



# a multicultural landscape

**NATIONAL PARKS & THE MACEDONIAN EXPERIENCE**

martin thomas

Studies in the Cultural Construction of Open Space

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**IMAGES:**

*Front cover* Outdoor celebration in Macedonia, May 1964.  
From the album of Vladimir Ivanovski and Kalina Ivanoska.

*Back cover* At Gjavato in Macedonia, 1984.  
From the album of Cveta Grbevaska.

*Page ii* Miroslava at Lake Prespa, 1962.  
From the album of Vladimir Ivanovski and Kalina Ivanoska

*Page viii* Family at Royal National Park, 1968.  
From the album of Vladimir Ivanovski and Kalina Ivanoska.

*Page x* The holy day of Bogopodica in the village of Trnovo, Pelister, Macedonia.  
From the album of Vladimir Ivanovski and Kalina Ivanoska.

## A FOREWORD TO THE SERIES

*Studies in the Cultural Construction of Open Space* is a series intended to encourage new ways of thinking about those parts of the Australian landscape which are ‘unoccupied’. Cultural geographers and others have long understood that few, if any, of the places we like to think of as wild spaces or wilderness do not have some history of human presence and use. In Australia, for instance, when we say that a place is a wilderness what we mean is that it has no European land use history. Aboriginal people, however, are likely to have occupied and moved through such wildernesses for tens of thousands of years before Europeans arrived.

We are interested in this history of use. We are interested in the people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who have previously lived in or moved through today’s areas of open space. But ‘use’ does not begin and end with physical presence: we are also interested in the extent to which people have occupied open space with their thoughts and apprehensions, desires and dreams.

The very fact that we like to think of some open spaces as wild says at least as much about us as it does about them: we see and understand these places – we construct them – through the lens of our desire. Our desire, that is to say, to believe that some corners of the earth are pristine and completely natural; our desire to believe that there are places we can go to and not find that ‘we’ are already there in the form of signage, pathways, facilities and litter. To say that this desire is understandable, while true at one level, obscures the fact that we actually know very little about it. And knowing something about it should involve asking whether this is a desire experienced by Aboriginal people, or by Vietnamese, or whether it is specific to Anglo-Irish Australians.

In the present volume, Martin Thomas addresses himself to the meaning and function of national parks in the multicultural society that Australia has become. As a case study, he looks to members of Sydney's Macedonian community and what national parks mean to them. He shows that the relationship these people have with national parks has formed inside the web of meanings and practices they have brought with them from the old country, but also from the experience of being a migrant in Sydney, from growing up or growing old in Sydney. The Service is currently carrying out comparable research among Vietnamese Sydneysiders, and the results of this research will be the subject of a future volume in this series.

Like most heritage agencies, in Australia and elsewhere, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has tended to focus its attention on heritage 'sites' in open spaces rather than on open spaces themselves. It has, for instance, been the Aboriginal shell midden or rock art site that has taken our attention rather than the landscape in which these sites occur. Aboriginal people periodically point out that they are not comfortable thinking of these places as separate from the landscape, from 'country', but the existing structure of heritage management does not particularly accommodate this view. Is this, one wonders, because white society (the white mind) is disturbed by the notion that Aboriginal people may still have deep attachment to landscapes 213 years after they were colonised? One of the ambitions of this series is to help park managers to expand the idea of cultural heritage, so that rather than seeing the parks as *containing* heritage places – along with plants, animals, hills and lakes – they see them as *being* cultural heritage. In this view the parks are sites of culture rather than merely landscapes that contain cultural sites.

The series mainly comprises the outcomes of a research program in cultural heritage begun by NPWS in 1998. The program is strategic insofar as the research projects are specifically designed to open up new directions for the Service in its conservation and management of cultural heritage places and objects. The program is also intended to bring to the organisation the benefit of new work and new thinking in the social sciences and humanities.

DENIS BYRNE  
NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service



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with Vietnamese communities. Consulting historian, Kate Rea, generously described her experience of working on the Ethnic Communities Consultation in Rural and Regional Centres Pilot Program for the NSW Migration Heritage Centre (contracted to the NSW Heritage Office). John Streckfuss, Senior Lecturer in the Tourism Group, Faculty of Environmental Management and Agriculture at University of Western Sydney (UWS), Hawkesbury, generously shared readings and insights on ethnicity and park use, opening a path for possible future collaboration.

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## INTRODUCTION

This publication describes progress made on the first phase of a research project into the relationship between migrant groups and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). This research is broadly concerned with exploring the ideas that migrants bring with them to Australia about open space, and what happens when those ideas meet local views and perceptions, particularly those held by people responsible for managing national parks.

The following discussion of the research project is divided into three parts. Part 1 consists of an introductory section dealing with theoretical and methodological problems. In this section, I argue that ethnicity, being a key factor in determining people's world-views, is central in shaping attitudes to the environment. Given this, it is argued that NPWS cannot hope to work effectively as a cross-cultural communicator unless it is acknowledged that national parks, having emerged from former colonial societies, are imbued with particular values and ideals concerning land use. Further, it is argued that the tendency in government to draw a demarcation between the 'mainstream' and 'ethnic others' is not productive. Rather, it is suggested that those in government must acknowledge their own history – their own cultural and ethnic specificity – in order to acknowledge the cultural experience of others.

Part 2 describes research involving members of Sydney's Macedonian community who, since the Second World War, have developed enduring traditions of visiting Royal National Park and other parks around Sydney. This was the major case study for the first phase of the research project into multiculturalism and national parks. In this section I describe a visit to Royal National Park on Christmas Day 1999, when I spoke with Macedonian people about the importance of large community picnics to Australian – Macedonian culture. This section outlines a methodology for approaching members of the Macedonian community, drawing upon



heritage assessment research conducted for the NSW Migration Heritage Centre and NSW Heritage Office by Kate Rea. A brief contextual history of Macedonian migration to Australia is also provided, and complemented by an account of an oral history with Paul Stephen, who arrived in Australia from Macedonia in 1948. Two focus group sessions that inquired into the attitudes to nature and the environment, both in Macedonia and here, of old and young Macedonians, and their experiences of parks usage, are discussed in detail.

Part 3 offers conclusions based on the research. It describes an initiative from the NSW Fisheries Department for negotiating ethnic diversity. It also draws some lessons from the research into ethnicity and national parks for how NPWS might better address the cultural complexity of contemporary Australia.

# part 1

## SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE

Swimming at Bitola, Macedonia, 1968.  
From the album of Donka Talevska.



## A CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACH

**THE CROSS-CULTURAL MIRROR** To see oneself from the perspective of someone else can be liberating or terrifying. Sometimes it is both. I hope that some sense of seeing ourselves from the perspective of others informs the following discussion concerning an inquiry into ethnicity and landscape. While the connection between cultural background and landscape experience is the theme that unites this project, the consultative methodology that produced it broke down the demarcation between researcher and research subject, which is often so rigid.

It proved impossible to dissociate people's experiences in national parks from their insights on the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) itself. In this respect the research into ethnicity and national parks presented here provides a mirror – an invaluable opportunity to consider how effectively NPWS is meeting the needs of a very large minority of the population: the 23 per cent in NSW who were born overseas.

### QUESTIONS EMERGING FROM ETHNIC DIVERSITY

NPWS has a statutory requirement to serve the population of NSW in all its diversity. Yet how effectively does it do this? Is the ideal of multiculturalism manifest in the way the Service does its daily business or does it merely pay lip-service to it? If this issue is confronted squarely, a series of questions will inevitably flow.

Does NPWS actively seek to reflect the heterogeneity of Australia in its workforce or is it an organisational culture that is largely homogenous? Is it an organisation open to the vast range of ideas and values, influenced by so many cultures, that shape attitudes to landscape management in NSW? Or does it prioritise particular forms of knowledge at the expense of others? Is NPWS an agency that values and takes notice of community input or is it an administrative order that seals itself off against such participation?

The answers to such questions are neither black nor white. In many respects NPWS reflects the complexities and contradictions of its constituency. NPWS has recently acknowledged that the physical evidence of Aboriginal occupation 'requires the stories and traditions of the people to give it context in the natural landscape'.<sup>1</sup> The need to understand stories and traditions concerning our migrant heritage is also important – and is additionally complicated by the fact that often there is no material evidence of the rituals, traditions, festivities that migrant people have brought to our outdoor spaces. Certainly, we need innovative approaches if the connection between ethnicity and landscape is to be understood holistically. Are there signs that the Service is ready for this challenge?

In publicly committing ourselves to 'telling the stories' of the NSW landscapes, NPWS has expressed a receptivity to the diverse range of experiences that shape attitudes to the environment and do, inevitably, influence the ways in which people behave within it. To that extent there are hopeful signs.

The *Visions* document (a mission statement developed through public consultation), which recommends that we tell the stories of the landscape, marks a move towards community-based liaison and regionally based land management. National parks are being regarded in their geographic and social contexts, allowing space for community partnership. The strategy here is to emphasise the principle of *biodiversity* – the connectedness between geographic areas, between ecosystems, between reserved and unreserved land. We now acknowledge that this mode of thinking is essential if conservation strategies are to assume the global dimension necessary for long-term survival.

## CONNECTED GEOGRAPHIES

**VALUING EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTION** Acknowledging that geographic spaces are intricately connected, there remains a question about how these connections are actually *experienced*. What narratives, what language, do people use to comprehend and actually live out the interconnectedness of landscapes? It is here that the ethnic diversity of Australia – the international quality of our society – assumes particular importance.



Paul Stephen in his olive grove near Picton, 2000. *Photo* Martin Thomas.

**AN EXAMPLE FROM MACEDONIA** Consider the experience of Paul Stephen, a Macedonian-born Australian, who provided oral history for this project. Paul was born in a mountainous region of Macedonia in 1936. Until 1948, when he emigrated to Australia, he lived a traditional peasant lifestyle, closer to nature than most of us could possibly imagine. The village where he lived was almost entirely self-sufficient. The only foodstuffs purchased were olive oil and salt. Even clothing was made in the cottages. Until he moved to Australia, Paul wore home-made trousers tied with a rope, footwear fashioned from pig hide, a coarse smock, spun and woven from wool grown on the farm and dyed green in an infusion of walnut husks.

I asked him to describe the landscape of his childhood.

Martin, you're gonna make me cry now. I'm here because of that landscape. We have the most wonderful landscape. I don't remember drought. I don't. We were fairly north; we would have been about 800 to 1000 metres above sea level. We had plains, and on our plains in fact was originally an ancient city there.

We could see these beautiful mountains where the forest was from the village. It always had snow on the peaks. But he [my uncle] always said to me there's a lake there and this is where heaven is. And not until 1984 was I allowed to enter my area, and to one of my cousins I said: 'Look, I have to go to this lake.' And my uncle was right, it is heaven. Because there's no tourists there. You couldn't even find a match there. No pollution. The white ducks are still there, the black ducks are still there. I cried with happiness. It is so supreme, so silent, so beautiful, and you've got these big pines and they're huge.<sup>2</sup>

Most noticeable about this account is its emotional charge. It is clear that the landscape of Paul's childhood is the stuff of heart and soul. Although there is no reason to doubt that the lake he describes is a geographical reality, the tone of nostalgia, and the description of it as 'heaven', suggest that this recollected landscape, carried inside him, is also a country of the mind.

One might ask whether landscapes of the mind are really the business of NPWS? Surely the physical landscapes here in NSW are enough to care for! But a little reflection might indicate that physical and mental geographies are not easily isolated.

## SOCIAL MEMORY PHYSICALLY AFFECTS THE ENVIRONMENT

Let's pursue the present example. Paul Stephen had a successful career as a dry cleaner and real estate agent. Now he is a 'landscape manager': the owner of a farm near Picton. Paul has made various choices about what he will do with this property – choices that he believes respect the integrity of the Australian bush while also

re-creating aspects of his Macedonian heritage. When he acquired the property, 30 acres of it were uncleared. They will remain so for as long as he owns it.

I've got a lot of people asking me for firewood. I couldn't. It's like cutting my arm. I couldn't do it.

But on those areas that were cleared by previous owners he has planted olive, chestnut, walnut and citrus trees. He plans to get a donkey so his grandchildren will be able to ride and get to know the animal that was so important to the farmers in the Macedonian village. He wants the children to be able to pick their own fruit and understand self-sufficiency. He wants them to be Australian but also to realise where they come from.

In talking to Paul Stephen, one rapidly gets a sense of how the different landscapes he has experienced are interrelated. The memory or inspiration of one place will have a discernible impact on others. This is especially noticeable when he describes traditions of socialising that have developed in outdoor recreational settings. We discussed the huge Macedonian picnics that occur annually in Royal National Park.

**SOCIAL COHESION IN PARK LANDSCAPES** These events are seen as rowdy, congested and environmentally unfriendly by some of NPWS personnel to whom I spoke. But to many members of the Macedonian community they are important social traditions. Paul explained how in the early years after the Second World War, it was predominantly men who arrived from Macedonia, initially intending to stay just a few years, earn some money, and return home to their families. The lack of women companions made it difficult to hold dances, which in Macedonia had been one of the main forms of socialising. The large picnics, he explained, where people could eat, drink and play music, were a hybrid tradition, influenced by outdoor celebrations that occurred in the homeland though inflected by the Australian context.

People could expand their national feelings, gathering in their language. Because everybody worked in a fish shop or a factory or something like that. So picnics were a tremendous outlet. People looked forward to this. They played a major part in our getting to know each other, and for people who would come from overseas it was an introduction to the people. They weren't alone. They could see there's other Macedonians here.<sup>3</sup>

These (admittedly brief) insights foreground the connection between historical experiences and attitudes to national parks. Here is evidence that any mode of inhabiting and interpreting a landscape is ethnically specific.

**BACK TO THE MIRROR** I commenced Part 1 with an observation about how cross-cultural research can provide a mirror. The ethno-specific experience of our neighbours might tell us something about ourselves. In this spirit we might engage with the vast range of ideas, experiences and expectations that accumulate to form the social memory of a society composed of so many immigrant cultures. Sometimes this diversity is viewed pessimistically as a threat to 'national cohesion'. But it can as readily be regarded as a resource of unsurpassed richness, a kind of 'cultural capital'. In her 1999 Boyer Lectures Inga Clendinnen described the migrant legacy as a 'gift' that has bestowed a 'multiplicity of intimate connections, by marriage, friendship, business, with other people and places in the world, and other ways of living in the world'.<sup>4</sup>

## CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**WEALTH IMPLIES OBLIGATIONS** Drawing from Clendinnen's view of social diversity as a source of cultural richness, we should ask how a bureaucracy or government agency might respond appropriately to such a source of wealth. At NPWS it is considered axiomatic that to inhabit or frequent a place of ecological diversity implies responsibilities as much as privileges. This attitude could be appropriately extended to encompass a relationship to the cultural diversity of contemporary Australia. To fully reap the social advantages that accompany ethnic diversity – the extended repertoire of skills, life experiences, languages, religions, customs, cuisines, accents: the sheer variety of ways of being in the world – dexterity is required of any service-providing organisation.

**MATTERS OF LIFE AND LIMB** Whether the government and its agencies are adequately meeting these challenges is a matter for conjecture. The apparent diversity of park users suggests that NPWS is, at least to some degree, fulfilling the needs of migrant people. But what happens when people unfamiliar with the Australian environment enter our reserves? Are they adequately prepared for the potential danger of outdoor spaces?

During my inquiries I was told about the death by drowning of two Koreans in Royal National Park during the previous year. Such a tragedy is a grim reminder that life and limb issues underlie this subject. The dangerous surf and the exposed nature of various rock platforms used by fishermen present problems to people unused to Australian conditions. An understanding of the physical properties of the environment is not a luxury. Sometimes it is a matter of survival.

It might well be asked how those drowned Koreans could have been expected to understand the particular dangers of the NSW coast? I raise this not as an isolated example of confusion, but in

order to acknowledge squarely the profound difficulties facing new settlers in this country: the bamboozling array of laws, rules, conventions, figures of speech and unwritten codes to which the migrant is expected to adjust – more by osmosis than formal induction.

