# Through Fire and Flood: Migrant Memories of Displacement and Belonging in Australia

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# Abstract

Natural disasters are a significant feature of the Australian environment. In a country with a rich history of immigration, it is therefore surprising that historians have not yet examined the specific challenges faced by immigrants within this hazardous environment. This thesis examines migrants' memories and experiences of bushfires and floods in Australia. Drawing on oral history interviews and regional case studies, this thesis explores the entanglement of migration and natural disaster in Australia and in the lives of migrants. Oral history interviews with migrants who have experienced bushfires in Victoria or floods in Maitland, New South Wales, are at the heart of this study.

This thesis contributes to scholarship in three distinct fields—migration and environmental history, and disaster studies—and brings them together through an examination of migrants' memories of bushfires and floods in Australia. Although traumatic experiences, displacement, and a changed and challenged sense of home, community and attachment to place and environment are common themes of both migrants and survivors of fire and flood, rarely have the similarities between these experiences been noted.

This thesis is not a history of natural disasters in Australia, nor a retelling of a history of immigration to Australia, but an exploration of experiences of 'double displacement'. This thesis argues that migrants' recollections reveal how their burgeoning sense of home, community and attachment to place and environment was challenged by natural disasters. It highlights how their experience of 'double displacement' contributed to a new sense of home and belonging in a natural disaster-prone country.

# Declaration

This is to certify that:

The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated;

Due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other materials used; and

The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

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Gretel Evans

December 2019

# Preface

A version of Chapter 6 has been accepted for publication in *Disasters in Australia and New Zealand: Historical approaches to understanding catastrophe*, edited by Margaret Cook and Scott McKinnon.

# Acknowledgements and Gratitude

I am so grateful for the opportunity to thank all the people who have been part of my PhD journey. I have received so much help, advice and encouragement that has really made this thesis a team effort. I especially want to acknowledge the people who I interviewed, to thank them for welcoming me into their homes, and sharing their stories with me. Without them there would be no thesis.

I would like to thank and acknowledge my supervisors Sara Wills and Alessandro Antonello for their help and advice throughout this project. Thank you Sara for all the time you have given me throughout this project and for being among the first friendly faces to welcome me to this university. Thank you Sandro for stepping on board towards the end of this project and providing an extra pair of eyes and a pragmatic perspective. I want to acknowledge all the help received from the admin team, particularly June McBeth and Sarah Gloger.

I also want to acknowledge the support and encouragement received from my past lecturers at USQ (University of Southern Queensland), including Robbie Mason, Celmara Pocock, Catherine Dewhirst, Libby Connors and Laurie Johnson. You encouraged me to think I might be actually be able to 'do a PhD', and I know I never would have started this journey without that gentle push. Thanks also to my honours year buddies Elise Payne and Brady Albrand; we might have been in different states, but it was such a joy to share the beginning stages of graduate life with 'The Dream Team'.

The initial seeds of this project were sown at USQ and also at ANU (Australian National University) where I was a Summer Scholar in 2013/2014. This was such a terrific opportunity to explore scholarly life at a different institution and to begin to think about what path my research would take.

During my candidature I was fortunate enough to receive funding for my research and for conference attendance. This included an Australian Postgraduate Award and travel funding provided by the University of Melbourne through the Graduate Research in Arts Travel Scheme and the Research and Graduate Studies Funding Scheme. I was also honoured to be a recipient of the Lloyd Robson Memorial

Award in 2015 and to participate in the AHA/CAL program in 2016. I wish to acknowledge my sincere appreciation for this funding that enabled me travel for research and conferences, which were foundational to the development of this project. It was such a blessing.

I was also lucky enough to be a 'Summer Scholar' at the National Library of Australia in 2016. The scholarship gave me the space and opportunity to think afresh and approach my topic from another perspective. Thank you to everyone at the library who made this such a fantastic experience. I was also blessed to be able to share this experience with Morgan Burgess, Meg Brayshaw and Talisha Goh who have been wonderful friends and supporters throughout this project. I'm looking forward to our next interstate reunion.

I was able to attend several conferences and workshops throughout my candidature and I'm thankful for all the constructive comments and suggestions I received. I particularly want to acknowledge the environmental history workshops I was able to attend. The 2015 'Visualising Environmental Humanities and History Workshop' at the University of Sydney and the 2016 'Environmental History PhD Workshop' at the Australian National University were extremely important to the development of this project. The workshops helped inform my thinking about environment history and gave me the opportunity to meet so many great colleagues and now friends. I also want to thank Margaret Cook (my original flood buddy), Scott McKinnon and all the contributors to the forthcoming *Disasters in Australia and New Zealand: Historical Approaches to Understanding Catastrophe*. Our 2019 workshop was a wonderful opportunity to talk disasters. Our conversations and your comments helped me to consolidate some final ideas for this thesis so I'm very grateful to you all.

I was able to travel to Maitland twice in 2015 and I wish to thank everyone who helped me during those research trips. Not only did I meet the amazing people whose stories fill the following pages, I encountered so many people who went above and beyond and out of their way to help me. Thank you Judy Nicholson for your help and assistance at the Maitland City Library, your knowledge of the local history collections, but also for taking me to Morpeth for coffee and cake—and views of the famous river. It was such a treat and a delight. Thank you to Amanda Hyde and your colleagues at

the Hunter Valley SES, and to Chas Keys and Peter Bogan for sharing your time and knowledge of floods with me. Everyone at the Maitland & District Historical Society was so welcoming and I want to thank you all for setting me up in a room and sending a whole stream of people in—one after the other—to talk with me and be interviewed for this project. Thank you also for the tea and biscuits! Helen Denzin and Ziggy, thank you so much for driving me around town and giving me a tour of flood areas and Newcastle—it was wonderful. And thank you to Dave and Diana who became my personal taxi drivers during the Greta Migrant Camp reunion. You didn't just provide me with excellent company on the drive back and forth between Greta and Maitland for the whole weekend, you went out of your way to show me flood areas and spots where flood markers were still attached on poles high in the sky.

Throughout this project, I have been blessed to be surrounded by so many super people who have helped me in so many different ways. This would have been impossible without the weird and wonderful postgrad community and the friends I've made. I want to thank my original officemates, Emily Fitzgerald and Nicole Davis, for your advice, support and friendship over many years; my HPA team Henry Reese, Chris Enger and Leigh Gilburt; my writing buddies Kate Allan, Kate Davison, Troy Street. Thank you to Angus Ferguson and André Brett for the beer and banter, and for reading drafts when I needed more eyes and readers. Thank you also to Angus and your mum Cathy for giving me a tour and proper insight into the bushfires in your lives. Where would I have been without the lunchtime banter and the hallway chats; thanks to Pete Minard, Meighen Katz, Bron Lowe, Jennie Jeppesen, Ross Karavis, Shane Smits, Julie Davies, Rebecca Sanders, and Tyson Retz. Thank you Elena for your structural advice, Claire Deery for our Gippsland chats. And thanks to Gonzalo Villanueva and Joel Barnes for asking about the thesis and to Michael Francis for not (but for providing all the memes).

You all deserve more words (and you'll get them), but Emily said "Stop!! You need to hit submit!!".

Thanks also to Claire Gibbs and Luca Giacomin for being the best housemates ever and for sharing the ice cream; to Ellen Otte for great chats, coffee and beer; to

Melissa Walsh for your enthusiasm for all things oral history; and to Trudi Edmeades, Abi Chue, Caitlin Hislop, Nikki Rakic, Nyasha Chakaingesu and my connect group this year—your encouragement, support and prayers truly have kept me going.

I want to thank my Toowoomba supporters particularly Alex Hutchinson, Matthew Skerman, and Tara and Ethan Gillespie. Your friendship, encouragement and support over the years has been wonderful. And thanks to Tara and Ethan for realising (perhaps more than me) how much I needed to visit you in London *before* finishing the thesis.

Finally, I want to thank my family. Thank you to Grandma and my Campbelltown family, and Aunty Naomi in Hillston, for your support and encouragement over the years. Thank you so so much to Mum, Dad and Michael for being the best ever, for your love and support, and all the sacrifices you have made for me over the years. Thank you Mum and Dad for first encouraging my interest in history, for reading thesis drafts along the way and providing helpful comments. Thank you Mum for typing when I could not and for visiting and supplying me with a freezer full of meals to get me through the final weeks. Thank you Michael for being the best brother ever. I have loved all our chats about music and musicals and the way you have not only expanded my musical horizons, but through our discussions about music composition and lyric writing, you helped me to think about my writing in a whole new way. Thank you for proof reading drafts in the final week and for making and supplying the maps. I don't think you realise what a delight and absolute gift it was to receive them.

PS: Thank you to everyone who provided feedback on single sentences sent to them in the final weeks of editing. You're the best.

# Dedication

To Grandpa,
Eddie (Edmund) Biddle
7th February 1934 - 3rd November 2018

Thank you for your patience and the way you valued, cherished and celebrated your grandchildren's educational achievements. I wish you could have also seen this project come to fruition and attended another graduation ceremony.
We miss you.

Peter Lawrence Bogan
31st May 1936 - 2nd December 2018

Thank you for your kindness and generosity in sharing Maitland's flood history with me, and for showing me the importance of dates and details.

# Table of Contents

*Abstract* *i*
*Declaration* *ii*
*Preface* *iii*
*Acknowledgements and Gratitude* *iv*
*Dedication* *viii*
*Table of Contents* *ix*
*List of Figures* *xi*
*Maps* *xii*
*Interviewees* *xv*
*Thinking Through Fire and Flood: Foreword* *xvii*

Introduction 1
- Migration 2
- Disaster Studies 10
- Environmental History 14
- Sources and Method 18
- Chapter Outlines 26

Chapter 1: Hope and Expectation: Migration and Settlement in Regional Australian Spaces 30
- 'We'd come from the war': Wartime Pasts, Migrant Futures 31
- Remembering the Greta Migrant Camp: Early Australian Encounters 35
- Making Home in Maitland 43
- Migration to Victoria 50
- Victorian Spaces and Places 60
- Conclusion 67

Chapter 2: 'I Didn't Know': Local History, Disaster Amnesia and New Arrivals 69
- Colonial Settlement 71
- Local History and Neglected Narratives 78
- Remembering & Forgetting: Environmental History and Disaster Amnesia 85
- Learning Locally: Challenging Vulnerability & Resilience 95
- Conclusion 109

Chapter 3: 'The Roar of the Water': Remembering the '55 111
The 1955 Flood 112
The Roar of the Water: Power of Nature and Sensory Memories 118
Double Displacement: Memories of War and Flood 123
Desiring Home, Safety and 'Higher Ground' 129
Conclusion 136

Chapter 4: Fire in the Hills: Narrating Fire 138
The Fire: Royal Commission and Personal Narrative 140
Sensory and Experiential: The Spectacle, Speed and Sound of Fire 149
Narratives and Roles 159
Unsettled: Migrant Memories of Fire 165
Conclusion 172

Chapter 5: 'We Experienced this Together': Community and Belonging in the Aftermath of Disaster 174
Community Revealed: Social Networks and Community Connections 175
Sharing the Aftermath: Experiencing Community and Belonging 186
Complexities 193
Conclusion: Migrants in Community 201

Chapter 6: Environmental Memories and Attachment to Place 203
Sensory Memories and Environmental Adaptation 204
Environmental Memories: Regeneration and Respect 208
A Sense of Place: Rebuilding Home 214
Embedded Memories of Trauma and Healing 220
Conclusion 229

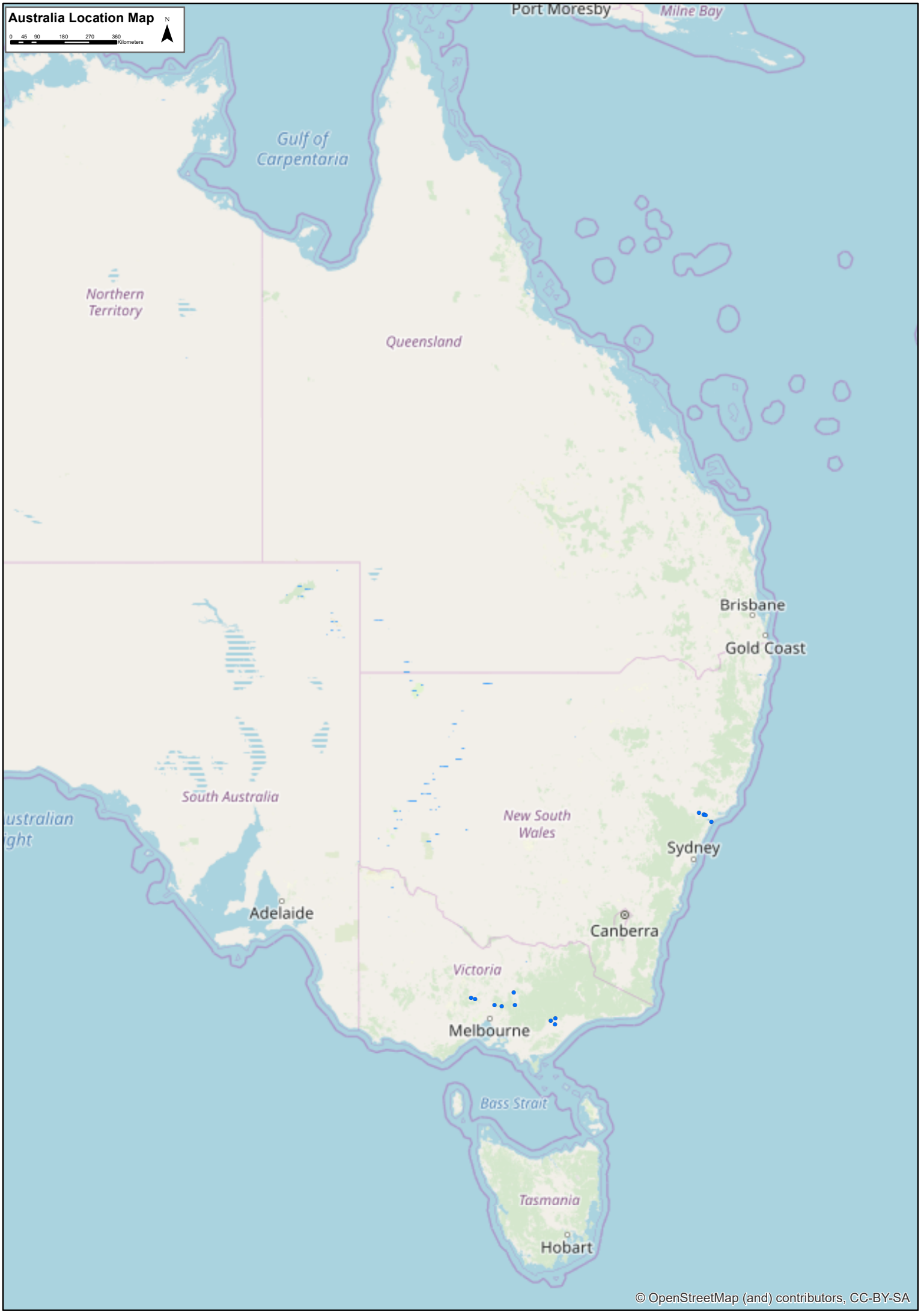
Chapter 7: Migrant Belonging in Disaster Prone Places 231
Life History Narratives: Successful Migration 232
Life History Narratives: Migrant Belonging 239
Migrant Belonging Through Disaster 250
Natural Disasters and National Belonging 256
Conclusion 262

Conclusion 264

Bibliography 271

# List of Figures


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Figure 1: | Australia Location Map | Page xii |
| Figure 2: | New South Wales Location Map | Page xiii |
| Figure 3: | Victoria Location Map | Page xiv |
| Figure 4: | Hunter Valley Location Map | Page 72 |
| Figure 5: | Gippsland Location Map | Page 77 |
| Figure 6: | Early CFA Adventures | Page 106 |
| Figure 7: | Flood water at the Belmore Bridge | Page 113 |
| Figure 8: | Flood waters throughout central Maitland | Page 115 |
| Figure 9: | Relocating houses to Telarah | Page 134 |
| Figure 10: | The Black Saturday Bushfires | Page 140 |
| Figure 11: | Map of the Murrindindi bushfire | Page 142 |
| Figure 12: | 'Behind me in the distance' | Page 144 |
| Figure 13: | 'Mushroom clouds of black smoke' | Page 145 |
| Figure 14: | The Fire Burning | Page 147 |
| Figure 15: | 'Six o'clock summertime, it was completely black and grey' | Page 151 |
| Figure 16: | Bright blue flood level signs, 1980s | Page 220 |
| Figure 17: | Bright blue flood level signs, 2015 | Page 222 |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Kilometers
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Queensland
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Gold Coast
South Australia
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Victoria
Melbourne
Bass Strait
Tasmania
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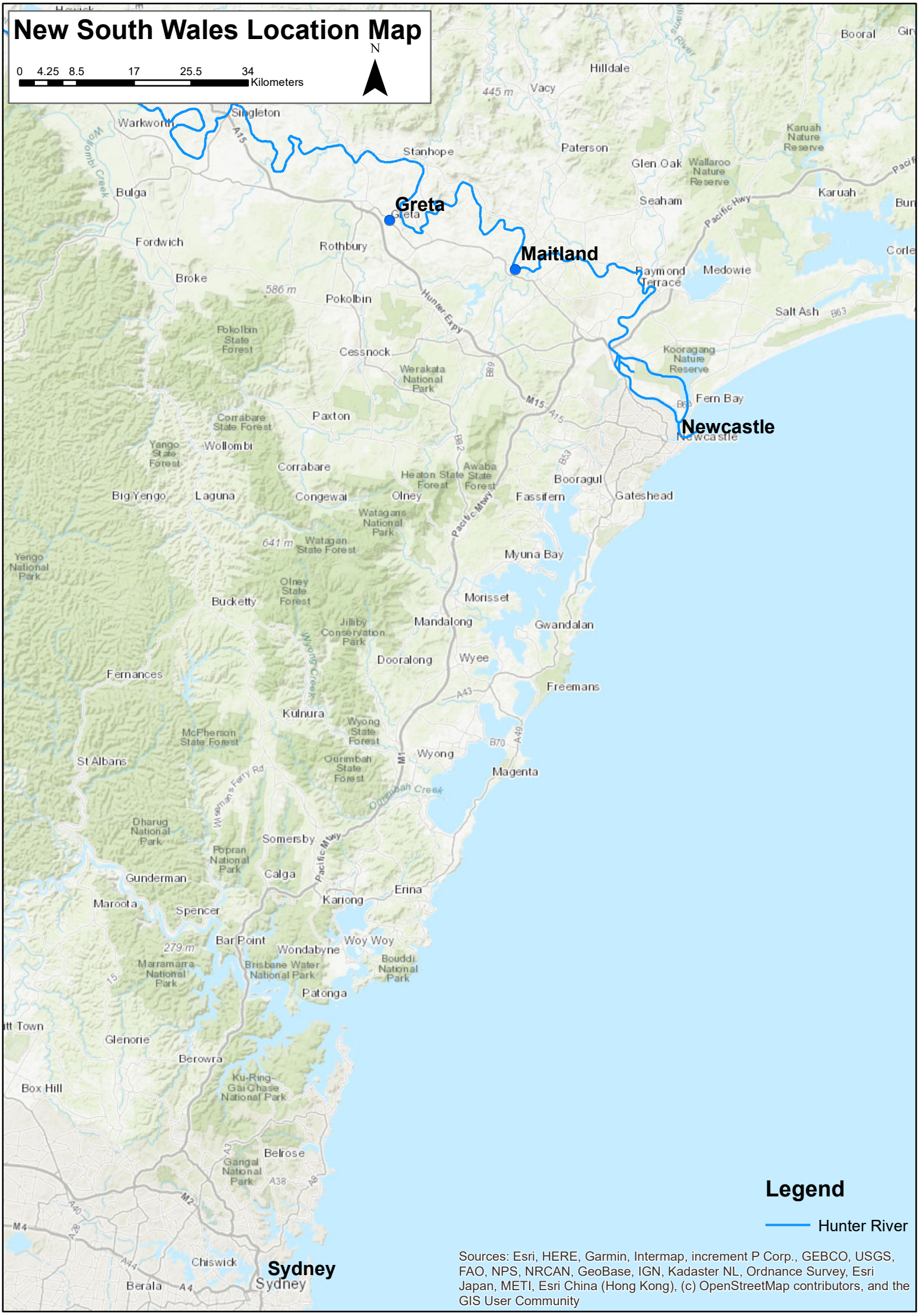
New South Wales Location Map
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Kilometers
Greta
Maitland
Newcastle
Sydney
Singleton
Warkworth
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Bulga
Fordwich
Broke
Rothbury
Pokolbin
Cessnock
Paxton
Corrabare
Wollombi
Big Yengo
Laguna
Congewai
Olney
Bucketty
Jilliby Conservation Park
Dooralong
Wyee
Mandalong
Morisset
Myuna Bay
Gwandalan
Freemans
Fernances
Kulnura
McPherson State Forest
St Albans
Wyong
Ourimbah State Forest
Magenta
Somersby
Gunderman
Calga
Erina
Kariong
Maroota
Spencer
Bar Point
Wondabyne
Woy Woy
Bouddi National Park
Patonga
Glenorie
Berowra
Box Hill
Belrose
Chiswick
Berala
Hilldale
Vacy
Paterson
Glen Oak
Seaham
Karuah
Raymond Terrace
Medowie
Salt Ash
Fern Bay
Booragul
Fassifern
Gateshead
Awaba State Forest
Heaton State Forest
Olney State Forest
Watagan State Forest
Watagans National Park
Werakata National Park
Pokolbin State Forest
Corrabare State Forest
Yango State Forest
Yengo National Park
Dharug National Park
Popran National Park
Brisbane Water National Park
Marramarra National Park
Ku-Ring-Gai Chase National Park
Garigal National Park
Kooragang Nature Reserve
Wallaroo Nature Reserve
Karuah Nature Reserve
Hunter Expy
Pacific Hwy
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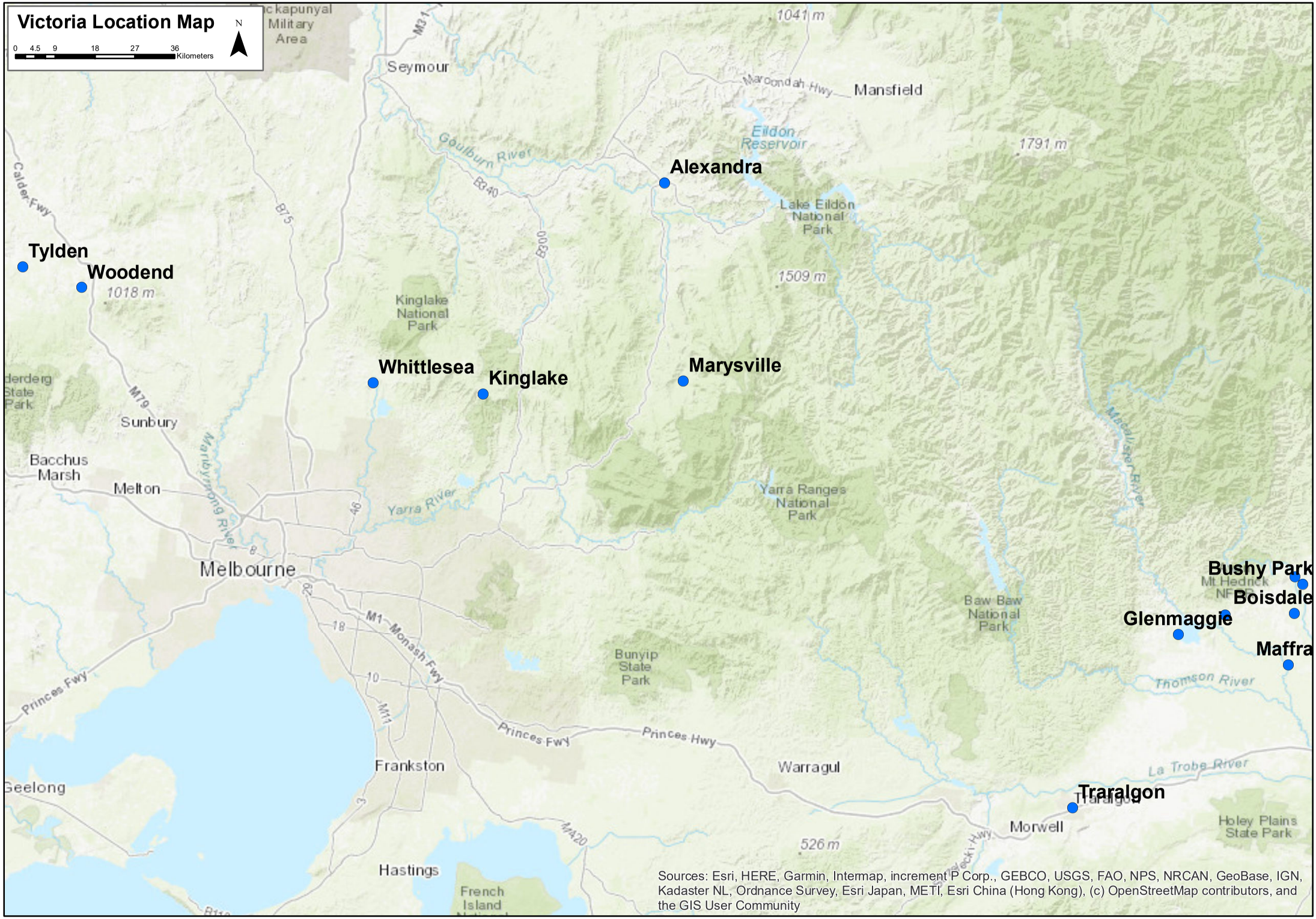
M1
M2
M4
M15
A15
A43
A49
B53
B82
B89
B70
445 m
586 m
641 m
279 m
Legend
Hunter River
Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community


Victoria Location Map
N
0 4.5 9 18 27 36
Kilometers
Seymour
Mansfield
Maroondah Hwy
Goulburn River
Eildon Reservoir
Alexandra
Lake Eildon National Park
1041 m
1791 m
1509 m
B340
B300
B75
Calder Fwy
Tylden
Woodend
1018 m
Kinglake National Park
Whittlesea
Kinglake
Marysville
M79
Sunbury
Bacchus Marsh
Melton
Werribee River
Yarra River
Yarra Ranges National Park
Melbourne
M1 Monash Fwy
Princes Fwy
Princes Hwy
Bunyip State Park
Baw Baw National Park
Bushy Park
Boisdale
Glenmaggie
Maffra
Thomson River
La Trobe River
Warragul
Traralgon
Morwell
Holey Plains State Park
Frankston
Geelong
Hastings
French Island
526 m
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Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

# Interviewees

## Maitland

Henry Meskauskas: Born 1947 in a German Displaced Persons camp, migrated to Australia 1949. Experienced the 1955 flood.

Ingrid Rudolph: Born 1939 in Germany, migrated to Australia 1949. Lived in the Greta Migrant Camp for two years. Experienced multiple floods in central Mailtand before the 1955 flood. Her family's house was relocated to Telarah.

John Szczudluk: Born 1930 in Poland, migrated to Australia 1949. Lived in the Greta Migrant Camp. Experienced the 1955 flood.

Nina Nikolaeff: Born 1941 in Vladivostok, migrated to Australia via the Philippines. Lived in the Greta Migarnt Camp for five years. Witnessed the 1955 flood while living in Greta township.

Tania Kuszelyk: Born 1926 in Poland. Worked in Germany during the war. Migrated to Australia 1950. Lived in the Greta Migrant Camp. Experienced the 1955 flood.

Terese Dron: Born 1940 Poland. Experienced concentration camps and Displaced Persons camps. Migrated to Australia 1950. Lived in Bonegilla, Cowra and Greta Migrant Camp. Experienced the 1955 flood from her home in Beresfield.

## Victoria

Bende: Born in Denmark. Visited Australia 1984 for six months. Migrated to Australia in 1991 but decided to move back to Denmark in 1995. Migrated permanently in 1997 to the Whittlesea area, Victoria. Experienced the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires.

Bruno Torfs: Born in Paraguy, migrated to Belgium in 1970/1971. Migrated to Marysville, Victoria, around 1996. Experienced the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires.

Hans van Wees: Born in the Netherlands, migrated to New Zealand 1979. Migrated to Gippsland, Victoria, 1996. Experienced bushfires in Meerlieu, and most significantly the 2013 Aberfeldy-Donnellys Creek fire near Maffra.

Ian van der Werff: Born New Zealand, migrated to Australia 1994. Moved to Woodend area 1997 and quickly joined the CFA. Experienced multiple bushfires through CFA involvement.

Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone: Born in the Netherlands, migrated to Alexandra, Australia 1989. Her father Wytze joined the local CFA when she was young. She joined as an adult. Experienced the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires with her father Wytze.

Kat Jenkins: Born in England, visited Australia in 1999. Migrated permanently in 2007 to Kinglake. Experienced the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires.

Rachel Dawkins: Born in England, visited Australia in 1985. Married her late husband Nigel Dawkins June 1988, migrated permanently to Valencia Creek, Gippsland, August 1988. Experienced multiple bushfires through her role at work and as a member of her community.

Wytze Kylstra: Born in the Netherlands, migrated to Alexandra, Victoria, 1989. Joined the CFA soon after arrival. Experienced multiple bushfires as a member of the CFA, in particular the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires with his daughter Jenneke.

# Thinking Through Fire and Flood: Foreword

This is a history of migrant belonging in Australia, and of the experiences of those encountering Australia's continuing history of natural disasters, particularly fire and flood. It considers how experiences of fire and flood have become part of the lives of migrants and how these experiences have created spaces for migrants to reflect upon and renegotiate ties and connections to people and places, and to re-articulate their sense of attachment and belonging. There are many ways this history could be articulated, and mine is not the final word on migrant experiences of natural disasters in Australia. But it is a starting point for a conversation and further research on migrant belonging in an environment that has long tested, in the words of Dorothea Mackellar, our love for a 'sunburnt' land of 'droughts and flooding rains'.

Despite the confidence of this opening statement, I find it necessary to preface this thesis with a confession. For a long time I struggled to make sense of and conceptualise the key contribution of my thesis. At workshops I would find myself defending or justifying my topic, particularly my attempt to bring the themes of migration and natural disaster together. I insisted that there was a need for these histories and stories to be told, and that they would have value beyond the academy. Yet some critics implied there was a flaw in the conceptualisation and framework of the research and to cut a long story short, their words reverberated strongly until I spent a summer at the National Library of Australia in early 2016.

I was lucky enough to be a scholar at the National Library in their 2016 Summer Scholars Program. The scholarship was a wonderful opportunity that provided me with the time and space to think afresh and approach my topic from another perspective, specifically by listening to the oral history recordings of other disasters in Australia—those that did not directly align with the case studies I had selected for my thesis. These were scattered throughout different collections in the Library and I had to scour the catalogues for any mention of fire and flood in connection to immigration and the nation's multicultural past. Along the way I came across a series of recordings about a small Victorian town called Ecklin, a town which had been burnt in 1983 by the

Ash Wednesday fires.[1]

Over the course of six weeks I became immersed in these recordings and the voices of those who lived there, and I listened to as many stories as I could in the limited time that I had in the Library. I became transfixed by these recordings—by their sounds and atmosphere—often swatting at non-existent flies in my office (flies that I could hear in the recording). Frequently I paused the recording to find and answer a ringing telephone, only to realise it was all in my head(phones). I listened my way into this world and into the life of a small Victorian country town reflecting on the fires.

The internal dynamics of Ecklin were revealed through discussions of two competing town halls, as well as the importance and central role of the local store in the community and within one particular family. I listened to stories of farmers who had to rebuild and re-fence hectares of land, and who had to deal with the death of animals in the aftermath of fires. The tone was often melancholic and reflective, as many felt Ecklin was slowly but surely changing and perhaps disappearing from the map as its importance and stature changed and diminished. Having listened to these interviews, I began to envision the fire in my mind, the way the fire moved, and the way people responded to the event.

My immersion in these recordings and memories of Ecklin was cut short as I developed a severe case of RSI and lateral epicondylitis from taking too many notes and trying to transcribe at the speed of someone speaking. I had to find other ways to learn about the fires during my time at the Library, so I turned to aerial photography, maps, emergency management bushfire maps, old diaries, 60-year-old mitigation meeting minutes and emergency management reports on fire and flood. Typically, these are not the sources I turn to first—I considered myself an oral historian, not a historical geographer. These sources were often dense and inaccessible. On their own they would not have spoken or revealed their stories to me; they would never have made sense without the voices and lived experiences of those who were there. They could have seemed static, with experiences flattened in favour of statistics and a focus on the science of disaster. But because I had first immersed myself in the oral history

[1] The Helen O'Shea collection of Australian folklore in its social context, National Library of Australia.

recordings, these sources came alive.

I found an official report of the fires called 'The Major Fires Originating 16th February 1983'. In spite of the slightly numbing official 'fire impact' and 'risk management' language, I could see the fire moving on the page as I read about the wind change. I knew where certain people were during the fire, if they knew it was coming, what they were doing, and where they were when the wind changed. I knew the wind change meant the destruction of the local store. I knew the sky went black as it filled with smoke. I could see the place where people sheltered in a truck, waiting for the fire to pass over, while watching plastics melt like ice cream.

The statistics began to make sense. They weren't just abstract depictions of the event. The figures for the loss of fencing made sense because I had listened to numerous people talk about the difficulties of a farming area recovering after the fires. I had heard how much destroyed fencing cost farmers, emotionally and financially, and the stresses of loosing stock. These numbers became meaningful and added another layer to the stories I already knew. As a result I had a better appreciation and understanding of the fire, and people's experiences as a result.

It was through finding these stories and voices, and linking these to other materials, that the often inaccessible risk management report came alive to me and I began to imagine these events in a whole new light. A report will state the time of a fire, the wind speed and direction; it will provide statistics about mileage of fencing lost and buildings destroyed. The language is analytic, bureaucratic, outcome-oriented and geared towards a clear set of recommendations—and understandably so. But the holistic and immersive experience of oral history enables us to access the experience of natural disaster in new ways. In the case of bushfires and floods, we come to a fuller understanding of the effects and affects of natural disasters, and how statistics may mask differential experiences across communities. We begin to wonder who else has a story to tell about disaster—whose stories tend not to be told—and perhaps what aspects of the experience of natural disaster may get sidelined by understandable efforts to quantify, explain and to create blueprints for future action.

Yet these experiences affect a whole life and reverberate with many other key events in the lives of those who live through a natural disaster. Scholars have

appreciated this and responded in a variety of ways. Environmental humanities scholars and historians have written histories of interactions between people and their environment. Those with an interest in politics and ideas will construct a story of the politics of burning, and of floodplain management. Those in emergency management will continue with their (often combative) approach to managing disasters. Governments will likely maintain their cries of 'resilient communities'; while others will talk (and sometimes shout) to each other in small groups and local communities of their needs, their experiences, and their suggestions. What I discovered through attention to interviews—both those I conducted myself and those listened to that summer in Canberra—was the deep need that many have to explain that they have a different story to tell: of how and why their world has changed.

I couldn't write all of these stories but I could listen to the voices of those who were generous enough to share their story and experience with me and who self-selected as migrants who had experienced a natural disaster and had something important to tell me. I could make sure those stories were recorded and heard and be attentive to the voices of those who were thinking about how the double displacement and disruption of migration and natural disaster was re-framing their sense of place, belonging and identity. This is information that sometimes gets lost as migrants are not be heard *as migrants* in the wake of a natural disaster.

So in the following pages I explore and examine the entanglement of these histories and fields of scholarship—migration, environmental history, and disaster studies—within Australia. I argue for the importance of community to migrants in the aftermath of disasters, and the significance of place and environment to many of those involved. While I find myself somewhat ambivalent about the concept of 'resilience', I want to demonstrate the deep capacity for living life—the 'heart'—that some have, and the strength and soul of many. I want to tell their stories and let them tell theirs in order to provide a deeper appreciation of another aspect of the depth of human experience.

By listening to their stories I learnt that it is not some peculiar quirk of mine to draw these two topics together, nor is it my task to prove or justify that an overlap exists, and that natural disasters and migration should be examined together. This

overlap has existed throughout Australia's history. I bring these histories and stories together simply by virtue of the life experiences of the people I have met—they have lived this. Their lives prove the entanglement of these histories. Their lives are the reasons these stories, and this history, matters.

# Introduction

In the wake of the Second World War and displacement across Europe, many Europeans migrated to Australia in an optimistic search for a new life and home. Ingrid and her parents migrated from Germany to Australia in 1949—they were among the 170,000 Displaced Persons who arrived between 1947 and 1952.[1]Like many others, instead of finding their idyllic new life, they were sent to live in the Greta Migrant Camp, in New South Wales (NSW). They lived there two years while they saved for a house in the nearby town of Maitland.

In 1955 one of the biggest floods in Maitland's history—and in Australia's history—swept through the town, inundated their house, and devastated the surrounding area. The 'roar of the water' figured powerfully in Ingrid's memory over sixty years later:

> It was such a horrendous bad flood, it really was, it really scared everyone […] You really thought you could die […] it was that bad, the force of the water […] you can never underestimate the force of the water, it takes on such a big force, you haven't got a hope against it, you haven't […] The roar of the water, it has such a might, it's just unbelievable, it destroys everything in its path. I mean imagine houses just being smashed and uprooted and flowing down the river, flowing down and people on top of the houses clinging on for dear life […] it was horrifying, it was like a nightmare. You see that and you hear all the stories […] Unbelievable, it's just unbelievable—the torrent of the water.[2]

While a figure of speech, the term 'unbelievable' was in many ways appropriate as migrants were often unaware of the propensity for flooding in Maitland. The town lies close to the Hunter River that is fed by over forty tributaries as it snakes its way northwest, southwest and then southeast through low-lying land to its outlet on the central coast of NSW. Ingrid's story is one among many that reveals a common experience of migrants in Australia who were often unaware of the history of natural disasters in their new home and who navigated the 'double displacement' of migration and natural disaster.

This thesis provides the first history of migrant experiences of natural disasters in Australia by drawing upon oral history interviews with people who have migrated to

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[1] Jayne Persian, "Displaced Persons and the Politics of International Categorisation(s)," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 58, no. 4 (2012).

[2] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

Australia and subsequently experienced a bushfire or flood. Oral history interviews are the foundation of this thesis that provide unique insights into the way migrants remember their experience of migration and natural disasters. This thesis showcases and analyses the individual experiences and memories of migrants who witnessed the 1955 flood in Maitland in the Hunter Valley in NSW, and those who have experienced more recent bushfires in the state of Victoria. It uses these two case studies to demonstrate the intersection between previously discrete areas of scholarship—migration history, disaster studies and environmental history—and thus aims to start a conversation and stimulate further research examining migrants' experiences of natural disasters.

At the heart of the migrant experience of bushfire and flood in Australia is what I have labelled a 'double displacement'. Migrants were displaced first by migration, and then by their experience of natural disaster. This double displacement was woven throughout the oral history interviews that I conducted and shaped how migrants articulated their sense of home and belonging in Australia. Their memories illustrate the immediate and personal experience of natural disasters through sensory and embodied memories. These two case studies reveal common themes of community, connection, environment and place throughout migrant experiences, and the way their experiences of bushfire and flood in some cases contributed to a sense of home and belonging in regional and disaster-prone environments. Oral history interviews highlight the specific migrant experience of natural disasters but also provide new insights into larger cultural patterns of 'disaster amnesia' and the way we remember and forget this history of natural disasters. This thesis argues that the similarities and differences between these cohorts provide a valuable indication as to how experiences and memories of migration may become entangled within the experience of natural disaster in complex ways. Understanding this entanglement can help us understand how doubly displaced people negotiate connection and belonging in often challenging community and environmental contexts.

## Migration

As a settler colonial nation, Australia has been shaped and defined by waves of migration. Since the arrival of Europeans in 1788 a variety of 'push and pull' factors have characterised the development of Australia's migration schemes and patterns. While the

focus of this thesis is on people who have migrated in the last seventy years, it worth setting this project within the boarder context of migration history and historiography. Migration historiography itself developed in greater depth and sophistication particularly since an interest in multicultural Australia emerged in the 1970s.

European migration to Australia began in the late eighteenth century as a largely culturally homogenous movement shaped and controlled by colonial government immigration schemes.[3] Migration assistance schemes shaped migration trends in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and (to a lesser extent) into the twenty-first century.[4] Coordinated migration schemes and policies acted in combination with protectionist economic arguments and the white Australia policy to determine who entered Australia, to encourage and reinforce British nationalism and colonial loyalty, and to facilitate the settlement of regional Australia.[5] Following the Second World War the mantra of 'populate or perish' was invoked to address concerns about the country's potential vulnerability to invasion and to encourage migration to address labour shortages and avoid economic recession.[6]

In 1945 Australia's first Minister for Immigration Arthur Calwell emphasised the

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[3] Ian H. Burnley, *The Impact of Immigration on Australia: A Demographic Approach* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4, 28, 29; Geoffrey Sherington, *Australia's Immigrants 1788-1988*, 2nd ed. (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 30.

[4] Sherington, *Australia's Immigrants*; Eric Richards, *Destination Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008); Burnley, *The Impact of Immigration*.

[5] Burnley, *The Impact of Immigration*, 31; Richards, *Destination Australia*, x, 35; Gwenda Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia* (Carlton North: Scribe Publications, 2005), 36.

[6] Burnley, *The Impact of Immigration*, 4, 31; Jock Collins, *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land: Australia's Post-War Immigration* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988), 21; Joy Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War: Australia's Greek Immigrants after World War Ii and the Greek Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, 31; J. Olaf Kleist, "Migrant Incorporation and Political Memories: Transformations of Civic and Communal Belonging in Australia since 1949," in *History, Memory and Migration: Perceptions of the Past and the Politics of Incorporation*, ed. Irial Glynn and J. Olaf Kleist (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 192; Laksiri Jayasuriya, *Immigration and Multiculturalism in Australia: Selected Essays* (Nedlands: School of Social Work and Social Administration the University of Western Australia, 1997); Klaus Neumann, *Refugee Australia: Australia's Humanitarian Record* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004); Jayne Persian, "'Chifley Liked Them Blond': DP Immigrants for Australia," *History Australia* 12, no. 2 (2015).

economic and demographic need for increased migration. Approximately 2.5 million people arrived in Australia between 1947 and 1972.[7] Initial migrant assistance schemes revealed a desired 'type' of migrant (namely white and British), but as high migrant labour targets were not met the migration net was extended to include migrants from Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and eventually Asia.[8] The conditions around migrant passage varied according to scheme and country of origin. Some people had to pay their way or were privately sponsored while others benefited from assisted passages.[9] Some post-war migrants were 'free' settlers, able to choose to leave their former homes for Australia, but others were 'pushed' to Australia as part of the 260,000 refugees and Displaced Persons accepted by the Australia government between 1947 and 1972.[10] Post-war housing shortages meant Displaced Persons were sent away from urban centres to live and work in non-metropolitan areas for the duration of their work contract.[11] Ex-army camps such as those located at Bonegilla in regional Victoria and Greta in regional New South Wales were turned into centres for migrant accommodation.[12] These migration schemes and systems of migrant accommodation led to many Displaced Persons being sent to the Greta Migrant Camp where they lived for two years. Afterwards many people chose to live in nearby Maitland which is how they came to witness and experience the major 1955 flood.

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[7] Richards, *Destination Australia*, 226.

[8] Collins, *Migrant Hands*, 24; A. James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Andrew Hassam, "The "Bring out a Briton" Campaign of 1957 and British Migration to Australia in the 1950s," *History Compass* 5, no. 3 (2007); Burnley, *The Impact of Immigration*, 33.

[9] Sherington, *Australia's Immigrants*, 148; Eric Richards, *Britannia's Children* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004); Burnley, *The Impact of Immigration*, 32; Joed Elich, "Dutch and Australian Governments' Perspectives on Migration," in *The Dutch Down under 1606-2006*, ed. Nonja Peters (Crawley: University of Western Australia, 2006).

[10] Collins, *Migrant Hands*, 48; James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Migration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 180.

[11] Jayne Persian, *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2017), 70, 78, 93, 94, 127.

[12] Alexandra Dellios, *Histories of Controversy: The Bonegilla Migrant Centre* (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2017); Christopher Keating, *A History of the Army Camp and Migrant Camp at Greta, New South Wales, 1939-1960* (Sydney: Uri Windt, 1997).

Postwar migration ideologies of assimilation and integration influenced the settlement experiences of these migrants, who were expected to fit in, learn English and adopt an (Anglo) 'Australian way of life', with very little in the way of settlement services.[13] Chapter One in particular examines Maitland migrants' memories of their experience of migration, settlement and the assimilation policies that shaped how they created an early sense of connection, community and belonging. By the 1970s these postwar settlement policies had shifted: White Australia was formally ended in 1973 and 'multiculturalism' was heralded as the appropriate vision for a nation developing new immigration policies.[14] The people who migrated to bushfire-prone places in Victoria and were interviewed for this thesis arrived after the embrace of multiculturalism and in a historical context that was much changed from the one experienced by Maitland migrants.

As policy changed and developed so did migration scholarship. Migration history and policy has been examined by multiple disciplines through a variety of different theoretical and methodological approaches. Themes of migration and displacement have been located in 'both "big" history and more intimate and local histories', and included in a variety of other studies including family, sport, urban and national histories.[15] Studies of migration conventionally focused on migrant employment, education and access to social and welfare services but historiography moved from a focus on settlement histories, recovering 'lost' migrant voices, emphasising 'ethnic heritage' and 'migrant contribution' narratives, [16] to considering questions of citizenship, identity and Australian

[13] See Anna Haebich, *Spinning the Dream: Assimilation in Australia 1950-1970* (Fremantle: Freemantle Press, 2008); Joy Damousi, ""We Are Human Beings, and Have a Past": The "Adjustment" of Migrants and the Australian Assimilation Policies of the 1950s," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 59, no. 4 (2013); Gwenda Tavan, ""Good Neighbours": Community Organisations, Migrant Assimilation and Australian Society and Culture, 1950-1961," in *The Forgotten Fifties: Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in the 1950s*, ed. John Murphy and Judith Smart (Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1997).

[14] Burnley, *The Impact of Immigration*, 34; Linda Burnett, *Issues in Immigrant Settlement in Australia* (Sydney: Macquarie University, 1998), 9; Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, 43, 86, 88.

[15] Ruth Balint and Zora Simic, "Histories of Migrants and Refugees in Australia," *Australian Historical Studies* 49, no. 3 (2018): 380.

[16] See Hsu-Ming Teo, "Multiculturalism and the Problem of Multicultural Histories: An Overview of

multiculturalism.[17] Scholarship has encompassed political and policy aspects of migration through a focus on the nation, integration and cohesion, alongside studies which have focused more specifically on the experiences of migrants through concepts of home, place and belonging.[18] Transnational histories have allowed for a consideration of migrants' connections and ties in both Australia and overseas, which contributed to changing understandings of the migration and settlement experience of individuals and families and subsequent generations.[19] The growth of oral history and memory studies

Ethnic Historiography," in *Cultural History in Australia*, ed. Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003).

[17] Andrew Hassam, *Sailing to Australia: Shipboard Diaries by Nineteenth-Century British Emigrants* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995); Peter Marden and David Mercer, *The Tyranny of Difference: Multiculturalism, Citizenship and National Identity in Australia* (Clayton: Monash University, 1996); Susan Schech and Jane Haggis, "Migrancy, Multiculturalism and Whiteness: Re-Charting Core Identities in Australia," *Communal/Plural* 9, no. 2 (2001); Will Kymlicka, "Immigration, Citizenship, Multiculturalism: Exploring the Links," *The Political Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2003); Robert Mason, "Australian Multiculturalism: Revisiting Australia's Political Heritage and the Migrant Presence," *History Compass* 8, no. 8 (2010); Anthony Moran, "Multiculturalism as Nation-Building in Australia: Inclusive National Identity and the Embrace of Diversity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 12 (2011); Ashley Carruthers, "National Multiculturalism, Transnational Identities," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 2 (2013).

[18] Stephen Castles, Graeme Hugo, and Ellie Vasta, "Rethinking Migration and Diversity in Australia: Introduction," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 2 (2013); Farida Fozdar, "Social Cohesion and Skilled Muslim Refugees in Australia: Employment, Social Capital and Discrimination," *Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 2 (2012); Farida Fozdar and Lisa Hartley, "Civic and Ethno Belonging among Recent Refugees to Australia," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 27, no. 1 (2014); Kymlicka, "Immigration, Citizenship, Multiculturalism."; James Jupp and Marie Kabala, eds., *The Politics of Australian Immigration*, Immigration and Australian Foreign Policy (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1993); Francesco Ricatti, "Migration and Place: Italian Memories of North Queensland," *Queensland Review* 21, no. 2 (2014).

[19] Sara Ahmed, "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3 (1999); Loretta Baldassar, "Migration Monuments in Italy and Australia: Contesting Histories and Transforming Identities," *Modern Italy* 11, no. 1 (2006); Loretta Baldassar, "Transnational Families and Aged Care: The Mobility of Care and the Migrancy of Ageing," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 2 (2007); Loretta Baldassar, "Transnational Families and the Provision of Moral and Emotional Support: The Relationship between Truth and Distance," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 14, no. 4 (2007); Loretta Baldassar, "Missing Kin and Longing to Be Together: Emotions and the Construction of Co-Presence in Transnational Relationships," *Journal of*

strengthened migration scholarship and placed value on the personal experience of migration; this led to the development of more recent scholarship that has begun to recognise and examine the influence of past experiences of trauma upon Australian immigrants.[20]

The common characteristics and themes that emerged from the two case studies in this thesis have guided the specific migration literature engaged and deployed throughout each chapter. The way migrant pasts and memories of war and trauma have influenced experiences of migration and settlement is discussed specifically in Chapter One, Chapter Three and Chapter Seven, while themes of home and belonging are examined in Chapter Three and Chapter Seven.

As this thesis focuses on disasters outside major cities, it thus focuses on migrant belonging in regional Australia. Regional migration has been a significant and distinctive part of migration history and Australian history more broadly but most scholarship has

*Intercultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2008); Naomi Bushin, "Researching Family Migration Decision-Making: A Children-in-Families Approach," *Population, Place and Space* 15, no. 5 (2009); Mary Chamberlain and Selma Leydesdorff, "Transnational Families: Memories and Narratives," *Global Networks* 4, no. 3 (2004); Alexandra Dellios, "Memory and Family in Australian Refugee Histories," *Immigrants & Minorities* 36, no. 2 (2018); Alexandra Dellios, "Remembering Mum and Dad: Family History Making by Children of Eastern European Refugees," *Immigrants & Minorities* 36, no. 2 (2018); Sarah Green, "'All Those Stories, All Those Stories': How Do Bosnian Former Child Refugees Maintain Connections to Bosnia and Community Groups in Australia?," *Immigrants & Minorities* 36, no. 2 (2018); Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho, "Citizenship, Migration and Transnationalism: A Review and Critical Interventions," *Geography Compass* 2, no. 5 (2008); Martin O'Flaherty, Zlatko Skrbis, and Bruce Tranter, "Home Visits: Transnationalism among Australian Migrants," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 5 (2007); Zlatko Skrbiš, "Transnational Families: Theorising Migration, Emotions and Belonging," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2008).

[20] A. James Hammerton, "'Family Comes First': Migrant Memory and Masculinity in Narratives of Post-War British Migrants," in *Speaking to Immigrants: Oral Testimony and the History of Australian Migration*, ed. Eric Richards and A. James Hammerton (Canberra: History Program and Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, 2002); Francesco Ricatti, "Elodia and Franca: Oral Histories of Migration and Hope," *History Australia* 7, no. 2 (2010); Alistair Thomson, "Moving Stories: Oral History and Migration Studies," *Oral History* 27, no. 1 (1999); Alistair Thomson, "'I Live on My Memories': British Return Migrants and the Possession of the Past," *Oral History* 31, no. 2 (2003); Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton, eds., *Remembering Migration: Oral Histories and Heritage in Australia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Damousi, *Memory and Migration.*

focused on the urban experience. Policies have explicitly intervened to encourage migrant settlement beyond the major cities throughout the colonial era and the interwar years.[21] Increased industralisation and urbanisation after the Second World War changed traditional migration and settlement patterns and led to a greater concentration of migrants in capital cities between 1947-2001.[22] The rising skill and educational level of migrants and corresponding shift from manual work to skilled labour reinforced metropolitan settlement trends.[23] Recent migration schemes in the 1990s and 2000s again encouraged people into regional areas in order to combat population pressures in cities and to revitalise regional communities and regional migrant populations.[24] And yet little historical or qualitative research has focused on rural and regional Australia despite location being a critical factor in migrant settlement.[25]

Experiences of migration to regional and rural Australia beyond major cities have been peripheral and largely incidental to the focus of migration studies. Studies of migrant camps in regional locations have led to a subsidiary engagement with regional migration but such scholarship usually highlights the desire of migrants who relocated to urban centres rather than those who decided to stay. Given the lesser attention to regional Australia within national histories it is perhaps unsurprising that the specific experience

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[21] Graeme Hugo, "Immigrant Settlement in Regional Australia: Patterns and Processes," in *Rural Change in Australia: Population, Economy, Environment*, ed. Rae Dufty-Jones and John Connell (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 57; Sherington, *Australia's Immigrants*; Richards, *Destination Australia*, 81-95, 103; Burnley, *The Impact of Immigration*; Michele Langfield, *More People Imperative: Immigration to Australia, 1901-39* (Canberra: National Archives of Australia, 1999), 12; Eric Richards, "Changing Century," in *The Australia Immigrant in the 20th Century: Searching Neglected Sources*, ed. Eric Richards and Jacqueline Templeton (Canberra: Division of Historical Studies and Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, 1998), 9; Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, 55-58, 141-143.

[22] Hugo, "Immigrant Settlement in Regional Australia," 59.

[23] Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, 214; Jock Collins, "Rethinking Australian Immigration and Immigrant Settlement Policy," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 2 (2013).

[24] Hugo, "Immigrant Settlement in Regional Australia," 70, 71; Bruce Missingham, Jacqui Dibden, and Chris Cocklin, "A Multicultural Countryside? Ethnic Minorities in Rural Australia," *Rural Society* 16, no. 2 (2006): 131; Joy Penman and Kalpana Goel, "Coping and Resilience of Rural and Regional Australian Immigrants: Imperatives for Successful Settlement," *Rural Society* 26, no. 2 (2017): 179.

[25] Penman and Goel, "Coping and Resilience," 179.

of migrants to regional Australia has been similarly under-researched.[26] Nevertheless, there have been studies that have examined migrants specific 'successful' settlement practices and others have considered migrants' attachment to place and the built environment in regional and rural locations.[27] With the exception of economic, demographic and sociological studies, the paucity of historical and qualitative work on regional and rural migration has arguably also led to the relative neglect of migrant encounters with the Australian environment. There are notable exceptions, which include the work of Mandy Thomas on Vietnamese migrants' experiences visiting Australian national parks, but its specificity does not always lend itself to wider considerations of migrants living within regional environments.[28] The regional location of the people interviewed for this thesis and the natural disasters they experienced enables this thesis to contribute to scholarship about regional migration and migrants' experiences and encounters with the Australian environment. Migrants' reflections on place and environment within regional Australia are significant and contribute to their experience of migration, settlement and bushfire or flood.

[26] Erik Eklund, *Mining Towns: Making a Living, Making a Life* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2012).

[27] Anita Devos, "Learning to Labour in Regional Australia: Gender, Identity and Place in Lifelong Learning," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 30, no. 4 (2011); Simon J. L. Massey and Nick Parr, "The Socio-Economic Status of Migrant Populations in Regional and Rural Australia and Its Implications for Future Population Policy," *Journal of Population Research* 29, no. 1 (2012); Missingham, Dibden, and Cocklin, "A Multicultural Countryside?."; Penman and Goel, "Coping and Resilience."; Parimal Roy and I. A. N. Hamilton, "Intermarriage among Italians: Some Regional Variations in Australia," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 31, no. 1 (2000); Robert Allan Townsend and Janice Pascal, "Therapeutic Landscapes: Understanding Migration to Australian Regional and Rural Communities," *Rural Society* 22, no. 1 (2012); Kirrily Jordan, Branka Krivokapic-Skiko, and Jock Collins, "Immigration and Multicultural Place-Making in Rural and Regional Australia," in *Demographic Change in Australia's Rural Landscapes: Implications for Society and the Environment*, ed. Gary W. Luck, Digby Race, and Rosemary Black (Collingwood: Springer Science+Business Media & CSIRO Publishing, 2011).

[28] Mandy Thomas, *Moving Landscapes: National Parks and the Vietnamese Experience* (Hurstville: NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Pluto Press Australia, 2002).

## Disaster Studies

The thesis facilitates a conversation about migrant experiences of natural disasters in Australia by bringing together diverse areas of scholarship including disaster studies. Migrant experiences of bushfire and flood can be approached through the multidisciplinary disaster studies paradigm that was established after the Second World War in response to new fears of nuclear war and to understand how populations would behave in times of threat and catastrophe.[29] Despite disparate methodological approaches, there are key theoretical concerns within disaster studies pertinent to this thesis. Explanations of natural disasters shifted away from religion, natural causes and environmental determinism, and moved towards the role of society and culture.[30] Disaster studies created distinctions between 'hazard' and 'disaster' by attending to the active role society and culture have in creating, exacerbating or reducing the risk and impact of disasters.[31]

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[29] Genevive Massard-Guilbaud, "Introduction: The Urban Catastrophe: Challenge to the Social, Economic, and Cultural Order of the City," in *Cities and Catastrophes: Coping with Emergency in European History [Villes Et Catastrophes: Réactions Face a L'urgence Dans L'histoire Européenne]*, ed. Genevive Massard-Guilbaud, Harold L. Platt, and Dieter Schott (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002); Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith, eds., *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002); Frank Furedi, "The Changing Meaning of Disaster," *Area* 39, no. 4 (2007); R. L. Wettenhall, *Bushfire Disaster: An Australian Community in Crisis* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1975); Kathleen J. Tierney, "From the Margins to the Mainstream? Disaster Research at the Crossroads," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007); Allen H. Barton, *Communities in Disaster* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1969).

[30] Anthony Oliver-Smith, "Theorizing Disasters: Nature, Power, and Culture," in *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, ed. Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002), 27, 31; Tierney, "From the Margins to the Mainstream?," 506; Piers Blaikie et al., *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerabilities, and Disasters* (London: Routledge, 1994); Tom Griffiths, "How Many Trees Make a Forest? Cultural Debates About Vegetation Change in Australia," *Australian Journal of Botany* 50 (2002): 376; Russell R. Dynes and Kathleen Tierney, eds., *Disasters, Collective Behavior, and Social Organization* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994); Virginia Garcia-Acosta, "Historical Disaster Research," in *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, ed. Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002).

[31] Oliver-Smith, "Theorizing Disasters," 27; Tierney, "From the Margins to the Mainstream?."; Furedi, "The Changing Meaning of Disaster."

A 'disaster' requires a 'hazard' or a 'potentially destructive agent' with the 'potential for social, infrastructural, or environmental damage' to combine with a human population.[32] A hazard could be a cyclone or earthquake, a nuclear facility or 'a socioeconomic practice'.[33] A hazard creates a disaster when populations are impacted and everyday routines and social structures are disrupted or damaged.[34] The type of hazard largely determines the type of disaster. A disaster can be natural, social, political, economic or technological depending on the type of hazard that caused them.[35] Natural hazards are triggered by climatic and geological variables, which are in part beyond the control of humanity.[36] In contrast, technological disasters emanate from the 'wrong category'; from the 'safe' category of culture that is perceived as one designed to protect us.[37] 'Complex' disasters arise from damage by two different hazard types; for example, a natural hazard can trigger a technological disaster as was the case when an earthquake and tsunami ultimately led to the Fukushima nuclear disaster.[38]

Studies of disaster provide new insights into society by revealing inner workings often obscured by everyday routines.[39] Scholars realised social structures could influence the likelihood and level of risk associated with disasters. Work on the social aspects of disaster led to the development of the concept of 'vulnerability' by scholars including Piers Blaikie, Terry Cannon, Ian Davis, and Ben Wisne, E.L. Quarantelli, Russel Dynes, Anthony Oliver-Smith and Frank Furedi.[40] The term 'vulnerability' elucidated how

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[32] Oliver-Smith, "Introduction: Why Anthropologists Should Study Disasters," 3, 7.

[33] Ibid., 4.

[34] Ibid.; Blaikie et al., *At Risk*, 21.

[35] Blaikie et al., *At Risk*, 3.

[36] Palm 1990 quoted in Kenneth Hewitt, *Regions of Risk: A Geographical Introduction to Disasters* (Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997), 55.

[37] Susanna M. Hoffman, "The Monster and the Mother: The Symbolism of Disaster," in *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, ed. Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002), 136.

[38] Oliver-Smith, "Theorizing Disasters," 43; Hewitt, *Regions of Risk*.

[39] Samara Anne Cahill, "Porn, Popery, Mahometanism, and the Rise of the Novel: Responses to the London Earthquakes of 1750," *Religion in the Age of Enlightenment* 2 (2010); Alessa Johns, "Introduction," in *Dreadful Visitations: Confronting Natural Catastrophe in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Alessa Johns (London: Routledge, 1999).

[40] Blaikie et al., *At Risk*; E. L. Quarantelli, ed., *What Is a Disaster? Perspectives on the Question* (London:

social, economic and political factors reduced or exacerbated disasters and thus how disasters impact people in differing ways.[41] Societies often exist in a state of imbalance and social and economic inequality, so when disaster strikes, some people are more vulnerable than others.[42] People in lower socioeconomic positions are more likely to live in hazardous locations and have less access to the economic or social resources necessary for recovery in comparison with wealthier home owners.[43] Hurricane Katrina strikingly revealed preexisting inequalities between geographic, socioeconomic, and ethnic and racial groups in the USA city New Orleans, which significantly conditioned people's preparation, response, evacuation and recovery.[44] Research examining ethnic experiences

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Routledge, 1998); Havidán Rodríguez, Enrico L. Quarantelli, and Russell R. Dynes, eds., *Handbook of Disaster Research* (New York: Springer, 2007); Furedi, "The Changing Meaning of Disaster."; Oliver-Smith, "Introduction."; Hewitt, *Regions of Risk*; Greg Bankoff, *Cultures of Disaster: Society and Natural Hazards in the Philippines* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

[41] Oliver-Smith, "Theorizing Disasters," 27; Blaikie et al., *At Risk*, 5; Michael E. Moseley, "Modeling Protracted Drought, Collateral Natural Disaster, and Human Responses in the Andes," in *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, ed. Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002), 188; Quarantelli, *What Is a Disaster? Perspectives on the Question*; Kenneth Hewitt, "Excluded Perspectives in the Social Construction of Disaster," in *What Is a Disaster? Perspectives on the Question*, ed. E. L. Quarantelli (London: Routledge, 1998).

[42] Garcia-Acosta, "Historical Disaster Research."; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[43] Christopher L. Dyer, "Punctuated Entropy as Culture-Induced Change: The Case of the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill," in *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, ed. Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002), 161; Blaikie et al., *At Risk*.

[44] See Vincanne Adams, Taslim Van Hattum, and Diana English, "Chronic Disaster Syndrome: Displacement, Disaster Capitalism, and the Eviction of the Poor from New Orleans," *American Ethnologist* 36, no. 4 (2009); Jeffrey W. Bethel, Sloane C. Burke, and Amber F. Britt, "Disparity in Disaster Preparedness between Racial/Ethnic Groups," *Disaster Health* 1, no. 2 (2013); Robert C. Bolin and Patricia A. Bolton, *Race, Religion, and Ethnicity in Disaster Recovery* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1986); Marisa O. Ensor, "Displaced Once Again: Honduran Migrant Children in the Path of Katrina," *Children, Youth and Environments* 18, no. 1 (2008); DeAnne K. Hilfinger Messias, Clare Barrington, and Elaine Lacy, "Latino Social Network Dynamics and the Hurricane Katrina Disaster," *Disasters* 36, no. 1 (2012); Candice A. Myers, Tim Slack, and Joachim Singelmann, "Social Vulnerability and Migration in the Wake of Disaster: The Case of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita," *Population and Environment* 29, no. 6 (2008); Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2006); Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires, eds., *There Is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina* (New York: Routledge, 2006);

of disaster and recovery subsequently intensified, which provides a framework for understanding migrant natural disaster experiences.

Disasters illuminate potential vulnerabilities within groups alongside characteristics of 'resilience'.[45] Resilience offers a way to consider patterns and support strategies developed by individuals and groups to cope with disaster and combat vulnerability. Marginalised groups might be vulnerable to disasters, but equally these groups might 'develop strategies of support and care… thereby exhibiting resilience'.[46] Vulnerability and resilience have been twin concerns within emergency management but this scholarship is frequently focused on prevention, response, communication and recovery to the neglect of longitudinal studies of individual and community experiences.[47]

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Keith Wailoo et al., eds., *Katrina's Imprint: Race and Vulnerability in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

[45] See Boyd-Franklin, "Racism, Trauma, and Resilience," in *Katrina's Imprint: Race and Vulnerability in America*, ed. Keith Wailoo et al. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010); M. Bianet Castellanos, "Solidarity in the Aftermath of Disaster: Cancun after Hurricane Wilma," *Anthropology Now* 2, no. 3 (2010); Massard-Guilbaud, "Introduction."; Johns, "Introduction."; Anouk Ride and Diane Bretherton, eds., *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2011).

[46] Scott McKinnon, Andrew Gorman-Murray, and Dale Dominey-Howes, "'The Greatest Loss Was a Loss of Our History': Natural Disasters, Marginalised Identities and Sites of Memory," *Social & Cultural Geography* (2016): 4.

[47] Ryan Crompton and John McAneney, "The Cost of Natural Disasters in Australia: The Case for Disaster Risk Reduction," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 23, no. 4 (2008); Kate Ames and Gillian Busch, "'Disaster Talk': Roles, Responses, and Expectations in a Triple Zero Call During the 2011 Queensland Floods," *Australian Journal of Communication* 40, no. 1 (2011); Susan Nicholls, "The Resilient Community and Communication Practice," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 27, no. 1 (2012); Amanda Gearing, "Harnessing the Power of Real and Virtual Social Networks During Disasters," *National Emergency Response* 26, no. 3 (2013); Deanne Bird et al., "Response, Recovery and Adaptation in Flood-Affected Communities in Queensland and Victoria," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 28, no. 4 (2013); Suzanna Ramirez, Emma Antrobus, and Harley Williamson, "Living in Queensland: Preparing for and Communicating in Disasters and Emergencies," *Australian Journal of Communication* 40, no. 1 (2013); Frances Shaw et al., "Sharing News, Making Sense, Saying Thanks: Patterns of Talk on Twitter During the Queensland Floods," *Australian Journal of Communication* 40, no. 1 (2013); Kate Brady, "The Words We Use and the Stories We Tell: The Impacts Language Has on the Actions and Perceptions of Emergency Managers," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 30, no. 4 (2015); Mark Crosweller, "Improving Our Capability to Better Plan for, Respond to, and Recover from Severe-to-Catastrophic Level Disasters," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 30, no. 4 (2015); Melissa M Teo et al., "Engaging Vulnerable Populations in Preparedness and Response: A Local

Similarly, disaster studies created a distinction between sudden or rapid and slow onset disasters,[48] but this does not fully compensate for an often lacking longitudinal and historical approach better provided by environmental history and oral history life narratives. Despite increased consideration of ethnic experiences of natural disasters internationally, the experiences of migrants and ethnic groups within Australia have been largely under-examined.[49] This thesis demonstrates the importance and value of examining migrant experiences of natural disasters within an oral history methodology that encourages reflections on the long-term significance of bushfires and floods in the lives of migrants. Migrants' oral history interviews provide fresh insight into our understanding of natural disasters and simultaneously expand our knowledge of migration through the unique perspective of those who have witnessed bushfires and floods in Australia.

