local radio.

> *"And then I just relaxed about it. I just got to a point where I thought it's all okay, and then at about 10 o'clock that night, pitch black, I walked out onto the veranda and I absolutely freaked because I could still hear the helicopters but I looked around and I realised that it was complete black everywhere. And I thought 'what is going on? Why can't I see anyone else's lights on or anything? Have I missed something? Should I not be here?' and I went back inside and rang the neighbours across the road and of course they didn't answer…and actually I thought that everyone had left. So I did have a couple of minutes of panicking thinking there's a fire right here and I didn't even know."*

This is the moment where Glenda starts to believe that she has been left out of the information loop, that her neighbours have ceased to care about her and she is isolated. Evidently, something about that scenario did not make sufficient sense or didn't correlate with Glenda's expectation of her community, and this prompted her to act.

> *"So I ended up getting in my car and driving across the road… it's up our driveway, across and then up on a hill to the next property. And I got there and they were sitting there with candles and stuff and I said "Thank god you guys are still here!" and they said "Well yeah, we don't have any power" and because I did, then I could tell them what was going on…and I had the radio still going at home so I could update them. So…, we have a fire [telephone] tree that I actually put together for our immediate neighbourhood, after the community program thing that we were in…So with that, I just sent a text message to people saying "I have power, I'll give you updates every half hour" so that worked."*

The bushfire awareness training Glenda had received was intened to provide her with some certainty in terms of a clear framework for action. However, in the midst of unfolding events interactions with her neighbour introduced lack of certainty about the effectiveness of that framework in that specific time and place. Later, she became uncertain about how strong her relationships with the neighbours were in the crisis. She acted to reassert the importance of her relationship to community by positioning herself as a reliable and responsible conduit of information during a crisis. She needed to know that her construction of community aligned with those of her neighbours and she actively worked toward reducing uncertainty – partly about the bushfire but mostly about neighbourhood identity.

(2) Geoffrey's story

As a volunteer firefighter, being a member of the brigade is part of Geoffrey's everyday locally situated practice:

> *"I think being a fire fighter, because you go into the community that you're living in and onto their property, you go to do a job, you go to save lives and livestock first and try to preserve their house."*

His retelling of a fire-fighting experience reveals a sense-making where the story of the 'event' becomes embedded in the everyday.

> *"One very good friend of ours, he was in the brigade as well and I can't remember which fire it was but when he left in the morning, his pager went off and he left, he had sprinkler systems and everything set up in his house, he thought I'll be right because it's going that way, as usual, heading around the town… so he grabbed his kit and out he went. Well, the wind changed and he lost his house and everything. I wasn't on the truck with him, I was on the truck with other guys and we were actually at his property trying to put the fires out. Because we had socialised at his house I remember just thinking oh my god, this is just gone and there's nothing we can do about it."*

To construct his narrative, Geoffrey situates his story in the everyday by first describing the practice of a volunteer firefighter when called to an incident. His story reflects the tensions between the command and control approach embedded in the management structures and training in the volunteer bushfire brigade, and the interplay of uncertainties about the interactions between the human and physical elements of the landscape. Here, the physical in the change of wind direction – momentarily overtakes the everyday in the narrative. But it is the face-to-face, everyday interpersonal interaction that anchors the story. And arguably, remembering those interactions is part of the process of recovery (for both Geoffrey and his friend):

> *"But it's not until afterwards when we went up and walked around with them and he was looking around and, "Do you remember this, do you remember that?" So that's a little bit of a reality check where you think yep, in the blink of an eye you could lose everything."*

And again, anchoring the story in the everyday of being in place makes the narrative whole.

Reflections on Golden Gully

These results indicate the interplay between the everyday and the event. As with the first two cases Glenda's and Geoffrey's stories speak to community and identity. It is about memory, making sense of the event, *post-hoc*, in a way that makes it fit into their everyday understanding, allowing them to continue to be in that place now and into the future. It may also be about an everyday understanding of community and belonging – face to face interactions. Their taskscape is undergoing constant reconstruction – their place is the sum of their memory, current (unplanned) events situated within the entangled social and landscape contexts (Haskell & Stawski 2017). It is memory that allows them to work through the tragedy of what happened to the house, or the celebration of belonging in Glenda's story. Memory helps Glenda organise her narrative to its triumphant recognition of self as part of community. Memory helps Geoff find meaning in his identity as a firefighter and a friend of the victim. His tasks as a friend and as a firefighter are both affirmed. The use of memory is thus a kind of relational glue for the taskscape and the landscape.

In Glenda's bushfire narrative we observe her pre-existing relationships with neighbours interacting with *ad hoc* events that resulted in her first questioning and then taking actions to reinforce neighbourly relationships. It wasn't an entirely comfortable transition as she began to question whether the neighbours knew something she didn't and had actually or figuratively left her behind. This points to the very real tension in time and place between being trained by the agencies to act as an individual when your instinct is to do something else and look for support from others nearby when the crisis comes. Many uncertainties are produced in the entanglement of social interactions and the physical reality of bushfire behaviour (eg. wind changes) As a consequence, we suggest that a focus on managing uncertainty may need to be included in fire agency engagement and education programs.

