

Fishing the Georges River

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INTRODUCTION

Fishing might be the most popular recreation in Australia, but there are many different ways in which Australians have fished the Georges River. Here is Mahmoud, whose family came from Syria:

..... we use a traditional Syrian or Lebanese rod where there's no reels. It's about a metre long and it's telescopic. So it comes out to some six metres and then all it is, is from the end tip the fishing line is tied to the top and then you put a sinker, the floaty and then another line down with the hook and then you just put simple bait, it might be small pieces of a prawn that been peeled or you get dough, you make some dough or bread and just mush it in water and just take a little bit and put it on the hook.

Kel and Francis, from Irish backgrounds, grew up in the squatter settlement at One Tree Point on Salt Pan Creek, which runs into the Georges River.¹ They reminisced about the 1930s:

Kel: Me and my brothers made prawn nets out of chaff bags strung together and we'd use a hurricane lamp at night time and go down and prawn and take them home and cook them straight out of the river into the pot. And we'd go fishing in the river, we had boats we'd row out to fish..... Shepherd² was the local fisherman and he used to come with two mates and they'd fish with nets. They used to fish next to our house and to keep in good with us they'd throw a couple of fish to us.

Francis: well, I used to do a lot of things, even though I was a girl. My father was my idol and I followed my dad everywhere. And we used to go do our prawning down in Little Salty and my dad used to make his own fishing nets. He was very good and that tatting was something that I never ever picked up with him.'

Cuong talked about how he has spent a fair bit of time rod fishing with friends and family on the Georges River, describing how the family's growing financial security was expressed through their fishing gear:

¹ Barnham, Glenyss. 2003. *Riverside Reflections: Memories of Lugarno*. Douglas Park NSW, self published. Contains a section with peoples' memories of night prawning, netting etc around Riverwood. There are as well literary references such as the figure in John O' Grady's 'Gone Fishin', Shorty Bent, a character inspired by a local fisherman Ken Dennis

² Joseph Shepard and Henrietta Mosely had 12 children on the banks of Salt Pan Creek and were well known fishing people of the area (Beverley Earnshaw *The Land Between Two Rivers*, 2001, p130-133)

So when they got here, they'd just buy a rod, just a stick, back when they poor. And when they sort of got a bit more, they got introduced to the whole fishing technology and that's when they'd first buy themselves a few expensive parts and they'd go fishing. My uncle actually went to Queensland and bought a net for \$400 but he only used it once, because it's illegal. When he first got back from Cairns he was so excited about it because it was about 20 years that he hasn't been able to find a net. In Vietnam, he didn't do it that often but it was part of his childhood, so when he found the net he just had to buy it, no matter how expensive it was! Coming back from Queensland the next day, he got up at about four o'clock, got all my other uncles up and went to the national park just to try the net. They caught nothing at all...

Lew, a Kuri, described his childhood at East Hills in the 1940s:

.....The brother and I used to catch prawns in the river. We'd join two hessian bags together, have two sticks over the end and the brother would walk out into the river. I'd stay out a little with the water up to my waist and he walked out a bit further, up to his neck. Then he'd walk around in a half circle and when we'd come in together, we'd have all these prawns in the hessian bags. There was heaps of little crabs all over the place too, little ones and ones almost as big as your fist. Now these days we don't see them.....

Another Kuri, John, talked about other ways again to do it he's learnt since growing up on Salt Pan Creek in the 1950s. Calling himself 'a lazy fisherman', he explained:

'..... if you go when the coast wattle is in flower, you can pop the flower and leaves into the deep inlets and pools around the Salt Pan. The next tide cleans it all out. But when you do it, it takes the oxygen out of the water and you can just scoop the fish out'.

An Anglo Australian teenager who'd grown up on the river told us he's never fished, the water is too polluted. But he's spent all his childhood with family and mates on the banks and out on boats. He says:

....anyway, it's the Asian fishermen who take all the little fish. They never throw anything back. I don't know if they're Vietnamese. Hell, they're just Asian. When we were kids we'd walk past their buckets and try and push them over, and we'd throw stones at them when we were out in the boats because they're dragging. We'd see them out there with their throw-nets, dragging the river at night. We were down there. They take all the prawns. It wrecks the river.

And here is Helen, from the Sudan, describing how she learned to fish from the people along the river's banks:

There's this old guy I met a couple of times when I first started fishing and he showed me a lot of what I needed to know, he was an old Greek guy, like a retired tiler or builder. He used to have these home concocted baits. He would get chicken breast, which is not cheap and he'd cut it up and then overnight he'd put lambs blood-coated bread crumbs around the chicken breast and that was his secret bait. And then, when he was showing me that bait, then some other guys, a group of young Lebanese guys would come up to me and go, 'Nah, we've been catching all day on steak'
.....

It is evident even from these glimpses of conversations that there are eddies and currents of strong emotions, fears, conventions, knowledge and politics circulating around what is often trivialised as the simple and unproblematic act of recreational fishing. The Georges River runs through the heart of Sydney's most culturally diverse population, whose communities are often in working class employment (if they have jobs at all), are living in densely packed suburbs and, despite some gentrification on the margins, still have significant disadvantages in educational and social infrastructure. As well as being a large river with scenic parklands threading along its lower estuarine reaches, the Georges River is also the focus of intensifying ethnic conflicts which often spill over into the media. The names of the river's suburbs like Cabramatta, Liverpool, Bankstown, Macquarie Fields and Lakemba are well known for their tensions as well as their high and diverse populations and, perhaps arising from these pressures, their emerging, rich cultures of performance and music.

This paper will ask whether considering the area's complex relationships of interaction and of tension through the lens of the 'everyday' might allow us to understand more clearly the sources and the directions of the conflicts. Fishing is one of those everyday sites, offering the chance to reflect on how the day-to-day relationships across and between communities actually work. Our project, *Parklands, Culture and Communities*, is investigating the broader questions around how cultural and ethnic diversity shapes perceptions and uses of public natural spaces along the estuarine Georges River in south western Sydney. We have conducted around 120 in-depth interviews drawn, in roughly equal numbers, from four of the many cultural groups in the area: the Aboriginal, Anglo, Vietnamese and Arabic-speaking people who live near and use the Georges River parklands. The Aboriginal population is a small but culturally significant minority of between 1% and 2% along the river. The Vietnamese community is focussed in the Fairfield area, where it forms 16% of the local government area, but Vietnamese people are between 4% and 7% of the LGA populations along the northern length of the Georges River and along the Cooks River which also runs into Botany Bay. Arabic-speaking communities form expanding minorities in many areas on the northern riverside, their numbers rising from 9% to 16% of the population in the Bankstown LGA between 1986 and 2001, and from 12% to 15% in the Canterbury LGA, with substantial although small rises in all areas from Rockdale in the east right out to Parramatta.³ As the river is the historic and geographic centre of the only substantial bodies of 'nature' in these densely developed suburbs, the topic of fishing arises constantly.