## Environmental History

Environmental history methodologies provide a useful framework for a deeper temporal, historical and longitudinal examination of natural disasters. Environmental history largely developed during the 1960s and 1970s in response to global environmental movements and 'green' and 'black' politics; it developed a specific Australian style by combining an understanding of human and natural histories with an examination of settler relationships with ecology and a comprehension of deep time.[50] Environmental history sits within the

Government Context," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 33, no. 1 (2016).

[48] Sudden or rapid onset disasters are understood as discrete events which occur over a shorter time periods—for example bushfires, floods, earthquakes, and cyclones. Slow onset disasters refer to more gradual changes such as drought, erosion, and sea level rising. Liz Heimann, "Climate Change and Natural Disasters Displace Millions, Affect Migration Flows," migrationpolicy.org, 2015, accessed 22 January 2016; Christian Pfister, "Learning from Nature-Induced Disasters: Theoretical Considerations and Case Studies from Western Europe," in *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies toward a Global Environmental History*, ed. Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009); Jane McAdam, ed., *Climate Change and Displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2010).

[49] Gail Winkworth, *Disaster Recovery: A Review of the Literature* (Dickson: Australian Catholic University, 2007), 6.

[50] Tom Griffiths, "Environmental History, Australian Style," *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 2

umbrella of 'environmental humanities' and contributes to the 'pairing of apparent opposites - environment and people, nature and culture, biology and society, science and humanities'.[51] Environmental history challenges 'anthropocentric, nationalistic and documentary biases of the modern craft of history' by working 'across time, space and species' to connect 'deep, evolutionary time with the human experience of daily, social time'.[52] The environment is perceived as a historical actor, which 'shapes and is shaped by human actions upon it'.[53] Scholarship has often focused on demographic, social and environmental factors and long-term trends.[54] In some ways this is an 'events based' thesis focused on sudden onset disasters, but bushfire and flood are part of longer environmental rhythms and processes. Although they are typically a significant and defining feature within an individual's life, natural disasters have an impact that extends beyond the immediate moment. This thesis will try to avoid the word 'event' to describe bushfire and flood and instead use 'experience' as a way to place migrants' encounters with natural disasters within the context of a larger life history and environmental process.

Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister argue that one of the strengths of environmental history is that it acknowledges the immediacy of a catastrophe and the specifics and particularities of a case in combination with the long-term effects which provide insight into how society 'repairs itself and moves on'.[55] This perspective offers a useful approach to histories of natural disasters within Australia. But specific historical

(2015); Griffiths, "How Many Trees," 376; Eve Vincent and Timothy Neale, eds., *Unstable Relations: Indigenous People and Environmentalism in Contemporary Australia* (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2016); Katie Holmes and Heather Goodall, eds., *Telling Environmental Histories: Intersections of Memory, Narrative and Environment*, Palgrave Studies in World Environmental History (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[51] Griffiths, "Environmental History, Australian Style," 158.

[52] Ibid., 167.

[53] Tom Griffiths, "The Nature of Culture and the Culture of Nature," in *Cultural History in Australia*, ed. Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 2003), 72; Ursula Lehmkuhl, "Historicizing Nature: Time and Space in German and American Environmental Historiography," in *Historians and Nature: Comparative Approaches to Environmental History*, ed. Ursula Lehmkuhl and Hermann Wellenreuther (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 34.

[54] Lehmkuhl, "Historicizing Nature," 6, 27, 32; Griffiths, "Environmental History, Australian Style."

[55] Pfister, "Learning from Nature-Induced Disasters," 6.

engagement with natural disasters by historians has been limited. Natural disasters have typically been the subject of a curated journalistic style of publication that chronicles disaster events.[56] In recent years, however, there has been a new interest in Australia's natural disasters and environmental history which has led to the development of new fields of scholarship that inform this thesis.

A range of archaeologists and historians including Bill Gammage and Stephen Pyne have argued that fire and its manipulation by Aboriginal Australians shaped this continent and the environment encountered by early Europeans.[57] They have highlighted how bushfire management schemes have further shaped this continent and our relationship with fire. Other scholars such as Emily O'Gorman have discussed water management practices, engineering shifts, flood mitigation and the flood responses of government departments.[58] While valuable developments in our understanding, studies focused on environmental and ecological concerns can sometimes forfeit sustained examination of people's experiences of environmental disasters.

By contrast Tom Griffiths' history of the Ash Range provides a focal point for explorations of environmental, social and bushfire histories.[59] Grace Karskens also integrates both individual, community and environmental experiences within a framework which recognises the longer ecological history of floods specifically in the

[56] Richard Evans, *Disasters That Changed Australia* (Carlton: Victory Books, 2009); Larry Writer, *The Australian Book of Disasters* (Millers Point: Murdoch Books Australia, 2011); Richard Whitaker, *Australia's Natural Disasters* (Frenchs Forest: Reed New Holland, 2006); Jonathan King, *Great Disasters in Australia History* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2013); Malcolm Brown, *Australia's Worst Disasters* (South Melbourne: Thomas C. Lothian, 2002); Ian Mannix, *Great Australian Bushfire Stories* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2008); Ian Mannix, *Great Australian Flood Stories* (Sydney: HapperCollins, 2012).

[57] Stephen J. Pyne, *Burning Bush: A Fire History of Australia* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991); Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2011); Fred Cahir et al., "Winda Lingo Parugoneit or Why Set the Bush [on] Fire? Fire and Victorian Aboriginal People on the Colonial Frontier," *Australian Historical Studies* 47, no. 2 (2016).

[58] Emily O'Gorman, *Flood Country: An Environmental History of the Murray-Darling Basin* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2012).

[59] Tom Griffiths, *Secrets of the Forest: Discovering History in Melbourne's Ash Range* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992); Tom Griffiths, *Forests of Ash: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Hawkesbury region.[60] Other environmental approaches to histories of natural disasters foreground the individual and community experience; drought research by Deb Anderson and Rebecca Jones, for example, used oral history methodologies to investigate the lived experiences of these 'slow catastrophes'.[61] Oral history has also been used to provide nuanced insights into marginalised minorities' experiences of the 2011 Brisbane floods.[62] Yet, despite developments in natural disaster research, migrants have been marginalised in research just as they have often been marginalised in society.

Scholarship at the intersection of migration and environment history has thus far been limited despite scholarship examining early settler responses to environment throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century.[63] Michael Cathcart, O'Gorman

[60] Grace Karskens, "Floods and Flood-Mindedness in Early Colonial Australia," *Environmental History* 21, no. 2 (2016).

[61] Deb Anderson, *Endurance: Australian Stories of Drought* (Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing, 2014); Rebecca Jones, *Slow Catastrophes: Living with Drought in Australia* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2017).

[62] Dale Dominey-Howes, Andrew Gorman-Murray, and Scott McKinnon, "Queering Disasters: On the Need to Account for LGBTI Experiences in Natural Disaster Contexts," *Gender, Place & Culture* 21, no. 7 (2014); Andrew Gorman-Murray et al., "Problems and Possibilities on the Margins: LGBT Experiences in the 2011 Queensland Floods," *Gender, Place & Culture* (2016); McKinnon, Gorman-Murray, and Dominey-Howes, "'The Greatest Loss Was a Loss of Our History'."; Scott McKinnon, Andrew Gorman-Murray, and Dale Dominey-Howes, "Disasters, Queer Narratives, and the News: How Are LGBTI Disaster Experiences Reported by the Mainstream and LGBTI Media?," *Journal of Homosexuality* (2016).

[63] Lesley Head, Pat Muir, and Eva Hampel, "Australian Backyard Gardens and the Journey of Migration," *Geographical Review* 94, no. 3 (2004); Saskia Beudel, *A Country in Mind: Memoir with Landscape* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Publishing, 2013); Cameron Muir, "White Bodies and Native Invaders," in *Rethinking Invasion Ecologies from the Environmental Humanities*, ed. Jodi Frawley and Iain McCalman (Oxon: Routledge, 2014); Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Matthew Graves and Elizabeth Rechniewski, "Mapping Utopia: Cartography and Social Reform in 19th Century Australia," *Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 9, no. 2 (2012); Eric Rolls, "The Nature of Australia," in *Ecology of Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, ed. Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1997); Grace Moore, "Surviving Black Thursday: Settlers and Bushfires," in *Victorian Settler Narratives: Emigrants, Cosmopolitans and Returnees in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Tamara S. Wagner (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011); Grace Moore, "Fires, Literature, Politics and Mateship in the Bush," *Agora* 48, no. 4 (2013); Grace Moore, "Home Was Where the Hearth Is: Fire, Destruction, and Displacement in Nineteenth-Century Settler

and Karskens observe that British river and water sensibilities conditioned their assumptions about water and drought rhythms in Australia.[64] Scholars such as Grace Moore have investigated settlers' relationships to bushfire and their emerging Australian environmental knowledge.[65] Other scholars have begun to specifically engage with migrant experiences of Australian environments such as Many Thomas' research on Vietnamese engagement with the environment and Australian national parks.[66] Other scholarship at the nexus of migration and environment includes research into climate induced migration, which has developed in recent decades to focus on individual and community responses and adaptation to climate change and increasing environmental hazards.[67] This scholarship reveals the complexity of population movement in relation to environmental changes and offers useful insights applicable to this thesis and to unpacking the complexities of migration, displacement, environmental and natural disasters in Australia.

## Sources and Method

Oral history is the 'act of recording the speech of people with something interesting to say and then analysing their memories of the past'.[68] Oral history is both the process and the product; the method used and the evidence produced.[69] As much as oral history is a way to gain information about the past, its 'most distinctive contribution… has been to include within the historical record the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been "hidden from history"'.[70] An oral history revival occurred

Narratives," *Antipodes* 29, no. 1 (2015); Richard Waterhouse, *The Vision Splendid: A Social and Cultural History of Rural Australia* (Fremantle: Curtin University Books, 2005).

[64] Michael Cathcart, *The Water Dreamers: The Remarkable History of Our Dry Continent* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2009); O'Gorman, *Flood Country*, 6; Karskens, "Floods and Flood-Mindedness."

[65] Moore, "Home Was Where the Hearth Is."

[66] Thomas, *Moving Landscapes*.

[67] See McAdam, *Climate Change and Displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*.

[68] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 1.

[69] Ibid., 2; Joanna Bornat, "Oral History and Remembering," in *Research Methods for Memory Studies*, ed. Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 29.

[70] Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Third ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016),

after the Second World War as part of larger changes in the methodologies and politics of historical research.[71] The conventional authority of the written document was challenged by the likes of Paul Thompson who defended the 'legitimacy and value' of oral history and argued that 'a new dimension is given to history' and its scope widened 'once the life experience of people of all kinds can be used as its raw material'.[72] Throughout oral history's gradual emergence and acceptance it faced criticism targeted at the 'unreliability' of memory as a source of historical information. As a result, the trend of 'rescuing voices' was often accompanied by cross-checking memory with written sources.[73] In the 1970s, however, such criticisms were turned into strengths as scholars celebrated the subjectivity and orality of oral history, and memory became the subject and source of oral history.[74] Michael Frisch argued that memory was 'the object, not merely the method, of oral history', which could be examined in order to understand how individuals explain and interpret their experience and the past.[75]

Significantly, Alessandro Portelli argued that oral history 'tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*':

> Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did. Oral sources may not add much to what we know… but they tell us a good deal about its psychological costs.[76]

Recognising that 'memory is not just a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings' also enabled oral historians to analyse the creation of oral history through an awareness of the subjective relationship and shared project between the

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[71] Ibid., 2.

[72] Ibid., 3; Paul Thompson, "The Voice of the Past: Oral History," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Rob Perks and Alistair Thomson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Bornat, "Oral History and Remembering," 29.

[73] Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, 3-4; Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 5-6.

[74] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 6; Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, 4.

[75] Michael Frisch, "Oral History and *Hard Times*," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Rob Perks and Alistair Thomson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 44-45.

[76] Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 50.

interviewer and the interviewee.[77] These theoretical developments remain foundational to this thesis. This thesis continues oral history's practice of illuminating voices often marginalised in larger historical narratives and documents, and considers not just the 'events' experienced by migrants, but how people narrate and make meaning from their personal experience of migration and natural disaster. This thesis, therefore, provides evidence of migrants' experience of bushfire and flood and illuminates the meaning and significance these experiences have for migrants.

I used a life history approach to oral history interviewing in order to gain an understanding of people's experience of both migration and natural disaster. Life history is a common approach to oral history because it offers a broader, holistic and nuanced approach to understanding individual memory by placing memories of specific events within a larger life history context. Life history is a chronologically told narrative of an individual's life encompassing various key life stages, pivotal moments, events and facts that provide coherence and meaning to life's experiences.[78] Remembering is an active process of meaning creation whereby memories are placed into coherent structures or narratives that make them meaningful for both the interviewee and the interviewer.[79] Narratives make ordered accounts out of disordered materials and provide a way to make sense of experiences and communicate them to others.[80] Memories are remembered and forgotten over time to give coherence to life stories, which are 'always viewed through the distorting lens of today' and constructed with the present and future in mind.[81] Life

[77] Ibid., 52-54.

[78] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 40-42; Rosemary Baird, "Constructing Lives: A New Approach to Understanding Migrants' Oral History Narratives," *Oral History* 40, no. 1 (2012): 57-58; Katie Holmes et al., "Oral History and Australian Generations," *Australian Historical Studies* 47, no. 1 (2016).

[79] Alistair Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis," in *Research Methods for History*, ed. Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 101; Katy Gardner, *Age, Narrative and Migration: The Life Course and Life Histories of Bengali Elders in London* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 27, 29, 32.

[80] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 106-107.

[81] Johanne Delvin Trew, *Leaving the North: Migration and Memory, Northern Ireland 1921-2011* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 25; Mary Chamberlain, "Narrative Theory," in *Thinking About Oral History: Theories and Applications*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), 86.

histories contextualise a person's life and offer a more complete picture of their experiences and pasts, which shape their sense of self and identity in the present.[82]

Oral history has often turned to life history as a way to comprehend migrant experiences.[83] Sean Field has observed that 'embedded within people's life stories are their memories of everyday choices and decisions, and the people or forces that intervene, influence or undermine their decisions or decision-making', which are shaped by 'specific historical contexts' and 'conditions of remembering'.[84] A life history approach, therefore, not only disrupts migration tropes, but illuminates the everyday choices, decisions, values, priorities and motivations within migrants' lives and the consequent role of migration in their past, present and future.[85] Migration is a pivotal moment of transition and change that features prominently within migrant's life narratives.[86]

Life history has also been used by the burgeoning field of 'crisis oral history', which is 'a response to the silences inherent in rescue, recovery, and rebuilding'.[87] As 'crisis is a historical constant', oral history provides unique insights into the experiences and

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[82] Stephen Sloan, "The Fabric of Crisis: Approaching the Heart of Oral History," in *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, ed. Mark Cave and Stephen Sloan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 271; Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia, 2014), 39, 42; Thomson, "Moving Stories," 35; Gardner, *Age, Narrative and Migration*, 28; Sean Field, "Remembering Experience, Interpreting Memory: Life Stories from Windermere," *African Studies* 60, no. 1 (2011): 128-129; Valerie Yow, "Biography and Oral History," in *Thinking About Oral History: Theories and Applications*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008); Steven High, "Embodied Ways of Listening: Oral History, Genocide and the Audio Tour," *Anthropologica* 55, no. 1 (2013).

[83] Ben Rogaly, "Disrupting Migration Stories: Reading Life Histories through the Lens of Mobility and Fixity," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33, no. 3 (2015): 531; Thomson, "Moving Stories."

[84] Field, "Remembering Experience, Interpreting Memory," 131.

[85] Rogaly, "Disrupting Migration Stories," 528; Trew, *Leaving the North*, 15; Keith H. Halfacree and Paul J. Boyle, "The Challenge Facing Migration Research: The Case for a Biographical Approach," *Progress in Human Geography* 17, no. 3 (1993): 334, 337, 343.

[86] Baird, "Constructing Lives," 57-58; Trew, *Leaving the North*, 24-25; Alistair Thomson, *Moving Stories: An Intimate History of Four Women across Two Countries* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2011); Hammerton and Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms*.

[87] Sloan, "The Fabric of Crisis," 264.

memories of individuals and communities, and the way people make meaning from these events and incorporate them within their life histories.[88] Kai Erikson has similarly argued that disasters are not and cannot fully be understood as discrete events: they need to be placed within a larger historical narrative to understand what happened previously, what happened in the moment, and what continues afterwards.[89] Oral history, therefore, is a valuable methodology that illuminates life experiences prior to natural disasters in order to understand how memories of natural disasters and traumatic events are shaped.[90] Often the voices of survivors of disaster are left out of historical records as attention shifts to other aspects of the disaster, whereas oral history shifts the focus back to survivors and places the people most affected by the disaster at the centre of the story so their voices are recorded, archived and shared.[91] Oral history simultaneously documents and validates these memories and potentially traumatic experiences so these stories of disaster, survival and resilience can be heard, witnessed, recorded and understood in new ways beyond traditional tropes or official narratives. Oral history is known for providing insights into previously neglected voices and experiences and thus is well positioned to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of crisis and catastrophe and for investigating the migrant experience.

The thesis draws heavily upon the life history interviews to showcase the rich material and unique insights provided into memories, experiences and narratives of migration and natural disasters. It reports on key themes and issues emergent in the interviews while striving to ensure that their voices remain at the forefront to ensure that 'the human stories… [are not] left out of… analysis'.[92] The framework of history, migration, memory and oral history has previously been used in migration studies but

[88] Mark Cave, "Introduction: What Remains: Reflections on Crisis Oral History," in *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, ed. Mark Cave and Stephen Sloan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

[89] Kai T. Erikson, "Preface," in *Displaced Heritage: Responses to Disaster, Trauma, and Loss*, ed. Ian Convery, Gerard Corsane, and Peter Davis (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), xix.

[90] Cave, "Introduction," 3.

[91] Sloan, "The Fabric of Crisis," 264.

[92] Carol Mutch and Jay Marlowe, "Lessons from Disaster: The Power and Place of Story," *Disaster Prevention and Management: An International Journal* 22, no. 5 (2013): 385.

rarely applied to migrants' relationship to the environment and response to natural disaster.[93] This thesis aims contribute to the development of oral history and studies of crisis, catastrophe and 'disaster amnesia' by asking how migrants remember and reconstruct their experiences of bushfire and flood, and by considering the long-term influence of these experiences on migrant belonging in Australia.[94] Although at times people's migration past did not appear to directly shape their memories and experiences of the immediate disaster and its aftermath, the life history context did illuminate the influence of migration, double displacement, and natural disasters upon long-term migrant articulations of connection and belonging. The oral history interviews with migrants from Maitland and Victoria form a significant part of this thesis' substantial original contribution to histories of migration and environment and oral history. They are the main primary material used throughout this thesis and are accompanied by conventional analysis of archival and media sources.

I conducted a national survey of natural disasters to identify potential case studies. Maitland was chosen as a suitable case study of migrant experiences of floods due to its history of floods and its proximity to the Greta Migrant Camp. It was fortuitous that 2015 was the 60th anniversary of the 1955 flood and the chosen time to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the Greta Migrant Camp. I was able to attend both events and make connections with local residents as well as the local Hunter Valley State Emergency Services (SES) and the Maitland Historical Society. I interviewed eleven people—and conducted two follow up interviews—about their experience and knowledge of migration and flooding within Maitland and their memories of the Greta Migrant Camp. During these research trips I was able to access archival material held at the Maitland City Library that was complemented by other documents, maps and images and film footage held by the National Archives of Australia, the National Library of Australia and the National

[93] Baldassar, "Transnational Families and Aged Care."; Baldassar, "Missing Kin."; Ricatti, "Elodia and Franca."; Skrbiš, "Transnational Families."; Maruska Svasek, "Who Cares? Families and Feelings in Movement," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2008); Maruska Svasek, "On the Move: Emotions and Human Mobility," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 6 (2010).

[94] See Mark Cave and Stephen Sloan, eds., *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Film and Sound Archive.

As Victoria is one of the most fire-prone locations in Australia and has a diverse history of migration it formed the second case study. I drew upon personal connections and local media outlets to recruit people and the Bushfire and Natural Hazard Cooperate Research Centre (BNHCRC) also assisted with advertising my project. I was able to travel throughout Victoria to interview nine people who volunteered to participate and be interviewed about their experiences. The recruitment process led to a focus on the experiences of European migrants. In Maitland the majority of participants were from Eastern Europe including Germany, Poland and Lithuania. Victorian migrants were from England, Denmark, the Netherlands, Paraguay via Belgium and New Zealand.

All twenty people interviewed consented to their names being used.[95] The oral history interviews I conducted form the foundation of this thesis, however, I also listened to a wide variety of other oral histories relating to natural disasters in Australia including recordings held by the Maitland City Library, the National Library of Australia and Museum Victoria.[96] Other people were also interviewed for this project including people with personal experiences with the Maitland and Newcastle migrant community, people with knowledge of Maitland's flood history, and someone who immigrated from Singapore and joined their local CFA brigade (Country Fire Authority) in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. These interviews helped inform my understanding of histories and personal experiences of migration and natural disasters but are not the specific focus of the thesis. The interview cohort meant it was not possible to directly comment on or compare cultural, ethnic and racial experiences of natural disasters. This was never the

[95] One person requested to be identified by their first name only.
I have indicated where I have edited an interviewee's words with square brackets and an ellipsis, eg […]. I have chosen to do this to make it clear when I have intervened, and to distinguish from any moments where a person trailed off in thought, eg …
English was not always a person's first language. I have tried to capture their speech patterns as best as possible and thus have avoided the use of [sic] and instead have tried to preserve their original grammar and tense choices.

[96] For example: Oral history interviews in the Victorian Bushfires Collection, Museum Victoria; The Helen O'Shea collection of Australian folklore in its social context, National Library of Australia.

intention.[97] Nor have I focused specifically on the impact of gender or class on the ways migrants remember fire and flood; while raised and noted where relevant, the emphasis has been on bringing together this first collection of migrant memories of bushfire and flood. Thus, this thesis has focused on how migration experiences influenced disaster experiences, and has examined common themes of double displacement, community, environment, place and belonging. It has provided participants an opportunity to articulate their experiences and have their voice heard where it might otherwise have been overlooked or neglected.

An important and well-trodden area of oral history methodology is the consideration of the dynamic between the interviewer and the interviewee and the influence this has on the interview.[98] There are times when it is relevant and compelling for the reader to understand the researcher's standpoint and the impact this has on the kind of material elicited: for example to clarify whether the interviewer has 'insider' or 'outsider' status and how this inhibits or enables access to certain kinds of knowledge. Despite the presence of a serious flood in my hometown of Toowoomba in 2011, I am not a flood survivor, and this was not the reason for my project. I did not live in Victoria during the Black Saturday bushfires and was a teenager at this time so have limited personal recollections of these events. Thus I was not able to claim or access any kind of special insight that might have been imparted through group membership as an 'insider'.[99] I was also of a different age, generation and gender than many of my interviewees, as well as being from a different state and region in many cases. Nevertheless, I would also not claim any special 'objectivity' or 'detachment' on this basis; I was certainly emotionally impacted at times by the subject matter of the interviews and felt a sense of investment in the life histories shared by many of the interviewees. I hope I was an interested, responsive, and empathetic listener, but I have chosen for the most part not to dwell on

[97] This is not to say that such issues could not be examined in greater depth, but rather to highlight that it has been beyond the scope of this thesis to do full justice to such an analysis for this cohort. As noted in the Conclusion, it is certainly a possible focus for future research.

[98] See for example: Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*; High, *Oral History at the Crossroads.*

[99] For a discussion of 'insider/outsider' status in oral history see, for example, Akemi Kikumura, "Family Life Histories: A Collaborative Venture", in *The Oral History Reader,* ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1997), 140-142.

my presence in the process of interviewing, or how that created a specific kind of dynamic. My purpose has been to listen to interviewee reflections and highlight their voices, not mine. I cannot absent myself entirely from the social situation of interviews, but I did not feel it was appropriate to highlight myself in this thesis. While aware that the rapport and dynamic between myself and my participants could shape the course of the interview and its content, I have tried to make this as much as possible their story and not mine.

## Chapter Outlines

The structure of this thesis mirrors the life history narratives of the migrants I have interviewed. Oral historian Stephen Sloan has emphasised that 'events are not experienced in isolation; they are connected to a life lived before or after'.[100] As such, this thesis adopts a 'before, during and after' approach and places migrants' memories of migration and natural disaster within a larger life history context that provides a more holistic understanding of their experience. Approaching crisis experiences through a broader lens creates a way to capture a fuller meaning of disaster and migration.

Chapter One examines pre-migration memories and narratives of migration in order to provide contextualise migrants' later experiences of settlement and natural disasters in Australia. Memories of life prior to migration elucidate migrants' connections to people, places and environments in their former homes and in some cases reveal past experiences of trauma. These memories informed people's migration motivations, experiences and narratives, and shaped migrants' consequent settlement experiences in Australia. The Second World War featured prominently in the memory of Maitland migrants who had limited agency and control over their initial settlement due to their placement in the Greta Migrant Camp. In contrast, Victorian migrants had the opportunity to choose their new home, and the aesthetics and practicality of the environment heavily influenced their decision. The different circumstances and motivations surrounding migration and settlement influenced how people created connections with the local community and environment.

Chapter Two examines how migrants learnt about the risk of bushfire and flood

[100] Sloan, "The Fabric of Crisis," 271.

upon arrival in Australia and how they were affected by local patterns of remembering and forgetting. Australian local history on the whole has ignored natural disasters through the perpetuation of narratives of pioneer progress, successful settlement and 'mastery' of the environment. These narratives obscure histories and memories of natural disasters, which contribute to a culture of 'disaster amnesia'. Patterns of remembering and forgetting are part of a broader culture of natural disaster memory in Australia that has the capacity to shape migrants' awareness and perception of natural disasters and environmental hazards in their new homes. Early connections with neighbours and community organisations influenced migrants' awareness and perception of natural disasters; these connections pose a challenge to assumptions about migrants' inherent vulnerability or resilience to natural hazards.

Having established various factors which inform pre-disaster experiences, Chapters Three and Four focus on the natural disaster. Chapter Three examines migrants' memories of the 1955 flood that occupies a unique position within Maitland's history and local memory. It demonstrates how migrant flood memories are complicated by pre-migration experiences that often surface throughout the remembering process. Some migrants remember the flood in relation to other life history experiences, while others remember their experience through significant sensory memories. Migrant flood memories expose experiences of 'double displacement' and demonstrate how memories of migration and natural disasters interact within a wider life history narrative of war, displacement and trauma. These memories reveal a desire for safety, security and stability within the home and community, and a process of establishing a sense of belonging in Australia complicated by war, displacement, migration and the 1955 flood.

Chapter Four offers a close examination of migrants' voices and memories of bushfire throughout regional Victoria and provides a different perspective and narrative to the one captured in reports and other areas of scholarship. The chapter offers a unique insight into the personal and immediate experience of bushfire through a sustained consideration of an individual's detailed and chronological narrative of their experience of the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. Migrants' personal experiences revealed significant sensory memories of the spectacle, speed and sound of bushfire that informed the way they remembered their experience. Their memories were shaped by gender and family

relationships, their role during the fire, and, notably, by their migrant status. Victorian migrants' memories of bushfire are recent and comparatively 'unsettled'. This provides unique insights into the way migrants reflect on how the bushfire shaped their experience of migration and settlement within regional Australia.

Having considered bushfire and flood memories within separate case studies, the final chapters examine the thematic similarities throughout these diverse experiences. Chapter Five considers migrants' memories of connection to community before, during and after natural disasters. Memories of community were evident through various social networks; migrants remembered learning about the risk of bushfire and flood from neighbours and local residents and they recalled how people responded to meet the needs of others in the aftermath. Recollections of the aftermath illuminated an experience of community and sense of connection that significantly contributed to a new sense of belonging. Although memories of community contributed to some people's sense of connection and belonging this was not the experience of other's who felt excluded from community because their personal experiences did not conform to widely accepted disaster narratives. Memories of community are diverse and complex but nonetheless were a common theme throughout migrants' recollections of bushfire and flood. These memories highlight how a shared experience of bushfire or flood can create a sense of connection, solidarity and a significant sense of belonging within disaster-prone places.

The transformation of the environment through disaster challenged migrants' preexisting perceptions and knowledge of the environment and caused physical and emotional connections to be revisited. Chapter Six demonstrates how migrants' sensory and embodied memories of the 'elemental drama' shaped their environmental understandings and behaviour in the aftermath. Many migrants articulated a new sense of understanding and respect for the natural world, which often informed how they chose to continue to live in these disaster-prone environments. Place was also a significant theme within migrants' environmental memories. Interviews revealed certain places as important sites of haunting and healing that offered a unique way for people to mourn and grieve the loss experienced as a result of natural disasters. Migrants' attachment to place, and a new sense of understanding and respect for the environment, contributed to many people's desire to stay within disaster-prone places.

Finally, Chapter Seven examines how migrants' experiences of both migration and natural disaster have contributed to a developing a sense of home and belonging in disaster-prone regional Australia, often alongside transnational connections. Migration narratives and transnational connections informed the way migrants reflected upon their experience of natural disaster and the extent to which this contributed to their sense of home and belonging. The experience of bushfire or flood was for many migrants an important part of their ongoing process of settlement and their reflections ultimately raise important questions about what it means to belong within disaster-prone Australia.

# Chapter 1

# Hope and Expectation:
# Migration and Settlement in Regional Australia

The SS *Fairsea* docked at Newcastle on 19 August 1949. Ten-year-old Ingrid and her parents were on board and knew 'absolutely nothing' about Australia. They 'didn't even know where Australia was'. Ingrid recalled that:

> We knew people who had heard of it and said it was right at the end of the world, right down the bottom. [...] We knew it was in the southern hemisphere, it was tropical but no idea, no one, no one had any idea [or knew what to expect]. You were just keen to get out of that horrible environment we were in. After [the] war there was [...] bomb craters, rubble, damaged houses—it was shocking—and no food. [...] We had to go from one camp to the other in order to be processed until you were on your way to Australia so it took [...] nearly one and a half years in order to get to Australia.[1]

Ingrid and her parents were among many migrants and Displaced Persons who left Europe and came to Australia in the aftermath of the Second World War. Although Ingrid knew nothing about Australia or its natural environment, she was grateful to leave the destruction of war behind and looked forward to a new life in Australia. The migration schemes operating at the time dictated that when Ingrid's family arrived in Newcastle they were transported via train to the Greta Migrant Camp where they lived for two years. Early life in Australia was not what they expected, but when they were able to leave the Greta camp they decided to purchase a home in central Maitland like many other 'New Australians'. It was in this location during a series of 'minor' floods that they first encountered Australia's history of natural disasters.

This chapter focuses on migrants' memories of life before migration, their narratives of migration, and their early experiences of settlement in order to understand their later experiences of natural disasters in Australia. It will first consider the experiences of Maitland migrants through an examination of their recollections on life prior to migration, which were significantly shaped by the Second World War. Their wartime pasts informed their motivation for migration and shaped their narrative

[1] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

construction of their experiences of both migration and settlement. Their placement at the Greta Migrant Camp for two years thwarted their expectations and hopes for life in Australia. Nevertheless, their residency in the camp was a significant experience that shaped many migrants' decision to move to Maitland and own their own home.

This chapter then considers the reflections of Victorian migrants whose later migration in a different historical context similarly shaped their experience of settlement and the decisions they made. The migration narratives of Victorian migrants were more diverse but were united by similar desires for space, and the aesthetic and practical qualities of the environment. Some people migrated permanently as family units, while others came as individuals seeking opportunity and adventure, but they all were able to choose to migrate and decide where to live. Memories of initial settlement within both the Maitland and Victorian cohorts revealed early connections with the local community and environment that ultimately influenced their awareness of natural disasters. This chapter demonstrates that a life history approach, which encompasses memories of life before, during and after migration, is crucial to understanding migrants' subsequent experiences of bushfire and flood.

## 'We'd Come From the War': Wartime Pasts, Childhood Memories and Migrant Futures

The Maitland migrants who were interviewed for this thesis were children and teenagers in Europe during the Second World War, so their memories of life prior to migration took place against the backdrop of war. Childhood memories are often fragmented, but they often shape adult lives and inform one's sense of identity and life story.[2] The childhood recollections of interviewees featured memories of war and

[2] Johanne Delvin Trew, *Leaving the North: Migration and Memory, Northern Ireland 1921-2011* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 25; Mark Freeman, "Telling Stories: Memory and Narrative," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 265; Paul Thompson, "Trauma and the Long-Term Life Story," in *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives*, ed. Kim Lacy Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff, and Graham Dawson (London: Routledge, 1999), 235-236; Sally Alexander, "Memory-Talk: London Childhoods," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Naomi Rosh White, ""The Best Years of Your Life": Remembering Childhood

trauma, which had a profound influence on the rest of their lives and, ultimately, framed and justified their decision to migrate to Australia.

The childhood memories of Maitland migrants included recollections of school, the environment, and the Second World War. Ingrid was born on 11 December 1939 in Germany. She remembered starting her school day with gymnastic exercises and she fondly recalled learning 'proper songs' with 'rhymes and beautiful melodies' about each changing season. They went on monthly school excursions where Ingrid observed squirrels collecting nuts for winter; this nurtured her continuing love for German forests and the environment.[3] Some migrants remembered exploring their local natural and built environments, such as Tania who remembered making snowmen and playing snowballs on the way to school in Poland.[4] But war also featured amongst these childhood recollections. Ingrid remembered playing games with children in rubble filled streets in Germany. She was 'constantly hungry' and always looking for food and remembered travelling with her mother to barter their best crystal and damask for food. One day her mother returned with only a bag of apple peelings with which to make a stew.[5] These wartime memories ultimately shaped migrants' migration and life narratives.

Terese's childhood and migration was shaped by war, displacement, and trauma. She was born on 1 January 1940 in Poland just after the German invasion. She lived on a farm with her family 'after escaping the first death camp' and then later in an orchard. Her childhood memories revealed a close relationship to the natural environment and a sense of time influenced 'by seasons—winter, spring—because it was flowers and we were in the orchard'. Twelve months before the end of the war her family were separated and taken to concentration camps; she never saw her brother again. Terese was subjected to medical experimentation and was consequently often sick throughout childhood. She recalled that the 'only comfort I got was from nature herself', when the

in Autobiographical Texts," *Children & Society* 12, no. 1 (1998).

[3] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

[4] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland Polish Assocation, Maitland.

[5] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

moon shone through the window and lit the room, and when she heard the sound of a cuckoo bird chirping at day break.[6] After the war she was reunited with her mother. Terese was given an orange for the first time while recovering in hospital and the 'lovely scent filled the room'. This signalled 'the beginning of a new life for me and my parents… It was as if I was being brought to life'.[7] Her autobiography *The Scent of an Orange* illuminated the importance of the natural environment to her as a child during the war and as a migrant to Australia.

These difficult and traumatic childhood memories of war informed Ingrid and Terese's experiences of migration and settlement in Australia. Oral histories are often marked by traumatic memories and consequences that are enveloped within life stories and complicate the act of remembering or forgetting.[8] Considering these aspects of migrants' pasts is therefore crucial when examining their later experiences of natural disasters.

Memories of war and displacement shaped the motivation, justification, and narration of migration articulated by Maitland migrants. Migration narratives are important to migrants and 'give coherence and meaning to their experiences'.[9] These narratives are constructed around the decision, process and outcome of migration.[10] The destruction and displacement of the war and its aftermath led to many people's migration.[11] The war was a prominent feature of Maitland migration narratives as it was

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[6] Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, East Maitland; Terese Dron, *Scent of an Orange: The Story of Our New Life* (Maitland: Timesavers, 2010), 30.

[7] Dron, *Scent of an Orange*, 32.

[8] Robert Reynolds, "Trauma and the Relational Dynamics of Life-History Interviewing," *Australian Historical Studies* 43, no. 1 (2012): 80; Selma Leydesdorff et al., "Introduction: Trauma and Life Stories," in *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives*, ed. Kim Lacy Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff, and Graham Dawson (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.

[9] Katy Gardner, *Age, Narrative and Migration: The Life Course and Life Histories of Bengali Elders in London* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 29.

[10] A. James Hammerton, "'Family Comes First': Migrant Memory and Masculinity in Narratives of Post-War British Migrants," in *Speaking to Immigrants: Oral Testimony and the History of Australian Migration*, ed. Eric Richards and A. James Hammerton (Canberra: History Program and Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, 2002), 24.

[11] Moya Flynn, "Reconstructing 'Home/Lands' in the Russian Federation: Migrant-Centred Perspectives of Displacement and Resettlement," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 3 (2007): 470.

a catalyst for change and the cause of migration.

Tania was sixteen when she received a letter in 1942 that said she had 'no choice' but to leave Poland and go and work in Germany. She and an elder brother left for Germany but the rest of her family stayed behind; she never saw them again. Tania travelled to Germany on a cattle train 'with just a little window so you can see'. She was taken to a camp where her hands were inspected, and where there was little food, insufficient clothing for the cold, and minimal sleep for the day and night shifts she worked at the ammunition factory; 'how many times I cry that I was helping […] to kill my parents […] to kill my country'.[12] After the war, Tania met her husband in a Displaced Persons camp. They married on 6 January 1946 and flew to Australia with their two sons—being eight months pregnant with their daughter—in 1950.[13]

War was also the reason for John and Henry's emigration. John was born in Poland in 1930 and remembered there were 'two culture[s], but everything was fine, there wasn't any problems' until it fell apart with the outbreak of war when there was 'this hatred, this killing'. John attended school throughout the war and was the only member of his family not to serve in the army. He could remember soldiers fighting and always felt frightened. John and his family migrated to Australia after the war.[14] Henry was born after the war in 1947 in a German camp to Lithuanian parents.[15] Although he did not personally experience the war it was an important part of his family's memory and history and was a motivating factor in their decision to emigrate. The war provided a structure and framework to understand and explain their family's emigration.[16]

Migration was invested with a sense of hope for the future and these

[12] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015; Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland.

[13] Family File, NAA: SP1122/1, N1958/32840.

[14] John Szczudluk, Interviewed 20th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland Polish Assocation, Maitland.

[15] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, ; Migrant Selection Documents, NAA: A11701, 1724-1726.

[16] Catherine Baker, "The Frames We Use: Narratives, Ethnicity, and the Problem of Multiple Identities in Post-Conflict Oral Histories (Bosnia-Herzegovina)," in *Beyond Testimony and Trauma*, ed. Steven High (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia, 2015), 294.

expectations were evident throughout migration narratives and memories. Terese was shown 'all these lovely films' of Australia and of 'beautiful homes […] being built' on the journey to Australia. It made her hope that this 'might be the end of the rainbow. [The] pot of gold' after her family's traumatic experience of war and life in Displaced Persons camps.[17] Ingrid's family were 'advised to move away as far as possible' after her stepfather's wartime work for the British Army. Ingrid said she had 'no particular expectations' for life in Australia and they 'were just glad to get away, that's all, glad for peace […] and freedom'; to get away from the 'hunger, starvations, bombings, terror [and] fear'. Her stepfather 'promised my mother […] "I'll be a judge again, and I'll give you a good life"', and they hoped to find work as an academic and lawyer, and as a nurse in Australia. But settlement was not always straightforward and 'it was hard for people, for adults who came over here with family, it was very very hard. You had to struggle'.[18] Displaced Persons hoped for a life of safety, security, and stability after their experience of war and displacement, but their migration and settlement was informed by postwar migration policies that placed them in the Greta Migrant Camp upon arrival in Australia. This temporary accommodation presented new challenges for migrants. While this experience frustrated their expectations of migration and life in Australia, it ultimately contributed to their decision to live in Maitland.

## Remembering the Greta Migrant Camp: Early Australian Encounters

The arrival of migrants and Displaced Persons escaping war-torn Europe was a transformative moment in the history of Maitland and the surrounding area. Although many came to Australia as voluntary migrants, significant numbers came as Displaced Persons 'pushed' from their homeland by 'forces out of their control' and often without the ability or desire to return home.[19] Between 1948 and 1954 over 170,000 Displaced Persons arrived in Australia assisted by the International Refugee Organisation on a two

[17] Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015.

[18] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[19] Jock Collins, *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land: Australia's Post-War Immigration* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988), 48; Jayne Persian, "'Chifley Liked Them Blond': DP Immigrants for Australia," *History Australia* 12, no. 2 (2015): 81-82; Jayne Persian, *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians* (Sydney:

year government work contract.[20] Policy was influenced by a concern for Australia's international reputation and the suitability of migrants to settle in Australia and meet racial and employment requirements.[21] Migrants were encouraged to fill vacancies and not compete with local Australians for jobs; consequently migrants were often employed in inferior jobs where prior skills and training went unrecognised.[22]

The combination of postwar urban housing shortages and rural labour shortages meant Displaced Persons were sent away from urban centres and society's gaze, to migrant camps and immigration training and reception centres in regional and rural areas; such as Bonegilla in Victoria and Greta in NSW.[23] The Greta Migrant Camp has not attracted the same scholarly or public attention as Bonegilla, although the sites' commemoration and memorialisation remains an ongoing concern within community groups.[24] The Greta Migrant Camp was constructed outside the Greta township near Anvil Creek. It was an army training base from November 1939 to June 1949 before the

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University of New South Wales, 2017).

[20] James Jupp and Marie Kabala, eds., *The Politics of Australian Immigration*, Immigration and Australian Foreign Policy (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1993), 17; Ian H. Burnley, *The Impact of Immigration on Australia: A Demographic Approach* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 32, 97; Laksiri Jayasuriya, *Immigration and Multiculturalism in Australia: Selected Essays* (Nedlands: School of Social Work and Social Administration the University of Western Australia, 1997), 59; Persian, "'Chifley Liked Them Blond'," 82; Geoffrey Sherington, *Australia's Immigrants 1788-1988*, 2nd ed. (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 136; Joy Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War: Australia's Greek Immigrants after World War Ii and the Greek Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 48.

[21] Klaus Neumann, *Refugee Australia: Australia's Humanitarian Record* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004), 40; James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Migration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 182.

[22] Persian, "'Chifley Liked Them Blond'."; Persian, *Beautiful Balts*; Collins, *Migrant Hands*, 23.

[23] Persian, *Beautiful Balts*, 78.

[24] See for example: Joel Fitzgibbon, "Speech: Federation Chamber: Greta Army and Migrant Camp: Monday, 17 September 2018," NationBuilder, 17th September 2018, http://www.joelfitzgibbon.com/speech_federation_chamber_greta_army_and_migrant_camp_monday_17_september_2018; Anthony Scully and Rick Hind, "Greta Migrant Camp Kids Return, Lamenting Lack of Monument 70 Years since First Wave of Arrivals," ABC News, 24 June 2019, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-24/kids-of-greta-migrant-camp-lament-lack-of-onsite-monument/11240072; Mike Scanlon, "Push for Monument at Greta Migrant Camp Site," Newcastle

Department of Immigration and converted into a migrant camp.[25] The first group of 600 migrants arrived at Greta from the Bathurst migrant camp on 7 June 1949 and the first group to arrive directly from Newcastle arrived on 19 August 1949.[26]

All the people interviewed for this thesis about their experience of migration and the 1955 Maitland flood passed through the Greta Migrant Camp. Greta was a significant experience that guided their decision to settle in Maitland. Their initial settlement in Greta camp was recalled favourably by some migrants—often those who were younger or a resident for longer—and as a challenging and mostly negative experience by others. Nonetheless, recollections of life at Greta camp provided details about migrants' early settlement experiences and their decision to remain in the Maitland area after they left the camp.

Nina was among the earliest arrivals at Greta camp and ultimately recalled a positive experience. Nina was born on 26 January 1941 in Vladivostok but lived in Tientsin (now Tianjin), China. When her father died her mother decided they would migrate. They travelled to Shanghai and were relocated temporarily to the Philippines by the International Refugee Organisation. The SS *Haven* departed Guiuan, Samar, Philippines around 29 May 1949 and arrived in Sydney in June where the passengers were then taken by train to the Bathurst Immigration Reception and Training Centre.[27] Nina said the Bathurst camp 'was absolutely freezing, it was absolutely incredible'. After a fortnight in Bathurst they travelled by bus to Greta Migrant Camp and lived there until 1954. On the whole, Nina remembered and reconstructed her life at Greta camp as a positive experience that provided a sense of stability in contrast to her previous experiences of displacement and mobility. The camp provided 'good nutritious meals'—'nothing fancy […] we were fed, we were fine'—and although it could be 'a bit cold and

Herald, 26 April 2019, https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/6088088/life-at-greta-migrant-camp/.

[25] Maitland and District Historical Society, *A History of Maitland* (Maitland: The Council of the City of Maitland, 1983), 53; Christopher Keating, *A History of the Army Camp and Migrant Camp at Greta, New South Wales, 1939-1960* (Sydney: Uri Windt, 1997), 7-10, 33-38; Val Randall, *Greta: The Town and It's People: 150 Years* (Greta: Wild & Williams Printers, 1993).

[26] Keating, *History of the Army Camp*, 38-43.

[27] Nina Nikolaeff, Interviewed 16th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.; Migrant Selection Documents, NAA: A12094, 198-201; Haven Nominal Passenger Roll, NAA: J25, 1953/4599.

a bit uncomfortable' and there were a 'few incidents', on the whole 'camp life really wasn't that bad' as there were 'all these adventures' for children who explored the campsite. Nina constructed a largely positive narrative of her life in Greta camp, but other people did not recall their experience as favourably.[28]

Ingrid was among the first group of migrants taken directly from Newcastle to Greta on 19 August 1949, and she was more critical of her experience in Greta camp.[29] Ingrid could still remember 'the first sight of the camp, we'd been in so many camps but this was the worst of the lot'. She argued 'the camp wasn't prepared for families, for migrants to come. They had done nothing'. The camp was 'like the troops hadn't left them. There were empty barracks, broken windows' with stretcher beds along the walls, no rooms and no privacy. Attempts to separate the men, women and children were met with 'an uproar' as people declared 'if we can't be together now then we will go back again, we don't want to stay here'. Ingrid was 'miserably unhappy, I really was, I didn't like it'. The 'food was slopped on [your plate] like you see in a prison'. She attended the camp school but 'I couldn't understand anything, the teacher just spoke English'. Ingrid said to her mother 'everyday, I want to go back to Germany, I want to go back, I don't want to stay here'. She found 'everything was so alien, so different. You are coming from a war torn country'. In Germany they 'lived in an apartment house, our apartment it was beautiful, it had oil paintings, it had furniture, parquet floors, we had chandeliers'. In 'Greta camp in the bush […] the houses were all like shacks, they were wooden, they had the toilet down the end of the yard'.[30] The camp was temporary accommodation that reminded some residents of past experiences in concentration and Displaced Persons camps. Rather than providing a home and sense of stability, it presented 'New Australians' with unforeseen challenges.

The government's two-year work contract had a significant impact upon initial settlement and caused tension and uncertainty within migrant camps because workers were often separated from their families and accommodated near their assigned places

[28] Ibid.

[29] Albrecht, Ingrid, NAA: SP1121/1, Albrecht, Ingrid.

[30] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

of employment.[31] Terese's family was often separated and moved through Bonegillia, Cowra, and Greta migrant camps following her father's search for employment; it caused great difficulty and disruption for their family.[32] Tania remembered that 'in the beginning it was very hard for us' because she did not speak English, did not enjoy living in the camp, and worried about her family being separated. She was relieved her family were able to stay together when her husband was given work in the Greta camp kitchens because as a skilled soccer player he was sought after for the Greta team.[33] John worked at the Masonite Factory in Raymond Terrace and returned to Greta camp to visit his parents each weekend.[34] Many people were employed by factories and industrial companies regardless of their prior skills and training.[35] Ingrid's stepfather promised his family a 'good life' in Australia where he expected to continue to work as a lawyer, but there was 'never the money or the opportunity' for him. His qualifications were not recognised and neither were his wife's nursing credentials. When they lived at Greta camp he worked as a cleaner and she as a nurse. When they left the camp he 'had to get a job. He was an academic. He had to work in a factory'.[36] He worked at the Bradford Cotton Mill, and Ingrid's mother at the Belmore Hotel.[37] These families avoided significant family separation by finding local employment that facilitated connections within the local area both within and beyond the Greta camp.

The regional location of migrant camps meant migrants were isolated from major towns and located in unfamiliar environments. Migrants' early recollection and perception of the environment conveyed a sense of alienation and placelessness in their new country. Terese knew nothing about Australia's climate so it was 'a shock' when she arrived. She remembered it was like 'stepping onto the moon […] so different. I believe there was a drought at that time' so 'there was no green grass […] just patches of black

[31] Alexandra Dellios, "Displaced Persons, Family Separation and the Work Contract in Postwar Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 40, no. 4 (2016): 418, 420.

[32] Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015.

[33] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015.

[34] John Szczudluk, Interviewed 20th February 2015.

[35] Keating, *History of the Army Camp*; George Klim, 1996, Interview by Barry York,

[36] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[37] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

because the sun had burnt it so much'. She found the environment 'very depressing. It was just depressing. The heat and the trees were different, the grass was black'. The trees were 'tortured and twisted' and 'it was so hot, it was dreadfully hot, I thought we'd died and gone to hell it was so hot'.[38] Ingrid found the close proximity of European towns contrasted with Australia where it was 'so big, big, it is vast and there is nothing'. The 'wide open spaces [… are] lovely, but you don't even know where you are'.[39] The environment was unfamiliar and the vast sense of space was disconcerting.

Migrants began to learn about the Australian environment while separated from wider society in Greta camp. Initially Tania did not 'know the climate' in Australia but when her children got terribly wind and sunburnt playing 'outside the barracks' in Greta camp she realised the 'different climate' and 'from this time I understand how to live' in Australia. She 'had to learn how to live with Australian weather'.[40] Ingrid learnt about Australian animals and was warned about snakes and crocodiles. If snakes were discovered and killed at the camp 'they hung it over the fence and they made a big fuss of it' to tell the 'kids, beware'. Ingrid had 'never seen a snake before and I was absolutely petrified'. She did not like 'the heat and the mosquitoes and the flies' in the camp, nor 'this land' of brown grass and gum trees so 'totally totally different' to the environment she knew and loved in Germany.[41] Other migrant children enjoyed exploring the local environment in and around the camp. Nina remembered having 'all these adventures' in the bush and surrounding creeks, building a cubby house, and crossing the railway line to explore and collect mushrooms or blackberries in surrounding paddocks. There was space and 'room, and there was no control, no one watching you'.[42] Henry went fishing, swimming and first 'experienced water' when he lived at the migrant hostel in Halifax at Nelson's Bay.[43] The local environment provided a sense of freedom for migrant children and a way for migrants to learn and adapt to the specifics of the Australian

[38] Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015.

[39] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[40] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015.

[41] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[42] Nina Nikolaeff, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[43] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015.

environment.

Although migrants were largely separated from wider society at Greta camp, school and other excursions beyond the camp facilitated some initial contact and connection with nearby townships and residents. Ingrid remembered migrants were 'sequestered in Greta camp so we didn't know what was going on in the rest of the world, you don't understand English, you don't hear news, you don't have TV or wireless or anything, you don't know'. The camp itself was so large 'you needed buses to drive you around', but these buses also provided connection and transport from the camp to Maitland and the chance to interact with local Australians. Ingrid's memories of these encounters demonstrated how segregation in the camp coupled with lingering wartime memories and propaganda contributed to communication difficulties and upsetting interactions. Ingrid could still remember walking all the way to the Greta shops because 'I love biscuits and the camp food was terrible'. She was 'so devastated' when she returned empty handed because the shop attendant did not understand her.[44] Ingrid remembered:

> When you took a bus into Maitland, the people in Maitland […] called us new Australians, you were labelled a New Australian, that's what you were, and they would stop and stare at you and look [from the] top of your head to [the] bottom of your toes and back up again. And everything would be looked at, criticised, not to your face, but afterwards […] I remember people staring and you just felt uncomfortable and it wasn't such a happy time'.[45]

Ingrid recalled 'New Australians were regarded as something alien' and 'we were pointed at because they didn't know if we had two heads or what we looked like […] we were just new'.[46] These memories of being an outsider likely contributed to Ingrid and other migrants' desire to assimilate and find a sense of belonging.

Memories of un-belonging were also a feature of migrants' school memories. Young children were schooled at Greta camp whereas high-school children attended school in Maitland. They often kept amongst themselves because 'we felt a bit strange here, we weren't used to the country'.[47] At school dances 'New Australians would be left

[44] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[45] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[46] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[47] Willy Detzil, Interviewed 20th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, East Maitland.

there on the seat' and Ingrid often felt 'you didn't know where you really belonged'.[48] Nevertheless, despite the feeling of un-belonging and challenges presented by school and trips to Maitland, these encounters provided an initial point of contact with local Australians and a foundation for new networks and points of familiarity beyond Greta, which were important when migrants' left the camp.

Greta camp challenged migrants' settlement expectations but was a significant place of early connection and emplacement within Australia. This temporary and transitional accommodation provided people with a place to live and work, a place to learn about the Australian environment, and a place of familiarity and community where new networks were created and extended into the local area. Ingrid recalled that 'you were told from the beginning' that 'you were under obligation to the government to stay in the camp for two years' and then 'after two years you were chucked out, you had to leave' and were 'on your own'. People rented 'or if you were lucky enough to save enough for a deposit on a home that's what you did' and 'most people of course wanted their own home'.[49] Some migrants left the regional areas they had been placed in for employment and life in capital cities, but a significant population decided to stay within familiar areas. This meant a significant portion of Greta migrants continued living within the Hunter Valley in the Maitland and Newcastle area. Many people recalled positive memories of leaving the camp because this heralded a new chapter with new opportunities and the possibility of owning a home and creating a new life in Australia.

The Greta Migrant Camp closed in January 1960 and was eventually sold at auction and is still privately owned. No buildings remain on the site. The old Nissen huts were taken away although locals say they are scattered around the area and used as demountable buildings and for other purposes. All that remains at the former camp site are some concrete foundations to indicate where the buildings stood and where the roads ran. Nina reflected that 'it would be nice to at least have one building, something that people could sort of relate to, but it's not really practical'. Heritage huts 'would […] shame […] the government', she noted, and people would 'see just how bad things

[48] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[49] Ibid.

really were […] you were virtually living in a tin shed'. Nina visited the site with other former residents for the 65th celebration of the Greta camp and she pointed out where all the buildings used to be. Nina lived there for almost five years and had 'memories and experiences' that are 'quite important' because they were part of her formative childhood experiences of Australia. She reflected that it is 'places that you have stayed' that leave an impression and matter, and Greta was 'part of the time and experience that has shaped my character so that is just part of me'.[50] Although not without challenges, life in Greta camp was a significant part of Maitland interviewees' migration experiences that contributed to their decision to create a home and new life in Maitland.

### Making Home in Maitland

Leaving the Greta Migrant Camp was another significant turning point in migrants' memories and their process of migration and settlement.[51] It represented an end to a period of displacement and transition brought about by war, migration, and temporary placement in Greta camp, and provided migrants with new hopes and expectations for their life in Australia. A recurring theme throughout all individuals' memories was a desire to own their own home. Home ownership was a priority because of the sense of stability and security it represented after past displacement and periods of uncertainty. For many people, home is more than the bricks and mortar of a physical place: it is built through feelings of security, familiarity, community, a sense of possibility, and the existence of immediate social and personal relationships that contribute to and restore social, economic, and cultural identities.[52] Home is not just 'a mere social and physical shelter' but presents 'opportunities for change, improvement […] for dreaming and imagining'.[53] A sense of home and belonging, however, was complicated by wartime

[50] Nina Nikolaeff, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[51] Zlatko Skrbiš, "Transnational Families: Theorising Migration, Emotions and Belonging," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2008): 239; Jay Marlowe, *Belonging and Transnational Refugee Settlement: Unsettling the Everyday and the Extraordinary* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 160.

[52] Ghassan Hage, "At Home in the Entrails of the West: Multiculturalism, 'Ethnic Food' and Migrant Home-Building," in *Home/World: Space, Community and Marginality in Sydney's West*, ed. Helen Grace et al. (Annandale: Pluto Press, 1997), 102; Flynn, "Reconstructing 'Home/Lands'," 463, 470.

[53] Stef Jansen and Staffan Löfving, "Introduction: Towards an Anthropology of Violence, Hope and the

pasts, policies of assimilation and, ultimately, the 1955 Maitland flood.

Migrants had positive recollections of leaving the camp. Nina had good memories of life in Greta camp but was 'quite happy to leave the camp because again, this was a new adventure'. Her mother had saved enough money to buy a block of land and build a 'little cottage' in the Greta township. Nina could still go on adventures with her siblings and friends and explore the river and 'all this space, all this wide space'—once she had finished her household chores.[54] Leaving the camp was the first opportunity Terese's family had to settle and put down roots and create a home as a family after years of displacement and separation in Europe and Australia. Their family was separated during the war, spent time in concentration camps, and had suffered the loss of a son and brother. Rather than finding the 'pot of gold in Australia', their family continued to be displaced and separated as Terese's father moved in search of work. Terese explained that during this period 'home was where my parents were […] I never had a permanent house so to me it didn't matter where I was as long as I was with my Mum and Dad'. When her father secured employment on the railway near Beresfield and Broadmeadows they were finally able to live together in the railway tents and have their own bedrooms and a kitchen. They were 'so grateful for having a house of their own'. It 'was heaven' because their family had 'done enough travels' and 'just wanted to enjoy where we were'. Eventually they were able to build their own home in Beresfield, Newcastle.[55]

Migrants' memories revealed the importance of home ownership. Through migration and resettlement, migrants' roots are reestablished in new places and new homes.[56] Migration hopes and expectations continued to motivate and inform resettlement experiences in Australia. Francesco Ricatti has argued that hope is 'about living the present more intensely' and the migrants I interviewed 'live[d] the present intensely, especially in the first few years of their settlement', driven by a sense of

Movement of People," in *Struggles for Home: Violence, Hope and the Movement of People*, ed. Stef Jansen and Staffan Löfving (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 16.

[54] Nina Nikolaeff, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[55] Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015; Dron, *Scent of an Orange*.

[56] Flynn, "Reconstructing 'Home/Lands'," 463.

purpose and 'the powerful intention of improving their living conditions'.[57] Hope develops out of lack and is a powerful motivating force for migration that continues to propel migrants' resettlement processes.[58] Home ownership is part of this process and is crucial for the 'development of a sense of belonging' particularly for migrants 'who have been denied access to a stable home of origin'.[59] This permeated powerfully throughout migrants' memories of resettlement and home ownership in Maitland.

Home ownership was a key priority for Henry's father, Bronius, who 'just wanted to settle and have a home and a house'. Henry remembered that owning a home was 'a priority' for 'every other migrant we knew in Maitland, in Newcastle, they all had their own home; they had their family and their house. That was probably their dream, to have their own house and family'. Bronius (known as Bruno) was 'just an ordinary fitter at the BHP' but was driven to find a house at 'the right price'. Their search for a house was indicative of a desire for security after the experience of war, but these recollections also demonstrated an emergent sense of home, place and belonging. Henry recalled that although their house was in a flood-plain 'they didn't want to leave Maitland. Once they got settled in here […] this was their home until they died you know, I'm not going anywhere else'. Their home 'was their castle. When you went there you were treated like a king'.[60]

Home ownership was also important to Tania and her husband. They left Greta

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[57] Francesco Ricatti, "Elodia and Franca: Oral Histories of Migration and Hope," *History Australia* 7, no. 2 (2010): 33.36.

[58] Ibid., 33.38.

[59] Farida Fozdar and Lisa Hartley, "Refugee Resettlement in Australia: What We Know and Need to Know," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2013): 36-37.
For further discussion of migrants, homes, home ownership and space see, for example: Mirjana Lozanovska, "Abjection and Architecture: The Migrant House in Multicultural Australia," in *Postcolonial Space(S)*, ed. Gülsüm Baydar Nalbantoglu and Chong Thai Wong (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997); Stephen Cairns, ed., *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); Gaston Bachelard, "The House. From Cellar to Garret. The Significance of the Hut," in *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); Nikos Papastergiadis, "Introduction: The Home in Modernity," in *Dialogues in the Diasporas : Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1998); Jane M. Jacobs, "Too Many Houses for a Home: Narrating the House in the Chinese Diaspora," in *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy*, ed. Stephen Cairns (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).

[60] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015.

camp in 1953 when they saved enough for a house in Maitland. Tania recalled that 'everyone wanted to own [a] house […] especially people from Europe— Poland, Russia, Germany—they live[d] in a camp, they all want[ed] to own [a house]. Not to pay rent, [that was] very important to us'. With four children at Catholic school, plus the cost of clothes, furniture and the house, Tania recalled 'everything in the beginning was very hard'. She once wanted 'so badly' a 'new dress for church' but her husband would 'rather pay for house'. Owning a house meant sacrifices but once it was paid for they went 'everywhere, dances, go to cinema, always enjoy[ing] life' together as a family.[61] The house provided a space from which a sense of place developed through expanding local connections. Similarly to the Greta migrant camp, this was another process of 'emplacement' which created connections between individuals and families and the local area, forging an early sense of belonging and home in Maitland.

Owning a home formed part of migrants' resettlement processes that fostered a burgeoning sense of home and place within Maitland, but this process was complicated by wartime memories and assimilation policies. During this period the 'byword for successful migration' was assimilation. It was built on the expectation that migrants break with their old country, their language and traditions, and build a new identity in Australia by conforming to Australian social and cultural norms and the 'Australian way of life'.[62] This nation building discourse ignored how past experiences can shape identity and a sense of self, and made it difficult for people to articulate stories of war and publicly express grief and loss.[63]

Assimilation was an important feature of Ingrid's memories of resettlement because it offered a way to combat her feelings of being an outsider and experience belonging. Ingrid recalled 'you wanted to [assimilate…] because it's your new home […]

[61] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015.

[62] Damousi, *Memory and Migration*, 2, 50, 53; Anna Haebich, *Spinning the Dream: Assimilation in Australia 1950-1970* (Fremantle: Freemantle Press, 2008), 8, 9; Collins, *Migrant Hands*, 228.

[63] Damousi, *Memory and Migration*, 53; Robert Mason, "Coalitions of Justice: Articulating Democratic Transition in Australia's Salvadoran Community," in *Cultures in Refuge: Seeking Sanctuary in Modern Australia*, ed. Anna Hayes and Robert Mason (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 96; Joy Damousi, "The Greek Civil War, Child Removal and Traumatic Pasts in Australia," in *Legacies of Violence: Rendering the Unspeakable Past in Modern Australia*, ed. Robert Mason (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017).

you wanted to be part of everything […] you were hurt if you were singled out and pointed at'.[64] She recalled 'you are coming there to make a life for yourself' and were a 'guest […] until you prove[ed] yourself' and were accepted by the community by being 'part of their life as well'.[65] She felt 'people judge you when you come to live among Australians, they see that you are hard working […] you don't ask for help […] you try to get on and do, […] you're assimilating […] you don't segregate yourself from the rest of the community, you keep to your customs […] but that's within your four walls in your home'.[66] Ingrid remembered wanting to assimilate because it provided a way to be part of Australian culture and society, but her memories also revealed underlying tensions and challenges to settlement in postwar Australia.

Migrants identities and personal histories were informed by wartime pasts that were renegotiated in Australia, yet the 'emotional effects of war and their enduring marks on the waves of immigrants' remain a significant absence within Australian migration and war historiography.[67] Machteld Venken has argued that standardised war narratives and 'selected representations of historical experiences' in Belgium hindered the extent to which migrants felt able to share their personal experiences of war and participate in the wider community.[68] A similar practice was evident in Australia as wartime memories and propaganda made Ingrid feel unable to identify as German. She recalled that 'when I first came here to Australia, you couldn't say you were German'.[69] Her constant swapping between first and second person when recalling these memories indicated a process of negotiation and inability to assert her German identity in postwar Australia. Ingrid felt 'torn between two countries'; 'you didn't know where you really belonged'.[70] Although Ingrid was 'very grateful to Australia for accepting us […] we had

[64] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[67] Damousi, *Memory and Migration*, 50; Damousi, "The Greek Civil War," 137.

[68] Machteld Venken, "'I Am Also a Foreigner, but with Me It's Different': Polish Displaced Persons, War Memory and Ethnification in Belgium," in *History, Memory and Migration: Perceptions of the Past and the Politics of Incorporation*, ed. Irial Glynn and J. Olaf Kleist (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012), 54.

[69] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[70] Ibid.

to assimilate, there was no such thing as having your own rights and people bending over backwards to accommodate you, no'.[71] The culture of assimilation in combination with Australian memories of war likely exacerbated issues of settlement and belonging, but nevertheless it was the prevailing ideal and was embraced and sought after by many migrants.

Assimilation was pursued through various individual and community initiatives. Good Neighbourhood Councils operated within the Newcastle area to assist migrants' assimilation.[72] Memories of such community organisations and social activities revealed the complexity of negotiating belonging for both migrants and local Australians, and the genuine offers of fellowship, friendship, and belonging.[73] Learning English was a common memory. Ingrid said she learnt English because 'you want[ed] to become part of it' and Terese felt she was 'accepted because I lost my accent'.[74] Tania learnt English through the help of her children and her neighbours who lent her comic books. The combination of pictures and writing were 'how I started reading in English'.[75] But as important as learning English and assimilating was for connecting with the local Australian community, many migrants remembered sharing a sense of community with fellow migrants.

Memories of war, migration and experiences at Greta camp helped forge a sense of community among migrants. Although wartime memories could create distance between migrants and the local community, these memories were also a point of connection between those with similar experiences; indeed, Venken argued that sharing

[71] Ibid.

[72] Damousi, *Memory and Migration*, 49, 54; Jayasuriya, *Immigration and Multiculturalism in Australia*, 61; Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, 180; Joed Elich, "Dutch and Australian Governments' Perspectives on Migration," in *The Dutch Down under 1606-2006*, ed. Nonja Peters (Crawley: University of Western Australia, 2006), 157; Michael James Kelly, "A Social History of the Good Neighbour Councils of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia: 1949-1971" (Master of Arts La Trobe University, 1979); Sara Wills, "When Good Neighbours Become Good Friends: The Australian Embrace of Its Millionth Migrant," *Australian Historical Studies* 36, no. 124 (2004): 335; Persian, *Beautiful Balts*.

[73] Helen Denzin, Interviewed 18th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland Historical Society, Maitland; Willy Detzil, Interviewed 20th February 2015.

[74] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015; Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015.