**THE CULTURE OF NATURE** Where does the national park experience fit within all of this? It is common to think of national parks as 'natural' spaces. What this actually means is that society has devised an elaborate set of laws and codes that keep them 'natural': laws additional to those that apply elsewhere – banning pets or restricting the collection of firewood or prohibiting fishing or regulating the lighting of fires. How would a new arrival, unfamiliar with the English language, know about these laws? That some are written on signs would bring little comfort. The migrant is not necessarily literate in English or any other language. Far from being aware that different forms of conduct are expected in these particular geographic spaces, the new arrival may not even realise that he or she has entered what for other Australians is a quasi-sacred space: a national park. It is here that the cross-cultural mirror becomes especially useful, allowing us to recognise that the concept of the national park is itself ethnically specific.

## WHITE AUSTRALIA AND MULTICULTURALISM

**ENVIRONMENTAL PERCEPTION** As someone who has studied in some detail settlers' responses to the Australian environment,<sup>5</sup> I discern a resonance between the recent drowning of those Koreans and more familiar narratives of disappearance, firmly ingrained in the national culture, like the many stories (actual and imagined) about White children lost in the bush.<sup>6</sup> Both emphasise the unforgiving, even violent, aspects of the Australian environment.

I also discern analogies between the perceptions of twentieth-century migrants and those of the nineteenth century. Born in Australia of British-Irish descent, I personally find it staggering that the majority of Macedonians who spoke to me in the course of this research insisted that the Australian bush is bereft of smell. It recalled the oft-made claim that colonial artists of the nineteenth century were incapable of painting gum trees. Admittedly, the point of comparison for the Macedonian informants was the overpowering aroma of a resinous pine forest. But for me, suffused with memories of damp gullies, overpowering boronia, sclerophyll and cicadas, the sweet humidity of summer before the storm, the idea of an odourless bush is frankly incredible.

Such contrasts in perception seem culturally familiar when I compare colonial accounts of the bush with my own sensory experience. When Macedonians suggest them in the year 2000, they seem initially strange. While my training as an historian undoubtedly modulates my interpretation, I suspect a more general truth is exposed by the tendency to regard a lack of familiarity with the Australian environment as a *colonial* rather than a *contemporary* phenomenon. It is indicative of the way the dominant culture in Australia situates the act of arrival and settlement as an ‘historical fact’ rather than an ongoing process.

**WHO DO WE CALL A MIGRANT?** White Australia’s perception of itself is fraught with contradictions. The social researchers Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis have pointed out that: ‘Even eighth-generation Australians mark their origin from an arrival, so even the most continuous white lineage of belonging harks back to the fact of migrancy.’ Paradoxically, however, that sense of migration is quietly shelved in the construction of a national self. As Schech and Haggis describe it: ‘The resonance of migrancy is compounded in Australia by the twinning of the always having arrived with the wilful forgetting of the nature of that arrival.’<sup>7</sup> The sense of belonging is thus loaded with further contradictions. Until at least the 1950s,

unquestioned claims to Australian soil could go hand in hand with the perception among White Australians who had never even been there that Britain was ‘home’.

**MULTICULTURALISM** In some respects our current era is one in which the doctrine of multiculturalism has become a governmental mantra.<sup>8</sup> NPWS, like all government agencies, is bound by a plethora of state and federal legislation that forbids discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, race, religion, sex, age and physical disability.<sup>9</sup> Such a situation, while undoubtedly a progressive move from the old ethos of assimilation or the White Australia Policy, tends to obscure the long history of racially based conceptions of the Australian nation – notions which, as the emergence of extremist groups like the League of Rights and One Nation clearly demonstrate, continue to exert their influence. To relegate ‘White Australia’ and the policy thereof to the realm of ‘history’ is wishful thinking. As we historians remind anyone who might listen, the legacy of the past is lived out in the present.

**PROBLEMATIC TERMINOLOGY** To address this situation in its complexity is as fraught with problems as it is politically necessary. Hence the difficulties that present themselves in debating matters of cultural diversity – problems that arise now, as I attempt to find an appropriate terminology for this discussion.

Public discourse in Australia is full of language that marks a separation between migrants and non-migrants. For reasons intimated above, this demarcation is ultimately unsustainable. Only Aboriginal Australians could claim non-migrant status (and indeed many of them have family connections throughout the world). Consequently, I use the terms *migrant* and *migrant heritage* cautiously. My usage does not seek to separate migrants from others, but rather to assert that histories of migration, whether they be manifest through lived experience or social memory, are central to the cultural experience of all non-indigenous Australians.



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'ETHNIC'? With this in mind, it is interesting to contemplate that the term *ethnic* is under attack at the present time. Stepan Kerkyasharian, chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW, associates it with rhetoric where 'people in key public positions talk about the "ethnics" as being an entity outside the mainstream community.' Complaining about references 'to the "multicultural community", as if multicultural meant separate and non-Anglo Saxon,' Kerkyasharian has declared support for proposed legislation that will change the name of the Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW to the Community Relations Commission.<sup>10</sup>

HOW DID THE TERM 'ETHNIC' ARISE? While mindful of Kerkyasharian's arguments, it seems to me that the notion of ethnicity remains useful if its meaning and etymology are better understood. To explain why, it is necessary to probe the meaning of the term. For a group of American scholars studying the influence of ethnicity on recreation in the early 1990s, ethnicity is unproblematically defined as 'a group having a real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood'.<sup>11</sup>

By this definition, ethnicity should apply to anyone. But here one must add a proviso that acknowledges a social reality in which the term is deployed readily in discussions of 'ethnic minorities' and rarely, if at all, in descriptions of 'the mainstream'. The *Macquarie Dictionary* (1998 edition) reflects this actual usage, listing among definitions of *ethnic*: 'of or relating to members of the community who are migrants or the descendants of migrants and whose native language is not English'.<sup>12</sup> Yet even this definition – which acknowledges a leaning towards stigmatisation – tends to gloss over the greater history of the term.

Originating from Greek, the word *ethnic* entered English in the fifteenth century as a way of identifying 'nations not Christian or Jewish; Gentile, heathen, pagan'. Occasional appearance of the term

*hethnic* spells out the connection between *ethnic* and *heathen*. Only in the mid-nineteenth century did it begin to refer to races, groups and nations in a more general sense, influenced by the 'science' known by its cognate, ethnology. Our contemporary usage is historically recent. In the USA in 1945, references to 'ethnic minority' began to appear.<sup>13</sup>

Such a history might support the view that the word *ethnic* is better discarded. Yet to me it remains useful: a term that allows groups of people to classify and defend their own historical and cultural distinctiveness against the homogenising tendencies of a dominant group. If we use the term with a knowledge of its complex history – a history that involves us all – it might be possible to encourage awareness that everybody is 'ethnic' to someone else. An accessible but highly revelatory illustration of this potential can be found in Lee Mun Wah's documentary, *The Color of Fear* (1994).<sup>14</sup> This film depicts a weekend discussion in which a group of American men of various ethnic backgrounds debate racism. There are two White men among a group that also included Japanese, Chinese, Latino and Black Americans. Much of the drama in this film revolves around the group's attempts to convince one of the White men of the reality of racism. He fails to see why ethnicity is a factor in their lives, arguing constantly that they would be better off if they regarded themselves simply as 'people' or 'human beings'.

The others responded by arguing that overarching categories like 'human being' are preferred by White people because they normalise and universalise a system that preaches egalitarianism while conferring considerable privileges on those who are White. A particularly interesting feature of the film was the loquaciousness with which the 'men of colour' spoke about their own ethnicity and the inability of the others, despite much prompting, to say anything whatsoever about being White. Exasperated at this lack of reflexivity, a Black man, Victor, turned to one of the White men and told him to: 'Get ethnic, man, get ethnic.'



GETTING ETHNIC Victor's advice that we 'get ethnic' explains the value of the term and informs my usage of it. In the context of government, where White men are predominantly the decision-makers, the need to expose the ethnicity of Whiteness acquires great urgency.

Amidst such debate, it will be surprising for some in government to learn that the hallowed term *multiculturalism* is itself under fire. Ghassan Hage, an anthropologist at the University of Sydney, strongly argues that the establishment of multiculturalism as official doctrine should be regarded with a certain scepticism:

The spread of culturally diverse social forms and processes was happening regardless of assimilation and, if a new policy was not created to help encompass this spread, the latter would have had to remain outside the realm of policy, and as such ungovernable. That is, the recognition of diversity did not cause diversity to happen, it was precisely *because* diversity had already become an entrenched part of a social reality that no attempts to impose assimilation could change the fact that the government needed a policy that could recognise this diversity in order to govern it.<sup>15</sup>

WHITE POWER Hage proposes that this managerial multiculturalism forms a vehicle for the maintenance of White power in Australian society. The argument is illustrated with a series of sometimes amusing examples. Hage describes an occasion where Phillip Ruddock, the current Minister for Immigration, addressed a meeting of Arab Australians with the statement: 'I look around me and I see Australians.' The crowd's reaction suggested that Ruddock 'was the only one who seemed unsure about it in the room, and it only had the effect of placing him in the position of the White acceptor, decreeing the Australianness of the ethnic other'.<sup>16</sup>

To Hage multiculturalism often works as a national mask. It presents a veneer of pluralism without the substance. He cites as another example the showmanship with which a multicultural Australia was presented to the world during Sydney's bid for the 2000 Olympic Games.

While this presentation was crucial and even dominant, however, it was striking how White the Australian Olympic subject was. That is, while many cultures were deployed on the stage to 'show off' the diversity of Australia, very few non-White Australians were part of the managerial decision-making team. Multicultural Australia did not come to represent Australia, it came to be presented by White Australia. All the 'multicultural' performers, from the ethnic dancers to the Prime Minister's wife's multilingual prowess, were objects/functions that White Australian decision-makers used in presenting 'Australia' (themselves) to the international community.<sup>17</sup>

That multiculturalism is imbued with values that covertly sustain the position of White people as power-brokers and decision-makers is compelling evidence of its relative newness on the Australian scene.

For much of its history *The Bulletin* carried the motto 'Australia for the White Man' on its masthead. And only in 1965, after effective lobbying by Gough Whitlam and Don Dunstan, did the Australia Labor Party delete reference to 'White Australia' from the party platform.<sup>18</sup> The legacy of this history has been partly – but only partly – erased by the social transformation of recent decades. Although it is now distinctly fashionable to say otherwise, very powerful institutions in this country have not moved far from the motto, 'Australia for the White Man'.

MULTICULTURALISM EMERGES IN THE 1970s Al Grassby, the Minister for Immigration in the Whitlam Government, is considered the original champion of multiculturalism. His formative paper, *A Multi-cultural Society for the Future* (1973), called for an end to the old doctrine of assimilation and promoted an optimistic vision 'of a truly just society in which all components can enjoy freedom to make their own distinctive contribution to the family of the nation'.<sup>19</sup>

This far more heterogeneous notion of Australian society was a notable turning point in both party politics and national self-image,

and demanded social and psychological adjustments that were alternatively embraced, challenged, resisted or ignored. Overtly race-based notions of Australia have been law and lore since colonial days and have been the norm for the greater part of the history of the Federation. The White Australia Policy entered the legislature in 1901 when the *Immigration Restriction Act* was passed.<sup>20</sup> Even during the considerable demand for migrant labour post-Second World War, lingering ideas of racial purity, a preference for White settlers, continued to influence immigration policy. This lasted until the 1960s.

In the context of a discussion about multiculturalism and landscape, it seems essential to at least gloss this history. How else to understand NPWS in its historical context and how else to address the thorny issue of whether it is committed to *embracing* rather than purely trying to *manage* the reality of a multicultural society?

## CONFRONTING CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN NPWS

**STAFF ATTITUDES** An email received as part of this research provides insights on the subject of cultural difference in the national park context. On commencement of the project, opinions were sought from NPWS personnel in the Sydney region about the use of parks by different cultural groups. The following observations, made by various staff and relayed to me in the following email, are indicative of the profound challenges that confront the Service.

In my experience (and at the risk of generalising) the priority for ethnic communities primarily in relation to national parks is their value for social gatherings (ie utilitarian values). This is a valid use, but how are we going to get the messages [across] about other values of national parks into these communities?

Asians have no regard for total fire bans and will only put out BBQs if threatened with a fine, gaol or the fire hose. They know the signs saying 'total fire ban' are displayed but they don't care.

Heat bead cooking is an issue in the park. Both the inappropriate use of them and the disposal of heat beads in the park. Asian and Muslim/Middle Eastern people suggested on this.

Comment that Bosnians ignore signage. That the signage is not significant to them.

General comment about leaving rubbish on the beaches in Royal after having a picnic.<sup>21</sup>

The officer who relayed these comments apologised for their superficiality. They seemed to indicate that the request for information from Head Office had not been taken as seriously as might be deserved.

**HOW WE SPEAK ABOUT 'ETHNICS'** In actuality, it is the very brevity of these comments, and the underlying attitudes revealed, that is probably most interesting. They expose a set of generalisations and stereotypes based on ethnicity or race. Asians, Arabs, Bosnians, etc, are singled out as exemplars of various types of antisocial behaviour. I am not denying that people of such description have conducted themselves in such manner. NPWS rangers are facing very real problems in trying to protect parks. What is significant is the totalising judgment of a comment like: 'Bosnians ignore signage.' No doubt the staff who made these observations would admit that there are White Anglo-Saxon people who also leave rubbish, ignore signs, light illegal fires, and otherwise break the rules. But it is difficult to imagine that Anglo-Saxons or White people would be categorised in quite this way. Rather, we would probably acknowledge that some might break the rules, others are model visitors, the majority are in between. Where 'White Australia' provides a differentiated field, 'ethnic Australia' is pathologised as a set of undifferentiated types. Research conducted for this and other reports suggests that such attitudes are not confined to this email. A 1999 marketing report on NPWS South Metropolitan District by students at St George College of TAFE discussed staff attitudes to visitors.

The ideal visitors were those that respected nature (eg bushwalkers) and those who were aware of their impact on the environment.

The least ideal visitors were noted as large groups of Lebanese, drunks, drug users, speeding drivers, loiterers and disrespectful campers. Whilst some specifically identified Lebanese (mainly young or in gangs), others said it was collective groups from all sections of society, and not only Lebanese.<sup>22</sup>

Even though the categorisation of Lebanese alongside drunks, drug users, etc, was qualified by some informants, its manifestation seems to confirm the aforementioned problem with acknowledging difference within particular cultural groups.

**WE OBSERVE FROM A POSITION OF POWER** While acknowledging that the few comments presented above could never reflect the depth or diversity of opinions and experience within NPWS, they do warrant some reflection. They reveal what might be termed a *position of observation*. The behaviour of certain people (Lebanese, Bosnians, etc) is measured against an implicit norm that stigmatises people of difference.

This reality is a reminder that NPWS, like the police force, the armed services, even the tax office, has developed its own set of norms and values since it was constituted in 1967. As the state's leading conservation agency, NPWS has developed a unique identity and culture with its own narratives, its heroes, its triumphs and disappointments. We are also a uniformed organisation, which perhaps strengthens the sense of camaraderie and consolidates self-image. And though we are hardly without divisions, the common, highly emotive ideal of promoting conservation, and the occasional calls for collective action in dealing with natural adversity, can encourage the forging of unique bonds. The collective mourning at the death and serious wounding of firefighters at Ku-ring-gai Chase in 2000 is a recent, highly memorable example of this *esprit de corps*. The tragedy deeply affected all staff working in the agency.

**CULTURE IS A LENS** Precisely because it is a norm – the lens through which we apprehend the wider world – the organisational culture at NPWS assumes an invisibility that is greatest for those most deeply enmeshed within it. Hence it is easy to overlook the way certain forms of knowledge (the dominance of science, say) are prioritised in NPWS environment. Similarly, there is a propensity to overlook the fact that it is a particular person of particular background who is likely to seek a career in NPWS. I spoke to staff about this during several focus group discussion meetings. They agreed that their own experience and preferences – often a background in bushwalking and conservation – influenced their view of what might constitute an 'ideal visitor'. Staff frequently feel at sea in negotiating the linguistic and cultural diversity of park users. On several occasions during this research I encountered the lament: 'We are such a white organisation.'



A house in Bitola, Macedonia, 1968. From the album of Donka Talevska.

**NPWS STAFF** The Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment (ODEOPE) reports directly to the Premier of NSW on employment ratios. The Office surveys government departments and agencies to ascertain the numbers of women, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, people of non-English-speaking background and the number of people with disabilities in their employ.