MODELS FOR RESEARCHING (AND UNDERSTANDING) FISHING

³ ABA results to 2001.

The project team members have each worked on fishing in a different contexts⁴ and we are aware that there is already a substantial body of literature emerging from sociology and leisure studies on fishing as a recreational activity, particularly from the United States and Canada⁵, although only a small amount of it considers the impact of ethnic diversity on fishing behaviours⁶. Some Australian studies by environmental agencies involve largely quantitative surveys, but do draw attention to significant differences in the purpose of fishing for indigenous communities, especially in northern Australia – where sustenance is a key part of the motivation for fishing not simply ‘fun’ or relaxation, and it is more like work⁷ There are some specific studies too, such as the RecFish study of Vietnamese Australian fishing (discussed later into this article) and several studies of indigenous fishing.⁸

There is another, usually quite separate, body of work emerging from development studies, geography and biology, relating to fishing as economy and livelihood in the developing countries from which many Australians draw their ancestry, like Vietnam, India and the Middle East.⁹ Much of the north American work is in the quantitative, model-building genre of sociology, which necessarily individualises the human respondents to its surveys, extracting them from any context more complicated than age or sex. It looks largely at the attributes of fishing places and assumes that such qualities are inherent in the sites, separable from the choices and behaviours of the anglers it surveys. The fine work of Myron Floyd does recognize ethnic diversity and class differentiation, but it too ignores the ways in which culture might lead or allow participants to evaluate fishing places very differently.¹⁰ What all this work does do, however, as is recognized in the work of Toth and Brown, is point to the significance of socialization and sociability as key factors in decisions about where and with whom to fish, alongside the utility of particular sites to

⁴Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent, *Mapping Attachment: A Spatial Approach to Aboriginal Post Contact Heritage* (Sydney: Department of Environment and Conservation, 2004), H. Goodall et al., "Cultural Diversity in the Social Valuing of Parkland: Networking Communities and Park Management" (paper presented at the ATLAS (Association for Tourism and Leisure Education) Conference, Networking & Partnerships in destination development & management, Naples, Italy, 2004), Heather Goodall, "Gender, Race and Rivers: Women and Water in Northwestern New South Wales," in *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water*, ed. Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt (Kolkata: Stree Books, 2006), Heather Goodall, "Main Streets and Riverbanks: The Politics of Place in an Australian River Town," in *Echoes from the Poisoned Well*, ed. Sylvia Hood-Washington, Paul Rosier, and Heather Goodall (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2006), Heather Goodall, "The River Runs Backwards: The Language of Order and Disorder on the Darling's Northern Flood Plain," in *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, ed. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001), S. Wearing and H. Goodall, "Ethnic Park Use" (paper presented at the NSW Regional Council Seminar: The future of Recreation in Australia, Parks and Leisure Australia, Penrith Leagues Club, Penrith, 2004).

⁵ Len Hunt, "Recreational Fishing Site Choice Models: Insights and Future Opportunities," *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 10 (2005), Len Hunt, Wolfgang Haider, and Kim Armstrong, "Understanding the Fish Harvesting Decisions by Anglers," *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 7 (2002), Diane M. Kuehn, Chad P. Dawson, and Robin Hoffman, "Exploring Fishing Socialization among Male and Female Anglers in New York's Eastern Lake Ontario Area," *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 11 (2006).

⁶ Myron F. Floyd et al., "Social Stratification in Recreational Fishing Participation: Research and Policy Implications," *Leisure Sciences* 28 (2006).

⁷ Gary W Henry and Jeremy M Lyle, *The National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey, Final Report, Fisheries Action Program Project (Natural Heritage Trust)*, vol. 48 (Cronulla: NSW Fisheries, 2003).

⁸ Scott Hawkins, "Caught, Hook Line and Sinkers: Incorporating Aboriginal Fishing Rights into the Fisheries Management Act," *Journal of Indigenous Policy* 3 (2004). Jason Behrendt and Peter Thompson, "The Recognition and Protection of Aboriginal Interests in NSW Rivers," *Journal of Indigenous Policy* 3 (2004).

⁹ Madan Mohan Dey et al., "Fish Consumption and Food Security: A Disaggregated Analysis by Types of Fish and Classes of Consumers in Selected Asian Countries," *Aquaculture Economics & Management* 9 (2005).

¹⁰ Floyd et al., "Social Stratification in Recreational Fishing Participation: Research and Policy Implications."

offer reliable or accessible fish catches.¹¹ Most importantly, the more quantitative of the studies of angler choices, Len Hunt's 2002 and 2005 studies, do recognize that a cluster of variables which relate to perceptions and culture cannot be quantified and so must be left indeterminate, limiting the predictive value of the models he produces.¹² The developing country studies, such as those of Can and Vo Quy and of Dey *et al* offer other important insights into the political economy of fishing, which has been transformed in the past two decades by widespread expanding aquaculture in many countries including Vietnam.¹³ The push to sell more fish products in the west has peaked and sales have slowed, with the result that much of the developing world's aquaculture products are now being aggressively marketed within the countries where the fish and prawn farming is being conducted. This dramatically alters citizens' experience of fishing, either in employment or recreationally, changing their dietary use of various fish species and increasing the cost of food now purchased in the cash economy to which they previously had inexpensive access as a subsistence resource. Any experience of fish and fishing which recent migrants bring to Australia is that of fishing practices, industry and consumption in a state of instability and rapid change.

Another approach is the work arising in sociology and anthropology about the 'everyday', which investigates taken-for-granted daily activities to learn more about the cultural meanings with which they are invested, the social relations to which they contribute and the power expressed through them. Fishing is certainly a candidate for this definition, although as already evident, despite it being 'everyday' it is not simple. It may be carried out very cheaply or at great expense, and there are many volumes published in Australia for popular audiences ranging from hints on technique and choices of sites to detailed popular catalogues of aquatic species. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is helpful in considering the everyday as it reminds us that a practice like fishing is embodied.¹⁴ It involves the very biological dimensions of human muscles, nerves and the movements they allow in baiting a hook, casting a line or throwing a net, all being ways to move the body which are absorbed by example, observation and practice, to allow a disposition of bodies in comfort and confidence as the fisher settles in to await the possible nibble, recognize the faintest tug and hopefully haul in a catch. This very physical, biological process is however also directly engaged with the physical/sensory/perceptual [and therefore cultural and intellectual] process of *seeing*, which in terms of fishing involves assessing the river

¹¹ JF Toth and RB Brown, "Racial and Gender Meanings of Why People Participate in Recreational Fishing," *Leisure Sciences* 19, no. 2 (1997).