[75] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015; Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015.

wartime memories with others can contribute to group formation and belonging.[76] Ingrid felt 'you have […] something in common, you have the language, you have the customs and you understand each other'—this connection continued into the present in the form of emotional and practical assistance given to fellow migrants.[77] Henry recalled socialising with other migrants who often visited their home and 'castle' for afternoons and evenings of merriment where 'you were treated like a king […] that's how you welcome people into your home'.[78] Tania said many Eastern European and 'Polish people moved to this area because of the Greta camp'; there were 'so many people [to] stop and talk [to]' on her walk into town.[79] The Maitland Polish Association—formed in 1949—also provided a focal point for some members of the local migrant community. It was fondly remembered as a place of various social activities including dances 'nearly every Sunday'—'everybody coming, our Australian friends too'.[80] The hall has been a place for many community activities over the years. Tania has helped in the kitchens and John, as current President, has organised community events and meetings. Tania also volunteered for years by visiting people and speaking in their own language about their childhood, their experience of war and displacement, and migrating to Australia. They typically did not speak of life in Australia, but wished to recall memories of a similar past and share them with their family and grandchildren.[81] This demonstrates how memories of war and migration continued to foster a sense of shared background and belonging.

Migrants' memories of childhood, war, migration and resettlement in Australia all shaped their sense of connection and belonging within Maitland prior to the 1955 flood. Early memories of their childhood and experience of war informed their decision to migrate to Australia. Postwar migration policies placed them in the Greta Migrant Camp and significantly influenced their early experiences of life in Australia, and their subsequent decision to stay and create a home in the Maitland area. Owning a home

[76] Venken, "'I Am Also a Foreigner'," 53-54.

[77] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[78] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015.

[79] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015.

[80] John Szczudluk, Interviewed 20th February 2015.

not only represented a chance for stability and security, but the beginning of a sense of home and place as migrants fostered connections throughout local social networks, which contributed to an early sense of community. Although wartime memories, placement in the Greta camp, and ideas of assimilation presented challenges, migrants nonetheless still recalled early experiences of connection within Maitland. These past experiences and early connections in Maitland ultimately influenced how they became aware of the history and risk of floods, and their subsequent response and recollections of the 1955 flood.

### Migration to Victoria

Changes to Australian migration policies and the shift towards multiculturalism in the early 1970s meant that the Victorian migrants interviewed for this thesis had different experiences and memories of migration and settlement in comparison with Maitland migrants. They had greater opportunity to decide where to live, which informed their migration and settlement choices. Migrants recalled their life prior to migration along with reflections upon their decision and motivations to migrate to Australia. Many people cited aesthetic and practical aspects of the Australian environment and a sense of space as reasons why they decided to live within disaster-prone areas of regional Victoria.

Jenneke remembered growing up in a 'small town' called Gennep in the southeast of Holland, surrounded by water and 'really dark green lush gardens'. She recalled that 'instead of fences they have water between the paddocks […] so there is water everywhere'. Jenneke remembered exploring this water-rich environment from the back of her family's bicycles, enjoying 'going on boats with my Dad and just having water around a lot', and even 'rowing around the house in a boat' when the river rose and flooded their house.[82] These early memories of outdoor activities fostered an early sense of place and fondness for the local environment.[83] Her father Wytze decided to

[81] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015.

[82] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Meeniyan, Victoria.

[83] Clare Cooper Marcus, "Environmental Memories," in *Place Attachment*, ed. Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (New York: Plenum, 1992).

migrate because 'I needed a bigger shed'.[84] He worked as a potter making industrial ceramics and roofing titles for restoration projects but 'too many rules and regulations' in the form of increased restrictions and land zoning regulations meant he 'couldn't find a space' to expand his business.[85] He decided 'I'm off, I'm out of here' and packed everything into two shipping containers ready for his family's departure.[86] Jenneke explained that 'Holland is very small, very dense and he just wasn't finding anything that was affordable' so they migrated to Australia 'because they've got more space. That's the main thing, more space'.[87]

Arguably in a nod to the legacy of the white Australia policy, Wytze speculated that they got their visa 'on the strength of our four children'. Wytze was 'forty years old—a bit old—a potter' whereas his children were all 'blonde and blue eyes […] between five and ten years old and looked really cute'.[88] As a child, Jenneke remembered migration not because of its personal significance, but because she recognised the event as 'conventionally… significant'.[89] She recalled 'being at the airport beforehand' with 'some relatives […] there to say goodbye. I actually remember thinking or realising that this was a big thing for my Mum. It didn't feel like a big thing for me. You could see from the adult interactions that this was significant'. The migration journey was not overly significant to her at the time; even though 'something [...] was happening' it only mattered that 'we're still together'.[90]

Wytze framed migration as a straightforward process and went ahead of his family to find a home in Australia. He travelled and found work in Eildon until his family joined him in 1989. They imagined Australia would be 'really hot and really dry', 'flat and dry and desert and miserable and people only drink beer' but when they arrived 'it was raining, green hills everywhere'.[91] Their family lived in a caravan park in Eildon

[84] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Marysville, Victoria.

[85] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016; Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[86] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[87] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[88] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[89] Freeman, "Telling Stories," 265.

[90] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[91] Ibid.; Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

and then a 'tiny tiny little house' in Alexandra until Wytze discovered a 'big old farmhouse', 'surrounded by green paddocks' and dairy farms.[92] Within ten minutes he arranged with a farmer to renovate the property in exchange for low rent and a place where he could run his pottery business.[93] Jenneke reflected that his discovery of the farmhouse was 'indicative I suppose of [opportunities in] Australia as opposed to Holland'. In Australia they found an affordable space, whereas it would be 'really hard to come by in Holland'. Jokes shared in Holland became reality when they had to drive to their neighbour's house—such was the distance and space between them. Jenneke reflected that Alexandra 'was a great place to grow up […] the freedom, space'.[94]

Space and employment opportunities were also motivations for Hans' migration to Australia in 1996. Hans grew up near Gouda in South Holland and recalled it was 'very good growing up there, really good being a teenager in Holland. Punk Revolution […] was on' and it was 'more liberal'. There were discos, dances, music festivals, demolition derby and 'a bit more social responsibility'. There was 'a lot of rebellion in the new generation' and a 'big culture change in Holland in those days'. But his father 'saw how small Holland was' and 'it was getting harder to get good jobs' and a good education 'so he decided we should go somewhere else'. Of the four possibilities they chose New Zealand because they knew people there and were eligible for assisted passages. Hans was 'dead against' the idea of 'going to the middle of nowhere' and leaving behind his friends and social life. His family migrated in 1979 and Hans recalled it was 'dead. 1979, nothing was open on a Sunday'. It was 'deserted, nobody around, old cars, funny houses compared to what we were used to'. He recollected 'it wasn't what you were used to, it wasn't right somehow'.[95]

Nevertheless, Hans' began to embrace life in New Zealand and actively strove to 'blend in' rather than maintain the Dutch customs of his family. His family 'were the classic Dutch migrants, [they] hung out with all the Dutchies and I didn't'. They 'might have left the country but they didn't leave it behind. They leave the land but they bring

[92] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[93] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[94] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[95] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maffra West Upper, Victoria.

the country with them'. His older sister 'couldn't adapt to the New Zealand lifestyle. She was Dutch, really Dutch' and maintained Dutch friendships before eventually returning because 'she migrated but never left Holland'. In contrast, Hans went to school, made friends, got a summer job and 'just blended in'. He made an effort to spend time with school friends and to 'think English, speak English, dream English' quicker than his siblings. At university he 'wasn't a Dutchman anymore. I had become an ag student […] I wasn't treated as an immigrant. I felt no different to anyone else'. He experienced his 'first proper earthquake' while at university but he learnt to 'get used to it' and be like the locals who 'don't worry' about 'little earthquakes'. His response and recollection of the earthquake demonstrated his desire to belong, blend in, and be seen as an agriculture student and local.[96]

Hans framed migration to Australia as a pragmatic response to New Zealand dairy farming conditions. He studied agricultural science to become a 'farmer by choice, not by birth' and worked as a dairy farmer, but it was very competitive and 'hard going to make reasonable money'. Upon learning Australia might have more opportunities he 'came over here to have a look around and got a job on the second day basically'. Hans argued migrating a second time was 'no problem, just pack up and go, so much easier. It was only 'three hours on the plane […] next door really'; 'the only thing different is the climate'. He migrated for 'money, job opportunities, that was it', and commented 'most people migrate to get ahead. Head down, tail up, go for it […] to provide for your kids' education that's really why we do it'. In New Zealand he felt 'the Dutch are really looked upon as really good migrants', and as the dairy industry is very competitive he was viewed as a 'go getter' and service provider. In Australia he felt dairy farming was seen as a last resort, or an industry only for 'old money' and generational farmers. Instead of being seen as a Dutch migrant, he was a New Zealand immigrant 'looked upon as though you are pinching people's jobs', which he found 'very frustrating'.[97]

Because Hans and his wife migrated for improved dairying prospects, the environment was a crucial part of their location decision. They travelled throughout Victoria investigating potential farming locations. The West was 'brown and barren'.

[96] Ibid.

Northern Victoria 'was 47 degrees on the car thermometer and it was shimmering heat and the flies were this big. It was flat and boring and brown'. They travelled to Gippsland in February when it was 'nice and green here and cool'. Although they heard it could be more profitable in the north, it was also remote, hotter and harder, whereas they knew people in Gippsland and 'it was green; green must be better than brown'.[98]

Hans' prior migration experience influenced how he reconstructed and narrated migration and settlement in Australia. Geographer Ben Rogaly has argued that life histories contain an in-built historical approach that highlights how not all forms of mobility and migration are imbued with the same meaning or social significance; the length of migration does not determine how significant it is to an individual.[99] This was evident within Hans and Bruno's migration narratives whose first migration was informed by their parents' choices, whilst their later relocation to Australia was their own decision.

Bruno was born in Paraguay, South America, in 1955 to European parents who emigrated from Belgium after the Second World War. Bruno remembered his childhood in Paraguay as 'a great experience' and 'a chapter that I really embraced' where 'people were still relaxed', 'laughing the language' and 'not taking life too seriously'. His family lived outside a city where it was 'more open and green', where he could climb trees, eat grapefruits off trees and find 'adventure everywhere'. He remembered playing marbles and card collecting games with other children in the street, along with soccer and warrior games, but he also felt from a young age 'gee, I'm different from all the other kids. I was blond and they were dark skinned'. When he was fifteen or sixteen 'the family in Belgium wanted my parents back' so his family returned to Belgium, which was 'a bit of a shock'. Bruno found Belgium 'was cold, not only in climate but also the people', who seemed serious and dressed in dark colours, whereas in Paraguay 'when it's sunny people are more relaxed […] you sleep outside and look at the stars, that was our TV, the stars'. Eventually Bruno began to 'see the good things' in

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ben Rogaly, "Disrupting Migration Stories: Reading Life Histories through the Lens of Mobility and Fixity," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33, no. 3 (2015): 530, 541.

Belgium. Language differences made school difficult so he started working an 'artistically orientated job, sign writing'. He met a young sculptor in the building who inspired him. Suddenly 'that was it. The clay was just, wow. This is just magic'. Bruno reflected upon 'how important it was [that] I had to be in Belgium to meet this sculptor, learn all the other things, the different cultures, the way I see life from different perspectives'. The 'artist just came natural […] I just followed the instinct. I am here to be an artist'. Migrating to Belgium proved a pivotal moment in Bruno's life because he 'had to be there' to become an artist.[100]

Fate and destiny were constant forces articulated throughout Bruno's life history that also shaped his migration narrative. He felt 'Australia was waiting when I was in South America. I wrote it down, one day I will live in Australia, in this little village, river at the back and mountains around'. He 'had a vision of that when I was fourteen, and it was in such convincing details' that he wrote it down in his diary. Bruno had a good life in Belgium as an artist, so to many people it seemed nonsensical to move:[101]

> Nobody understood, but the gut feeling was, everything is telling you you had better do it. You have to respect that. You have to be crazy […] Life works in mysterious ways, and sometimes you just have to trust it […] at the moment it might not make sense, but later, man, now I understand even the fires.[102]

The day Bruno opened his final exhibition in Belgium was the day the paperwork came through permitting migration. He and his wife both sold their house that evening. This sense of fate and destiny was woven throughout Bruno's life story, binding his adventures and decisions together.[103] When buying his house in Australia, Bruno said all the signs indicated he had found it—it was an old gallery, owned by someone that dabbled in gardening, for sale at the exact price their home sold for in Belgium, and it was in a village surrounded by mountains, with a creek running through the property, just as he had written years ago in his diary—except it was number six and Bruno had only ever lived in residences with the number nine. Eventually he realised, 'Bruno, you

[100] Bruno Torfs, Interviewed 27th July 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Marysville, Victoria.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

down under mate. You are upside down but again it makes sense'. The nine was upside-down; he was down-under now.

Bruno narrated his migration as the result of a sense of fate or destiny bringing him to Australia, but it was also shaped by a desire to live in nature again. Nature, space and the environment were key themes in Wytze, Jenneke, Hans and Bruno's memories and narratives of migration. Similarly, Ian and his wife were very conscious environmental differences between New Zealand and Australia when they migrated in 1997 seeking new employment opportunities. They lived in Carlton for three years but never intended to stay in suburbia. Each weekend they would 'drive in a different direction to find which way we might want to go'. They wanted somewhere 'not flat, [that] had lots of water and was within an hour of Melbourne. That was our ideal'. They 'didn't want flat because we didn't want boring country'. Water was important because 'this is an arid country. We wanted a place that had less of a water issue than other places'. On their weekend drive they saw a for-sale sign and quickly 'put on the brakes and reversed up and we liked the look of it'. The owners 'were selling the house, [but] we were buying property'. The land was a key criteria because they wanted to have goats and an orchard to produce cider, but the environment was also their sanctuary and retreat from suburbia.[104] Overwhelmingly the migration of Jenneke, Wytze, Hans, Bruno and Ian was motivated by a desire for space and the aesthetic and practical qualities of the environment. Space and environment were important and attractive features in these migrant stories in addition to the opportunities offered for Wytze's potting, Hans' dairying and Ian's orchard.

Space and the opportunity for adventure were also themes in the migration narratives of Rachel, Bende and Kat who initially came to Australia as backpackers, exchange students, or short-term migrants on a working holiday seeking adventure, change, and to escape feelings of dissatisfaction at home. James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson have discussed how the assisted passages operating at the end of the war ultimately facilitated the beginning of the working holiday.[105] Previously an

[104] Ian van der Werff, Interviewed 16th August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Tylden, Victoria.

[105] A. James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

international working holiday was almost unheard of and practically unaffordable, but assistance schemes like the Ten Pound Pom scheme enabled young people to imagine and afford international travel and to pioneer the backpacking holiday.[106] The arrival of the jet age transformed 'a momentous and mostly irreversible journey across the world into an investment in recreational globetrotting', which encouraged sojourners and backpackers to Australia.[107] Notably it was often single women who paved the way for migrants such as Rachel, Bende and Kat who embarked on similar journeys a few decades later.[108] As single women Rachel, Bende and Kat had different expectations and experiences of Australia compared to migrant families. They were able to move in search of different work or travel opportunities and were less bound by financial and family constraints.[109] This was a pivotal and transformative life experience that influenced their decision to stay in Australia.

Rachel Dawkins first came to Australia as a working trainee with the International Agricultural Exchange Association in 1985. She had studied agriculture at Wye College in London and worked as an animal inspector in North Gloucestershire before becoming frustrated with 'red tape and bureaucracy' and a feeling that 'this isn't really leading anywhere'. She feared 'if I don't travel now I'm not going to'. In the pages of *The Farmers Weekly* she discovered an advert for an agricultural exchange and accepted her second choice for dairy farming in Australia. She 'pictured this land of ochre and dust and dirt and long roads and heat' so was 'quite disappointed' when 'I end up on [an irrigated] dairy farm in Gippsland'. During her stay she met Nigel Dawkins and after exchanging visits between the UK and Australia, 'he proposed, we got married and I emigrated in August '88'. What began as a temporary working holiday and chance of adventure turned into permanent migration motivated by love and escape. Rachel reflected that 'people migrate for different reasons. For me it was about falling in love and getting married but there was also an element of escape, of getting away from a

[106] Ibid., 248-249; Alistair Thomson, *Moving Stories: An Intimate History of Four Women across Two Countries* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2011), 100.

[107] Hammerton and Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms*, 257.

[108] Ibid., 67.

[109] Ibid., 249; Thomson, *Moving Stories*, 100.

really traumatic situation in England' after the death of her mother. She was 'desperate to get back here [Australia] was a lifeline for me'. They never considered living in England—'it was always about coming out here'.[110]

Bende grew up in the countryside in Rebe, the oldest town in Denmark, which is 'only half the size of Tasmania'. There have 'always been five million people […] five million seems to be a cap', which is 'why we are all so tall and skinny'. She nannied in Iceland after finishing school then returned and became a qualified baker and confectioner, which she hoped meant she could travel the world because 'everyone would need bread'. At twenty-five she 'needed something that was bigger' than Denmark and Australia 'was a country of opportunities. I felt like I could come here and do whatever I wanted'. Her mother refused to help with any of the paperwork 'because she didn't want me to leave', but 'I wanted to do something different'. Bende arrived in 1984/85 for six months and worked on sheep farms in Hamilton, Victoria, before returning to Denmark to finish her baking training. When she migrated to Australia in 1991 she moved to Canberra to 'find out why it is the worst place to live'. She worked as a chocolatier and found Canberra 'was beautiful' as 'it was young then' with 'lots of young people so it was fun'. After two years she moved to Melbourne for a few years and then north to Townsville. Around 1995 she decided 'no, this is not the place for me anymore' and decided to return to Denmark. Before she moved back she agreed to house-sit for a friend in Melbourne. Her mother had said 'come home now because if you stay any longer I know you will fall in love'. But it was too late. While house-sitting she met her now husband through friends 'who matched us up before we met'. Bende returned to Denmark but her family saw 'they weren't going to keep me over there'. They exchanged visits but he 'wanted the space' and Denmark was 'too small for him' so Bende returned permanently to Australia.[111]

Kat was born in Dorset and 'grew up right near the sea, [the] same house, we never moved'. She was raised by her Mum and felt for 'most of my childhood not much ever happened'. She 'didn't really have many adventures' unless her older sisters visited

[110] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Traralgon, Victoria.

[111] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Eden Park, Victoria.

or she was 'whisked off by my sister' to have fun and go to festivals. Kat finished college but 'felt a bit lost' and 'didn't really know what I wanted to do' so she decided to join a friend of hers backpacking in Australia for a 'big exciting year away from my family'. She travelled throughout Western Australia with her friend until she returned to the UK. When her son was around six years old she got 'really itchy feet' and was at 'a point in my life where I felt that I wanted to leave the UK […] to go and live somewhere else for a while' and experience different cultures. She met her now husband who had just applied for an Australian visa so the three of them left the UK seeking adventure in Australia, which was 'sold as this land of opportunities […] the new America' with 'more prospects'.[112]

Kat's backpacking adventure holiday to Australia was an escape from an uncertain life at home that became a formative part of Kat's life. Her sojourn experience was a pivotal and transformative experience where she learnt new things on a global stage rather than at home.[113] Initially Kat shared a brief overview and rehearsed story explaining how she came to live in Australia; such socially acceptable stories are shared to communicate who we are and how we got here.[114] She then began to reflect more deeply on this experience. Kat's 'limited knowledge' of Australian culture—'from Neighbours and Home and Away'—combined with her friend's description of Fremantle, a place with 'arty galleries', 'beautiful beaches' and 'all these really amazing people'—'artisty, hippyish' and 'pot smoking partying artisty types'—made Australia and Fremantle in particular sound 'really exciting and a different experience'.[115]

On the other side of the world, with a new sense of freedom, away from parental supervision and with no one to say 'there's no way you are hanging out with that person', they 'all went a bit nuts for a while'. Eventually they decided to escape from the 'feeling of complete fear of being in Fremantle' but 'went from that situation to an even worse situation', which was 'just absolutely awful'. Kat reflected 'we went from one trauma to another trauma to another trauma on this gap year journey of self discovery

[112] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Kinglake, Victoria.

[113] Hammerton and Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms*, 248, 252-254, 261.

[114] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 38.

[115] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016.

[…] it wasn't discovering yourself in this […] zen way'. She felt 'you get caught up in the dreaminess of being in another country' but there are 'so many toxic people out there' that 'you've got to be really switched on'. Although some 'of the worst experiences of my life' have been in Australia she also had 'good memories of being there' and 'didn't hold it against Australia […] I knew that there was this beautiful side to Australia'. Although she's 'not really sure why I'm here sometimes […] there has always been this really soulful pull for me to be in Australia […] I need to be there'. She 'knew that I really felt I had to come back to Australia and be here'.

In 2007 when Kat and her family migrated they arrived in Fremantle before travelling to 'experience the country where we are going to live and put down roots'. They 'decided to keep travelling and just keep having a bit of an adventure and see where we land' and 'camped all the way to Victoria' before eventually heading to Kinglake. The mist was just rising as they drove along the winding road to Kinglake; it 'was just so peaceful and tranquil and we just arrived, kinda went yup, this is it, it just feels really right to be here'.[116] Although there were challenges and they experienced 'a real limbo period in our life' while finding somewhere to live, once again Kat felt it was right to be here in Australia. This pull and her sense of connection with the Australian environment encouraged her return to Australia and settle in Kinglake.

### Victorian Spaces and Places

The desire for more space motivated many people's journey to Australia, but once here these spaces could prove alienating and unfamiliar until they became known places that provided people with an early sense of connection and attachment to their new homes. Early settlement memories highlighted practices that forged bonds between people, place and environment and created an emergent sense of home and belonging within Australia. In contrast to Maitland migrants who largely remembered early settlement through connections with local community and migrant groups, Victorian migrants often recalled early encounters with the local environment. This was arguably because they were able to chose where to live and the environment was a pivotal part of this

[116] Ibid.

decision. The space in Australia was appealing to many but it needed to be populated by new memories, experiences and meanings in order to forge a sense of place, home or belonging prior to the bushfires.

Many migrants' recollections of space and environment in their former homes were accompanied by memories of bicycle riding that provided insights into memories of place and space in Australia and Europe. Jenneke's childhood memories included 'lots of memories […] of my immediate family and the place we lived' and also 'lots of bike memories', which were particularly special. One of her earliest memories was 'being on the back of my Mum's bike and watching her legs pedalling and thinking I can't wait till I can ride my own bike'. She used to 'take a me sized bike and just walk around and pretend I could ride [it]'.[117] Bende enjoyed growing up in Denmark 'especially in a town where you can ride your push bike. We rode our push-bikes everywhere, we knew everyone around town, went to school with everyone, played summer sports with everyone'.[118] Hans described the size and character of his 'rural […] village' in part by stating 'you would push-bike everywhere'. It was a 'very close community' where 'you knew everyone in town […] every house and you walked everywhere or push-biked. Nothing was more than 400 metres away. It is very small, compact'.[119] As is typical of childhood and early memories, people remembered homes and buildings in less detail than activities like cycling that encouraged them to explore and interact with the local environment.[120] Cycling memories in their early homes conveyed a sense of familiarity and intimacy with people and place that provided a striking counter point to recollections of early settlement in Australian spaces.

Places are spaces that are made meaningful through people's cultural and emotional connections and layers of shared experiences and memories.[121] Spaces are the

[117] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[118] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[119] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016.

[120] Louise Chawla, "Childhood Place Attachments," in *Place Attachment*, ed. Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (New York: Plenum Press, 1992); Clare Cooper Marcus, *Environmental Autobiography* (Berkeley: Institute of Urban & Regional Development, University of California, 1979); Marcus, "Environmental Memories."

[121] Setha M. Low and Irwin Altman, "Place Attachment: A Conceptual Inquiry," in *Place Attachment*, ed.

location and setting for activities until emotive bonds between people and environments forge a sense of place.[122] Places are deeply important and symbolise 'that we belong to a family, or a community'.[123] Cycling memories conveyed a sense of place through migrants' recollections of a deep sense of familiarity and intimacy with their early home, community and environment; they described the ease with which they could travel around their hometown and meet familiar faces along the way. These were places heavily saturated with memories and shared experiences created while growing up there. When people migrated they moved away from these places of meaning and memory and encountered new spaces in Australia.

Wytze, Jenneke and Bende all spoke about the space desired and found in Australia. Wytze wanted space for his potting business and Bende said 'it was the open space' that drew her to Australia and 'the space' which made her decide to settle in the country. Denmark was 'not big enough to have land like this' and she and her husband saw 'no point in living in the town in Australia. If you had to migrate to another country you would want to live in the country'.[124] Regional Australia provided space but it also presented challenges to the daily ways people moved through new locations. People who shared cycling memories were from countries with the highest cycling rate and a similar ratio of cycling among men and women.[125] People who lived in places where cycling was common are more likely to continue to ride in Australia, yet Jenneke and Bende commented that they struggled to continue to cycle here.[126] The distance was too great in Alexandra for Jenneke's family to ride. It was only when she moved to Melbourne she

Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (New York: Plenum Press, 1992), 5; Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998), 103.

[122] Stephen Miles, "Anthropogenic Disaster and Sense of Place: Battlefield Sites as Tourist Attractions," in *Displaced Heritage: Responses to Disaster, Trauma, and Loss*, ed. Ian Convery, Gerard Corsane, and Peter Davis (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), 20; Kenneth Foote, *Shadowed Ground: American's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (United States of America: The University of Texas Press, 2003), 208.

[123] Hugh Mackay, *The Art of Belonging* (Sydney: Macmillian, 2014), 20.

[124] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[125] Jennifer Bonham and Anne Wilson, "Bicycling and the Life Course: The Start-Stop-Start Experiences of Women Cycling," *International Journal of Sustainable Transportation* 6, no. 4 (2012): 195.

[126] Ibid., 204.

felt able to ride again.[127] Bende rode in Canberra where 'everything was so big and open and it accommodated for push-bikes and cars like in Europe. She intended to ride in Whittlesea, but found the distance too great and 'everyone has a car'; 'they don't look after each other, it's only about cars'. She felt a sense of independence is gained 'a lot later here than […] in Denmark. We were riding push-bikes everywhere from the age of ten or nine […] whereas here you just don't do that'.[128] In former homes bicycle memories were entangled with a sense of freedom, independence and place. In Australia there was a comparative sense of space or displacement because an intimate knowledge and familiarity (or bond) between environment and people did not exist and could not be easily forged on the back of bicycles. These bicycle memories illustrated how migrants left 'places' and came to new 'spaces' in Australia that had to be populated with new memories and connections before this country also held a sense of place and home.

Migrants' early memories of settlement were often about turning spaces into places and creating a new sense of connection within their chosen locations in regional Victoria. Living and working in the local environment can give people a sense of attachment or belonging to places and environments.[129] Rachel received an agricultural training in England and she knew that environment well, but in Australia 'I didn't know the wildlife, I didn't know the birds, the trees, the plant species. You feel really ignorant'. This not knowing made her feel out of place. She actively wanted to learn 'about the different species of plants and animals, breeds of cattle and horses' in Australia and as her mother-in-law was 'very knowledgeable about the countryside and plant species, flora and fauna' she was able to teach Rachel about her new environment and help her feel settled in her new home.[130]

Jenneke also remembered actively learning about her new environment. Although nature has been viewed as a 'colourful backdrop' or the 'stage and setting' to human action—rather than something people actively engage or interact with—

[127] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[128] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[129] Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1996), 5.

[130] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016.

interviewees' memories revealed deliberate practices that forged connection and attachment between people and environments. Jenneke's family 'did a lot of exploring when we first came here' and went for 'lots of walks and rambles […] and most of my growing up we slept mostly outside'. She said it was 'a regular thing to explore where we live' by going for a 'drive somewhere [… and] go[ing] for a walk and a ramble'. This gave her 'a feeling of belonging to a place because you are familiar with your environment, with the world around you'. She speculated whether her parents made a conscious decision 'to give us a feeling of connection' but nonetheless felt the 'experience of being outside' and the outdoors 'lifestyle my parents created for us here would be really hard to do in Holland'.[131] Walking and exploring within her local environment gave Jenneke a sense of familiarity, connection and place within her new home in Australia. Places are made meaningful and significant through everyday activities, walking, and shared experiences.[132] Places can also provide an anchor for identity that can last into adulthood, as discussed in Chapter 7.[133]

People connected to their local environment in various ways throughout their early settlement. Historian Peter Read has examined how newcomers articulate a sense of identification and belonging to country and the Australian environment and observed that while some migrants feel the emotional soil of their new country is shallower, others feel a sense of identification and 'spiritual' relationship with the land.[134] Bruno said he felt 'really at home' here 'because of nature', but both he and Kat felt a sense of fate and destiny brought them to Australia, and they felt a spiritual connection to the environment.[135]

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[131] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[132] Read, *Returning to Nothing*, 5-7; Heather Goodall, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney's Georges River* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 16; Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2007), 103.

[133] Barbara B. Brown and Douglas D. Perkins, "Disruptions in Place Attachment," in *Place Attachment*, ed. Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (New York: Plenum Press, 1992), 280; David Glassberg, "Public History and the Study of Memory," *The Public Historian* 18, no. 2 (1996): 18.

[134] Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Read, *Returning to Nothing*, 31.

[135] Bruno Torfs, Interviewed 27th July 2016; Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016.

Meanwhile, other migrants like Wytze demonstrated a physical and artistic connection to the local environment. Wytze made flat roofing tiles in Holland in handmade moulds and bought ready made mixed clays 'a dollar a kilo from the shop'. Whereas in Australia he became 'quite organic' and started 'using local clay' that he and his wife collected.[136] Their pottery styles changed and began to reflect the aesthetics of the Australian environment. Jenneke took mugs and vases off shelves and out of cupboards in her kitchen during our interview to illustrate the combined Dutch and Australian influences. Their early pieces had 'tulips on it, that's very Dutch' and they used lots of colour—particularly blue—and created 'simplish designs'. Their designs evolved to be both Dutch and 'also Australian' which was evident through the 'terracotta colour, the earthy colour'. The clay came from 'down the road' and her parents would purposely leave a lip of the clay exposed and unglazed at the bottom of the vessel 'because they loved the terracotta colour so much'.[137] In Australia, the raw material, their designs, and their use of colour changed to reflect their new home and local environment.[138] Jenneke felt 'their designs are quite a fusion of the both. You can definitely see Dutch influence in it but it is also [Australian]'.[139] The changing pottery style indicated a growing sense of appreciation for the local environment and sense of attachment and connection in regional Victoria.

Another way migrants connected with their new homes was through people and the community. A sense of place can be developed through emotive bonds and connections between people and environments,[140] or encouraged through experiences and memories shared with others which facilitate the formation of communities.[141] Communities can contribute to a sense of home and belonging, provide a sense of recognition and a confidence that people could be relied upon for help, and help enable

[136] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[137] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[138] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[139] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[140] Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, 208; David M. Hummon, "Community Attachment," in *Place Attachment*, ed. Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (Boston, MA: Springer US, 1992), 253.

[141] Crang, *Cultural Geography*, 103; Julie Roberts and Martin Young, "Transience, Memory and Induced Amnesia: The Re-Imagining of Darwin," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 53.

people to learn life within new countries by creating new social circles.[142] Wytze and Jenneke reflected on their early encounters with the local community and how participating in local groups helped facilitate a sense of connection. Jenneke found 'spending time with people around us who were either Australian or migrants' helped her feel connected with others.[143] Wytze said his family 'participated in everything' and therefore 'integrated into the community'.[144] He said 'when you have children growing up it's easy' because 'we were dragged into everything' from the fire brigade to the school council.[145] Jenneke commented that her Dad 'is very passionate, he becomes very passionate about things' and so has worked and volunteered for many projects including as a 'volunteer ambulance man'.[146] At the time of our interview he had just finished helping with the local olive harvest and had recently finished building his boat after fifteen years.[147]

Wytze commented that he was initially concerned whether their potting business would thrive 'in a rural community; they are farmers, they don't spend money on that kind of stuff, why would they?'. But 'I was so wrong. The farmers didn't come, but their wives came', and so did sporting clubs who wanted trophies. His pottery workshop provided a unique way for Wytze to connect with others and create friendships with people who would drop by to watch him work, or for a coffee and a chat. He once returned from a lunchbreak to find someone 'behind the counter playing shopkeeper' for another customer in his absence; another time he found a note explaining someone had no present for a wedding so they left money on the counter for one of Wytze's plates. These were some of Wytze's examples that explained why

[142] Maria Holt, "Keeping the Memory Alive: Palestinian Women in Lebanon Narrate Home, Homeland and Homelessness," in *Imagining Home: Migrants and the Search for a New Beginning*, ed. Diana Glenn, Eric Bouvet, and Sonia Floriani (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2011), 48; Hage, "At Home," 103; Amy Bhatt and Nalini Iyer, *Roots and Reflections: South Asians in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 173; Robert C. Bolin and Patricia A. Bolton, *Race, Religion, and Ethnicity in Disaster Recovery* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1986), 17.

[143] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[144] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[147] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

'country living, it's worth a million dollars'.[148]

Another important way that some migrants connected with their local community was through the local CFA (Country Fire Authority). The CFA emerged from the first volunteer fire brigades of the mid to late 1800s, and the Country Fire Brigades and the Bush Fire Brigades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was formed in 1945 and has been an important volunteer and community fire and emergency services organisation within Victoria.[149] It featured as part of Ian, Wytze and Jenneke's early settlement memories. Ian heard about the CFA while he and his wife were still moving to the area. It was not long before Ian witnessed bushfires in the area and promptly signed up. Wytze joined the 'fire brigade really early on', which was a 'big thing' for his whole family, because they would go to the 'fire shed and hang out there'. They 'knew all those people very well'.[150] The CFA provided a way for some newcomers to become aware of bushfires and simultaneously offered a way for people to connect with and participate in community. Wytze's family returned from a visit to Holland one year and went to the CFA end of year BBQ located amongst 'weeping willows and poplars and green grass and black and white cattle'.[151] Wytze asked his youngest daughter 'how can you tell that you are not in Holland?'. She did not mention the cattle or trees but replied there was 'no accent'. The Australian accent was already 'the norm. She heard all these people talk and she said these are my people'. Wytze felt it was 'really quick' for them to feel connected here and call this place home. When people asked, 'are you going back home' he would correct them: 'no, home is here'.[152]

## Conclusion

Migrants' pre-migration, migration and settlement memories provide valuable insights into their experiences, which enable a greater understanding of their later encounters

[148] Ibid.

[149] Robert Murray and Kate White, *State of Fire: A History of Volunteer Firefighting and the Country Fire Authority in Victoria* (North Melbourne: Hargreen Publishing Company, 1995); Country Fire Authority, "History Timeline," accessed 13th January 2019, https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about/history-timeline.

[150] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[151] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[152] Ibid.

with bushfire and flood. This chapter introduced the people whose experiences and memories are the focus of this thesis by illuminating their background and memories of life prior to migration. This ultimately informed their decision to migrate and shaped their early experience of settlement in Australia. Migrants' memories revealed a desire for home and space that led to their settlement in regional Australia and the early creation of connections to community and place. Early settlement was not without its challenges, as attested to by the memories of Maitland migrants, but it was a significant period that facilitated the creation of new networks and a new life in Australia.[153] The themes of home, place, community and environment prevalent throughout these early memories are important because they persisted throughout migrants' life history interviews about their experience of migration and natural disaster. The life history approach to oral history interviews provided an insight into migrants' lives before migration and before their experience of Australian natural disasters. The following chapter will examine migrants' early awareness of natural disasters and how they learnt about the risk of bushfire and flood within their new homes.

[153] Alistair Thomson, "Moving Stories: Oral History and Migration Studies," *Oral History* 27, no. 1 (1999): 24.

# Chapter 2

# 'I Didn't Know':

# Local History, Disaster Amnesia and New Arrivals

When Ingrid arrived with her family in Newcastle on 19 August 1949 she travelled via train to the Greta Migrant Camp. Ingrid remembered looking out from the 'red rattler' carriages at the Australian landscape for the first time and noticing the brown grass and the gum trees. Everything 'was all so different'.[1] She remembered seeing 'telephone [poles] sticking out of the water' and noticing there 'was water everywhere, I remember all the water and everything was grey, it was raining, it was yucky, there was no sun shining'.[2] She recalled 'taking it all in, but [had] no idea that we were going through a flood', 'we just thought oh swamps maybe […] you don't know'.[3] Ingrid had 'never seen a flood' before arriving in Maitland, and partly because the Australian environment was so different to Europe, she was unaware they were passing through flood waters.

Ingrid and her parents lived at Greta camp for two years and were isolated from the local community and any knowledge about the history and continuing presence of floods within the Maitland area. When they left Greta camp her family had been able to save enough money for a deposit on a house in central Maitland. Ingrid was 'so excited' when her parents told her they had 'the keys to our house, now our home'. She still remembered the first time she saw their house. They took the bus into Maitland and 'came around the corner there, behind the town hall […] and we only got as far as the convent and here was our house in about six feet of water. That was our first look at the house'.[4]

As newcomers, Ingrid's family were like other migrants who were unaware of the history and continuing threat of natural disasters in regions where they settled. Even Ingrid's initial encounter with floods on arrival in 1949 did not prepare her family for

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[1] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

[2] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

[3] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015; Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[4] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

finding their new house flooded two years later. This 'not knowing' is the focus for this chapter which examines the extent to which migrants were aware of floods and bushfires prior to settlement in new homes in Australia, and how they learnt about the risk of natural disasters. New arrivals unfamiliar with Australia's continuing history of bushfire and floods have often been unaware of the risk when moving into locations likely to be effected by these events. As Tom Griffiths has argued, while history carefully examined certainly reminds us that nature can overwhelm culture, declaring events 'unnatural' or 'unprecedented' is often 'the beginning of our forgetting'.[5] This chapter argues that histories of bushfire and flood in each location reveal patterns of remembering and forgetting that illuminate a broader culture of memory often associated with natural disasters in Australia.[6] Oral history interviews highlight migrant participation in this history, but also their sometimes differential negotiation of this new culture of memory. I argue that in certain cases this understanding may challenge concepts of 'vulnerability' and 'resilience' employed by disaster scholars seeking to understand and characterise migrant responses to natural disasters.

This chapter provides a brief background history of the case study locations in order to begin to understand the extent to which it would have been possible for migrants to become aware of natural disasters. It then explores the broader 'memories' within these environments by examining the construction of local histories and noting their focus on pioneer narratives that privilege successful adaptation to environment. It then turns to consider what is less often celebrated in local records, but what is also available in historical archives—histories of natural disaster stretching back to early settlement.[7] This provides a framework for considering migrant familiarity with stories

[5] Christine Hansen and Tom Griffiths, *Living with Fire: People, Nature and History in Steels Creek* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2012); Tom Griffiths, "We Have Still Not Lived Long Enough," *Inside Story*, 16th February 2009, Inside Story, http://inside.org.au/we-have-still-not-lived-long-enough/.

[6] On patterns of 'remembering and forgetting' in Australian history see, for example: Chris Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008).

[7] The focus is on sudden onset natural disasters, particularly bushfire and flood, rather than 'slow catastrophes' such as drought. See Rebecca Jones, *Slow Catastrophes: Living with Drought in Australia* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2017).

of bushfire and flood, which are examined through the oral history interviews conducted with migrants in Maitland and Victorian bushfire regions. I argue that while early connections to the local environment and community (explored in Chapter One) can influence migrant awareness and preparation for natural disasters, migrants are affected by broader cultural patterns of forgetting. Finally, I note that listening to individual memories and experiences recounted in oral history interviews provides a way to evaluate the extent to which migrants are 'vulnerable' and/or 'resilient' to bushfires and floods, thus informing key concepts employed in disaster studies analysis.

## Colonial Settlement

Maitland is located on the Hunter River, inland and west of Newcastle NSW. Originally called West Maitland, Maitland was the areas' oldest settlement and commercial centre.[8] The Hunter River inlet was first encountered by Europeans after an incident involving escaped convicts near Port Stephens, north of Newcastle.[9] Both Lieutenant John Shortland's party in 1797 and that of Lieutenant Colonel Williams Paterson in 1801 found evidence of flood damage, but reports of the discovery of coal encouraged further exploration, migration and settlement in this area despite the 'next to impenetrable' environment of thick dense vegetation and cedar trees.[10] Exploration along the Hunter River in search of coal and cedar led to the establishment of a penal

[8] H. W. H. King and E. R. Woolmington, "The Role of the River in the Development of Settlement in the Lower Hunter Valley," *Australian Geographer* 8, no. 1 (1960): 11; W. H. Maze, "Land Utilization in the Lower Hunter Valley, New South Wales, Australia," *Australian Geographer* 2, no. 3 (1934): 43.

[9] John Turner, *A Pictorial History of Newcastle* (Crows Nest: Kingsclear Books, 1997), 4; Maitland Centenary Historical Committee, *Maitland: 1863-1963: Produced for the Council of the City of Maitland* (Sydney: Oswald Ziegler Publications, 1963), 9; Maitland and District Historical Society, *A History of Maitland* (Maitland: The Council of the City of Maitland, 1983), 7; Annette Rees, "Wollombi: A Unique and Interesting History," in *The Way of the River: Environmental Perspectives on the Wollombi*, ed. Denis Mahony and Joe Whitehead (Newcastle: University of Newcastle, 1994), 35.

[10] Dulcie Hartley, *Men of Their Time: Pioneers of the Hunter River* (North Arm Cove NSW: Aquila Agribusiness, 1995), 114; Maitland City Council Heritage Group, *Hay Barns and Dairy Buildings of Maitland* (Maitland: Maitland City Council, 2002), 1; Maitland Centenary Historical Committee, *Maitland*, 9; Rees, "Wollombi," 35.

settlement in Newcastle in 1804.[11] Subsidiary settlements sprang up along the Hunter at Paterson's Plains (now Morpeth) and 'The Camp' later known as Wallis Plains and then West Maitland.[12] Agricultural settlements developed along the alluvial flats; these provided agricultural produce for Newcastle and lessened its dependence on imports from Sydney.[13] A few 'good conduct' convicts were given land rights near the confluence of the Hunter River and Williams, Paterson's and Wallis Creeks, but gradually the area was opened to free settlement, particularly through the 1823 land grants around The Camp and Paterson's Plains.[14]

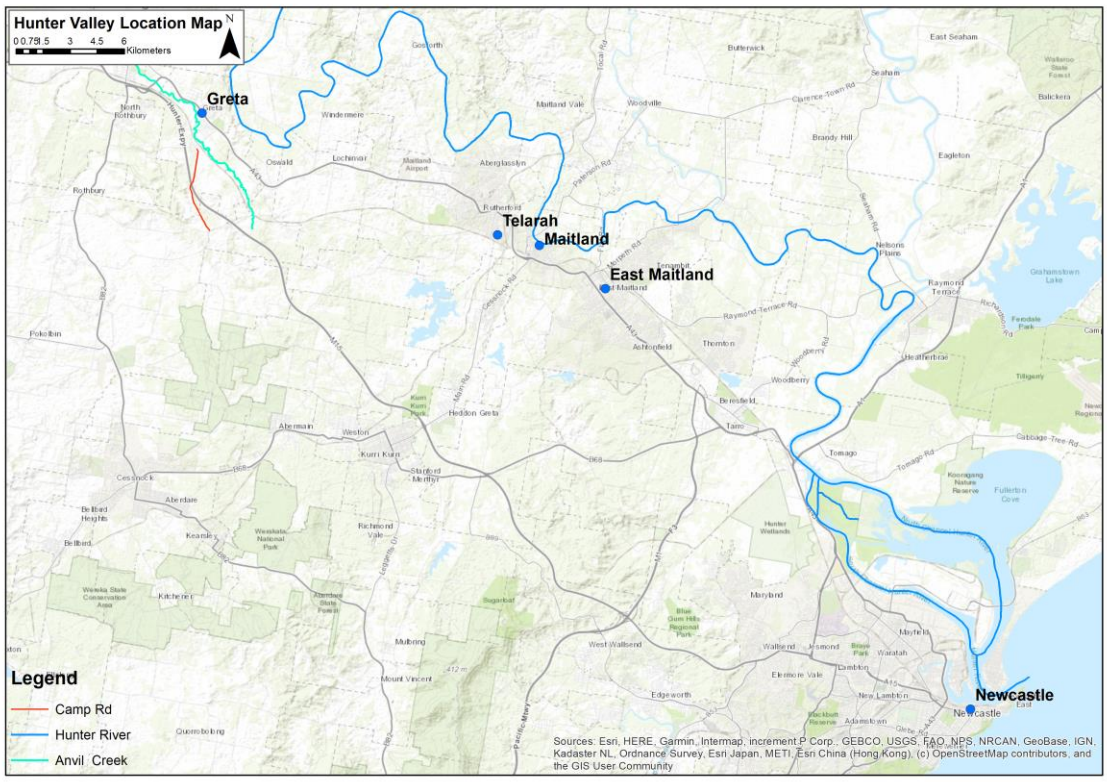


**Figure 4:** Hunter Valley Location Map showing the location of Maitland as well as other nearby towns of East Maitland, Telarah and Greta. The Greta Migrant Camp was located near Anvil Creek. The Hunter River flows alongside Maitland.
Source: Created by Michael Evans, December 2019.

[11] King and Woolmington, "The Role of the River," 4,6.

[12] Hartley, *Men of Their Time*, 1; King and Woolmington, "The Role of the River," 7; Rees, "Wollombi," 35; Chas Keys, *Maitland, City on the Hunter: Fighting Floods or Living with Them* (Paterson: Hunter-Centre River Catchment Management Authority, 2008), 8; Turner, *A Pictorial History of Newcastle*, 9.

[13] King and Woolmington, "The Role of the River," 7.

[14] Ibid.

The 1820s onwards saw rapid development as Maitland overtook Newcastle in both population size and strategic importance. Scholars have suggested the continued presence of convict miners in Newcastle discouraged free settlement.[15] Newcastle entered a period of decline in 1823 and failed to develop as a regional capital. It remained a mining town and a minor port of call between Sydney and Morpeth or Maitland until the arrival of the railway in 1857.[16] Although Newcastle had a useful harbour it was separated from the best agricultural lands by the Hexham swamps and the only land link with Maitland was often impassable.[17] Meanwhile Maitland and other river-based free settlements developed and prospered on the fertile agricultural land along the Hunter, which also supplied a system of communication and transport.[18] Maitland was the last port where larger ships could stop before the Hunter became too shallow.[19] The river was essential to Maitland's establishment and development and contributed to the area's wealth.

Thomas Mitchell led a survey of West Maitland as a possible town site in the late 1820s but objected to suggestions of settlement due to flood dangers.[20] Morpeth was regarded as a more logical choice for a depot because the land was higher and the river became more convoluted towards Maitland. But E.C. Close was unwilling to part with his 1821 Morpeth land grant or negotiate a lower price with the colonial government so they decided on a site at flood-free East Maitland. The negotiation and delay in surveying until 1829 meant it was 1830 before East Maitland was open to businessmen and merchants.[21] East Maitland was a higher site beyond the reach of flood waters and was seen as a more desirable place for settlement. But in the interim Maitland continued to grow organically and develop beyond Morpeth and East

[15] Ibid., 14.

[16] Ibid., 10, 14.

[17] Ibid., 11, 14; John Turner, *The Rise of High Street, Maitland: A Pictorial History* (Maitland: The Council of the City of Maitland, The Maitland Bicentennial Community Committee and The Maitland Mercury, 1988), 7.

[18] King and Woolmington, "The Role of the River," 15.

[19] Ibid., 11.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Turner, *The Rise of High Street*, 8.

Maitland. Despite the tendency to flood, the convenient location by the Hunter River was preferred by the populace.[22]

The 'people's town' of Maitland thrived ahead of the 'government town' of East Maitland or the 'little fancy town' of Morpeth. Maitland was unplanned and grew according to the desires of the residents, whereas East Maitland was an artificial development encouraged by the government. Little land was settled in East Maitland, partly because of the lack of water supply but mainly because West Maitland remained the centre for river communication.[23] In 1850 there were 652 houses in West Maitland compared with East Maitland's 190.[24] The Hunter River and the presence of floods shaped the development of Maitland but this history is often ignored in favour of local histories focusing on the development of the town and its alleged triumph over nature. Nevertheless, Maitland's history is one of tension between the environmental benefits provided by the Hunter River and by floods and the corresponding damage, destruction and pain caused to local communities.[25] The challenge would continue throughout the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

* * * * *

The forests to the north and east of Melbourne are bounded by rivers and extend eastwards from Mount Disappointment towards the Thomson River. Tom Griffiths termed them the Ash Ranges or 'forests of ash'.[26] The alpine ash, shining gum, and the manna gum flourish in this country, along with the 'cathedral-like pillars of Australia's giant eucalypt—the Mountain Ash'.[27] The Black Thursday fires of 6 February 1851 burnt over five million hectares throughout Victoria and arguably opened forests and

[22] King and Woolmington, "The Role of the River," 11; Hartley, *Men of Their Time*, 12.

[23] King and Woolmington, "The Role of the River," 11.

[24] The Lions Club of Maitland, *Maitland: Hub of the Hunter: Historical Homes and Buildings* (Maitland: Lions Club of Maitland, 1973).

[25] Keys, *Maitland*, 5.

[26] Tom Griffiths, *Forests of Ash: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13; Tom Griffiths, *Secrets of the Forest: Discovering History in Melbourne's Ash Range* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992).

[27] Griffiths, *Forests of Ash*, 13, 14.

encouraged the discovery of gold and the creation of new settlements.[28] Gold initially drew people into the forests and saw the growth of small towns and camps along the tracks heading to the gold fields. The Yarra Track opened in 1862 before John Steavenson altered the route in 1863 to run through what became Healesville in 1864 and to cross the river downstream of Paradise Plains.[29] While overseeing road construction, Steavenson made his headquarters at 'The Camp' and renamed it Marysville in 1863 after his wife Mary Martha Murphy.[30] Paradise Plains was abandoned in favour of Marysville in 1864; Marysville served as a stopping point and place of replenishment for those travelling to the goldfields, and as a tourist destination during the 1880s boom.[31] Marysville was one of many villages that grew from the movement of people along the Yarra Track and was sustained by timber and tourism.

These forests were also attractive to early pastoral settlers and the timber industry. Whittlesea settlement began in the Plenty District from 1837.[32] The desired land came with 'uncertainties of whether the nomadic Aboriginals were to be trusted' and the threat of bushfire,[33] but the goldrushes demanded pastoral and agricultural produce so the lush country rejuvenating from bushfires attracted more settlers.[34] Sawmills were established south of Kinglake forests in the 1850s and mining began to

[28] Stephen J. Pyne, *Burning Bush: A Fire History of Australia* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991), 224, 279-280; Griffiths, *Secrets of the Forest*, 25; Griffiths, *Forests of Ash*, 64; Paul Collins, *Burn: The Epic Story of Bushfire in Australia* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2009); Danielle Clode, *A Future in Flames* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press; State Library of Victoria, 2010).

[29] Ann Thomas, *The Last of the Yarra Track Stopping Places* (Reservoir: New Lithographics, 1980), 15; Griffiths, *Secrets of the Forest*, 27.

[30] Kornelia Freeman and Ulo Pukk, *The Yarra Valley and Surrounds* (Melbourne: Melbourne Books, 2012), 78.

[31] Thomas, *Yarra Track Stopping Places*, 21; Sally Symonds, *Healesville: History in the Hills* (Lilydale: Pioneer Design Studio, 1982), 61, 63; Freeman and Pukk, *The Yarra Valley*, 10.

[32] Ethel Mary Duffy, *Reminiscences of Whittlesea* (Kilmore: Lowden Publishing, 1971); J. W. Payne, *The Plenty: A Centenary History of the Whittlesea Shire* (Kilmore: Lowden Publishing, 1975).

[33] Payne, *The Plenty*, 7.

[34] Michael Jones, *Nature's Plenty: A History of the City of Whittlesea* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 34; Whittlesea Agricultural Society, *The Whittlesea District: Whittlesea Agricultural Society Publication* (Whittlesea: Whittlesea Agricultural Society, 1949), 3; Payne, *The Plenty*.

be replaced by the timber industry.[35] Early work on the reservoirs north of Melbourne, including the Yan Yean from 1851, created local employment opportunities and simultaneously contributed to the eventual collapse of the timber industry as land was reserved for water supply purposes during the 1870s.[36] Eventually greater government control over the forests meant the primary industries around Whittlesea and Kinglake shifted towards dairying and agriculture.[37] The Kinglake National park was established in 1928 to protect portions of the Great Dividing Range and for recreational enjoyment.[38]

Upper West Maffra and Valencia Creek sit beneath the adjoining Ash Ranges and foothills of the Great Dividing Range. Drought, overstocked land and changes to squatting legislation in New South Wales drew people away from the coastline in the 1830s and encouraged exploration south into Gippsland.[39] Squatters entered the region by heading south from the Monaro district through Omeo or via coastal settlements near Genoa.[40] Angus McMillan, an overseer for Lachlan Macalister, travelled south from Omeo to discover 'new land' in 1839.[41] McMillian's party reached Lake Wellington and followed the Avon River north towards the mountains and the plains that would become his home.[42] Other parties including those of Paul Strzelecki and Baron Ferdinand von Mueller were beginning to explore Gippsland so the Macalister party were quick to occupy prime agricultural country. McMillan chose 60,000 acres west of the Avon River called Boisdale for Macalister and a nearby 16,000 acres east of

[35] Griffiths, *Forests of Ash*, 77; Freeman and Pukk, *The Yarra Valley*.

[36] Duffy, *Reminiscences of Whittlesea*, 3-5; Griffiths, *Forests of Ash*, 91-95.

[37] Payne, *The Plenty*.

[38] Collins, *Burn*, 51; Griffiths, *Secrets of the Forest*, 83.

[39] Meredith Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps: A History of the Shire of Avon* (Stratford: Shire of Avon, 1988), 9; John Wells, *Gippsland: People, a Place and Their Past* (Drouin: Landmark Press, 1986), 4; P.D. Gardner, *Gippsland Massacres: The Destruction of the Kurnai Tribes 1800-1860* (Warragul: Warrigal Education Centre, 1983), 12, 41.

[40] Gardner, *Gippsland Massacres*, 12, 41; Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps*, 11, 13.

[41] Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps*, 9; Wells, *Gippsland*, 18.

[42] Don Watson, *Caledonia Australis: Scottish Highlanders on the Frontier of Australia* (Milsons Point: Random House Australia, 1997), 144; Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps*, 10.

the Avon at Bushy Park for himself.[43] These former runs now lie between Valencia Creek and Maffra, the present homes of Rachel and Hans who were interviewed for this thesis.

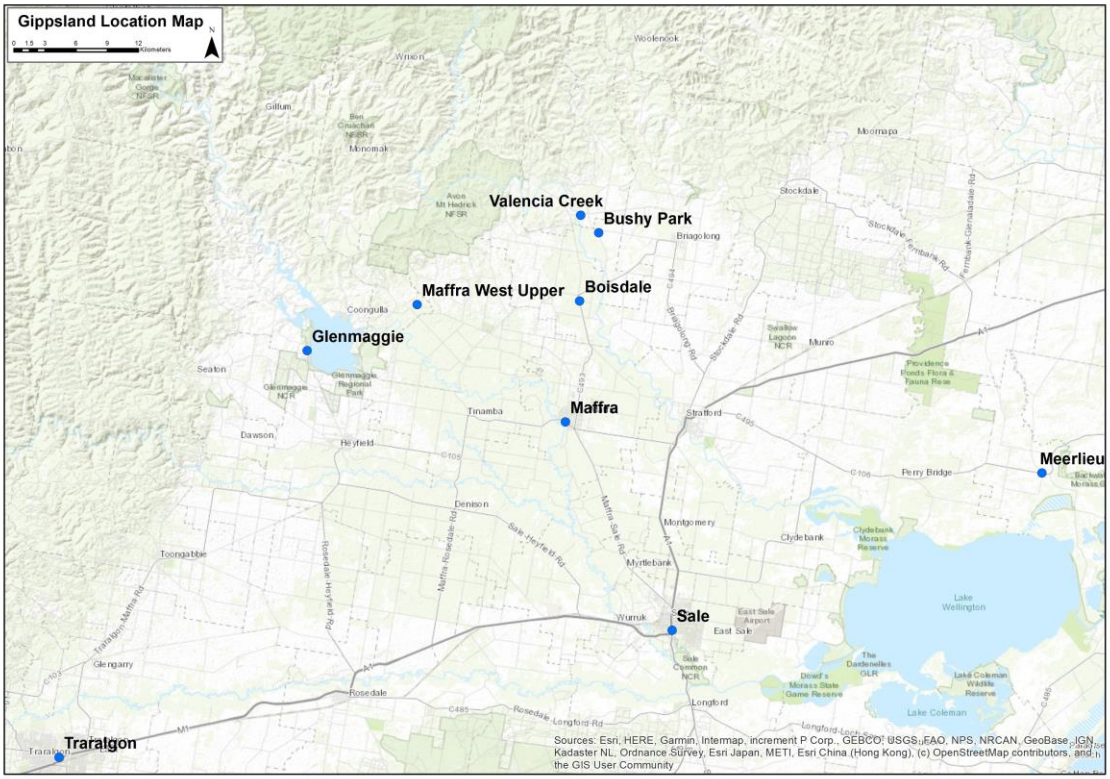


**Figure 5:** Gippsland Location Map showing of the homes of Hans and Rachel. Bushy Park and Boisdale were former runs chosen by McMillan.
Source: Created by Michael Evans, December 2019.

Grazing commenced on the red gum plains in the 1840s and gradually turned to dairying.[44] The isolation, labour shortages, oversupply of single men, and the attraction of goldfields elsewhere initially kept Gippsland's population small.[45] Further exploration

[43] Gardner, *Gippsland Massacres*, 41, 13; Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps*, 11; Erik Eklund and Julie Fenley, "Introduction: Towards a New Environmental History of Gippsland," in *Earth and Industry: Stories from Gippsland*, ed. Erik Eklund and Julie Fenley (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2015); Joanne Wills, "Seizure and Settlement: Squatting in the Shire of Maffra," in *Macalister Landscapes: History and Heritage in Maffra Shire*, ed. Richard Aitken (Bairnsdale: Kapana Press, 1994), 27.

[44] Meredith Fletcher and Florence Pearce, "Introduction: Through the Eyes of Boisdale," in *Macalister Landscapes: History and Heritage in Maffra Shire*, ed. Richard Aitken (Bairnsdale: Kapana Press, 1994), 7, 9; Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps*.

[45] Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps*, 11, 18-20; Gardner, *Gippsland Massacres*, 42.

and the local discovery of gold led to an influx of miners and new settlers from the 1860s who challenged the squatter's land monopoly.[46] Pastoralists harnessed the plains around Bushy Park and Boisdale, and dairying led to the construction of several creameries around Maffra from the 1870s and the railway in the 1880s.[47] Settlers were familiar with fires but the 1898 Red Tuesday fires were 'the greatest fires that ever ravaged Gippsland'.[48] These fires changed and accelerated settlement in Gippsland.[49] Settlers were 'deprived of the profitable timber industry' but many welcomed the fires as a pioneering tool which cleared the remaining scrub, opened the country, advanced settlement, and improved land conditions.[50] The construction of the Glenmaggie Weir by 1927 guaranteed the Macalister Irrigation District access to some of the best agricultural and pastoral land in Gippsland.[51]

## Local History and Neglected Narratives

These histories of settlement are articulated in local lore, museums and history publications, but the history of natural disasters is often kept separate. The segregation of these histories complicates the process of remembering natural disasters. Scholarship has often focused on early pioneer narratives that perpetuate heroic settler perceptions and responses to the Australian environment, including their growth in knowledge and understanding of unique environments; but less often has scholarship considered how newcomers are made aware of more difficult and challenging histories of bushfire and flood that are typically excluded from local histories. In many ways Australia's settler and migrant populations are still surprised by the advent of fire and flood and each generation seems to need to learn anew how to live with recurring natural disasters in

[46] Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps*, 21-24, 41; Eklund and Fenley, "Introduction," xxv.

[47] Wells, *Gippsland*, 78, 132-134; Florence Pearce, *The Street Where You Live: Historic Buildings of Maffra* (Bairnsdale: E-Gee Printers, 1991), 30.

[48] Charles Daley, *The Story of Gippsland* (Melbourne: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1960), 137; Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 241; Wells, *Gippsland*; Collins, *Burn*.

[49] Collins, *Burn*; Daley, *The Story of Gippsland*; Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 243; Griffiths, *Forests of Ash*.

[50] Griffiths, *Forests of Ash*, 37; Daley, *The Story of Gippsland*, 137; Collins, *Burn*, 83; Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 243.

[51] Wells, *Gippsland*, 249-250.

the Australian environment. Australia's patterns of remembering and forgetting histories of natural disasters influence migrant knowledge and perception of natural hazards; the difficulty of negotiating and incorporating disaster memory and history within larger histories and cultures of memory is demonstrated through local history.

Graeme Davision has argued that local history 'links our aspirations for community to a sense of place, our fragile present to a seemingly more stable past'.[52] Local history examines how towns were established and developed in an effort to know one's 'place' and 'uncover its hidden stories' and distinctive character.[53] It explores connections between place and community, offers 'a genealogy of place', and has often been driven by a sense of (historical) identity and belonging.[54] Studies traditionally mimic socially and physically constructed borders, such as parishes or administrative and governing boundaries, and encompass the study of community, family, urban, and landscape histories.[55] As local history has been written by professional and amateur historians alike, its histories are refashioned by each generation to address different social, psychological and political needs.[56] Local history has evolved to reflect changing attitudes towards history and locality, and new local history particularly from the 1990s onwards has been influenced by questions of national belonging.[57] Davison has argued there are five broad styles in the development of local history: pioneer history, patriarchal history, professional history, preservationist history, and community history.[58]

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[52] Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 197.

[53] John Beckett, *Writing Local History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 2; Frank Bongiorno and Erik Eklund, "The Problem of Belonging: Contested Country in Australian Local History," *New Scholar: An International Journal of the Humanities, Creative Arts and Social Sciences* 3, no. 4 (2014): 39-40.

[54] Bongiorno and Eklund, "The Problem of Belonging," 40; Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 291, 222-223.

[55] Beckett, *Writing Local History*, 2.

[56] Ibid.; Davison, *The Use and Abuse*, 197, 198.

[57] Davison, *The Use and Abuse*, 198; Bongiorno and Eklund, "The Problem of Belonging."; Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 291.

[58] Davison, *The Use and Abuse*, 199.

Many works written about Maitland and key places in Victoria strive to explain the origins and consequent development of these towns through a narrative of progress and development. Such local histories have similarities with Davison's pioneer and patriarchal history styles. Pioneer history 'is a triumphant history, of territory gained, settled and subdued. Its endless lists of firsts' provide a genealogy of communities establishing legitimacy in newly settled land.[59] The authors could be pioneers themselves chronicling and reflecting upon their past and the history of new settlements.[60] Late nineteenth-century nostalgia for the 'heroic feats of the pioneering days' likely also influenced such narratives.[61] The patriarchal histories of the early twentieth century strove to record early pioneer histories and pass on lessons to new and future generations. Davison has argued that pioneer history focused on origins, while patriarchal history was about generations.[62] Local history offered a way to bolster the identity and self-esteem of communities during the interwar years and periods of population drift towards the cities.[63] It provided a measure of settler progress through the articulation of settlement narratives and an outline of civic progress and development.[64] Related historiography developed in the 1950s and 1960s in conjunction with shifts within social and urban history and its embrace and further theorisation by professional historians.[65] It grew in the 1970s and in the 1990s increasingly engaged with questions of place and national belonging.[66] It was within this context that the 'genealogies' of Maitland and the Ash Ranges were constructed.

The majority of Maitland local histories chart the establishment of West Maitland and its development throughout the nineteenth-century in comparison with

[59] Ibid., 200.

[60] Ibid., 199-200.

[61] Andrew Gorman-Murray, Kate Darian-Smith, and Chris Gibson, "Scaling the Rural: Reflections on Rural Cultural Studies," *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 45 (2008): 38.

[62] Davison, *The Use and Abuse*, 202.

[63] Ibid., 204.

[64] Ibid., 205; Bongiorno and Eklund, "The Problem of Belonging," 41.

[65] Beckett, *Writing Local History*, 5.

[66] Davison, *The Use and Abuse*, 197, 205-220; Bongiorno and Eklund, "The Problem of Belonging."

other local townships.[67] They focus on the physical development of the town and trace the erection of post offices, churches, banks, homes, and infrastructure.[68] These 'firsts' in the town are chronicled to indicate the establishment, growth, and relative importance of towns within the Hunter Valley, particularly Maitland. Local history's common focus on trade and industry reveals connections between towns and other regional centres, which demonstrate its valuable contribution to political, national, and economic histories.[69] This focus was present within Maitland's local histories, through discussions of the Hunter River, which was crucial in terms of its provision of communication, trade and transport beyond Maitland, and its encouragement of agricultural and industrial development.

John Beckett and other scholars have argued that the landscape can be read and analysed as text that provides a way to study local places through humanity's marks on the landscape in addition to streetscapes.[70] This approach is demonstrated within Maitland histories that 'read' the remaining hay barns and dairy buildings around Maitland to chart the establishment, growth, and decline of the dairy industry, and in Wilton and Eisenberg's examination of the cemetery and Synagogue that explores Maitland's Jewish history.[71] The urban development and history of the town is examined but the community and its residents are largely neglected with the exception of founding families and other key identities. The Hunter River was a significant force behind Maitland's establishment and development, yet it is typically only mentioned throughout local history accounts as a way to explain Maitland's origins and overall progress and development. Rarely are the significant floods throughout Maitland's history (discussed below) mentioned as factors that influenced the towns' history.

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[67] Maitland Centenary Historical Committee, *Maitland*; Maitland and District Historical Society, *A History of Maitland*; Maitland City Council Heritage Group, *Hay Barns*; The Lions Club of Maitland, *Maitland*.

[68] Maitland City Council Heritage Group, *Hay Barns*; The Lions Club of Maitland, *Maitland*; Duffy, *Reminiscences of Whittlesea*.

[69] Beckett, *Writing Local History*, 123.

[70] Ibid., 3, 139.

[71] Maitland City Council Heritage Group, *Hay Barns*; Janis Wilton, *Maitland Jewish Cemetery: A Monument to Dreams and Deeds* (Maitland: Maitland Regional Art Gallery, 2010).

Local histories of Victorian towns are similarly constructed around narratives of progress and development and the successful harnessing of and adaption to the environment.[72] Local histories of Kinglake, Whittlesea and Marysville echo the conventions of pioneer and patriarchal histories. Ethel Mary Duffy's *Reminiscences of Whittlesea* presents a history of Whittlesea—and her own family—by charting the many firsts of the town and commenting on the changes to the timber industry and the consequent rise and fall of the population.[73] Charles Daley's Gippsland history also preserved pioneering histories through a narrative of progress and development throughout townships including Maffra and the surrounding area.[74] Pastoral, agricultural and industrial developments, and the exploitation of natural resources, are common themes throughout these establishment narratives. The timber industry and the shift to agriculture was a pivotal part of Whittlesea and Kinglake's early history.[75] The discovery of gold and consequent pioneer exploration and settlement was a formative part of Marysville's origin story.[76] Gold also encouraged settlement in Gippsland but it has been overshadowed by histories highlighting pastoral, agricultural and industrial progress throughout Gippsland and within the Maffra and Macalister Irrigation district.[77] The arrival of the railway was also highlighted as a sign of positive progress and increased trade and transport opportunities.[78]

Local histories acknowledge the importance of the environment by recognising

[72] Duffy, *Reminiscences of Whittlesea*; Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps*; Freeman and Pukk, *The Yarra Valley*; Jones, *Nature's Plenty*; Payne, *The Plenty*; J. W. Payne, *The English Church at Whittlesea: A History of Anglican Services at Whittlesea, Victoria 1848-1982* (Whittlesea: Christ Church Anglican Church, 1982); Pearce, *The Street Where You Live*; Symonds, *Healesville*; Thomas, *Yarra Track Stopping Places*; John Wells, *Gippsland: People, a Place and Their Past* (Drouin: Landmark Press, 1977); Whittlesea Agricultural Society, *The Whittlesea District*.