The performance of NPWS in relation to the public sector generally is detailed in the following table.<sup>23</sup>

Representation	National Parks and Wildlife Services, NSW 1999	Public sector 1998/99	Benchmark or govt target
Women	37%	54%	50%
Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders	4.9%	1.5%	2%
People whose language first spoken as a child was not English	3%	14%	19%
People with a disability	5%	7%	12%
People with a disability requiring work-related adjustment	1.6%	2.2%	7%

The data reported here is highly revealing. NPWS performs poorly in its employment of women and extremely poorly in its employment of people whose first language was not English. The latter make up only 3 per cent of the workforce compared to a state average of 14 per cent (which is still well below the government target). The Service’s one strength is in the area of Aboriginal<sup>24</sup> employment. This is due to its responsibilities for Aboriginal heritage under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. It is NPWS policy to recruit indigenous staff to meet these responsibilities.

Obviously, the high rate of employment of Aboriginal people in NPWS must challenge the simplistic notion of ethnic homogeneity within the Service. But the fact remains that NPWS, compared to many other NSW Government departments and agencies, is, as the staff observed, overwhelmingly ‘a white organisation’. In contemplating this state of affairs, it is worth considering the historic legacy of national parks in affirming ideas of nationality.

NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL PARKS

WHY ARE PARKS NATIONAL? Consider, for a moment, a question that is surely fundamental to any discussion of ethnic makeup and reserved parkland. Why do we use the word *national* to describe a park? This term is so familiar, so ingrained in the ‘national psyche’, that it seems as natural as the environments it describes. This in itself is good reason to subject it to a gentle questioning. We do, after all, inhabit an era where the notion of an environment being entirely ‘natural’ is contested by those who recognise how human activities, dating from the earliest Aboriginal occupation, have affected Australian ecosystems. The setting aside of a tract of land as an example of ‘nature’ is a modern phenomenon and a *cultural* act.

The national park concept has, to a large degree, been internationalised. Parks now occupy 8.84 per cent of the Earth.<sup>25</sup> For Macedonian and Chinese interviewees, it was a familiar concept from their homeland. In Macedonian the word, not just the concept, has been directly borrowed. National park in Macedonian is *national park*.

NATIONAL PARKS AND THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

The current internationalisation of the national parks concept can obscure the fact that this specific way of identifying and managing landscapes originally developed in the former colonial societies of Australia and the United States. In both countries there is a well-established association between national parks and issues of nationality. As originally conceived, the reservation of natural spaces had a premeditated connection with a sense of emerging nationhood. These were iconic spaces: both the property of the nation and expressive of certain national virtues.

The first use of *national park* recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates from 1871. N. P. Langford, writing in the *New York Tribune*, declared that Yellowstone Park ‘should be at once ... set apart

as a public National Park for the enjoyment of the American people for all time'.<sup>26</sup> By then the connection between reserved land and national identity was already established. In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash recounts an incident in 1832 where George Catlin, the painter and proponent of wilderness values, sat on a bluff in South Dakota, where he spread out a pocket map of the United States 'and considered the effects of an expanding civilization'. Catlin envisaged a magnificent park, immune from the degrading influence of settlement:

what a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world, in future ages! A *nation's park*, containing man and beast, in all the wild[ness] and freshness of their nature's beauty.<sup>27</sup>

Such pronouncements mark a trend in which wild spaces could evoke the triumphs of the nation or ease its pain. Simon Schama draws a connection between the reservation of Yosemite Valley in 1864 and the American Civil War. Yosemite, he argues, became 'a place of sacred significance for the nation, during the war which marked the moment of Fall in the American Garden'.<sup>28</sup> Parks offered a retreat into uncorrupted nature, providing an antidote to the difficulties or agonies one might encounter in what is obviously 'historical' space.

NATIONAL IDENTITY NATURALISED In Australia, also, the connection between national identity and landscape elements, especially the distinctive flora and fauna, is pronounced. Consider the deployment of national symbols. In contrast to Britain, for example, which employs one non-indigenous creature (the lion) and another that is mythical (the unicorn) on its coat of arms, Australia depicts the kangaroo and emu. It is not so much the supposed power or attributes of these creatures that is important here (as is the case with the lion and unicorn). Rather, it is the fact of their being native to Australian soil. Kangaroos, emus, waratahs, wattle, wallabies, gum

trees, lyrebirds, all play a part in the iconography of nationhood, contributing to the sense of national uniqueness that in other, more established nations is conveyed by language, religion, folklore, dress, architecture, cuisine. This is a situation where nature – or to be specific, *a culturally processed rendition of nature* – plays a heightened role in establishing a national culture.

DEFINING 'AUSTRALIANNESSE' In Australia, national parks express certain national ideals, continuing a well-established pattern in which 'the bush' provides key images in defining 'who we are' and 'where we are'. National parks function as sources of nationalist imagery as well as providing physical spaces in which the citizen can participate in activities like bushwalking, camping, swimming, barbecues – often regarded as national traditions. In NPWS we seem hopeful that reserved land can play a privileged role in defining some notion of an Australian sensibility. This is articulated in the previously cited mission document, *Visions for the New Millennium*. It lists among 'key challenges and opportunities' the Service's role:

as a leader in managing and interpreting landscapes that contain both natural and cultural values and give people a sense of being Australian.<sup>29</sup>

It also asserts the need for programs that:

increase understanding of our identity, history and future as Australians in those landscapes.<sup>30</sup>

A critic might find a certain humour in these objectives. Does a French national require a stroll through a nationally charged space – the Tuileries Gardens, say – in order to feel properly French? Or is the feeling of being French and the intimation that France is possessed of an 'identity, history and future' something the French citizen can take as given?

The suggestion in *Visions* that Australians require certain signals or experiences that will make them feel their 'Australianness' suggests that in this country the sense of national self is rather insecure.



Indeed, the *Visions* document could be regarded as symptomatic of a syndrome in which considerable anxiety revolves around the issue of what it means to be Australian.

NATIONS ARE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS We might find that this anxiety exists to some extent in many national cultures – perhaps even a highly patriotic society like the French. Recognising that the concept of the nation is a social construct, Benedict Anderson, an historian of nationalism, has compared the political power of the nation state to its ‘philosophical poverty.’<sup>31</sup> There are no great theorists of nationalism as there are with liberalism, Marxism or other ‘isms’. Hence a certain flimsiness of foundation – the fact, as Clendinnen writes (glossing Anderson), that ‘ethnically and religiously diverse nations, like our own, cannot hold together unless they share a common vision as to how the world works, what constitutes the good life, what behaviour is worthy of respect.’<sup>32</sup> These characteristics, augmented by the fact that the boundaries of many, perhaps most, nation-states are arbitrarily defined, suggest that nationalism belongs with religion and kinship, functioning by means of belief. Anderson defined the nation as ‘an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign’. It is imagined because it extends the sensations of fraternity across geographical areas. The fellow citizens, often members of diverse, even conflicting, interest groups, will never know each other ‘yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’.<sup>33</sup>

Acknowledging that national parks in Australia are part of an elaborate web of cultural institutions and social structures that contribute to a sense of imagined community, we might consider the vein of national anxiety intimated by the proposition that citizens could feel their ‘Australianness’ through contact with outdoor spaces. ‘Australianness’ is by no means an innate concept. The notion of a national character or national tradition is constantly being

re-defined. This sense of flux is confronting to many people, prompting on occasions extreme, even violent, manifestations. The ethnic diversity of contemporary Australia – the fact that a particular stereotype of ‘being Australian’ is under threat – has forced re-thinking (and in some cases fear and bewilderment) about what ‘being Australian’ actually means.

SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL ECOLOGY In this context it is salutary to realise that ecological arguments have been eagerly exploited by various parties who oppose further immigration. The League of Rights and Australians Against Further Immigration – both regarded as extreme right-wing organisations – have frequent recourse to ‘defence’ of the environment. A policy statement from Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party declares that:

Australia has a responsibility to protect it's [sic] bio-diversity and not allow its flora and fauna to be ousted from their habitats to extinction because of population or economic pressures. In comparison, the pro-immigration lobby feels we have no moral right to this land unless we push development beyond the limit. Our population must be stabilised as population growth will need to be stabilised elsewhere in the world.<sup>34</sup>

It is interesting in this passage how an embattled environment becomes a metaphor for embattled Australianness. According to this logic, ‘traditional’ Aussies, like the traditional flora and fauna, are being squeezed from their habitats by feral intruders.

I cite this document in order to emphasise that right across the political spectrum, there are believers who regard ‘the Australian environment’ as a sacred and essentially immutable space. Changes to the environment and changing social practices associated with it are regarded with distrust.

It is timely, given the historic role of national parks in affirming a sense of the Australian nation – a role typically geared towards absolving differences within and between communities – to ask

whether NPWS is keeping abreast of the considerable changes occurring in society. It is comfortable with the idea that reserved lands provide a locale for the conservation of flora and fauna. Yet NPWS rarely thinks of its role in preserving social traditions and customs. In attending to the role played by outdoor spaces in maintaining communities of *people*, we must countenance the reality that a multicultural society, having re-defined the notion of 'being Australian', could be re-defining the concept of national parks.

## SURVEYING THE MULTICULTURAL LANDSCAPE

**PARK USERS** Several National Park user surveys point to the popularity of parks in the Sydney region among ethnically diverse communities. A survey conducted at Bobbin Head in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park over Easter 1997 showed that 20 per cent of survey recipients spoke a language other than English at home, the most common being Mandarin and Cantonese.<sup>35</sup>

A similar survey conducted at Lane Cove during the Queens Birthday weekend in June 1997 revealed that 26 per cent of visitors spoke a language other than English at home. Mandarin, Cantonese and other Chinese languages were the most common but French, Spanish, Greek, Italian, German, Arabic, Persian and Polish were also reported.<sup>36</sup> Forty-four per cent of respondents lived within 10 kilometres of the park, and less than 1 per cent of those surveyed were visitors from overseas.<sup>37</sup> In 1998 another survey was conducted over the June long weekend, in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, which indicated that 8 per cent of visitors spoke a language other than English at home.<sup>38</sup>

**LIMITS OF SURVEYS** These surveys are certainly strong indicators that the parks are popular among a wide variety of people. But many staff I spoke to felt that the surveys, which take the form of written questionnaires in English, significantly understate the true diversity.

A survey conducted in the Wattamolla area of Royal National Park over the period 25–28 December 1998 used an alternative technique: direct questioning of visitors by a National Parks volunteer. It revealed that speakers of no less than 42 languages were using this limited area of the park over that period.<sup>39</sup>

These figures have other limits. They concern only a small number of parks and are collected only during certain holiday periods. They say nothing about the kinds of experiences visitors have in parks or the reasons why they go there. Nor do they elucidate the obverse question that might eventually be considered: whether there are non-English-speaking communities who feel unwelcome in parks and use them less than other people. This has been the thrust of some American research (based on telephone polling) that reveals that White people have a significantly higher participation rate in activities such as visiting remote parks, recreation sites, camping and hiking than people of colour.<sup>40</sup>

It was well beyond the scope and budget of this project to commission comparable research in NSW. To some extent I have had to rely on more anecdotal data, substantiated by document-based research and direct consultation. Consequently, the research has been skewed in the direction of considering the experiences and attitudes of those who *do* use parks and those who work within them. Despite the lack of hard statistical evidence, this method of inquiry provided access to a mass of data concerning, for instance, why people go to parks, what they do, what they don't do and how they think about nature and the environment.

**RANGERS' OBSERVATIONS** Obviously, a large amount of information concerning park users already exists within NPWS. Through direct observation and discussion with visitors, Service rangers and field staff have acquired considerable understanding of the relationship between ethnicity and park use. The value of this knowledge is incalculable. In endeavouring to tap into it, I convened



focus discussion group sessions. It was this method of interview that I employed both when meeting with Macedonian community groups and groups of staff within the Service. In February 2000 a round-table discussion was conducted with five South Metropolitan rangers and field staff at NPWS headquarters in Royal National Park. This conversation provided a window on the experiences of some NPWS employees. This type of inquiry made accessible a depth of thinking that is not reflected in the email cited earlier (pp. 18–19).

**IDEAL VISITORS** The staff agreed that they shared certain expectations about what visitors should be looking for in a National Park visit. They mentioned quiet, tranquillity, a preference for passive recreation over organised games. But they also recognised that these expectations were due to their own experience and preferences – often a background in bushwalking and direct involvement in conservation issues. They acknowledged that social attachment to the environment takes many forms.

#### CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND THE USE OF PARKLAND

Our discussion at Royal National Park developed into a wide-ranging consideration of race, racism and ethnicity. The observations opened up the many ways in which park users engage with NPWS estate. Different types of area are apparently favoured by particular groups of visitors. The walking tracks, for instance, were described as ‘very Anglo’; the beaches – a mix of different cultures. The ‘ethnic communities’ gravitate towards the picnic areas, I was told. Pacific Islander communities favour Kurnell, where they have been known to move concrete picnic furniture into configurations uniquely suited to their social requirements. Staff are faced with something of a problem in restoring these heavy items to their original place.

Many Asian people, it was reported, walk through the park in order to go fishing, but not many go for extended walks without a specific purpose in mind. It was further reported that the subject of

fishing opened up conflicts between various cultural groups. One ranger stated that many of the more established anglers (Greek and Anglo) resent the Asian presence. He reported how racist sentiments exist in the very taxonomy of fishing – there is a type of fish known as ‘niggers’.

Our discussion considered the deaths by drowning previously mentioned. Dangerous surf and the exposed nature of various rock fishing platforms are a particular issue in Royal National Park. There was also concern at the practices of collecting shellfish and fishing with spear guns at Kurnell, a protected tidal area where such activities are prohibited. How to communicate this message?

**COMMUNICATION** Obviously, signage is an important issue for management. It was felt that with so many language groups visiting parks it would be impossible to represent them all. A system based on pictorial symbols has been adopted. Amidst these carefully considered attempts to assist non-English speakers, there was often the impression that staff are genuinely flummoxed at the difficulties facing them. They described Chinese and Arab visitors who have brought kittens into parks; problems with vegetation being picked; and constant concern about charcoal heat beads (especially popular in barbecues used by people of Middle Eastern background) being thrown into the bush – sometimes when they are still red hot.

A further discussion with a staff from Parramatta Regional Park reiterated many of these issues and raised others. Parramatta is place of considerable ethnic diversity. Almost 35 per cent of the population were born overseas.<sup>41</sup> The urban setting and the landscaped character of the park – with a stadium for concerts and other outdoor events – makes it popular for many ethno-specific cultural events. These include the annual India Fair, which attracts up to 20 000 people; the Thai Loy Krathong Festival which attracts 10 000–15 000; and the Lebanese Independence Day Festival, which attracts 10 000. Smaller events are organised by Sri Lankan, Turkish, Romanian, Pakistani, Assyrian, Bangladeshi and other community organisations.

## CULTURAL PRACTICES AT PARRAMATTA REGIONAL PARK

The focus discussion groups with staff produced many insights into the original and imaginative ways in which the national park landscape is being used by an extraordinary variety of visitors. Once again, the conversation swung from marvel at the diversity of activities to exasperation at the challenges posed. There were accounts of *tai chi* taking place each morning; Japanese weddings; enormous children's birthday parties held by people of Asian background. It conjured images of a carnivale-type extravaganza occurring spontaneously but regularly in national parks: musical performances and dancing; religious ceremonies and rituals; the wafting aroma of umpteen cuisines being cooked on barbecues. In many ways, it seems, the multicultural landscape is alive and well.

But the problems should not be understated. Many staff felt the lack of training in cross-cultural negotiating skills. They mentioned difficulties that include, but extend beyond, the frequent lack of common language. Rangers find themselves trying to stop people gathering apparently edible weeds for the dinner table which have actually been rendered inedible by the application of toxic spray. This is one of many issues to do with food. Chinese people have been found catching protected turtles in the Parramatta River, which they were planning to take home, fatten, and eat. The notion of protecting wildlife – that elements of the environment are not ubiquitously available for consumption – is completely foreign to some people.

## ETHNIC TENSION The discussions also raised evidence of ethnic

tension. It was reported how a long-planned celebration of Lebanese Independence Day in Parramatta Regional Park was cancelled after a drive-by shooting in Lidcombe that damaged a police station. The reason cited was fear of retribution from other communities.