¹² Hunt, "Recreational Fishing Site Choice Models: Insights and Future Opportunities.", Hunt, Haider, and Armstrong, "Understanding the Fish Harvesting Decisions by Anglers."

¹³ Le Thac Can and Vo Quy, "Vietnam: Environmental Issues and Possible Solutions," *Asian Journal of Environmental Management* 2, no. 2 (1994), Dey *et al.*, "Fish Consumption and Food Security: A Disaggregated Analysis by Types of Fish and Classes of Consumers in Selected Asian Countries."

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

bank and the surface of the water to judge the shape of the bed below, the presence of water flora and fauna and the ways in which fish might move through it.¹⁵

Bourdieu regards this embodied knowledge as absorbed and imbibed— and policed and disciplined – unconsciously and from childhood, allowing an enfolding of individuals within specific social relations within the social field of the practice. The concept of cultural capital employed by Bourdieu is useful in looking at the relative authority with which some Australians are seen to fish ‘the right way’, as opposed to others who are represented in the popular imagination as being irresponsible, as we will discuss below. Yet ‘cultural capital’, as Bourdieu uses it, can at times seem deterministic in its persistence and recalcitrance to change. Analysts like Judith Butler have appreciated Bourdieu’s stress on the embodied nature of social relations, but have pointed out that the concept of *habitus* does not need to be entrapped within a deterministic frame. Instead she argues for the power of consciousness and for the exercise of agency to reshape *habitus* and for the potential of speech and performance to challenge the authoritative practices which mark out social dominance and political control.¹⁶ In an Australian example, Noble and Watkins have reflected on the way temporality and agency can be understood in the context of the careful training of the bodies of sportsmen and women, in the most embodied examples possible.¹⁷

A useful reflection on Bourdieu’s work has occurred in the emerging histories of emotions. Elspeth Probyn has explored the physical expression, or *affect*, of emotional disturbance and disjunction, the dislocation of the emotions from bodily confidence and comfort which results in the very physical signs of shame and embarrassment.¹⁸ This question of shame is an important one in our discussion below of the social and power relations around fishing, but here I want to use it to link the embodied knowledge so far outlined as our understanding of fishing with the emotional dimensions of fishing as a practice. For, unlike the tennis which Noble and Watkins describe, an angler has to engage with the emotional encounter with death and pain. This is a dimension of fishing which, along with hunting terrestrial animals, makes it very different from the symbolic, socially focussed competitiveness of all other forms of contemporary organized sports with the exception, perhaps, of boxing where it is humans who elect to suffer the inflicted pain. In societies where hunting is more widely practised as sport and certainly in those like traditional indigenous Australian societies, there are well described ritual approaches to the killing of game, which often express respect for the prey and may have establish some limits to harvesting. Contemporary fishing ultimately involves confronting the need to inflict pain and/or to kill, even for

¹⁵ Ghassan Hage, personal communication

¹⁶ Judith Butler, "Performativity's Social Magic," in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

¹⁷ Greg Noble and Megan Watkins, "So, How Did Bourdieu Learn to Play Tennis? Habitus, Consciousness and Habituation," *Cultural Studies* 17, no. 3/4 (2003).

¹⁸ Elspeth Probyn, "Everyday Shame," *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2/3 (2004).

those adhering to the recent practice of 'catch and release'. A number of our informants have described to us their disturbing first-time fishing experiences, in which their absorption in the complexity of the tackle and the physical skills of casting, and then the excitement of the catch were suddenly replaced by the sickening realization that they needed to kill the animal writhing in agony on the end of their line. Indeed, some Buddhist Vietnamese interviewees found they didn't want to go fishing again – as it conflicted with their ideas about respecting life. Although most people have forgotten this first encounter, and a few may not even have noticed, there are some who continue to be haunted by the emotional rollercoaster they had to ride. For conservationists, including those in partnership with our research in the Department of Environment and Climate Change, the questions around fishing involve not only its potential threats to biodiversity but its confronting demand that fishers participate in this cruel intervention in the natural ecosystem.

As this discussion suggests, one problem with Bourdieu's work is that it is entirely human-centred: however embodied and biological it may be, it treats non-human biology as irrelevant. There are two influential approaches which do engage a recognition of embodied knowledge with a consideration of how it is related to the external, natural environment. One extensively developed in anthropology has been that by Tim Ingold, who has defined a 'dwelling perspective' as the way in which culture is learnt each day in an active process of interaction with one's physical as well as social environment.¹⁹ In 2005, reflecting on critiques of his initial formulation which have pointed out the implication of stasis and harmony which 'dwelling' might imply, Ingold explored the idea further, explaining that:

'Fundamental to the "dwelling perspective" is the thesis that the production of life involves the unfolding of a field of relations which cross-cuts the boundary between human and non-human'.²⁰

Ingold's work is extremely important for our research as it opens up the continuing, and often unpredictable, interactions between the natural world and the humans as cultural, in that they generate a continuing process of creating 'embodied knowledge'. It helps to explain why the migrants we are working with do not – and cannot – simply repeat behavioural essences they learnt in their homelands. Instead their inevitable interactions with the new natural environment they encounter explains why their cultural identity is fluid and requires continual cultural work to shape and refine it. Ingold's approach is developed further still in the work of Arjun Appadurai, who points to the intense burden of social meanings loaded onto sites and landscapes in the

¹⁹ Ben Campbell, "Changing Protection Policies and Ethnographies of Environmental Engagement," *Conservation and Society* 3, no. 2 (2005), Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²⁰ Tim Ingold, "Epilogue: Towards a Politics of Dwelling," *Conservation and Society* 3, no. 2 (2005).

production of *localities*, or the lived, socialized and 'everyday' generation of bonds between humans and places.²¹

A second important and influential body of work is that of Bruno Latour, arising from the philosophy of science, whose attention to the ways in which humans constantly interact with the external material world includes not only the biological, living world (largely the focus of Ingold's interest) but also the technologies with which and through which humans interact. Latour argues that an effective way to understand the intersection of the human with the non-human is to analyse 'networks' in which not only human and non-human species can be identified to be in mutually constitutive relationships, but in which non-living technologies, such as waters and soils but also mechanical and digital technologies, can all be recognized as actors in the network of events.²² Fishing is an intensely socially and culturally meaningful practice which does fit Bourdieu's concept of embodied knowledge in many ways, but it is inextricably engaged in interacting networks of meaning and process with non-human technologies like nets and rods, with non-human species and with non-living elements like soils and waters, tides and winds, not to mention the non-human products of human societies like waste excrement, toxic residues and dead cars.