[73] Duffy, *Reminiscences of Whittlesea.*

[74] Daley, *The Story of Gippsland.*

[75] Payne, *The Plenty*; Jones, *Nature's Plenty*; Whittlesea Agricultural Society, *The Whittlesea District*; Duffy, *Reminiscences of Whittlesea*; Payne, *The English Church at Whittlesea.*

[76] Freeman and Pukk, *The Yarra Valley*, 78.

[77] Daley, *The Story of Gippsland*; Wells, *Gippsland*; Griffiths, *Forests of Ash*; Doris Kemp, *Maffra: The History of the Shire to 1975* (Bairnsdale: James Yeates & Sons, 1975); Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps*.

[78] Daley, *The Story of Gippsland*; Wells, *Gippsland*; Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps*, 58.

the natural resources that enabled the establishment and development of towns and their primary industries; but there is limited discussion or acknowledgement of the role of bushfires within these locations. Bushfires, and their influence on the environment and its resources, are typically presented as an annoyance or destructive disruption to young settlements and their developing industries.[79] Although 1960s developments in local history encouraged the landscape to be 'read'—as occurred in Maitland—the emphasis was on cultural heritage as evidence of human history and occupation, while other layers in the landscape—such as wider environmental change and indeed the role of bushfires—were often overlooked.[80] In more recent local histories, even less attention has been paid to environmental contributions to early settlement as towns are recast as historic and tourist destinations. As Davison has argued, while 'pioneer history sought to conserve old-time values; preservationist history seeks to conserve old things' through a 'love affair with its physical fabric'.[81] Heritage as a movement for 'preservation, [and] restoration', in combination with an emphasis on the 'historic' characteristics of a town, creates a 'new and glossier kind of local history […] grounded less in a sense of community pride than in an appreciation of the picturesque', which is then placed 'on the menu of tourist destinations'.[82] Kinglake and Marysville's history has been incorporated into tourism narratives and rural images of 'cultivated rusticity'.[83]

Local histories written by and for locals express the relationship between people, place, their history, their sense of identity and belonging, and their ownership and commitment to local pasts.[84] Expressions of belonging, place, and identity constructed through local history narratives influence consequent relationships with the

[79] Daley, *The Story of Gippsland*.

[80] Beckett, *Writing Local History*; Jane Lennon, "Uncovering Gippsland History through Reading Evidence in the Landscape," in *Earth and Industry: Stories from Gippsland*, ed. Erik Eklund and Julie Fenley (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2015).

[81] Davison, *The Use and Abuse*, 212.

[82] Ibid., 212-213.

[83] Freeman and Pukk, *The Yarra Valley*; Gorman-Murray, Darian-Smith, and Gibson, "Scaling the Rural," 45.

[84] Bongiorno and Eklund, "The Problem of Belonging," 40-42, 44; Gorman-Murray, Darian-Smith, and Gibson, "Scaling the Rural," 45.

environment and perceptions of bushfire and flood. Environmental considerations have largely been separated from local histories, or are only present as part of narratives of progress and development, which cast the environment as a natural resource harnessed to support pioneer settlements. The separation of environmental histories of bushfire and flood from local histories influences the construction of local history narratives and a community sense of identity. It also shapes how bushfires and floods are remembered or forgotten and what impact they have on the town's past, present and future. Historical geographer Jane Lennon argued that scant attention has been paid to physical environmental change likely caused by bushfires and floods 'possibly because the early settlers accepted these hazards as part of nature and beyond their control'.[85] The environment has been a significant influence and contributor to local history but is rarely mentioned beyond an anomaly or brief interruption to the story of humanity's progress and development within the social and built environment. Yet, it was this very history of natural disasters which contributed to the viability and desirability of these locations.

Beckett has argued that local history has the potential to be a 'total history',[86] but the neglect of the environment—or its inclusion only as a resource to explain the establishment and development of a town—severely limits a fuller, deeper understanding of the history of places with a bushfire and flood-prone past. The marginalisation of environmental considerations constructs a past where the importance of bushfire and flood is forgotten in light of other narratives of progress and development, despite environmental difficulties. This suggests a sense of identity founded on overcoming nature and ignoring the capacity for nature to still overwhelm culture.[87] As local history illuminates a sense of identity, place and belonging, the narratives of progress and development paint a picture of the ultimate success of settlement regardless of environmental considerations and the often rhythmic reappearance of bushfire and floods. The neglect of environmental considerations

[85] Lennon, "Uncovering Gippsland," 15.

[86] Beckett, *Writing Local History*, 3.

[87] Hansen and Griffiths, *Living with Fire*, 161.

within local history has the capacity to shape how we remember and forget natural disasters in Australia. Writing them out of local history writes them out of our memory, our past, our present and our future.

## Remembering and Forgetting: Environmental History and Disaster Amnesia

The exclusion of environmental history and natural disasters from local history perpetuates patterns of remembering and forgetting. Natural disasters have been treated as random events and have not been incorporated into other histories. Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister have argued that in contrast to memories of war, memories of natural disasters are short lived.[88] Once the water levels recede, nature revives and survivors recover, attention to disaster subsides and the longitudinal significance of natural disasters is forgotten or ignored.[89] Emily O'Gorman has observed 'it is not unusual for people to think that the biggest floods, and droughts, are behind them and will not happen again'.[90] Similarly, Griffiths has written that 'we seem unable to carry the memory of the ferocity of nature from one event to the next. One thing that we never seem to learn from history is that nature can overwhelm culture, that some of the fires that roar out of the Australian bush are unstoppable'.[91]

Remembering natural disasters is difficult.[92] Memory often requires a site for the

[88] Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister, "Introduction," in *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies toward a Global Environmental History*, ed. Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 3.

[89] Ibid., 3, 5.

[90] Emily O'Gorman, *Flood Country: An Environmental History of the Murray-Darling Basin* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2012), x.

[91] Hansen and Griffiths, *Living with Fire*, 161.

[92] Tom Griffiths, "'An Unnatural Disaster'?: Remembering and Forgetting Bushfire," *History Australia* 6, no. 2 (2009); Griffiths, "We Have Still Not Lived Long Enough."; Tom Griffiths, "The Language of Catastrophe: Forgetting, Blaming and Bursting into Colour," *Griffith Review* 35 (2012); Tom Griffiths, "The Disturbing Logic of "Stay or Go"," *Inside Story* 2012, http://insidestory.org.au/the-disturbing-logic-of-stay-or-go/; Paula Hamilton, "Memory Remains: Ferry Disaster, Sydney 1938," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 47 (1999); Philip Seaton, "Japanese War Memories and Commemoration after the Great East Japan Earthquake," in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, ed. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

nourishment of memories beyond those passed down orally through generations.[93] Unlike the proliferation of war memorials, there are few memorials 'to keep alive the memory of great natural disasters'.[94] There are 'cultural and psychological pressures working against human adaptation' to bushfire and a 'dangerous mismatch between the cyclic nature of fire and the short-term memory of communities'.[95] In bushfire and flood-prone towns the 'material legacy of the past can never survive for long' and communities 'need to work harder than most to renew their local historical consciousness'.[96] Fire can obliterate cultural materials and the surface evidence of human occupation.[97] The cultural heritage that remains is often viewed as historic and a marker of human progress and development rather than as indication of environmental and ecological change and impact.[98]

The language we use to describe natural disasters also shapes our memory (or our forgetting) of bushfire and flood and the construction of those histories. Crisis language and military metaphors are used to describe natural disasters like bushfire and flood.[99] Destruction and tragedy are positioned as threats to national security.[100] Bushfires and floods have been reported and timestamped in local histories in ways not dissimilar from the passing mention of national wars. Griffiths has argued 'the forgetting of the recurrent power of nature is immediately and insidiously embedded in the ways we describe and respond to disaster. Our sympathy for the victims of bushfire, the surge of public financial support and the political imperative to rebuild as swiftly as possible conspire to constrain cultural adaptation'.[101] Often our heightened awareness of natural disasters is suppressed by the immediate response, process of recovery, and other

[93] Hamilton, "Memory Remains," 197.

[94] Mauch and Pfister, "Introduction," 3.

[95] Griffiths, "'An Unnatural Disaster'?," 5.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Lennon, "Uncovering Gippsland," 7-8.

[98] Ibid., 17.

[99] Hansen and Griffiths, *Living with Fire*, 163-164; Peter Stanley, *Black Saturday at Steels Creek* (Brunswick: Scribe Publications, 2013).

[100] Hansen and Griffiths, *Living with Fire*, 164.

[101] Ibid., 162.

practices of remembering and forgetting. The desire to quickly 'return to normal', recover and rebuild, shapes how we remember these moments and how they are encapsulated within our histories, stories and memories.

The social impact of natural disasters also illuminates cultures of memory surrounding disasters. Past experiences and memories, or generational and inherited local knowledge, informs how people prepare for and respond to disasters. Perceptions of risk and disaster are historically and culturally constituted.[102] The 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami illuminated the powerful role of disaster memory upon people's responses. Many residents of Jantang in Sumatra locked themselves inside when they felt the ground shake and heard explosions from the sea because the sounds reminded them of gunfights between rebels and the Indonesian army.[103] In contrast, the whole population of Langi, Simeulue, survived because the memory of the 1907 tsunami that killed 70% of the population was kept alive throughout generations.[104] Past experiences and memories, however, have had devastating consequences when treated as a benchmark. Residents who had survived Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and Hurricane Camille in 1969 saw no reason to evacuate for Hurricane Katrina, which was predicted to be less powerful.[105] Testimonies of Hurricane Sandy powerfully evoke and illuminate the influence of lived experience.[106]

Natural disaster scholarship and popular publications have subtly contributed to the culture of disaster memory. Disaster studies methodologies are typically present

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[102] Susanna M. Hoffman, "The Monster and the Mother: The Symbolism of Disaster," in *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, ed. Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002); Virginia Garcia-Acosta, "Historical Disaster Research," in *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, ed. Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002), 50.

[103] Amanda Ripley, *The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes - and Why* (London: Random House Books, 2008), 137-138.

[104] Ibid., 137.

[105] Ibid., 24-27.

[106] Elizabeth Rush, "How Hurricane Sandy Turned Regular People toward Radical Solutions: Elizabeth Rush on the Importance of Testimony in the Aftermath," Literary Hub, 2018, accessed 13 June 2018, 2018, https://lithub.com/how-hurricane-sandy-turned-regular-people-toward-radical-solutions/.

focused and lack a consideration of temporal depth.[107] This is evident throughout much disaster scholarship despite theoretical developments encouraging a distinction between slow and rapid onset disasters. Initial reactions of awe and amazement are captured and capitalised upon within popular publications that treat disasters as once off events and not inevitable environmental processes.[108] These publications typically focus on the catastrophic event with little to no consideration of local history or of the long-term impact upon communities. A historical approach to disaster acknowledges both the immediacy and long term effects of catastrophes and can provide insights into how 'society repairs/reweaves itself and moves on'.[109]

Recent historical scholarship examining environmental change, humanity's relationship with the environment, and natural disasters in Australia has demonstrated how ideas of environmental control and mitigation have shaped responses to natural disasters and the cultural memory of disasters. Historical accounts of floods have often simplified the 'human-environmental story of floods to a series of major flood events' instead of examining 'detailed biographies of floods and how they were experienced'.[110] Emily O'Gorman's *Flood Country,* for example, has noted how 'floods have been understood as both events and part of longer environmental rhythms', but it ultimately focused on evolving environmental and engineering knowledge evident through the actions undertaken to manage water and rivers and mitigate floods throughout eastern Australia.[111] The desire for environmental control and mitigation has shaped local relationships with rivers and memories of flooding. In Brisbane the 1893 floods led to a

[107] Mauch and Pfister, "Introduction," 5.

[108] See for example: Malcolm Brown, *Australia's Worst Disasters* (South Melbourne: Thomas C. Lothian, 2002); Richard Whitaker, *Australia's Natural Disasters* (Frenchs Forest: Reed New Holland, 2006); Richard Evans, *Disasters That Changed Australia* (Carlton: Victory Books, 2009); Ian Mannix, *Great Australian Bushfire Stories* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2008); Ian Mannix, *Great Australian Flood Stories* (Sydney: HapperCollins, 2012).

[109] Mauch and Pfister, "Introduction," 6.

[110] Grace Karskens, "Floods and Flood-Mindedness in Early Colonial Australia," *Environmental History* 21, no. 2 (2016): 318.

[111] O'Gorman, *Flood Country*.

'path of dependency on dams that continues today'.[112] The 1974 Brisbane flood could have questioned 'the wisdom of building on a floodplain, providing a chance to modify human behaviour', but instead led to the construction of another flood-mitigating dam that continued Brisbane's 'over-reliance on structural engineering' and the myth of flood immunity.[113] Such efforts to control and mitigate floods also 'dam' disaster memories as the populace begins to believe floods are a thing of the past.

Disaster amnesia is a problem within places with a transitory population where the built environment can act as a site of memory and embody greater significance in an effort to 'stabilise memory'.[114] While Cyclone Tracey has been 'appropriated by the nation as a seminal moment of identity formation', it has simultaneously been subject to 'willful forgetting and the slow erosion induced by a constantly changing population' in Darwin.[115] The erosion of disaster is problematic within transitory populations and has repercussions for how newcomers such as migrants are included in these spaces of memory. The erosion of disaster memories can also occur with bushfire's erasure of cultural materials and evidence of human history and occupation.[116] The 1939 Victorian fires led to an illusion of the 'pristine condition' of land 'born of ignorance of the detailed history of the place'.[117] This erosion of local environmental memories by natural disasters, in combination with the desire to control and contain the environment, contributes to a culture of amnesia surrounding natural disasters in Australia.

Disaster memories might be subject to a complicated process of selective remembering and forgetting, but the historical record demonstrates a continuing presence of flood history throughout Maitland. Floods were present throughout this

[112] Margaret Cook, "A Legacy of Brisbane's Benchmark Floods of 1893: Creating Dam Dependence," *Arcadia* 9 (2017).

[113] Margaret Cook, "The Australia Day Floods, January 1974," *Arcadia* Spring, no. 15 (2017); Margaret Cook, *A River with a City Problem: A History of Brisbane Floods* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2019).

[114] Julie Roberts and Martin Young, "Transience, Memory and Induced Amnesia: The Re-Imagining of Darwin," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 56.

[115] Ibid., 59.

[116] Lennon, "Uncovering Gippsland," 7-8.

[117] Ibid., 7.

area long before European migration and records. Aboriginal oral histories preserve the history of flooding, and flood debris was observed in 1801.[118] The 1820 flood caused severe damage to the area during the very early settlement of Maitland when the population was small.[119] The growth of Maitland and establishment of pastoral and agricultural estates led to environmental changes that altered the path of the river and caused larger, quicker and more erosive floods.[120] There were 31 floods between 1857-1875 and another twelve in the 1890s alone, but these floods receive scant mention within local history accounts.[121] Even the 'great floods'[122] preserved in community memory receive little mention beyond Chas Key's targeted flood history of Maitland, despite the fact that floods have been so significant that arguments have been raised in favour of relocating the town to a higher, less flood-prone area.[123] Instead a 'history of the eventual but not complete triumph over the many menacing aspects of flood inundation' predominates and flood history remains largely segregated from local history publications.[124]

One has to look elsewhere for records of the interaction between residents and floods.[125] In 1894, for example, the *Evening News* admired German migrants' 'steady and industrious' work 'year after year battling floods and insect pests and rendering good service in an unobtrusive way to the country of their adoption'.[126] Theodor Müller's autobiography described the difficulties of working within flood-prone areas because frequent flood destruction meant 'progress [… was] hampered'.[127] Wilton and Eisenberg

[118] Hartley, *Men of Their Time*, 114; Keys, *Maitland*, 8.

[119] Keys, *Maitland*, 8.

[120] Ibid., 9, 10; Maitland City Council Heritage Group, *Hay Barns*; Hartley, *Men of Their Time*, 10, 14, 114.

[121] Keys, *Maitland*.

[122] August 1857, June 1867, March/April 1870 and the 1893 flood, which was exacerbated by the economic depression.

[123] Keys, *Maitland*, 5, 9, 14.

[124] Ibid., 5.

[125] Historical Newspapers….

[126] "Hunter River Matters: The Wine Industry," *Evening News* 24 May 1894.

[127] Theodor Müller, *The Swiss Swagman: Theodor Müller's Nineteen Years in Australia*, ed. Maurie Garland and John Ramsland, trans. Frank Pammer (Melbourne: Brolga Publishing, 2007).

argued the Maitland Jewish community 'mirrored the rise and decline of Maitland as the key colonial centre of trade and commerce'.[128] The David Cohen and Company building was a wholesale establishment run by the Levy family who emigrated from England in the 1830s. Lewis Wolfe Levy chaired the 1857 Flood Relief Committee, gave his daughter Caroline the second name 'Flood', and lost part of the building in a landslide caused by the 1864 flood.[129]

Flooding was less frequent in the early twentieth century but records were set in 1913 and 1930.[130] There were no floods between 1934-1941; the absence of floods during years of demographic change due to the depression and the Second World War might have affected the culture of local flood memory. Five of the twelve highest floods in Maitland occurred in quick succession between 1949-1955.[131] The flood of 1949 was the worst since 1893 and 80% of the town was flooded.[132] There were floods each year until 1957 and while some rose to great heights—like in 1952—these floods were surpassed in community memory by the 1955 flood. Chas Keys has considered whether memories of previous floods were obliterated by 'the '55' or if the frequency of floods has 'meant that only the worst have survived in the community memory'.[133]

Bushfires have also been a constant presence throughout Victoria stretching back long before European settlement. Scholars have argued Indigenous fire formed the environment encountered by early colonists, such as the open plains and pastoral land in Gippsland, and the forests of the Plenty Valley.[134] The Black Thursday fires of 6

[128] Wilton, *Maitland Jewish Cemetery*, 15.

[129] Ibid., 33-36.

[130] Keys, *Maitland*, 17; Maitland and District Historical Society, *A History of Maitland*, 44.

[131] Keys, *Maitland*, 23.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., 24.

[134] Fred Cahir et al., "Winda Lingo Parugoneit or Why Set the Bush [on] Fire? Fire and Victorian Aboriginal People on the Colonial Frontier," *Australian Historical Studies* 47, no. 2 (2016); Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2011); Pauline Brightling, "Mapping Contours of Culture: Images of Ganai Life," in *Macalister Landscapes: History and Heritage in Maffra Shire*, ed. Richard Aitken (Bairnsdale: Kapana Press, 1994); Pyne, *Burning Bush*.

February 1851 have been described as the 'first of the great holocausts' to burn throughout Australia since European settlement.[135] Settlement throughout Victoria was sparse and the fire likely 'exceeded anything the colonists had experienced'.[136] It burnt around five million hectares throughout Gippsland and the Plenty Ranges near Kinglake and Whittlesea.[137] The prevalence of fire throughout Victoria is such that Stephen Pyne has argued the evidence is only limited by one's desire for search for it.[138] There were fires in 1875, 1877 and again in 1886 in many parts of Victoria.[139] Bushfires in 1898 became known as the 'Great Fires' and 'the year from which Gippsland pioneers effectively dated their lives'.[140] Red Tuesday was a 'climatic midpoint' in a long drought and occurred after years of forest destruction, 'clearing', and the accumulation of scrub and combustible litter by timbermills and 'settlers [who] transformed timber to tinder'.[141] Fires burnt from the west to north east of Melbourne throughout Mountain Ash forests and reduced Gippsland to a 'blackened waste… practically destitute of houses, fences, grass or fodder'.[142]

There were fires during the early twentieth-century, with the 1926 Black Sunday fires considered the 'worst since 1918' and expected to be 'long remembered by the people of Victoria'.[143] Thirty-one people died at Warburton on the 14 February alone.[144] Fires occurred throughout the mountain regions from Healesville to Albury (burning the Kinglake Hotel), and from Gippsland to Canberra (including near Maffra).[145] Drought primed the region for bushfires that burned separately throughout December (and as early as October in Gippsland) and ultimately climaxed on Black Friday, 13

[135] Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 221.

[136] Ibid., 222; Clode, *A Future in Flames*, 59-62; Jones, *Nature's Plenty*, 32; Payne, *The Plenty*.

[137] Clode, *A Future in Flames*; Collins, *Burn*, 68-70.

[138] Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 280.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid., 280, 240.

[141] Ibid., 240; Griffiths, *Forests of Ash*, 36-37; Daley, *The Story of Gippsland*, 137, 151.

[142] Daley, *The Story of Gippsland*, 151; Collins, *Burn*, 79.

[143] Daley, *The Story of Gippsland*, 152; Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 281.

[144] Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 281.

[145] Daley, *The Story of Gippsland*, 152; Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 270; Collins, *Burn*.

January 1939.[146] Fire burnt across 1.5 million hectares and more than 25% of the state throughout mountain regions including the Dandenongs, Healesville, Warburton, Toolangi, Alexandra, Kinglake, Warrandyte, Maffra, the LaTrobe valley and Baw Baw forests.[147] Although Australians had witnessed fires before, Pyne argued that this new 'reality exceeded prior experience; accomplished bushmen had, upon reflection, simply "not lived long enough" to understand what might, "and did", happen'.[148] Pyne further argued that 'the 1939 holocaust signified a systematic breakdown in Australian fire practices and precepts and immediately established itself as the standard for disaster, the worst-case scenario against which every subsequent fire would be measured'.[149] Until the fires, Pyne argued that 'Australian society had treated bushfires with a casualness, with an almost calculated indifference, that typified its own unsettled state', noting that 'if Australians were to reconcile themselves with their continent', 'emigrants' needed to establish a commitment to Australia.[150] These nationalistic undertones will be examined in Chapter Seven.

Judge Leonard Stretton's Black Friday Royal Commission report into the 1939 fires stated:

> Men who had lived their lives in the bush went their ways in the shadow of dread expectancy. But though they felt the imminence of danger they could not tell that it was to be far greater than they could imagine. They had not lived long enough. The experience of the past could not guide them to an understanding of what might, and did, happen.[151]

Black Friday may have been a watershed moment in Australia's history of bushfire with the potential to provide insights into Australians' relationship to their environment, but it also highlighted the already difficult task of learning from the past and the complexity of memories of disaster. It is notable that such a significant fire is rarely recorded in the

[146] Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 309-310; Daley, *The Story of Gippsland*, 152; Clode, *A Future in Flames*, 84.

[147] Daley, *The Story of Gippsland*, 152; Pyne, *Burning Bush*; Clode, *A Future in Flames*, 85; Collins, *Burn*, 53, 106.

[148] Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 309.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid., 314.

[151] Leonard Stretton, *Report of the Royal Commission to Inquire into the Causes of and Measures Taken to Prevent the Bush Fires of January, 1939* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1939).

local histories of these areas. There was only a brief mention of the 1939 Black Friday bushfires in a Maffra local history, while the outbreak of war months later overseas was heavily chronicled.[152]

And bushfires have continued. The 1940s saw further bushfires (particularly in 1944) and the establishment of the Country Fire Authority in 1945 from the disparate firefighting brigades already in operation throughout Victoria.[153] Fires burnt into the Kinglake National Park in 1962,[154] and in 1965 fires again burnt through East Gippsland starting north of Maffra near Valencia Creek and Boisdale and burning north in addition to fires that broke out near Glenmaggie, Omeo and Benambra and throughout the Buckland Valley.[155] Once again country was in drought when the Ash Wednesday bushfire of February 16 1983 devastated areas in South Australia and Victoria and challenged the conception of fire forged through Black Friday. Ash Wednesday burnt less acreage, mobilised society to a greater extent, and utilised more resources to fight the fire, but losses were high and 75 people died (47 in Victoria).[156]

Much work on bushfires points to the issue of Australians failing to 'learn the lessons of our environment'. Danielle Clode worries 'we are still unprepared. We still live in high-risk areas'.[157] Despite the evidence it is easy to forget what occurred in the past, or expect that nothing will ever be as destructive and surpass the bushfires and floods of the past. But the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires broke records established by Black Friday in 1939, and Black Saturday of 2009 again burnt through bushfire expectations. These fires have burnt through the same areas again and again, and yet are all too often ignored in local histories or forgotten and 'burnt out' with a newer bushfire. The longterm impact of bushfires and floods upon populations have scarcely been

[152] Kemp, *Maffra: The History of the Shire to 1975*, 123.

[153] Collins, *Burn*; Clode, *A Future in Flames*; Robert Murray and Kate White, *State of Fire: A History of Volunteer Firefighting and the Country Fire Authority in Victoria* (North Melbourne: Hargreen Publishing Company, 1995).

[154] Clode, *A Future in Flames*, 104; Symonds, *Healesville*.

[155] Fletcher, *Avon to the Alps*; Collins, *Burn*.

[156] Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 412.

[157] Clode, *A Future in Flames*, 8.

considered within much local historical work. Pyne argued that Black Friday necessitated a reconsideration of Australia's relationship with the bush and bushfire, and a re-commitment to this continent.[158] In order to properly engage with and understand bushfires, Australians needed to engage with the bush and their environment in new ways. This has included an evolving understanding and relationship with the environment that has oscillated between ambitious desires to eliminate bushfires and flooding, and new understandings that encourage adaptation and preparation. Local history narratives have largely supported a version of history that emphasises humanity's control of the environment, but persistent bushfires and floods throughout the past and present suggest we need new stories and narratives about our relationship with a disaster-prone environment.

### Learning Locally: Challenging Vulnerability and Resilience

Patterns and practices of remembering and forgetting natural disasters shaped the way that migrants were made aware of the history and continuing reality of bushfire and flood within their new homes. They moved into places where remembering and forgetting coexist. Memories of natural disasters ebb and flow. Despite patterns of forgetting, memories of fire and flood still exist and can be recalled at specific moments. The event-like aspect of sudden onset disasters means they can be more readily forgotten, rather than remembered as part of larger environmental processes. As populations adapt and mitigate against future disasters, the frequent natural reminders of the presence and risk of fire and flood are erased. Populations can begin to hope the worst of disasters are behind them. Personal experience can be a disadvantage, as people often start to believe such an event will never happen again; surely it won't happen again in their lifetime.[159] Such beliefs can alleviate concerns and offer reassurance and comfort to people who want to continue to live in those places. It enables people to continue to live there. At the same time, there are other people living there who

[158] Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 314-317,321-322.

[159] See, for example: Eleonora Rohland, *Changes in the Air: Hurricanes in New Orleans from 1718 to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).

maintain such events will happen again. Thus, remembering and forgetting occur in tandem in places. The memories can still be there but might only be recalled at specific times. We can choose to remember and choose to forget; both provide ways to continue living in these places.

Migrants arrived in these places of complex and complicated memory and history. These patterns of remembering and forgetting thus shaped the way they became aware of the history and future risk of natural disasters, and the way they made early connections with community and the local environment. It seems there is a certain amount of forgetfulness that is necessary for people to keep living in and imagining a future in a place visited by disaster. The past is not completely forgotten or erased–particularly on an individual level–but it might not be consciously dwelt upon, and instead only recalled at certain moments. It is likely after a period of no flooding in Maitland, memories of past floods were recalled by locals during the series of frequent floods throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Their memory, knowledge and adaptation to floods was then shared with migrants. Similarly, it was often during nearby bushfires that migrants′ eyes were opened to the risk of fire in their new homes in Victoria. It was during these moments that they then connected with locals and community groups.

Migrants' memories provide insights into whether they were previously aware and prepared for bushfire and flood risks. Categories of vulnerability and resilience (outlined in the Introduction) are a useful way to understand their reflections, but their lived experiences challenge the dichotomy such categories introduce. Migrants in both Maitland and Victoria demonstrated characteristics of vulnerability, but their behaviour and environmental understandings also revealed characteristics of resilience that illuminated the complexities of their lived personal experiences, and the importance of early connections with the local community.

Maitland migrants exhibited characteristics of vulnerability and resilience in the face of flooding. As migrants they were unaware of the history and risk of flooding in Maitland and were unfamiliar with the local environment. On the journey to Greta camp in 1949 Ingrid saw 'water everywhere' and 'telephone [poles] sticking out of the

water', but because she and other migrants were unfamiliar with the Australian environment they had 'no idea' they were seeing evidence of recent floods.[160] When they arrived in Australia they 'were sequestered in Greta camp, so we didn't know what was going on in the rest of the world, you don't understand English, you don't hear [the] news'.[161] Although Nina thought migrants were aware of 'occasional floods', it is unlikely they were able to learn much about the history of flooding while residing at Greta camp. It was only when they left the camp that they encountered Maitland's flood history firsthand.

In contrast, fourth-generation resident Peter Bogan grew up with floods stories 'passed down from family to family'.[162] Peter grew up in Horseshoe Bend— in the 'bend of the river'—and reflected 'we were river people' and 'everyone looked after each other'. They were somewhat isolated from other parts of Maitland, which meant they 'probably had more experience of floods'.[163] Floods 'bookend[ed]… his teenage years': he had to evacuate during the 1949 flood, helped move pianos upstairs during the 1952 flood, and in 1955, despite his family's efforts to move their furniture from Horseshoe Bend to his father's engineering workshop near High and Denman Street, every item and the entire workshop was lost.[164] Peter 'vowed never to drive a nail into a piece of wood less than three feet above the level reached by the 1955 flood'.[165] He moved away from the flood area to East Maitland and dedicated himself to flood education.[166] He and his family were not immune to floods and lived in a particularly flood-prone area, but they were beneficiaries of local flood memory and generational knowledge in a way that migrants were not. Polish migrant John said floods were 'a surprise, because nobody told us',[167]

[160] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015; Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015; Christopher Keating, *A History of the Army Camp and Migrant Camp at Greta, New South Wales, 1939-1960* (Sydney: Uri Windt, 1997), 46.

[161] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[162] Peter Bogan, Interviewed 6th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland.

[163] Ibid.

[164] Keys, *Maitland*, 63.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Peter Bogan, Interviewed 6th June 2015.

[167] John Szczudluk, Interviewed 20th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland Polish

and Dutch migrant Willy said migrants 'had no idea about those floods, we were never told'.[168]

Ingrid's family lived at Greta camp for two years before they left the camp and bought a house in central Maitland. Housing patterns and building construction can contribute to social vulnerability, and this was evident within Ingrid's and other migrants' memories prior to the 1955 flood.[169] As mentioned above, Ingrid still remembered the first time she saw her new house. They travelled into Maitland, 'came around the corner […] and here was our house in about six feet of water'. Ingrid said 'Maitland used to flood a lot but we weren't aware of that'. She argued that 'these estate agents were so cunning. They didn't tell the new Australians that these houses they were buying were in flood areas':[170]

> The real estate agents in Maitland they made a killing because they sold all the houses that were in the flood area to the immigrants […] because the migrants had no idea that they were buying houses that were in a flood area. And so that was another downfall and another disappointment and another let down and so forth [… migrants] don't know, they'll find out too late, then they bought the house. They were the cheaper houses too.[171]

Ingrid believed the estate agents 'all knew' but 'didn't tell you, they omitted to tell you' about the risk of flooding. This meant migrants 'bought houses because they were cheaper, they were cheaper houses but we had no idea. We had no idea how much houses cost in Australia'. She explained 'you were just new, you don't even know the

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Assocation, Maitland.

[168] Willy Detzil, Interviewed 20th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, East Maitland.

[169] Alice Fothergill, Enrique G. M. Maestas, and JoAnne DeRouen Darlington, "Race, Ethnicity and Disasters in the United States: A Review of the Literature," *Disasters* 23, no. 2 (1999): 156; Christian Pfister, "Learning from Nature-Induced Disasters: Theoretical Considerations and Case Studies from Western Europe," in *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies toward a Global Environmental History*, ed. Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 21; Sammy Zahran et al., "Social Vulnerability and the Natural and Built Environment: A Model of Flood Casualties in Texas," *Disasters* 32, no. 4 (2008); Keith Wailoo, Karen M. O'Neill, and Jeffrey Dowd, "Race, Vulnerability, and Recovery," in *Katrina's Imprint: Race and Vulnerability in America*, ed. Keith Wailoo et al. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Piers Blaikie et al., *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerabilities, and Disasters* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[170] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[171] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

language properly, you're trying to, you trust people right and so we bought a house right behind the town hall'. This is 'why all the New Australians are clustered around those areas, Horseshoe Bend, Louth Park, all those areas [because] the houses were cheap, right? And you had to get a house, you had to get out of the camp, so no one told you that was a flood area'.[172]

Migrants were often more vulnerable to purchasing houses within flood-prone locations. Ingrid's family were not the only migrants who lived in flood-prone houses. Henry's family lived in more than one house at risk of flooding. Henry's Lithuanian father, Bruno, was frightened of floods, but after the 1955 flood he knowingly bought in a flood-prone area because the price was right. He had asked locals and friends about previous flood water heights, but economic factors and his desire to own a home were weighed against his perception of the risk of another flood.[173] He knew about the flood risk, but arguably chose to forget in order to buy a house; thus reflecting complicated patterns of remembering and forgetting in flood prone places.

Peter and Willy remembered migrants buying houses in Horseshoe Bend or near the railway line especially after the 1955 flood because the houses were cheaper.[174] Willy also speculated that migrants wanted to stay together with others who shared their language.[175] Language barriers can contribute to individual and community vulnerability in times of crisis and, as Tania and Ingrid spoke of having to learn English upon arrival in Australia, it is probable that some members of Maitland's migrant population experienced language difficulties during the flood.[176] Nevertheless, this was not an

[172] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[173] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015; Robert Paine, "Danger and the No-Risk Thesis," in *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, ed. Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002); Eleonora Rohland et al., "Woven Together: Attachment to Place in the Aftermath of Disaster, Perspectives from Four Continents," in *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, ed. Mark Cave and Stephen Sloan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[174] Peter Bogan, Interviewed 6th June 2015; Willy Detzil, Interviewed 20th February 2015.

[175] Willy Detzil, Interviewed 20th February 2015.

[176] See for example: Fothergill, Maestas, and Darlington, "Race, Ethnicity and Disasters"; Council of Australian Governments, *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience: Building the Resilience of Our Nation to*

experience articulated by anyone I interviewed.

For Ingrid's family, it was only after they bought their house that they realised it was susceptible to flooding. After a series of minor floods 'they were sick and tired of always cleaning up the house'. In order to combat this they, like many others, 'saved like mad' to have the Fraser company (well-known throughout Maitland) raise their house; 'so our house was on big piers' nine feet high.[177] They 'thought we'd be safe' but in 1955 the water still went over the top of their house: 'that's how big the flood was'.[178] Such floods were 'another downfall and another disappointment' for Ingrid's family who had 'been through so much hardship' already.[179] They were more vulnerable to floods than people living on higher ground and they were outsiders to local knowledge and preparation strategies. They tried to mitigate against future floods, but their housing location meant they were still vulnerable.

The recurrent floods throughout the early 1950s revealed their vulnerability to floods but were also the catalyst for the creation of connections with local neighbours that provided a way for migrants to learn about floods and adapt to living in the area. Disasters require a response from communities, which reveals how communities function, treat outsiders and respond to new challenges.[180] Resilience is not the absence of distress but a process that demonstrates an ability to recover and adapt to changing situations.[181] Recurring disasters allow communities to evolve specific coping

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*Disasters* (2011); Melissa M Teo et al., "Engaging Vulnerable Populations in Preparedness and Response: A Local Government Context," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 33, no. 1 (2016); Scott Hanson-Easey et al., "Risk Communication for New and Emerging Communities: The Contingent Role of Social Capital," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*; Rosemary A. Webster et al., "Effects of a Natural Disaster on Immigrants and Host Population," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 183, no. 6 (1995); Jeffrey W. Bethel, Sloane C. Burke, and Amber F. Britt, "Disparity in Disaster Preparedness between Racial/Ethnic Groups," *Disaster Health* 1, no. 2 (2013); Piers Blaikie et al., *At Risk*.

[177] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[178] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[179] Ibid.; Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[180] Anouk Ride and Diane Bretherton, "Introduction," in *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, ed. Anouk Ride and Diane Bretherton (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 7.

[181] Maria Dimopoulos and Georgia Prattis, *Exploring Inherent Capabilities in Migrant and Refugee Communities for Disaster Resilience: Annotated Bibliography*, Australian Emergency Management Institute

mechanisms.[182] Migrants were unaware of these coping mechanisms and strategies until they moved into flood-prone locations and connected with their neighbours and local community. They were reliant upon locals sharing their flood experiences and expertise, which in turn created connections within their new community and strengthened their resilience to floods. Ingrid remembered:

> You listened to the people, the neighbours, the Australians that we got to know in our street. That's the first time we got to know Australians, they were all very caring, they were all helpful […] they had their own houses to pack […] but they welcomed us to the street and they couldn't be more caring'.[183]

They would not always hear flood warnings on the radio but 'you'd know' a flood was coming when neighbours starting packing and moving their furniture and when local Australians would warn others a flood was coming and help them to prepare.[184] Henry remembered learning about floods from the local Australians. If a flood was coming, his father's friends from the Belmore Hotel would come and help move the furniture into the roof and store belongings 'out of waters reach'.[185] Ingrid was 'told by Australians' to put 'all your crockery in the bath because when the water comes in and the mud settles […] you have no broken crockery'.[186] Everything glass went in the bath. People would run around town to find moving vans for furniture, ask people to store items in manholes in ceilings, and to assist others to prepare for floods. An Australian family living across the road with five children (with whom Ingrid played with) 'bought all their furniture and their personal belongings into our home and stacked it' hoping it would escape the flood waters.[187] Neighbours would help move beds and wardrobes, stack, pack, and raise everything up in preparation.[188] Ingrid recalled that men were often away working when the flood warning came so preparing for floods fell to

(Altona, 2013), 15.

[182] Pfister, "Learning from Nature-Induced Disasters," 19; Keys, *Maitland*, 14.

[183] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[184] Ibid.

[185] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015.

[186] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[187] Ibid.

[188] Ibid.

women.[189] Ingrid remembered coming home from school and her mother warning her a flood was coming so 'we'd better be prepared'.[190] The house would be empty: the 'crockery of course was in the bath'. Once the water receded, they started cleaning with broom and buckets before bringing the furniture down and returning everything to its place.[191]

Migrants learnt from locals and participated in the community's flood mitigation and recovery activities, which increased their resilience and enabled them to adapt to their changed circumstances.[192] Communities can become visible during times of crisis as people connect, communicate, and cooperate with others in order to understand what is happening, how to respond, and how to assist others.[193] In some ways migrants' vulnerability was addressed through their connection and communication with locals as they learnt from longer-term residents about the threat of flood and how to prepare for them. While on the one hand being a migrant meant they were largely excluded from existing flood knowledge and thus more vulnerable to flooding (indeed Ingrid commented that they were obliged to 'put up with it, you had no choice' as they had no relatives to offer help unlike other residents); on the other hand Ingrid repeatedly emphasised that 'everyone is in the same boat' and everyone 'did the same thing, we helped each other and you got on with it […] clean clean clean and clean'.[194] They were vulnerable to floods through their locations and their reliance on others to assist during times of flood, but Ingrid praised the assistance provided by the community. Connections with the local community had helped to combat the vulnerability of migrants and equipped them with skills, knowledge, and strategies to prepare for floods.

[189] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[192] Dimopoulos and Prattis, *Exploring Inherent Capabilities in Migrant and Refugee Communities*, 15; Libby Robin, "Resilience in the Anthropocene: A Biography," in *Rethinking Invasion Ecologies from the Environmental Humanities*, ed. Jodi Frawley and Iain McCalman (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 51.

[193] Anouk Ride and Diane Bretherton, "Conclusion: Community Resilience in Natural Disasters," in *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, ed. Anouk Ride and Diane Bretherton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 171, 173; Ride and Bretherton, "Introduction," 2, 3, 5.

[194] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

In this way, strengthening connections to the local community provided a way for migrants to become more resilient to floods. This theme of community connection is further examined in Chapter Five.

Characteristics of vulnerability and resilience were also present in the memories of Victorian migrants. Migrants' awareness of bushfires varied according to their past experiences and early settlement in Australia. Kat was not actively aware of Australian bushfires before her experience of Black Saturday in 2009. When she first arrived in Western Australia she recalled 'looking up at the sky and it was black'. Kat said to her landlady it looked like 'a big storm overhead'. The landlady replied: 'it's a bushfire. It's smoke. It's not a storm' but Kat 'didn't think about it'.[195] She was unable to recognise the signs of bushfire and was reliant upon local knowledge. In Kinglake, the night before Black Saturday, Kat and her friends received a text message from a neighbour who was 'really big on bushfire safety' and heavily involved in the CFA education department. She told them 'the readings for tomorrow are going to be off the chart, make sure you have a bushfire plan, make sure you know what to do'. Although they had made some preparations 'there was a real kind of joking about it' so the next morning Kat went to work in the city as per usual. She was vulnerable to bushfires because she did not understand the seriousness of them and was only faintly aware of them through the efforts of a neighbour.

Others felt they were aware of bushfires prior to arriving in Australia. Bende reflected she 'knew that Australia was going to be hot' and 'there was drought out in the outback. I never thought about floods and I never thought about fires. I knew there were bushfires but I knew they had to have bushfires […] for regrowth for regeneration'. When she was first in Australia she encountered the aftermath of the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires. In Hamilton she was warned of the dangers of driving over dry and freshly harvested paddocks of a certain height in case it started fire: 'because we were driving a car we had to know what the dangers were'. Already 'there was talk of fires'. It 'never happened' but it meant she was aware of the risk. Her husband had witnessed the Ash Wednesday fires as a teenager and helped his family to fight the fire

[195] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Kinglake, Victoria.

and protect their home. As such he 'always knew that we had to prepare and he is up on the roof and getting all the gutters cleaned, making sure there are no leaves around and no trees around the house'. In varying ways they were both aware of bushfires although Bende felt that prior to Black Saturday she 'didn't think much about fires over there', despite having 'boxes packed every year'. She said 'it was something we did. Three big boxes with all our photos in it, papers—before everything was on the computer—wedding certificate and birth certificate, ready to put in the car in case we had one of those hot days'.[196]

Rachel was also aware of bushfires before arriving in Australia. She exchanged letters with a friend between the UK and Australia so she 'knew about those [Ash Wednesday fires] but I was on the other side of the world and I didn't know much about Australia at all'. Rachel only had an abstract knowledge of bushfires because 'being new to the country I didn't know the local area all that well', and there were not many 'major disasters from the time I emigrated here in the late 1980s'. The 1998 Caledonia bushfires, which burnt 32,000 hectares in the Alpine National Park and the Carey River State Forest, were her first major fire but 'even then I can't remember any sense of understanding about what it could do and the impacts'.[197] In 2002/2003 when Rachel was in charge of media releases at work she had 'almost literally a baptism of fire' as she learnt on the job about the nature of bushfires while managing bushfires media releases to inform the community about the fire.[198]

A significant way migrants learnt about bushfires was through connecting with their local community, in particular the local CFA—the volunteer-based fire-fighting organisation throughout rural Victoria. Ian was 'a city boy' who 'knew nothing about fires' but was made aware of the CFA by friends who were passionate about the

[196] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Eden Park, Victoria.

[197] Forest Fire Management, "Past Bushfires: A Chronology of Major Bushfires in Victoria from 2013 Back to 1851," Forest Fire Management Victoria, 2018, accessed 9th March 2018, 2018, https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/history-and-incidents/past-bushfires; 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, *The Fires and the Fire-Related Deaths: Final Report Volume I*, Parliament of Victoria (Victoria, July 2010).

[198] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Traralgon, Victoria.

organisation and who he met through a farming course before he and his wife moved to the area. Within a year a bushfire came within kilometers of their property and Ian joined the CFA the following week. He thought 'I was probably aware they had fires but no concept of what they could do because in NZ we have fires occasionally but not with the regularity here'. The Tylden CFA was a major source of community for Ian that also contributed to his bushfire education. During the interview he reached through his jumper to his shirt pocket and produced a USB: on it was every file from his computer, backed up at least monthly. This USB was part of his fire plan and goes with him everywhere. This was one way that Ian lived in a constant state of awareness and preparation for bushfires.

Wytze also joined the local CFA after witnessing a nearby fire. A fire at a family's barbeque picnic got out of control on a hot day and headed towards Merton and Alexandra. Wytze remembered the 'smoke was just awe inspiring'. It 'created awareness' of the risk of fire and people began to ask him 'why don't you join' the CFA.[199] Jenneke thought her Dad joined because it is common for the CFA to visit newcomers but it also 'ticks a lot of boxes with him. It's social, it's very practical', it involves initiative and 'it's exciting, it's helpful, you're doing a useful service'.[200] Being involved in the CFA increased Wytze's awareness and understanding of bushfires and provided him with adventure and a sense of camaraderie. Wytze emphasised the main reason he joined the CFA was 'to help the community' because 'it is very much a community thing and it is appreciated. They have a standing in the community, the CFA and the SES'.[201]

Wytze joining the CFA was also 'a big thing for us', Jenneke recalled, as she and her siblings spent every Sunday at the fire shed getting to know 'all those people very well' and forging an 'early connection with the fire brigade'. On New Years Eve they would 'celebrate with the fire brigade' with a barbeque on a farmers property next to the river on the river flats, 'perfect for cricket and barbeques'. The CFA meetings provided a

[199] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Marysville, Victoria.

[200] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Meeniyan, Victoria.

[201] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

space to socialise in addition to training exercises. When Jenneke returned to Alexandra as an adult she often went to the meeting to catch up with people and make coffee until one day someone suggested 'you should actually be a firefighter'.[202] She did her minimum skills training and learnt about the truck and how the pump works which she said 'was really fun. It was great. I really enjoyed that sort of learning'. She emphasised 'it's very practical, satisfying learning. You're working in a team always and that's fantastic fun'. The CFA was an 'exciting thing to be part of' and another opportunity for 'hanging out with my Dad'. They 'have great adventures together and this was another level of adventure that we could have together'.[203]

**Figure 6:** Early CFA Adventures. Jenneke and Wytze on their CFA truck.
Source: Photo supplied by Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, family collection.

[202] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[203] Ibid.

Thus, the CFA contributed to 'making people aware' of bushfires and was a key part of Ian, Jenneke and Wytze's bushfire education and training. Their involvement in the local CFA enhanced their bushfire knowledge and resilience and influenced how they conceptualised and responded to bushfires. Many of the Victorian migrants interviewed were aware of bushfires, but the CFA training and education received by Jenneke, Wytze and Ian made them less vulnerable to bushfires in comparison with other migrants who were unaware and unprepared.

Increased awareness and resilience towards bushfires, however, does not guarantee immunity, particularly when considering the impact of disaster amnesia. When Bende had first arrived in Australia she saw people 'building houses again' after they burnt during Ash Wednesday and she questioned why 'they were still building houses with wooden frames […] why wouldn't you use something else as a frame?'[204] She was witnessing a culture of forgetting, but also the resolve to rebuild, recover and return to 'normal'. Bushfires were 'something new' for Bruno and 'in some ways part of the adventure of being in Australia. It is vulnerable and it is more living dangerously'. He said he was 'not scared of another bushfire. I don't really think about that', and instead, commented 'it is all beautiful again, we had better enjoy that'. Marysville has often been a place of bushfire but Bruno said 'this is quite safe really, relative to those places'. He said 'a normal bushfire wouldn't be that bad, this was a storm, a bushfire storm'.[205] Such statements contribute to the 'beginning of our forgetting' by declaring certain bushfires to be abnormal, unusual, or something that won't happen again. Stating that 'a normal bushfire wouldn't be that bad' helps people to be able to live in these hazardous locations, but it forms part of the culture of remembering and forgetting surrounding disaster memory.

Being aware and prepared for bushfires is valuable as it mitigates against the extent of disaster, but it also shapes the perception people have of bushfire and risk. Histories of particularly devastating or memorable floods and fires have at times been

[204] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[205] Bruno Torfs, Interviewed 27th July 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Marysville, Victoria.

regarded as benchmarks or as providing a limit for future events.[206] This can have dangerous consequences. Bende, Wytze and Jenneke knew to expect bushfires and were in some ways prepared, but Bende expected another Ash Wednesday fire, not Black Saturday. The memories and local history she was exposed to conditioned her perspective and expectations of bushfire. She was aware of bushfires and learnt to prepare by packing boxes each summer, but she did not anticipate the magnitude and severity of the Black Saturday bushfires. Jenneke reflected that after 'being part of that enormous bushfire in 2009 you forget what life was like before that or how you thought about it before' but she never 'expected that a bushfire could be that dramatic' despite having 'had some awareness of bushfires before that':

> I don't think I realised what a threat they were before actually seeing it myself. I think I knew they were an issue and I knew they existed. But I suppose I always thought they were avoidable. For people to be there or not be there. I thought you would have warning, I didn't realise how dramatic, out of control it could be and I wonder if being part of the fire brigade from such a young age. Obviously you have an awareness of bushfires because every Sunday that's what you talk about, that's what the CFA was there for and I'm just theorising here, maybe that gave me a sense of something that was able to be controlled and subdued if it needed to by our CFA and others.[207]

While Jenneke was aware of fires from an early age by going along to CFA meetings before joining herself, and this certainly helped to prepare her for Black Saturday, her original perception of bushfire was still challenged. Migrants like Wytze, Jenneke and Ian who were involved in the CFA, and Bende who was aware of bushfires and married to an Ash Wednesday bushfire survivor, were more prepared and less vulnerable to bushfires than other migrants. Our desire to understand and make sense of such phenomena, however, means we conceptualise bushfires within our range of experience, education, and within the memory spaces and local histories to which we are exposed. These migrants were in some ways prepared for bushfires due to their awareness and bushfire education, but even the best attempts at preparation can be shaken by the culture of disaster memory and the ferocity of another bushfire. Their statements give

[206] Cook, "Australia Day Floods."; Cook, "Brisbane's Benchmark Floods."; Pyne, *Burning Bush*.

[207] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

some credence to Tom Griffiths observation that 'one thing that we never seem to learn from history is that nature can overwhelm culture, that some of the fires that roar out of the Australian bush are unstoppable'.[208]

## Conclusion

Local history has largely ignored natural disasters in favour of narratives of successful settlement that emphasise human control and 'mastery' over the environment. These narratives influence the culture of disaster memory and the memories that migrants are exposed to, which in turn shapes their awareness and perception of risk. Migrants usually first became aware of bushfires and floods once settled in their new homes and through connecting with people in their local community. They became enveloped in local patterns of memory that influenced their potential vulnerability or resilience to natural disasters. Most Maitland migrants had no idea of the history of floods and bought houses in high risk areas. They were dependent on others to share flood mitigation strategies with them. Victorian migrants also had a limited awareness of bushfires before they moved into these locations, which demonstrated that such knowledge is often held locally and only available to newcomers once they have settled in. Migrants were in a more vulnerable position because local residents had a greater capacity to be embedded within the community with access to local memory and generational knowledge to which migrants were not privy. These locations are rich in memory, history, and local knowledge, but it is often only through connecting with others that migrants can combat these inherent vulnerabilities.

While these locations are places rich in aspects of local memory and history, this does not negate the impact of disaster amnesia and cultural practices of forgetting surrounding natural disasters. Bende witnessed people rebuilding houses the same way after Ash Wednesday, and migrants such as Bruno spoke of bushfires as though they are (usually) able to controlled, thus framing bushfires like Black Saturday as simply one off events. Ingrid observed similar practices of forgetting active in Maitland and Chas Keys

[208] Hansen and Griffiths, *Living with Fire*, 161.

has argued that mitigation practices can create a culture of complacency.[209] These practices of forgetting natural disasters were active within the locations where migrants were learning about bushfire and flood risk.

Nevertheless, while histories and memories of flooding are obscured and ignored within local histories and practices of forgetting, through connecting and communicating with locals and the community, the migrants interviewed were able to access aspects of disaster memory. Floods created the opportunity for migrants like Ingrid to connect with their neighbours and learn about the risks and how to best prepare for them. Similarly, structures like the CFA in Victoria helped create an awareness of bushfires and encouraged migrants to prepare accordingly. In some ways migrants are more vulnerable to natural disasters than locals because they are not embedded within local memories and histories and are somewhat dependent on others sharing this knowledge with them. However, migrants' early connections with the community increased their awareness and perception of the risk of natural disasters and their resilience to these hazards. Their connections with the local community, knowledge of the environment, and larger patterns of remembering and forgetting natural disasters, ultimately shaped their own experience of Australia's bushfires and floods.

[209] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015; Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015; Chas Keys, Interviewed 18th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland Historical Society, Maitland.

# Chapter 3
# 'The Roar of the Water':
# Remembering the '55

The 1955 flood was the highest recorded flood in Maitland's history. It rose above records set by 'the great floods' of the nineteenth-century and the more recent heights of the 1949 and 1952 floods. It destroyed homes, buildings, businesses, properties, and farm lands, and disrupted the lives of many people in Maitland and the surrounding area including many newly arrived migrants. More than sixty years later these flood waters have receded and in some ways the memories have too. Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister have noted that the memory of natural disasters is short-lived; the water subsides, media attention dwindles, people are encouraged to recover, rebuild and move on, and there are typically no memorials or associations to keep the memory of natural disasters alive or recorded in history books.[1] We saw this in the previous chapter. In Maitland, flood memorials are scarce and with the passing of over sixty years, memories have faded, people have passed away, and the population has changed. But the marks of a history of flood are still upon Maitland, and the 60th anniversary of the 1955 flood in 2015 in particular highlighted how flood memories are still alive for some people who witnessed the waters.

Oral history interviews with migrants unearth these flood memories and reveal how these individuals remember and reconstruct the 1955 flood. Mauch and Pfister argue that history's strength and powerful contribution to disaster research is its 'capacity to acknowledge both the immediacy of the catastrophe' and its long-term effects. It recognises the specificity of the event and provides insights into how society repairs and reweaves itself and remembers afterwards.[2] Kai Erikson has similarly argued that there are times to resist the urge to move from particular observations to general

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[1] Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister, "Introduction," in *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies toward a Global Environmental History*, ed. Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 3.

[2] Ibid., 6.

findings, 'times when the need for generalizations must yield to the urgency of passing events, times when the event must tell its own story'.[3] Thus in this chapter, the story of the flood is told primarily through migrants' memories. Disasters leave scars on the landscape and on the 'minds of everyone who experienced it', but each disaster is 'also a unique private tragedy, inflicting its own special wounds, its own particular species of pain'.[4] Focusing on individual recollections of the flood encourages a deeper understanding of what this experience meant to people and how they continue to remember it over sixty years later.

This chapter draws on a specific group of interviews conducted in 2015 around the 60th anniversary of the 1955 flood and the 65th anniversary of the Greta Migrant Camp. These commemorative activities yielded fascinating insights into how the wider community has attempted to remember the history and future of floods, but rather than consider the collective and social memory of floods this chapter will maintain its focus on migrant memories and experiences of the flood. The chapter first recounts the events of the 1955 flood and examines how migrants witnessed the flood as it happened. It then explores sensory memories of the flood that provide an insight into the tangible and affective experience of the flood. Flood memories triggered the recollection of other traumatic pasts and experiences of war, fear, loss and displacement. The 'double displacement' experienced by migrants—and evident within their reflections on the legacy of the flood—revealed memories of fear and insecurity and a corresponding desire for safety, security, stability and a sense of home.

## The 1955 Flood

In 1955 it rained from the 22-26 February throughout the Hunter Valley catchment area.[5] Heavy rainfall fell on land already soaked from the previous four months of

[3] Kai T. Erikson, *In the Wake of the Flood* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), xiv.

[4] Ibid., 20.

[5] There were catchment wide rains from Cassilis and Murrurundi to Hexham and Newcastle's western suburbs. See: Chas Keys, *Maitland, City on the Hunter: Fighting Floods or Living with Them* (Paterson: Hunter-Centre River Catchment Management Authority, 2008), 25.

significant rain.[6] The river rose swiftly, overtopped the levees, rushed through the town and inundated the entire floodplain of the middle and lower Hunter and impacted people in Aberdeen, Denman, Maitland, Muswellbrook, Scone and Singleton and surrounding farmlands and villages.[7] Water raced through the (now) Oakhampton, spillway down the floodplain and into Maitland where it swept up rows of houses in Mount Pleasant Street that smashed into the Long Bridge. Water filled the streets from the court house to the town hall. People were evacuated and 32 towns in the area were flooded or cut off. The flood peaked on Friday 25 February at 4.1 metres over the railway line at the Maitland Railway Station, 1.4 metres inside the Post Office and Town Hall in High Street, 3 metres over the New England Highway between Wallis Creek and East Maitland, 1.5 metres above the deck level of the Long Bridge, and set new records of 12.1 metres AHD (Australian Height Datum) at the Belmore Bridge gauge (surpassing the 12 metre record of August 1952).[8]

**Figure 7:** Flood water at the Belmore Bridge reached 12.1 metres.
Source: E. R. Brown, Picture Maitland, Maitland City Library, https://www.flickr.com/photos/98887654@N05/9448175522.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 21, 24-26; Hunter-Central Rivers: Catchment Management Authority and State Emergency Service, *1955 Hunter Valley Flood*.

The middle and lower Hunter River floodplain was inundated but Maitland suffered the greatest damage to houses and buildings and was where most deaths occurred.[9] Fourteen people were killed; eleven in Maitland and three at Singleton.[10] The 2.1 million megalitres of water flooded 5,200 homes, 130 of which were destroyed or had to be demolished. There was unparalleled damage to urban and rural areas including infrastructure, businesses and farmlands costing over $2 billion in today's terms, which made recovery difficult both financially and emotionally.[11] Relief and rescue was assisted by the Royal Australian Air Force, the Australian Army, the Royal Australian Navy and the Surf Life Saving clubs.[12] Despite flood adaptation within Maitland through levee construction, warning procedures and rescue and relief responses over the previous century, the 1955 flood 'overwhelmed the community's coping strategies almost completely'.[13] This flood and others during the 1950s revolutionised flood management in New South Wales and ultimately led to the establishment of the State Emergency Services (SES) and modern flood mitigation.[14]

The 1955 flood left its mark upon disaster management and mitigation, and upon local and wider cultural memory. In addition to local newspapers, the flood was widely reported throughout NSW as copious photographs and film captured the flood. Footage was broadcast through Movietown News at the cinemas and also featured in the 1978 film *Newsfront*. Despite the impact of the flood, the only significant study of Maitland's flood history and the 1955 flood is Chas Keys' *Maitland, City on the Hunter* (2008). There have been attempts to keep the memory and history of floods alive through the 1980s placement of flood markers around Maitland, a small sign indicating the height of past flood waters at the Maitland railway station, Peter Bogan's flood history walk and talks, and the recent 60th anniversary of 'the '55' in 2015; but there has

[9] Keys, *Maitland*, 27.

[10] Richard Whitaker, *Australia's Natural Disasters* (Frenchs Forest: Reed New Holland, 2006), 123, 125; Peter Bogan, 6th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland; Authority and Service, *1955 Hunter Valley Flood*.

[11] Authority and Service, *1955 Hunter Valley Flood*; Keys, *Maitland*, 26.

[12] Authority and Service, *1955 Hunter Valley Flood*.

[13] Keys, *Maitland*, 29.

[14] Ibid., 29, 30.

been no consideration of the migrant experience of floods despite the history of postwar migration and the nearby location of the Greta Migrant Camp, which was used as an evacuation point during the flood. Oral history interviews with migrants who witnessed the 1955 flood prove that migrants were among the survivors and witnesses of the floods. The oral history interviews capture for the first time what migrants remember and how they remember, reconstruct and articulate their experiences. These memories are entangled with migrant pasts and demonstrate how their experience of double displacement shaped their sense of home, place and belonging in Maitland.

**Figure 8:** Flood waters throughout central Maitland. The main street of Maitland, High street, is filled with water and the townhall is just visible to the left. Ingrid's house was located around the bottom left hand corner of this photo, which looks north out towards the Hunter River.

Source: Hunter Valley Conservation Trust, Picture Maitland, Maitland City Library, https://www.flickr.com/photos/98887654@N05/26465752690/in/album-72157635267134656/.

Ingrid provided the most direct and detailed account of the 1955 flood. Her family had moved into central Maitland and experienced four or five floods before 'the big one'. Ingrid was fifteen at the time and attending Maitland Technical College. She left at lunchtime to go home and prepare for the flood even though people said 'you don't have to worry, it's only going to be a minor flood'. Ingrid's family had raised their house up on stilts to attempt to protect it from flood damage, so their Australian neighbours 'brought all their furniture and their personal belongings into our home and stacked it' in the hope that it would escape the flood. They watched as the waters rose. Ingrid said that 'nobody knew how big it would be' but 'it turned out that it went right over the top of our roof so we lost everything and they did too'. Her family 'had to get rescued by an army DUKW'.[15] Ingrid 'had a cat who was highly pregnant and I rescued her and nothing else; but you couldn't, you couldn't the water was coming […] we were desperate to get out […] imagine, if we hadn't been rescued we would have been drowned in the house'. They were taken to the court house but the river banks had broken so they went to Maitland Girls High School where they slept that night on blackboards. Ingrid's cat sheltered with her but people complained. Ingrid was 'horrified, my cat she was precious to me [but] I had to let her go and I never ever saw her again'.[16]

Ingrid's memories described her experience in a detailed, coherent and largely chronological narrative that conveyed both the 'facts' and affective qualities of her encounter with the flood waters. Her recollections feature strongly throughout this chapter, but the voices of other migrants also provided important insights into the way the flood has been remembered in relation to other significant life experiences. Polish migrant Tania and her husband left Greta camp and lived in a double story house in central Maitland. She remembered it raining and 'after this raining come flood'. They had moved everything higher up inside cupboards or upstairs but as this was 'the first time' they had seen a flood they did not know 'how high the water' would come. They

[15] An army DUWK (duck) is the colloquial name for amphibious military trucks. Several of these were deployed to assist with rescue and recovery during the 1955 Maitland flood. They were also used in in the aftermath of previous floods.

[16] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

'lost so many things because we don't know how high the water coming'. The water surrounded their house and they were rescued by a boat which arrived at their verandah and took them to safety at the Maitland High School before they were evacuated to Greta camp.[17] Tania remembered that after the flood, and the 'water [had] come down', 'the streets and houses [… were] so dirty' and there was mud and flies everywhere.[18] Her husband travelled from Greta camp to Maitland and swam across to their house to try and start the cleaning. Their family stayed in their house for many years until they eventually moved next door.

Tania's less detailed and fragmentary flood memories were articulated alongside other memories that had a 'life review' and reminiscent quality.[19] She remembered both the 1955 and the 2007 flood but preferred to reflect on the joy and satisfaction found in her family and her home in Maitland. Tania's memories of migration and the flood were reconstructed through a 'life review' framework whereby she reflected on her successful migration that brought her a sense of home, belonging, and most importantly, a well loved and cherished family. It was not the flood but these memories of home and family that reoccurred throughout her interview.

Life history interviews combine memories of public and private events through a 'personal chronology'.[20] Historical moments feature in life narratives but the personal significance of these events determine the extent to which public events structure individual narratives or feature within their memory.[21] As such, flood memories appeared as both public and private events in migrants' interviews. Ingrid and Tania shared personal reflections and memories of the flood whereas the recollections of Nina, John and Terese illuminated other ways that people encountered and thus remembered the flood. Russian migrant Nina lived in the Greta township during the 1955 flood. She

[17] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015,

[18] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland.

[19] Tony Kushner in Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia, 2014), 38; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 137.

[20] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 88.

[21] Norman R. Brown et al., "Living in History: How War, Terrorism, and Natural Disaster Affect the Organization of Autobiographical Memory," *Psychological Science* 20, no. 4 (2009): 399.

was not directly affected so she recalled the flood and its aftermath as something exciting. She shared stories of her friends from Greta camp who lived in flood-prone Horseshoe Bend.[22] Polish migrant Terese also shared other's flood stories rather than her own experience.[23] Terese was fifteen years old and living in Beresfield and could 'only tell you what I heard on the radio' or saw on newsreels.[24]

Hearing significant news can be combined with personal memories and narratives.[25] The Maitland flood and other public and historical events provide chronological anchors within Terese's autobiography. The flood was a significant public event that was connected to her memory of meeting her baby brother for the first time. She remembered walking through flood-damaged streets, where 'the smell […was] something dreadful', and across a bridge to visit him in hospital.[26] The flood also acted as a temporal anchor for John's memories of his return from hospital and his family's decision to buy and move into a new house.[27] He returned from hospital 'two weeks before the Maitland flood'.[28] Thus the 1955 flood was entangled within significant personal and family memories and larger public and historical narratives. Terese, Nina and John recognised and remembered the flood because it was a significant historical moment for their town and the lives of others. Their proximity to the flood meant their memories were not as detailed or personal as those of Ingrid and Tania's, but nonetheless revealed other ways migrants experienced and remembered 'the '55'.

## The Roar of the Water: Power of Nature and Sensory Memories

Memories of the 1955 flood recalled by interviewees were striking for their descriptive and sensory details. Tom Griffiths has observed that nature and the environment have

[22] Nina Nikolaeff, Interviewed 16th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

[23] Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, East Maitland; Terese Dron, *Scent of an Orange: The Story of Our New Life* (Maitland: Timesavers, 2010).

[24] Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015.

[25] Luke Tredinnick, "The Remaking of History: Remediating Historicized Experience," in *History in the Digital Age*, ed. Toni Weller (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 49.

[26] Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015.

[27] John Szczudluk, Interviewed 20th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland Polish Assocation, Maitland.

[28] Ibid.

often been perceived as the background to human actions, separate from culture, static and stationary.[29] This comfortable perception, however, is broken when a tranquil river or calm body of water is suddenly the source of such destruction and devastation. Floods challenge these misconceptions of the environment and require new methods of understanding and remembering. Migrants' memories illustrated how people remembered the flood and renegotiated their understanding of the power of water. The human experience and sensory and affective qualities of the flood were captured within migrants' memories along with a sense of awe and astonishment at the natural environment.

This was evident in the memories of the flood and the destruction recalled by Nina and Terese. Terese said 'I couldn't believe how the water could just turn into a river and be so aggressive as to pick up a car and sail away with it'.[30] Nina was not directly affected by the flood but the damage showed her how powerful the flood was. She remembered the 'force of that water just picked up and carried everything'. She 'saw this huge lot of water coming down' carrying 'dead animals, bits of shed, logs, anything you can possibly think of […] it was dreadfully high' and 'washed away our little cubbies' built high up the river banks; 'it was quite terrifying'. Nina said the way houses were 'picked up by the water and simply carried and smashed […] gives you some idea [of] how much force it had […] it was quite horrific actually, my God, mess everywhere'. She recalled thinking, 'it looks like we're having a bit of a clean-up […] mother nature is having a bit of a clean-up. All the rubbish got taken away'. Nina explored the changed riverbank after the flood and noted 'things were so different'. As a child she thought the flood 'was exciting' and she enjoyed exploring the changed environment 'rather than worry[ing] about the horrible part of it', but her memories indicated an awareness of the power of water and its capacity to shape and mould the environment in which she played and explored.[31]

The 1955 flood reminded Terese's mother of how 'very very forceful' water can

[29] Tom Griffiths, "The Nature of Culture and the Culture of Nature," in *Cultural History in Australia*, ed. Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 2003), 67.