One park manager reported the problems she experienced when trying to convince an opinionated group of Afghan men to modify their behaviour. They had organised a large gathering in Parramatta

Regional Park that involved drums and loud music. They had brought a generator to power their amplifiers but did not want the sound of it disturbing their picnic. So they placed it outside the park, where it disturbed neighbours and created a hazard because the power cable ran across a busy road. The manager found the task especially difficult because the Afghan men refused to acknowledge that a woman could be in a position of authority. Staff in other situations that have required them to ask people to modify their conduct reported the confronting experience of being dismissed as racists by the people concerned.

## SOCIAL ATTACHMENT TO LANDSCAPE

## THE CASE SO FAR Part 1 of this report has opened a set of

inter-related issues. I have argued that ethnicity, being a key factor in determining people's world views, is, inevitably, highly formative in shaping attitudes to the environment. I have briefly considered the ethnic diversity of contemporary Australia – a diversity that is apparently reflected in the wide range of people who use national parks. At one level, this usage represents a bold statement of the plurality of public culture in Australia. In addition, it provides a 'mirror' on NPWS, prompting reflection on the history and constitution of the organisation, of national parks more generally, and of their early role in fostering nationalism in former colonial societies. This nationalism has historically favoured racial homogeneity. We now live in an epoch when any semblance of homogeneity has disappeared, prompting re-definition of the 'imagined community' of the Australian nation.

I have suggested that multiculturalism poses challenges to government and its agencies at a variety of levels. Influenced by Ghassan Hage, I raised the question of whether the doctrine of multiculturalism is about embracing or managing cultural diversity.

**ETHNO-CULTURAL SPECIFICITY** In discussing the value of *ethnicity* as a social construct, I have argued for its importance on the grounds that many White people, so often the power brokers in a range of institutional and social contexts in Australia, are frequently incapable of discerning their own ethno-cultural specificity. My deliberate use of the term *White people* is also influenced by Hage, who argues that officially preferred terms like:

‘Anglo’ and ‘Anglo-Celtic’ are far from being a dominant mode of self-categorisation by White people whether at a conscious or unconscious level. I will argue that ‘White’ is a far more dominant mode of self-perception, although largely an unconscious one. Furthermore, the category ‘Anglo’ could not account for the many non-Anglos who relate to, and define themselves through, the ‘White nation’ fantasy.<sup>42</sup>

By acknowledging the ethnic specificity of the world-view that has given rise to national parks in NSW, it becomes possible to recognise and critically evaluate cultural patterns that might otherwise seem self-evident.

**WILDERNESS VALUES** As an example, we might consider the veneration of *wilderness* that is common to many conservationists and NPWS staff. ‘Wilderness’ is probably the most highly esteemed category of land in the national park system. For many Aboriginal people this is of course highly problematic. Far from seeing ‘wilderness’ as country eternally devoid of human influence and corruption, they see a terrain in which the custodians themselves have been expunged.

Marcia Langton has identified the veneration of wilderness as an extension of the doctrine *terra nullius*, the now discredited conceit that the indigenous occupants of Australia had no legal tenure to the land on which they lived.<sup>43</sup> As Langton describes it: ‘Where Aboriginal people had been brought to the brink of annihilation, their former territories were recast as “wilderness.”’<sup>44</sup>

**A LANDSCAPE INSCRIBED** My own experiences of travel with Aboriginal people convince me of the high value attached to all sorts of marks and inscriptions within the landscape, whether they be the remains of a fringe camp, an animal’s footprints, art and ceremonial sites, the evidence of a creation ancestor’s journey. Indications that other people have inhabited or engaged with the landscape are not evidence of its corruption. Rather, they provide points of contact through which one’s own relationship to country can be more thoroughly explored.



Hwang San, China, 1980s. The text reads: ‘The scenery, just like a picture.’  
Photo Tanya Kwong.

**CHINESE PERCEPTIONS** Although the culture and context is, of course, radically different, it was interesting to discover certain resonances between this model of attachment to country and that described by some Chinese–Australian interviewees whom I met in April 2000. Tania Kwong is 45 years old and arrived in Australia from Hong Kong in 1987. Prior to emigrating, Tania and her husband, Chi Young Kwong, had been part of a group known as *hansang*, a kind of hiking club. During vacations they would visit mainland China and climb some of the great mountains. These journeys typically took at least a few days. Tracks and steps are carved into the mountains. Frequently there are monasteries where people can stay.

They showed me photographs where beautiful calligraphy was carved into the rock face. These were proverbs or poems paying homage to the mountain. One translated as ‘The scenery, just like a picture’. Culture and nature were inextricably fused in these experiences, each contributing to the appeal of the other.<sup>45</sup>

MARKING PARK LANDSCAPES IN AUSTRALIA With the significant exception of (usually pre-contact) Aboriginal sites, poetry and works of art are generally not to be found in Australian national park landscapes. This is evidence of the extent to which non-indigenous Australians are part of a culture that is still attempting to situate itself in this environment. We are cautious of the landscape being an expressive space; still captivated by narratives of discovery. Consequently, the ways in which we do inscribe the landscape follow rigid conventions, as a research team from the University of Western Sydney (UWS) observed in a study of the Minnamurra Rainforest walking track system in Budderoo National Park, south of Wollongong.

The UWS researchers, who have offered valuable insights to this project and opened future possibilities for collaboration with NPWS, are similarly interested in ethnicity and landscape. They have used the Minnamurra Rainforest as a case study, arguing that the failure of interpretive infrastructure within the park to communicate to non-English-speakers is part of a broader pattern in which particular forms of knowledge are privileged and others excluded. Commenting on the many educational plaques located along the Minnamurra walkway, the team argued that:

The referent in all these signs is what can be labelled, for convenience sake, the ‘natural sciences’. It locks each plant or animal into a singular description, or name, as though no other possibilities exist. In national parks, natural science is the dominant language and because of the authority that science carries culturally, the pervasiveness of the natural sciences does several things simultaneously: it communicates an assumption that this knowledge

is universal, authoritative, and seemingly, outside the realm of contestation; it assumes that the knowledge is organically bound to the object being viewed (there are but two names for all objects and the botanical, written magisterially in Latin, is positioned as the most significant) and that knowledge is organically bound to the landscape being experienced, and by implication, this binding of knowledge to specific objects or landscapes excludes, or marginalises, other types of knowing.<sup>46</sup>

A MATTER OF RECOGNITION To explicitly recognise and acknowledge the value of other ways of knowing the landscape is the predominant challenge presented by this project. It is a challenge that is by no means unique to NPWS. Rather, it is woven into the social fabric of Australia. In recent years a body of scholarship has emerged which considers the phenomenon of diaspora.<sup>47</sup> The large-scale movement of peoples across the globe, the voluntary and involuntary relocations, can be seen as perhaps the most distinctive trait of the modern era. As Peter Read puts it so evocatively, ‘Most countries in the world are lands of forced exile to somebody now living in Australia.’<sup>48</sup>

Read is the author of *Returning to Nothing* (1996), a study of the values people ascribe to lost places. He shows how the intimation of uprootedness is utterly fundamental to contemporary Australia, manifest not only in the experiences of refugees, but of Aborigines displaced from their country, communities forced away by development, people who have suffered fires and cyclones, those cast aside when the motorway comes through.

COMMUNITY VALUES Working from in-depth interviews with people who have suffered such experiences of loss, Read presents a method of inquiry and exposition exemplary to this project. In many ways his book is a lament at the inability of government to acknowledge that community values are in fact things *of value*. In an argument of great bearing to NPWS, Read compares the

romanticism with which our predominantly urban culture has celebrated bush and wilderness with its concurrent discounting of the integrity of inhabited environments.

The elevation of the undifferentiated and unlocalised bush to iconography made it correspondingly harder to save from destruction the local, the familiar, the specific, the lived-in, the un-unique and the un-universal – especially the suburb, the street, the private house and the country town. Compared to the rich and complex aesthetic of wild country bequeathed to us by nineteenth-century Romanticism, Australians have no adequate discourse to conceive, describe and hence defend our apparently ordinary homes and suburbs.<sup>49</sup>

Historically, NPWS has often been insensitive to values derived from human association with estates within its care. Only in recent years were reforms implemented that saw the protection (rather than the active demolition) of huts and dwellings in locations such as Royal and Mount Kosciuszko National Parks. But clearly, it has further to go, especially in the recognition of important sites where material evidence of human association is slight. Much of the following section, where the values and meanings of the family gatherings and picnics of Macedonian Sydneysiders are described, seeks specifically to engage with the quotidian yet socially significant uses that are made of national parks.

## part 2

### A CASE STUDY

#### MACEDONIANS IN ROYAL NATIONAL PARK

Holiday in Pelister, Macedonia, undated.  
From the album of Vladimir Ivanovski and Kalina Ivanoska.



## INTRODUCTION

**A CHRISTMAS DAY VISIT** The fieldwork for this project started on Christmas Day, 1999. Having been informed by Royal National Park staff of the longstanding tradition where Macedonian people attend an annual mass gathering in the Audley picnic area, I visited the park with camera and tape recorder. On arriving, the staff explained that with the weather overcast, attendance was down on previous Christmases. Ranger Jennifer Bean related that two years earlier the weather had been perfect and it was ‘bedlam’. Even on this reduced scale, Christmas at Audley presented quite a scene. Car culture is evidently strong among the younger men, and by 11 a.m. a vehicle had been impounded by police after some scary exhibitionism on the road. A police vehicle was assigned to the park for the day, and a large contingent of rangers was on patrol.



Christmas Day at Audley, Royal National Park, 1999.  
Photo Martin Thomas.

**DIVERSITY AT AUDLEY** The pavilion at Audley was packed with people, many of whom were Macedonian. I met Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Indian people, to name some of the nationalities. The barbecues were in demand, and the aroma of kebabs, marinated pork and seafood wafted through the space. Among Macedonians, the pavilion seemed the gathering place for parents, grandparents and very young children. Teenagers and young adults congregated around cars on the other side of the river. Apart from the occasional hotted up car doing wheelies, the atmosphere seemed relaxed. But for some of the rangers it was still a tense day. Problems, mainly to do with driving or drinking, had emerged in the past. In some years traffic congestion had reached the point where vehicles had to be turned away at the gate. Efforts to encourage visitors to share cars or mini-buses had been made by contacting community language media. But this seemed to have been ineffectual. The officer in charge told me how it was:

very difficult to talk or negotiate with the community because we've contacted all sorts of ethnic newspapers and radio stations and nobody can give us one key person to talk to. There appear to be a number of isolated groups.<sup>50</sup>

The officer's expectation that Macedonians *would* be a homogenous community is revealing – a judgment that he would probably be unlikely to make of his own 'community'. But amidst such attitudes, some valuable, pro-active initiatives had been taken to make the Christmas festivity a smoother occasion. Most importantly, a Macedonian interpreter had been hired for the day. She was there to assist should any altercation develop. Certainly, none occurred while I was there. Much of the time she spent talking to people she knew in the crowd. And she introduced me to several long-term Christmas visitors.





Vera Dimitrievski (left) and Draga Nacovski at Royal National Park, Christmas, 1999. *Photo* Martin Thomas.

**VERA AND DRAGA REMINISCE** There is some conjecture about when the Audley Christmas gathering started. Ranger Bill Sullivan suggested it was in the mid-1970s. Vera Dimitrievski and Draga Nacovski, whom I interviewed during their lunchtime barbecue, suggested it was earlier, though neither could give an exact starting point. They are both in their mid-forties and have spent most Christmas Days at Audley for the last 30 years. They gave some important insights into the social significance of the occasion.

An important point to note when considering this festivity is that Macedonians are almost invariably Orthodox Christians. They honour Christmas on January 7 – a strictly present-less day, typically celebrated with a lunch at home. December 25, as it has developed in Australia, is more holiday than holy day; a chance to catch up with kith and kin in a bush and barbecue context. Much Macedonian fare, which includes pork, sausage, and cooked capsicum (preferably home-grown) is well suited to the barbecue. I was told it is a Macedonian as well as an Australian tradition.

**KINSHIP** Vera and Draga have a sisterly relationship. Today, two of their children are married to each other, but their own friendship well pre-dates that connection. Originating from Macedonian villages about 20 kilometres apart, they arrived in Australia while still in their teens. They have known each other since that time and remember their teenage Christmases at Audley with considerable nostalgia. Like many Macedonian immigrants, their families had settled in the southern suburbs of Sydney. But at Audley they would meet other youngsters, some from their own villages, who were living in more distant places, including Wollongong and Newcastle. Draga emphasised the great joy of encountering her own people.

To come from such a faraway country to meet again, that was a big thing, a really big thing. Like in this beautiful country, you'd see these people you hadn't seen for five or six years. It was like a reunion. That's it: it's a reunion every Christmas.<sup>51</sup>



Macedonian Christmas picnic in Royal National Park, 1999. *Photo* Martin Thomas.

**RELAXATION OF FAMILY PRESSURE** For young immigrants of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Audley gathering was an occasion for social contact and release. Girls, especially, were at most other times tightly chaperoned and controlled. 'Because it was so



strict, anything like this was like a treat to us,' Draga explained. They described the anticipation that awaited the arrival of Christmas: the months of planning and the decisions about what to wear. The carnival atmosphere of the season allowed some relaxation of the normally rigid codes. It was one of the few occasions when young people of the opposite sex could mix socially. Everyone I've consulted knows wives and husbands who first met at the Audley gathering, often on or around the bridge. Judging by the outfits and general sense of personal display around the cars on the other side of the river, the tradition is alive and well.

**BEING MACEDONIAN IN AUSTRALIA** The spirit of community reunion, the chance to hear one's language and encounter one's own people *en masse*, can be contrasted with day-to-day experiences when, as recent migrants, people so often felt their minority status. That is not so acute today, but the legacy of the Audley tradition continues. It has had a profound impact on Vera and Draga's perception of themselves as Macedonian-Australians. Having lived here most of their lives, they are comfortable speaking English. It's the language in which they think and dream. Vera considers that she is very Westernised.

It's like we live two lives. We're not really that different here, are we? Like we don't do anything different to the Australians? But we have the Macedonian side of it as well.

The Christmas gatherings are not the limit of their interest in the park, though clearly they highly important. Both Vera and Draga visit Royal National Park at other times of year, especially when they have overseas visitors. The picnics assisted in developing their fondness for the Australian bush – an affection that is strongly felt. Vera described her response to news of the 1994 bushfires at Royal that severely damaged the park: 'We were devastated, absolutely devastated. We didn't think we'd come again actually.'

**THE CASE STUDY EMERGES** This visit fuelled my conviction that the Macedonian gathering at Royal National Park would form a fitting case study for this project. In working from this decision, I am not asserting that the Macedonian experience is in any way emblematic of other communities, nor even that the conclusions drawn are representative of Australian – Macedonians as 'a community'. As Part 1 has established, I am deeply suspicious of such categorisations, a suspicion that impelled me to pay particular attention to differences *within* communities, especially as they are played out among generational groups.



Macedonian Christmas picnic in Royal National Park, 1999.  
Photo Martin Thomas.

Rather, the Macedonian use of Royal National Park was chosen because it seemed reasonably approachable as a research subject. It seemed fair to assume that a considerable number of narratives and memories would have developed over its 30-plus-year history, and that a certain amount of documentary and photographic evidence would have accrued. In addition, I had received advice from Rosa Droescher, Senior Project Officer at the Ethnic Affairs Commission, that for a government agency embarking for the first time on this kind of cross-cultural research, it is usually more effective to start with an 'established' community where there are

likely to be organisations and infrastructure that can help mediate the process. This seemed important given our unfamiliarity with consultation of this kind. While the community knowledge imparted pertains to a particular circle of Macedonian–Australians, the method of approach and research offers insights and certain possibilities for future development of this project.

## METHODOLOGY

**NEW DIRECTIONS** This research constitutes a departure from previous inquiries into ethnicity and parks usage. Bibliographic searches revealed an overall paucity of literature on the subject. One strand of research, emanating from the USA, is being pursued by scholars in leisure studies and environmental management. It is primarily concerned with demographics, investigating questions that I briefly raised in Part 1 about whether ‘people of colour’ are using remote parks and wilderness areas less frequently than other Americans.

**BEYOND STATISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS** As previously stated, it was beyond the scope and interest of this inquiry to seek statistical data of this nature. Developed in a research environment that is actively seeking methodologies that can access qualitative data about the social significance of cultural landscapes, this project is underpinned by the axiom that statistical and demographic analysis can provide only limited insights on the lived connections between people and the places they occupy or visit.