Our early findings have been more readily understood by drawing on these two approaches rather than that of Bourdieu alone. Ingold and Appadurai allow us to explore the continuing interactive production of cultural meanings as people interact with biological nature and places in everyday life, while Latour's approach allows us to see beyond the human perceptions of meaning of the natural world, to look at the interactive relations with technologies as well as biological species in the material reality of the nature with which all our fishing people engage. We are finding that when the people with whom we are working are enacting embodied knowledges in relation to this external material world, they are making performative claims and assertions towards it. By doing so they are making interventions in the relationships of power in the human societies around them. Tim Ingold again has been important in recognizing the intentionality in everyday embodied practice when he writes:

'The concept of nature, like that of society, is inherently and intensely political. It is invariably bound up in a politics of claim and counter-claim, whose outcome depends on the prevailing balance of power'.²³

²¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation, Public Worlds Vol 1* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), Arjun Appadurai, "The Production of Locality," in *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, ed. Richard Fardon (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

²² Bruno Latour, "Circulating Reference: Sampling the Soil in the Amazon Forest," in *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

²³ Ingold, "Epilogue: Towards a Politics of Dwelling."

The remainder of this paper introduces themes where the engagement of embodied knowledges with external networks and the ongoing production of localities suggests new ways to see behaviours and social relations which have been characterized as 'problems' or have been sites of conflict. The first is the theme of embodied knowledges which seem to be dislocated from the external natural world through migrancy or time and tend to be regarded as an inappropriate repetition of the past or as practices only suitable in another place: fishing 'out of place'. The second theme suggests a process involved in performative deployments of embodied knowledges: fishing as a claim. The paper concludes by sketching out a third theme we have identified as demanding further research: that of fishing as an exploratory and future-oriented intervention which produces, as Appadurai would suggest, a new 'locality'. The first of our themes concentrates on the fishing practices of Vietnamese people in the Georges River area, while the second and the potential third themes widen the scope of inquiry to all four of our chosen study communities, including Aboriginal, Anglo-Irish and Arabic-speaking communities. The consideration of migrancy, of the ongoing creation of a relationship with a new place, is relevant for all four communities. Many of the local Aboriginal population have either moved themselves from rural areas into the city or have parents who did so. The group who least recognize themselves as migrants are in fact the Anglo-Irish, but the possibility that their fishing practices are a continuing expression of discomfort and insecurity in relation to place is an element which recurs frequently in our data. Finally, migrancy is usually understood as being about conserving relationships to the past by consolidating identities and repeating practices. We argue that embodied practices like fishing, following the suggestions of Judith Butler, can be seen as future-oriented activity for change, a grass roots strategy for learning and making a new 'place'.

FISHING 'OUT OF PLACE'.

Fishing is so engaged with the non-human material world that it poses immediate questions to consider that this practice might be 'out of place'. Australian regulators suggest that that migrants, and in particular Vietnamese migrants, are practising fishing behaviours which were developed for different environments and in different economic, legal and social contexts. We suggest that this is too simple a reading and argue that much Vietnamese fishing is directly engaged with the ecology in south western Sydney and is undertaken to address some very immediate and contemporary needs. There are however also some dimensions of Vietnamese and other people's fishing behaviours on the Georges River which the people themselves would suggest are indeed 'out of place'. They were not only learnt in another environment but are practised to evoke more than the memory but instead the physical feel and experience of that other place. Ghassan Hage has suggested that for someone missing their home, the complex of experiences involved in feeling the weight of holding a Lebanese fishing rod in one's hands, the familiar physicality of baiting, casting and hauling in and the surrounding presence of a riverine

environment were ways to conjure up the sensations of regaining a lost homeland, to experience both places simultaneously.²⁴ Such evocation of other places is echoed by other Arabic-speaking interviewees who spoke of how they or their older relations enjoyed spending time near the Georges River because the sensations of the moist air and the sounds of the flow were enough to recreate a strong sensation of those other rivers left behind. Vietnamese women have offered similar reflections. BoiTran Huynh- Beattie, an art historian who came to Australia to complete doctoral studies, in 1990s from Hanoi said:

I love Georges River which reminds me of Dong Nai river in Vietnam where I was born and lived there most of my life before migrating to Australia.

Bach, a 73 year old grandmother from southern Vietnam, now living in Bankstown said:

I like the river, it's very peaceful to look at. I lived in South Vietnam where rivers are a way of life so it is something that brings back a sense of nostalgia

The group whose fishing is consistently identified as 'out of place' both by the group itself and, in a problematic sense by regulation agencies, are Vietnamese Australians. Their rod fishing and shellfish gathering is criticized because regulators and the general public assume that Vietnamese people tend to catch and keep under-sized fish, to gather too much and in general to fail to abide by the regulations about the types and size of fish to be caught. The larger issue for the Georges River is net fishing. While regulators have quite complicated rules about where you can or cannot net fish in the lower Georges River and what sort of nets you can use, it is generally understood in the wider population that all net fishing is illegal everywhere and in any form.

When we look at the ways in which Australian regulation authorities talk about Vietnamese fishing practices, we find that they describe them in the same deterministic way that Bourdieu's writing about *habitus* suggests. An example is the 1997 Australia-wide report, *We Fish for the Future*, commissioned by the Department of Environment's Recfish and conducted with the assistance of the Ethnic Communities Council.²⁵ Although now a decade old, it is the major report conducted to date and it broke important new ground in initiating consultation with the Vietnamese community and exposing much of the official failure to convey information effectively to this or other non-English-speaking communities. Yet at the same time, it identified Vietnamese practices to be a major problem which threatened the existence of species in estuarine and coastal environments. The authors explained such activities with phrases like "all activities are naturally geared to the catching of food" or these activities are "culturally entrenched" and "continue to persist". In effect, the Recfish report argued that Vietnamese people were trapped with a culturally determined understanding of fishing as aimed at essential food provision, which lead them to have what Recfish termed a "conceptual difficulty" in comprehending regulations

²⁴ Ghassan Hage: personal communication

²⁵ Recfish and Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, "We Fish for the Future: Recreational Fishing and People of Indo-Chinese Background," (Department of the Environment, 1997).

restricting those practices in Australia. As a consequence Recfish generated a number of recommendations about policies which would socialise or in extreme cases punish the groups involved to dissuade them from such inappropriate behaviour.

It actually makes little sense, however, to assume that the majority of Vietnamese migrants to Australia are from subsistence backgrounds which might lead them to have a conceptual difficulty in understanding fishing in any other sense. Such a primitivist explanation is contradicted by the accounts of participants in our study, as well as those in earlier research by Mandy Thomas²⁶, who have all suggested that most migrants from Vietnam since 1980 have not come from subsistence agricultural areas, but instead from urban areas. Although they might have lived close to rivers or to coastlines as do most people in Vietnam, they were only very seldom practicing fishing either commercially or as subsistence. Most of our interviewees explained that they have not fished for a long time before migrating. For many of them, fishing was something that they remembered with nostalgia as a childhood pastime at their grandparents' village, in what several called 'fishing for fun'. Fishing has had a variety of meanings for the Vietnamese we interviewed but what it doesn't mean is the expectation that their life in Australia will rely on subsistence fishing.