[30] Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015.

[31] Nina Nikolaeff, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

be, and prompted her to tell her daughter of her past experience with dangerous waters. Terese's mother's brother died in a flood or river accident in Poland when he got caught in a rip or 'twirl' and 'slipped away from them'. Her mother had never spoken of this before but the memory resurfaced 'because of the floods', because 'she's been through one, she's seen a flood before', and she wanted to explain to Terese 'how forceful the river could be'.[32] Recalling these memories in the aftermath of the 1955 flood was a way to affirm her knowledge of the power of water and a way to educate her daughter about its danger.

The 'force' of the water was constantly recalled and articulated by interviewees as though they were reminding themselves and others of how potent water can be. Water's destructive qualities can be forgotten when safely contained to a riverbank; this makes its power all the more shocking during a flood. Migrants' memories provided insights into the 'elemental drama' of floods as migrants grappled to describe their experience and mould words around their memories.[33] Ingrid's home was flooded in 1955 and she recalled:

> The force of the water was so great, it was absolutely, you haven't got a hope against it. I felt it [...] Can you imagine the fright, the screams, the terror, the force of the water? [...] You were just so frightened out of your wits, you don't know what's going to happen, whether you'll be swept along too.[34]

Her memories described the strength and power of the water and alluded to the sensory and affective qualities of this experience.

> The '55 was such a horrendous bad flood, it really was, it really scared everyone. I remember thinking, you really thought you could die then it was that bad, the force of the water, unless you've been in it […]. You can never underestimate the force of the water, it takes on such a big force, you haven't got a hope against it, you haven't. […] The roar of the water, it has such a might, it's just unbelievable, it destroys everything in its path. I mean imagine houses just being, smashed and uprooted and flowing down the river, flowing down, and people on top of the houses clinging on for dear life […] it was horrifying, it was like a nightmare. You see that and you hear all the stories. It's awful. Absolutely awful.[35]

[32] Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015.

[33] Griffiths, "The Nature of Culture," 72.

[34] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

[35] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

These memories captured the immediacy of the flood and demonstrated people's attempts to comprehend and describe the power of nature. Their recollections also showed how memories are often embedded with sensory recollections: 'the roar of the water'.[36] Scholars including Caro Verbeek and Cretien van Campen have noted that sensory memories are often more tangible and enable a vivid recall of events.[37] Visual memories and descriptions can be intense and sustained but fragmentary sensory memories of sound and smell, for example, can convey emotional experiences which are almost 'outside language'.[38] Sensory memories inform how people interpret experiences and can act as a glue holding memories together.[39] The flood memories recalled in this way articulated a sense of the depth of the emotional experience. Ingrid and Nina articulated vivid descriptions of the sight of the flood waters but their other sensory memories provided evidence of deeper emotional responses.

Sensory memories describe the smells and sounds at the time but also expose the meaning it has for people.[40] Nina recalled the flood water was 'quite terrifying [… and] made this horrible noise as it was washing down'.[41] Nina's recollections are accompanied by how it felt to watch the water rush down the river. When Ingrid described the flood she emphasised the 'roar of the water'. She described the physical intensity and 'force' of the water through its sound, which was connected to her own emotional response of fear, terror, helplessness and hopelessness. She could hear the water and 'see it rising' and thus recalled the speed and sound of the water and her accompanying fear and desire to 'get out while you can'. It was 'just unbelievable', but the sound and sight of the water and her emotional response helped her to remember. There was a sense of relief

[36] Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Third ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 11.

[37] Caro Verbeek and Cretien van Campen, "Inhaling Memories," *The Senses and Society* 8, no. 2 (2013): 139, 145.

[38] Paula Hamilton, "Oral History and the Senses," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Rob Perks and Alistair Thomson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 107.

[39] Mark Cave, "What Remains: Reflections on Crisis Oral History," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Rob Perks and Alistair Thomson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 96.

[40] Hamilton, "Oral History and the Senses," 106.

[41] Nina Nikolaeff, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

conveyed in her speech when she recalled it was 'wonderful, to be rescued, 'cause you don't think about anything else. You're just thinking about being alive and being rescued, getting onto safe ground' away from the sound of the water.[42]

In addition to memories of sight and sound, migrants also remembered the smell of the flood. Memories of smell are usually discontinuous and fragmentary but—particularly strong and unusual scents—can be some of the most resistant to forgetting and can trigger other memories.[43] The smell of the flood left a stark impression on people's memories. Terese remembered the 'smell was something dreadful', and Henry also said the mud and 'the smell was the worst thing' that lingered for weeks.[44] Ingrid said after the flood 'everything smelled […] had a horrible smell, decaying smell, everything around the place, the mud was just… It's hard to describe but it was like a dead smell you know? [… there were] decaying animals around and the mud just smelt horrible. Everyone will tell you that it just smelt yuck and the whole place had a horrible smell'.[45] Later she simply stated: 'Maitland smelt horrible. It was a like a city of dead corpses that's how it smelt'.[46] Further testimony to the powerful mnemonic capacity of scent or smell was evident when there was flooding in the Hunter Valley in April 2015. I interviewed Ingrid in June and she said the 'same smell' she remembered from the 1955 floods was around 'recently when we had that scare again; water everywhere, and there was that horrible smell again'.[47]

These sensory memories, therefore, evoked the experience of the flood in a way that resonated strongly in the present. The flood was not just a one or even two-dimensional event, but an immensely overwhelming experience of considerable force

[42] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[43] Hamilton, "Oral History and the Senses," 107; Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 84; Olivera Simic, *Surviving Peace: A Political Memoir* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2014), 119; Verbeek and van Campen, "Inhaling Memories."; Melanie A. Kiechle, *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History of Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017); Charles Fernyhough, *Pieces of Light: The New Science of Memory* (London: Profile Books, 2012).

[44] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, ; Terese Dron, Interviewed 19th June 2015.

[45] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[46] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[47] Ibid.

that was remembered in multiple ways. Oral history can capture the emotional perspective of witnesses and the sensory resonances of events that add depth to our understanding of the past.[48] Ingrid's particularly vivid memories captured the fear and sense of danger experienced during the flood as she watched the waters flowing through her town, destroying houses, and threatening her own home and family. The loss of her beloved cat was likely felt more acutely because she thought she had saved her. The spectacle, the sound, and the smell of flood waters were seared into her memory as an overwhelming threat to physical space and place—arguably forming a kind of continuum with her equally vivid and traumatic experience of war. Scholars have noted that children exposed to intense aerial bombings involving an overwhelming of the senses—and particularly to the *sound* of planes and attacks—may have a similarly strong affective response to later or present-day events.[49] Ingrid's young age, her past experience of war, the repetitive flooding of her home followed by her direct encounter with the dramatic scale of the 1955 flood, likely intensified her experience and sense of danger and fear, and contributed to the vividness of her memories in the present day. The detailed, sensory, and emotional qualities of migrants' flood memories were significant because these memories sometimes prompted the recollection of past experiences similarly associated with fear.

## Double Displacement: Memories of War and Flood

Migrants' memories of the 1955 flood echoed Stephen Sloan's observation that 'events are not experienced in isolation; they are connected to a life lived before and after'.[50] Migrants did not just remember the flood; they also remembered experiences they had before and after 'the '55', particularly their experience of war. Memories of war and

[48] Cave, "What Remains," 94, 97.

[49] See: Daya J. Somasundaram, "Post-Traumatic Responses to Aerial Bombing," *Social Science & Medicine* 42, no. 11 (1996); Carolyn Birdsall, "Sound Memory: A Critical Concept for Researching Memories of Conflict and War," in *Memory, Place and Identity : Commemoration and Remembrance of War and Conflict*, ed. Danielle Drozdzewski, Sarah De Nardi, and Emma Waterton (London: Routledge, 2016).

[50] Stephen Sloan, "The Fabric of Crisis: Approaching the Heart of Oral History," in *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, ed. Mark Cave and Stephen Sloan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 271.

flood interacted and overlapped significantly within Ingrid's reflections. The war explained how Ingrid came to be living in Australia and why she was part of the 1955 flood, so she often recalled memories of the war throughout the interview. Although the interview was primarily about her experience of the flood, the war featured heavily throughout her recollections, which demonstrated an experiential overlap between war and natural disasters.

War, migration, and flood were deeply significant moments woven throughout Ingrid's interview. Ingrid had 'been through so much' during the war. She could still remember the 'hunger, starvations, bombings, terror [and] fear—you lived in fear'[51]—that ultimately led to her displacement and her departure from Germany. She left her homeland, her family and sense of familiarity for Australia—a place 'right at the end of the world'.[52] Ingrid was 'glad to get away […] glad for peace, peace and freedom' but it was hard for her and other migrant families in Australia; 'you had to struggle'.[53] Alessandro Portelli has observed that war often 'keeps coming back' in memories as a 'dramatic point of encounter between the personal and public, between biography and history'.[54] War 'is the ground where *history and story*' meet and the stories of personal experiences 'communicate what history means to human beings'.[55] Ingrid's reflections combined the history and story of war and flood in a way that revealed important similarities between these experiences and common themes of displacement and insecurity.

Memories of war in Australia have been the subject of much scholarship but the presence of war memories among Australian migrants has been relatively unexamined.[56]

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[51] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[52] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[53] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[54] Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), ix.

[55] Ibid., 42.

[56] Joy Damousi, "The Greek Civil War, Child Removal and Traumatic Pasts in Australia," in *Legacies of Violence: Rendering the Unspeakable Past in Modern Australia*, ed. Robert Mason (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 128-129; Joy Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War: Australia's Greek Immigrants after World War Ii and the Greek Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2, 50.

Ingrid carried wartime memories with her to Australia but felt she could not articulate or share them. She said that when she first arrived 'you couldn't say you were German'.[57] Her particular wartime memories were not welcome. Ingrid's war memories illuminated the contrast between public history and accepted narratives of war, and private tragedies.[58] Her wartime past shaped her sense of belonging and connection within Australia and her response to other elements of the everyday. When Ingrid was new to Australia, if she heard a siren from a fire engine, ambulance or police car she 'used to shake' because in the north of Germany they had 'three minute warnings when the English bombers would come and drop bombs on our city'.[59] The embodied response and fear triggered by sirens illustrated how powerful memories of sound are and how the sound of a siren can be associated with past traumatic experiences. Other scholars have also observed the interconnection between the sound of sirens and the sound of war; in Canada the sound of a siren recalled Rwandan refugees' memories of war, and in Japan the same sirens are used as warnings for bombs and tsunamis.[60] Sound is a powerful way memories are recalled and carried into the present. Ingrid's wartime memories were a 'dramatic point of encounter between the personal and the public', and thus remained a feature in her life history and became part of how she remembered and reconstructed her memories of the flood.[61]

A relationship between war and natural disasters has been observed in official discourse and memory practices. There are connections and commonalities between the construction of official narratives and practices of remembering and memorialisation. Philip Seaton has observed how war and natural disasters have been intertwined in official narratives in Japan, and how memories of natural disasters have influenced the

[57] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[58] Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 96; Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, viii, 161.

[59] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[60] Philip Seaton, "Japanese War Memories and Commemoration after the Great East Japan Earthquake," in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, ed. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 346; Steven High, "Smile through the Tears: Life, Art, and the Rwandan Genocide," in *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, ed. Mark Cave and Stephen Sloan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 212.

[61] Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, ix.

memory and commemoration of war. Memories and ways of remembering war have influenced the memory and meaning of major disasters in the present—including natural disasters—which have also triggered a shift in memories of the past.[62] Natural disasters have been used as a metaphor for war in a way that erases an 'enemy' and draws attention away from the human-caused aspects of war and frames them as 'just something that happens'. This is arguably indicative of a worldview where the population is at the mercy of nature through the prevalence of earthquakes, tsunamis and floods.[63] Similarly, debates about blame and responsibility within war have shaped the understanding and remembering of natural disasters by suggesting they too are outside of human control.[64] In Japan and China there are growing similarities between commemoration services for natural disasters and war.[65] In Australia the discursive overlap of war and natural disasters is evident within the military metaphors used to discuss natural disasters, particularly the management and mitigation of bushfires and their aftermath.[66] These military metaphors foster sentiments of heroism and blame. The connection between war and natural disaster in Ingrid's memories, however, was not through official discourses and memorialisation practices but through the entanglement of her own experiences and memories.

Wars and natural disasters are often defining moments in people's lives and tend to evoke similar emotions and powerful stories of grief, fear, loss, comradeship and overcoming adversity.[67] Both are occasions of fear and insecurity and moments when vulnerable people feel under attack.[68] Legal scholar Olivera Simic has written eloquently

[62] Seaton, "Japanese War Memories," 346.

[63] Ibid., 346-347.

[64] Ibid., 346-347.

[65] Bin Xu, "Disaster, Trauma, and Memory," in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, ed. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Seaton, "Japanese War Memories."

[66] Tom Griffiths, "'An Unnatural Disaster'?: Remembering and Forgetting Bushfire," *History Australia* 6, no. 2 (2009): 35.34; Christine Hansen and Tom Griffiths, *Living with Fire: People, Nature and History in Steels Creek* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2012); Peter Stanley, *Black Saturday at Steels Creek* (Brunswick: Scribe Publications, 2013).

[67] Philip Seaton, *Japan's Contested War Memories: The 'Memory Rifts' in Historical Consciousness of World War Ii* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 9.

[68] Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 5.

about her experience of disasters and how on 'each occasion I am still overwhelmed with the same feelings of fear, disbelief, helplessness and shock'.[69] During the 2011 Brisbane flood she observed how 'old demons, the chain of difficult memories and dreams' were 'stirred up' and memories of her experience of the Bosnian war, September 11 and an earthquake in Costa Rica returned with the flood.[70] As an author and lecturer, Simic is perhaps more easily able to express the connections, but there are thematic and affective similarities between Simic's observations and Ingrid's memories. Throughout Ingrid's memories of war and flood are also themes of fear, insecurity, instability, displacement, a desire to be safe, and a desire for a sense of home. The 'spores of sorrow'[71] caused by the war float throughout her memories of the flood, and influence her remembered response and the reconstruction of her memories in the present.

In Germany Ingrid 'lived in fear' and was under attack from bombs:

> Unless you've had a war in your own country, you don't know what it's like to go through all these hardships, there's nothing worse than bombings, believe me. The noise, the children crying, the the the the fear, the terror, children growing up in that, traumatised for life. That's hard to understand. Australia's a lucky country, it's had no war except up there in Darwin [...] the rest of Australia doesn't know what it's like, to be invaded, to be bombed day and night and never getting a proper sleep and not just that [there's] no food, you're scrounging round for food.[72]

On the other side of the world in Australia, it turned out this was not a safe place either. Suddenly her environment was unsafe again. Once more she lived in fear. During the 1955 flood Ingrid watched the waters rise towards her home and her family was evacuated. It was no longer bombs but floods that posed a threat to her sense of security and safety. Ingrid became fearful every time it rained.[73]

The end of war had not brought security and a sense of safety for her family. The aftermath of the war echoed in the aftermath of the flood. Despite moving away from war-torn Europe, Ingrid still found herself in a disaster zone. Once again, her life

[69] Simic, *Surviving Peace*, 108.

[70] Ibid., 107-108.

[71] Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, viii.

[72] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[73] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015; Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

was swept up in historical moments. Victims of disaster can experience fear, helplessness, estrangement, vulnerability and the erosion of a sense of security.[74] Life changing moments such as war and natural disaster can be accompanied by 'feelings of powerlessness in the face of forces too big… to control'.[75] In Ingrid's memory, war and flood are constructed as something beyond her control. Memories of the flood are blurred with memories of fleeing Europe and the experiences of other refugees. She said her family wanted to be safe from the flood just as refugees want to be safe. She reflected the 'flood is like an enemy and the refugees are the ones being persecuted'.[76] The 'flood is just something that happens […] it's an act of God more or less'. She then quickly corrected herself saying 'it's not an act of God, it's to do with the climate', but nonetheless it reflected the sentiment of powerlessness in the face of nature and highlighted parallels with the powerlessness felt during the war and subsequent displacement, migration, and the initial feeling of alienation within her new country. The blurring of memories also highlighted perceived parallels between her experience and those of refugees also escaping situations of danger and insecurity.

Both situations were also characterised by loss and displacement. Steven High has written in *Oral History at the Crossroads* (2014) that for refugees 'to remember life before war and genocide is also to recall all that was lost: friends, family, young love, innocence. Once joyful memories are now inextricably tied to the horror and sadness that followed'.[77] Ingrid's memories of war encompass the loss of her family and homeland. Ingrid's family lived in East Prussia and they were all displaced; 'I never saw my part of the family again […] I had no one'.[78] In Maitland after the 1955 flood they again suffered from loss and displacement. They lost everything in the flood and relocated to higher ground in Telarah.

Ingrid's memories of war and bombing are highly evocative, especially for

[74] Arthur Hansen, "Human Disaster, Social Trauma and Community Memory," in *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives*, ed. Kim Lacy Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff, and Graham Dawson (London: Routledge, 1999), 220.

[75] Seaton, *Japan's Contested War Memories*, 9.

[76] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[77] High, *Oral History at the Crossroads*, 179.

[78] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

someone so young at the time. The sounds and affective responses to wartime experiences were still recalled years later. Narratives of war, successful migration, and the idea of Australia as 'the lucky country' all coalesced in her memories and shaped the way she comprehended her experience of floods in Maitland. The loss and displacement caused by the Second World War shaped Ingrid's experience of loss and displacement caused by the 1955 flood. It bears some similarity to the 'double victimhood narrative' Seaton observed in Japan where people suffered during the war and again during the tsunami and earthquake of March 2011.[79] I argue that migrants like Ingrid experienced a 'double displacement', first through war and secondly through natural disasters in Australia. The experience of displacement is a pivotal part of both phenomena: both are moments of crisis and disaster that threatened Ingrid's sense of safety, stability and security and led to her displacement and relocation and a desire for home. These profoundly intimate and personal experiences of war and natural disaster illuminate how past experiences of fear, trauma and 'double displacement' shape migrant lives in Australia.

### Desiring Home, Safety and 'Higher Ground'

Many migrants, including Ingrid's family, expressed a strong desire to own a home, arguably as a reaction to losing their home during the war and also as a consequence of migration; but the 1955 flood was for many another moment when they faced the loss of home. Memories of the aftermath of the flood—of viewing the damage and deciding what to do next—further illuminated their experience of 'double displacement' and revealed their desire for a safe, secure and stable home.

Once the water receded people began cleaning out their homes. Mud was shovelled out of houses, and furniture, bedding and carpets were thrown away.[80] The 'smell and stink' still gives Henry 'headaches when I think about it'.[81] Tania's family was able to live upstairs while they cleaned out the downstairs but the water was only one

[79] Seaton, "Japanese War Memories," 352.

[80] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015; Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015.

[81] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015.

step away from flowing into the second storey.[82] Ingrid remembered unstacking all the furniture and lining up to receive clothes and food.[83] They would 'clean, clean, clean and clean'.[84] The water went 'right over the top of our roof so we lost everything', she remembered, 'you lose everything, you lose your photos'.[85]

Ingrid said multiple times that 'everything' was destroyed or lost in the floods. This included possessions purchased in Australia but also many items that came through the Displaced Persons camps and arrived with them in Australia. There is no doubt that her sense of loss was real and painful, but it was also the case that Ingrid's mother was able to salvage her 'feather beds from Germany'. Ingrid said Australians 'didn't know about feather beds' but 'all the women from Europe they brought their feather beds' to Australia.[86] They were often treasured, valuable and inherited possessions.[87] The feather beds arguably represented a safe, comfortable and warm place to sleep or rest that, when coupled with its homeland connections, made those particular items bear more mnemonic weight. After the flood Ingrid's mother had them 'on the roof in the sun and she kept on hosing them to get the mud out and it took a lot of water and a lot of sun […] she did that constantly until there was not one bit of mud left or one smell'.[88] Her indefatigable efforts to clean the feather beds demonstrate their importance and the multiple layers of loss of a place of rest and safety that they represent.

Sociologist Kai Erikson investigated how the 1972 Buffalo Creek flood in a coal-mining community in the Appalachian Mountains of Logan County, West Virgina—caused by a dam collapse—*felt* to survivors. His work *In the Wake of the Flood* is one of a few in-depth studies of a community affected by flood. In it he wrote about 'the furniture of the self' and how people 'had invested a great deal of time and money

[82] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015.

[83] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015; Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[86] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[87] Lel Gretton, "History of Featherbeds & Duvets," accessed 9th March, 2019, http://www.oldandinteresting.com/history-feather-beds.aspx.

[88] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

and pride' in their homes, which in many cases had been converted from 'old company shacks into comfortable new dwellings'.[89] He argued:

> A refurbished house on Buffalo Creek served as the emblem of one's rise out of poverty. It was a measure of security, an extension of self, a source of identity. It was not just the outer shell in which one lived out one's life but a major feature of that life.[90] These goods are more than a form of decoration [...] they are a measure of one's substance as a person and as a provider, truly the furniture of self'.[91]

Erikson illuminated the layers of loss felt during the aftermath of the flood that included the loss of homes and possessions. People 'lost possessions of considerable meaning to them […] mementos of no measurable worth which were highly cherished'. Objects were a link with the past and 'their loss was deeply mourned'.[92] One resident commented that everything earned through a life-time's mining work 'was in that home; you tell me what it was worth'.[93] Erikson demonstrated that 'to lose a home or the sum of one's belongings is to lose evidence as to who one is and where one belongs in the world'.[94]

There were similar layers of loss experienced during the Maitland flood. Migrants houses were not decade-long renovations, but they were highly desired and arguably a symbol of a successful migration outcome. Migrants wanted to own their own home in Australia, and these homes were bought with sacrifices and savings.[95] Every penny saved was likely funnelled into their house. Their home was the manifestation of their life in Australia and their attempt to construct a new and secure environment and sense of belonging and place.[96] And then it was filled to overflowing

[89] Erikson, *In the Wake of the Flood*, 128.

[90] Ibid., 129.

[91] Ibid., 130.

[92] Ibid., 129-130.

[93] Ibid., 129.

[94] Ibid., 131.

[95] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed June 2015,

[96] Ghassan Hage, "At Home in the Entrails of the West: Multiculturalism, 'Ethnic Food' and Migrant Home-Building," in *Home/World: Space, Community and Marginality in Sydney's West*, ed. Helen Grace et al. (Annandale: Pluto Press, 1997); Ghassan Hage, "Migration, Food, Memory, and Home-Building," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Stephen Cairns, ed., *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy* (Abingdon: Routledge,

with mud and water during the flood. It was devastating for migrants to watch their houses, the embodiment of their new life in Australia, be filled with flood waters. They had invested time, energy, finances, and emotion into their homes making them hard to leave after the flood, and their sense of loss more acute.

The efforts made to restore objects offers a glimpse into the hardship and pain that comes with displacement and insecurity but also the determination to save important objects of memory. Ingrid said: 'I [will] never forget those feather beds. She got them so clean and so light and fluffy and they were always in the wind and in the sun and she took over a year or two years to get them properly clean, but nobody else had feather beds, they were important to her'.[97]

Migration pasts and memories of loss and displacement coalesced with other memories of fear and insecurity in the aftermath of the 1955 flood. Place and belonging seemed more tenuous. The sound of rain brought fear to Ingrid and to Henry's father Bruno. Ingrid remembered 'every time it rained you think is it going to be a flood again'. There was 'a certain pattern' and if it rained 'for a couple of days you start to think, oh God, this could be a flood again'.[98] She was 'always frightened when there was rain […] you get this churning stomach like butterflies in your stomach and you couldn't rest, you were restless with worry'. It 'was a horrible feeling'.[99] Henry recalled his father was always anxious when it rained and the river rose. Bruno 'was always frightened of floods […] he was terrified every time the Hunter river came up he would be very anxious […] he'd be panicking […] he couldn't keep still […] he definitely had anxiety that we'd be washed away'.[100] Similar patterns of embodied memory and fear of rain were evident in the aftermath of the Buffalo Creek disaster.[101]

The fear of rain was particularly significant because of the way it interacted with migration experiences. Henry's family rented in Louth Park but just months after the 1955 flood Bruno bought 'a two-bedroom cottage' in Denman Street, central Maitland,

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2004).

[97] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[98] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[99] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[100] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015.

near the court house, which had filled with water. Moving in required them to shovel and hose out the mud and clean, re-carpet and paint the house.[102] Although it was flood damaged, Bruno 'wanted to move and own a home' and this house was close to the shops, central Maitland and the train station and was 'probably at the right price, only a few pounds […] 120 pounds or something'.[103] Henry's father was likely among many who benefited from a drop in house prices after the flood. Home ownership represented a sense of stability and security that was particularly important for migrants displaced by war. Owning a home, being part of the community, among familiar (and central) surroundings, plus the economic advantages of owning a home were in this case more important and outweighed the risk of buying in a flood-prone area.

Owning a home in a flood-prone area, however, meant Bruno was 'always concerned' about future floods and often spoke of 'precautions they could take' to 'minimise the loss and the heartache'.[104] Henry said they learnt 'from the Australians' to be cautious, 'observant and apprehensive. They didn't want to be caught out'.[105] Henry recalled Bruno would get anxious 'every time the river came up, but [he also felt] this was his country, he was settled here, he wasn't going anywhere else'.[106] Henry emphasised Bruno's desire to 'settle [and] have a home and a house where he could live, sleep, go to work, come home […] that's what kept driving him'.[107] His parents stayed in Maitland, 'they didn't want to leave. I think once they got settled […] if it flooded, it flooded'.[108] Nevertheless, the family 'never forgot that first experience back in '55'.[109]

The 1955 flood, fears of rain, and feelings of insecurity led to another type of displacement for Ingrid's family who relocated to higher ground in Telarah. After the flood some people cleaned up their homes and stayed; others raised their houses onto

[101] Erikson, *In the Wake of the Flood*, 133.

[102] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

stilts or put another story on top.[110] Some waited to sell their homes and then moved away from the floodplain to higher ground but many could not afford to relocate and 'had no option but […] to stay'.[111] After the flood a scheme was organised by the Lions Clubs to relocate houses to higher ground. They collected donations, bought land in Telarah and paid for relocation expenses. They held a ballot at the town hall and 'if your name was drawn […] you were one of the lucky ones'.[112] Ingrid recalled that 'we were really lucky. We didn't have relatives or anyone' to help and they could not have afforded relocation costs, but 'we were really really lucky to get that block of land and have our house moved through the generosity' of the community and the Lions Clubs.[113] The streets where land was purchased were named after the towns of the Lions Clubs: Lismore Avenue, Taree Avenue.[114]

**Figure 9:** Relocating houses to Telarah after the 1955 flood through the generosity of Lions Clubs.

Source: John Fraser, Picture Maitland, Maitland City Library, https://www.flickr.com/photos/98887654@N05/36224824200/in/album-72157635267134656/.

[110] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[111] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

Reflections on their relocation, however, revealed further connections and blurring between memories of war and the experience of flood. Ingrid said the fear of rain disappeared when their house was moved to 'higher ground' and they 'were out of the flood area' where 'nothing can touch you. [You] don't get that horrible churning, sinking, dreadful feeling in your stomach when it rains'.[115] They finally felt 'safe and secure and that's a big thing when you're a new comer to a country to feel safe and secure because you never felt safe and secure when you were in your own country with all the bombing and everything that was going on. Yeah when you're right in the midst of it is awful'.[116]

She did not feel safe in Germany during the war and did not feel safe living in their house in central Maitland:

> When we moved to higher ground we knew we were totally, totally safe, and this is what families want to be [...] refugees, they want to feel safe. Safe, this is it. The flood is like an enemy and the refugees are the ones being persecuted. It's a horrible feeling not to know whether you will see through the night or whether you'll be killed [...] that's horrible'.[117]

Her comments described the importance of safety to flood survivors and refugees alike and demonstrated how memories of her 'double displacement' through war and flood were entangled. Her family's desire for a safe, secure and stable life in Australia after the devastation and displacement through war was thwarted and fractured by the floods. Only through their relocation did they find a new sense of safety, security and home.

Once on higher ground their 'whole demeanour was a lot happier':

> We were safe now, that is the word, safe and out of the flood area and everything we did would be safe from the flood. Everything would be safe, would be there forever. You never had to pack up again. You didn't have to worry every time it rained. We quickly adapted to that new environment of living on high ground.[118]

What mattered was 'to be out of that fear and constant worry' and be 'on safe ground […] that was a big thing it really was […] that was just heaven. From then on, we had a

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[117] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[118] Ibid.

more happy atmosphere in the house, everyone was happier. [It] made a big difference'.[119] Once they were safe from the flood and had a new confidence in the environment they were able to invest in their home. They could 'beautify' their home, build steps up to the house and 'cultivate a garden'. Ingrid worked in town and would 'bicycle home' where her 'mother would have dinner cooking […] our whole demeanour was a lot happier. We were safe now'.[120] No longer did they fear attacks from war or threats from nature, nor did they need to anticipate packing up or moving again. On higher ground they were unafraid to put down roots and build a sense of home and community, but Ingrid did not forget her routes through war and flood.

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how memories of the flood were complicated by previous experiences of loss, fear, displacement and war. The 'double displacement' experienced by migrants shaped their actions in the aftermath of the flood, which was evident in the way Ingrid's mother carefully preserved her flood damaged feather beds. The fear of rain remembered by Henry and Ingrid was also arguably influenced by both war and flood experiences. Migrants remembered the flood but they also remembered their previous experiences of fear, insecurity and ultimately destruction and displacement. These multiple layers of memory illuminate the unique characteristics and meaning attached to migrants' memories of the 1955 Maitland flood.

These insights enable a deeper appreciation of the significance of experiences of natural disaster and how these memories are incorporated into migrants' wider life history. Migrants' memories illuminate what they remember of the flood and how their flood experiences were captured within their memories. Memory conventions familiar to oral history scholarship were evident in the recollections of the 1955 flood and provided a useful framework to understand the meaning and significance of the flood within individual lives. The affective and sensory qualities of flood memories provided insights into the immediacy and experiential aspects of the flood and highlighted how such sensations were captured in memories and articulated during the interview. The

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

interaction between memories of the flood and migrants' wartime pasts further demonstrated the unique characteristics of migrants' memories. Their 'double displacement' and the recurring parallel themes of fear, loss and uncertainty influenced their responses in the aftermath of the flood and heightened their desire for a sense of safety, security, stability and home and belonging.

# Chapter 4
# Fire in the Hills:
# Narrating Fire

The bushfires that swept throughout Victoria on Saturday 7 February 2009 were the most destructive in Australia's history. Black Saturday remains one of the worst bushfires in Victoria: it led to the death of 173 people. Just over ten years since, the fires are 'still smouldering' as Victorians continue to grapple with how to remember the fires and their continuing presence within our lives and the environment.[1] The fires' legacy in literature continues to grow with new book releases and documentaries added to the prolific cultural, social, community and scholarly response to the fires. It demonstrates how, as Peter Stanley noted, 'the story of what happened in February 2009 is important for all of us'.[2] He wrote in 2013 that 'fire is part of the natural history of this continent we call home—which means that, while these fires were exceptional, they were not unique. They have come before, and they will come again. Australians, especially, need to understand how to live with fire'.[3]

Migrants have been involved in bushfires throughout Victoria and their oral history interviews are an important and valuable contribution to our understanding of bushfire. This chapter examines how migrants remember and reconstruct their experience of bushfire and foregrounds the richness of the material drawn from oral history interviews. The central focus of this chapter is on migrants' narratives, memories and experiences of bushfire.[4] Seven interviews conducted in 2016 form the basis of this

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[1] Gretel Evans, "Still Smouldering: Reflections on the Symposium," Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC, 2019, accessed 21 March, 2019, https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/blogpost/gevans/2019/still-smouldering-reflections-symposium.

[2] Peter Stanley, *Black Saturday at Steels Creek* (Brunswick: Scribe Publications, 2013), xi.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Other histories have focused on a single bushfire or location. See for example: Christine Hansen and Tom Griffiths, *Living with Fire: People, Nature and History in Steels Creek* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2012); Stanley, *Black Saturday at Steels Creek*; Peg Fraser, *Black Saturday: Not the End of the Story* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2018).

chapter, which centres on memories of bushfires in Gippsland and two Black Saturday bushfires.[5] Participants in this thesis experienced, witnessed or were involved in a number of different bushfires. These included: the 1998 Caledonian River area fires in the Alpine National Park, the 1998 Trentham fire, the 2002/2003 north east Victoria and East Gippsland fires, the 2006/2007 Great Divide bushfires, the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires (specifically the Kilmore East fire and Murrindindi fire), and the 2013 Aberfeldy-Donnellys Creek fire. The specifics of each fire are significant and are highlighted where pertinent in this chapter, especially in cases where individuals' memories revealed a keen awareness and understanding of fire and its interaction with the local ecology. Local practices of memory, community memorials and commemorative activities are discussed when relevant, but were not typically explicitly commented upon by interviewees. In most cases, people reflected on their personal experience, thus enabling this thesis to identify aspects of the experience and memory of bushfire that resonate across case studies.

This chapter begins by contrasting different bushfire narratives by considering extracts from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Report in conjunction with personal narratives of bushfire. Jenneke's narrative offers an insight into the power, depth, and complexity of individual memories and experiences of fire, and highlights the importance of listening to multiple perspectives. Sensory memories—particularly memories of sound—feature strongly throughout the interviews and illuminate the emotive and immediate affective experience of the fire. People's roles during the fire shaped their actions during the fire and how they later remembered, reconstructed, narrated, and reflected upon their experience. Migrants' bushfire memories are still being enveloped within their life histories and the unsettled nature of these memories was particularly evident within Bruno and Kat's reflections on the fire. These memories are still settling within migrants' personal narratives and understandings of Australian bushfires.

[5] The two other interviews will be discussed in the following chapters.

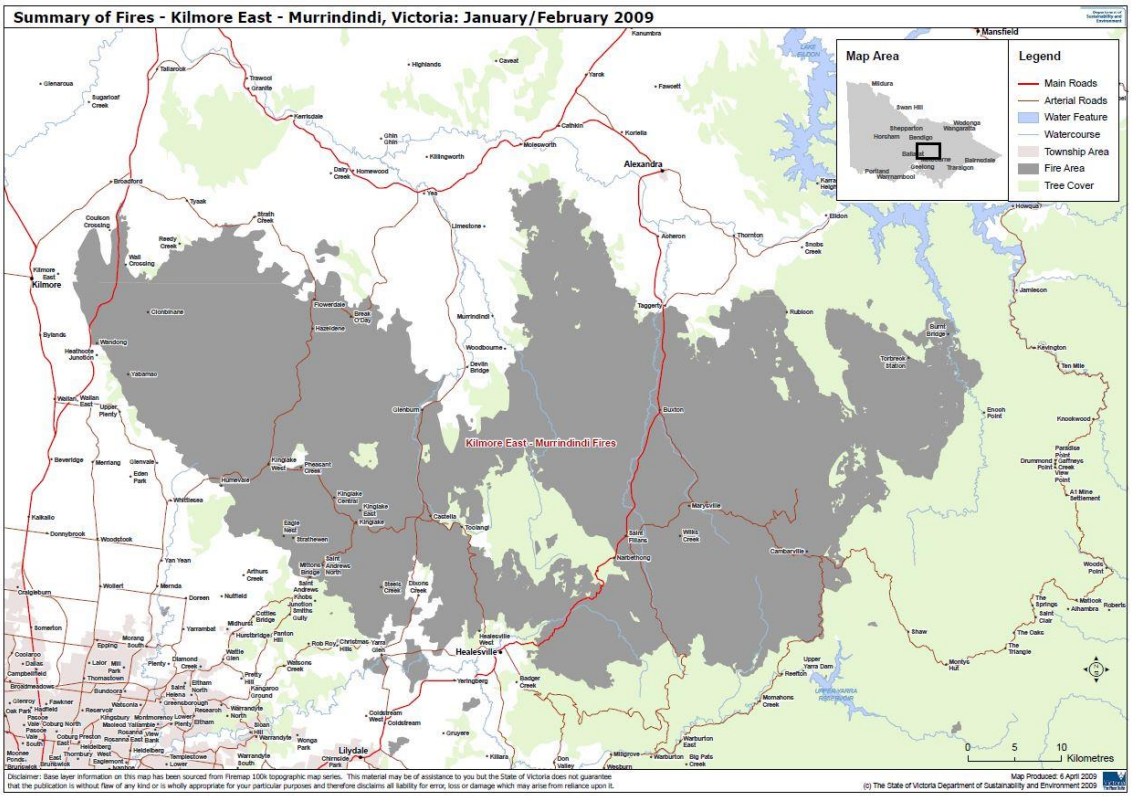


**Figure 10:** The Black Saturday Bushfires.
Source: State of Victoria Department of Sustainability and Environment.

## The Fire: Royal Commission and Personal Narrative

The destruction, devastation, and personal and collective tragedy brought about by bushfires like Black Saturday cry out for meaning and understanding. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission was part of an endeavour to understand and explain how these fires occurred, what happened and what could be learnt in order to prepare for the future and 'minimise the risk of a similar tragedy'.[6] Conducted by Bernard Teague, Ronald McLeod and Susan Pascoe, the commission heard evidence from experts and lay witnesses directly affected, who gave personal accounts of their experiences. The final report described the fifteen fires that inflicted the greatest damage and told the story of the 173 people who died. It looked at what lessons could be learnt from the fire, included the statements of 100 lay witnesses, and included sixty-

[6] 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, *The Fires and the Fire-Related Deaths: Final Report Volume I*, Parliament of Victoria (Victoria, July 2010), 1. In Australia, Royal commissions are the highest form of independent inquiry into matters of public importance, instigated by the state or federal government.

seven recommendations to improve bushfire management.[7] The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission report is a valuable document that presents a chronological account and explanation for the events on Saturday 7 February 2009. It is an official narrative that preserves and codifies a particular story and memory of the fire. The report was 'an important part of securing the memory of the fires', however it contributes to the tension between remembering and forgetting bushfires because it is unable to capture and 'secure' all aspects, experiences and memories of the fire.[8] Focused on detailing the events as they occurred and future outcomes, such an approach cannot fully document the personal experiences of bushfire and the many different perspectives of those whose lives were scarred by the fires.

The report focused on 'what happened', whereas migrants' oral histories shift the focus to memories that are not captured in the report or included in other bushfire narratives. Stephen Sloan has written of the significance of oral history as a response to crisis, and its ability to address the silences inherent in rescue, recovery and rebuilding narratives, and to place people—not the disaster—at the centre of the story.[9] Oral history testimony also challenges bureaucratic language that 'abhors the active and descriptive' and that often pervades bushfire reports and agencies. Peter Stanley has argued this has impaired 'our capacity to describe, evoke, and analyse what happened on 7 February, and—even more—our capacity to understand and feel it'.[10] Migrants' oral histories provide a new perspective on the fire, placing them at the centre of the narrative and revealing what they remember, how they remember, and how they understand their bushfire experience and incorporate it into their life history. Oral histories are able to illuminate how the fire was experienced through migrant eyes and how migrants make sense of their experiences and Australia's recurring history of bushfires.

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[7] Ibid.; Joshua Whittaker, "Ten Years after the Black Saturday Fires, What Have We Learnt from Post-Fire Research?," *Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience* 34, no. 2 (2019).

[8] 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, *Final Report Volume I*, vi.

[9] Stephen Sloan, "The Fabric of Crisis: Approaching the Heart of Oral History," in *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, ed. Mark Cave and Stephen Sloan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 264.

[10] Stanley, *Black Saturday at Steels Creek*, 207.

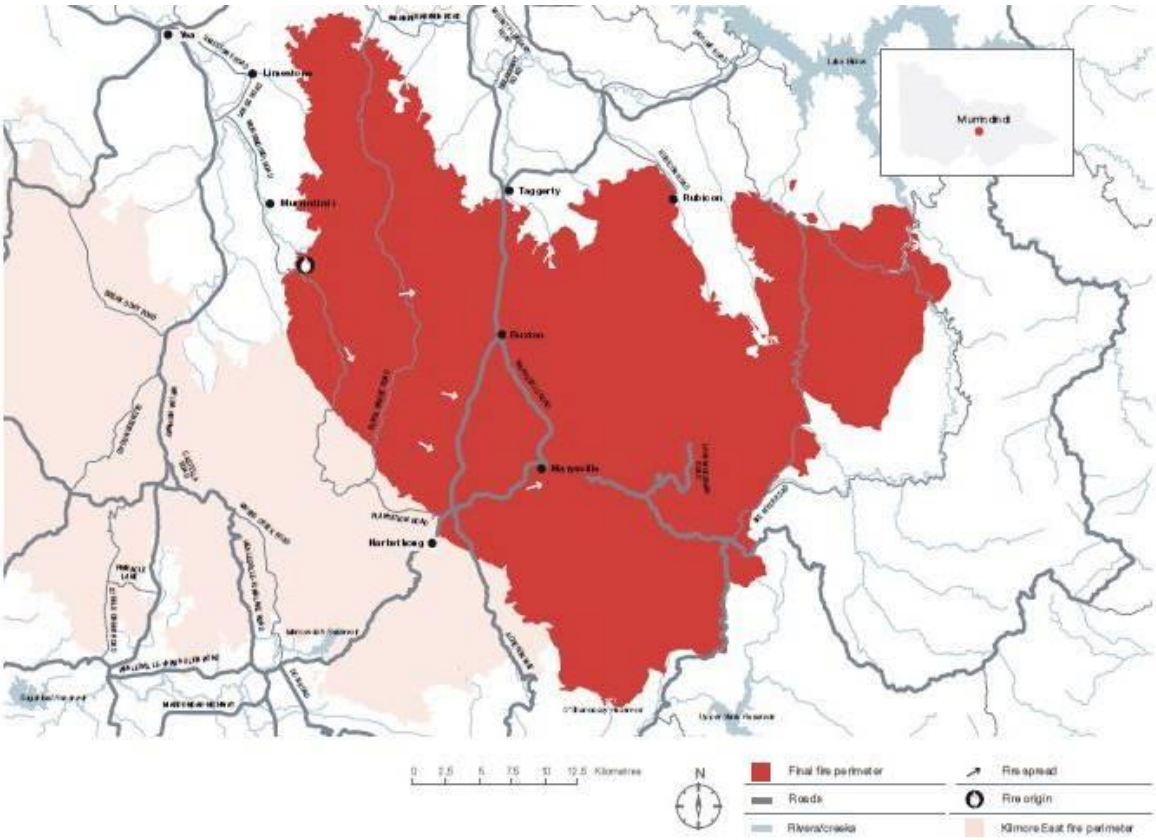


**Figure 11:** Map of the Murrindindi bushfire complex that Jenneke and Wytze witnessed.

Source: 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Vol 1, Figure 10.1.

On Saturday 7 February 2009, Dutch migrants Jenneke and Wytze sheltered on the Gallipoli oval with their CFA team and local residents as the Murrindini mill fire swept through Marysville and engulfed the town in flames. The Royal Commission explained:

> The Murrindindi fire started at about 14:55 on 7 February 2009, to the north of a sawmill in Wilhelmina Falls Road, Murrindindi. It travelled rapidly and by 16:30 was affecting Narbethong. Following a wind change that arrived at about 18:15, the fire swept through the communities of Marysville, Buxton and Taggerty. It continued to burn for weeks [...] and was not formally declared contained until 5 March. [...] The fire resulted in the deaths of 40 people, and more than 500 houses were destroyed or damaged'.[11]

[11] 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, *Final Report Volume I.*

Jenneke and her father Wytze were both part of a CFA team and had been attending to the fire further north near Yea and Molesworth before they were instructed to drive to Buxton and then onto Marysville for asset protection. The wind change meant they suddenly found themselves sheltering with others as the fire front burnt through the town. The report touched on the CFA involvement, but the focus on the fire meant the movements of individuals like Jenneke and Wytze were unclear. Jenneke's narrative offered a unique and personal insight into the diversity and complexity of individual memories and experiences of fire.

In 2016 Jenneke shared a well-crafted, chronological, detailed and uninterrupted story of her experience of the bushfire with me at her home in South Gippsland. She made sure to go back and clarify points or provide extra details. She told me her experience of the fire in a calm voice without interruption or pause. We sat at her kitchen table on mismatched chairs with cups of tea and she spoke of her early life in Holland, migration to Australia, early life in Australia and travels abroad before she began to tell me her story of the fire.

On the morning of Black Saturday Jenneke drove from Melbourne to Alexandra to be on standby in case their CFA crew was required to 'step up'.[12] Jenneke and Wytze were members of the Whanregarwen CFA. They waited at home, their 'uniform ready, [with] packed food and water […] and then we got a call'. They joined their team and 'waited there together with our uniforms on' before they were called to another brigade near Molesworth. Jenneke recalled: 'at that stage you feel something is happening'. She was with her Dad and 'three other men […] that I really respect and enjoy being with'. They were called to 'come and help with this Murrindindi mill fire'. Jenneke explained: 'the big thing of the day was not only that it was very hot and very dry and those crazy winds, but also there was a wind change predicted', which would change 'the nature of what you're dealing with':

> I should say that this was my first call out ever. That was why I was keen to be on standby, because I thought this would give me my first call out if we get something. My uniform is nice and clean.

[12] The following quotes in this section are drawn from: Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Meeniyan, Victoria.

**Figure 12:** 'Behind me in the distance'. Jenneke and her CFA crew 'blacking out' the fire while 'behind me catastrophes already opening up'.

Source: Photo supplied by Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, family collection.

They went to prevent a house from burning and to put out nearby spot fires. In 'some ways that was our most intense actual firefighting part of the day because the fire, we felt it was a manageable thing, and we're going to try and put it out'. They were 'blacking' areas so that 'when the wind change did come it didn't cause embers to spark up and create more fires'. A photo was taken of her 'doing this blacking out' with a rake, while 'behind me in the distance you could see that the fire had spotted […] there was mushroom clouds of black smoke'. It captured 'the funny juxtaposition of situations' with Jenneke 'working on this little thing […] and behind me catastrophes already opening up'.

They drove to Buxton where trucks were forming strike teams. Driving there was the 'first sort of awareness [of the] gravity of what we were dealing with' as they realised 'there's actually people dying in this moment' and they were unable to help. They were instructed to go to Marysville for asset protection and 'by this stage we all have adrenaline because it's like this is full on, this is serious'. There were 'cars, cars, cars, cars, cars' leaving Marysville as 'we were driving in'. She recalled:

**Figure 13:** 'Mushroom clouds of black smoke'.
Source: Photo supplied by Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, family collection.

> It was like driving into night time and the smoke was so big it blocked the sun. It was like driving from daylight into night time with all these cars going in the other direction. It was like the feeling of the end of the world […] something was wrong. So we got into the town and it is a town that I am quite familiar with. I spent time there on our family adventures and we have friends there […] so I know it quite well […] I felt that I knew the roads quite well and I was pleased. It was a really strange feeling like the town has been abandoned. It was really dark and hardly any cars. There was no people on the street and we were told to drive up a road and along a road at the edge of town.

They relied upon radio contact with other cars in the strike team 'to know where you're going and at one stage radio contact between everyone stopped working […] so that was quite scary'. They were driving up the road when Wytze stopped and reversed into a street saying, 'I'm not going any further because if we keep going up this road we're not going to be able to turn around. If something happens and we're trapped'. Jenneke was in charge of radio communication, relaying information and instructions between her Dad—who was 'talking out loud'—and the captain who was in the back of the truck. Wytze said 'there's a spot fire down there […] see if they can put it out'. There was 'a

bit of a pause' before the captain replied 'yes, we're a bit beyond that now'. She continued:

> And then in front of us. So we're at the edge of town just looking into the bush and you could see this fire front heading towards us. And because it's so close now it gets really smoky and you suddenly can't see anything anymore and you're in this truck and you can't see where you're going. And so there's a discussion: do we try to go back the way we came, do we try and find a safe place, do we wait here. We decided in the end to turn the truck around [...] a big decision to make because on one side the road drops off, so if we drop down there, that's the end of us.

With 'one wheel in the gutter we drove down—and we can't see where we're going—really slowly because there's other vehicles on the road. Other people are still trying to leave so the road is quite chaotic'. They 'made it to the oval […] and busted through the barriers and drove into the middle of the oval and put some lights there so other people could follow'. There were 'lots of cars' and children too, 'that was really awful'. Two trucks had not arrived and the lost radio contact meant 'it was really scary for the men in charge because they felt like they just lost, felt there was a possibility they just lost about ten men':

> We got out of the cabin and jumped on the back, put blankets over us and waited. And the fire was just enormous. More enormous, beyond anything that I could have imagined. Like, a town that I had grown up with, that you'd seen all my life, you feel is a safe place […] and it was just completely exploding around us. Completely unsafe. You can see people trying to get to safety but you can't help them because if you go there you will probably die.

Jenneke stayed on the truck and 'gave myself the job of being on the radio, listening to what was happening'. She could hear arguments between the CFA and people about whether they could go and save houses. With the adrenaline 'everybody is really emotional and yelling at each other and just this feeling of panic'. Another truck on the oval somehow had access to AM radio which was talking about bushfires but 'there was no mention of our fire'. The lost radio contact meant 'the first thing they heard from us was Marysville's gone. So that whole time we were in there burning we couldn't tell them what was happening. We couldn't ask about this other crew. You feel so isolated and alone […] this is happening and no one knows we're here, you're just kind of on your own'.

**Figure 14:** The Fire Burning. The Murrindindi bushfire captured by Wytze.
Source: Photo supplied by Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, family collection.

They tried to rest knowing that once the fire front passed they would need 'to get back into the truck and try to fight the fire—[…] that was a bit terrifying'. The 'fire went through' and they headed in a convoy out of Marysville towards Buxton, following a bulldozer which unblocked the road. They were 'going to try and do what, do something. That was also quite scary because you are driving through a landscape that is still burning. And the trees are falling over everywhere'. Radio chatter between the trucks discussed whether they could drive over fallen power lines; 'they didn't sound sure enough to me and we were first in the convoy […] we were fine but that was quite scary'.

They drove from Marysville to Buxton, which 'was all burnt', and then towards Taggerty where the fire had not come. While they waited for instructions other CFA trucks drove past. Jenneke looked at the town names printed on the side of the trucks. They 'were all names that I didn't recognise and I thought "oh yes, they know we need help, they are coming, and they're here" and I felt such an enormous relief that we weren't alone anymore'.

Eventually they went home. Back in Alexandra, Jenneke and Wytze pulled mattresses into the kitchen and slept on the floor because 'we needed to be close to each other, we needed to be close to the centre of the house, we needed to be close to the phone. It felt like the safest'. The next morning Wytze went to return to the fires and Jenneke stayed to protect the house. After the fires Jenneke tried to go back to work in Melbourne but 'I didn't realise how much I was affected by what had happened'. She was angry when people flippantly spoke about the inconvenience the bushfires caused for a wedding. She cried, thinking, 'you just don't know what just happened, you don't understand what's just happened'. She went to work and her boss told her to go home. She 'went back to Alexandra because I think everyone was there feeling the same as me, you are with the people, they know, they get it, they totally get it'.

Jenneke's remembering adds another layer to our understanding of bushfire and the Black Saturday fires. Her uninterrupted, detailed and chronological recollection and reflections capture her experience of bushfire as it unfolded on the day. There is a tendency for the past to be represented as a static and predetermined event without the sense of uncertainty and possibility it contained at the time. Jenneke recounted the uncertainty of the unfolding day through the way described how she and her CFA team members responded to the changing circumstances surrounding them and went from blacking out and 'fighting fires' to 'running for our lives'. Instead of a narrative that placed the fire centre stage and gave a sense of inevitability to the day through the articulation of various 'facts', timestamps and navigational directions, Jenneke's oral history account highlighted the subjective human experience of the fire. Her reflections illuminated significant details about her experience of the fire and how she remembered it. Memories of the spectacle, speed, and sound of the fire were enveloped within her chronological descriptions, which were given a specific narrative arc and framework through her role as a CFA crew member. This role gave her a specific task and sense of purpose and provided a clear beginning, middle and end to her narrative. This was her experience and memory of the bushfire but it also speaks to common themes in the interviews with other migrants and with other stories of bushfire. It contrasts and complements the official report and other narratives and stories of Black Saturday and Victoria's history of bushfire.

## Sensory and Experiential: The Spectacle, Speed and Sound of Fire

Personal narratives revealed the immediacy and lived experience of bushfires. Jenneke's detailed narrative, and the memories of other migrants, provide significant insights into the direct and sensory experience of bushfire. Sensory memories are enveloped within wider narratives and recollections of bushfire that illuminated how people felt during the fire and how they remembered the spectacle and visual aspects of fire, its speed and power, and particularly the sound.

### Spectacle

Memories of bushfires in Gippsland conveyed a sense of the spectacle of fire. During the Great Divide bushfires of the summer of 2006-2007 in Valencia Creek,[13] Rachel remembered 'the smoke coming over the hill, we could see it, really scary, it stays with you'. They 'didn't get to the stage of being surrounded by flames, but we got to the stage of it being dark'.[14] In the 2013 Aberfeldy-Donnellys Creek fire,[15] Hans could see the 'hills were red behind us […] there were sparks falling everywhere'. There was 'a red glow and embers falling, red and blue flashing lights, people running around like headless chooks. A bit surreal'. The 'sky was red, sparks flying'.[16] These visual memories provided an insight into the sensory and affective experiences of bushfire and how the experience challenged migrants' understanding and expectations of fire, which consequently altered their perception of the environment and sense of safety.

Visual memories of the Marysville Black Saturday fire conveyed a sense of the power of nature and the obscured vision that threatened people's sense of safety. Memories of darkness and smoke were particularly prominent. Jenneke described how

[13] Over 1,000 fires burned across more than 1,200,000 hectares throughout Victoria from December 2006 to February 2007. The two major fires were the Great Divide North fire in the northeast, and the Great Divide South fire in Gippsland. There were 33 houses destroyed, 13 houses damaged, plus 255 other buildings, as well as the loss of 1334 animals and livestock, and 1,357km fencing. See: CFA and Forest Fire Management Victoria websites.

[14] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Traralgon, Victoria.

[15] Four fire fighters and a community member died during the 2012-2013 fire season in Victoria. Over 190,00 hectares of land were burnt, and 46 houses destroyed. The Aberfeldy-Donnellys Creek fire burnt for around six weeks—from 17th January—burning 86,000 hectares.

[16] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maffra West Upper, Victoria.

'the smoke was so big it blocked the sun' making it feel like they were driving 'from daylight into nighttime' as they entered Marysville.[17] When the fire front arrived it became 'really smoky and you suddenly can't see anything anymore'.[18] Wytze saw 'little spot fires everywhere, and we hear[d] the noise'. When Jenneke saw the fire front and 'houses around us started exploding' she realised 'we have to get to safety now. We are no longer fighting fires, we are running for our lives now'.[19]

They turned the truck around in this darkened atmosphere. Wytze said the 'strike team leader gave command back to us, "just go and save yourselves […] I can't oversee it anymore"'. Their Captain 'didn't know the way. I knew the way thank God':

> It was six o′clock summertime, it was completely black and grey. There were cars coming my way yelling and screaming. "Turn on your lights, why don′t you put your head lights on?!" They were. They were just tiny pin pricks.[20]

Wytze knew the geography of the town: where the oval was and the location of Bruno's house directly opposite. He 'put my wheels in the culvert [or gutter] and bang bang bang bang into the mailboxes because I couldn't see the road'. They 'decided to bust' through the fence onto the oval and created 'a badge of honour, the dent in the front of our fire truck [from] the moment I pushed through the barrier'.[21] These memories described the darkness and thickness of the smoke that restricted their sight and shaped their affective experience. It was 'six o'clock summertime' when it would normally be bright and light, but 'it was completely black and grey'. We might imagine fire as bright and light, orange and yellows, but the descriptions of Wytze, Jenneke and Bruno emphasised that the arrival of the bushfire brought darkness and restricted people's vision. These firsthand accounts help to convey this exceptional situation and visual and sensory experience to someone who did not experience the fire. Carefully considering and understanding these sensory memories has important benefits for people deciding whether they would stay during a bushfire or leave early, and for other people involved in bushfire management and communication.

[17] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Marysville, Victoria.

[21] Ibid.

**Figure 15:** 'Six o'clock summertime, it was completely black and grey'. Jenneke and Wytze with other CFA members on the back of their truck on the Marysville Oval.
Source: Photo supplied by Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, family collection.

People sheltered in darkness on the oval and watched the fire front pass through the town. They recalled visual and sensory images of the strange atmosphere, weather and environment created by the fire. The height of the flames were restricted from view by 'smoke clouds'.[22] Bruno said 'the smoke was so black that I couldn't see my own hands'.[23] Wytze said the oval 'is very protected […] it hardly ever blows here', but when he and others sheltered in the back of the CFA truck with woollen blankets, the blankets 'were blowing out of our hands'. He emphasised how 'the fire makes its own weather. […] It was 40 degrees or 45 degrees and then it started to rain'.[24] Bruno felt there was a 'divine protection there [on the oval]' and felt they were being protected by spirits. He said: 'the trees were flying around, we were in the eye of the storm. [It was] windy […] but not like all around us. Could have been my protection there. Oh yes, it

[22] Ibid.

[23] Bruno Torfs, Interviewed 27th July 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Marysville, Victoria.

[24] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

happens. Spirits do amazing things'.[25]

Jenneke, on the other hand, felt unsure and said 'I don't think anyone else was sure if we were actually in a safe place'. The fire was 'enormous, beyond anything that I could have imagined'. She watched as 'a town that I had grown up with, that […] you feel is a safe place […] was just completely exploding around us'.[26] Jenneke's ideas of safety were shattered by the fire as she watched it burn the town:

> At first it was so smoky, then it was not too smoky and then the houses started to explode around us and it got very smoky [...] So you are just watching everything burn around you. It didn't look like a front coming toward you at that stage [...] Not everything was burning at once obviously, but you just watch this catch, okay, that's burning now. Will that burn or won't it? It's not a front coming through, it's just things burning.[27]

Marysville ran on 'enormous gas bottles'—rather than gas mains—which were exposed to the fire. Wytze said the 'bullet tanks […] started blowing up one after the other'. Both he and Jenneke recalled watching the petrol station, indoor swimming pool and the school explode from the oval but 'that was as far as you could see. The rest was just clouds and black and by that time it was night'.[28] Jenneke said:

> Houses would look totally normal and then at one moment it would go *poof* [...] it looked like it was exploding. Weird. You hear all these explosions going on; might be the petrol station blowing up. You see the primary school and pool and everything just burning. Lots of people were dying around us and there was nothing you could do. I could hear, these people.[29]

Most of Jenneke's memories describe the physical destruction of property, but in this memory there is a sudden and striking reminder of the loss of human lives. This was also one of the few moments in the interview when her voice became unsteady. As though the brief focus on people dying was too painful, she flipped back to recalling the events, her role and her behavioural (rather than emotional) response.

Wytze and Jenneke remembered 'being with Bruno and watching him watching

[25] Bruno Torfs, Interviewed 27th July 2016.

[26] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[29] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

his life's work' burn just opposite the oval.[30] Bruno asked them to help protect his house but it was not safe. He 'saw the whole show' as his 'magnificent gallery', home and sculpture garden burnt.[31] The fire did not behave the way Bruno imagined it would. It came from a different direction. The 'huge fire was so big it pulled all the oxygen it could get and there was a spot fire coming toward the big fire so it was coming both ways. Can you imagine that?'.[32] Wytze 'had to almost physically stop him' from going over. Later, when 'things were still burning fiercely […] he sneaked over there to have a look'.[33]

Once the fire had passed, Wytze and Jenneke left Marysville. They drove through 'a dream landscape, everything was black, and going north we had no idea what has happened to Alexandra […] it was black and black and how far north is this going?'. They were worried how close the fire burnt to their home in Alexandra. Wytze remembered 'everything was black […] all the mountains over the hills, completely black. I took some photos as we drove in and it was green'. In such a short time the environment had been changed so drastically from the fires.[34]

### Speed

Hans did not describe in detail his experience of bushfire in Gippsland, but his reflections did indicate his shock and surprise at the speed of the 2013 Aberfeldy-Donnellys Creek fire when '880 acres burnt in 15 minutes. It was a big fire, it went quick'. Hans went to see the owner of the farming country they leased, knowing there was 'a fire in Feldy, a little fire' that might be a problem in three days time. He wondered if he should move the 'steers off the hill'. He left at 9pm. At 3am they were woken by a phone call and the evacuation order for Newry. Hans looked out the window and saw 'sparks falling everywhere', cars driving away from 'Lake Maggie' and

[30] Ibid.

[31] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[32] Bruno Torfs, Interviewed 27th July 2016.

[33] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[34] Ibid.

fire trucks going the other way; it was 'time to get out and go'.[35]

The 'fire was 60k's away when we went to bed' and 'travelled 60 kilometres overnight'. When they woke 'the place is gone, that's how quickly it went. Same fire went from Feldy to Lake Maggie […] it came a lot quicker than anybody thought'. He reiterated '800 acres went up in about 15 minutes' and that 'the fire comes through so quickly, 25 kilometres of fencing went, woosh, gone'. Hans felt that they had a fire plan and were prepared, but 'looking back now, well, we weren't prepared at all.[36]

The bushfire challenged Hans' understandings and assumptions about the behaviour and power of fire and also threatened his sense of safety. Hans felt 'caught out' by the 'sudden attack' of the fire. It made him feel unprepared—'this was not supposed to happen'—when they woke up to 'embers falling, not standing [outside] with a hose'.[37] He could not trust his eyes to know how quickly and how far the fire would travel; distance was no indication of safety. The speed, destruction and power of the fire challenged his expectations about bushfire behaviour and shook his sense of safety. His memories emphasised the speed and unpredictability of fires, and illuminated experiential aspects of bushfire and an overwhelming sense of shock and surprise.

## Sound

Auditory stimuli was also a significant feature of migrants' sensory memories with many recalling various sounds that evocatively described the bushfire. As with smell, sound memories can be a key part of recollections.[38] Before the fire front arrived Wytze

[35] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] This section was informed by a wider reading of studies of sound including such works as: Joy Damousi and Paula Hamilton, eds., *A Cultural History of Sound, Memory, and the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Michael Bull, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies* (London: Routledge, 2019); Ros Bandt, Michelle Duffy, and Dolly MacKinnon, eds., *Hearing Places: Sound, Place, Time and Culture* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); Siobhan McHugh, "The Affective Power of Sound: Oral History on Radio," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Siobhan McHugh, "Oral History Goes to Air: Reflections on Crafting Oral History as Radio Narrative," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* 33 (2011); Brian Pauling and Nicki Reece,

remembered seeing 'little spot fires everywhere and we hear[d] the noise'. On the oval he described the 'noise like a steam train on a wooden bridge out of control. Rumbling, screaming, screeching, thundering. Noise, you can barely make yourself heard'. Above them were 'burning gases' which was 'where a lot of the fire is and that makes a lot of the noise'.[39] In Gippsland, Rachel said that 'if you can hear the sound of jet engines—it is a terrific noise—it is time to bunker down […] because it is too late to leave'.[40] Wytze and Rachel described the sound of fire without detailing how it made them feel, but Bruce Johnson has argued that our first response to sounds are more often emotional and physiological rather than cognitive or intellectual.[41] This was evident through the way Hans recalled the sound of bushfire near his home in Gippsland.

Hans reflected that those who decide to stay during bushfires need to be 'very well prepared and physically and mentally strong. The noise and all. We could hear the fires in the hills before we got evacuated. It is a bit like being at the movies'.[42] This comment reflected Hans' changed attitude towards staying or leaving before a fire, but it also described the impact of the soundscape he encountered. Similarly to Wytze, Hans heard the fire before he saw it. When we cannot locate the source of sound, such as low-frequency sounds or sounds coming from above, it creates an unbalanced power relation that can produce emotions of anxiety and terror.[43] Sound 'produces emotional responses' or 'involuntary affective interpretations'.[44] Being unable to locate the source of a sound usually encourages a sense of fear or anxiety. Hans described the 'noise' of fire as inescapable and immersive. He argued that one needed to be physically prepared and notably 'mentally strong' to stay and defend, and suggested that facing a fire involves

"Against the Odds: Community Access Radio Broadcasting During the Canterbury Earthquakes: Some Reflections on Plains Fm 96.9," *Medianz* 14, no. 1 (2014); Charles Fernyhough, *Pieces of Light: The New Science of Memory* (London: Profile Books, 2012).

[39] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[40] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016.

[41] Bruce Johnson, "Sound Studies Today: Where Are We Going," in *A Cultural History of Sound, Memory and the Senses*, ed. Joy Damousi and Paula Hamilton (New York: Routledge, 2017), 16.

[42] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016.

[43] Johnson, "Sound Studies Today," 16.

[44] Ibid., 16-17.

facing not just the physical flame but enduring its sound. The experience of sound was such an important quality that Hans emphasised how bushfires 'on telly' look different from 'when you walk out and see and smell and [hear] the sound of death and wounded things'.[45] Acknowledging the power of sound provided a more detailed understanding of bushfire and its sensory characteristics.

Sound was also central to the powerful and palpable way that Jenneke experienced and remembered the bushfires. The sound of radio communication featured strongly in her narrative as she recalled using and listening to the radio as a source of news and information. Radio plays an important role within emergency situations as a conduit for news and information, but it was the sound rather than the content of radio communication that featured significantly in Jenneke's memories of Black Saturday. Jenneke first recalled memories focused on the sound of radio communication when they were on the edge of town in the darkened environment. They were 'supposed to have contact through your radios with the car that is the head of your strike team [in order] to know where you're going', but at 'one stage […] we lost a lot of radio contact […] that was quite scary'.[46] Voice contact can provide a sense of connectedness, but losing radio contact between trucks broke this sense of connection and security.[47]

Jenneke was in charge of the radio communication between herself and Wytze in the front of the truck, and the captain and crew in the back. She became the link within the truck during a confusing and intense moment of the fire as they decided to turn the truck around and head to the oval. She was 'constantly thinking what do I need to be doing now […] I need to keep the connection between these two': their captain and Wytze.[48] The sound of voices was thus part of her memory of this pivotal moment in her bushfire experience.

Jenneke's experience of the presence and absence of sounds of radio communication whilst on the oval was also significant. On the oval they 'had no radio

[45] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016.

[46] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[47] Edward D. Miller, *Emergency Broadcasting and 1930s American Radio* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 8.

[48] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

contact' with two missing trucks. This was 'really scary […] because they felt like they just lost […] about ten men'.[49] She repeated and restarted her sentence to explain this. It was through radio sound that they had a sense of connection and communication with other members of the team. The physical place where we hear sounds provides the foundation for interpretation.[50] Losing radio contact during the bushfire meant losing any certainty that they were safe. They later learnt the two trucks were safe, but during that moment when they lost contact with them radio silence was a source of intense fear, concern, anxiety and potential loss.[51]

Successfully sustaining the sound of radio contact could be empowering. Jenneke continued to be involved in radio communication on the oval and gave herself 'the job of being on the radio, listening to what was happening, so I could relay it to the rest of the crew'. Having this role and responsibility provided a sense of control and a purpose during this stressful situation. Nonetheless, it also meant she could 'hear these arguments going on' between the CFA and others as they debated whether they could save houses. The 'adrenaline' meant 'everybody is really emotional and yelling at each other, and [there was] just this feeling of panic' conveyed through the radio. Radio communication on the oval gave Jenneke a role but also exposed her to others' feeling of panic. Recalling these moments of the sound of radio communication and its presence, absence and silence were one of the few times that Jenneke's voice wavered. Throughout the rest of the interview, despite the traumatic events she recalled, she maintained a constant, steady, modulated and controlled voice.[52]

Sounds of radio broadcast were also part of the soundscape on the oval.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Johnson, "Sound Studies Today," 16.