A survey of government agencies in NSW and elsewhere revealed that ethnicity is emerging as a research subject among those concerned with environmental management. For instance, the Environmental Protection Agency and Sydney Water collaborated to produce a report titled *The Environment and NSW Ethnic Communities* (1997),<sup>52</sup> a survey of community attitudes to issues such

as waste management, recycling, use of resources. More recently, Parks Victoria commissioned a *Report on Ethnicity and Parks Usage Project* (1999),<sup>53</sup> which sought data on attitudes to park visits among various non-English-speaking linguistic groups in the Melbourne metropolitan area. The survey was based on focus group discussions and did raise issues concerning attitudes to nature and the particular park activities favoured by discussants. However, the lines of questioning and reporting were again primarily statistical and made little allowance for the diversity or subtlety of migration heritage.

## PERCEPTION OF PLACE A GROWING RESEARCH FIELD

This dearth of qualitative research on ethnicity and social attachment to national parks can be compared to the burgeoning literature concerning memory and the culture of place that has emerged in recent years. Some catching up is required if understandings of parks as social and cultural spaces are to be contemporary. This seems especially pressing in Australia, where events like the Mabo and Wik judgments have forced re-thinking about the very concept of land ownership, challenging the notion that proprietorial rights are exclusive to a single lease or title holder. Instead, a mode of occupancy can be envisaged in which various individuals or groups have interests, rights, and cultural-historical claims to a common piece of ground.

Inevitably, such a shift – signalling a move from a monocultural to a multicultural notion of ownership – forces a dramatic broadening of the types of knowledge we recognise and honour when evaluating a landscape and its traditions. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), predominantly a science-driven organisation, has historically privileged scientific (and sometimes pseudo-scientific) ways of knowing. This has influenced even those legislative responsibilities that fall clearly within the domain of the humanities or ‘social sciences’, such as heritage interpretation and management. Hence a culture, now disputed, where archaeological data concerning Aboriginal occupation was privileged over the ‘softer’ disciplines of

history, ethnography, and – most disturbingly – over the opinions and experiences of Aboriginal people themselves.<sup>54</sup>

#### THE INTERFACE BETWEEN PEOPLE AND LANDSCAPES

This study, emerging from, and contributing to, a research culture that aims to question this paradigm, consequently draws from those ‘softer’ forms of knowledge. In that respect it endeavours to connect with and develop methodologies suggested by such impressive studies as Delores Hayden’s *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (1997). Contemplating the diverse ways in which ‘social history is embedded in urban landscapes’, Hayden remarks on the propensity of places to:

make memories cohere in complex ways. People’s experiences of the urban landscape intertwine the sense of place and the politics of space. If people’s attachments to places are material, social, and imaginative, then these are necessary dimensions of new projects to extend public history in the urban landscape.<sup>55</sup>

Hayden would no doubt agree that the need for such knowledge in rural and park landscapes is equally important. We need some concept of the communal experiences that contribute to the ‘sense of place’ if the landscapes we care for are to be managed in a manner that is sensitive to these attachments. Yet how does a government agency acquire such knowledge?

#### MIGRATION HERITAGE CENTRE PROVIDES A PRECEDENT

The approach developed in this report – obviously nascent and experimental – was informed in the first instance by pioneering work initiated by the NSW Migration Heritage Centre and project-managed by the NSW Heritage Office. The research and methodology is detailed in *Rich Rewards: Cultural Diversity and Heritage Practice: Report on Stage 1* by Kate Rea, the consulting historian who conducted the project. Its aim was ‘to develop a heritage identification model for use with ethnic communities’.<sup>56</sup>

The *Rich Rewards* project acknowledged that the typical processes for identifying and classifying sites and structures of ‘heritage significance’ – the things usually included in a list like the State Heritage Register – make little allowance for the cultural diversity of contemporary Australia. The great bulk of heritage sites listed for protection connect with familiar narratives from White Australian history. The consequent absences are considerable. As Rea describes the present challenge, we need culturally diverse heritage practices which:

recognise that all communities have places, items and sites of value. Adopting inclusive heritage practices that reflect the cultural diversity of the State will ensure the contributions and experiences of migrant communities are recognised and celebrated as part of its collective history. For migrants, heritage, whether it is a place, building or object, articulates a sense of association with place and belonging in the community. It marks a set of experiences and tells the story of Australian citizenship. Inclusive approaches to heritage identification add to our understanding of place and community, creating layers of meaning and association that truly reflect the complexity of our society.<sup>57</sup>

Working with communities in Albury-Wodonga, Broken Hill and Orange, Rea developed a workshop model that allowed the identification of heritage items that had previously been officially unrecognised. In addition, the project sometimes added further layers of significance to previously recognised locations. An example of this was the Albury Railway Station (already listed as a site of state significance for its architectural merits), which symbolised arrival and the opening of a new life for many recent migrants in the area.<sup>58</sup>

PHOTOGRAPHS TRIGGER MEMORIES Rea adapted her approach from a method of community consultation developed by Meredith Walker in the early 1990s. Briefly summarised, the method involves identifying what ethnic communities are represented in a town and

inviting representatives to a one-day workshop where the participants are divided into pairs and supplied with film or disposable cameras. During the morning they go about the area and photograph sites significant to their community's heritage. The films are processed during a lunch break, and the afternoon sessions are structured around the discussion of photographs.

**METHODOLOGICAL ADAPTATIONS** While Rea's model provided a template for this project, providing a workshop model in which photographs provided stimulus for discussion, certain adaptations were necessary. Where the Migration Heritage Centre research was directed at the *identification* of significant sites, this was not in question in the case of Macedonian use of Audley. Rather, the established attachment to the site, its ongoing significance on the community calendar, suggested the adaptation of social mapping techniques developed by Denis Byrne in collaboration with the Aboriginal communities at Foster and Purfleet on the NSW North Coast. This project involves mapping the attachments that individual community members have to places in the landscape, based on their own experience and on knowledge handed down from time immemorial. It is specifically concerned with documenting the *aggregation* of experiences that contribute to the social memory of a particular landscape.

The data yielded by the North Coast social mapping project owes much of its quality to the practice, where possible, of recording oral testimony at the locations that form the subject of the inquiry. Being in the place is a mnemonic trigger, and something of its mood is reflected in the informants' recollections. I also used this technique with some success last year in interviews with Roy Barker for the Trail of Jimmie Barker Research Project.<sup>59</sup> While I considered organising a Macedonian focus group discussion on site at Audley, this proved impractical for various reasons. As the following account will make clear, flexibility is essential in negotiating this kind of community-based research.

**ETHNO-SPECIFIC WORKSHOPS** Our focus groups differed from Rea's in another significant way. Where the Migration Heritage Centre research involved participants from various communities in a single workshop, ours were ethno-specific. This decision, also, emerged from community consultations. It was established that the English skills of the older Macedonians were poor and that a translator would be essential. Given this situation, it seemed more fruitful to work within one community and attempt to probe attitudes at quite a deep level.

## APPROACHING THE COMMUNITY

**ESTABLISHED PROCEDURE** In NSW certain conventions have become established when a government agency seeks to approach a particular ethnic community. I received advice from the Ethnic Affairs Commission that the first port of call in approaching a particular community is to ring the Ethnic Communities Council (ECC) and ask for a contact with the 'peak' community organisation.

**ESTABLISHED PROCEDURE NOT ALWAYS APPROPRIATE** While this might work well with some communities (probably the most established), the ECC was unable to nominate 'peak' organisations for either of the communities I inquired about: Macedonian and Vietnamese. It is probably unrealistic to assume that community organisations in NSW will be assembled in a formation with a 'peak' body at the top. Many ethnic groups experience internal conflict, and it would be disingenuous to suggest that there are not conflicts between ethnic organisations.

Researchers should also be aware that the ECC is not viewed favourably by all community groups, as I discovered in negotiations with a Macedonian community worker. Macedonia and Greece have a long history of conflict. Because the ECC strongly represents Greek community organisations, a statement in my project brief that the

ECC was being informed about the research roused instant suspicions. It put me in the awkward position of having to dampen the suspicion that I was aligned with Greek interests.

A MATTER OF TACT While certain protocols must be honoured, the success of cross-cultural research of this nature probably depends on a combination of tact, tenacity and serendipity. Personal contacts, where they exist, are most valuable. The previously mentioned small focus group discussion with Chinese people eventuated from my own discussions with Chimin Chan, who works on a casual basis at NPWS, where she provides assistance on GIS projects. This fruitful session, which could open the way for further research with Chinese communities, was organised with a minimum of fuss.

In contrast, attempts to organise a focus group discussion with members of the United India Association were a failure. The fact that the Association has used Parramatta Regional Park for its annual India Fair, and that differences had emerged between organisers and NPWS personnel, could have provided an important case study that would enhance understanding of the dispute and perhaps overcome ill feelings. Whether I was hampered by lingering distrust as a result of the dispute is difficult to determine. I was certainly given a warm audience by Dr B. K. S. Chugh, the Chairman of the United India Association, who initially offered to allow us to conduct a focus group at one of the Association's regular meetings. After much delay, I was advised that the Association could not help in this regard but that members would respond to an email questionnaire, which Dr Chugh would distribute. I sent him a questionnaire, as suggested, but received no responses.

#### THE MACEDONIAN AUSTRALIAN WELFARE ORGANISATION

Contact with the St George Migrant Resource Centre in Rockdale proved a conduit to the Macedonian Australian Welfare Association. This community group is listed in the *Ethnic Communities Reference Book*, published by the ECC.<sup>60</sup> Gorjana Milosevski was at the time the Community Settlement Services Worker. She expressed great enthusiasm for the project and offered to assist its facilitation by organising a focus group discussion drawn from members of her women's pensioners group and their husbands.

Gorjana's assistance was utterly invaluable. She was convinced of the value of her community's experiences and supported any efforts to document them. In that respect the project offered informants the prospect of assuming a position of advocacy. Gorjana recruited the discussants, organised a venue for the workshop at St George Migrant Resource Centre, and recommended an interpreter, Toni Najdov. On Gorjana's advice, it was decided not to attempt holding the event at Audley because it would discourage the majority of participants, most of whom are grandparents and have childcare responsibilities after school.

A recognition and understanding of community groups such as the Macedonian Australian Welfare Organisation is essential if NPWS education and information programs are to reach non-English-speaking people. Already, numerous government departments and agencies, particularly those concerned with health and welfare, use them to convey information. Many of these community organisations arrange regular recreational activities, including bus trips to places of interest. The existence of this sort of infrastructure could open great opportunities for NPWS in running guiding and education programs in community languages.

#### PARTICIPANTS TO BRING PHOTOGRAPHS

The fact that our workshop was occurring in Rockdale eliminated the possibility of asking participants to take photographs of sites of significance.



Possibly, this would not have been highly effectual anyway, since we already knew the principal site for the Christmas picnics. Instead, participants were requested to bring personal photographs that could stimulate discussion. They were asked to bring photographs of the Macedonian landscape and some of Australia. Many participants brought numerous photographs, too many to be discussed or even described in a one-day workshop. But they generously allowed us to borrow the photographs for a short time. They were scanned at NPWS office and then returned.



Gathering at Bistrica, Macedonia, 1959. From the album of Donka Talevska.

As can be seen from the reproductions throughout the book, these photographs are significant primary documents that provide valuable insights on how people relate to the landscape. We were granted permission to use them in this publication, and also to publish them on NPWS web site. This is a way of disseminating the research and encouraging other communities to contact the Service and inform it about their own associations with national parks.

**YOUNGER PEOPLE CONSULTED** Once the focus group workshop with the pensioners' group had occurred, it was decided to seek the opinions of some younger Macedonian people in order to broaden the perspective. To this end, Toni Najdov, who translated for the pensioners, agreed to meet on a week night with some of his friends. The process was thus truncated into an evening rather than a whole day, but this was necessitated by the work commitments of the participants. The discussion was nonetheless highly revealing, and considerably broadened the scope of the research.

## **MACEDONIAN MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA**

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND** Given that Macedonian history is not widely understood in Australia, a brief introduction to the country seems appropriate. The geographical area of Macedonia is located in the Balkans between the Shar Mountains in the north, the lower Mesta River and the Rhodope Mountains in the east, and the Albania highlands in the west. It is a mountainous and scenically beautiful country that produces cereals, tobacco, opium poppies and wool.

Macedonia's geographical position is strategically significant. It controls the main north–south route from central Europe to the Salonika and the Aegean down the Moravia and Vardar Valleys. Such centrality greatly contributed to Macedonia's power in the fourth century BC when, under the leadership of Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great, it was the most powerful state in the ancient world. Its strategic location, however, made it a valued prize for neighbouring powers. Macedonia has been occupied and divided for much of its history, dominated at various times by the Roman, Byzantine, Serbian, Bulgarian and Ottoman empires. Its present status is a direct legacy of the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, when Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria formed alliances to liberate Macedonia from

Turkish rule. The country was carved up by the victors, with most of the northern, or Vardar, part of Macedonia going to Serbia and the southern part to Greece.

This basic division remained in place with the post-First World War peace settlement. Vardar Macedonia entered the Yugoslav federation in 1944 while the southern part, known as Aegean Macedonia, stayed with Greece.<sup>61</sup> With the breakup of Yugoslavia, Vardar Macedonia became an independent republic in 1991. Differences between Greece and the northern, now independent state, continue. Greece waged an intense international campaign against the use of the name Macedonia when the former Yugoslav state acquired independence.

**MACEDONIANS IN NSW** To address a question as apparently simple as the number of Macedonians in NSW, this history must be kept in mind. Australian residents who identify as Macedonian and speak the language could have been born in Aegean Macedonia (the Greek state) or the former Yugoslav republic. Census figures become problematic because people who are ethnically Macedonian, but born in the south, can be counted as ‘Greek’ in the population figures.<sup>62</sup> The situation is further complicated by the Australian Federal Government’s decision (influenced by Greek community lobbying) to put the acronym ‘FYROM’ (from Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) instead of ‘Macedonia’ as country of origin on the census form. The term FYROM is not used in the former Yugoslav republic and is widely resented as a foreign imposition. These limitations must be kept in mind in interpreting the population figures cited below.

**EARLY MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA** Oral tradition relates that Macedonian emigration to Australia started in the late nineteenth century when a group of itinerant workers heard about the discovery of gold on the ‘fifth continent’ and made their way to places like Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill. Being a rurally based and often



Saying goodbye at Bitola Railway Station in Macedonia, 1964.  
From the album of Zora Kotevska.

impoverished economy, Macedonia has a well-established custom known as *pecalba*, which means working away from home. *Pecalbari* would travel abroad for a period in order to raise money that could be invested at home in the form of a new house, an extension to a building, or a new plot of land. Some *pecalbari* did reach Australia prior to the Second World War despite restrictive immigration policies. In *The Macedonians in Australia* Peter Hill relates that pre-Second World War immigration occurred in two waves: the first, in 1924, when the USA imposed heavy immigration restrictions and the second, after 1936, when the fascist regime of Ioannis Metaxas in Greece forced an exodus of many Aegean Macedonians. Some did return to their homeland as originally intended, but others settled permanently in Australia.<sup>63</sup>

**POST-SECOND WORLD WAR** After the Second World War, Macedonians moved to Australia in increasing numbers. The majority arrived post-1960, moving to the suburbs of Fitzroy in Melbourne and Rockdale in Sydney. Much of the emigration is attributed to a disastrous earthquake in Skopje in 1963. The flow of immigrants waned in the 1970s but resumed in the 1990s with



the breakup of Yugoslavia. The 1990s wave of immigrants was obliged to pass the rigid immigration tests that are still current in Australia. They are predominantly educated, professional people and thus very different from the earlier post-War migrants, who came from peasant and working-class backgrounds. As we shall see, both categories of migrant were represented in our focus group discussions.



Boris, Dosta and family, 1963. From the album of Cveta Grbevaska.

**SOCIAL SNAPSHOT** Demographic information about people born in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia can be found in the 1999 *Atlas of the Australian People*. This is based on the most recent census of 1996 and, as previously mentioned, is subject to limitations (Aegean Macedonians not being included in these figures). Even so, the *Atlas* does give a social ‘snap shot’ of a large sector of the community. I will quote from it at length.