More people in our interviews explained that on arrival in Australia they felt a sense of unfamiliarity with the recreational behaviours around them, like lawn bowls and had not felt welcomed in such sports clubs and venues. Having looked in vain for the sort of recreational pastimes with which they had been familiar in Vietnam, so they did was what they *did* know how to do, which was how to fish. In this sense their practice of fishing reflected, at least initially, a sense of exclusion as well as an inability to participate in the dominant local recreational activity. There were, however, outcomes to this almost enforced fishing which were seen by both older and younger Vietnamese interviewees as beneficial. The older interviewees reflected that it had allowed them to talk about their lives in Vietnam to younger members of their family who were growing up without that experience.

Strikingly, a number of the people that we spoke to talked about the fact that they or their older relations fished **more** in Australia than they had in Vietnam. They explained to us that fishing had taken on not only a different but a more central and defining role in Vietnamese people's experience of **being Vietnamese** in Australia, so that over time the practice became much more commonly assumed to be an expected part of family outings and larger extended family and community gatherings. It came to be almost a ritual which would demonstrate a link with the past which did not reflect actual practice of people in Vietnam but which expressed a sense of what they shared with other Vietnamese people in Australia and that which defined them as a cultural

²⁶ *Moving Landscapes National Parks and the Vietnamese Experience*, NPWS, Hurstville, 2002

group with a sense of identity to non-Vietnamese people in Australia. This helped to explain too why activities which involved significant numbers of people, like harvesting shellfish on coastal rock shelves or prawning, or the illegal netting, might be carried on long after there might be any economic or nutritional need, if there ever was one. It was the 'collectiveness', one interviewee explained, 'the fact that it was doing things together! so they could come home with what they had gathered, have a get together, eat this food they had collected together!' In a situation of migrancy, in which pressures have been high and identities challenged, the emergence of a collective activity which was even marginally related to a homecountry tradition, and which could offer ongoing opportunities for socialization and community building, was to be welcomed and sustained.

One of the terms which arises a lot in discussions with Vietnamese interviewees and which is also very common in the regulatory documentation is the language of shame. Elsbeth Probyn has written about shame as an *affect*, a dimension of *habitus*, in that it is the bodily expression of a sense of being 'out of place'. The concept of shame is commonly discussed by our interviewees. For regulatory authorities, their research has often involved seeking to know what it is that Vietnamese people might be ashamed about with their fishing practices because this will give them a clue of how to undertake their behaviour modification and social campaigns to change Vietnamese fishing practices. So they ask their interviewees about what it is that makes them uncomfortable, in order to learn what they are uneasy or furtive about doing *in public*. Then they seek to regulate this behaviour by mobilising community pressure to shame the practitioners of illegal activities into not doing it any longer at all, in public or secretly. They seek to recruit members of the Vietnamese community as well as members of the broader community to 'dob in' people they see harvesting seafood against regulations.

From the interviews that we have done with Vietnamese people, we are certainly finding that concept of shame is widely present but we have not found many people who are ashamed of either fishing or gathering against regulations. The issue that people **were** uneasy about was much more often the expression of embarrassment that the Vietnamese would be observed by members of the wider public to be gathering and fishing **as if they were in need of subsistence**. So Vietnamese interviewees have said things like: 'I was embarrassed because Vietnamese people look like they were hunter-gatherers'. They may have been expressing a long held distaste in Asian societies for subsistence harvesting, peasantry and dependence on manual labour. On the other hand they are also apparently expressing a sense of discomfort that Vietnamese people who are practicing shellfish gathering had not yet learnt how to be a part of a cash economy in which you purchased the things that you needed rather than gathered them directly from nature. Their countrymen embarrassed them because they had not yet learnt to be consumers or voyeurs of landscape rather than that they were seen breaking regulations.

Finally there is a need to consider the meaning of regulations themselves. Coming from heavily bureaucratized socialist Vietnam, our interviewees discuss a cynical memory of having a multitude of regulations which were nevertheless little policed nor highly regarded by the general public. They commented instead on their surprise at the degree of over-regulation faced by Australians, where they noticed more assertive policing of those regulations which were in existence here, like fishing licences and littering restrictions.

There is, however, another aspect of shame which is totally unnoticed by regulatory authorities but is talked about by Vietnamese interviewees in relation to fishing. This is the gendered nature of recreational fishing in Australia, particularly in urban areas and in relation to area where an Anglo population is the dominant one. In Vietnam, women fish very widely, they are often involved in commercial fishing but they are also often fishing in domestic and local village environments. Usually they are fishing in ponds which are associated with houses, there is so much water in Vietnam that accessibility to relatively private and very localised fishing places is very widespread. Women often fish in collective groups whether commercially or locally and privately, they might be family groups with children but there might be slightly wide groups again of friends and woman who are well known to each other in a village setting.

In Australia the urban and well known settings for fishing are very public and they are today very masculinised. Some local histories suggest a more active role for Anglo women in fishing in the past, but in contemporary recreational fishing they are seldom seen.²⁷ This is different again from Aboriginal cultures in rural area of New South Wales where Aboriginal woman fish extensively and are often the more frequent fishers, as well as being those who teach young children how to fish when they are looking after them in the daytime. [Jo Kijas Fishing Rept] So the practice of public recreational fishing in urban areas of Australia is very different from the cultures of fishing in Vietnam and in Aboriginal Australia. It is something which Vietnamese people find confronting when they come to Australia and which a number of our respondents have talked about as generating a sense of discomfort and physical embarrassment and awkwardness. A few people talked about their mothers or even themselves having tried fishing a little bit when they first came to Australia but continuing was difficult because of the distance from home and because of their sense of exposure in a way that did not occur in Vietnam. The sense of being open to public view and of doing something which is very different from the

²⁷ See Brookes, Barbara, and Colleen Burke, eds. 1992. *The Heart of a Place: stories from the Moorebank Womens oral history project covering the suburbs of Moorebank, Chipping Norton, Hammondville and Holsworthy in the Liverpool City council area*. Liverpool: Liverpool City Council. [includes Womens accounts of fishing and prawning, to support/add weight to Francis' quote at the beginning. Anglo women used to fish more than they tend to now. This is also shown in Dunn, Bob. 1991. *Angling in Australia: its history and writings*. Balmain: David Ell Pty Ltd. Original edition,

normal visual expression of fishing in public places in Australia was something that had dissuaded most Vietnamese women from fishing in the longer term. The older women we spoke to felt they had withdrawn to a much more inactive and passive role in relation to their use of public space and they had retreated all together from the embodied practice of expressing their knowledge and participating in fishing in Australia.