[51] The Royal Commission Report details when the trucks working along Kings Road drove towards the Gallipoli Park oval. Vehicles suffered damage including mirrors and plastic parts which melted in the heat. One crew was caught outside their vehicle when the wind changed. They were saved by another crew who picked them up and took them to Alexandra. It is likely these are the two trucks Jenneke referred to. Wytze also commented that one truck was left behind and the whole crew climbed into the back of truck already filled with people. See: 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, *Final Report Volume I*, 156.

[52] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

Somehow another truck was 'getting AM radio' and 'people were listening to the news'. They were talking about bushfires but 'there was no mention of our fire'. They could hear the radio broadcast but it did not give Jenneke any feeling of comfort or support.[53] The presence, absence and silence of the radio was significant during these stressful and critical moments. Radio can provide a sense of intimacy between strangers as the disembodied voice is heard by unseen listeners.[54] In this situation the radio was not a source of comfort and connection but of disconnection, isolation and abandonment. Being able to hear AM radio broadcast did not provide reassurance because their bushfire was not mentioned. People on the oval were unable to communicate with the outside world and tell them what was happening, find information, or ask for help. The sound of a radio voice offers hope and the possibility that someone knows and could seek or send help. During disaster it can provide a sense of connection and slice through distance.[55] On the oval, however, radio sounds had the opposite effect. It heightened the sense of distance and contributed to feeling alone, unknown and isolated.

Memories of the sound of radio communication and news radio were also present after the fire. When Jenneke left Marysville there was radio chatter discussing whether it was safe to drive over fallen powerlines. Jenneke felt 'they didn't sound sure enough to me, and we were first in the convoy'. The sound of radio voices continued to shape her affective experience and memory of the fire. Once back in Alexandra Jenneke was protecting the house on her own. She had the AM radio on for updates but knew 'they are not actually accurate' because 'I was in the middle of the fire the night before that the radio hadn't even logged'. She 'didn't feel any comfort from the local radio' and sat on the back step crying. Radio can break news quicker than print media; it can feel intimate and offer a familiar voice.[56] But not during this moment. Jenneke's experience of bushfire and radio the day before meant it did not provide any sense of comfort or security. It was not a voice that she could trust to convey correct information. When she was alone defending the house, this was the only voice she could hear, and the only

[53] Ibid.

[54] Miller, *Emergency Broadcasting*, 7, 167.

[55] Ibid., 49.

[56] Ibid., 50, 57.

form of connection to another person or the world beyond her immediate situation. Yet it did not provide solace.

### Narratives and Roles

Sensory memories prioritise personal experiences and memories of the fire, but migrants also remembered and articulated their bushfire experiences according to communal narratives and their role during the fire. The specific roles of interviewees and their membership of particular groups shaped their experience and behaviour during the fire, as well as their recollection and process of understanding afterwards. Bende and Jenneke reflected on how their role as women and family members shaped their behaviour and response during bushfire. Wytze and Rachel's role as members of bushfire organisations informed their actions and understanding during bushfire and shaped the personal and communal framework of their bushfire narratives.

Disasters offer a window into the inner workings and function of society by revealing through disruption the social structures and patterns of behaviour that are usually obscured from view. Migrants' memories demonstrated how Black Saturday revealed subconscious assumptions and expectations of people's behaviour. Bende acknowledged how assumptions about gender roles shaped her family's behaviour during Black Saturday.[57] Their family left their house at three o'clock on Black Saturday 'because we could see flames on that hill'.[58] Although Bende and the children left, her husband returned to a friend's place—not far from theirs—with four other men who intended to help save that house if the fire came 'because that is what you do when you are a man. You make sure that the wife and kids are safe and then the men go off, like

[57] For further discussion of the influence of gender upon experiences of bushfire see: Christine Eriksen, *Gender and Wildfire: Landscapes of Uncertainty* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Fraser, *Black Saturday*.

[58] Bende and Kat were both involved in the Kilmore East fire on Black Saturday, which burnt across the Shires of Nillumbik, Mitchell, the Yarra Ranges, and the City of Whittlesea. The fire started at about 11:47am in Kilmore East and burnt in a south-easterly direction, crossing the Hume Highway, and travelling towards Mount Disappointment. After the wind change, the fire passed through Kinglake, Kinglake West, Steels Creek, Strathewen, and burnt towards Flowerdale, Hazeldene, Castella, and Glenburn. The fire burnt 125,383 hectares, destroyed 1,242 homes, and 119 people died. The Kilmore

that; they did in Kinglake as well and Marysville'. The fire did not come to that house but it made Bende reevaluate their actions. Their 'house was not worth saving' but she never questioned him joining the others; 'I thought of course you have to go and help save that house'. It was only afterwards Bende 'started thinking':

> What if something had happened to him? What if the fires hadn't turned? What if the wind hadn′ t turned because the only thing that saved our house or that side of our road was because the wind changed at five in the afternoon. When it got to our mailbox at five o′ clock there was a big wind changed and [it] turned away from our house.[59]

Upon reflection, Bende became aware of the assumptions made about her family's roles and behaviour during a fire. When growing up in Denmark her father was a volunteer fire fighter so she was accustomed to him leaving when the fire alarm rang. Additionally, her husband helped fight the Ash Wednesday fires as a teenager. Both her father's and her husband's past fire fighting involvement reinforced the assumption that if there was a bushfire her husband would go; 'that's just what men do'.[60] Scholars including Christine Eriksen and Peg Fraser have examined how gender remains 'a central organising principle' in bushfire communities. Gender roles influence the level of knowledge people have about bushfire, assumptions about appropriate behaviour during a fire, and determine who will stay and who will leave.[61] The fire revealed and challenged Bende's family's assumed gender roles and led to a different bushfire plan. The 'rule is now if anything happens again we stay together'. The 'rule is now you just leave. These are all dead things, just leave' […] 'I don't believe you can save a house without being scarred forever'.[62]

Jenneke also reflected on gender and family roles during the fire because she was aware of being one of only two women on the Marysville oval who were part of the CFA. Gender roles influence the membership of volunteer bushfire brigades and the

East fire later merged with the Murrindindi fire. The combined burnt area was 168,542 hectares. See: 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, *Final Report Volume I.*

[59] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Eden Park, Victoria.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Eriksen, *Gender and Wildfire*, 31; Fraser, *Black Saturday.*

[62] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

decisions women make during fire.[63] Jenneke was aware of her unique position of being a daughter and the only woman in her CFA team and 'was scared that I was going to be a burden or they would feel I wasn't up to it'. For 'a long time afterwards' she carried this worry but when she asked her crew they reassured her 'you were great, you were fine'. She 'needed to get that off my chest'. Whenever she began to doubt she 'just had to remember […] they said I was fine'. Although she was the only woman in the team she did not feel this changed her experience of being part of the CFA crew.[64]

Family dynamics and roles also had the capacity to influence how Jenneke and Wytze experienced and remembered their bushfire. Jenneke was on stand-by that day because she wanted to gain more experience. Black Saturday was her first call-out. Wytze had been in the fire brigade for twenty-two years and said:

> "I've never had a fire like this and you get it on your first call-out." He thought it was a bit unfair. And another moment he said under his breath, "You're not supposed to be here." It was okay for me to be part of the adventure when it was safe but at that stage it was a bit touch and go.[65]

Now that Jenneke is a parent she felt it would be hard 'having your child with you at that moment'. But she said 'the funny thing was my Dad didn't treat me that differently, I didn't feel he's being a protective Dad at all, which is kind of nice, I was just part of the team'. Although she was in a unique position on the truck, overall Jenneke felt part of the team. Jenneke 'wasn't just someone running for my life I was part of a team, I was on a truck, so I was trying to fulfill my role within this emergency so that we would all as a team end up being in safety'. Having a specific role during the fire gave her a sense of purpose and 'helps you not to panic', and ensured she felt part of the team.[66] Her role informed her response during the fire and how she was able to understand the experience in the aftermath.

Migrants' roles and membership of bushfire organisations contributed to the different forms of 'history-telling' used to narrate, reflect on and frame their experience.

[63] Eriksen, *Gender and Wildfire*, 21.

[64] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

Jenneke and Wytze were on the same CFA truck but arranged their 'story materials' in different ways, which provided different perspectives.[67] Jenneke was part of the CFA and a collective group and organisational structure but she narrated her experience from a personal perspective. Wytze was part of the same CFA team but anchored his memory and experience more firmly within a communal narrative. Alessandro Portelli has argued there are three modes of history-telling and ways of organising historical narratives: institutional, communal and personal. These are characterised by social and spatial references and the narrator's point of view.[68] Most 'history-telling is the art of combining modes into meaningful patterns'.[69] Wytze's narrative drew on all three modes of history-telling but he primarily constructed his memories through a communal narrative. These 'patterns of the remembering and the forms of the telling' enabled an understanding of how people remembered and made meaningful their bushfire experiences.[70]

Wytze's life history interview was largely focused on his working life and involvement within community groups. His reflections on bushfires were constructed in a similar way that focused on his participation within the CFA before, during and after Black Saturday. Joining the local CFA was a significant moment within Wytze's family because it connected them with a particular social group and community. The CFA became the framework through which Wytze explained and narrated his involvement in Black Saturday. Wytze firstly outlined his fire credentials and previous participation in fighting fires. He joined the CFA after witnessing fire within his local area and within four years he was captain. He had been 'to fight fires in New South Wales, South Australia' and Victoria. First-hand experience and expert knowledge of bushfires informed his actions during the fire and how he later framed his memories of Black Saturday.

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[67] Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 52.

[68] Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 27.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 73.

His longterm CFA membership provided him with a deeper knowledge of fire, which was evident in how he made sense of the Marysville bushfire. It helped him make decisions and comprehend what was happening on the oval. Wytze explained 'crown fires' burn and race through treetops where the leaves and eucalyptus oils are. These fires are faster and hotter and travel swiftly when assisted by winds. During these fires 'most of the flames are higher up […] burning gases 40, 50, 60, 70 metres up in the air […] that's where a lot of the fire is and that makes a lot of the noise'. Whole trees burn as the fire races from tree to tree and then descends. People wondered if it was possible to leave the oval to save buildings, but Wytze explained that they were 'not going anywhere because the trees were dropping left, right and centre because the eucalypts do. They have a very shallow root system and when they are stressed they drop their branches without warning […] they weigh tonnes'.[71] Wytze's knowledge of the Australian environment—and his conscious comparison with European trees that 'creak and croak and then they come down'—informed his behaviour during the fire, his comprehension of what was happening and explanation of the event. The CFA provided a frame of reference for understanding, responding to and making sense of the fires, which in turn shaped the reconstruction of memories.

His longterm involvement in the CFA meant Wytze was able to situate his experience of Black Saturday within a broader context of Australian bushfires. Wytze had seen 'houses, whole paddocks, valleys burn up, you had seen that plenty of times and no lives lost'. He had seen fires with 'flames maybe two metres high, a few embers, but this! Those fires were this compared to that. It was just…'. Wytze compared Black Saturday with his previous experiences in order to comprehend what happened:

> Now I know what bushfires are, but this one really rattled our bones, no one, none of the other guys ever experienced something like that, so overwhelming and we almost lost our lives. It was scary and we didn't realise at the time.[72]

Wytze had a specific type of knowledge and experience of bushfires that was shared with others belonging to the CFA. This informed the communal narrative he told about his experience of Black Saturday. Phrases such as it 'really rattled our bones' and

[71] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[72] Ibid.

'we almost lost our lives' emphasise his role as a member of the CFA team. Wytze aligned himself with other similarly experienced CFA members who had never seen something like Black Saturday. This situated Wytze within a collective community experience and communal narrative.[73] Wytze remembered and reconstructed his experiences from a communal mode of 'history-telling' but also switched between personal and institutional modes.[74] He commented on other organisations and institutions involved in the aftermath of the fire, the Royal Commission, and what he saw as the politicisation of aspects of Black Saturday. Rachel also switched between institutional, communal and personal modes of 'history-telling'. Her role as an emergency communication employee meant she was able to reflect on her experience of bushfire from within an institutional framework (as will be discussed in Chapter Five), as well as share a communal narrative of her personal experience of bushfire within her local community. These modes of 'history-telling' provided useful frameworks for remembering the fire and provided insights into how people made sense of their fire experience.

Communal narratives based on individual roles provided a way to anchor and frame bushfire memories. Framing bushfire experiences through communal perspectives and roles also provided a sense of order and logic to traumatic experiences and offered a way to make sense of these 'difficult stories'.[75] Wytze's role as a member of the CFA informed his knowledge of bushfires and provided him with a framework that helped make sense of the bushfire and his experience. Wytze and Jenneke were part of a team, which shaped their actions and experience and gave them a sense of purpose and contribution during the fire. Roles and actions taken during the fire shaped their experience of bushfire, but also how they remembered and reconstructed their memories of the fire and made meaning from their experience.

[73] Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 69.

[74] Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 28.

[75] Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, "Only Human: A Reflection on the Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Working with "Difficult" Stories," *The Oral History Review* 37, no. 2 (2010).

## Unsettled: Migrant Memories of Fire

The construction of bushfire memories in particular narrative conventions provided a sense of order and meaning. It gave the impression of memories settled into shape and into a static complete story. The formal, finished quality is deceiving.[76] Memory is 'an active process' of creating meaning and 'not a passive depository of facts'.[77] Maitland migrants had sixty years to process their experience and memory of the 1955 flood, whereas Victorian migrants were still living in the recent aftermath of the fires and their memories were thus still being reworked, retold, and reincorporated into their life history. Their memories were less settled than the flood memories of Maitland migrants. These very changes in memory 'reveal the narrator's effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives'.[78] Oral historians 'listening amid chaos' record the experience of people who are 'still processing the meaning of events' and enduring the aftermath.[79] The ongoing aftermath and process of making meaning from the bushfires was particularly evident within Bruno and Kat's memories. As a prelude to the following chapters, this chapter will close with an examination of how being a migrant shaped their actions during the fire and their subsequent reflections and narratives.

Bruno's interview demonstrated the 'unsettled' nature of bushfire memories through the opportunity he saw to 'go deeper' and to revisit, reflect and explore his experiences. Bruno has told his life story—and story of the bushfire—many times for visitors to his gallery and sculpture garden in Marysville. The bushfire is a significant feature throughout his sculpture garden. Photographs of sculptures before the fire and scalded and burnt in the aftermath are placed beside regenerated sculptures. He has marketed his bushfire story and made it part of the rebuilt gallery and garden. The 'Phoenix edition' of his book includes the bushfire and presents a story of hope and an 'optimistic philosophy', which meant 'the fires are not the end of Bruno's tale, just

[76] Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia, 2014), 37.

[77] Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 52.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Sloan, "The Fabric of Crisis," 263.

another chapter in his colourful story'.[80] The story he told during our interview was different and revealed other layers of significance. He initially avoided being interviewed because he had been interviewed by journalists in the aftermath of the bushfires who had misinterpreted and misunderstood his story. He agreed to be interviewed again so he could 'lay out the whole picture' and revisit and review his experience again. He commented 'you wanted to go deep and that's why I like it. I can just tell a story, but to me, I like reviewing again'.[81]

When I interviewed Bruno we sat on huge green upholstered antique wooden chairs looking out on the tree-lined street. Bruno gazed out the window, confidently grasping the white cup containing his decaf cappuccino, his thumb occasionally accidentally dipping into his coffee. He did not recount a detailed chronology of the events, nor provide many 'facts' about his experience, but reflected on what it was like to be in the fire and how he has made sense of and explained this experience to himself and others. He drew on his past experiences and worldview to make sense of the fire. Dreams from his childhood and an encounter with a clairvoyant helped him explain why he went through the bushfire. His spirituality and worldview helped inform his responses to the event. He felt able to 'go deeper' and reflect on other parts of this experience and tell me about his understanding of spirituality and the cosmos, which ultimately informed how he privately made sense of the fires. The constant process of sharing, scripting and redrafting memories has enveloped the bushfire within Bruno's larger worldview and life history.

Kat's memories of Black Saturday illuminated the unsettled nature of memory, how memories are still being processed and made meaningful in the aftermath, and their entanglement with larger migration and life history narratives. Kat and her family had only recently arrived in Kinglake before Black Saturday and they were not prepared nor understood the seriousness of bushfires and the warnings predicted for the following day. Kat went to work in Melbourne on Saturday but left early in the afternoon. She was 'feeling a bit dodgy about this' situation from monitoring the CFA website and

[80] Andrew Kade and Bruno Torfs, *Bruno's Art and Sculpture Garden: A Colourful Story*, Phoenix Edition ed. (China: Self Published, 2009), 229.

[81] Bruno Torfs, Interviewed 27th July 2016.

receiving messages about bushfires. She felt she needed to 'go home and be with my family'. As she was driving up the Hume Highway, Kat received text messages from her CFA friend about smoke in the area and fire near Kilmore. She began to 'feel a bit dodgy' and questioned 'is this really the best way' because she 'didn't know the area very well' and could not remember how close to Kilmore she would travel. She remembered saying 'universe, please look after me, please make sure I get home safe whatever way that is, just make sure I get home safe to my family, and immediately the engine coughed and stopped'.[82]

Kat was stranded on the side of the Hume Highway and angry her husband could not come to collect her. She could 'smell smoke', but was unsure how far she was from Kilmore and the fire. The RACV had a two hour wait time so she sat on the side of the road waiting. Then Kat received a text message from her husband telling her 'the garden is on fire, there are embers everywhere'. Kat was 'in this absolute shock'. She 'didn't even know the fire was anywhere near him' and suddenly 'it's here. The garden is on fire. I just remember crying and despairing'. At that moment the RACV turned up and towed her car to the nearest safe garage.

> [It had] a perfect view across the Kinglake mountain and it was just like this billow of smoke coming off it, like the whole mountain was smoke and it was still daylight at the time and it just looked like a volcano erupting'.[83]

Kat spoke to her friend and neighbour on the phone who said the fire was all around them. The phone was passed to her son so she could say goodbye. They 'ended the call and I just collapsed over the bonnet of my car sobbing my heart out'.[84]

Kat was collected by a work colleague who took her back to Melbourne and her work place, which was already receiving phone calls about bushfire deaths. She got 'zero sleep that night and [I] just remember being in a complete state of shock and had no car, nowhere to go, no clothes to change into'. The following day she left to try and return to her family. Her real estate agent rang to ask whether the property was okay: 'I remember saying, "I'm okay but I don't know if my husband and my son are alive" and

[82] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Kinglake, Victoria.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

he said "And do you know if the property is still there?"'. Eventually her husband rang to say 'we are alright, it is just a big mess up here'. The roads were closed and no one was allowed into Kinglake, but by Sunday evening a convoy of people, including her son and her neighbour's family, were coming down from the mountain. They stayed together in a motel and then with friends in Melbourne for the next few nights before they were allowed back to Kinglake. Kat 'needed to come back' to Kinglake and 'felt I needed to experience it somehow'. They travelled back via Whittlesea and Kinglake West. She thought 'it is just like winter. There are no leaves on any of the trees, except that there are no dead leaves on the ground. It was just this huge, clean slate of black trees, black ground, and that was it'. It was 'silver and grey and black and charcoaled' with 'tiny bits that you could recognise' or 'a little tiny pocket of colour somewhere from one bush' flowering. It 'looked like some war zone'.[85]

Traumatic and difficult memories were not contained to the day of the fire but continued in the days that followed. There were different layers to people's experience of trauma and the Black Saturday fires. Kat found it difficult being away from Kinglake and separated from her family during the fire. It was 'not just the fire [that] was hard for me but the aftermath was even worse' because she was 'struggling with this awful, awful guilt' from not being there with them. On another level she felt 'I had been robbed of my opportunity of experiencing the fire. I felt like my family had gone through this ordeal, my friends, and I felt like I'd been completely isolated from them'. It took a long time to accept she did have that experience, it was just different.[86]

Kat's story illustrates how the bushfire impacted many people in multiple ways. People experienced different forms of loss and trauma. Peg Fraser and Rob Gordon have discussed the 'hierarchies of loss' that can emerge after disaster as severely affected people serve as benchmarks 'against which other losses are judged'.[87] Fraser sensitively addressed how efforts to 'retrieve order from chaos' can create hierarchies of relative experiences but 'no dichotomy can capture the multitude of experiences and reactions to

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Rob Gordon, "Community Impact of Disaster and Community Recovery," *The Bulletin of the Australian Psychological Society* 31, no. 2 (2009): 13.

such an event'.[88] Although Kat did not see the flames, the fire had a dramatic impact on her life. Her story is different from her family's; hers is the story of someone who wasn't there but tried desperately to get back and who experienced the trauma of returning to a place burnt and 'charcoaled into the ground'.

Kat reflected that 'we live in such a sheltered environment, sheltered community, where you feel like nothing bad ever happens':

> [We think] we can control mother nature, and yet, here's the whole town burnt down. Whole families that I knew charcoaled into the ground and my family is okay, but that woman lost two of her kids. How did that happen? Why is my family okay but she's lost hers or that entire family died? There was this real sense of, I don't know how we are still here, and in fact, am I still here? Maybe I did get stuck in my car on the way home and I did die in the fire, maybe this isn't real. A complete unsense of reality, there was nothing normal to cling to and everything that did have meaning before the fire suddenly had no meaning whatever, like music that once you were really fond of or a TV show or anything suddenly it was so meaningless. Um yeah, so it was really tough, really hard to come back into a community where something like that had happened and how do you, how do you retain normalcy after something like that?[89]

Kat was filled with questions in the aftermath and felt there was 'so little understanding really of what it is like to go through a massive, massive trauma and as a community as well'. Their 'entire lives had just been obliterated' and yet there was pressure to return to 'normal' even though in the aftermath 'you don't really know what normal is'. She returned to work at the Coroners Court which placed her in 'the eye of the tornado'. Everyone 'experienced different layers of awfulness and trauma', and Kat's experience exposed her to details 'behind the scenes' which were 'just too awful'. She struggled because she was unable to talk to anyone about it because 'no one wants to hear it. Everyone is traumatised'.[90]

Kat's interview illuminated the unsettled nature of difficult and traumatic memories. Kat's experience was likely complicated by feeling unable to speak about and share her memories with others. The raw and recent quality of memories almost transported us both back to the fires on an otherwise grey, drizzly, winter day. She

[88] Fraser, *Black Saturday*, 98.

[89] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016.

[90] Ibid.

seemed fixed in the present by nursing, holding, and caring for her baby, and yet was simultaneously transported back in time as she steadily recounted what happened. There was a contrast between the affective quality of her memories and the sound of a child's toys being played with in the background. She spoke specifically about the fire for over twenty-seven minutes straight without break or interruption. I was the most shaken by this interview and feared I was trespassing on such intensely personal recollections.[91] Memories were often recollected in first person, present tense, which made the events seem more immediate. The recency and emotional resonance gave the impression memories were still settling and being made meaningful and incorporated into large life narratives. Traumatic events can rupture individual's internal and external worlds and cause a loss of confidence in the 'scaffolding of family and community', nature and humanity, which is then renegotiated in the aftermath.[92] Survivors can be 'struggling to understand what happened and its significance in their own lives'.[93] The next two chapters specifically examine the changing attitudes and reflections upon community, home, place and belonging in the aftermath of the fires.

Lives were altered permanently by the fire. These interviews captured one moment in an ongoing process of understanding and making meaning from the fire. Kat felt the fire 'just impacts every aspect of your life permanently, I think, really permanently […] I am definitely not the same person that I was'. She questioned:

> How do you survive and keep going? How does this become a part of you? How do you want to relate to it? Do you want to relate to it with bitterness and unhappiness or do you want to relate to it with nurturing and being compassionate to yourself and almost embracing the painful side of it.[94]

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[91] For a discussion on the impacts of interviewing survivors of trauma see: Mark Klempner, "Navigating Life Review Interviews with Survivors of Trauma," *The Oral History Review* 27, no. 2 (2000); McHugh, "The Affective Power of Sound."; Steven High, ed., *Beyond Testimony and Trauma* (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia, 2015); Sheftel and Zembrzycki, "Only Human."

[92] Sean Field, "Beyond 'Healing': Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration," *Oral History* 34, no. 1 (2006): 31; Kai T. Erikson, *In the Wake of the Flood* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979).

[93] High, *Oral History at the Crossroads*, 37; Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds., *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Cathy Caruth, *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014).

[94] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016.

Kat's interview also revealed how the fire impacted her family's migration story. When people were reflecting and sharing their bushfire memories often their migrant background was not immediately evident. People felt they experienced the fire like everyone else rather than specifically as a migrant. It was only upon reflection during the aftermath that connections between their migrant past and their bushfire experience were evident. However, there were moments in Kat's interview where she specifically commented on how being a migrant shaped her actions and experience of the fire. Kat did not know the area well because they had only lived in Kinglake just over a year when the fires came; this shaped her response on the day. Unlike Jenneke and Wytze, who stated they were familiar with the area and knew the roads well, Kat said she did not know the area well and was unsure of her proximity to Kilmore during the fires. Additionally, she was separated from her family and her town during the fires and did not have many connections within Melbourne who she could turn to for information or support.

The fire was a huge disruption within their life and within the future they imagined for themselves as migrants to Australia. The bushfires were 'an empowering experience for us but it has [also] just been mind-numbing'. Australia 'not being my country of origin' was 'hard' because 'my family is not here'. In the aftermath Kat's family clung to their pre-fire plans:

> We had been in Kinglake just over a year before it came through and [...] we hadn't had much time to really settle in our place as a family and know who we are, who are we going to be in this new country? Who do we want to be, what do we want to do in Australia? And we hadn't really settled in that sense and then this huge experience blows up in your face.

The bushfire also challenged their migration and settlement expectations:

> There is a sense that you move to another country for a better life and then you go through something like that and you think well that's not better. You feel a bit let down somehow by where you have moved to and there is a realisation that trauma happens wherever you are. You move overseas because you want more opportunity or [a] more peaceful environment for your kids to grow up in and you don't sort of expect to move somewhere and then go through the most dreadful experience you've ever encountered and you feel like when you leave you should be leaving all that behind you, that you shouldn't have any of that in front of you.

And yet the experience also enabled Kat to reflect on what they had 'achieved' as migrants:

> Amidst all of that I guess we had kind of achieved a lot of what we wanted to have in Australia when we came out here. We have our own house and our land, and we have our chickens and we grow our veggies and a lot of our dreams of coming out to this new country have come true. It's been really hard work but it has come true. And we are still in Kinglake despite all that.[95]

While Kat was explicit about it, the extent to which being a migrant shaped the actions and reflections of other interviewees was less evident. Bushfire memories were not easily characterised as 'migrant' memories, as no one stated specifically whether being a migrant changed the nature of their experience. Wytze, Jenneke, Bruno, Hans and Bende had all lived in regional Victoria for many years before the fires and were European English-speaking migrants whose memories of the fires did not seem overly determined by migration. Similarly, the fleeting comment that an English migrant 'came through the Blitz' before experiencing Australian bushfires, seemed only incidental to Peter Stanley's wider examination of Black Saturday at Steels Creek. This differed from Maitland migrants' flood memories. In my Victorian interviewees, the significance of being a migrant was only seen in their reflections in the aftermath, or inferred from how they remembered and reconstructed their memories of the fire. The reflections of many migrants suggested that they felt their experience was not different from the non-migrant population because they observed that longterm local residents were similarly overwhelmed by the fires. This perceived similarity of experience had the capacity to create a sense of shared belonging and community—as will be explored in the following chapters.

## Conclusion

Migrants' memories of bushfire provide a deeper, nuanced understanding of the lived experience of fire. Oral history interviews revealed the different ways migrants remembered, reconstructed and framed their memories, made sense of difficult and traumatic experiences, and positioned them within larger life histories. Sensory

[95] Ibid.

memories of the spectacle, speed and sound of bushfire illuminated and provided deeper insights into the immediate and affective experience of bushfire. Migrants' roles during the bushfire shaped their behaviour as well as how they remembered, reconstructed, and narrated their personal experience. Migrants' reflections also remind us that these memories were captured in one moment in a process of understanding their personal experience of bushfire. The unsettled nature of bushfire memories demonstrated how the process of comprehending, interpreting, and making meaning from these experiences and incorporating them into migration, settlement and life narratives is ongoing. Instead of bushfires or 'events', these reflections place people centre stage and illuminate the subjective and human experience of fire, significant sensory details, and the ways these experiences are captured within people's memory.

# Chapter 5

# 'We Experienced this Together': Community and Belonging in the Aftermath of Disaster

In the days after the Black Saturday bushfires Jenneke tried to return to work in Melbourne but found herself 'so angry' with people who spoke of the fires as 'really inconvenient' and who didn't 'understand what just happened'. She went to work one day but went straight to her boss's office 'and cried'. She remembered: 'he said "I think you should go home", so I actually went back to Alexandra […] because I think everyone there was feeling the same as me […] they know, they get it, they totally get it'. It was 'really significant' and a unique time when 'everyone [was] hugging each other and eating together and I think everyone needed to tell their story'.[1] In the aftermath of the fires, Jenneke experienced a 'significant' and 'unique' coming together and revelation of community that was echoed throughout other migrants' reflections.

Disasters offer a glimpse into the inner workings of society: its structures, its beliefs and its response and reaction to disaster. Community is a common theme in disaster studies and has often been examined by those involved in 'counter disaster activities' such as emergency management, planning, response and recovery.[2] This chapter examines migrants' memories of community by focusing on their reflections of the nature of community before, during and after bushfire and flood. This chapter draws upon a tripartite understanding of 'community'[3] through a discussion of the way locality, social networks and a sense of belonging contributed to migrants' understanding and experience of community. Migrants' reflections illuminated how society functioned in the aftermath of disaster and the tangible ways community was made evident through the mobilisation of social networks and increased connection and communication. The bushfire and flood revealed connections within society and

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[1] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Meeniyan, Victoria.

[2] Beverley Raphael, *When Disaster Strikes: A Handbook for the Caring Professions* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1986), 24.

[3] Peter Fairbrother et al., "Creating 'Community'? Preparing for Bushfire in Rural Victoria," *Rural Sociology* 78, no. 2 (2013).

demonstrated how the shared experience of natural disaster contributed to an affective sense of community, connection and belonging. The experience of disaster was a devastating, traumatic and significant disruption to individual lives, but it also provided a point of commonality and connection that in many situations ultimately forged a sense of community and belonging.

While an increased sense of community was recalled by many migrants, the experience of disaster can also estrange and isolate people whose experiences do not conform to wider narratives and experiences. Not everyone recounted positive memories of community or articulated a sense of connection in the aftermath. Thus this chapter also discusses how the community was not always a source of solace and connection, and the 'community' recalled was not always the same for each individual.

## Community Revealed: Social Networks and Community Connections

'Community' was a common theme amongst migrants' recollections both before, during and after disaster. Community is a social unit and focus of social activity.[4] It has been described as a collective made up of a number of individuals in relative proximity to each other who share certain common institutions.[5] Ideas of community have been viewed as essential to disaster preparedness and emergency management and yet the definitions of 'community' are often vague.[6] 'Community' has been used to refer to a locality, a 'sense of community' experienced by residents, and in some instances has been used as a rhetorical tool by state and federal governments to legitimise political decisions and policy.[7] Physical space and geographic and territorial boundaries have been part of various definitions or conceptualisations of 'community',[8] but it has been argued that locality and community 'should not be conflated' because 'simply inhabiting the same

[4] Russell R. Dynes, "Coming to Terms with Community Disaster," in *What Is a Disaster? Perspectives on the Question*, ed. E. L. Quarantelli (London: Routledge, 1998), 113.

[5] Allen H. Barton, *Communities in Disaster* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1969), 212.

[6] Fairbrother et al., "Creating 'Community'?."

[7] Ibid., 187.

[8] Dynes, "Coming to Terms with Community Disaster," 113; Fairbrother et al., "Creating 'Community'?," 189.

space does not necessarily or automatically foster a sense of community'.[9] Scholarship such as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* shifted definitions to consider the way community can be constructed through shared understanding, identity, feeling and sentiment.[10] Community was an important building block in his conceptualisation of nationalism. Links and communication between individuals and people through social networks can also constitute a type of community.[11] Community can thus refer to a specific locale, social networks or a type of imagined or shared sense of belonging.[12] This tripartite understanding of community as a locality, a sense of belonging and a social network is a useful way to make sense of the memories and experiences recalled and articulated by migrants in the aftermath of bushfire and flood. This chapter will firstly focus on how community was evident in migrants' memories through local social networks and then examine how a sense of belonging was instrumental to migrants' experiences of community in the aftermath of bushfire and flood.

As previously noted, disasters can illuminate the structure and function of society, which explains how communities can emerge and become visible during times of crisis.[13] Migrants' reflections similarly demonstrated how bushfire and flood revealed different aspects of community through formal or informal social networks before, during and after the disaster. Migrants recalled learning about natural hazards and how best to prepare for them. They also remembered how local residents came together to aid others and to offer or receive help and assistance during and after bushfire or flood. Memories focused less on the geographic aspects of community that were usually constituted locally through the immediate streets, neighbourhood or township; instead,

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[9] Fairbrother et al., "Creating 'Community'?," 190.

[10] Ibid., 189-190; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[11] Fairbrother et al., "Creating 'Community'?," 191.

[12] Ibid., 187.

[13] Virginia Garcia-Acosta, "Historical Disaster Research," in *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, ed. Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002), 58; Anthony Oliver-Smith, "Introduction: Why Anthropologists Should Study Disasters," in *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, ed. Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002), 9; Anouk Ride and Diane Bretherton, eds., *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2011), 3.

migrants' memories highlighted the connections with other residents that demonstrated the existence of networks of belonging.

Ingrid's family moved into a flood-prone house in central Maitland and learnt about the reality of floods by connecting with neighbours and local residents. The geographic location was important because Ingrid's memories implied that she was only made aware of floods once her family had moved directly into the area. There they experienced the recurrent series of 'minor floods' before 'the '55'.[14] The minor floods were a challenge for her family but provided an opportunity to connect with neighbours and learn from them about how to prepare for future floods. Ingrid learnt from neighbours to lift furniture into the roof, move belongings higher in cupboards, and to put all their crockery in the bath. Their neighbours warned them when floods were coming. Ingrid said they 'listened to the people, the neighbours, the Australians that we got to know in our street'. The floods were the 'first time we got to know Australians, they were all very caring they were all helpful […] they had their own houses to pack […] but they welcomed us to the street and they couldn't have been more caring'.[15] The presence of floods meant Ingrid's family forged connections with local residents and were included in local social networks and spaces of knowledge.

Community constituted through social networks was evident after the 1955 flood when many migrants recalled receiving offers of help from local community groups. Recovery efforts often reveal people helping strangers, forming groups and cooperating in the aftermath of disaster and this was evident within Maitland.[16] Activities typically focused on providing tangible relief and assistance to people by organising food and clothing.[17] Migrants whose homes were flooded recalled receiving tangible help from the immediate local community and surrounding towns in the form

[14] There were frequent floods every year from 1949-1957 in Maitland. The 1952 flood was the highest flood recorded at the Belmore Bridge gauge until it was surpassed in 1955. For further information see: Chas Keys, *Maitland, City on the Hunter: Fighting Floods or Living with Them* (Paterson: Hunter-Centre River Catchment Management Authority, 2008).

[15] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

[16] Dicky Pelupessy, Diane Bretherton, and Anouk Ride, "Indonesia," in *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, ed. Anouk Ride and Diane Bretherton (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 28-31.

[17] Ibid., 29-30.

of food, clothing, and help cleaning out the water and flood mud from their houses.[18] Tania and Ingrid both remembered receiving food and clothing donations through the Salvation Army and the father of Ingrid's highschool friend came around 'with big boxes of clothes and cans of food'.[19] Henry's family received help to clean up from his father's friends and work colleagues at BHP.[20] John's family also received help to clean their house, which he saw as a 'good example' and a 'good sign [of] the solidarity—when you need it, the people are there'.[21] A significant way that community assistance and generosity was revealed to Ingrid and her family was through the relocation of their house to higher ground in Telarah. Lions Clubs in various towns donated money that enabled this generous act of support and assistance. These actions and tangible offers of help caused by the flood revealed the existence of strong social networks and thus a type of local community.

Victorian migrants also recalled memories of local social networks that were created as a result of bushfires. New Zealand migrant Ian remembered that when he moved to Tylden, he had 'no experience farming' and 'wasn't a country person', but he 'was willing to become a country person [… and] become part of the community'.[22] One way he joined the community was by becoming a member of the Country Fire Authority (CFA). The CFA was how Ian learnt about the local environment and risk of bushfires. As the CFA was an important site of community and the focus of particular local social networks it was also a way Ian was able to connect with people in the local community. Ian commented that 'individuals form the community' but the physical meeting points or 'hubs' such as the CFA and the pub are important to sustaining these social networks. Ian explained that the 'first rule of the CFA is save the pub. If you lose your pub you have failed. We saved the pub' because 'as long as we have that community hub we will survive'.[23] Ian's anecdote illustrated the importance of physical meeting

[18] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland.

[19] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015; Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015.

[20] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans,

[21] John Szczudluk, Interviewed 20th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland Polish Assocation, Maitland.

[22] Ian van der Werff, Interviewed 16th August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Tylden, Victoria.

[23] Ibid.

points that sustain the social networks that constitute community. As much as the CFA equipped Ian with the knowledge of bushfires, it also provided him with specific ways to connect with others and form a community.

Wytze was also a member of his local CFA and this gave him a thorough knowledge of bushfires and a connection with the local community. The CFA was thus an important focus for a particular type of community that gave migrants including Wytze, Ian and Jenneke knowledge of fires and placed them within specific social networks. Networks like the CFA 'constitute the ligaments of community activity'.[24] The CFA was created by local groups in response to the threat of bushfires and provided a way for people to learn about bushfires. Scholars have observed how social networks are the building blocks of increased connection with other residents that foster a feeling and experience of community.[25] The memories of Ian and Wytze corroborated these observations because by joining their locally based CFA they were able to connect into existing social networks and experience a sense of community.

Community was a prominent theme throughout Rachel's reflections on her involvement in emergency management disaster communication and as a member of her local community in a bushfire-prone area in Gippsland. Her observations pointed to the way social networks and interpersonal relationships in the workplace inform how people respond during emergencies. Disasters can require people to take on different roles and responsibilities.[26] Rachel observed that disasters can challenge everyday hierarchies as people can 'get thrown into a team with people doing things they wouldn't normally be doing'. Disasters such as bushfires require people to 'take off your normal hat and put on your emergency response hat [and] work with different people, work at different levels; it is a great leveller'.[27] Emergencies have built 'really strong relationships' in Rachel's workplace and she reflected that when 'people stay in their different roles long enough we have the strength that goes through the next disaster and I think that's what we have in Gippsland'. The strong relationships and networks built 'on the run' and

[24] Fairbrother et al., "Creating 'Community'?," 200.

[25] Ibid., 203-204.

[26] Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, 5.

[27] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Traralgon, Victoria.

those spanning multiple years and emergencies have helped people work together during disaster situations.[28] Rachel's experience within her workplace also influenced her observations of how her own residential community responded during bushfire.

If a bushfire threatens her home and community, Rachel said she would leave to 'defend my own property and work with and support my own community. They have to come first over work'. During the 2006-2007 Great Divide bushfires Rachel was at the local CFA shed and mustering point 'surrounded by smoke'. Her memories of this fire provided an insight into some aspects of how her community responded and functioned during the bushfire. During the fire people who lived in the foothills of the mountains and who had decided to stay and defend their homes were called regularly to ask if there were any embers or burnt leaves falling and if they were hot, warm or cold; 'we got to warm'. People were encouraged to:

> Check whether it is hot, is it smoky, which way is the wind coming from. If it is smoky outside the fire is probably getting closer. Listen, if you can hear the sound of jet engines—it is a terrific noise—it is time to bunker down and do your last minute preparations because it is too late to leave.[29]

The system encouraged and fostered a connection between local residents as they kept in contact and conveyed information back to a central location. The continual communication encouraged people to go outside rather than rely on TV, internet or radio within a house shielded by closed curtains. The experience demonstrated to Rachel how communication during a bushfire 'is not just about someone in Traralgon putting out a media release […] it is about people on the ground phoning each other, coming into the CFA shed, having a chat [...] people checking, wanting to know, wanting to support, that was the real aspect'. Instead of writing a media release in Traralgon, she was in the CFA with the ABC radio on, 'hearing that information coming out from my replacement and realising that it does work'. It showed her 'how things happen at the coalface and how people are going to behave', and led to her 'coming away with a sense of belonging and doing my part in that'.[30]

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

Rachel's experience revealed the existence of community through the way it mobilised during an emergency. Communication through various social networks kept a connection between local residents in the area and people were able to relay pertinent information about the fire. Such recollections support research that has demonstrated how social networks and increased communication and interaction can contribute to people feeling an experience of community.[31] Rachel commented that the 'pillars of the community' are often the 'key people who do everything', who always turn up and 'are people I can rely on. These are the people who [with] the first whiff of smoke around the community will be first around the shed'. Rachel found that 'people keep themselves to themselves until there is a disaster, until there is an emergency, and then you need each other, you need to come together, you need the information'. Everyone has 'your day jobs in the community, you do what you do and you go to work and you wave to each other and you have the occasional core meeting, but when you are in the middle of an emergency relationships change'. A 'major emergency like a fire or a flood […] galvanises people', she said, and changes the relationship and degree of communication and interaction between local residents.[32]

The social networks put into action because of bushfire illuminated and forged a type of community. Rachel remembered that 'although we are a small rural community, I didn't know everyone in the community' but the 'face to face' meetings organised because of bushfire brought 'the whole community together'. They had a 'meeting in the local hall. 173 people came. I didn't think we had 173 people in Creek'.[33] Rachel felt 'that sense of community is always there but it unfortunately takes a major incident that is going to affect the whole community to really pull people together'. In 2006 'for all the worst reasons [there was] a real sense of gathering, pulling together looking after each other'.[34]

Rachel's recollections highlighted the way community can emerge and become

[31] Fairbrother et al., "Creating 'Community'?," 188; Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, 5.

[32] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

visible during disaster through the increased interaction, communication and connection between local residents. Social networks were mobilised because of bushfire and thus demonstrated the 'great emotional solidarity and mutual helpfulness in the disaster-stricken population', which is often observed during the aftermath of disasters.[35] Social connections and networks are an important part of recovery processes.[36] Contrary to common misconceptions of disaster, which focus on chaos, mass misbehaviour, looting or rioting, scholarship from the beginning of disasters studies through to recent times has consistently observed patterns of altruism and cooperative behaviour during the 'recovery' or aftermath of disaster.[37] Disasters require communities to respond, which offers an insight into human behaviour through how the community functions, treats outsiders and rises to challenges.[38] During the process of emergency recovery the community often demonstrates altruism and cooperation and common action and organisation.[39] Rachel's memories demonstrated how a disparate community came together because of the bushfire and organised in a way to provide help, assistance and information to each other. These networks were also evident in the aftermath of bushfire and flood.

Similarly to the offers of help and assistance recalled by Maitland migrants, Victorian migrants who experienced bushfire also remembered how their local

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[35] Barton, *Communities in Disaster*, 206.

[36] Jay Marlowe, "Belonging and Disaster Recovery: Refugee-Background Communities and the Canterbury Earthquakes," *British Journal of Social Work* (2015): 191.

[37] Barton, *Communities in Disaster*, 206; Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disasters* (New York: Penguin, 2009); Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*; Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc, and Erica Kuligowski, "Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 604 (2006); R. L. Wettenhall, *Bushfire Disaster: An Australian Community in Crisis* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1975); Russell R. Dynes, Kathleen Tierney, and Charles E. Fritz, "Foreword: The Emergence and Importance of Social Organisation: The Contributions of E. L. Quarantelli," in *Disasters, Collective Behavior, and Social Organization*, ed. Russell R. Dynes and Kathleen Tierney (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994).

[38] Anouk Ride and Diane Bretherton, "Introduction," in *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, ed. Anouk Ride and Diane Bretherton (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 7.

[39] Rob Gordon, "Community Process and the Recovery Environment Following Emergency," *Environmental Health* 4, no. 1 (2004): 20.

community responded by providing tangible help and assistance to others. The initial disaster response is usually locally based as communities start to lead their own recovery.[40] Social systems can adapt to compensate for sorrow and stress as information about the needs of the community are shared and circulated, which in turn motivates people to work for a common purpose until most urgent needs are met.[41] Bende remembered how people in Whittlesea set up food and clothing tents 'for everyone who needed it, which [was] amazing to see'. People came 'together and everyone would just chip in, doesn't matter who you are'. Existing social networks such as the school community mobilised to help people who had lost their house or needed support. Text messages and Facebook ensured that 'word went around so things came pretty quickly which [was] lovely'. Bende said 'whatever we had two of just went' to people who had lost their houses, whether 'it was furniture, if it was glasses, if it was kettle, if it was anything, toilet paper, they had nothing, they didn't even have a place to live'. Bende's family did not have power for a week so some parents from the school cooked for them. Someone else heard of their need and cooked for them which led to them becoming good friends.[42] These were some of the tangible acts of kindness, support, cooperation and organisation within the local community.[43]

Similar memories were recalled by Jenneke who remembered how the highschool in Alexandra was turned into a place to receive medical help and connect with others. There was a 'register of people who were opening up their homes so people could stay with them', a place where people could collect clothes and other donations, and activities were organised to keep children entertained. A 'city of tents' emerged on the oval as people arrived from nearby towns and interstate to help. Jenneke returned to Alexandra and reconnected with people in the local community, helped out by participating in local initiatives, and 'wandered around town looking for people to make

[40] Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, 172; Pelupessy, Bretherton, and Ride, "Indonesia," 33; Margaret Moreton, "'We Needed Help, but We Weren't Helpless': The Community Experience of Community Recovery after Natural Disaster in Australia," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 33, no. 1 (2018).

[41] Barton, *Communities in Disaster*, 207.

[42] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Eden Park, Victoria.

[43] Gordon, "Community Process and the Recovery," 20.

sure they were okay'. Jenneke participated in 'one more call out' with the CFA who were 'working overtime' with the SES 'fighting the fire for a long time after Black Saturday'.[44]

Tangible offers of help and support were recalled by Bruno in Marysville whose home, art gallery and sculpture garden was destroyed by the fire. Trees were uprooted and the garden 'looked bad'. He wondered 'what am I going to do here'. But friends came and asked him if he was rebuilding, saying 'if you're not rebuilding we are not doing our bed and breakfast'. The phone rang with people saying: 'Bruno, you've got to do it again. I love your place, and if you want a hand on the weekend…'. The phone kept ringing and people started coming to help so he decided 'we have just got to do it. I mean, what else was I going to do? This is my dream. [We] will do it again'. Bruno began to rebuild his home, gallery and sculpture garden with help from near and far. He said it was 'like the whole universe [was] helping' as people across Australia and internationally raised funds through art auctions and concerts. Someone gave him seven or eight established camellia trees and an architect volunteered to design his house. He said: '"stay, I've got a plan", [and he had] the whole plan like it was supposed to be'. Bruno reflected that there was 'a moment there when I thought, too bad, the whole village [is gone]', but the collective rebuilding effort in Marysville along with offers of help and support from the community encouraged him to start again.[45]

Thus migrants' reflections before, during and after the bushfire and flood demonstrated how community was evident through the exercising of various local social networks. Knowledge about natural hazards was communicated to migrants through locally based social networks such as the CFA in Victoria or through neighbourhoods in Maitland. During and after the fire and flood many migrants recollected the way the community mobilised as evidenced by the tangible acts of support and assistance given and received. This demonstrated how community can grow through the communication and interaction between its members after disaster.[46]

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[44] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[45] Bruno Torfs, Interviewed 27th July 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Marysville, Victoria.

[46] Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, 5.

## Sharing the Aftermath: Experiencing Community and Belonging

In an essay on the impact of trauma and community, Kai Erikson observed:

> The energy with which rescuers work and the warmth with which neighbours respond act to reassure victims that there is still life among the wreckage, and they react with an outpouring of communal feeling, an urgent need to make contact with and even touch others by way of renewing old pledges of fellowship. They are celebrating the recovery of the community they momentarily thought dead, and, in a way, they are celebrating their own rebirth.[47]

Interviews conducted for this thesis also revealed migrants' experiences of a new and deeper sense of community that emerged during and after the disaster. They articulated an experience of community and a sense of connection and belonging that moved beyond what had existed before. Scholars have demonstrated how common adversity can provide a shared solidarity and the opportunity for 'new social connections and a collective identity'. [48] Rebecca Solnit observed that the 'purposefulness and connectedness' as a result of disaster 'bring[s] joy even amid death, chaos, fear and loss'.[49] As discussed above, community can be revealed through the communication and interaction between its members during a disaster.[50] The revelation of these social networks, and sense of shared experience, can also illuminate or create affective bonds between individuals that can contribute to an ongoing experience of community and a sense of belonging.[51]

Over sixty years after the 1955 flood, migrants still recalled a sense of connection and community spirit that was largely caused by the flood. Many migrants recalled receiving tangible acts of assistance but they also remembered an affective sense of community. Disasters can bring people together as they work for a common good and create a sense of solidarity and the opportunity for new social connections.[52] This was

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47 Kai T. Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 189.

48 Marlowe, "Belonging and Disaster Recovery," 195.

49 Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 3.

50 Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, 5.

51 Raphael, *When Disaster Strikes*, 28.

52 Bin Xu, "Disaster, Trauma, and Memory," in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, ed. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 357; Marlowe, "Belonging and

evident within Ingrid's memories. She remembered:

> People rallied round they helped as much as they could. They were wonderful people, were just absolutely wonderful, they couldn't do enough for you, you were helped all along the way. People came from everywhere to help you clean out houses. Willing hands everywhere. People living on high ground came down to help the people in the flood and you can't forget that it was, the community spirit was great, absolutely.[53]

Ingrid remembered 'the community spirit' and the 'willing hands' that 'brought us all together'. The community was remembered not just by its actions, but through the intangible sense of solidarity and connection felt after the flood. When disasters threaten everyone, and not just individuals, they can be perceived as an equalising force that creates a sense of 'altruism and community spirit'.[54] Ingrid said 'everyone was in the same boat', which implied that the flood was perceived as something that affected everyone, and thus something that 'brought us closer' and created a sense of solidarity; or as Ingrid articulated, a 'community spirit'.[55]

Ingrid's memories of her experience of community in the aftermath of the 1955 flood echoed Marlowe's investigation of refugees' changing sense of belonging after the 2010-2011 Canterbury earthquakes in New Zealand.[56] Farida Fozdar and Lisa Hartley have distinguished between a 'civic' sense of belonging conceived of as equal access to rights and services and an 'ethno' sense of belonging based on emotional and cultural connections.[57] Marlowe used this framework to demonstrate that prior to the earthquake refugees spoke of a civic belonging understood through access to employment and education and the opportunity to resettle, but that they lacked an

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Disaster Recovery," 195; Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, 174.

53 Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

54 Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, 186.

55 Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

56 Marlowe, "Belonging and Disaster Recovery," 199.

57 Farida Fozdar and Lisa Hartley, "Civic and Ethno Belonging among Recent Refugees to Australia," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 27, no. 1 (2014): 139. This shared some similarities to the 'governmental' and 'homely' belonging articulated by Ghassan Hage: Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Annandale: Pluto Press, 2000). Ghassan Hage, "The Spatial Imaginary of National Practices: Dwelling--Domesticating/Being--Exterminating," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14 (1996).

ethno sense of belonging to the wider Christchurch community.[58] After the earthquakes most participants articulated an ethno belonging that they had not experienced previously. Through the earthquake they had connected with their neighbours and a wider group of people beyond their ethnic community.[59] Similar sentiments were expressed by interviewees in this thesis. Prior to Ingrid's experience of floods, she spoke of feeling unable to identify as German and belong in postwar Australian society; whereas after the flood she articulated an ethno sense of belonging. She remembered connecting with her neighbours and the local community; her family received help and assistance from strangers in the community and ultimately had their house relocated to safer ground through the generosity of community groups.[60] There are parallels between her experience and people who previously felt uncomfortable in New Orleans and wanted to leave, but after Hurricane Katrina and through their disaster experience they felt more at home and connected with the city.[61] One person recalled that Hurricane Katrina was 'one of the most profound identity processes of my life [… it] made me a part of the fabric of this city that I never was before, you know. We're all woven together now. I am New Orleans, or New Orleans is me. I never had that before'.[62] The 1955 flood similarly shaped Ingrid's identity because the flood was an experience she shared with others that enabled her to connect to people and experience a new sense of community.

Ingrid's memories suggested that an earlier sense of isolation or separation from the larger Australian community was disrupted by the flood. Migrants like Ingrid became part of a significant and shared moment in Maitland's history and were enveloped into the wider community. Migrants had 'been through so much hardship' already and left war-torn Europe only to find themselves in another disaster zone with

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[58] Marlowe, "Belonging and Disaster Recovery," 194.

[59] Ibid., 195.

[60] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015; Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

[61] Eleonora Rohland et al., "Woven Together: Attachment to Place in the Aftermath of Disaster, Perspectives from Four Continents," in *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, ed. Mark Cave and Stephen Sloan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 193.

[62] Ibid., 184-185.

'another hurdle […] to jump over'. Yet, despite the experience of another disaster, Ingrid emphasised that 'everyone else was in the same boat and I think it made us all closer, brought us closer'.[63] She argued 'we all went through the same thing, and being a migrant made no difference whatsoever'.[64] Ingrid's memories demonstrated how community was revealed in the aftermath of the flood as people came together and responded to the needs of others that created a sense of solidarity and connection that went beyond the formally 'civic' belonging. Although being a German migrant in postwar Australia made her different, the flood was an experience she shared with others. She became enveloped into the wider community, and earlier postwar divisions seemed to fade away in her recollections.

The experience of community and sense of connection and belonging facilitated by disaster was also evident in the memories of Victorian migrants. The CFA provided a way for Ian and Wytze to learn about bushfires and become involved in particular social networks, which also provided an affective sense of community. The 'camaraderie' was a significant part of what Wytze liked about the CFA. In the early days a siren would sound and he would jump on the truck in the early morning and travel with his crew to the bushfire when 'everybody [was] asleep, the whole country is quiet'. They would 'see the glow in the distance' and from the 'top of a hill at three o'clock in the morning […] the whole valley [looked] like the sky, the night sky, beautiful pinpricks and the beautiful smell of burning eucalypts. Look at this, this is magic'. Once there they would drag hoses around for hours, 'blacking out' the area, and they would 'do it together'. Wytze travelled throughout Victoria and NSW with the CFA; 'we've been everywhere, fantastic'. His experience in the CFA has changed over the years and rather than camping for a week he is now usually 'back before dinnertime'. Nevertheless, Wytze continued to be involved in the CFA because he viewed it as an important service to the community that 'is appreciated […] by the locals'. Wytze was upset by rifts within the CFA and other organisations in the aftermath of Black Saturday and what he saw as the politicisation of the fires, but he remembered that there are 'oodles

[63] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[64] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

of volunteers that take the job seriously' and the reason they do this is 'to help the community. That is our main goal, just forget about the rest'. Wytze continued to be involved in the CFA because 'I've got a lot of experience' and knowledge to share with younger members. When he goes on a truck 'I know what to do and where everything is. I am training them to be the same'.[65] His involvement provided a way to serve the community and help train a younger CFA generation but it simultaneously gave him a unique experience that was shared with others and forged a sense of camaraderie, connection and community.

The connections created by various social networks contributed to an experience and affective sense of community in the aftermath of bushfires. Jenneke volunteered and provided assistance to her local community in the aftermath of Black Saturday, which included volunteering for the local radio. This important community institution had been developed over a number of years by a local man and as Jenneke observed: 'when there is a crisis moment like this the radio station was absolutely critical in supporting the community in the moment of crisis'. Jenneke had previously worked for local radio so she volunteered to do 'radio shifts giving the radio warnings' and announce where people could collect clothes, where kids activities were being held, and where people could find more support. Jenneke explained that other radio stations 'did a lot of sensationalizing' and would broadcast how many people died or how many houses were lost but 'when you've just lost a house or a loved one or you're in total stress or waiting […] trying to protect their house […] you don't want to hear about who's dying'. Instead, their local radio 'gave up to date information […] you needed […] in a positive supportive way' and was 'definitely the main place that people called when they needed to know something'. The local radio 'really had their finger on the pulse' and Jenneke said it 'felt really good to be part of, to be able to offer my services'. Jenneke recalled a sense of being part of a close-knit group; being on the radio in the early morning, passing on updates, talking to people and hearing familiar voices, 'felt quite magical'.[66]

In contrast to the physical and tangible expressions of help and community

[65] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Marysville, Victoria.

examined above, Jenneke was able to provide another type of intangible assistance and service to her community by broadcasting information, support and comfort through the radio. Wytze mentioned that Jenneke had a calm, mellow voice that was soothing on the radio.[67] Having a familiar voice on the radio during this time was likely a comfort to listeners. Jenneke was able to speak calm words and give useful information to listeners that she did not hear when she was on the Marysville oval surrounded by fire, or back home preparing to defend her family home alone. As we saw in Chapter Four, during the fire the radio was a source of communication between people fighting the fire, and a source of distress when the radio connection failed. In the aftermath, radio and sound was once again a feature of her memories, but this time for the positive contribution the local radio was to her community. Volunteering and being on radio gave Jenneke a way to contribute to her community and feel useful. It also arguably helped her own personal process of recovery.[68] Jenneke felt that all the skills she had learnt through previous employment, volunteering and CFA training were useful in the aftermath and she felt like she was 'actually helping people'. It was because she 'had already been involved in the community' and 'knew these people' through existing social networks that she was able to volunteer.[69] These social networks provided the foundation for an emotional or affective sense of connection and community.[70]

Jenneke returned to Alexandra after the bushfires because she felt it was important to be there. Everyone there 'was feeling the same as me' and there 'was an incredible sense of community and people were really looking after each other […] it felt really good to be part of that, really good'. Jenneke's recollections resonate with scholars who argue that disasters can create a 'city of comrades', a 'community of sufferers', or a 'post-disaster utopia' through a shared and common experience.[71] Jenneke reflected that the bushfire was a 'really scary and awful time, and in another

[66] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[67] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[68] Raphael, *When Disaster Strikes*, 93; Pelupessy, Bretherton, and Ride, "Indonesia," 38.

[69] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[70] Fairbrother et al., "Creating 'Community'?," 205.

[71] Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," 189; Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*.

way, very surreal and otherworldly' that made her 'realise all those connections you have with the people around you and how important they are for you, being with them, seeing them and working with them'. Being able to witness and share in that experience 'was really special'. The bushfire heightened her comprehension of the preexisting connections she had with people. Community was something she witnessed take place, participated in, and *felt* in the aftermath of the fires.

A common theme within migrants' memories was how the fire was an important shared experience between many people, and the way people connected with others by telling their fire story. Jenneke observed that 'everyone needed to tell their story' and that people needed 'to tell it to make sense of it'.[72] Storytelling was similarly a significant part of Bende's experience of the fire. She said that after the fire:

> It was weird, it was like I can't go now, I have to stay here. […] Everyone had a story to share, to tell. No two stories were the same. […] It was very important to sit there and listen to everyone's story that they wanted to tell and it is still very important to listen to them all talking about their stories. I think I felt like if I had moved away then, I think for a human being we had to talk it through and see how you could get through all that, get through it. I think that was very important.[73]

Sharing stories were an important part of how Bende recalled the fire's aftermath. These fire stories gave Bende a 'background' with local residents and forged a new sense of connection and community. Bende felt that after the fire 'everyone became closer because everyone had experienced the same thing and everyone has a story to tell'.[74] The shared experience of the fire, and the practice of telling stories, was recalled as something that brought people together.[75]

Sharing stories of the fire was also an important feature and part of mourning and grieving. Scholars have noted that one way people gain mastery over their disaster experience is by 'talking through' what happened and 'giving testimony'.[76] Speaking

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[72] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[73] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, 174; Carol Mutch and Jay Marlowe, "Lessons from Disaster: The Power and Place of Story," *Disaster Prevention and Management: An International Journal* 22, no. 5 (2013): 387.

[76] Raphael, *When Disaster Strikes*, 94.

about what happened was also part of how Bende made sense of her experience; it was 'how I deal with it, I need to speak about it'.[77] Solnit has observed that a major personal loss can isolate people from the community and 'we are alone in being bereft', but 'when the loss is general, one is not cast out by suffering but finds fellowship in it'.[78] Suffering and loss can thus be 'transformed when they are shared experiences'.[79] Disasters can cause devastation and death and make these bereavements public, but can 'also bring people together and reconfirm the community's solidarity', cohesiveness and unity.[80] This was evident in Bende's reflections when she commented:

> You know when someone in your family dies and you feel like the whole world should stop and grieve because your grandfather died. That happened for Black Saturday. The whole world knew that something was going on and people have died; everyone knew what was going on. It is a bit like when one person dies who is close to you, you want everyone to know and everyone to grieve and everyone to listen and talk or whatever but they don't do that, but they did that year it was so weird. Everyone did stop and everyone did listen and everybody knew what happened.[81]

Bende felt there was a collective sense of mourning and grief after Black Saturday when people were able to stop and pause as a community in a way that is sometimes longed for during individual personal grief. The shared experience of the bushfires and the collective sense of mourning, grieving and sharing stories was a significant moment. Many people were unable to have funerals but were able to have 'memorial services which were good; we had to have something'.[82] Memorial services and commemorative events can connect people with other mourners and sometimes contribute to the construction of a shared sense of identity and connection.[83] The collective and communal expressions of grief and mourning arguably contributed to a sense of shared

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[77] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[78] Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 55.

[79] Ibid., 56.

[80] Xu, "Disaster, Trauma, and Memory," 357; Raphael, *When Disaster Strikes*, 105.

[81] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), 76; Paul Ashton, Paula Hamilton, and Rose Searby, *Places of the Heart: Memorials in Australia* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012), 79.

connection with other people in the community. As a significant moment within people's lives, sharing such important experiences with others can create a sense of connection through a special sense of understanding and empathy.[84] Thus the interviews conducted for this thesis demonstrated how disasters can create an opportunity to develop new connections, bonds and social relationships through shared experiences that contribute to a sense of connection, solidarity and belonging.[85]

## Complexities

A positive experience of community was a significant and common theme throughout many of the interviews conducted for this thesis, but it was not experienced or remembered in the same way by everyone. Not all migrants recalled being enveloped in a sense of community in the aftermath but rather articulated memories of community that did not fit within straightforward or positive narratives of local group solidarity. While community can be a source of identity and unity,[86] it often fails to account for multiple subjective perspectives and can be exclusionary.[87] Experiencing a disaster can unite people but it can also be a source of exclusion when people are estranged from those who 'gather into groups with others of like mind'.[88] This was evident within some migrants' reflections.

Disasters can change an individual's sense of self, their way of relating to others and their worldview.[89] It can result in a loss of confidence in cultural structures that were supposed to camouflage the risks of the world and provide meaning or protection.[90] Kai Erikson's quotations from various case studies share parallels with

[84] Raphael, *When Disaster Strikes*, 28, 92.

[85] Marlowe, "Belonging and Disaster Recovery," 199; Mutch and Marlowe, "Lessons from Disaster."; Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, 175.

[86] Gordon, "Community Process and the Recovery," 20, 22.

[87] Fairbrother et al., "Creating 'Community'?," 190.

[88] Kai T. Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," *American Imago* 48, no. 4 (1991): 466; Fairbrother et al., "Creating 'Community'?."

[89] Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," 466.

[90] Kai T. Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble: The Human Experience of Modern Disasters* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 241-242; Kevin Rozario, "Making Progress: Disaster Narratives and the Art of Optimism in Modern America," in *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster*, ed.

comments made by Jenneke and Kat. Jenneke felt that the 'things you took for granted, [and] how you thought the world worked' were challenged by the fire; she had to learn to 'deal with how the world actually works and it's a lot scarier than I thought it was'.[91] Kat said 'there was nothing normal to cling to and everything that did have meaning before the fire suddenly had no meaning whatever'.[92] It was difficult to 'retain normalcy after something like that'. They had to balance feeling like their 'entire lives had just been obliterated' with the societal 'pressures of going back to work as soon as possible'.[93] After these experiences people needed to adjust to a 'changed sense of self, meaning and purpose that was never invited'.[94] Experiencing a traumatic event can result in the loss of confidence in the larger scaffolding of family and community.[95]

Paradoxically, this changed worldview can become the basis for communality.[96] It is not necessarily feelings of affection that bring people together but the common sense of being set apart.[97] People may feel drawn to others with a similar experience, but relating to others is hard; it is not an easy comradeship.[98] Kat found it 'really tough, really hard to come back into a community where something like that had happened' and commented that there is 'so little understanding really of what it is like to go through a massive massive trauma and as a community as well'.[99] Kat and her family had only recently arrived in Kinglake before the fires so did not have wide social networks within the local area.

While she was able to share aspects of her experience with a select group of close

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Lawrence J. Vale and Thomas J. Campanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 31; Susanna M. Hoffman, "The Monster and the Mother: The Symbolism of Disaster," in *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, ed. Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002), 136.

[91] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[92] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Kinglake, Victoria.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Rob Gordon, "Forward," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 33, no. 1 (2018).

[95] Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," 471.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., 466.

[98] Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," 186.

[99] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016.

friends, and she certainly also experienced some new positive connections, there were other ways that Kat felt excluded from the community. He reflections illustrated that the bonds between people who have shared such an intense experience can be so special and emotionally important to those people that others who were not part of precisely the same experience may feel excluded.[100] Kat's experience of the fire was different and she struggled with feeling guilty for not being there with her family during the fire and also feeling as though she 'had been robbed of my opportunity of experiencing the fire':

> I felt like my family had gone through this ordeal, my friends and I felt like I'd been completely isolated from them and I hadn't had the experience and it took me a really long time to accept yes, I did have that experience, I just had it in a different way from you guys.[101]

Kat did not have the same encounter with the fire that others did who saw the flames and so she questioned the validity of her experience. Of course, her experience was no less important or significant than that of others, it was just a different kind of experience. Erikson has related the experience of residents of Buffalo Creek who were away from home when the 1972 floods struck, and who did not experience the 'raging waters […] firsthand'. They were traumatised by what happened and were 'injured by the loss of a sustaining community'.[102] Kat was not necessarily injured by the loss of a community but was arguably excluded from the collective because her experience did not conform to the same narrative being told and expressed by others.

Kat did not have 'much to do with the Kinglake community' after the fires. She decided not to participate in any collective or communal memorial services but did this 'quite privately'. She said: 'I can't, I don't want to be part of the memorial services that happen each year. I do things my way'.[103] Kat's experience of community in the aftermath of the fires was not a space of solidarity or envelopment in social networks and a collective feeling of attachment. The extent to which her being a migrant to Australia influenced this is hard to judge, but seems less relevant than the fact that she

[100] Raphael, *When Disaster Strikes*, 92.