The *Atlas of the Australian People* states that 18 573 people in NSW were born in the former Yugoslav republic.<sup>64</sup> Of these, 6.9 per cent arrived in the period 1991–1996 and 13.9 per cent arrived in the period 1981–90. Like other groups from the Balkans, males outnumber females quite considerably (109.3 males to 100 females). It is an aging population that is not highly qualified educationally.

The proportion of degrees or diplomas is lower than that among Australian-born people. A high proportion (29.3 per cent) report difficulty speaking English. Almost all (94 per cent) speak Macedonian at home. They are religiously devout, with a large majority belonging to the Macedonian Orthodox Church (75.5 per cent) and a further 13.6 per cent belonging to other Orthodox congregations.

Australian Macedonians seem to value home ownership. 88.6 per cent own their dwellings (compared to 71.7 per cent of the Australian-born population). 64.1 per cent of NSW Macedonians live in Sydney. The largest concentration is in the St George–Sutherland area (population 5569). There are minor concentrations in Canterbury–Bankstown (2203) and Fairfield–Liverpool (population 1842). A concentration of 4791 people reside in Wollongong, with smaller groups in Newcastle and Queanbeyan. Several informants pointed out that the proximity of Royal National Park to both Wollongong, and the southern suburbs of Sydney was central in its emergence as a site for ritual gatherings like that on Christmas Day.

## MACEDONIAN USE OF SYDNEY PARKLAND: A DISCUSSION WITH PAUL STEPHEN

Important information concerning Macedonian use of Sydney parkland was provided by Paul Stephen (formerly Paul Stephanopolis), with whom I recorded an oral history interview in May 2000.<sup>65</sup> Having arrived in Australia from Aegean Macedonia in 1948, aged 12, Paul could provide insights on the history of park use by the Macedonian community that pre-dates the memories of the older Macedonian focus group, most of whom arrived in the 1960s.

**MALE POPULATION** As I mentioned briefly in Part 1, Paul is convinced that the lack of women among the *pecalbari* was instrumental in the evolution of the picnic tradition. Dances seemed inappropriate without mixed company, so alternative forms of

gathering were required. Paul Stephen's family lived in the Sydney suburb of Petersham but they often met with Macedonians in Mona Vale who had businesses growing tomatoes in glasshouses.

The first picnic Paul recalls was at a football park in Mona Vale in 1949. Most of the participants were men and they engaged in various picnic games like sack races, egg and spoon races and wrestling. There was also Macedonian singing – a practice that continued at many outdoor gatherings.

The event was extremely popular and the community quickly turned to other venues. Paul remembers picnics at Nielsen Park on Sydney Harbour, Ashton Park at Mosman, and elsewhere. Royal National Park, which they first visited in 1951 or 1952, was thus numbered among a series of locations in the broader metropolitan area that were suitable for convivial gatherings.

Paul emphasised that Christmas Day (25 December) was only one of the occasions when people would picnic. One of the early gatherings at Royal celebrated the traditional festival of Illinden (2 August) when 200–300 people attended. In these early post-Second World War years, the majority of Macedonians in Australia were, like the Stephen family, from Aegean Macedonia in the south. Emigration from Yugoslavia was not yet in full swing. We can thus get some picture of how the small community of Aegean–Macedonians developed a social practice that later immigrants would join in increasing numbers. Paul emphasised the lack of difference between Aegean Macedonians and those from the north: 'We were all Macedonians and still are.'

OUTDOOR FESTIVITIES IN MACEDONIA There were precedents for gatherings of this nature. 'Our people could relate to sitting on the ground eating their food,' Paul explained. He recalled similar events from his early childhood, though it was less usual to eat a full meal outside. More commonly they would take *meze* (light nibbles) into the fields, having eaten their main meal

at home. The adaptation was necessary, he explained, because in Australia 'our homes were far away from the fields here so we carried our food to the picnic grounds.'

At home such a festivity was called a *sredzelo*. They were annual village gatherings that occurred in nearby fields, the venue shifting from year to year. A *sredzelo* started in the afternoon and involved a big bonfire. It could be celebrated on Easter Sunday or on particular saints' days. Everyone knew it was happening and everyone attended. There was nothing resembling a barbecue. Meat was eaten infrequently, and as Paul pointed out, his early experience was one of wartime austerity. He acknowledges that food may have been more abundant in earlier times.



Friends gather with musical instruments, Pelister, Macedonia, 1957.  
From the album of Donka Talevska.

I asked Paul if May Day was one of the occasions for a *sredzelo*. I had met other Macedonians who described this as a precedent for Australian outdoor gatherings. He explained that while this was true in the communist Yugoslav republic, it would have been inconceivable in the south that they celebrate a day with socialist associations.

**REMEMBERED LANDSCAPES** The contrasts and connections between landscapes were an important theme of our interview. Paul spoke extensively about his memories of the Macedonian countryside and his experiences of the Australian environment. Although he declares an extremely strong affection for the Australian bush – a love he recalls as instantaneous upon arrival – there are ways in which Australia cannot compare with the land where he spent his first twelve years. Of Macedonia he says:

The environment, the flowers, everything in spring there seems to have an aroma. I have a lot of Australian natives that do have a bit of an aroma, you know, and perhaps I'm a bit biased... I used to roam, I was very fortunate. I have an uncle who used to take me around to the fields so I had access to all my fields whether spring, autumn or winter... You can rub grass there and it has a different – an earthly smell. I rub grass here, it smells nothing, unfortunately. It's not Australia's fault. I think we are in a topography where all the goodness is washed out.

**MOUNTAINS AND FOREST** He describes Macedonians as a mountain people. The ocean is not their natural context. Hence their fondness, if they do well, for buying properties at Jindabyne, the Snowies and (its name perhaps adding to its attraction) Mount Macedon. The fullness of aroma that he remembers from his childhood can be compared to the depth of history that was discernible in that landscape. He related oral traditions of how the pine forests in the Macedonian mountains were planted by the Romans. He described age-old traditions where areas of the forest were assigned to particular land holders in the village who had exclusive rights to cut timber at that particular place. In evocative terms he told me about the rituals and cycles of life in his village – the value ascribed to manure, for example, and the way human faeces were broken up when frozen in winter and dug into the soil.

**BECOMING URBAN DWELLERS** So what was the effect of the move to Australia on rural Macedonians? Paul warned that one should not overlook the shocking effect of arriving in an environment where immigrants lacking English and professional skills went straight to the factories.

Emotionally, it's affected their family life and everything else. It's something synthetic. To replace the lifestyle they were used to they became very materialistic. They bought houses. In their peasantry way they thought this is going to give me the comfort in their old age.

They worked the long hours they had done in the villages, but without the annual rest enforced by winter. Paul has witnessed much physical and mental damage caused by this. He has seen in his own life and in the lives of those around him how socially taxing the stress of transition was. He is now ashamed at his strictness with his children, the way he tried to shield his daughters from Australian society. While much of what follows draws on the positive side of arriving in Australia and congregating as a community, such experiences must be borne in mind in considering what overall messages should be drawn from our focus group discussions.



Celebrating the First of May at Kisela Voda, Macedonia, 1959.  
From the album of Vladimir Ivanovski and Kalina Ivanoska.

## FOCUS GROUP 1: MACEDONIAN PENSIONERS

**THE VENUE** The first of our two Macedonian focus group sessions was held at Rockdale Migrant Resource Centre on 10 April 2000. The session was convened by Sharon Veale, NPWS Historian, and myself. The group consisted of four men and six women. Also in attendance were Gorjana Milosevski, the then Community Settlement Services Worker, and Toni Najdov, a freelance translator.<sup>66</sup> The session ran from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m., during which time we broke for lunch and coffee.



The focus group of older Macedonians at the St George Migrant Resource Centre in Rockdale, 2000. *Photo Sharon Veale.*

The Migrant Resource Centre is used by a large variety of community groups and was already familiar to the participants. We met in a meeting room that Gorjana had decorated with posters of Macedonian landscape in order to stimulate discussion. The sessions were recorded on audio tape, and this account is developed from detailed notes and the tapes themselves. We briefly considered video taping the proceedings but decided that this could be seen as intrusive and would possibly inhibit rather than enhance the sharing of information.

In convening these discussion groups we were purposely acknowledging the participants' ethnicity as they themselves define it, not as it might be defined by conventions such as census protocol.

**DIFFICULTY OF TRANSLATION** Obviously, the need for a translator posed certain problems. We quickly discovered that our discussants were passionate and sometimes argumentative about the subjects we raised. It was often difficult to limit the polyphony of voices. Certainly, it was beyond the power of any translator to convey everything that was going on in the room at such moments. Consequently, the notes and recording do not capture the overall complexity of the discussion. Also, it was often difficult, in reviewing the tape, to discern who was being translated. It is likely that such limitations will occur whenever a translator is required.

When the participants arrived we sat down around a table. The men seated themselves at one end and the women at the other. Sharon and I introduced ourselves and we thanked everyone for coming. I explained the purpose of the gathering: that NPWS is interested in how different ethnic groups understand parks and the ways in which they use them. I emphasised our interest in how different cultures have different understandings of the land and nature. I also stated an interest in finding better ways of communicating with people for whom English is not their first language. In the first session before lunch we would talk about the land and nature in both Macedonia and Australia.

**THE PARTICIPANTS** Each participant was asked to give their name and state when they arrived in Australia. Although I was inquiring merely of the *year* in which they arrived, most gave the specific date. The anniversary of their arrival was clearly important in their personal calendars.

Luba Kotevska – 29 January 1969

Vera Pilovski – 26 October 1967

Donka Talevska – 17 September 1962

Zora Kotevska – July 1965

Kalina Ivanoska – 15 December 1966

Cveta Grbevaska – 30 April 1961

Dragan Grbevski – 3 December 1957

Vladimir Ivanovski – 29 March 1966

Krste Talevski – 17 September 1962

Todor Kotevski – 18 September 1965<sup>67</sup>

The dates indicate that with one exception, the discussants were part of the 1960s wave of Macedonian migration to Australia. We considered it inappropriate to ask their ages in a public forum. But the dates of arrival and the fact that they were recruited from a Macedonian pensioners organisation suggest that participants were in their sixties or a little older. Half the group originated from towns or cities. The remainder were from country villages. They all originated from Vardar Macedonia, the former Yugoslav republic.



In the yard of Donka's house in Bitola, Macedonia in winter, 1964.  
From the album of Donka Talevska.

RURAL LIFE EPITOMISES MACEDONIA The group was asked what memories they had of the Macedonian countryside. It was clearly remembered with considerable affection. 'Beautiful' was an immediate response. Someone added, 'Beautiful milk'. They described a life that is utterly remote from the urban experience. People lived on small farms and worked on the property. In many respects they were self-sufficient.

Despite half the group coming from towns, images of the 'good life' in the village seemed to dominate everyone's impressions. Even the town folk had relatives in the country with whom they would stay during the summer. There was great nostalgia for the rural life, where the food was healthy, the water pure, the air clean. They spoke of the cherries they would harvest each summer; the strawberries picked from the fields. Life in the country was 'healthy and good'.

The discussants seemed aware of the nostalgia of their recollections. One of the men commented that it seems beautiful now, but he still remembers having to walk 2 to 3 kilometres to get fresh water. There was no electricity, no radios, no refrigeration. During the summer there were few opportunities for recreation. Work on the land dominated their lives. But during the winter, when the villages were often snowbound for a good six months, there was more free time.

The incorporation of Macedonia into Yugoslavia in 1944 brought many changes. Rural collectives were established, and remote villages received electricity for the first time. May Day festivities became commonplace, typically celebrated with an outdoor *sredzelo* and parade.

NATIONAL PARKS IN MACEDONIA One of the informants, Vladimir Ivanovski, spoke of a national park near Bitola. It is called Pelister and was gazetted as a national park shortly after 1945. It has two small lakes. People go there to hike and relax, especially on holidays or special religious days. He informed us that every village has its own special religious day when people gather and dance.



The national park now contains a resort, restaurant and ski lift facilities. This prompted the question of whether the idea of ‘wilderness’ or untampered nature was prevalent in Macedonia. They answered in the negative. Everyone agreed that in Macedonian national parks one would expect to see a considerable amount of human influence upon the landscape.



Vladimir in a park in Bitola, 1949. From the album of Vladimir Ivanovski and Kalina Ivanoska.

**PROTECTED SPECIES** Pelister National Park is famous for a type of pine known as *molika*, which grows exclusively in this area. I asked if you are permitted to chop it down, and they laughed. It is heavily protected by law. The group explained that rangers patrol the national parks. Picking plants or shooting animals must be approved. While there are restrictions, the kind of blanket prohibitions on disturbing plants and animals found in Australia are without precedent. Some shooting is permitted at certain times of year, and it is acceptable – to be expected, in fact – that people will pick strawberries wherever they might be growing. The flavour of the earth, as manifest in fruit, air and water, seemed important to all the informants. Just speaking about it aroused emotion and pride. ‘My village is the best,’ cried one of the men when this was being discussed.

**PHOTOGRAPHS OF MACEDONIA** When we asked if anyone had brought photographs taken in Macedonian national parks, several images were presented. Immediately noticeable about these and all the other photographs shown by informants, was the centrality of people in the images. There was no sense of photographing a mountain, a tree, a river, for its own sake. This seems to reflect strongly on how nature is regarded in Macedonian culture. It is something in which people are always imbricated, as Zora Koteuska explained when she showed a photograph from a Macedonian national park in which she and her husband are depicted in front of a forest. Between them and the forest is a large sculpture of a man poised with a boulder that he is about to throw. It was explained that the sculpture depicts a famous resistance fighter from the Second World War. When he ran out of ammunition he took to throwing rocks at the enemy.



Second World War memorial in a national park in Macedonia, 1988. From the album of Zora Kotevska.



**HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS** The photograph prompted recollections from various people concerning the resistance movement during the war. One woman's father had been involved in the struggle; others remembered taking food to partisans in gaol. The discussion was reminiscent of Paul Stephen's memories of the pine forests and their association with Roman occupation.<sup>68</sup> The forest and mountains were redolent with all sorts of historical associations. Events from the First World War were also mentioned. In this respect, the informants' perception of landscape as a fundamentally historical space that is inscribed with the narratives of human events seems markedly different from the way national park landscapes are usually perceived in Australia.

**MOVING TO A NEW LANDSCAPE** So what was it like departing from a place so full of meaning and so rich in sensation? 'Quite difficult – with tears in our eyes,' was one response. One of the men described the difficulties he had had on coming here: the family pressure and the need for work. Appreciation of nature was a low priority in the early years. They found jobs in factories and began working and saving in order to buy a house. They recalled that \$8000–12 000 was the sum required for a house in the 1960s. A deposit of \$2000 was needed. They assured me it was the absolute norm for women as well as men to work during this period. Childminding was, and to a large degree still is, the domain of grandparents.

**CULTURAL DIFFERENCE** Most of the group seemed to experience quite profound problems in attempting to orientate themselves in Australia. Vladimir described how he didn't know where he was going at first. He described nervousness about speaking his own language in public situations. When asked if there was a lot of discrimination, the group responded with a resounding 'Yes!' They were commonly referred to as 'new Australians' or 'wogs'.

Their feeling of 'outsiderness' was probably compounded by their initial conviction that they were here only temporarily. The intention was to stay a while, save money and go back home. Some in the group described an almost daily despair at their new situation. 'Tomorrow I will go back home,' was a common thought. Some said the first three years were especially hard. We asked what induced them to stay. They replied that their attachment to Australia was actually cemented by return visits to Macedonia. When they saw the changes happening there they started appreciating Australia. In addition, their children were exerting pressure. They didn't want to leave what to them was home.



Friends gather with musical instruments, Pelister, Macedonia, 1957.  
From the album of Donka Talevska.

**NATIONAL PARK VISITS IN AUSTRALIA** A considerable variation in experience was reported when we asked the group about their first national park visits in Australia. Some were taken on picnics shortly after their arrival. Others waited several years. One thing on which they all agreed was that Royal National Park had been favoured for picnics at Christmas and also Easter because of its proximity to both Sydney and Wollongong. Everyone in the group had been to such picnics on numerous occasions.