FISHING AS A CLAIM

Whereas fishing 'out of place' reflects some awareness of disjunction between the external environment, both living and non-living, when people are mobilizing fishing as a claim in the sense to which Ingold refers, it has a specific interactive relationship to the surrounding environment and generates the making of 'localities' as known and meaningful places for the groups involved. Fishing on the Georges River can be an act of claiming in that the ability to be comfortable and skilful in fishing involves long practice and participation in the sport but also a familiarity with the specific place, the way the banks slope, the currents in the river as they flow over the unseen bed, the tidal influences and the species which may swim there. To be able to fish successfully there, to look physically comfortable doing it, means knowing and accepting the conditions, from the biting insects and other inconveniences to the potential catches and pleasures. This performance of comfortable and knowledgeable fishing therefore positions the fisher as one who is 'at home', who belongs in that place and may be said to exercise an assertion of ownership. It is legitimised by the assumption that these fishers have the rights, by familiarity and confidence, to take fish from there, because they 'know' the place.

The most assertive group to use fishing in this way are the Anglo-Irish residents of the area, although they are increasingly the minority in the crowds who flock to the riverbank parks on weekends or holidays. During the quieter week days, however, it is the Anglo-Irish locals who are most often seen fishing and who are very ready to articulate their sense of their fishing as a claim, an assertion of belonging. We spoke informally with a group of elderly Anglo-Celtic Australian men a couple of years ago, fishing on a weekday at Burrawang Reach at Picnic Point who told us that they were from Heroes Hill, which for them meant the returned service peoples retirement village up the hill a little bit from the National Park. Their affectionate use of the term heroes hill recalled the valorisation of returned serviceman in Australia, the legends about Anzac and the assumed foundations of the Australian nation in these sorts of historical events. These elderly men came regularly to fish, every day or two, through the week and they told us about first of all their sense of belonging in that area, that this was their accustomed and rightful place. Within the short time of our chat, however, this group moved onto express their sense of anger and intrusion because of new-comers whom they said were taking over some of their spaces along the river. In relation to the land overall, they complained particularly about Muslims in the

area, talking about the presence of increasing numbers of Arabic-speaking peoples whom they identified as Muslims. They suggested that the name of their home would soon be changed from Heroes Hill to Iraqi Hill. In relation to the river, however, their main complaint was about Asian fisherman. Their accusations mirrored those of the young teenager we had talked to who didn't fish but still claimed to care about anyone who 'wrecked the river'. These older men positioned themselves as the ones who not only knew the regulations about fishing and catch sizes, but who cared enough about the river to abide by the restrictions. Asian fishermen, they complained, would 'take everything out of the water', catching and keeping fish smaller than the regulation size and using nets. Such representations are reinforced by press articles about violent clashes along the Georges River between Vietnamese fishers, fishing authorities and European identifying fisherman. Greek and Italian fishermen accused Vietnamese fishermen of 'overfishing' and using aggressive tactics to secure the best fishing spots.²⁸ Yet violence – or the accusations of it – do not all flow one way. A number of Vietnamese recreational fishers have been assaulted while fishing and many reported that they had been targeted for abuse.²⁹

The assumption that all nets are illegal is widespread among not only white Australian groups but Arabic speaking groups as well. The complicated river maps from the Sydney Waterways and Fisheries Department do suggest that in some areas some sorts of nets are legal and in some areas they are not, while signage is often ambiguous. Yet there were few ambiguities in the views of these fishermen who assumed that whatever Asian fisherman were doing with nets was nefarious and illegal. Their common complaint that Asian fisherman took undersized fish, however, raises questions when it is compared with the accounts given to us by a number of people who were from different backgrounds, one of them a young Arabic-speaking woman, who was learning about fishing from groups of older Anglo men rather like these men to whom we were talking. She recalled commenting that she should throw her first catch back because it was so small. The older fishermen she was learning from reassured her: "There is no such thing as 'too small', love, you just have a second bucket in the boot of the car". We have to problematise the popular perception along the Georges River that such covert strategies are only practised by Asian fishermen. And we must ask too, how accurate is that popular belief that white Australians were so well informed but also so in sympathy with the environment that they would never dream of doing anything like taking undersized fish.

These stories had emerged as we discussed with these older men their everyday experiences of fishing, about what you did and how you did it. This conversation had quite rapidly elicited stories

²⁸ Terry Smyth, Martin Chulov, and Daniel Dasey, 'Fishing Brawlers', *Sun Herald*, Sydney 22 October 1996, p40. See also stories regarding 'illegal net fishing' which do not discuss ethnicity but do mention "ignorance of the fishing laws' (a veiled reference to ethnicity?) and apprehensions, summons etc being served at Chipping Norton lake. Graham Brown, " 'Illegal' Net fishing in the Georges River" *The Torch*, Bankstown, 30 Jan 1991, p1.

²⁹ See accounts of Vietnamese fishermen of attacks on them while fishing along Cooks River, Sydney, FECCA, 1997, p18 in Recfish and Australia, "We Fish for the Future: Recreational Fishing and People of Indo-Chinese Background."

about groups identified as 'other' and as in some way undesirable, an attribute which was expressed in descriptions of the way they fished. Anglo-Celtic Australians in this area have had unquestionably a long history of fishing in these waters and there is an important record of their working class activism in saving these river foreshores from over development and the river itself from the increasing burden of industrial and sewerage pollution. The goals of the Anglo-Celtic community and particularly the fisherman around the 1940s and 50s had been to save these bush land areas as a National Park. The archives from the period, however, are consistent with the conversations we have described above in showing that the imagined nation for whom these white Australians wanted to create the park was expected to be mono-cultural and quite strictly bounded in racial and ethnic terms.

This is certainly not the view of Aboriginal people themselves who live in the area of the Georges River. There has been a sustained history of Aboriginal presence in this area, and Joe Anderson, a man descended from the Tharawal owners indicated the key role of the river in their conception of country when he spoke as King Burruga on national cinema in 1933 to demand recognition of Aboriginal ownership of land and water but to do so on the basis of sharing the resources of the country. He said:

"there is plenty fish in the river for us all and land to grow all we want. One hundred and fifty years ago the Aboriginal owned Australia and now he demands more than the whiteman's charity. He wants the right to live". FN

Another early Gweagal owner, Bidy Giles, was welcoming of white visitors whom she guided along the whole southern bank of the river, as long as they showed the respect for people and land which met local protocols. FN However, as well as those people who are related directly to the traditional owners there are far more Aboriginal people living in this area now whose background can be traced to rural New South Wales or Queensland. These are Aboriginal people who are themselves migrants in the sense that they have a traditional ancestry that relates to some other part of Australia, although not too far away in most cases. However they are taking up their understanding of cultural responsibility as Aboriginal adults to have an active role in the custodianship of the land on which they are living. This is an expression of traditional cultural relationships to land and participation as an adult in Aboriginal social processes which is well described throughout Australia. It is one of the sustained dimensions of traditional life that allows Aboriginal people to deal with the intense pressures of contemporary instability generated as large numbers of people have been forced to move because of employment, education or housing needs over the last decades.