Geoffrey's identity as a firefighter encompasses an expectation that command and control reduces uncertainty. This is challenged by the recognition that he and the crew were not able to save his friend's house. His narrative is not of heroic firefighter, but about his relationships. His commiseration with his friend in the aftermath of the bushfire affirms their purpose and their solidarity despite the loss. They use their social connectedness to create and affirm their memories and their identity as firefighters and in so doing they act cohesively forming community. He can tell this story because his friend has not been left alone; his community grieves with him. The richness of this narrative expresses the

vulnerability that individuals and collectives may experience as a result of accepting a degree of responsibility for managing bushfire.

Conclusion: place identity and the 'more-than-bushfire' landscape

We began with the contention that 'community' is enacted through a complex interplay and co-construction of place-identity, a sense of what belongs in the 'local', the physical and imagined landscape and the work of remembering. 'Community' thus constructed is not a fixed entity but emerges in the ebbs and flows of the interacting processes. This diversity of responses to disturbance is a source of community adaptability, yet this fluidity represents a moving target for commonly generic engagement programs implemented by management agencies .

All of the participant accounts presented here demonstrate the fluidity of individual and community identity and relationships, the importance of the physical and imagined landscape context and how these shape the construction of the narratives and remembering. In Dianella place-identity was threatened by loss of self-government when shires were amalgamated, and by the removal of government and other services. The physical landscape is a constant memory cue of community processes that have been lost (eg. mountains of grain sitting under tarpaulins going nowhere). But by remembering how the community worked, individuals describe coming together as as a collective (the action group) to reconstruct a meaningful sense of place-identity. The co-constructed identity is then enacted and defended by individuals, demonstrating the fluidity between the individual and the collective. Most importantly, this social memory of being resilient reassures them that they will be able to adapt and cope with the threat of bushfire if and when it occurs.

The interplay between the physical and imagined landscape, memory and identity is clearly observed at Pioneer Valley. In this place, the primary narrative was about finding resolutions for the tensions between individual and community identity, and the power balance between community members and the state's fire authority – situated within the changing relationship between people and the forest landscape. There is a fluidity between individual and collective identity – by acting collectively they can express their individual identities as caring for the forest. Expression of individual identity has also necessitated at least partial

suspension of the reluctance to follow rules and regulations – new narratives of being and belonging in this place continuously emerged.

The narratives of Golden Gully are about the everyday, face-to-face encounters between individuals that demonstrate how individual relationships – remembered and imagined – connect to the experiences of shared places and ultimately to a sense of community identity. Throughout the incident as described by Glenda, she is actively (re)constructing social memory as she imagines and reimagines her place within (or outside of) the collective as she feels alternatively isolated in her home and part of a neighbourly community. Geoffrey's account of the loss of his friend's home during the firefight exposes that sharing responsibility is more than transactional between governments, agencies and individuals. When people accept responsibility it is about more than the physical aspect of bushfire – it is also about people and place (Kruger & Beilin 2014).

Finally, we offer some reflections on what this may mean for the unspecified aims of 'sharing reponsibility' for managing the threats associated with living in bushfire landscapes. We note that the focus of much of the quotidian community education and engagement endeavour by fire and land management agencies is on individual or household level preparedness – how fire danger ratings work, having a household plan, managing fuel around the house and property[1]. Paradoxically, most of the policy and practitioner discourse emphasises building community resilience, as if it will arise from these tasks. We see little evidence of a link forming between the encouragement of individual action and building community. Indeed, we observed in Glenda's account of her experience in a bushfire, her intuitive enactment of community identity outweighed the fire agency's education about how to respond. While this ultimately reinforced Glenda's sense of belonging to the community, along the way it left her uncertain, but she was able to cope with the uncertainty by pursuing and reinforcing her own sense of community. While Glenda's experience is individual, her practice of acting 'just-in-time' according to circumstances as they happen is frequently observed, especially in community or individual responses to disasters (McLennan *et. al*. 2018). However, from a fire management agency perspective, this practice may leave her apparently under-prepared and exposed to risk. For agencies to build on individuals such as Glenda's actual experience, there needs to be acknowledgement that many householders will cope by acting intuitively,

[1] There are of course exceptions, such as trials of community led planning, but these are not yet part of the 'mainstream' of community education and engagement.

just-in-time and embedded in an interplay with other people in time and place. This observation needs to be built into agency-based preparedness planning and decision making frameworks.

Social memory is a basis for individuals knowing how to 'be' part of a community. However, social memory can only exist in the relationships between individuals and others (or how we imagine ourselves and others). We conceptualise social memory as constantly adjusting and dynamic, much as we observed in this study, subject to the fluidity of individual and community identity. Taskscape, landscape and memory are continuously co-constructed and emergent place identities are similarly being renegotiated or tested.

In the ever evolving relationship between land and fire management agencies and the communities they seek to engage, we suggest significant additional research is required into the evident disconnect between (a) community education rhetoric directed at achieving safer household outcomes, and (b) the on-ground reality that there is a fluctuating, collective relationship between the agencies' representatives on the ground and the place-identities of the the resident individuals in their landscapes. We propose that agencies' community bushfire safety promotion activities should, at least on pragmatic grounds, be sufficiently porous and flexible to allow (and even encourage) active consideration of what community members regard as the serious threats to their 'community'—be these natural hazards such as bushfires or politically generated socioeconomic threats to their survival. This requires action at a political level. The question arises: how can governments and their agencies be influenced to change their conception of shared responsibility from simply involving a division of labor and allocation of tasks, to one of community engagement as a shared construction of the local bushfire narrative? This bushfire narrative is, as our respondents have so eloquently described, an aspect of the wider array of existential threats to communities and these interact and require that agencies and communities mutually agree on mitigating responses.

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