Of all the elements of the picnic, the barbecue was described as fundamentally important. It is the centrepiece of a Macedonian picnic in Australia, and while many people have their own portable barbecues, a frequent complaint about the parks is the inadequacy of barbecue facilities. Eating, drinking and socialising were the important activities at a picnic. When asked if they would go for a walk, the group seemed unenthusiastic. They would certainly not have done so during the early days because of the perceived lack of footpaths and signs, and fear of snakes.

Fear of attack was a reason for not doing so now. It seems that the bush is a place of danger for many informants. Such sentiments are echoed in other research. The *Parks Victoria Report on Ethnicity and Parks Usage Project* found that across all the cultural groups consulted there was 'a strong association between outdoor open spaces and the propensity for contact with drug use (especially syringes), muggers, robbers, rapists, child molesters and murderers!'<sup>69</sup>



Celebrating Easter at Captain Cook Reserve, 1970.  
From the album of Vladimir Ivanovski and Kalina Ivanoska.

**SOCIAL COHESION** On reaching Australia it seems that the Macedonians clung together. Even in the workplace they were often among their own people and spoke Macedonian. Hence the problems in acquiring English. I asked if their national park visits ever included non-Macedonians. They replied no, though it was common to meet other nationalities or ethnic groups in the parks.

The main food eaten at the barbecues is pork. In the 1960s butchers would often give them a head of pork for free. These days they have to pay. They eat the pork very well done and always enjoy alcohol with their picnics. Brandy or grappa are favoured drinks. The group showed many photographs of park visits in Australia.



Royal National Park – after a few drinks, undated.  
From the album of Vladimir Ivanovski and Kalina Ivanoska.

**FAVOURER PARKS** Numerous venues around Sydney, including Picnic Point, Kiama and Royal National Park, were mentioned when we asked the group about sites for recreation. Sometimes they went to the Blue Mountains and Jenolan Caves. Often a few families would look at a map, decide on a place and drive off into the country without a clue what they were visiting. It was enough just to find a nice place, stop there and get out instruments and make some music.

In the 1960s they had not been aware of the difference between national parks and other reserves. 'A park is a park,' explained one respondent. But they assured us that they did know that there were rules and regulations associated with the parks: not to touch wildlife and not to hunt. They knew about this because their children would interpret signs for them. They all agreed that their children had played an important role in interpreting Australia for them.

**PICNICS AT AUDLEY** All the informants agreed that the Christmas gatherings at Audley in Royal National Park had a special place in the social calendar. While its significance as an occasion for meeting relatives and kinsfolk is obvious, the group cited it as especially important as an occasion for young people to intermingle. In addition, the young generation often plays a special role as a kind of 'advance troop', sometimes arriving as early as 3 a.m., when they stake out a picnic site for the family group. Audley is the preferred location, but if parking proves utterly impossible they move on to Wattamolla or somewhere else in Royal National Park.

As Vera and Draga had already stated, the importance of the picnic as a meeting place for young people must be seen in relation to the strict moral codes that were operative within the Australian Macedonian community in the 1960s and 1970s. (Most people believe they have now relaxed considerably.) The pensioners related that a tightening of mores to do with socialising and dating was one of the ways in which they responded to the shock of adjusting to a new society.

**RELAXING THE CODES** In some ways, the Audley picnic might be seen as a social safety valve. While sex between young people was deemed improper, there was a strong desire that youngsters would meet, befriend and eventually marry other Macedonians. These days 'mixed marriages' (relationships with non-Macedonians) are more common and acceptable. But in the 1960s the very thought was abhorrent. We were told that this was in part due to a fear of the

unknown. It was not that Macedonians did not want to mix with others but rather their lack of exposure to different cultures and the foreignness of the idea of becoming allied through marriage with an unknown family. They feared that outsiders could be criminals or worse. So families stuck together and the village structure was to some extent replicated in the Australian context. The pensioners believed that their children were happy with the situation. They were always eager to attend picnics and other Macedonian social events. They believe that enthusiasm among the young is now waning.

**THE AUSTRALIAN BUSH** What did the informants think of the Australian forest when they first encountered it? Most of them agreed that the Australian landscape is not as beautiful as Macedonia. They thought the trees were 'sad' or 'depressing' because they were dry and grey. They compared them to the trees in Macedonia, which grow in 'a particular way that you don't find here'.

This discussion led to the subject of the smell of the Australian bush. The group unanimously agreed that the Australian forest has no smell whatsoever. This is in contrast to the Macedonian pine forests, the smell of which they describe as intoxicating. One man described his joy when he came across a pine plantation during a family drive in the country. He stopped the car enraptured, and they had a four-hour barbecue in the forest. The high value attached to radiata pine plantations was firmly endorsed by the group. Many Macedonians buy holiday houses near plantations because of these fond associations.

**ABORIGINAL SITES** Informants were asked about their knowledge of Aboriginal sites. They reported a general ignorance about the subject although they all agreed they would like to find out more. They cited a lack of information as the major problem.

Interestingly, everyone in the group had met Aboriginal people. This seemed surprising since it pointed to a higher rate of familiarity than one would find in a sample of Australian-born White people. They explained that they had met Aboriginal people in the factories

where they worked. Many informants described experiences they had had with Aborigines in the workplace, indicating that they were quite diverse. The group reported that one of the really unique things about coming to Australia was encountering people from such a plethora of ethnic backgrounds.



In Royal National Park with friends, 1967.  
From the album of Vladimir Ivanovski and Kalina Ivanoska.

**COMMUNITY RELATIONS** We asked the group whether they had ever had problems with NPWS. One mentioned problems in the early days to do with rubbish disposal. They had left theirs lying around and were given a slap over the wrist but could understand why. They also mentioned problems with unclean toilets, lack of toilet paper and insufficient parking. The toilet problems, they acknowledged, were perhaps related to other visitors rather than neglect on the part of staff.

This generally positive assessment of the Service was a little surprising. Gorjana had previously told me that some Macedonians had had serious confrontations with rangers in the past. It is possible that the focus group format, opening up many cheerful memories for the participants, is consequently less informative in soliciting criticism. On the other hand, it might simply be a case where altercations were considered minor and were eventually forgotten.

Improvements in the facilities at Audley were recognised by all the discussants. The electric barbecues were described as 'beautiful'. The benches and picnic tables were greatly appreciated. They considered themselves up-to-date with regulations concerning fire bans and other matters, though these had to be explained at first. One man said he was familiar with fire regulations in Macedonia.

**SIGNAGE** When asked about the need for signs in languages other than English, the discussants agreed, though they seemed to think the need was greater for languages such as Chinese rather than their own. They also conceded that a visual symbol is probably more effective than something written.

**PREFERRED MEDIA** We spoke about other ways of communicating with the Macedonian community. They stated that the Special Broadcasting Services (SBS Radio and Television) are extremely popular, especially the Macedonian radio broadcasts. They also listen to community stations that broadcast in their language. On the other hand, it should not be assumed that information in English will never reach them. They advised us that a great deal of English language television gets translated by their children and passed on.

The focus group expressed great enthusiasm for other, more personal ways of passing on information. Given the role played by these older people as childminders, much of what they know gets passed directly to the younger generation. Several of the women said they would like stories about the Australian bush to pass on to grandchildren.

As the discussion continued, we identified ways in which this might be achieved. There was popular support for the idea of visiting Aboriginal sites with an Aboriginal sites officer and translator. A regular program of bus excursions already exists for the pensioners group. Guided walks through national parks, developed from the already existing NPWS Discovery Rangers program, could be developed for this purpose.



## FOCUS GROUP 2: YOUNG MACEDONIAN ADULTS

**THE GROUP** The convening of a second Macedonian focus group was a direct outcome of the earlier session. Toni Najdov, who translated for the Macedonian pensioners, expressed his support and enthusiasm for the project. Toni organised for me to meet with him and a group of his friends at a restaurant in the Fox Studios, Sydney. The work commitments of the discussants prevented a day-long workshop. On the other hand, the discussion could proceed more rapidly because everyone was conversant in English.

The group consisted of the following six people, all connected with the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia:

### **Toni Najdov**

29 years old

Born in Macedonia; arrived in Australia in 1992

### **Violeta Brdaroska**

27 years old

Born in Macedonia; arrived in Australia in 1989

### **Elvis Joncevski**

26 years old

Born in Melbourne

### **Bilyana Brdaroska**

25 years old

Born in Macedonia; arrived in Australia in 1989

### **Suzi Bodganovski**

26 years old

Born in Sydney

### **Novica Angelovski**

27 years old

Born in Australia



Young Macedonian focus group at Fox Studios, Sydney, 2000.  
*Photo Martin Thomas.*

The group consisted of three couples: Toni and Violeta; Elvis and Bilyana; Novica and Suzi. It should also be noted that Violeta and Bilyana are sisters. As can be seen from the places of birth and arrival, members of the 1990s wave of migration and children of the 1960s phase of migration were represented. Elvis's experience is slightly different. Born in Australia, he returned to Macedonia with his family when he was just two years old. He returned to Australia independently when he was 18 and now works as a night manager in a hotel. Everyone except for Elvis is university educated. Toni studied history and is now employed as a Macedonian community worker; Violeta studied arts/law and works as a political adviser; Bilyana is a psychology graduate; Novica is a lawyer; and Suzi is a teacher. The experience of this group, like that of the pensioners, indicated that there is considerable traffic between Australia and Macedonia. Consequently, Suzi and Novica, who were born in Australia, have concrete experience of the Macedonian countryside.

The session was opened in a similar way to Focus Group 1. I introduced myself (Sharon Veale was not in attendance) and stated the reasons for NPWS being interested in the issue of ethnicity and national parks.<sup>70</sup>

## WHAT DOES 'THE ENVIRONMENT' MEAN IN MACEDONIA?

The discussion opened with this question and we returned to it several times during the evening. The responses were extremely illuminating. Toni pointed out that 'There's no specific word for environment in Macedonian.' Prior to the discussion he had tried finding the equivalent word in the dictionary. There was *priroda*, which means nature, and *okolina*, meaning surroundings. But neither captured the complex set of meanings that cluster around the English term *environment*. It seemed an important insight to the cultural specificity of what in English is such a heavily laden term.

Novica also responded, suggesting that the significance we attach to 'the environment' probably reflects our alienation from it. He described most Macedonians, including his parents, as coming from a village background. That determines their mentality, he explained. Environment there involves everything they do. Their work is controlled by the seasons. The environment is in no way separate from oneself; it governs every aspect of life, whether it be planting crops or tending animals.

Suzi and Novica explained that when they went to Macedonia together in 1998, the villagers they visited found the concept of tourism difficult to grasp. They could not understand the reason for leaving one's home and sightseeing around Europe. 'Why do you want to see things?' they would say. To them this seemed to reflect the fullness with which the villagers were adapted to the rhythms and cycles of the natural world. Novica also pointed out that mountains represent hard work – following sheep up to the pastures, for example. To be able to stop and look at the view as an object of pleasure requires distance from the rigour of labour.

A NATIONAL PARKS CULTURE IN MACEDONIA The group acknowledged that co-existing with this village mentality is a culture of national parks in Macedonia. But this is more the preserve of urban people who enjoy outdoor recreation in ways similar to those popular in Australia. Violeta and Bilyana were brought up in a village that was close to the city. Their mother worked in the hospitality industry. Tourists came from all over Europe wanting to go to the mountains, ride donkeys, and enjoy the scenery. The concept of tourism was thus very familiar. They suspected, however, that this familiarity was not common across the country. Toni cited examples of national parks with villages within them. He felt that for these people, still working the tough life on the land, the idea of tourism would be 'a bit weird'.



Suzi Bodganovski with a flock of sheep near the village of Kointse in northern Macedonia, 1998. Photo Novica Angelovski.

AN IMAGINED LANDSCAPE I suggested to the group that there is often a landscape, most likely an imagined landscape, that underlies national cultures. In Australia it might be the beach or the bush, even though most people live in the cities. I asked if there's a rural landscape or ideal that underlies Macedonian culture.



Novica responded with an observation that would be repeated emphatically throughout the session.

I think so. You rarely hear people talk about the beauty of a physical place, at least in the sense whenever our parents talk about it. It's not just a beautiful river but it was the beautiful river where we did this and this. Where we might have collected this or where we might have walked –

**Suzi:** Or where I bathed or where I washed –

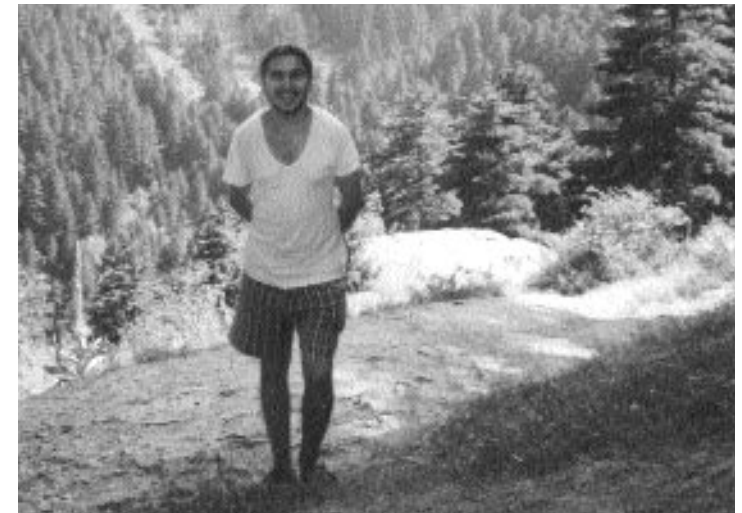
**Toni:** Or the monasteries we visited, the churches we visited.

Like the photographs shared by the pensioners group, there was no sense of a landscape without some human or social activity occurring within it. Toni confirmed the previously stated impression that the village appears as an idyllic model, even for people who live industrialised lifestyles. Some will commute to factories from villages; for those who live in town, the village is a weekend refuge. This is where one eats the healthy food, relishes the clean air, and has convivial times with friends and family.

**RETURNING TO THE VILLAGE** For Suzi, growing up in Australia, impressions of her family's village were central to her understanding of Macedonia. She went there for the first time in 1998. 'I was blown away by my parents' village,' she recalled. 'Just the location. Time has stood still there.'

Yet in certain ways time has not stood still. Emigration (overseas and to the cities) has had a profound effect on the villages. They are remembered with great nostalgia by the emigrants, but these days they are almost empty. The population of Suzi's village has dropped from 500 in its heyday to 30 now. Most of the population is over 60, and the old traditions still prevail. Most work on the farm is done by hand. There is no shop in the village. They still grow their own vegetables and make their own bread and cheese. In financial terms they are poor, but to Suzi and Novica they have all the good things in life.

Suzi described her initial surprise at what seemed a lack of 'environmental responsibility' within the villages. She was initially shocked when she saw people throwing rubbish into open spaces, responding to her objection by saying: 'No, the wind will blow it away.' Later, she reflected on her response and realised the hypocrisy of making judgments about this. 'How dare we be mortified and judge them when we destroy the planet ten times more than they do.'



Novica Angelovski in Pelister National Park near Bitola in southern Macedonia, 1998. *Photo* Suzi Bodganovski.

**EMIGRATING TO AUSTRALIA** Why did the informants' families leave those villages, which now, viewed from an urban context, seem to embody the good life? Suzi was the only member of the group whose family's emigration is associated with political persecution. She described the situation as 'dire' for her family. Her uncle had escaped, and her father followed, arriving in Australia in 1966.

All the group agreed that familiarity with the Macedonian community in Australia contributed to the migration. It was inconceivable one would arrive without knowing other Macedonians. They describe economic betterment as the primary motivation for coming to Australia.

**VILLAGE TO FACTORY** While the material benefits were considerable, the group confirmed Paul Stephen's claim that the transfer from Macedonia to Australian factories was traumatic. The strict division between working life and leisure time was foreign to them. So was the social environment of the nuclear family. To some extent they tried to replicate the extended family or even the village structure. Sometimes several families shared houses, and parents placed enormous pressure on children not to move out of home. As Novica explained:

That's why they build large houses, what are derogatorily called the 'wog boxes'. Not to show off wealth or anything but to build enough rooms so that when the children marry they stay and the grandchildren stay.

I pointed out that Novica had said 'wog boxes' with a bit of a smile. It seemed evident that the discussants sometimes found a humour in the ways of their parents. Toni said: 'We're still in a rebellious stage.'