Lew Solberg's life story exemplifies this process. Lew is a Wiradjari man who came to Sydney with his mother, a Wiradjari woman from around Mudgee, and his Anglo-Norwegian father. They lived in Redfern, where Lew spent some of his time, but most of his weekends were spent with

his father's mother in her home on the northern shores of the Georges River at East Hills. From this childhood on the river, he has remained in the area all his life. He is now an elderly man who has actively taken up his responsibilities to the Aboriginal community and to the river by participating actively in current Land Council activities in the area and also by taking a place on the Catchment Management Committee. Lew's knowledge of fish habitat, of changing bank and bed structures of conditions of the waters and the changing life along the water's margins on the river banks have all contributed to a deep understand of change in the quality of the water over time. These factors have allowed Lew to strengthen his own sense of his role as a custodian of the river which he sees and embodying his responsibilities an Aboriginal man. He considers fishing to be one of the ways in which he demonstrates his knowledge and one of the ways in which he continues to build on it and to monitor the state of the river. It is this basis on which he has become an active member of the local Aboriginal land council. He has been nominated as their representative on Sydney Water the catchment management authority where he is able to speak on behalf of the Land Council and reflecting its concerns about the health of the river as a whole.

The assumptions of white Australians that they are the owners of the area is in conflict with the claim being developed by Aboriginal members of the community that they are not only the underlying owners but those with the custodial responsibility to care for the river. There is yet another and different type of claim being made by a number of the Arabic speaking groups in relation to their use of the river and particularly fishing, although not only around fishing. Access to the open air, nature and to the river is understood among Muslims to be one of the ways encouraged by the Koran to communicate with God. According to Manzoor: "all is holy ground. As the Prophet so beautifully puts it: the whole of the earth is a mosque". Nature is seen as a gift and a divine revelation.³⁰ In Islam, the material use of water continues to have a very direct link to the expression of religious affiliation, so that the ability to access parks freely, to sit and mediate by the waters, to fish in river water as well as to participate actively in coastal beaches and swimming, are all expressions of relationships to God. Some academics have argued that Islamic teaching considers water as Gods gift to people and the whole Muslin community must have access to it.³¹ Others have stated that the Koran and associated hadiths recommend water conservation and valuing of resources.³²

Our respondents have described how Muslim families seek out parklands and access to the water on occasions like family celebrations and birthdays, for family and community events like Eid at the end of Ramadan as well as for personal meditation and reflection. This Muslim use of

³⁰ Lisa Wersal, "Islam and Environmental Ethics - Tradition Responds to Contemporary Challenges," *Zygon* 30, no. 3 (1995).pp 452, 456.

³¹ Walid Abderrahman , A., "Application of Islamic Legal Principles for Advanced Water Management," *Water International* 25, no. 4 (2000). p513.

³² H.A . Amery, "Islamic Water Management," *Water International* 26, no. 4 (2001).

the river echoes that of some Vietnamese Buddhist interviewees use local rivers for meditation. For all of these events the assumptions are that being close to nature and rivers means being close to God in a very material sense. This takes parklands out of the 'national' frame in which they are positioned by white Australians generally. Instead of offering a platform on which to perform the nation and national identity, the parklands and the river instead offer a site with which to express one's relationship to God and one's common humanity rather than one's national identity.

The significance of water is even more evident in the case of the Mandeans, an Iraqi group whose religion is neither Christian nor Muslim, but whose teachings, like Islam, retain a strong link between the symbolic meanings of water in a religious sense and the material uses of water both for religious practices and for everyday life.³³ Mandeans baptize regularly in full emersion ceremonies in what they regard as *Yardna*, the living water. This again allows a direct relationship between the individual and God and between individuals within the community with each other collectively and through that collective process with God again. So that both of these quite different religious groups from Arabic-speaking cultures bring with them a way of positioning themselves and of claiming their rights of access to water both to picnic and to fish as being expressions of a far broader global humanity and affiliation with human beings generally in their relationship with the spiritual. These points of reference are far outside the concept of either local and underlying owners or the concept of a nation state as owner of a common and public 'nature'. Our research has shown that any such concept of a singular 'nature' is illusory.

These are all different ways in which the physical practice of fishing and the use of waters in the Georges River area can be understood to be an expression of making a claim of positioning oneself as having a particular relationship to the land and to the social and political structures of the nation state and then again to the broader religious community.

Vietnamese net fishing can also be regarded as a kind of place claiming, even though authorities and other communities tend to see it as a demonstration of Vietnamese people's failure to understand Australian fishing conditions or regulations. Yet when fishing in Vietnam is observed it is quite clear that nets are commonly used across the country and used in many different ways. All of these methods of net fishing involve high degrees of knowledge and high degrees of co-ordination and skill on the part of individuals and groups of people so that fishing with nets is not only a technologically complex but a socially complex process. If we consider this practice not as a transgression or an involuntary repetition of the past but instead as a claim to the present we can identify a number of elements that might be relevant.

³³ Francesca de Chatel, "The Hammam and the Mikvah: Physical and Ritual Purity in Islam and Judaism [Abstract Only]" (paper presented at the Water and Civilization, Paris, France, 1-4 Dec 2005, 2005).

Drawing on the interviews from our Georges River Project as well as those from the 1997 Recfish Report, we find that the elements which are stressed by Vietnamese interviewees are firstly the complexity of the body of knowledge that they bring with them from Vietnam about the technologies of fishing with nets. Although Vietnamese are uneasy about discussing the details of this technology with non-Vietnamese Australians, because of the intense stigma and violence which has come to be associated with it, it is nevertheless clear that many Vietnamese hold strong and positive memories of not only the technology but the knowledge that was involved in knowing how to use it. As Cuong, our interviewee quoted earlier suggested, his uncle's delight in finding a net had led to him taking the opportunity to teach not only about his memories of nets in Vietnam but to show his young family members the skills and the knowledge that went with it.

The second element we suggest is associated in Vietnamese netting practices with assertion of the right to be recognized as having an environmentally responsible attitude. A common term used by Vietnamese interviewees on the Georges River and in the Recfish Survey was that of anxiety about waste of resources. Interestingly this is the same phrase, the same argument utilized by Anglo graziers and Anglo common farmers in western New South Wales when they expressed concern about our limitations to their rights to extract water for irrigation from the Darling River. Each of these groups talks at length about the waste of water and the absence of responsibility amongst those who would let the water flow downstream unchecked and unused. Similarly many of our Vietnamese respondents expressed a firm belief in the need to engage with nature in such a way as to not to allow valuable resources to be left unused where they could be utilized productively. This is regarded not as inappropriate exploitation or greed but it is regarded very strong as a responsible attitude in relation to the environment. Despite the fact that this may not in fact be appropriate in the fragile circumstances in which much of Australia's environment exists nor in the even more stressed environment of an urban setting, nevertheless, as long as Vietnamese people are thought to be fishing in a way that reflects ignorance and an absence of respect or understanding for environmental concerns, there will be a fundamental mismatch between what regulatory bodies are trying to tell Vietnamese people and what they understand themselves about their own behaviour.