[101] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016.

[102] Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble*, 234.

[103] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016.

was elsewhere on the day of the fires. Her bushfire experience was not necessarily the same as everyone else's so she felt separated from the community even while finding a sense of connection and significant bonds with other people in her life. Traumatic experiences can both unite and exclude and in various ways Kat's recollections demonstrated how both are possible.

These reflections demonstrated that while there is reassurance in a narrative of a community coming together in the aftermath of disaster, there are alternative and difficult memories and experiences of the aftermath that are just as important. Kat had little to do with the Kinglake community and 'struggle[d] with it' because there was 'a very negative aspect' and 'a lot of really angry people'.[104] Erikson has argued that disasters can open 'whatever fault lines once ran silently through the structure of the larger community' and divide it into fragments.[105] Debate about causes and attributing blame can be common afterwards. While it is not clear to what degree tensions were evident before the fire, people did remember fractures and tension within groups after the fires. Wytze, for example, felt aspects of the fire became politicised in the aftermath as people tried to ascertain what happened. He observed 'tears really close under the surface' of everyday life.[106] Dissatisfaction and conflict can occur when recovery efforts are led by outsiders such as government or non-government organisations who try to impose control rather than listen to people's needs.[107] Wytze witnessed examples where outsiders tried unsuccessfully to lead the local community. There were outsiders and counsellors who sought to impose their own system of organisation and control instead of recognising and responding to the needs of CFA volunteers. In response to these difficult situations Wytze said that 'we did our own thing'.[108] These reflections highlighted the tension during the aftermath of disaster and provided a small insight into how some individuals and groups responded and managed their own recovery process.

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[104] Ibid.

[105] Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble*, 236.

[106] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[107] Moreton, "'We Needed Help'."; Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters.*

[108] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

Personal and collective processes of recovery were recalled and reflected upon by migrants in both a positive and negative light. As seen above there were times when collective displays of recovery were unhelpful to individuals because they estranged people whose experiences did not fit within common narratives, or because some recovery processes were poorly managed and were experienced negatively by individuals and groups. Psychologist Rob Gordon has worked extensively in disaster recovery and has argued that 'poorly managed recovery is often identified as "the second disaster"; the unnecessary one'.[109] He has argued that 'a person's recovery depends more on how well they manage the recovery years than what the event does'.[110] One characteristic observed is how people respond and throw themselves into recovery activities and look after others before themselves which can cause their pain to surface later.[111] During extreme threat and traumatic events people run on adrenalin, which is highly appropriate for crisis and survival mode, but if they continue months in that state they will run out of reserves really quickly.[112] Adrenalin mode or 'bushfire brain' is adapted for the event but not everything can be done in this mode.[113] It is often later that the exhaustion hits people. These patterns were experienced and articulated by Hans who continued in 'adrenalin mode', helping others rebuild, before he suddenly 'cracked' and needed to properly rest, recover and regain his own strength after the fire. He reflected:

> I could deal with a fire, and the other bits, but it was one of those years. It built up, up, up and the body said 'I can't deal with this'. No breakdown but just physically and mentally tired. I think it was just like, I don't want another problem. That's how long it took for me to crack and say I can't cope with this. Nothing mental just the body had had enough, the brain said that's enough. That was a big fire.[114]

This was also a year when their farm had sick cows as well as fires and flood. Hans

[109] Gordon, "Forward."

[110] Ibid.

[111] Rob Gordon, "Acute Responses to Emergencies: Findings and Observations of 20 Years in the Field," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 21, no. 1 (2006): 20.

[112] Moira Fahy, "Afterburn: In the Tiger's Jaws," (One Thousand Productions, 2013), DVD Documentary.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maffra West Upper, Victoria.

reflected that 'it builds up on you and something else triggers what I call a crack and I realised I can't physically cope any more, I can't deal with more work'. He took six weeks off and 'slept a lot' to restore his body. His reflections demonstrated how local residents came together and gave help and support to each other. He commented 'we don't need help, we know what we are doing', thus indicating a belief in the strength of local networks of support and assistance and their knowledge of their local area. It also demonstrated an awareness of their relatively geographically isolated location which necessitates that they rely on each other in case the CFA or other organisations cannot reach them. These comments illuminated the ties and connection between people in the community, but also remind us that recovery is not a straightforward process. Narratives of community solidarity and bonding are one part of a complex and ongoing collective and individual process after disaster. It is useful to acknowledge the reality and lived experience of social networks that provide a sense of community and belonging; it is also important to acknowledge the complexity and difficulty of these processes, and how these twin experiences sit alongside each other. A positive experience of people responding to the needs of others is accompanied by 'hard work', which can take a physical and emotional toll upon individuals and groups. As Hans reflected: 'rebuilding is harder than the fire'.[115] It does not mean that ideals of community and solidarity did not occur, nor that tensions and fractures within communities are absent; they are both 'real consequences' of the aftermath of natural disasters.

The specific community remembered and referred to also differed between individuals and demonstrated how living in the same place did not necessarily indicate a sense of community or belonging.[116] Nevertheless, most of the reflections on community in the aftermath of disaster referred to imagined connections between people within a specific geographic locality. The geographic borders of these communities are malleable but seemed to largely refer to people who were engaged within similar social networks that were focused on a particular town and area. The community recalled could be quite specific and focused on the neighbours in the street,

[115] Ibid.

[116] Fairbrother et al., "Creating 'Community'?," 190.

or it could encompass a boarder sense of connection based on the larger township. Ingrid articulated a sense of community focused on both her local neighbourhood and Maitland more broadly. Other Maitland migrants also articulated a sense of connection and community in the aftermath of the flood, but many also articulated a specific attachment to another type of ethnic community. Jay Marlowe used Fozdar and Harley's distinction between civic and ethno belonging and argued for an additional 'ethnic' category as a way to consider the links, support and shared understanding and experiences between refugees and individuals from the same background.[117] A similar 'ethnic' sense of belonging was articulated by Maitland migrants who remembered sharing a sense of community and belonging with other migrants. The shared background of war, migration and life in Greta camp forged a sense of connection and commonality between many migrants. Migrants often moved to similar areas in Maitland because of these shared experiences and connections.[118] Ingrid felt a connection to the Maitland community in the aftermath of the flood which continued over many years, but she also commented on the shared customs and background that sustained connections with others migrants.[119]

Belonging within a specific migrant community was particularly pertinent to those who were involved in the Maitland Polish Association. Tania and John were both actively involved in the Polish Association for numerous years; Tania helped others and worked in the kitchens and John organised meetings, events and activities as President of the Association.[120] Their separate involvement contributed to a sense of community and belonging in Maitland, which was arguably independent of the 1955 flood. Tania's reflections on community mainly focused on connections with the migrant community and an 'ethnic' sense of belonging. While she recalled receiving help after the flood, and a general sense of community within Maitland, she articulated more specific instances

[117] Marlowe, "Belonging and Disaster Recovery," 194.

[118] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015; Nina Nikolaeff, Interviewed 16th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah; Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland Polish Assocation, Maitland; Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015.

[119] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015; Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[120] John Szczudluk, Interviewed 20th February 2015; Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015; Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015.

of connecting with people with whom she shared a homeland or similar experience of migration.[121] Thus, although community was a common theme across many Maitland migrants' recollections, the specific focus and corresponding sense of connection and belonging was different for each individual.

In Victoria, part of the bushfires' challenge to Kat and Jenneke's worldview was that it disrupted their lives with the threat and experience of death. Death and trauma were not part of the culture or community that they lived in. In contrast, Maitland migrants had come from a war-torn background and thus already had past experiences of destruction and death. It is possible this background contributed to how they made sense of the flood and responded to it. Ingrid framed the flood as another obstacle in a series of hurdles; it was not articulated as something that directly challenged her worldview, instead it was another example of the difficulties faced throughout life. The obstacle became a source of connection through the way the community mobilised in the aftermath and ultimately forged a sense of community, home and belonging. In this way it is possible that migrants' wartime pasts influenced their worldview and how they made sense of the flood and incorporated it within their larger life history.

The memories of Maitland and Victorian migrants demonstrate that shared narratives of community are an important part of the aftermath of natural disasters but not the only experience. Disasters can be accompanied by ideals of community, solidarity, and increased connection and unity, and they can also be accompanied by the loss of sustaining networks and the breakdown of connections and community.[122] Communities will heal but in changing ways that might not satisfy everyone.[123] Disaster narratives have the 'power to settle those who have experienced the unsettling of their worlds' and provide a way 'to make sense of that which seems most senseless'.[124] This does not negate the reality experienced by those whose memories do support such

[121] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015; Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015.

[122] Kai T. Erikson, *In the Wake of the Flood* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979); Barbara B. Brown and Douglas D. Perkins, "Disruptions in Place Attachment," in *Place Attachment*, ed. Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (New York: Plenum Press, 1992), 292; Robert C. Bolin and Patricia A. Bolton, *Race, Religion, and Ethnicity in Disaster Recovery* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1986), 291.

[123] Peter Stanley, *Black Saturday at Steels Creek* (Brunswick: Scribe Publications, 2013), 204.

[124] Rozario, "Making Progress," 33.

narratives of community connection and unity, but it does mean that people whose memories and experience are not reflected in wider narratives or official process of grief and mourning could be excluded. We need to hold in mind multiple experiences and memories of disaster in order to have a more holistic understanding of the short and long-term impact of bushfires and floods.

## Conclusion: Migrants in Community

This chapter has demonstrated that interviewees experienced bushfire and flood in unique ways, but the theme of community was a common feature regardless of whether this was a positive or difficult experience. The bushfire and flood strengthened previous connections, or created and consolidated them, through the way people, and thus the community, mobilised to give help and support to others during and after the disaster. Community was evident through these social networks and also felt and experienced. The shared experience of bushfire and flood often made people feel more connected and contributed to a heightened sense of belonging and community. In Maitland, though, memories of community were forged not just through the flood but through past experiences of war, displacement and migration shared with other migrants. The disaster had the potential to create stronger connections and a sense of community that went beyond the 'civic', but migrants' memories also demonstrated how experiences were often more complicated than a generalised narrative of increased connection and belonging. While some people found solace and community through shared experiences, and shared grief and mourning, these same phenomena also excluded people who felt their experience and memories were different.

Rachel felt 'that sense of community is always there but it unfortunately takes a major incident that is going to affect the whole community to really pull people together'. In 2006 'for all the worst reasons [there was] a real sense of gathering, pulling together looking after each other'. This sense of gathering and pulling together was evident in many migrants' reflections. It revealed the community to them and often was accompanied by an experience and sense of connection, community and belonging. Rachel said her sense of belonging in Australia was 'very much about community'. Her sense of community was formed through her involvement in various groups including

the local choir and fire brigade. She commented that 'the more of that you do, the more people you meet, the more grounded you become. And then when you have a disaster it is a clincher'.[125] The shared experience of the bushfire, when people came together and helped each other, contributed to a sense of connection, community and belonging for Rachel and for many migrants. As Jenneke reflected:

> I suppose I feel that we are a migrant family but what I got a sense of at that time was that we might be a migrant family but we are very integrated into this community and I feel very much part of it and I don't feel like an outsider. I feel like a migrant but experiencing this as someone who belongs here.[126]

[125] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016.

[126] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

# Chapter 6
# Environmental Memories and Attachment to Place

After the 2009 Black Saturday bushfire Jenneke reflected:

> I don't think I ever expected that a bushfire could be that dramatic. […] I don't think I realised what a big threat they were before actually seeing it myself. […] I knew they were an issue and I knew that they existed. But […] I suppose I always thought they were avoidable: for people to be there or not be there [… I thought that] you'd have warning. […] I didn't realise how dramatic they would be, how out of control they could be.[1]

The experience of Black Saturday changed Jenneke's understanding of the Australian environment and her place within it. She expected something like 'a bushfire, where as what happened […was] a firestorm'. Jenneke said she only realised the severity of the situation 'when the fire front came and houses around us started exploding'. This was when she realised: 'okay, we have to get to safety now. We are no longer fighting fires we are running for our lives now. That was the moment'.[2]

Such moments have stayed with people in the aftermath of natural disasters. Jenneke's remembering of the Black Saturday fires underlined how the extremity of such experiences challenged and changed her previous perception of bushfire and the local environment. Like other migrants, she was already engaged in a process of learning about the Australian environment: slowly coming to terms with what it meant to inhabit a different environment from the European one she grew up in. The bushfire heightened her awareness of the natural world and led her and the other migrants interviewed to reflect on their knowledge of the environment and their connection and relationship to place. In the aftermath, new memories were formed and a new sense of place emerged.

This chapter examines how migrants reflected on the Australian environment and their sense of place in the aftermath of bushfires and floods (as distinct from connections to people and community discussed in the previous chapter). The chapter

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[1] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Meeniyan, Victoria.

[2] Ibid.

returns to examine the sensory and embodied memories of bushfire and flood already noted in Chapters Three and Four, but this time focusing on how they shaped migrants' environmental understandings and changed their behaviour and reaction to specific weather patterns. Migrants' knowledge of the Australian environment began to be formed soon after their arrival in Australia, it was strengthened and deepened by their experience of natural disasters. Their environmental observations in the aftermath of bushfires in particular, revealed how their new understandings contributed to a new sense of respect for the natural world and its often awe-inspiring 'elemental drama'.[3]

This new respect for the environment was often articulated alongside migrants' reflections on their connection and attachment to place. Multiple factors shape people's decision to stay in disaster-prone places—including economic and political considerations. The reflections of migrants interviewed for this thesis often revealed a desire to stay because of their pre-existing connections and attachments to place—and perhaps because of their past experiences of starting afresh. These attachments sometimes deepened through the rebuilding and recovery process. For some people, place became even more important in the aftermath of natural disasters as it was often an important site of mourning, remembering and belonging. Residents in Maitland tried to remember the floods through markers in both the natural and urban environments. Bushfire memories also came to be embedded in places across Victorian bushfire areas which provided a way to remember the fires and mourn the loss of loved ones. These sites of memory, loss and healing demonstrate the importance of place in the aftermath of natural disasters.

## Sensory Memories and Environmental Adaptation

Migrant memories of natural disasters often focused on the 'elemental drama' and captured the immediate and visceral experience of bushfire and floods. Oral history can capture vivid descriptions of the immediate sensory experience as well as long-lasting memories of these dramatic experiences.[4] While Chapters Three and Four noted how

[3] Tom Griffiths, "The Nature of Culture and the Culture of Nature," in *Cultural History in Australia*, ed. Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 2003), 76.

[4] Andrew Holmes and Margaret Pilkington, "Storytelling, Floods, Wildflowers and Washlands: Oral

sensory memories were an important way people experienced and remembered the fire and flood, this chapter considers the way sensory and embodied memories shaped migrants' subsequent understandings of the natural world and their behaviour in the longer term.

Migrants' memories demonstrated how sensory and embodied memories of the 1955 flood altered understandings of the local environment and feelings of safety. Henry remembered how after the '55 flood' his father Bruno was 'always frightened of floods' and would 'be panicking' and 'terrified every time the Hunter [river] came up'. Bruno was determined to own a home but bought within a flood area, which meant he was 'always concerned' about the risk of flooding. Specific weather patterns like rain prompted his memories of the 1955 flood, so he 'never forgot that first experience back in '55'. These memories reminded him of the risk of floods and thus prompted him to always take precautions in order to 'minimise the loss and the heartache'. This long-term learning was still evident when Bruno evacuated to Henry's home during the 2007 flood. Although he continued to worry about floods, his sensory and embodied memories enabled him to adapt to living in flood areas in Maitland.[5]

In different ways Ingrid's sensory and embodied memories also changed her family's behaviour and response to floods. As noted in Chapter Three, Ingrid also remembered being 'frightened when there was rain', getting a 'horrible feeling' 'like butterflies in your stomach', and being 'restless with worry'.[6] These embodied memories were one way that she remembered the flood, and they also shaped her subsequent responses and reactions on days with similar weather patterns. While Henry's family and Tania's family stayed within flood-prone locations, Ingrid's family were able to relocate to higher ground in Telarah through the generosity of Lions Clubs. Once they moved and 'were out of the flood area', Ingrid was no longer fearful every time it rained. She said the fear 'went a long time ago. When we moved to higher ground we knew we

History in the River Ouse Project," *Oral History* 39, no. 2 (2011): 84, 93.

[5] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans,

[6] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah; Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

were totally totally safe and this is what families want to be'.[7] Embodied memories were thus part of an ongoing process of how people remembered the flood and adapted to living within the local environment. The personal experience of flood, captured and remembered through sensory and embodied memories, was part of how Ingrid began to cultivate a new awareness of the local environment and learn about locations safer from floods. This new knowledge helped Ingrid feel safe on higher ground in Telarah and able to cultivate a sense of being at home in Australia, but with a new respect and understanding of the natural environment.

Sensory and embodied memories also shaped migrants' perceptions and understandings of bushfires and often ultimately led to altered responses and behaviour in regards to environmental risks. As discussed in Chapter Four, Hans' sensory memories of the bushfire challenged his understanding of the power of nature. Hans thought his family had a fire plan and were prepared but he later reflected that 'we weren't prepared at all. Seeing what a fire can do, we weren't prepared, we thought we could fight fires, but no hope. […] when you see what a fire can do, it is insignificant'; the preparations, pumps and fire-breaks felt insignificant compared with the fire.[8]

The sound, speed and unpredictability of bushfire that Hans witnessed led to a new understandings of the natural environment and a new way of living with its potential. He said 'seeing what a fire can do changes how you deal with fires' and he no longer believe that one should attempt to stay and fight them. As such Hans is now 'more aware of what we need to do' and puts 'a lot more value on life than possessions. Just get out, let it burn'; 'everything can be replaced except life'. In the event of a future fire Hans said 'the house can just go, we would just get out and go. I am not going to risk life and limb for a bit of brick and mortar. That is totally different to what I thought before. I thought we can risk it, we are an irresistible force, we can deal with nature'.[9] Witnessing a bushfire changed Hans' perception of bushfires and the Australian environment. It underlined for him that they need to be threated with respect and this has shaped how he would prepare and respond to future fires.

[7] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[8] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maffra West Upper, Victoria.

[9] Ibid.

Jenneke's personal experience, and embodied and sensory memories of bushfire, challenged her previous understandings and perception of safety in the environment. She said she 'used to have an idea of how a fire would travel but then I saw one and you would never outrun it'. On Black Saturday Jenneke had sheltered on the Marysville oval as the fire front burnt through the town. She later returned to defend her home in Alexandra in case the bushfire continued to burn north. Jenneke could 'see the fire the in the hills' but could not tell 'how far away it was because it was just so smoky and because in my mind I was no longer sure how fast a fire would travel'. Her experience and memory of the day before had changed her understanding of bushfire. She knew the wind had changed and 'the weather had dropped' but 'in my mind I couldn't quite marry those two'. She walked around the house repeating to herself 'there is hardly any wind, there is hardly any wind, it is not that close'. She kept 'reminding myself of these details. My mind was rationally saying one thing but my body was thinking flee'. Her personal experience and sensory memories of bushfire the day before changed her understanding of fire and her sense of safety in the environment.[10]

Jenneke's relationship with the natural world changed as a result of her sensory and embodied memories of the fire. These memories have been recalled by Jenneke in similar environmental conditions or when there are similar weather patterns. She recalled:

> I have been in windy days since then, hot windy days, and my mind is fine by my body thinks feel. I feel very tense, I feel like screaming even though I know it's fine. But it's like my body has a memory that [I] need to go.[11]

Her reflections revealed how embodied memories of the bushfire can be provoked by similar weather conditions. Hot windy days cause her body to recall the sensory and affective memories of bushfire and these embodied memories now influence her subsequent responses to the environment. After the fire Jenneke became 'hyper aware of where I was all the time, and what the risks were'. When camping she was 'constantly of aware of which way you would leave, where is water', and she now always needs a clear fire plan to be in place 'before I can feel settled in that spot'. Jenneke is now 'really aware

[10] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[11] Ibid.

what's a fire day and what's not' and has a heightened awareness of risk as a consequence of her experience of bushfire. Although in some ways she felt 'less safe being in the world' she is now more aware of her surroundings. Since the fire Jenneke has 'moved through the environment differently, through my whole life differently because of it'.[12]

Sensory and embodied memories, therefore, were an important way that migrants remembered their experience of bushfire and flood, and these memories were particularly significant because they revealed migrants' changing understandings of the Australian environment. Their direct encounter with bushfires and floods, encapsulated and remembered through sight, sound, and sensory and affective memories, challenged and changed migrants' understanding of the environment and their future reactions and responses to their surroundings. These oral histories illuminated how sensory memories shaped migrants' environmental understandings and their subsequent behaviour on days with similar weather patterns, which thus contributed to a new sense of respect for the natural world in Australia.

## Environmental Memories: Regeneration and Respect

Natural disasters like bushfires and floods dramatically change or destroy environments and make natural and built environments unfamiliar—and this was reflected in migrants interviews for this thesis. Migrants' memories often unearthed a new relationship and sense of respect for the power of nature. It is worthwhile remembering that migrants' knowledge of the Australian environment was usually learnt only after their arrival in Australia. As noted in Chapter One, many migrants remembered becoming aware of their new local environment by exploring their local area and becoming familiar with the different Australian flora and fauna. An awareness of natural disasters prior to their direct experience or involvement was only articulated by a small portion of those interviewed.

When Ingrid migrated to Maitland she missed Germany 'terribly' and was conscious of the differences between the German environment she left behind and the

[12] Ibid.

one encountered in Australia. Along with her friends, toys, school, teachers, language and customs, Ingrid missed the natural German environment. Ingrid explained that as children they were 'very attuned to nature […] and still to this day I love wood, I love trees'. She remembered going for 'walks in the forest and the smell of the pine forest, the fir forest; there's nothing like it'. When Ingrid visits Germany the first thing she loves to do is to walk through a forest filled with 'lots of nice smells'. She said 'I'm so in tune with nature, I just love nature' and will 'never lose that' attachment to the German environment because 'it's always your motherland, always'. In Germany the seasons 'are so pronounced, dominant, you can tell one season from the other' and she would look forward to watching the changing seasons.[13] As such Ingrid and many other migrants found the Australian environment different, strange and disconcerting.

Initially Ingrid 'didn't have much interest in the Australian environment because it was so alien to the environment over there' in Germany.[14] She found the Australian environment was:

> Very rugged and raw and so different, the colours are different again. They're not as bold as they are over there. Flowers, trees, grass everything is more defined, more green, more colourful. Here it's more subdued, but it's beautiful too in its way and it's just different again. I admire the blue mountains, I admire mountains, I went to the snowy mountains, I admire all that landscape, I love it, I like it, but it's taken a heck of a long time.[15]

Ingrid's memories and reflections on her relationship with the Australian environment were framed by the larger context of her migration and life experiences. Her memories reflected a gradual change in her attitude and relationship from her initial perception upon arrival to her observations after over sixty years living in Australia. She reflected:

> It's different. It's totally different to Europe, its uniqueness, you like it, you get to like it. I love the wide open spaces the smell of the gum trees, which at first I thought were horrible looking. You get used to it, you actually like it. And you like the crickets when they chirp in the bush. It's different; because of it being so different you like it too. You can like both, you can like the European environment and you can like this environment. And I do like it […] the Australian way of life it's so typical of the land

[13] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

> […] I do like the Australian environment now but it's taken a long, long time to get used to it. I'm still frightened of spiders and frogs and snakes especially. I think if I ever see a snake I'll have a fit. Things like that, spiders especially any creepy crawly thing you worry about'.[16]

Ingrid's reflections upon her love of the Australian environment were not directly shaped by her experience of floods. She argued that the flood did not affect her view of nature:

> [It] didn't have anything to do with it. Flood is just something that happens […] it's an act of God more or less. It's not act of God, it's to do with the climate […] and it has to happen. Sometimes you have to have a bushfire to cleanse all the land and scrub and you have to have a flood to clean things out, to cultivate. You have to have those things.[17]

The flood was not positioned as an experience that caused a change in Ingrid's perception and relationship to the natural environment. It was described as 'just something that happens', a part of the environment that contributes to its nourishment. Her statement displayed a degree of knowledge of Australian floods and natural disasters, but her statements also implied a sense of separation between her love of nature and the existence of natural disasters—as though nature as the focus of attachment and affection was somehow segregated from the natural hazards it contains. Although floods are an active element within the environment they do not appear to be enveloped within her love of nature or have contributed to its development. There is a contrast or tension, perhaps, between Ingrid's love of nature and her acceptance of natural disasters. The flood neither challenged nor cultivated a personal relationship with the environment.

In contrast, Victorian migrants' reflections on the environment after their experience of bushfire suggested that their personal experience significantly contributed to challenging, changing and deepening their understanding and relationship with the natural world in a way that often generated a new sense of respect. This was generated by the awe and ferocity felt during the fire, but also by their observations of environmental changes and regeneration in the immediate aftermath.

In the aftermath of the fire, many migrants observed slow but constant changes

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

in the environment as it began to regenerate. Bende was previously aware that 'you have to burn things down to regrow it, to regenerate'. After the fires she became 'fascinated with how it regrows by itself after it has totally, totally burnt down. That it just comes up again'.[18] Before the fire Bruno lived in a 'place that was so pristine'; he could drink the water from the nearby river. After the fire the water 'was black like soot' for months. He found it difficult and 'really painful to see nature […] suffering so much'. But Bruno began to notice changes as 'slowly' the water cleaned itself and 'now [the environment] its green and it's quite beautiful. I never expected to see that coming back, amazing'. He commented 'it takes time and nature regenerates itself'. The 'gum trees are very tough apparently'.[19] Kat witnessed new plants growing after germinating through the fire.[20] Jenneke noticed that the 'Cathedrals [Ranges] where we used to walk [are] completely different. All of those trees are gone. It was a hot fire so it killed a lot of the trees. So the ecosystem has to start from scratch'.[21] Wytze also observed the regeneration of the environment around the towns of Whittlesea and Kinglake where many 'trees were so hot' they died completely and only 'skeletons of trees' remained after the fire. But other trees like the eucalyptus 'can sprout new growth through the skin' and bark of the trees and 'all the green that you see is regrowth'.[22] The awe and amazement expressed at nature's resilience and capacity to survive and emerge again from the ash increased their sense of understanding and respect for the natural world.

Memories of environmental regeneration were often connected to reflections on personal processes of recovery and renewal. Awareness of environmental regeneration influenced some people's perception of their own healing and created a way to frame and understand their experiences. In Gippsland, Hans found 'dealing with the aftermath' and 'rebuilding […] harder than the fire'. He 'didn't know what fire could do until I had to deal with the consequences'. The ongoing repairs became overwhelming

[18] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Eden Park, Victoria.

[19] Bruno Torfs, Interviewed 27th July 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Marysville, Victoria.

[20] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Kinglake, Victoria.

[21] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[22] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Marysville, Victoria. For further details regarding the regrowth process of Eucalyptus trees see: Forestry Tasmania and Ann LaSala, "Thinning Regrowth Eucalypts," *Native Forest Silviculture Technical Bulletin* 13 (2001): 23,28.

because 'every time you went there you saw the damage: burnt smoldering trees, fences that weren't there'. They were 'very lucky' as their herd survived but it was difficult 'dealing with the logistics of moving 600 steers around a place with no fences, no yard, no power, no feed'. In one year they had sick cows, fires and drought and then it rained in June 'and the whole dairy farm turned to swamp'. The emotional toll and the 'labour problems' 'built up, up up and the body said "I can't deal with this" […] just physically and mentally tired […] the body had had enough, the brain said that's enough'. Hans suddenly ran out of adrenalin and took six weeks off and 'slept a lot'.[23] He felt he had 'run out of all the good stuff, it is time to restore me. The environment is rebuilding itself too'.[24] It was as though both his body and the environment were sharing in a time of regeneration. The reflections of Hans parallelled the experiences of other people that were captured by researchers, which implied that there was often a sense of solidarity, reassurance or hope as people restored their mind and body alongside the environment.[25]

Migrants' observations of the regenerating environment were accompanied by reflections that revealed a new sense of respect for bushfires, the environment and the power of nature. The 2013 Gippsland bushfires challenged Hans' perception of the environment and were 'a refresher call that it can burn here' even in 'the middle of the irrigation district'. Prior to the Aberfeldy fires Hans was aware of bushfires but 'never thought about [them] until it happen[ed]'. He expected bushfires could be fought and houses protected. He commented that 'you think you can fight them but when you have to deal with the aftermath of a real fire they are totally different they are a lot more powerful when they get going'. Hans used to think natural disasters were 'a novelty, a bit of fun' but now 'I see them differently'. Previously he through 'we can deal with

[23] Hans experience is similar to patterns observed by Rob Gordon. See: Moira Fahy, "Afterburn: In the Tiger's Jaws," (One Thousand Productions, 2013), DVD Documentary; Rob Gordon, "Acute Responses to Emergencies: Findings and Observations of 20 Years in the Field," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 21, no. 1 (2006).

[24] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016.

[25] See for example: Christine Hansen and Tom Griffiths, *Living with Fire: People, Nature and History in Steels Creek* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2012); Fahy, "Afterburn."; Peg Fraser, *Black Saturday: Not the End of the Story* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2018).

nature', but now his family would evacuate in the advent of a fire which is 'totally different to what I thought before'.[26] Witnessing a bushfire and experiencing the aftermath changed his perception of the natural environment and its power and thus altered his response.

The experience also facilitated a new sense of respect and reverence for nature as a force in its own right. Hans does not feel threatened by the environment although he did comment 'nature can be a bastard, usually throws two or three curved balls at once'. The aftermath made him realise 'we are just so insignificant, we have no chance of stopping this, no hope'. He has since found it difficult 'to explain to people who don't live in Australia what a bushfire can do. The power of them. Awesomeness, people don't understand. You can't tame nature, you have to live with it, you can't fight it. She gives and takes, you have to accept that'. As a dairy farmer he was aware 'our farm is very fertile because it is a flood plain but it has to flood to be fertile. I think you have a bit more respect for nature'. His experience taught him 'you need to respect a fire, you need to learn to be scared of it'.[27]

This new sense of respect was echoed throughout other Victorian migrants' memories of the aftermath of bushfire. After 'being part of that enormous bushfire in 2009' Jenneke found it difficult to remember how she thought about fires previously. She had been aware of bushfires through her father Wytze and her own involvement in the CFA, but she never 'expected that a bushfire could be that dramatic' or 'how out of control they could be. She thought she knew what a high fire danger day meant—'oh yes, I get it'— but in hindsight she 'really didn't understand what a big risk it' was. As noted above, her experience gave her an increased awareness of risk and changed how she moved through the environment but she also became 'really respectful of what fires are able to do […] more aware of what the bush is capable of, how hot it can burn'.[28] Jenneke felt honoured to have been able to experience such a life changing event. This sentiment was echoed by English migrant Kat who experienced the Black Saturday bushfires in Kinglake. She witnessed 'this huge force of mother nature and it's quite

[26] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

humbling in a sense to have been through an experience like that because it is quite rare to have gone through something like that'. She felt 'we should be privileged to be here on this part of the planet' and to be reminded that 'the environment and mother nature is bigger than us and the fire is part of the cycle of life'. Kat felt 'more respectful of the environment around me because I know what it is capable of. I still feel very at peace with it and drawn to it. It hasn't frightened me away from living in the bush. But I feel I have more respect for it definitely. It's mindblowing'.[29]

This new sense of respect for bushfires was also indicative of a new and deeper knowledge of the Australian environment. The recognition of the power and potential destruction wrought by nature contributed to the creation of a new sense of caution but also admiration for its capacity for regeneration. In contrast, the experience of floods was articulated as something distinct from migrants' sense of value of nature. Rather than being incorporated into a changed understanding and appreciation of the natural environment, the experience of floods was articulated as a separate challenge to their migration, settlement and life in Australia. Nevertheless, common to migrants' bushfire and flood memories was a sense of connection and attachment to place after natural disasters.

## A Sense of Place: Rebuilding Home

The aftermath of natural disasters contributed to a new knowledge, awareness, and respect for the environment and in some cases contributed to creating or deepening migrants' attachment to place. Natural disasters disrupt lives, devastate landscapes, and destroy 'material traces of memory'.[30] This destruction and disruption requires that people deal with loss and recreate or repair attachments and connections to people and place.[31] Most migrants interviewed for this project decided to stay within the Maitland

[29] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016.

[30] Nicholas J. Entrikin, "Geographic Landscapes and Natural Disasters," in *The Place of Landscape: Concepts, Contexts, Studies*, ed. Jeff Malpas (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011), 114-115.

[31] Simon Swaffield, "Place, Culture and Landscape after the Christchurch Earthquake," in *Space, Place & Culture*, ed. Helen Sykes (Sydney: Future Leaders, 2013), 149; Barbara B. Brown and Douglas D. Perkins, "Disruptions in Place Attachment," in *Place Attachment*, ed. Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low

area and within bushfire-prone locations in Victoria. People often ask why others 'choose to remain in a place where they have experienced great trauma' and in a place which continues to be hazardous.[32] Economic and political factors along with affective qualities and the relationship people had or have with their environment shape people's desire and decision to stay in these places. The decision to stay and the consequent rebuilding practices represent significant investment, which can further intensify people's attachment to place.

The reflections of many Maitland migrants revealed economic factors that influenced their decision to remain in Maitland, but their memories also demonstrated how people's familiarity with the town, community and their attachment to place contributed to their desire to stay within the area. Home ownership was an important theme in many Maitland migrants' memories and this continued to be a priority after the flood because families had invested economically and emotionally in their houses. Tania and her husband stayed in their house and cleaned it out after the flood, which arguably reflected a desire to stay in this location, but also an economic imperative and emotional desire not to give up on their dream of homeownership.[33] Ingrid remembered that some people could not afford to move, so they cleaned up and stayed and added another level to their house.[34] Others sold and some bought. Henry's father capitalised on low housing prices after the flood and bought a house still filled with mud. People can feel economically bound to stay in places despite natural disasters, and this was likely the case for some in Maitland.[35] The low cost of housing and the opportunities afforded through the convenient location to key amenities outweighed the risk of future

(New York: Plenum Press, 1992), 284.

[32] Helen M. Cox and Colin Holmes, A., "Loss, Healing, and the Power of Place," *Human Studies*, no. 1 (2000): 63.

[33] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland Polish Assocation, Maitland; Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland.

[34] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[35] Eleonora Rohland et al., "Woven Together: Attachment to Place in the Aftermath of Disaster, Perspectives from Four Continents," in *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, ed. Mark Cave and Stephen Sloan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

disasters.

The economic considerations of staying or leaving were ameliorated for Ingrid's family through the opportunity they were given to relocate their house to higher, safer ground. They 'wanted to stay' in Maitland but did not want to live in the flood-risk area.[36] By moving to Telarah they were able to retain their connections to the community and town but were safely 'out of the flood area' and away from the 'fear and constant worry'. The fear of floods disappeared when they left central Maitland and were safe on high ground.[37] The house itself was not important—'it could have been another house it wouldn't have mattered to us as long as were on safe ground'.[38] They were then able to invest in their new home and 'beautify it all again' and 'cultivate a garden' secure in the knowledge that 'everything we did would be safe from the flood […] would be there forever, you never had to pack up again'.[39] They were free to create new connections in this place and continue the sense of community and belonging found within the Maitland area. Peter Read has observed how home is mentally constructed and occupies different spaces: a city, a suburb, a house, a single room, a single plant in the garden.[40] Ingrid's home was not necessarily that relocated house, but it was the safe higher ground in Telarah. Everyday activities and interactions with people before and after the flood facilitated a sense of community, but the flood and the process of recovery, relocation and rebuilding also fostered a new sense of connection and attachment to place.

Attachment to place was a significant theme throughout migrants bushfire memories and a factor which arguably contributed to people's desire to stay and rebuild. Jenneke remembered returning to Marysville after the fires and driving through the town. She commented '[it's] tidy isn't it, I wonder why it is so tidy here' before she suddenly realised 'it is tidy because everything was burnt [and] whatever was left was

[36] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[37] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[38] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1996), 101-102.

removed and people have started from scratch'. Rebuilding efforts after the fires meant 'all the houses look really new' and there was 'no rubbish around the houses like there often is after years of built up farm machinery'. Jenneke felt that Marysville looked 'totally different':[41]

> If you are in a town and someone chops down a tree, the eye notices something is different there. In Marysville it is like that. It feels like you are walking into a different town. There are none of the visual clues that used to be there. The buildings are not there, the trees are not there. The landscape has the same undulation but that is it. And the roads are in the same spot. They are the familiar things.[42]

Jenneke felt the town was changed but it was not unrecognisable. Peter Read's *Returning to Nothing* highlighted places that have been lost to people through migration, natural disaster and changing land use, and the places that have been cleared for highway construction or that have been dammed and flooded. These places are no longer accessible or available to people or have changed so much that they are unrecognisable. The bushfire destroyed much of Marysville, but far from being an irretrievable or 'lost place',[43] the undulation of the land and the roads provided a sense of familiarity to the town. It was irrevocably changed, but people have rebuilt and, as Jenneke said, 'it seems that people are happy to be there. It feels okay'.[44]

Jenneke said it was initially 'awful to be around' Marysville straight after the fires. Being there 'seeing burnt-out things was a little bit hard' as was knowing 'so many stories' of people who had died. But ultimately it did not change her 'want to be there or not be there'. She expected that 'people would leave the town because it is kind of a death trap in that way it is surrounded by forest' but although some people left others 'have been happy to rebuild and are happy that they have'.[45] People rebuilt and were 'happy to be there. It feels okay'. As much as this comment was about recovering a sense of safety within the built and natural environment and an increased awareness of the risk of fires, it was also an insight into a continued connection to place. Place is more

[41] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Read, *Returning to Nothing*; Fraser, *Black Saturday*, 204.

[44] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[45] Ibid.

than just a geographical location, it is where histories, memories, meanings and emotions are layered together. People often feel an attachment to place because they provide continuity to our lives through the physical setting, the people and activities and the memories that are inscribed and located in place.[46] Places provide an anchor for shared experiences, binding people together and providing a sense of identity and source of community and communality.[47] Jenneke's familiarity with the undulation of the land, the crisscrossing of roads, and her past individual and collective histories that she had built there as a migrant represented an existing sense of place and an anchor during the chaos after the fires. The bushfire challenged Jenneke's sense of safety and how comfortable she felt in Marysville during and after the fires, but her pre-existing sense of place meant her bushfire memories were ultimately woven into this location, contributing to a continuing sense of place.

A sense of place arguably contributed to people's desire to return and their commitment to stay and rebuild. Kat and her family returned to Kinglake after the fires and began to rebuild. In order to 'deal with our trauma' they clung 'to the plans that we had before the fires' and 'threw ourselves into getting the house built and moving into the house'. The fires shaped how they 'designed the house and property'. Building a greenhouse and shed and growing a garden were activities that 'a great distraction for us'.[48] Doreen Massey has described place as 'an attempt to find rooted security, to establish fixed identities amidst—and in opposition to—the flux, fragmentation, and disruption of a postmodern world'.[49] Rebuilding arguably gave Kat a sense of order and control after the disruption to their lives, first through migration and then through the fires, and contributed to the creation of a sense of place.

There are political and economic factors that contribute to people's decision to stay and rebuild but there are also instances when people have been prepared to stay in

[46] Swaffield, "Place, Culture and Landscape," 144.

[47] Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998), 22, 23; Brown and Perkins, "Disruptions in Place Attachment," 280.

[48] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016.

[49] Shelley Trower, "Introduction," in *Place, Writing, and Voice in Oral History*, ed. Shelley Trower (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 13.

an environmentally vulnerable place and put emotional values first.[50] Rebuilding can also contribute to deepening people's sense of attachment to place. A study examining place attachment after disasters noted that after the 1997 Central European flood a Brandenburg resident observed that had they not rebuilt the barn with such effort and meticulous detail 'I wouldn't have clung to it that much, for sure'.[51] A similar sentiment was expressed by Kat who reflected that they had put 'so much time and energy into this home, there is no way we could ever move […] the idea of moving somewhere else and leaving that all behind is' unthinkable.[52] Rebuilding their house and their lives here, in a way that was informed by the bushfires and their new environmental understandings, deepened their connection and attachment to place. Their decision to rebuild represented an economic and an emotional investment in this location that contributed to the creation of a deeper sense of place.

Staying in Kinglake generated new memories and experiences that further contributed to a sense of attachment to place. Despite the traumatic experiences of the bushfire Kat, still sees 'a really beautiful side to Kinglake and I feel really connected to it, the earth and the environment here'.[53] Kat participated in a charity trailwalk and trained by walking through 'the bush and up mountains and all around the local scenery'. She commented:

> It is just the most amazing place. It's so beautiful and in that respect I adore being here. I love being here, it is a remarkable space to be. There is a rainforest just down the road. It definitely feels like home and I feel like I have earnt my stripes being an Australian citizen'.[54]

Kat's memories of walking through the local environment echoed migrant memories of learning about the environment before the fire, and they demonstrated how she reconnected with the environment after the fires and rekindled a sense of attachment to the place she chose to call home.

[50] Rohland et al., "Woven Together," 193.

[51] Ibid., 187.

[52] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

## Embedded Memories of Trauma and Healing

Places are embedded with layers of histories, memories, shared experiences and meaning. They can be a 'bank of cultural memories' where residues of the past are embedded in the landscape and written over, but not erased.[55] Memory attaches itself to sites, and this was evident within migrants' oral history interviews which illustrated how memories of bushfire and flood were embedded within the environment and contributed to the meaning of those places.[56]

There have been changes to the way the 1955 flood has been remembered and forgotten by individuals, the community and the very fabric of the town. Memories of past floods have been woven and layered throughout the urban and natural environment in Maitland. Memories of the 1955 flood ebb and flow in this place but the passing of over sixty years has contributed to some people's concern about an extensive forgetting of this past. After the series of floods throughout the 1950s, and the 1955 flood in particular, there were proposals to permanently relocate the town to higher ground. Although this did not eventuate, notable growth in East Maitland, building prohibitions in central Maitland and high-risk flood-prone locations, and significant flood mitigation developments changed the urban and natural environment surrounding

**Figure 16:** Bright blue flood level signs, 1980s. These were erected at the height of the 1955 flood throughout Maitland and the surrounding areas.
Source: Public Works Q1396, Picture Maitland, Maitland City Library, https://www.flickr.com/photos/98887654@N05/11376130854/in/photostream/.

[55] Crang, *Cultural Geography*, 22, 23.

[56] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux De Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989): 22.

Maitland. It also contributed to particular ways the flood was remembered and embedded within this place. Chas Keys has argued that building prohibitions in Maitland 'played a positive role in maintaining' the unique heritage facades along High Street.[57] The prohibitions allocated flood-prone land for specific purposes such as businesses and carparks and ensured it would not be used for residences. Once Ingrid's family's house was relocated the council regulations dictated the block be left as vacant land 'because it was a flood area'.[58] During the 1980s the council erected bright blue flood level signs on telegraph poles around Maitland to indicate the height of the '55 flood waters. Building prohibitions and telegraph signs were reactions to prevent future flooding; they were also ways the town tried to remember floods. The empty spaces in the urban fabric demonstrate how memories of the flood have been embedded within these places.[59]

Some of these places remain empty. In 2015 the local flood historian Peter Bogan led a series of 'Walk and Talk flood tours' in conjunction with the local SES as part of the 60th anniversary of the 1955 flood. We began by walking north along Sempil Street, which was washed away in the 1955 flood. We then turned to head west along Mount Pleasant Street, which was lined with houses in 1955, all of which were swept away and smashed into the Long Bridge by a torrent of water. This space was deliberately left empty to mitigate against future floods. It forms part of the Mount Pleasant Street floodplain and no houses have been rebuilt along the street. The empty space is testament to a type of flood memory and demonstrates how the history of floods has been embedded within the landscape.

Memories and histories of floods are woven throughout other places in Maitland and some have been encased within a new layer of urban fabric. More recent memories,

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[57] Chas Keys, Interviewed 18th February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland Historical Society, Maitland.

[58] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[59] For further discussion on empty and abandoned spaces and places see: Ignasi Solà-Morales Rubió, "Terrain Vague," in *Anyplace*, ed. Cynthia Davidson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); Leon van Schaik, "Terrain Vague: A Melbourne Reflection on Sites of Abandonment," *Photofile*, no. 57 (1999); Nikos Papastergiadis, "Traces Left in Cities," in *Poetics in Architecture*, ed. Leon Van Schaik (London: Wiley-Academy, 2002).

histories and homes have been layered within Maitland, but the construction of new buildings upon specific sites arguably represents a type of flood forgetting. The vacant block of land where Ingrid's family house was located was supposed to be left vacant. She used to go past 'and have a look at it from time to time and it was always just bare land everywhere; vacant lots […] I thought it would stay that way'. But the council changed and prohibitions were lifted and people began to build on the land again. Ingrid got married and moved away. When she returned there was a house where hers' once stood that looked 'exactly like our old house'. It was even 'built up nine feet' in a way that replicated the actions taken by Ingrid's parents decades earlier to raise their house out of the way of future flood water. All of 'these houses, built up nine feet, nine feet exactly the same. History repeating itself'.[60] Or perhaps history being forgotten.

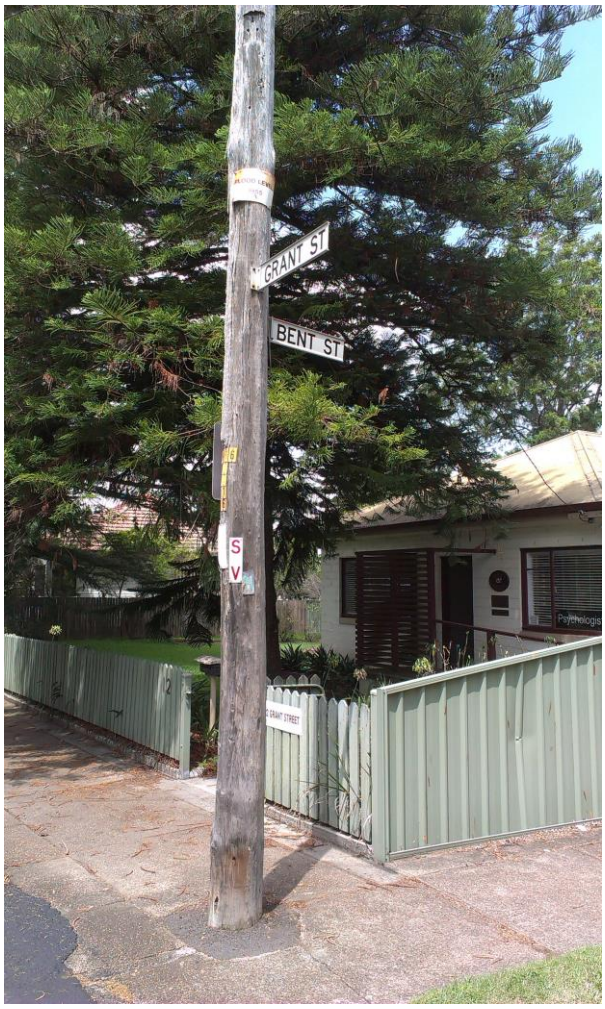


**Figure 17:** Bright blue flood level signs, 2015. The 1980s flood level signs have faded, rusted, fallen down and forgotten.
Source: Photo taken by Gretel Evans, 2015.

The empty lots were the result of flood mitigation but they also preserved the memory of floods through the empty space. This potentially barren land was evidence and a reminder of the history of floods in this place. Building a new house on this site could be interpreted as a type of (deliberate) forgetting. Erecting a house on stilts, however, implies a level of remembering. Ingrid commented that the houses in the street are all raised up high, which means 'people, they know it's a flood area'. She speculated whether people chose

[60] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

to build there because the land was cheap and they chose to believe or hope that it will not flood again. Ingrid said she gets a 'weird feeling when I see that and I think that's a repetition, that's exactly what happened with our house. And yet it's the same thing again, it's history repeating itself'.[61]

Some people are concerned that the memories and risk of flooding is being forgotten. Ingrid said 'that is the mantra around Maitland, it will never flood again they say. But it will, everyone knows that it will. You ask the man next door, it will, it will flood again'.[62] Henry felt that it was mainly the older population in Maitland who were concerned about flooding. Younger people are not interested in preparing for floods because 'they haven't experienced the real drama, the life drama'.[63] Henry has tried to keep the history alive by telling his grandchildren about the floods and how his family migrated to Australia from Lithuania. He said 'you've got to keep the story; I get them all together and I tell them the story again' because 'there's no doubt about it, the water will rise again'.[64] Ingrid also argued that only the older generation remember the floods and that 'when we are gone nobody knows because we went through it all. My parents who went through it, well, they're all dead. It happens and once we're gone there'll be no record of it anymore except archives'.[65] The physical marks and memory of the flood have in some cases been built over and talk of the floods has become softer with the passing of time. The bright blue flood markers have rusted away to shades of brown which blend into treetops and the tops of the telegraph poles. Some have fallen away or been taken for souvenirs. Ingrid feared that some people deliberately 'took them down. They're not there anymore'.[66] These examples are viewed by many as signs of floods being forgotten and assigned to history rather than being viewed as a present-day reality.[67] Nevertheless, these sites and spaces within the urban and natural environment demonstrate the deliberate effort taken—at least initially—to remember floods. It also

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Henry Meskauskas, Interviewed 24th February 2015.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[66] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[67] Chas Keys, Interviewed 18th February 2015.

illustrates how flood memories are embedded within this place.

The more recent experience and memory of bushfires meant that they were subject to different processes of remembering and forgetting. Nevertheless, Victorian migrants' reflections also demonstrated the importance of place and how bushfire memories are embedded in place. Place is important because so much about the fire and its consequences depended on people's location: about where they were when the fire occurred. It effected how and why people lived and died. That place can become a significant place of remembering and mourning. Significant 'sites of memory' were recalled throughout some migrants' interviews. Pierre Nora's original concept related to national or collective memories tied to physical places where the past is remembered.[68] The concept has been widely used in subsequent scholarship particularly in relation to memory, commemoration and war, and sites with regional, national and international significance.[69] Places recalled by migrants did not necessarily have national significance, but were important sites of personal and sometimes collective memory. The places or 'sites of memory', in this instance, refer to the interconnectedness of personal memory and place and how individual and personal memories (and sometimes those shared with wider social groups) have been embedded within specific locations.

A significant personal place of memory within migrants' oral histories was the Marysville oval where many people sheltered as the Murrindindi Mill fire burnt through the town on Black Saturday. The oval has become a significant location for memories, histories and studies of the bushfire because it was one of the few places of safety during the fire.[70] Wytze remembered that one day after the fires 'Jenneke was really clever' and

[68] Nora, "Between Memory and History."; Keir Reeves, "Sites of Memory," in *History, Memory and Public Life*, ed. Anna Maerker, Simon Sleight, and Adam Sutcliffe (London: Routledge, 2018), 65-67.

[69] Reeves, "Sites of Memory," 66-67; William Logan and Keir Reeves, "Introduction: Remembering Places of Pain and Shame," in *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with 'Difficult Heritage'*, ed. William Logan and Keir Reeves (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 2.

[70] A memorial was constructed in the Gallipoli Park Precinct. It includes a Reflective Garden and a New Life Sculpture designed and made by Bruno. The memories of Jenneke and Wytze, however, focused on their personal reflections and the oval itself. Marysville Tourism, "Gallipoli Park Precinct," Marysvill Information and Regional Artspace, 2019, accessed 20 September, 2019, http://www.marysvilletourism.com/things_to_do/gallipoli-park/; Bruno Torfs, "Photograph - Colour - Memorial in Gallipoli Park, Marysville, 2012," Victorian Collections, 2012, accessed 20th September,

she and Wytze 'got in the car and went to the oval and sat in the middle'. While sitting there they were able to reflect that 'this is where we were, this is where it all happens and now there are people eating ice creams'. Wytze said the experience was 'a little bit emotional because it brought it back'.[71]

Nevertheless, Wytze also felt that activities like returning to the oval and 'talk[ing] about it a little bit' enabled the experience to 'wear off'.[72] The oval was where people sheltered as a terrible bushfire surrounded and burnt through the town; now it was a place for everyday activities like eating ice cream. Returning to the oval illustrated the significance of that place and the memories embedded within it. Over time places become 'saturated with memories of significant life events'.[73] They are constructed in 'our memories and affections through repeated encounters'.[74] When we return we can remember what we did there, the people we saw, the thoughts we had.[75] Wytze and Jenneke were both familiar with Marysville before the fires so likely had many memories of the town and the oval. After the fires, returning to that place brought back memories of the fire. Trauma studies have noted how through the process of remembering, traumatic memories can be rearticulated and made meaningful by being placed within an individual's larger life history narrative.[76] Jenneke and Wytze's return to the oval arguably helped them to integrate their memories of the bushfire within this place and alongside their previous experiences and memories on the oval and in the town.

Thus places can be sites of haunting and trauma and sites of healing. Some people feel 'lost and emotionally incomplete away from sites of their trauma' and there are instances where people have felt returning to the site of their loss and survival was a beneficial 'part of coming to terms with the disaster experience' and part of the healing

2019, https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/5c581e2521ea670068cc075a.

[71] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[72] Ibid.

[73] David Glassberg, "Public History and the Study of Memory," *The Public Historian* 18, no. 2 (1996): 18.

[74] Rohland et al., "Woven Together," 192.

[75] Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2007), 221.

[76] See for example: Mark Klempner, "Navigating Life Review Interviews with Survivors of Trauma," *The Oral History Review* 27, no. 2 (2000).

process.[77] Although returning to the oval was difficult, it arguably created and represented a new layering of experiences and memories. Jenneke and Wytze's deliberate decision to return to the oval might have eased the tension and difficult memories associated with that place; at the same time it also demonstrated the layering of new memories and histories in that place. This place holds the layers of difficult and traumatic memories of bushfire and survival along with previous histories and new and future experiences.

Bende's reflections also illustrated how bushfire memories are embedded within the environment. Her family sold their property once they were ready to part with it and once the trees had grown green from burnt black. They moved away to be safe from fires but stayed within a similar area near Whittlesea to be close to friends and have easier access to town. Bende was drawn to the space in Australia, where she could 'look into the distance, there is nothing that is breaking my view'. The floor to ceiling windows in their new house provided a beautiful view of their property and of Mount Disappointment.[78] It is part of the 'borrowed landscape' and its 'sparse eloquence'

[77] Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), 152; Bill Bunbury, *Cyclone Tracy: Picking up the Pieces* (South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1994), 103, 109; Rohland et al., "Woven Together," 199, 201.

[78] Australian places were *re*named by colonists. The explorers Hume and Hovell named Mount Disappointment in 1824 when they were disappointed that Port Phillip Bay could not be seen from the summit because of dense vegetation. Mitchell Shire Council, "Mt Disappointment State Forest," Visit Victoria, accessed 20th September, 2019, https://www.visitmelbourne.com/regions/daylesford-and-the-macedon-ranges/things-to-do/nature-and-wildlife/parks-and-gardens/mt-disappointment-state-forest; DELWP – Broadford, *Mt Disappointment State Forest*, (Victoria: Department of Environment State of Victoria, Land, Water & Planning, 2015), https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/26366/FS0011-Mt.Disappointment-State-Forest.pdf.

For further discussions on naming, mapping, geography and the relationship between landscape and language see: Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Matthew Graves and Elizabeth Rechniewski, "Mapping Utopia: Cartography and Social Reform in 19th Century Australia," *Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 9, no. 2 (2012); JM Arthur, *The Default Country: A Lexical Cartography of Twentieth-Century Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003); Simon Ryan, "Maps and Their Cultural Constructions," in *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia*, ed. Simon Ryan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths, eds., *Words for Country: Landscape*

seemed to become increasingly significant throughout our interview.[79] Mount Disappointment formed the backdrop to our interview on a sunny winters day. The skeletons of burnt trees were visible in the distance.

Mount Disappointment is 'a keeper of memories' that offers a unique way to remember the bushfires and the people Bende lost in the fires.[80] Memories of the bushfire have become embedded in this place and upon the mountain. Bende said:

> When I sit here and look out the window I think about Grandpa. But I feel like I have to, that is a part of my everyday now. As I drive to work I drive past all the burnt bits. It is one of those things I think we did this and this and this and maybe could have done that.[81]

Mount Disappointment is a place that holds memories of loss and grief. It has become a place to mourn and remember the loss caused by the bushfires. Maria Tumarkin's work on traumascapes has explored the 'enduring, tangible imprints that suffering and loss leave behind', and places like Mount Disappointment are a type of traumascape.[82] We remember natural disasters in ways both similar and different to other human caused catastrophes, but the differences due to the environmental elements of the disaster are what contribute to the difficult process of remembering natural disasters within a larger culture of disaster amnesia. The Black Saturday bushfires affected the lives of multiple people and communities, but just as the Marysville oval was a place of personal remembering practices for Jenneke and Wytze, Mount Disappointment was a place that enabled Bende to personally remember the bushfires and mourn her loss.

After traumatic events some people and survivors have felt a compulsion to return to or stay near the places and sites of these events.[83] Bende commented that after the fires 'it was weird, it was like I can't go now, I have to stay here' and participate in sharing and listening to people's storytelling. Speaking about Black Saturday was an

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*& Language in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002); George Seddon, *Landprints: Reflections on Place and Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[79] Tumarkin, *Traumascapes*, 37.

[80] Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study: Second Edition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 213. Quoted in Tumarkin, *Traumascapes*, 128.

[81] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[82] Tumarkin, *Traumascapes*, 11.

[83] Ibid., 28-35; Hansen and Griffiths, *Living with Fire*, 150.

important way that Bende 'deal[s] with it. I need to speak about it'.[84] When she looked out the window she thought about Grandpa and the fires. She said 'I feel like I have to'. This place and its view of the mountain was part of a process of mourning, grieving and remembering.

Mount Disappointment was not the site where her father-in-law died, although it was in that direction upon similar topography. Bende's family no longer lived in the same house, but this place and its view of the mountain became a focus for her bushfire memories. It provided a way for her to remember the fire and the loss of loved ones. Tumarkin has observed that internal processes of thinking, remembering and grieving need 'the right kinds of places to unfold' and traumascapes 'were often these kinds of spaces'.[85] They can be sites where people can place the events of traumatic moments into the landscape.[86] Experiences of loss can be bound to physical places. Although this might not have been the site, it is an important place for remembering. Bende reflected that people 'deal with grief in different ways' and that they 'don't think about the fires everyday like we do here because we see the mountains […] they can get away from it whereas we can't get away from it and we don't want to get away from it'. The mountain provided both an opportunity and an obligation to remember.

Bende desired a sense of space when moving to Australia. Now that space has been turned into a deeply enriched place filled with memories before and after the fires. Mount Disappointment acted as a personal place or site of memory and a personal traumascape inscribed with her memories of the fire. These places are an important and powerful way to remember bushfires. When I asked her if she thought about the fire regularly, she responded:

> Yes, but not to the extent where I sit and cry about it. It is like I said, if I put the kettle on I look out and I think yes, I wonder what that looks like up there, what those trees [look like] and I wonder how big the bushes have got since the fires. And I stand here at the [kitchen] sink looking and thinking when the people were here—because we weren't here—they would have had the best view to see where the fire was going. I think of that quite often.

[84] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[85] Tumarkin, *Traumascapes*, 36.

[86] Ibid.

## Conclusion

A commonly asked question is why people decide to live in areas of known risk, especially in the aftermath of a traumatic event. I only interviewed people who stayed, but having an understanding of why people decided to stay is extremely valuable. Many of the reasons migrants decided to stay within these places had to do with a sense of connection to place. They remembered the 'elemental drama' through embodied and sensory memories that could be prompted and recalled by similar weather patterns. These memories challenged and changed their previous understanding and perception of the environment and led to a new awareness of environmental risks and a new way of responding and behaving within natural disaster prone places. The Australian environment was a significant feature of migrants' reflections on life after the fires and flood. Although the flood was not articulated as a factor that influenced Ingrid's relationship with the Australia environment, it arguably contributed to her knowledge of the local environment as she became more familiar with the risks embedded in Maitland and absent in her new home in Telarah. Victorian migrants' reflections indicated a stronger connection between their experience of bushfire and their changing knowledge and relationship with the bushfire-prone environment. Their memories captured the changes observed in the environment in the aftermath of the fires and the process of regeneration. Memories of the ferocity of fires combined with observations of regeneration often contributed to a new sense of knowledge, understanding and respect for the Australian environment and bushfires.

Migrants' ongoing process of learning about the Australian environment contributed to the development of a commonly articulated sense of connection and attachment to place. Economic factors and an attachment to place influenced migrants' decisions to stay within the Maitland area after the flood. A pre-existing sense of place also encouraged some migrants to stay and rebuild after bushfires and floods; the rebuilding process in some situations helped strengthen migrants' attachment to their local environment. Place was both an important location of connection and attachment and an important way to remember natural disasters. Places in both Maitland and Victoria are embedded with memories and histories of natural disasters. Layers of histories and memories of floods are embedded within Maitland's natural and built

environment and these places are part of the way the 1955 flood, in particular, has been remembered and forgotten. In Victoria, places like the Marysville oval are important sites of personal and collective memory and other places (and traumascapes) like Mount Disappointment illuminate the significant way places can act as a keeper of memories and provide a unique and personal way to remember bushfires and the lives of loved ones.

These reflections demonstrated that migrants' perceptions of the environment shifted after their experience of natural disasters. Rather than deciding to leave after these traumatic experiences, the migrants interviewed decided to stay. They articulated a greater sense of respect and deeper understanding of the environment and consequently changed how they lived within these disaster prone locations. As Kat commented: 'it hasn't frightened me away […] I have more respect for it'. Many migrants also articulated a changed and renewed attachment to place in the aftermath of natural disasters. Bende commented: 'I can't go now, I have to stay here' in the place embedded with important memories and experiences that she also shared with others. We saw in Chapter Five that community was a significant feature of migrants' memories of the aftermath of disaster that contributed to their sense of connection and belonging. In a similar way, migrants' reflections on environment and place in the aftermath demonstrated another type of connection and belonging that contributed to their desire to stay in disaster-prone locations. These people were displaced through migration and displaced through the experience of natural disaster that challenged their understanding of the environment and their connection to environment and place. Connections to place were challenged and changed in the aftermath, but they were not shattered or lost; instead, many migrants forged new connections to environment and place. They had experienced a 'double displacement', but also a new understanding of their local environment, a new sense of respect for nature, and a new connection to place.

# Chapter 7
# Migrant Belonging in Disaster-Prone Places

> One of the oldest stories we tell is the story about leaving home. It is the story which [...] prepares us for the inevitable business of moving on from what is known to what is as yet unknown [...]. It is worth exploring a little what it means, this leaving the place where your ancestors' bones lie in the local churchyard, the streets where you first played games [...]. In a place like Australia [...] we are all migrants, all settlers: we have all experienced in our bones (that is, in the bones of our parents and grandparents) the painful business of leaving a first place and remaking our lives in a new one. The story of it continues to haunt us. It is an essential aspect of our being in a new land. Which is why every story about those who leave home and do not get back, and must start again on another shore, seems like our own story, the one that belongs in our history, but is also our personal story.[1]

All the people interviewed for this thesis have their own unique story of leaving home that ultimately led to their migration to Australia. As migrants, they have traversed the challenges of negotiating old and new connections and a sense of belonging within their former homes and within Australia. What makes this cohort of migrants unique is their personal experience of natural disasters in Australia. During our interview Rachel was reflecting on her sense of belonging in England and Australia when she said:

> [It] will be interesting to see if there is a bit of a theme that connects all the people. The theme is we are all migrants who have experienced emergency incidents. Is there another theme […] of belonging or feeling divided?[2]

Rachel's question strikes at the heart of this thesis. The focus of this thesis has been to tease out the significance of experiences of double displacement caused by natural disasters and migration and to examine how a bushfire or flood might influence migrants' settlement and belonging.

This chapter revisits some of the themes and examples discussed in previous chapters and asks different questions to gain a deeper, nuanced understanding of

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[1] David Malouf, "Introduction," in *The Journeyman: A Story of Migrant Life: A Series of Woodcuts by Salvatore Zofrea*, ed. Sally McInerney (Sydney: Picador, 1992), 2.

[2] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Traralgon, Victoria.

migrant experiences. Woven alongside their recollections that often speak to a more general or universal 'human experience' of bushfire and flood, are moments of reflection informed by their unique experience of migration and displacement. Migration and displacement shaped the way many migrants remembered and reflected on their experience of natural disasters, and how they narrated processes of migration, settlement, and belonging in Australia and more broadly. While not wishing to overstate any differences between migrant and non-migrant experience, it is nonetheless important to pay attention to the nuances within migrants' memories and consider these in light of larger life history narratives.

This chapter highlights how Maitland migrants framed their life history through a narrative of successful migration to Australia, which fostered a sense of belonging in Maitland. Displacement from war and temporary residence in the Greta camp meant their lives were to a degree still in flux when the 1955 flood occurred. As such the 1955 flood was framed as part of a larger process of settlement in Maitland and finding a new sense of security, home and belonging. The flood was remembered as a period of displacement that was 'battled' and largely overcome. By contrast, Victorian migrants' memories of bushfire were more recent, which influenced how they remembered and reconstructed their experiences. Yet their memories were similar to Maitland migrants because they also contributed to a narrative of migrant belonging. The relatively recent memory of bushfire meant Victorian migrants reflected more clearly on how their experience of bushfire challenged their expectations of migration to Australia and contributed to an adjusted sense of local belonging. What was particularly significant about some migrants' recollections was how they articulated feeling 'more Australian' in addition to an enhanced sense of local belonging because of their bushfire experience. Natural disasters were a significant moment in the lives of many migrants that enabled them to reevaluate their sense of home and belonging locally, nationally, and transnationally.

## Life History Narratives: Successful Migration

This thesis has highlighted migrants' memories of migration and natural disasters told within the context of a life history interview. Life history is a holistic approach that

elucidates key life events and turning points and provides an insight into individuals' interpretation of significant life experiences.[3] Many Maitland migrants constructed their life history as an ultimately successful migration to Australia. The 1955 flood was an important moment in their lives, but it was integrated into a larger narrative of migrant success, alongside reflections on their family, community and a sense of home and belonging in Maitland.

Family, community, home and belonging within Maitland were characteristics of the migration narratives articulated by Tania, Terese, John and Nina. Although there were challenges—including war, displacement, migration, temporary residence in Greta camp and then the 1955 flood—all remembered an ultimately successful migration and settlement in Maitland. These successful migration narratives have parallels with 'Aussie battler' and migrant 'battler narratives' noted by other scholars of migration to Australia. These are narrative conventions in which people battle 'courageously against enormous odds', hardship and alienation, and are ultimately successful.[4] Tania reflected on her migration to Maitland within the walls of her home that were covered with photos of her family and her 'beautiful children, grandchildren, and grand grand [children]'. Although 'at the beginning [Australia] was very bad', Tania and her husband worked hard to buy a house and enjoy the opportunities they found living in Maitland.[5] Despite war, displacement, migration, uncertainty in the Greta migrant camp, and the experience of the 1955 flood, Tania said that she 'never wanted to move anywhere from this place'. The 1955 flood waters filled the bottom floor of Tania's house but even the 'flood didn't make me want to move'.[6] Tania and her husband cleaned their house and

[3] See Introduction.