Vietnamese fishing could be seen overall, even in forms like netting which are most strongly condemned as being out of place, as being assertive acts which are a demand for recognition of the knowledge and skills which Vietnamese bring with them and the environmental responsibility that they seek to exercise. This is much more like a claim to belong or a claim to be able rightfully to utilise the resources of the natural world than it is an inappropriate and ignorant action or indeed a challenge to the national framework in which Anglo Australians seek to position themselves and others in the National Parks. However it may be more appropriate to

see it as an over-arching claim to participation in a global citizenship, a global sense of belonging and relationship to the environment. With the recognition of what is known from outside the Anglo framework and from outside the Australian national framework, communities like the Vietnamese can be understood to be eager to participate in the building of knowledge that will allow a genuine conservation of the resources which are there. This only becomes a possibility however if we see the embodied knowledge and practice of fishing as being one which is open to change rather than one which is constrained by the inertia of a deterministic view of culture. This takes us to the final theme of fishing as exploration.

CONCLUSION: FISHING AS EXPLORING

We can take a further step, beyond either the assertiveness or the reactivity of the conditions that we have been describing so far. The *We Fish for the Future* Recfish Report of 1997 assumes that the practice of fishing is extremely difficult to change, that this is almost compulsive behaviour and certainly a culturally determined practice. Nevertheless within its pages we find that many of the Vietnamese respondents to that survey talked about actively seeking knowledge in the form of written material or radio broadcasts or other sources of establishment of official knowledge that would give them guidance about fishing regulations, rules and laws in Australia. If we consider fishing to be an embodied knowledge, one which is expressed as much in the physical practices of fishing as it is in conscious knowledge, we have a good example in the work of Noble and Watkins in identifying the conditions by which change might occur. Noble and Watkins considered a tennis player who is trained both physically and intellectually by a coach. Over time, with conscious effort and engagement, the physical disposition of the knowledge of tennis can be displayed in the body of the learner. But our investigation of fishing is not one in which the conditions of changing a physical practice involved manuals and trainers in controlled conditions, in our case this is an active exploration by ordinary people, undertaken not with formal training but in the everyday and taken-for-granted trialing and testing of fishing.

What we found in our interviews was that not only do Vietnamese people talk about seeking information from official sources, but many of the people we have interviewed talk about either themselves or their close relations taking active steps to observe and communicate with non-Vietnamese fisherman, of whatever cultural background. They have set out to learn from watching them and imitating ways in which they make decisions on locations, for example, or in which they cast lines. As one young Vietnamese woman described her observations of her community:

'People take part in fishing here even if they haven't done it in Vietnam, like if they came from urban Saigon. They'll watch each other, watch 'Aussie' fishermen and learn from

them, and take part! It has been a really obvious thing since 'Asians' came to Australia. They have loved to fish. It might be about food or finances but also enjoying it. But they haven't usually been professional fishermen. They've had to learn to fish since they've got here, for example by looking at how the Australians fish.'

Our interviewees describe Vietnamese people actually *doing* fishing as they know it in order to test out the environment, so they open themselves up to communicate, be observed and perhaps even to be criticized by neighbouring fisherman. What they are doing is exploring the environment directly by seeing what works and what doesn't from the repertoire of fishing knowledge they already have. This allows them to have a direct feedback mechanism from the non-human social world, the environment, where they have to make decisions and judgements about water conditions, about baits and about tackle. They also have feedback directly from the social world around them which is outside the Vietnamese community so that they place themselves in a position of vulnerability in relation to the wider community order to be able to learn more rapidly and more effectively.

This type of exploratory behaviour means taking social risks. Yet it is demonstrated not only by Vietnamese interviewees but also by Arabic speakers, including Lebanese Muslims, Syrians and Sudanese. Each of them describes the complex and satisfying social processes within their own community of sharing fishing time with either members of their own generation or cross-generational groups involving family members where there is talk about practices in a home country as well as about the conditions and the results and responses from fishing in this new environment, new for the older members of the group not for the younger ones. There are also descriptions of interactions with neighbouring fishers on the bank who are outside their cultural or language group, often deliberate exchanges and contacts in which information is exchanged about baits and about biting, the sort of low key and everyday exchanges which nevertheless allow more open observation of each others practices and more thoughtful learning about what others are doing.

Mahmoud has described well his enjoyment at learning from members of his own community but as well, his keen interest and pleasure in the diverse cultures who all end up fishing the Georges River together:

My brother and I, we'd just grab the rod and we go by ourselves and we'd see all the people from the same community or same cultural background there. There's a few characters in particular that I admire for their skill and for their knowledge and experience. Because it's amazing you know? They put like not even a dollar's worth of prawns or dough, and they just keep on catching ... you get to meet new people and learn new things and you find that a lot of people like help each other. If you're out of

bait, or, you need equipment, hooks, or sinkers whatever, I'm sure your neighbour, will fix you up.

Lots of different people fish there, like heaps. It's not really any particular cultural background that fishes there, it's unlimited. And young and old, some people even just park their car and watch the other people fishing they just have a look at what the people are doing, sometimes they have a look in the bucket. It's a nice place, just even if you just want to relax, have some time out, private time. Nice place to go.....

This pleasure in exchange is extraordinary in a climate in the area and in the country generally where communication between Arabic-speaking and other Australians is becoming more tense and difficult in reflection of wider national and global conflicts. And yet such informal, personal and everyday interchange over the very ordinary activity of fishing is reported widely among all our respondents. The deliberate extension and expansion of such embodied knowledge as a form of cultural exploration is an important example of agency and confidence in the processes of migrancy. Perhaps even more importantly, the communication we are tracing in the everyday pastime of fishing on the Georges River offers some hope in the intercultural future for an area high in social polarization and ethnic and religious conflict. We close this paper with the reflections of our interviewee Helen, the young Sudanese woman who has enjoyed the camaraderie among many different people which fishing brings her, as an example of just such low key and important optimism:

.....There's a lot of older men from non English speaking backgrounds I've met. Different cultures have different ways of fishing, which I find really interesting, yeah like different methods. ... I think people just talk to each other when they're fishing. You stroll along and say 'hey how's the catch? What you getting? What bait are you using? I was here last week, I got this '

.....There's conversation you can have with people without asking them any details about them or being intimate. So you can actually get to know someone fishing quite easily, so I've got people who I've met doing that, but I don't know them to talk to them again or anything...

.....Fishing's like that I've found.....

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