[4] Ann Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology," *Journal of Australian Studies* 23, no. 61 (1999): 18; James Hammerton, "The Quest for Family and the Mobility of Modernity in Narratives of Postwar British Emigration," *Global Networks* 4, no. 3 (2004): 275; A. James Hammerton and Catharine Coleborne, "Ten-Pound Poms Revisited: Battlers' Tales and British Migration to Australia, 1947-1971," *Journal of Australian Studies* 25, no. 68 (2001); Val Colic-Peisker, "A New Era in Australian Multiculturalism? From Working-Class "Ethnics" to a "Multicultural Middle-Class"," *International Migration Review* 45, no. 3 (2011).

[5] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 23rd February 2015,

[6] Tania Kuszelyk, Interviewed 18th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maitland.

stayed close to facilities like the railway station, post office and shopping centre and to significant social and community centres like the cinema and church. Owning a home and enjoying life with her family by going to the cinemas and having ice cream with their children each Saturday were details that made Tania's experience of migration to Australia a success.[7] The flood caused hardship but was ultimately overcome, and flood memories became enveloped within and overshadowed by the process of migration and settlement in a larger life history narrative.

Migration is an ongoing process that extends and continues beyond settlement as people continue to negotiate and maintain connections between borders and spaces.[8] Migrants' desire to maintain transnational connections with family and friends and significant places can significantly affect their settlement experience.[9] When Ingrid first migrated to Australia she missed Germany 'terribly'. She missed her friends, her school teacher and 'missed the language, the customs, especially the customs'.[10] Ingrid wanted to assimilate and to participate and belong in Maitland but she also wanted to maintain a connection with Germany and thus 'kept the customs' alive.[11] Ingrid was 'still living in a German household because my mother cooked German, she spoke German' and kept the same values and cultural traditions.[12] Ingrid argued that you 'never lose that' connection and tradition. As someone 'born in another country, it's always your

[7] Ibid.

[8] Zlatko Skrbiš, "Transnational Families: Theorising Migration, Emotions and Belonging," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2008): 232, 233, 239.

[9] Loretta Baldassar, *Visits Home: Migration Experiences between Italy and Australia* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2001); Loretta Baldassar, "Transnational Families and Aged Care: The Mobility of Care and the Migrancy of Ageing," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 2 (2007); Loretta Baldassar, "Transnational Families and the Provision of Moral and Emotional Support: The Relationship between Truth and Distance," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 14, no. 4 (2007); Loretta Baldassar, "Missing Kin and Longing to Be Together: Emotions and the Construction of Co-Presence in Transnational Relationships," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2008); Loretta Baldassar, "Transnational Family–Work Balance: Experiences of Australian Migrants Caring for Ageing Parents and Young Children across Distance and Borders," *Journal of Family Studies* 15, no. 2 (2009); Skrbiš, "Transnational Families."

[10] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

[11] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015, Interview by Gretel Evans, Telarah.

[12] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

motherland, always. You were born there, that's where you were formed, you grow up with that mentality. Oh yes, it never leaves you'. As David Malouf has argued, and many sociologists, anthropologists and historians have demonstrated, migrants' like Ingrid 'bring their first life with them, and that too goes on in the new land'.[13] Over the years Ingrid has maintained these customs and continued to share a connection with migrant neighbours by exchanging meals and handiwork because, as she explained, they have 'something in common, you have the language, you have the customs, and you understand each other'.[14]

Ingrid also kept these transnational connections alive by returning to visit Germany. Return visits are a common feature of migrants' lives.[15] Ingrid was able to reconnect with the beloved German forests of her youth and to see the farm where she remembered playing in trenches and eating 'the pulp out of the cabbages to fill our stomachs […] because you were always hungry'.[16] Returning was also difficult because so much had changed and it was 'all different, it was all alien'.[17] Ingrid 'looked where I lived my life there. It was so different' and she 'didn't relate to it'.[18] This experience of returning to a changed place is akin to others who have made similar return journeys.[19] What made the journey particularly challenging was that some people viewed Ingrid as

[13] Malouf, "Introduction," 2. See for example: Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Martin O'Flaherty, Zlatko Skrbis, and Bruce Tranter, "Home Visits: Transnationalism among Australian Migrants," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 5 (2007); James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994); Brian Lambkin, "The Emotional Function of the Migrant's "Birthplace" in Transnational Belonging: Thomas Mellon (1813–1908) and Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919)," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2008); Skrbiš, "Transnational Families."; Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho, "Citizenship, Migration and Transnationalism: A Review and Critical Interventions," *Geography Compass* 2, no. 5 (2008); Baldassar, "Transnational Families."; Baldassar, "Missing Kin."; Katy Gardner, *Age, Narrative and Migration: The Life Course and Life Histories of Bengali Elders in London* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

[14] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[15] Skrbiš, "Transnational Families," 239; Lambkin, "Migrant's "Birthplace" in Transnational Belonging."

[16] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1996).

an outsider who had left and abandoned Germany during the years of recovery after the war.[20] Nevertheless, Ingrid continued to feel a sense of connection to Germany. As a result, Ingrid reflected she felt 'torn between two countries' and 'didn't know where you really belonged':

> I love Germany, it's my mother country and always will be but you're still, you still feel you're not totally accepted because you left, you're Australian now, you left so they don't consider you as a real German. Which I'm not because I'm Australian, but it's complicated, it's really complicated, coming from another country, but you never forget your mother country you know and your allegiance is to, well to Australia and to Germany because it's my mother country.[21]

Migration meant Ingrid was engaged in negotiating a dual sense of belonging. The 1955 flood meant she also experienced a sense of double displacement. Her family hoped to leave the destruction of war behind them but as Ingrid explained, it was 'one hardship after another when you buy a house in a flood area' as each new flood was yet 'another hurdle you had to jump over'.[22] The flood was constructed as an obstacle to migration and settlement within a larger life history narrative:

> [Floods] are obstacles that have been put in your way, it's just that when you come to a new country and you want to have a safe place you don't expect to have all these things happen to you.[23]

The double displacement caused by the flood challenged assumptions about what successful settlement looked and felt like. It was another hurdle to be surmounted and overcome so that Ingrid's family (and other migrants) could get on with their life and experience a sense of safety, security, and home in Australia.

Floods were framed as both an obstacle, and a moment of breakthrough and connection within a wider life history narrative of migration, displacement and belonging. Ingrid's memories of settlement highlighted the difficulties of arriving in Australia and the struggle and desire to assimilate, fit in, and belong. Negotiating

[20] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[23] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

assimilation policy was part of a conscious effort to belong in 1950s Australia,[24] and in some respect the flood was part of this process. Ingrid's memories of being an outsider seemed to subside with the flood waters and she began to speak about the flood as an equalising force that connected people in the community. She argued 'we all went through the same thing, and being a migrant made no difference whatsoever'. The flood was an important shared experience that 'molded us all together, it helped to bring us together', which contributed to a sense of connection, community and belonging in Maitland.[25]

A defining aspect of disasters is how 'a group of people make sense of the event and the shared identity that results' from knowing that 'together they have been affected by major catastrophe'.[26] Disaster literature has demonstrated that people have felt a sense of solidarity after a disaster because they were 'in it together'.[27] The 'natural' or environmental element of natural disasters have at times given the impression that everyone was affected indiscriminately.[28] This is problematic as the 'natural' characteristic of the disaster can obscure the way the extent of the destruction caused by the disaster is due to human populations and differences in socioeconomic status and geographic location. Nevertheless, the perceived 'natural' cause of a disaster might be interpreted differently by people who have experienced human inflicted disasters such as war. In the aftermath of the 2010-2011 Canterbury earthquakes, researcher Sally Carlton observed that some refugees were reminded of a warzone when people fled in the aftermath. Rather than leaving they felt it was 'really important to stay because New

[24] John Murphy and Judith Smart, eds., *The Forgotten Fifties: Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in the 1950s* (Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1997); Gwenda Tavan, "'Good Neighbours': Community Organisations, Migrant Assimilation and Australian Society and Culture, 1950–1961," *Australian Historical Studies* 27, no. 109 (1997).

[25] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[26] Paul Ashton, Paula Hamilton, and Rose Searby, *Places of the Heart: Memorials in Australia* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012), 79; Gail Winkworth, *Disaster Recovery: A Review of the Literature* (Dickson: Australian Catholic University, 2007), 6.

[27] Sally Carlton, "Connecting, Belonging: Volunteering, Wellbeing and Leadership among Refugee Youth," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 13 (2015): 346.

[28] Ibid.

Zealand had given so much to me and this was a time for me to do something'.[29] The earthquakes gave refugee youth a particular identity and entry into mainstream society through their membership of a group of earthquake survivors.[30] In a similar way the 1955 flood provided people with a shared sense of identity and membership to a common group who experienced the flood. Ingrid left Germany after the war and was seen as an outsider when she returned because she was not there during the aftermath. In comparison, Ingrid and her family stayed in Maitland during the rebuilding and recovery after the 1955 flood which contributed to her shared sense of experience, identity and belonging in that area.

It is important to note that both Jay Marlowe and Eleonora Rohland observed that at times the experience of an increased sense of connection and ethno belonging can wear off over the years as relationships morph back into their previous state.[31] This same pattern was not articulated by Ingrid nor other Maitland migrants. The flood occurred over sixty years ago, but Ingrid still remembered the community spirit: it contributed to her desire to stay in Maitland and has continued to provide a point of connection with other people. She remembered the community response to the flood 'was really really good, it brought us all together and consequently I've been all over the world [… but always] came back to Maitland'.[32]

Ingrid stayed in Maitland because 'everything is familiar to you because you have a history with the place'.[33] Ingrid grew up in Maitland, got her first job there and has grown up with people from that time who 'all know each other from way back then'. She commented that 'Maitland welcomed us at that time' and she wanted to 'give

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Eleonora Rohland et al., "Woven Together: Attachment to Place in the Aftermath of Disaster, Perspectives from Four Continents," in *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, ed. Mark Cave and Stephen Sloan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Jay Marlowe, "Belonging and Disaster Recovery: Refugee-Background Communities and the Canterbury Earthquakes," *British Journal of Social Work* 45, no. 1 (2015).

[32] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[33] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

something back to my community'.[34] On the 60th anniversary of the flood, she said that 'we all have that history' of growing up and going through the flood together. People 'all went through the same thing, we have that in common. And when you come to an anniversary like today, everyone brings up their stories. Everyone has a story to tell, it's fascinating'.[35] The flood 'was a disaster that happened in Maitland in 1955 and it's something that our age group, we all remember'.[36] These recollections suggest that although it is possible a sense of solidarity or 'post-disaster utopia' experience might fade,[37] it is not inevitable but can continue to influence migrants' sense of community, home and belonging for years afterwards. An initial obstacle, the flood was overcome and became a significant moment of connection not just in the immediate aftermath. It continued to provide a sense of connection, home, and history for years to come as demonstrated by its place within a larger life history of displacement, belonging, and successful settlement.

## Life History Narratives: Migrant Belonging

Wider life narratives of migration, displacement and belonging also shaped how Victorian migrants reflected on their experience of natural disasters. Chapter Five discussed their memories of connection and community in the immediate aftermath of the fires. The following two sections use a life history approach to examine ways migrants were already engaged in negotiating home and belonging in Australia and elsewhere, before and after their experience of bushfire. This long-term perspective unearths some of the ways the bushfires influenced migrant belonging within a wider context of lives lived and remembered.

Migration to Australia meant migrants experienced an initial sense of displacement and a need to re-establish belonging prior to the bushfires. Migrants reflected on this in a variety of ways; some were aware of the dual sense of connection,

[34] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 16th June 2015.

[35] Ingrid Rudolph, Interviewed 21st February 2015.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Kai T. Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 189.

while others challenged their status as migrants entirely and preferred to think of themselves as tree-changers and newcomers to local communities. Initial practices of belonging often shaped how people reflected on their experience of bushfire within a wider framework of migration.

Hans and Ian articulated their sense of belonging locally and chose not to identify as migrants, but as tree-changers. Tree-changers, or amenity-led migration, refers to the increasing urban to rural migration by people who desire a lifestyle change, affordable property, less congestion and are attracted to a particular coastal or natural environment.[38] Tree-changers are different from the group of people who have been driven through urban expansion and outward migration into the 'urban fringe', the urban-rural interface, or what Stephen Pyne has called the 'urban bush'.[39] There are similarities between migrants and tree-changers for both groups are typically attracted to a particular lifestyle in a different environment. Ian, for example, was attracted to the aesthetics of the environment and looked for a place that had 'four seasons' and variety in the landscape, was 'not flat, had lots of water and was within an hour of Melbourne. That was our ideal'.[40] He and his wife moved to Wooden accordingly and thus share some similarities with other tree changers in the area.

Another similarity between migrants and tree-changers is their lack of awareness and knowledge of natural disasters in their new location of choice. New arrivals may be unaware of the threat of bushfire because they have no history of bushfires within their families or have only ever lived in urban environments.[41] This was the case for Ian, who moved to the Woodend area with no knowledge or understanding of the risk of bushfires. After he moved to the area Ian witnessed a bushfire and immediately joined

[38] Christine Eriksen and Nicholas Gill, "Bushfire and Everyday Life: Examining the Awareness-Action 'Gap' in Changing Rural Landscapes," *Geoforum* 41, no. 5 (2010): 815; Charis E. Anton and Carmen Lawrence, "Does Place Attachment Predict Wildfire Mitigation and Preparedness? A Comparison of Wildland–Urban Interface and Rural Communities," *Environmental Management* 57, no. 1 (2016).

[39] Stephen J. Pyne, *Burning Bush: A Fire History of Australia* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991), 368; Holly Foster et al., "Peri-Urban Melbourne in 2021: Changes and Implications for the Victorian Emergency Management Sector," *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 28, no. 3 (2013).

[40] Ian, Interviewed 16th August 2016,

[41] Eriksen and Gill, "Bushfire and Everyday Life," 823.

the CFA. His CFA involvement gave him a way to learn about the history and risk of bushfires. As a result he said that like tree-changers his knowledge of bushfires was 'all learned'. He argued that his lack of knowledge was 'not [from] being an immigrant' but from 'being a non-country person. Just I happen to be an immigrant as well'. Ian aligned his experience with other tree-changers and commented that 'I am definitely a tree-changer, I don't see myself as a migrant. Australia, New Zealand, come on, it's one country, they just haven't figured it out yet'.[42]

Hans similarly had limited exposure to natural disasters before arriving in Gippsland where he has since witnessed both bushfires and floods. Hans' argued, however, that 'I might be a newcomer but [I am] just like any newcomer' to a country area.[43] These comments align both Hans and Ian with tree-changers who had to learn about the nature and risk of bushfires in their new location. Positioning themselves alongside other tree-changers works to flatten and obscure potential cultural differences between them and the local population, but it does highlight the similarities between their experiences and those of non-migrant residents, thus contributing to a sense of belonging in regional Australia.

Nevertheless, their experience of moving to a bushfire-prone part of regional Victoria was informed by a larger process of transnational migration to Australia. Hans and Ian both migrated from New Zealand to places in regional and rural Victoria and this wider context of transnational migration shaped their settlement and belonging in bushfire-prone locations. This was demonstrated through their changing perception of where they are from and where they belong (or desired to belong).[44] Anne-Marie Fortier has argued that the question of 'where you're from' can be remembered and re-articulated as 'where you're at'.[45] Fortier used Avtar Brah's distinction between a 'desire for the homeland' and a 'homing desire' to consider where people want to belong or where they desire to feel at home.[46] Considering where people *want* to belong is a useful

[42] Ian, Interviewed 16th August 2016.

[43] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Maffra West Upper, Victoria.

[44] Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 70, 163.

[45] Ibid., 70.

[46] Ibid., 70, 163; Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (Florence, United States:

way to examine Hans' desire to 'blend in' and the way he spoke about where he was from. Hans left the Netherlands with his family when he was seventeen and migrated to New Zealand. He said it did not take long before he 'just blended in'. At University he was treated as an ag student not as an immigrant and 'felt no different to anyone else'. When Hans migrated to Australia, he 'couldn't come as a Dutch migrant'; he became a New Zealand citizen so that he 'could move to Australia'.[47]

Hans' changing identity is indicative of a process of migrant belonging in both New Zealand and Australia. He expressed no desire to maintain a Dutch identity in New Zealand, and when he migrated to Australia he chose to identify as a New Zealand migrant and was 'seen as a New Zealander' by Australians. Hans said that now 'I am a New Zealand citizen, but I consider myself Australian. I call myself an Aussie, but I still cannot support the Wallabies, I still support the All Blacks'. These comments show a 'homing desire' or a desire to belong in changing locations. Hans said he now identifies as an Australian, which is arguably why he called himself a newcomer to the bushfire-prone home rather than a migrant. Hans articulated a sense of identity based on the most recent place of residence: Dutch migrant, ag student, New Zealand migrant or a farmer, and finally a newcomer. He said he 'felt like a migrant the first place we went to, but after a couple of years, no. I might be a newcomer but just like any other newcomer'.[48] These comments suggested a desire to belong in this place and to continue to 'blend in' rather than be seen as different because of his migration past. The act of aligning his experience with tree-changers rather than with migrants was part of a process of negotiating a sense of home and belonging locally in regional Australia.

This framework arguably shaped how Ian and Hans constructed their sense of identity and belonging in regional and rural Australia after bushfires. Their interviews prompted reflections on their sense of belonging locally, and how the bushfire contributed to their sense of connection to the local community. The memories of other migrants revealed ongoing processes of negotiating connections to current and former homes, which were then reflected upon and reconsidered in light of their experience of

Routledge, 1996), 16, 177, 188-189, 194.

[47] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016.

[48] Ibid.

bushfire in Australia.

Jenneke, Bende and Rachel all had a strong connection to Australia and simultaneously felt a sense of belonging in other parts of the world, particularly for loved family and friends and cherished places. They straddled connections between *here* and *there*. Jenneke indicated she 'felt a connection to Holland' and her overseas family through letters and parcels exchanged, and particularly through the customs and material culture her family brought to Australia. Her family's Australian home was filled with Dutch artwork, poetry and language books, 'so you could come into the house and say "oh there is a Dutch family living here" because of what you could see around you'. Her parents would often 'speak Dutch to each other […] so I still felt we were Dutch' and they ate 'meatballs and sauerkraut, mashed potatoes' and continued to follow 'food traditions' and other 'very Dutch traditions […] which is nice'.[49]

This sense of connection sustained from Australia was articulated in tandem with reflections on return visits to Holland. Jenneke remembered retuning to houses 'that we had known as young children'—which provided 'a real feeling of homecoming'—and she enjoyed 'seeing people that we loved', buying food she and her sister 'remembered the flavours of', 'riding bikes' and 'being in the countryside; I really loved that'. Jenneke was surrounded by the language again and although as a fourteen-year-old she was shy about speaking it, she remembered 'having it around me and that being a normal thing was really fun'. When Jenneke returned to the Netherlands as an adult she went to Friesland, the home of her ancestors and her surname. She walked amongst gravestones and found the 'names of our immediate family or our extended family'. Jenneke commented: 'that was the first place in the world that I've been to where that happened because we all have such unusual names. That was kind of a nice feeling'. Jenneke reflected:

> I feel very Australian, I feel like I belong here, but I also have a feeling of belonging in Holland through moments like that when you see other names. And when you introduce yourself and say my name is Jenneke and people know the name, they can pronounce it and for them they don't bat an eyelid. In that way you feel like you fit in'.[50]

[49] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Meeniyan, Victoria.
[50] Ibid.

It was a 'nice little surprise' every time Jenneke did not have to correct the pronunciation of her name; 'oh that's right, here it is normal!'.[51]

Jenneke felt a sense of connection and belonging in both Holland and Australia. Nira Yuval-Davis has argued that 'belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling "at home"'.[52] Marco Antonsich connected Yuval-Davis' idea of emotional attachment to aspects of place.[53] Belonging or 'feeling at home' is not a 'static form of rootedness in one physical locality' but a 'cognitive and emotional process in which people identify with particular experiences and feel familiarity with their lifestyles'.[54] This was exemplified when Jenneke lived in Belgium and walked past a florist selling wattle. Jenneke 'cried and cried and I thought, wow I miss it, I miss it so much'. The wattle seemed to symbolise Australia because it is 'connected to Australia, with the land itself' and she soon returned and moved back to Alexandra 'because I think I needed to reconnect' to that place. She commented that the 'smells and experiences that you have when you were small give you a feeling of home and belonging and the strongest ones are Australian smells and Australian experiences'.[55]

Reflections on cultural practices, customs, material culture and changing pottery styles in Australia, along with return visits to Holland, demonstrated a growing connection within Australia and a continuing sense of belonging in the Netherlands. Jenneke was already involved in negotiating these different connections prior to the bushfire, so they formed part of her wider life history context and how she made sense of her fire experience. As a child growing up in regional Victoria, Jenneke felt she was 'aware of the rest of the world' and that being a migrant meant 'your consciousness

[51] Ibid.

[52] Nira Yuval-Davis, "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging," *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, no. 3 (2006): 197.

[53] Nicola Samson, "Narratives of Women's Belonging: Life Stories from an East London Street" (Doctor of Philosophy University of East London, 2013), 7; Jessica Nancy Bird, Leonie Cox, and Max Brough, "Doing Belonging: Meanings of Home and Settlement among the Karen Community in Brisbane, Australia," *Journal of Social Inclusion* 7, no. 1 (2016): 73.

[54] Maruska Svasek, "Who Cares? Families and Feelings in Movement," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2008): 215.

[55] Jenneke Kijlstra-Shone, Interviewed 17th May 2016.

[was] much bigger than the small town'. Transnational connections and cultural practices continued to contribute to her sense of identity as a migrant living in Australia. When Jenneke commented after the fires: 'I feel like a migrant but [someone who is] experiencing this as someone who belongs here', she was arguably considering other transnational connections held in tandem with a sense of belonging in Australia.[56] Unlike Hans and Ian who challenged their migrant status and the influence of their past, Jenneke acknowledged it was a continuing part of her identity, but that ultimately despite connections in others places, and even after the fires, home was still in Alexandra and regional Victoria.

Bende also spoke of feeling at home in both Australia and Denmark. Belonging can be understood as feeling 'at home', although Samson has cautioned against using 'belonging' and 'home' as synonymous lest it overlook the way 'home' is not always a positive experience.[57] Nevertheless, ideas of 'home' are part of how Bende discussed her sense of connection and belonging in both Australia and Denmark. Her reflections demonstrate how belonging can be 'here and there all at the same time'.[58] Bende said she felt 'at home there and at home here' but reflected 'I probably feel most Danish'. One of the things that made Bende 'feel most Danish' were her formative years spent in Denmark. Bende 'went to school there' and 'because I grew up there, had those school years and those teenage years there' she felt 'that is the base' and an important part of the foundation of her identity and her sense of home and belonging. These formative years and experiences in Denmark led to friendships with other Danish migrants in Australia who have 'all had the same background'. When they meet, they 'speak our language' and 'know what we are talking about when we talk about the difference places' in Denmark. Bende felt it is 'important to find these people with a similar background to you, a foundation to have around you'.[59] Her formative years were an important foundation for her identity and sense of home and belonging and created a sense of shared understanding and connection between other Danish migrants in Australia.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Samson, "Narratives of Women's Belonging," 10-11.

[58] Bird, Cox, and Brough, "Doing Belonging," 76.

[59] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Eden Park, Victoria.

Bende's family history and the larger history of Denmark also contributed to her sense of feeling Danish. Fortier has observed how ideas of nation, nationality and national belonging can influence the way connections 'over there' can make a difference 'over here'.[60] Bende grew up in 'the oldest town in Denmark', which is 'over 1300 years old, so it has got lots of history […] it is old'. Bende found a contrast between 'coming from that place' in Denmark steeped in history to 'then coming out here and then listening to them talk about history out here' as comparatively recent. She commented 'they have got the Vikings over there [and] houses that are so old but still standing. I love that I have had that background but I also love that I am here'.[61] Malouf observed that migrant stories are about 'leaving the place where your ancestors' bones lie'.[62] Both Jenneke and Bende spoke in different ways about leaving or returning to ancestrally significant places, which by default are absent in their new home. Australia's deep history is not one that Bende is ancestrally connected too, unlike in Denmark where Bende's father is able to show his granddaughters around the town he grew up in and point out places where he lived and went to school. Bende's ancestral, cultural and historical roots are in Denmark in a place which feels 'old' compared to the more recent colonial past in Whittlesea and Australia evident in the built environment.[63] As her formative experiences were in Denmark, these were still a crucial part of her identity, but she has also grown new connections and roots in Australia through her family and her experience of the bushfire. These experiences provide an additional Australian sense

[60] Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 70.

[61] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[62] Malouf, "Introduction."

[63] The 'recent' nature of Australian history has been challenged as understandings of Indigenous histories and 'deep time' have deepened and lengthened throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. See, for example: Billy Griffiths, *Deep Time Dreaming: Uncovering Ancient Australia* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018).

Scholars have also examined the belonging of non-Aboriginal Australians (both Australian born and Australian migrants) in this country and in a place with different ancestral connections. See: Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Peter Read, *Haunted Earth* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003); Rebe Taylor, "Lubra Creek," in *Words for Country: Landscape & Language in Australia*, ed. Tim Bonyhhady and Tom Griffiths (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002).

of belonging.

This sense of belonging in multiple places was eloquently articulated by Rachel who has lived in Australia for over thirty years. During this time, she has continued to miss England, her family, 'the English summers', 'the stillness, the smell of greenness'. At times she has watched British programs broadcast on Australian television and she 'can almost smell the Englishness, and I think, but I am in Australia, what am I doing here?'. Her reflections on missing England hinted at a continuing sense of connection and belonging there. She still feels 'that tug, that pull, of maybe I'm not meant to be here, maybe I'm meant to be over there. But I know I'm meant to be over here'. Like Bende, Rachel felt 'you just can't escape your origins, I don't think any migrant could, there is always some part of you that is forever England. I can't escape being English, it is obvious from the way I speak, and half my life was spent over there, that was where I grew up'.[64]

The opening to this chapter drew upon Malouf's discussion of 'the painful business of leaving a first place and remaking our lives in a new one. The story of it continues to haunt us'.[65] In this same piece he argued that life in another place can feel 'second-hand':

> Where the life you live, however real and hard the conditions of it, and whatever the success you may have there, will always, to a degree, be ghostly, since it is a second life, and you had begun to grow, and still, maybe, in a part of you, continue to grow, in the first. No man or woman really migrates. They bring their first life with them, and that too goes on in the new land, and peoples it with shadow-lives as well as real ones.[66]

Similarly, Peter Read discussed migrants' lost places in a chapter called 'Vanished Homelands': places that are so changed they are almost unrecognisable or which belong to a past so painful and difficult that people do not want to return to or revisit but imagine them as lost. He wrote of how 'dead homelands remain moving shadows throughout the whole of life' in migrants' lives in the new country.[67] Both Read and Malouf speak of the shadows of homelands in migrants' lives. It is an evocative way to

[64] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016.

[65] Malouf, "Introduction."

[66] Ibid.

[67] Read, *Returning to Nothing*, 28.

think about the places people have left, the types of connection people have or had to the places of their birth, and how connections 'there' influence lives 'over here'. But Rachel did not reflect on her home as lost or vanished. Rachel spoke of 'travelling two roads; I often refer to it as a parallel universe'.[68]

Rachel has been aware of this 'parallel universe' when she has returned to England:

> It does your head in because you don't know what you are: you are not a tourist, you are not a resident, you are a visitor, but you know the roads, I know where I am going. And I am here, it is not home, it is my brother's home, I know it so well, it is just the strangest feeling. You are almost a split personality.[69]

Rachel liked 'getting back to England and having that familiarity' but also found it 'weird' and 'really really strange'. If she travels by herself she 'feel[s] young again because I am back in my teens when I go back'. But as much as she enjoys being home in England, after three weeks there she is 'desperate to get back here'. She 'hate[s] saying goodbye […] but what do I do, I can't stay there, I have to come back to Australia. I can be in tears until halfway back [then] it is a switch, bye-bye England, hello Australia, here is my other life'.[70]

Rachel has continued to negotiate her sense of belonging in both countries. She said that 'every migrants' dilemma is living in two places at once […] you are living here in Australia, but you know there is a piece of you back in whichever country you are from. It is quite a difficult one to come to terms with'.[71] It was previously understood that while immigrants might experience loss and nostalgia, this was 'only en route to a whole new home in a new place'.[72] This view was encouraged by ideologies of assimilation and integration that did not acknowledge or value the connections many people maintained with their homelands. But increasing globalisation, the 'intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities', and transnationalism have led to changes in theories of migration and migrants'

[68] Malouf, "Introduction."; Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016.

[69] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

experiences.[73] Transnationalism has drawn attention to continuing social, economic and cultural ties between migrants and their former homes.[74] This recognises how migrants like Rachel, Bende and Jenneke can sustain connections with multiple places.

Belonging is not just a process of feeling 'at home' here but 'encompasses an ongoing negotiation of transnational attachments and local expectations of integration, amidst the structural limitations of the lived environment'.[75] Jessica Nancy Bird, Leonie Cox and Max Brough have argued that 'exclusively locating sense-belonging here or there or elsewhere is simplistic, and denies the intersubjective, constructed and strategic nature of belonging and identity'.[76] Relationships can be 'stretched globally through resettlement', which means 'a sense of belonging can be elsewhere, here and there all at the same time'.[77] Rachel's sense of belonging stretches between England and Australia. England is 'where I used to live, where I grew up, where my family and my roots are, but I don't feel like I belong there, I feel I belong here'. She feels belonging in Australia because 'I have been here so long and have been involved in so many incidents. That is imprinted on me now and I sometimes forget I am from England'. Rachel said she would 'never be a local, it's a fact, I'll always be a migrant and there will always be a part of me in England', but 'I belong here, my boys are here, I belong here. I come from England, but I don't belong there anymore'.[78]

Rachel's reflections demonstrate how belonging is not static, but involves emotional investment and the desire for attachments.[79] Belonging, as conceptualised by Elspeth Probyn, 'captures more accurately the desire for some sort of attachment […] and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong,

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[72] Clifford, "Diasporas," 307.

[73] O'Flaherty, Skrbis, and Tranter, "Home Visits," 817.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Bird, Cox, and Brough, "Doing Belonging," 81.

[76] Ibid., 76.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016.

[79] Ho, "Citizenship, Migration and Transnationalism," 1290; Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho, "Constituting Citizenship through the Emotions: Singaporean Transmigrants in London," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99, no. 4 (2009): 791.

wanting to become, a process that is fueled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state'.[80] Rachel articulated a sense of belonging in England and Australia, but she also demonstrated a desire to belong in Australia.

Rachel's sense of belonging in Australia stemmed from 'family first and foremost, but community, definitely community', and bushfires—or 'incidents'—were part of this. She wears 'a few hats' in the community through her involvement in the hall committee, fire brigade, local progress association, local choir and commented 'the more you do, the more people you meet, the more grounded you become. And then when you have a disaster it is a clincher'. Rachel argued that being 'involved so closely with the community team' as a migrant during disasters, 'cemented my own identity within my very small community'. During bushfires Rachel has been at work or 'at home defending or supporting my own community'. In these moments she has never thought 'what am I doing here, I wish I was back in England where it is wet and cold, and we don't get bushfires. No' she reflected, 'I never thought that'. Rachel thought there was a difference between a recent migrant and someone who has lived here a long time; her involvement in bushfire and emergency management for over fifteen years meant 'the migrant aspect of how I see bushfires is quite far away'. Nevertheless, bushfires intensified her connection to the local community and her sense of belonging in regional Australia. Thus, while Rachel's sense of a parallel life was partly from a continuing sense of connection and belonging in England that was not static or broken, she also wanted to and chose to belong in Australia, in Gippsland, with her family and her community, in a place where she has experienced natural disasters, and where the 'rolling hills and high rainfall' 'remind me of home'.[81]

## Migrant Belonging Through Disaster

Migrants' memories of natural disasters were articulated within a wider life history context of migration and the ongoing process of negotiating belonging within former homes and Australia. Most people interviewed articulated a sense of belonging in Australia—because of or despite their experience of natural disasters—but the

[80] Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 19, 19.

reflections of Kat, Bende, Rachel and Hans detailed how the bushfire influenced how they made sense of their experience of migration, settlement, home and belonging. Their reflections elucidated a specific type of migrant belonging in Australia shaped by their experience of bushfire.

Natural disasters were a significant disruption to migrants' lives and their expectations and view of the world. In Maitland, Ingrid spoke of the 1955 flood as another 'obstacle' confronted by migrants on the path to finding a sense of home, safety and security after the war. In Victoria, Kat similarly articulated how the Black Saturday bushfires were an obstacle and disruption to her expectations of life in Australia. As discussed in Chapter 4, Kat reflected that she felt 'a bit let down' by the country because she moved for a 'better life'—she did not expect 'the most dreadful experience you've ever encountered'. The bushfire thwarted Kat's expectations of migration and settlement to Australia. They were previously unaware of the risk and danger of fires in Australia. Suddenly the bushfire was a defining part of their process of settling in Kinglake and creating a home for their family.

In the midst of coming to terms with their bushfire experience, and 'trying to deal with our trauma', Kat said they 'achieved a lot of what we wanted to have in Australia […] we have our own house and our land […] and a lot of our dreams of coming to this new country have come true. It's been really hard work but it has come true'. The bushfire became a defining and pivotal part of their migration and settlement. Kat has had 'some of the worst experiences of my life […] in Australia […] not really sure why I'm here sometimes […] but there has always been this really soulful pull for me to be in Australia, there's always been this feeling of I need to be there for some reason'. As disruptive and destructive as the bushfire was, it became part of Kat's process of settling and creating a home and life in Australia. It was not enough to frighten her 'away from living in the bush'.[82]

The bushfire encouraged some migrants to grow further roots and connect to Australia, but it also caused people to reflect on their past and their connection and relationship to their home overseas. Kat was conscious that they were 'uprooting

[81] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016.

ourselves as a family' by migrating to Australia, so when they arrived they travelled to 'put down roots' and 'experience the country where we are going to live'. Kat put down further roots as a result of the bushfire, but it also made her reflect on—and more aware of—connections to her family and her cultural heritage in the UK. Kat migrated for adventure and new opportunities for her children, but she realised that simultaneously 'you have taken away any relationships you have with family members, you have taken away their relationships with their cousins, with their cultural heritage'. Kat said experiencing the bushfire and 'not being [in] my country of origin has been hard […] because my family is not here'. During the first years after the fire Kat 'was just in shock, not really making much sense of anything, but I think now I look back on that time and I think I really missed my family with all my internal organs, I have missed them so much'. Kat felt a 'massive urge that I need to go back and I do need to reconnect more with where I come from'. Kat said 'I feel very connected to where I am in Australia', but when she went back to the UK for the first time after the fires she 'saw things in such a different way from how I remember it being when I left the country':

> I don't want to go there to live, but I really feel I need to go back way more often than what I have done. I actually feel irresponsible moving to the other side of the world and cutting myself off from my family and keeping my kids away from them.[83]

The bushfire strengthened her connection to Australia and transformed her connection to her home in the UK making her more aware of her transnational ties and sense of belonging. Kat felt afterwards that 'part of me would like to go back and live there six months and live here six months: one foot in both countries'. The 'fires made me realise what I had lost in my life but it's not always practical to go chasing after what you have lost'. Prior to migration Kat did not have a strong appreciation or attachment to her cultural heritage, but the fires transformed and intensified her familial and cultural connections in the UK.

Black Saturday made Bende reflect on her familial connections and transnational belonging as she grieved the loss of her family's Australian grandparent. She also reflected on what her expectations of bushfires were and how these had been shaped by

[82] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016, Interview by Gretel Evans, Kinglake, Victoria.

[83] Ibid.

her experience living as a migrant in bushfire-prone places and hearing about the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires. In some ways Ash Wednesday had become a benchmark for Bende's knowledge and understanding of bushfire. Black Saturday challenged her expectations of fire, and as Bende observed, it also challenged the assumptions about fire held by people around her. Bende felt that if she had witnessed the Ash Wednesday bushfires, she would have experienced them differently to other people because she was a migrant. But Black Saturday 'had such an impact on everyone and it came with such an impact I don't think anyone has ever imagined it would be able to do what it did'. She listened to the 'stories people are telling and [the] stories I have been reading' to gain an understanding of people's reactions and responses.[84] She said:

> I think Black Saturday changed everybody′ s view of a bushfire, because of the impact. That's just what I think, what I've heard, nobody expected it to be like that. Nobody had ever seen anything like it and the more I hear, nobody, nobody, nobody [...] I'm not the first one experiencing it this way.[85]

The language used to describe the fires arguably perpetuated the 'unusualness' of the fire. Bende, Jenneke and Bruno all referred to Black Saturday as being a different type of fire: Jenneke and Bruno described it as a firestorm. Peg Fraser has discussed the difficulties of finding an appropriate term to distinguish between 'normal' bushfires and fires like Black Saturday or Ash Wednesday. She adopted the word 'catastrophic'.[86] It is useful to find a productive way to distinguish between types of fires but as Tom Griffiths has argued, words like 'unprecedented' or 'unnatural' begin the process of forgetting of fires instead of forging a greater understanding of the cyclic nature of bushfires and the inevitability of their return.[87]

Nevertheless, the significant scale of the destruction and loss of life caused by the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires shaped how people were able to comprehend their experience. Wytze aligned his experience of Black Saturday with other longterm

[84] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Peg Fraser, *Black Saturday: Not the End of the Story* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2018), 242-245.

[87] Christine Hansen and Tom Griffiths, *Living with Fire: People, Nature and History in Steels Creek* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2012), 162-163.

residents and experienced CFA members, which suggested his experience was the same as their and not influenced by migration. He was able to confirm he was not the only one overwhelmed and 'rattled' by the fire.[88] Jenneke distinguished between a bushfire and a firestorm and argued that if they knew it was a firestorm they would not have been sent to Marysville for asset protection. This statement aligned her experience within a widely accepted narrative of Black Saturday; the 'unprecedented' nature of the fire. They may not have known the extent of the danger, but neither did the local non-migrant population. Bende was able to observe other people's reactions and stories and compare them to her expectations of bushfire. Their shock and surprise made her feel she did not experience the fire differently because she was a migrant. She commented 'if I had seen Ash Wednesday as I saw Black Saturday I might have thought "my goodness, is this what can happen?"'. She speculated that 'the expectations, the feelings everybody had for Black Saturday [were] what I would have had for Ash Wednesday'. Bende felt that 'Australians would have coped with [another] Ash Wednesday' bushfire because they survived that fire. Many people hoped that it would not 'get any worse [than Ash Wednesday], but it did. Hopefully it will never get worse than Black Saturday, but it might'.[89]

Bende's reflections drew attention to the way she comprehended bushfires like Ash Wednesday and Black Saturday as a migrant. She initially speculated her expectations did not align with those held by other locally born Australians, but the way the Black Saturday bushfires shocked local residents made her feel her experience was not that different. She was able to position her experience alongside those of local residents in a similar way to how Hans and Ian framed their position within their local community. Black Saturday overwhelmed so many people's expectations, and thus contributed to another type of belonging narrative. Disasters have often been seen as an equalising experience or social leveller through the sense of solidarity that can emerge in the aftermath.[90] It is debatable how 'equal' disaster experiences are when accounting for

[88] Wytze Kylstra, Interviewed 13th July 2016.

[89] Bende, Interviewed 2nd August 2016.

[90] Carlton, "Connecting, Belonging," 346-347; Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disasters* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

variances in geography, economic and social and cultural structures and potential vulnerability. But a sense of the shared shattering of previously held expectations of bushfires, whatever the type of information and personal experience it was constructed upon, does create a type of unifying and enlightening recalibration. Bende was a witness and participant in this shared process of readjustment that helped confirm that her experience was not different because of her migrant background.

Bende felt that through the fire she now had a shared background with the local community. Disasters have the capacity to forge a sense of solidarity and shared experience, and for Bende and Rachel it also contributed to a sense of belonging to their local community.[91] After the fires, Bende felt she 'needed to read every story that there was' about people in Whittlesea, Kinglake and nearby. It was 'very important to read about the individual and how they experience[d]' the fire. Afterwards if Bende saw that person in town she would know 'what they went through' and 'what happened' to them. As she put it: 'I know your background'. In order to explain what she meant Bende described how she went to school in Denmark and had 'the same curriculum', the 'same teachers', and went 'the same way to school' as the other students in her grade. When she returns to Denmark, she 'know[s] everyone. I know their background, I know what they are doing or what they have been doing'. That background and foundation formed an important part of her identity and sense of belonging. In Whittlesea, however, she 'never knew […] the background of everyone', but the fires made her reflect that 'now I feel like I have a background with the people in town. We experienced this together'. Bende felt that 'I have come closer to the town, I have grown with this town' because of the Black Saturday bushfires.[92]

Thus, bushfire formed the basis of shared experiences that created deeper connections between Bende and other local residents in the community. Sharing, listening, and reading stories provided a way to bring people together with a stronger sense of solidarity.[93] She reflected that 'I didn't have my background here and my

[91] Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 5.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ride and Bretherton, *Community Resilience in Natural Disasters*, 174; Carol Mutch and Jay Marlowe, "Lessons from Disaster: The Power and Place of Story," *Disaster Prevention and Management: An*

beginning here. Now I know other people's beginnings. That makes me feel more connected to the people and the place'. She wondered whether this feeling of connection 'might have grown' without Black Saturday, but ultimately considered the fires an important part of how she connected to the town, to the people, and experienced a greater sense of community and belonging. Bushfires were thus instrumental in shaping how some migrants like Bende, Rachel and Kat experienced and narrated a sense of connection and belonging in regional Victoria, Australia.

## Natural Disasters and National Belonging

Bushfires are also part of a wider narrative of national belonging that echoed throughout migrants' reflections. There are key moments in the memories of some migrants that connect their specific experience of bushfire to a larger sense of Australian national identity. Australian identity and ideas about what is distinctive about Australia have often historically been linked to the bush.[94] The unique and distinctive flora and fauna of the Australian environment was part of folklore and a formative background for Australian identity construction.[95] Natural disasters have in varying ways been part of this mythology due to their entanglement within the celebrated uniqueness of the Australian bush.[96] Connections have been made between geographically specific and localised natural hazards and a larger national consciousness and an Australian sense of identity. Some disasters have been constructed as nationally significant or have been granted a place within the national memory and imaginary and woven into narratives of identity and nation.[97] Brad West and Philip Smith have examined how drought has

*International Journal* 22, no. 5 (2013): 387.

[94] See for example: Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958); Graeme Davison, "Rethinking the Australian Legend," *Australian Historical Studies* 43, no. 3 (2012); Graeme Davison, "Sydney and the Bush: An Urban Context for the Australian Legend," *Australian Historical Studies* 18, no. 71 (1978).

[95] Lauren Rickards, "Goodbye Gondwana? Questioning Disaster Triage and Fire Resilience in Australia," *Australian Geographer* 47, no. 2 (2016): 132.

[96] See, for example: Christine Eriksen, *Gender and Wildfire: Landscapes of Uncertainty* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 4.

[97] Paula Hamilton, "Memory Remains: Ferry Disaster, Sydney 1938," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 47 (1999): 195; Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile," 6.

been used as a resource to unite national communities and was 'capable of resonating with the core beliefs and foundational narratives of the Australian people'.[98] Cyclone Tracy is a significant example of the way 'a locally-based geographically-specific event […] has been appropriated by the nation as a seminal moment of identity formation'.[99] It was enshrouded in a 'national social memory to evoke nationalistic pride, rather than environmental fear'.[100] Tracy became 'an event seared into the consciousness of Australia' and some scholars argued it was 'a defining moment in the forging of Australian identity'.[101]

Bushfires have also been entangled with ideas of Australian national identity. Grace Moore has argued that nineteenth-century fire stories encouraged a sense of unity through crisis and that fire was important to a sense of 'mateship' and 'Australianness'.[102] West and Smith have demonstrated how bushfires were linked to national identity in the aftermath of the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires. *The Australian* described the fire as 'a tragedy not only for those directly involved but for the nation as well', while *The Advertiser* declared that 'fires are as Australian as Australia, and are one of the invincible terrors that give our capricious country its unique personality'.[103] Bushfires have also been used politically, as demonstrated by Moore and her analysis of a wartime propaganda poster that explicitly linked the 'familiar problem' of the 'annual terror of the fire season' with a 'geographically distant enemy' in Europe.[104] In more recent decades politicians have continued to use disaster to encourage unity and community in the nation, such as then Prime Minister John Howard after the 2003

[98] Brad West and Philip Smith, "Drought, Discourse, and Durkheim: A Research Note," *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 1 (1996): 95, 99.

[99] Julie Roberts and Martin Young, "Transience, Memory and Induced Amnesia: The Re-Imagining of Darwin," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 59.

[100] Ibid., 57.

[101] Ibid., 54; Tim Sherratt, "Human Elements," in *A Change in the Weather: Climate and Culture in Australia*, ed. Tim Sherratt, Tom Griffiths, and Libby Robin (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2005), 8; Hamilton, "Memory Remains," 195.

[102] Grace Moore, "Fires, Literature, Politics and Mateship in the Bush," *Agora* 48, no. 4 (2013).

[103] Quoted in Brad West and Philip Smith, "Natural Disasters and National Identity: Time, Space and Mythology," *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 33, no. 2 (1997): 210.

[104] Moore, "Fires, Literature, Politics and Mateship," 57.

Canberra fires.[105] In *Places of the Heart* Paul Ashton, Paula Hamilton and Rose Searby discussed how Australians have memorialised natural disasters. They argued the state and federal governments validated particular memories and narratives of the Black Saturday bushfires and created a 'national framework for mourning that supported and sanctioned a collective consciousness of grief', which was perpetuated by the media.[106]

Bushfire historiography has also perpetuated a connection between bushfires and Australian national identity. Stephen Pyne suggested that a teleological process of developing a deeper understanding of bushfire was an important part of becoming an Australian. He argued that 'until the 1939 fires Australian society had treated bushfires with a casualness, with an almost calculated indifference, that typified its own unsettled state'.[107] The Black Friday fires were positioned as a watershed moment in Australia's history and relationship with fire and debates about 'what it meant to be an Australian' and how to live with fire.[108] Entangled within this framework was the idea that 'a fire conscience would arrive only after the emigrants established a commitment to Australia' and became 'naturalised'.[109] For Pyne, the 1939 fires were a time to reassess Australian identity and acquire a new relationship with the bush and with fire.[110] A cultural and identity evolution was built into the structure of his work *Burning Bush,* which discusses 'The Eucalypt', 'The Aborigine', 'The European' and finally 'The New Australian'.[111] Connections between bushfire and Australian identity also featured in Bill Gammage's *The Biggest Estate on Earth.* He wrote that colonialism and 'an invasion of new people and ideas' meant 'knowledge of how to sustain Australia, of how to be Australian, vanished with barely a whisper of regret. We have a continent to learn. If we are to survive, let alone feel at home, we must begin to understand our country. If we succeed, one day we might become Australian'.[112] These statements have contributed to ongoing

[105] Ibid., 56.

[106] Ashton, Hamilton, and Searby, *Places of the Heart*, 68-69.

[107] Pyne, *Burning Bush*, 314.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid., 322.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Crows Nest: Allen &

discussions about what it means for a settler colonial society to belong in this environment and on this land. They suggest that people are in a perpetual process of learning about the unique flora and fauna of this country and how to best live with fire. This historiography has aligned an understanding of fire with what it means to 'be Australian'.

Fire was an instrumental part of the narrative of settlement and belonging for many of the people interviewed and in some cases was linked with ideas of Australian identity. Rachel, for instance, said that her sense of belonging within this country came from residing in Gippsland for 'so long', through her involvement with her local community, and because she was 'involved in so many incidents that is imprinted on me now'. She reflected that receiving an Australian Fire Service Medal in the Australia Day honours in 2015 'set in stone' and 'cemented' her 'sense of belonging and being Australian'—even with her continuing connections and belonging in England. Bushfires were an important part of what contributed to Rachel's Australian identity and belonging.[113] Similarly, Kat commented that despite the bushfires, Kinglake 'definitely feels like home and I feel like I have earnt my stripes, being an Australian citizen'. Kat spoke of an affective sense of home and a civic sense of belonging and expressed a sentiment that she had earnt the right to call herself Australian and belong here because she experienced a bushfire. She said it was 'quite humbling in a sense to have been through an experience like that because it is quite rare to have gone through something like that'.[114] Her experience significantly shaped her migration and settlement trajectory in Australia. It also contributed to her feeling that she had 'earned her stripes' or gained a position or sense of recognition through her experience of bushfire and thus belonged in this place and in Australia.

Hans also articulated feeling that he belonged and was viewed 'differently' after he had been through a fire. He said 'you're seen differently after you have been through it. You have to be wounded by it to be part of it, having helped out part of the community'. Helping others locally is 'just what you do out here'. This reflection

Unwin, 2011), 323.

[113] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016.

[114] Kat Jenkins, Interviewed 10th August 2016.

indicated a sense of local connection to community as he felt he was less of an outsider as a result of the fire and related differently to other longterm residents in the community. He also articulated a sense of belonging in Australia and feeling more Australian by virtue of having directly experienced a fire. Hans considered himself 'a local and an Aussie':[115]

> I might be a New Zealand citizen but I am an Aussie [I feel Australian because] I have been through floods and fires. That makes you part of the local community. A box you tick with the locals, you haven't pyked out and run […] People look at you in a different light, you didn't back out or fold. You helped clean up, it is a bit like getting kudos. […] Now I look back at it, until you have gone through a big flood or fire you don't really know what you are talking about [… now] I respect people who have fought fires and gone through them.

Thus, experiencing bushfires gave Hans' a different connection to the local community. Hans did not think he was viewed by others as a migrant (more like a farmer), but nevertheless said that he was 'seen differently after you have been through it'. He felt 'more part of the local community' because he experienced bushfire and flood. Hans said that the direct, immediate, personal experience and encounter with bushfire 'looks different' to what is shown on television. He reiterated throughout the interview that if a fire came again 'I would go'. He wondered if he was more inclined to leave because 'I don't have that attachment, maybe because I wasn't born here'. He indicated that he would not stay during another fire because now he understands 'what a bushfire can do. The power of them'. He does have an attachment to the place, but he said he was 'not going to lose my life over it'.[116]

The reflections of Rachel, Kat and Hans revealed a particular type of belonging forged through their experience of bushfire in Australia. Rebecca Solnit has written about that 'solidarity with others caused by the rupture in everyday life':

> An emotion graver than happiness but deeply positive. We don't even have a language for this emotion, in which the wonderful comes wrapped in the terrible, joy in sorrow, courage in fear. We cannot welcome disaster, but we can value the responses, both practical and psychological.[117]

[115] Hans van Wees, Interviewed 10th June 2016.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 5. Similarly, some scholars have observed that national cohesion is

This sense of shared experience and solidarity contributed to the sense of local belonging articulated by some migrants. But there is also a sense of a particular 'Australian' belonging articulated within these comments. The historiography of fire demonstrates that bushfires have been entangled with ideas of what it means to live in Australia and what it means to be an Australian, but what does this mean for new arrivals, for migrants, and for 'New Australians'?

Bushfires have been linked to Australian identity, and the rhetoric of national identity and mourning that has accompanied bushfires could have encouraged migrants to link their experience of bushfire with a sense of feeling Australian. As Solnit argued, 'we cannot welcome disaster, but we can value the responses' if they have led to a positive and constructive sense of solidarity and belonging. But these reflections also highlight more problematic aspects of the entanglement of bushfires and Australian national identity. Linking bushfires with national and cultural aspects of identity and belonging has the capacity to almost celebrate what was for many a deeply destructive, disruptive and difficult experience. Does one have to be 'wounded' by fires to be part of the community or to belong in Australia? Most of the people interviewed argued that now they have experienced fires and know what they are like they would leave next time. But despite the changes to the rhetoric and the 'stay or go' policy,[118] does the link between fire and national identity subconsciously encourage people to stay in order to experience the fire for themselves or to belong in this country? Is the direct experience of such catastrophe necessary to forge a sense of connection with local residents and to create a sense of belonging in Australia? Is an understanding and detailed knowledge of

sometimes sustained by shared memories of trauma. See: Maria Tumarkin, "Secret Life of Wounded Spaces: Traumascapes in Contemporary Australia" (Doctor of Philosophy University of Melbourne, 2002), 176; Peter Gray and Kendrick Oliver, eds., *The Memory of Catastrophe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

[118] Costa Haritos and Nathan Maddock, "Ten Years on from Black Saturday: What Have We Discovered?," *Fire Australia*, no. 1 (2019); Liam Mannix, Joshua Whittaker, and Katharine Haynes, "Lessons of Black Saturday Ignored as Australians Forget, Research Shows," The Age, 2019, accessed 23 September, 2019, https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/lessons-of-black-saturday-ignored-as-australians-forget-research-shows-20190205-p50vtw.html; 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, *Final Report: Summary*, Parliament of Victoria (Victoria, July 2010); Tom Griffiths, "The Disturbing Logic of "Stay or Go"," *Inside Story* 2012, http://insidestory.org.au/the-disturbing-logic-of-stay-or-go/.

bushfire and natural disasters a prerequisite to 'becoming an Australian'? Is knowledge sufficient or is experience compulsory? And what does this mean for Australian born residents—or other migrants—who will not experience a natural disaster? Do they belong less than people who have directly experienced a bushfire, flood, cyclone or earthquake?

We need to consider the answers to these questions, particularly in light of changing population demographics, the changing location of people, growth in the 'urban-bush', climate change and the likely increasing prevalence of natural disasters. Nevertheless, the specific memories and reflections shared by migrants demonstrate, however problematically, that natural disasters and particularly bushfires have the capacity to contribute to migrants' sense of belonging in local communities and in Australia. One way migrants are able to comprehend and make meaning from their personal experience of bushfire and flood is by incorporating it within a wider life narrative and process of migrant belonging in Australia.

## Conclusion

> People migrate for different reasons. For me it was about falling in love and getting married but there was also an element of escape […] I was desperate to get back here, it was a lifeline for me and just knowing that I had plans to come back anyway, well before Nigel asked me to marry him I was coming back […] No, [there was] never any sense of what am I doing in this country with this raging bushfire because it is part of the decision you have made.[119]

Natural disasters have been a significant feature in the lives of migrants interviewed for this thesis. They have shaped how migrants have made sense of and constructed a narrative of belonging in Australia. The 1955 flood and Victorian bushfires thwarted migrants' expectations of life in Australia, but did not necessarily break newly formed connections, and, in some situations, created and deepened the ties migrants had to their local community and environment. For some migrants, like Rachel, it was acknowledged as 'part of the decision' they had made. For some it was even part of becoming Australian.

[119] Rachel Dawkins, Interviewed 3rd August 2016.

Migrants' memories reflected many key themes of disaster studies, and scholarship of human experiences in the face of adversity, but their memories also had qualities and characteristics that elucidated a specific Australian migrant experience. The 1955 flood, for example, was incorporated into a narrative of successful migration that forged a shared sense of experience, identity and belonging. Most migrants emphasised that their experience of natural disaster did not differ markedly from the experience of those locally born; this highlighted the construction of particular migrant narratives of belonging within Australia. Significantly, migrants' reflections raised key questions about what it means to belong in a country with a history (and a future) of natural disasters. These reflections paint a picture of how the experience of bushfires, in particular, have become entangled with ideas of resilience in the face of hardship, and battling or overcoming the environment on the path to becoming 'a real Australian'. While not reflected in all of the interviews, it does underline the ways in which responses to natural disaster are often framed and remembered by broader structures of national identity and belonging.

The threads of migration and natural disasters were woven throughout these migrants' life narratives because this was how they constructed and comprehended their experience of home and belonging in Australia. Natural disasters have been an obstacle to migrants' settlement and sense of belonging in Australia, but they also helped them to develop new narratives of belonging, and thus provided new insights into 'the decision [they] have made' to find a home and a new belonging in this place.

# Conclusion

This thesis is the first history that specifically examines the experiences of migrants who have encountered Australia's continuing history of natural disasters. It has contributed to our understanding of migrant belonging by offering an in-depth consideration and analysis of migrants' responses to and memories of bushfire and flood in Australia. The thesis has added to oral history investigations of crisis and catastrophe by conducting oral history interviews, listening to migrant voices, and analysing how they remember their experience of migration and environmental disasters. The two case studies have demonstrated the intersection between previously discrete areas of scholarship—migration and environmental history, disaster studies and oral history—and have provided a starting point for further research on migrant belonging and experiences of natural disasters in an environment that has long tested our love for a 'sunburnt' land of 'droughts and flooding rains'.

At all times, this thesis sought to highlight the migrant and personal experience of natural disaster because this has traditionally been marginalised within disaster studies and all but neglected in environmental history investigations in Australia. This thesis intervened and contributed where there have otherwise been few studies that have specifically engaged with migrant experiences and encounters with the Australian natural environment. The oral history case studies enabled an in-depth consideration of migrant experiences of flood in Maitland, NSW, and bushfire experiences within Victoria. These life history case studies allowed the thesis to balance disaster studies, migration, environmental and disaster histories alongside oral history and memory studies. There were clear differences within the migrant cohorts interviewed for this thesis, due to varying migration practices and policies at the time, and different systems of emergency management and mitigation. As such, this thesis traversed a wide terrain and a number of issues specific to the historical context of migration and emergency management. The life history framework enabled the thesis to focus on 'before, during and after' moments of migrants' experience of migration and natural disaster, and it illuminated persistent themes throughout migrants' lives. Instead of focusing on disaster

'events', I placed migrants' voices and experiences at the centre of the thesis and within a larger life history and environmental context, in order to highlight their experience of double displacement—migration and natural disasters—and their experience and process of negotiating and finding a sense of community, place, home and belonging.

The two different historical moments of migration illuminated how migrants' pasts, and their time of arrival, influenced their experience of settlement and Australian natural disasters. Migrants' memories of life prior to migration—and their motivations for migration—not only shaped their lives in Australia, but also how they made sense of their subsequent experience of natural disaster and incorporated it within their life history. The Second World War continued to be a significant feature in the lives of Maitland migrants; it shaped their initial placement in the Greta Migrant Camp and their ongoing desire for home and belonging. The life history framework showed how the war, their time in the Greta camp, and the 1955 flood contributed to an attachment to community and place, and the way they articulated a sense of belonging in Australia. A persistent theme throughout Victorian migrants' life histories was a sense of space, and practical and aesthetic values of the Australian environment. This initially attracted them to regional areas, but these environmental understandings and attachments to place changed and deepened through the fire, and shaped how migrants made sense of their ongoing connection and belonging in Australia.

This thesis has made a key contribution to oral history scholarship of crisis and catastrophe through a detailed examination of migrant memories of bushfire and flood. Close attention and analysis of oral history interviews illuminated chronological and detailed narratives of disaster, the significance of sensory and embodied memories, and how these recollections captured the immediate and affective personal experience of natural disasters. Sensory and embodied memories also shaped migrants' behaviour in the aftermath, as some people responded differently to their immediate environment and to specific weather patterns. The past experience of war, displacement and migration was woven throughout Maitland migrants' memories of the 1955 flood. Their past shaped how they experienced, articulated, and constructed their memories and narratives of the flood, and their desire for safety, security, home and belonging within Maitland after their 'double displacement'. I have used the term 'double displacement'

to refer to the experience of people who have migrated and then experienced a natural disaster; this experience is one of the findings and contributions made by this thesis.

Migrants' memories of the 1955 flood had over sixty years to settle into specific narratives and be moulded into larger life histories, whereas the more recent experience of bushfires meant many Victorian migrants' memories were comparatively 'unsettled'. These memories were still part of ongoing process of being made meaningful in light of a wider life history context. The unsettled nature of these memories provided insights into the way migration pasts shaped migrant experiences of bushfires and the aftermath. Migrants' experiences of migration were entangled within their memories of bushfire and flood, and their double displacement shaped the way they constructed their life history and reflected on their experience of home and belonging in disaster-prone environments and communities in Australia.

The two case studies highlighted many similarities between how migrants remembered and reconstructed their experience of natural disasters. Bushfires and floods are ecologically and physically distinct; they create different threats to human populations and cause distinctive damage to the urban and natural environment. This leads to different needs and priorities in the aftermath, clean up and recovery; however, beyond the material aspects, the key themes and issues are very similar. Most oral histories demonstrated how the shared experience of fire and flood created and strengthened significant bonds between individuals and communities that contributed to migrants' desire to stay. 'Community' was not experienced, remembered or articulated in the same way by everyone, nor did it refer to the same type of community, but it was still a significant feature of their memories. The personal experience of natural disasters challenged migrants' assumptions about the environment and led to new a new appreciation and sense of respect for the power of nature. Their deepened understandings of the environment accompanied a strengthened and renewed attachment to place that further contributed to migrants' desire to stay within disaster-prone places. Places were embedded with memories and were important sites for remembering (and forgetting) natural disasters, and for grieving and mourning the loss of loved ones.

On the whole, I interviewed people who found a new sense of community,

belonging and connection to place and environment within regional locations through the experience of migration and natural disasters. But this was not the experience of everyone. There are stories this thesis cannot tell. I did not hear many stories of communities splintering and fracturing in the aftermath, but there are examples of this.[1] The people I interviewed stayed in these disaster-prone locations, but other people have moved away.[2] The recruitment process for this thesis led to a focus on the experiences of migrants who—at the time of the interview (with one exception)—were still living in regional locations where they had experienced natural disasters. This allowed for a deeper engagement with and insight into why people decided to remain living in a disaster prone location.

Migrants' memories unearthed larger patterns of remembering and forgetting natural disasters, which influenced the way they learnt about and prepared for bushfire and flood, and the way they made sense of their experience and incorporated it within their larger life history narrative. 'Disaster amnesia' and broader cultural patterns of remembering and forgetting natural disasters were evident within local history and historiography and the reflections of migrants. Migrants' early connections with community, and understandings of the environment, informed how they learnt about the history and present risk of natural disaster, and simultaneously challenged categories of inherent vulnerability or resilience. Migrants' reflections on community, environment and place also contributed to their sense of home and belonging in the aftermath of bushfire and flood. Migrants maintained connections to their former homes, which shaped—and were shaped by—their experience of Australian natural disasters and their narratives of transnational home and belonging. Experiences of bushfire and flood were articulated and shaped within the larger Australian cultural context of remembering and forgetting natural disasters, and these memories influenced how they made sense of

[1] For example Peg Fraser's *Black Saturday: Not the End of the Story* provides an important reminder about the thwart and complex nature of 'community'. She felt unable to use the word 'community' to describe and discuss the aftermath of the fires within Strathewen. Peg Fraser, *Black Saturday: Not the End of the Story* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2018).

[2] For example I listened to oral history interviews collected for the Victorian Bushfires Collection at Museum Victoria. This collection included interviews with people who decided to move away after the fire.

their 'double displacement' and constructed a life history narrative of home and belonging in Australia.

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This thesis points towards the need for more scholarship that focuses closely on specific ethnic and cultural experiences of natural disasters, and also towards scholarship that expands our horizons to consider boarder aspects of how we remember and forget natural disasters in Australia. Almost all the people who volunteered to participate in this project were from European backgrounds. This was informed by the context of significant European postwar migration and the demographic make up of the regional locations captured in the two case studies. I was able to interview one person who migrated to Australia from Singapore but his location within Melbourne's urban fringe meant that unfortunately his experiences did not fit within the parameters of this project.[3] His experience of migration and natural disasters in Australia, however, points towards future research trajectories that could focus more specifically on the experiences of migrants with non-European ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Such a project would be able to examine the ways different cultural, religious, ethnic and racial backgrounds, and categories of 'whiteness', in combination with the experience of migration and displacement, inform how people experience and make sense of natural disasters in Australia. It could also encompass a comparative approach between how migrants, refugees, tree-changers and 'local' Australians experience and respond to environmental hazards in specific towns, regions or states. Future research could also examine the way fires and floods have been remembered, narrated, and commemorated locally, and consider whether this has affected processes of migrant memory and belonging that are specific to those local areas. There is also future scope to consider other structural patterns of inequality, such as the way gender and class might shape migrant experiences of natural disaster.

Migrants' memories of bushfire and flood unearthed larger patterns and histories of remembering and forgetting natural disasters. They also raised questions about the

[3] He was a member of the local CFA but his geographic location meant he had not personally witnessed or been involved with bushfires.

way natural disasters—particularly bushfires—have provided some people with a type of belonging through the connection between natural disasters and cultural and national identity. Throughout the course of this project I became increasingly aware of the need for more work at a macro level that could further examine and interrogate wider aspects of Australia's natural disaster histories, disaster amnesia and our cultural patterns of remembering and forgetting. It is exciting to see that since this project began, work has commenced within the emerging field of 'disaster histories', but aspects of remembering and forgetting natural disasters and their connection with national identity and belonging are topics in need of further research and exploration.

When I was a Summer Scholar at the National Library of Australia, I listened to hours of oral history interviews that illuminated people's experience of bushfires and flood in Australia. One collection focused specifically on the remembrances of residents of the town of Terang who recalled and reflected upon the bushfire and the challenges in the aftermath of the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires. In 2018 I heard the same words and phrases as Terang was once more the place of bushfire. The same place, the same words and yet there was no mention of previous bushfires like Ash Wednesday. Attention was instead directed to other fires elsewhere in the country. Did we remember? In 2019 media coverage of bushfires throughout Victoria occasionally drew comparisons with the Black Saturday bushfires. The presence or absence of such comparisons with previous significant or 'benchmark' natural disasters can influence the way we remember and forget and make sense of these environmental hazards. Generations old and new have had to learn to live within disaster prone environments; in many ways we are still learning how to live with, remember and forget these difficult pasts.

The questions raised throughout this thesis through an examination of migrant memories and experiences of bushfire and flood are at once unique to their situation and pertinent to larger discussions about environmental and disaster histories, migration history and oral history scholarship. They point to the need for further wider and broader scholarship to consider cultural and national constructions of natural disasters, patterns of remembering and forgetting, and the influence these patterns have on newcomers to Australia. These questions will become increasingly pressing and

important with changing population demographics and as more people move into areas of urban-bush or choose to live in areas with natural disaster histories and futures during a time of climate change, rising sea levels and population displacement. We need to think about how we remember (and forget) our histories, and the impact this will have on future responses to bushfire and flood for migrants and for everyone living in Australia.

This thesis has examined migrants' memories and experiences of bushfire and flood through life history oral history interviews that revealed how their migration and displacement pasts influenced their response, memory and recollection of natural disasters and their desire to stay within disaster-prone environments in Australia. Sensory memories were an important and significant way that migrants remembered their experience of bushfire and flood and the aftermath. Their memories also revealed common themes of a new sense of connection, community, and attachment to place and environment that often contributed to a sense of home and belonging. These are the memories of people who stayed and whose memories provide an insight into migrant belonging in disaster-prone places in regional Australia. These stories have demonstrated the value of oral history as a way to contribute to disaster and emergency management studies. We need succinct factual accounts of what happened and when, but we also need accounts of how people experienced those events, what they believe happened, and how these experiences have shaped broader experiences of community and belonging. Migrant memories of fire and flood unearth larger patterns and histories of remembering and forgetting natural disasters, the way people have learnt to live within disaster-prone environments, and the way these experiences can contribute to a sense of home and belonging. Their life histories reveal the significance of both migration and natural disasters within their lives, and they remind all of us of how we still need learn to live with, remember and less frequently forget, our history of bushfire and flooding rains.

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