The pressure on children not to leave home was something all the informants had had to contend with. Violeta said that in some ways it was actually easier for the girls. They were expected to leave home – traditionally to marry. This was still the case, though the expectation is perhaps less severe. It is certainly deemed preferable that they marry a Macedonian. Suzi believes this has become more flexible, however. The mores have been loosened in response to the large number of failed marriages.

**MACEDONIAN GARDENS** In discussing how Macedonians developed their own aesthetic in modifying their outdoor spaces, Suzi spoke with amusement about her Macedonian neighbour who tried to burn down the eucalyptus tree outside her house because it was dropping leaves.

**Suzi:** You should see his garden. It's concreted. He'll plant a tree and concrete around the tree. Very much controlled.

**Toni:** The emphasis is on functionality.

Novica spoke far more affectionately about his parents' garden. They planted fruit trees and a vegetable patch that colonised the whole front yard. This used to embarrass him, but he's proud of it now. It was their way of making themselves at home.

**AROMA** Novica related how many Macedonians grow a plant called *stravec*. If you rub the leaves it smells beautiful. Another plant, something like basil but known as *bosilok*, is also grown for its aroma and is often taken to church. Suzi described the comic scene of her parents walking round with *bosilok* up their noses. The group agreed that the fondness for these aromas is part of their nostalgia for home. I asked them about smells associated with Macedonia.

**Violeta:** A smell of late autumn getting into winter and smoke from the chimneys.

She smelt it again during a recent visit to the Blue Mountains. They also spoke of cooking smells, manure in the villages – sensations triggered by a visit to the Royal Easter Show. There were memories of the specific type of incense used in the churches, the fragrant lipa tree, which is used for tea, and of course the pine forests.

In contrast, no one could identify aromas typical of the Australian bush. As Toni put it:

I think it is different. I don't know if you can attach a specific smell to it. Eucalyptus – does it smell? [laughs] Once you cross the equator there's a completely different smell, isn't there?

Like the pensioners group, the younger Macedonians had little concept of the Australian bush having its own aroma.

**IDEAS OF WILDERNESS** Opinions differed about whether there is such a thing as wilderness in Macedonia. Novica thought there probably are large, unoccupied tracts of land, but they are not regarded as beautiful or precious because they are unpopulated. Suzi said she definitely had ideas of wilderness when she went to Macedonia.

We had thick mountainous country and hunters. They actually have hunting shacks... There are no defined trails. Definitely wild.

But there seemed consensus that the high value placed on wilderness as an *uninhabited* environment is not replicated in Macedonia. As Violeta put it, 'wilderness is used for interaction rather than leaving it on its own.' Human influence on 'wilderness' spaces was acceptable, indeed to be expected. The killing of animals, for instance, could definitely occur within rugged areas. Both wolves and bears are found in Macedonia, and hunting is reasonably common. The group pointed out that the people who go hunting are well informed about the life and habits of the fauna. Elvis had had extensive experience of this since his family are all hunters. They know which animal they will be stalking and not to kill during mating. In summer their guns are all locked up because it's out of season.

Novica offered the following insight on the wilderness theme, reinforcing the connection between people and environment in Macedonian culture:

I think I'd go back to what I said earlier about people being important, people being central. I think for Macedonians of my parents' generation, people have to be in the picture somewhere. If you look at the ways people use national parks here, one of the biggest days on the calendar is going to the Royal National Park. It's a big community event. That's the highlight. The highlight is on the inward focus, the focus within the community, rather than going to observe nature, and that's part of the beauty of it – a large group of people getting together in nice surroundings. In my own growing-up very rarely have we gone out as a family unit somewhere – whether it's a park, a national park, it's always a grouping of family, family and friends, so that you can not only enjoy good food and nice surroundings but the company of people. I don't think there's that priority of going somewhere to observe the physical environment. That's more foreign.

All the group members agreed that the size of cities plays an important role in defining attitudes to wilderness in nature. They pointed out that even in the larger Macedonian cities, the mountains are visible. They seem part of life. There isn't the need to escape the urban environment that they feel here. Consequently the demarcation between civilisation and nature in Macedonia seems less rigid.

**NATIONAL PARKS IN AUSTRALIA** We spoke about the sorts of outdoor recreation popular within the group. With the exception of Elvis, who has no taste for it whatsoever, bushwalking was cited as a popular activity. It seems that the desire for community solidarity in outdoor spaces is far less important to the younger generation. Their national park recreation is more private, involving just their partner or a small group of friends. Toni related how nature was always part of his life in Macedonia. He continues to feel that here, describing a visit to a Queensland rainforest in the following terms:

I felt a sense of cleanness. My whole body felt clean. I don't know how to explain it. It's probably a spiritual thing or something. I did experience it.

I was interested to find out whether the fear of the bush described by the pensioners group was manifest in the younger generation. Novica thinks it is far less pronounced.

You've got to understand culturally why they are afraid. They come from a society where crime is very low and where everyone knew everyone in the village. In an industrialised society like this they do get scared and think there's a lot of crime out there. They are more fearful.

While Toni considered himself more concerned for his personal safety in the urban environment, Suzi does find the bush a menacing place:

I go to a rainforest and we're the only ones there and I start to get freaked out. We'd walk and walk and get further away from people, and then I'd realise *we're on our own!* There could be someone behind us.

In contrast, Violeta described experiences in the bush, such as swimming in waterfalls, and marvelling at her preparedness to do this despite not being able to see the bottom of the pool. It seemed on such occasions that latent fears could be overcome.

**CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS** What is the attitude of this generation to the Christmas ritual at Royal National Park? The group had mixed feelings about these annual festivities. Novica and Suzi went there as children but would be reluctant to attend now. Their basic complaint is ‘too many people’.

For Violeta, who arrived in 1998: ‘Going on Christmas Day was part of my initiation into Macedonian–Australian society.’ She laughed as she said this, and I asked if it was a somewhat tongue-in-cheek introduction.

**Violeta:** Kind of, yeah. It wasn’t a very good experience for me because there were too many people. It’s a very different culture from what I know.

**Me:** So you felt a bit out of touch with Australian–Macedonian culture. How did that seem to you?

**Violeta:** Very different. I felt completely out of touch. It just felt the way they spoke and the way they behaved, the customs and the family relationships, were what I would have read of in descriptions of post-War Macedonia, or even in the Ottoman Empire. It was interesting that they spoke English but they behaved like Macedonians. To me that was a striking difference.

Bilyana, like her sister, found it strange to be in Australia while totally surrounded by Macedonians. The others, also, described feelings of discomfort or alienation at the Christmas picnic.

**Elvis:** There were too many people, too many Macedonians around, I guess. I never went back again.

**Novica:** As you get older the daggier it seems because you associate it with your childhood, going with your parents.

**Toni:** Also, for us that have come recently, for new arrivals, they

don’t have that sort of thing in Macedonia. Also it’s Catholic Christmas, so they’re not paying their normal respects.

**Suzi:** Toni, if you were to marry and have children, would you go to the National Park?

**Toni:** No, not because of the Macedonians or anything like that. I just don’t like what they do.

**Suzi:** What don’t you like? Is it the fact there’s too many people?

**Toni:** I don’t like the car thing, showing off the cars. We’ve been to National Park on Christmas Day but what did we do? We went on the side where there was no one there, it was just our group. Instead of relaxing and having a nice quiet day it becomes a circus.

**Novica:** We’ve grown and want to do something separate that’s more to our own taste.

**ABORIGINAL ISSUES** The discussants gave a range of responses when asked if they had much knowledge of Aboriginal culture. Suzi had taught at an Aboriginal school in the Sydney suburb of Darlington. This gave her many insights. Violeta had learnt about Aboriginal issues through contact with lobby groups she encountered in her work as a political adviser.

Toni had studied Australian history at the University of Western Sydney (UWS), but was disappointed at the lack of Aboriginal history on the curriculum. He felt he had learnt a lot about convicts and very little about indigenous Australians. Novica suggested that there was a big gulf between Aboriginal issues, which are reported in the media, and culture, about which not a lot is known. When I asked him if he felt he would understand the issues better if he understood the culture, he gave the following example.

After uni I worked for a brief period with ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) and I worked in the law and justice section. And the controversial minister, Herron, wanted to introduce means-testing for legal services. On the face of it it seems if someone can afford to pay, why shouldn’t they pay? I did a bit of research into the issue. I found out that Aboriginals often, if there’s a wage

earner – unlike in the white society where you support only your nuclear family – often there might be only one wage earner for a very large extended family and community. So it becomes a lot harder when you have an understanding of that to say: ‘You’re earning \$500 a week, so therefore you can afford to pay for your legal costs.’

Suzi also believes that an appreciation of Aboriginal culture is the foundation for an understanding of political issues.

When I worked in that Aboriginal school there was definitely an emphasis on culture, and culture taught you how to deal with the children, so there were always books about Aboriginal songs, Aboriginal music. It was a big eye-opener.

**RECONCILIATION** The discussion revealed a great deal of passion within the group about issues to do with justice and reconciliation – not only on the Aboriginal front but also in wider society. The failure of the Commonwealth to apologise for the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal children was cited as a matter of great moral weakness.

**Violeta:** If a government does not want to lead to that extent, or doesn’t want to devise proper strategies to enable reconciliation, then it’s a very selfish way of approaching other things as well. It will follow into other relations – into how we bring up our children tomorrow.

I asked Violeta if she saw a necessity for reconciliation across the social spectrum. She replied strongly in the affirmative.

You can’t have double standards on reconciliation. I saw in the paper today John Howard saying sorry for the Holocaust. But why is that not being extended to Aboriginal people, why is it so difficult to say that? Obviously black–white relations are not present in the history so that we new migrants could not learn to the proper extent what took place. There’s obviously some covering of history. That in itself is a big problem that needs to be reconciled.

Novica added:

You can just tell that something’s gnawing away. Even with the people who are loudly and emphatically trying to say that there isn’t a problem, there’s nothing to say sorry about, there’s no Stolen

Generation, even those declaratory statements show how much there actually is something gnawing away. It has to be faced, it has to be addressed. It needs a big heart.

**THE BALKAN EXPERIENCE** I remarked on the urgency of their tone. The reconciliation issue clearly embroiled both Novica, who was born here, and Violeta, who has been here just two years. Violeta described how the long history of conflict in the Balkans had heightened her sensitivity to this issue.

I wanted to add another thing about reconciliation as migrants, especially coming from the Balkans. We have very extensive history of wars and a lot of things to be sorry about and to say sorry about or to feel victimised and the whole thing. And I think we have been taught in certain ways, whether through history or through tradition, that you move on and that you perhaps know who the enemy is or was but you still move on. I think it’s very healthy way for a nation or a culture to proceed.

**Novica:** I think with Macedonians especially there’s a famous proverb that the head bowed low will not be beheaded, it won’t be cut off by the sword. In other words, just recognise your occupier, your coloniser, and try to get on with your daily life. Try not to provoke. There’s that current in the Macedonian community, not to stir the pot.

**RACISM** With their criticisms of the failure to achieve reconciliation, I was curious about whether the young Macedonian group perceived Australia as a racist country. Although they all agreed that there are racist people within it, they were reluctant to categorise Australia as a whole in that fashion. Novica discerned evidence of ‘structural racism’ within the legal system. He cited Aboriginal deaths in custody and the high rate of Aboriginal imprisonment as examples of this. They also mentioned the invidious recognition of foreign qualifications in Australia. While a degree from an Anglo-Saxon country was readily recognised, Violeta’s straight A grades from Macedonia had been interpreted as middle-ranking marks by an official at the University of NSW.



Despite these problems, the group acknowledged their appreciation of Australian laws that try to enforce equal opportunity. There are no formal structures of this kind in Macedonia. Consequently it is very much the norm that minority groups like gypsies suffer systematic discrimination. Novica suggested that most Macedonian parents would not be happy if their daughter came home with a black boyfriend. They evidently felt that a certain degree of racism exists within the Macedonian community in Australia.

## CONCLUSIONS FROM THE MACEDONIAN RESEARCH

**A HISTORY REVEALED** A major achievement of this research was its revelation of a generally unrecognised history – a history still very much alive – involving parkland around Sydney. Admitting that this is but a taste of a much more elaborate story, the research to date still offers important insights on the ‘culture of nature’ among Macedonians now resident in Australia.

We have seen evidence of a world-view in which people and ‘the environment’ are inextricable. Testimony has been provided on the change of life in going from Macedonia, in which the rural village is dominant in both personal experience and cultural memory, to urban Australia and an industrialised working life.

**SOCIAL BONDING** It can be surmised that one of the ways in which the Macedonian migrants survived this experience was to cling together as a community. Maintaining that cohesion was a way of ensuring some degree of continuity in a world where everything had changed. The research showed how parkland (national parks and other open spaces) played a unique role in consolidating the feeling of being Macedonian in Australia. Picnics and barbecues provided occasions where they could be together *en masse*. They could speak their language, drink their grappa, sing and dance without ridicule.

They could enjoy their own food, cooked according to the Australian barbecue tradition. Young people could meet, socialise and some would marry.

Paul Stephen related how the tradition, initiated by a group of Aegean Macedonians, offered a way of welcoming new arrivals. Clearly, the practice acquired its own momentum. It was still current when Violeta Brdaroska arrived in 1998 and was taken to the Audley picnic as a ‘rite of passage’.

**WILL THE TRADITION ENDURE?** The sense of discomfort expressed by Violeta and her peers about the Audley picnic suggests that for university-educated Macedonians and more recent immigrants, the tradition is less important – perhaps anachronistic. Times have changed, and the kinds of pleasure they seek in outdoor spaces are less group-orientated and more concerned with the particular aesthetics of the Australian bush.

This said, we have seen how the Macedonian landscape continues to influence, perhaps dominate, the younger people’s perception of the environment. The mountains and pine forests exert influence to the extent that sensory stimulus, the sense of smell, for instance, is mediated by cultural experience. While they feel themselves more Westernised, and have a certain distance on the ways of their parents, it is clearly apparent that they still value Macedonian customs and retain the language. They have all coupled with other Macedonians, arguing that the common culture gives them a common understanding in their relationships. Cohesion within the Macedonian community continues, at least to some extent.

It is difficult to tell whether the diffidence the younger focus group expressed towards the Audley picnic is representative of a wider trend. The pensioners group seem to think the tradition is waning. This said, a significant number of young people continue to participate on Christmas Day. It remains to be seen whether this tradition will continue to meet the needs of the coming generations, whether it will drop off, or whether it will evolve into something else.



**MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS** The Macedonian picnics are community-organised events. They occur year after year, filling Royal National Park with vehicles on Christmas Day, presenting certain logistic difficulties. They take place in a manner that is largely indifferent to NPWS suggestions of car pooling and calls for order.

From a managerial point of view, the gatherings might seem rowdy and anarchic. This research shows, however, that they have great meaning for the people who participate. Initiatives taken by NPWS regional staff, such as the employment of a translator to help mediate conflict on the day, are to be applauded. Surely the responsibility of management is to ensure that the event occurs safely and that the environment and facilities are treated with respect. That said, respect is due on the part of NPWS also: respect for a tradition that has endured in varying forms for half a century and which has a special place in the history of those who perpetuate it, since it has been instrumental in maintaining their cohesion as a community.

Certainly, the Macedonian tradition would have to be considered were any alterations or developments being planned for Audley. The picnics must be regarded as an integral part of the social heritage of the site. This should be reflected in heritage studies and listings.

**DEFINING THE ROLE OF NATIONAL PARKS** A critical finding emerging from this research is the vista it opens on the relationship between national parks and communities. Through one particular example (there would be countless others) we have seen how a ritual, unique to a particular park (though connected with other outdoor spaces), has been pivotal in the maintenance of community life.

At the end of Part 1 I quoted an observation made by the historian, Peter Read, who suggested that:

The elevation of the undifferentiated and unlocalised bush to iconography made it correspondingly harder to save from destruction the local, the familiar, the specific, the lived-in, the un-unique and the un-universal.

This comment is pertinent to NPWS because it reflects very tellingly on the way it has defined itself as an agency and how it has championed our role as protector of reserved land. This self-perception involves the guardianship of flora, fauna, geological and coastal phenomena. The Service's entirely fitting role as protectors and conservators of natural ecology has eclipsed the social ecology of the many people whose lives are enriched through contact with national parks.

This is not to question the primacy of its role in nature conservation. It is simply to observe that the polarity between the natural and the social that Read identifies is ultimately unsustainable. NPWS's public appeal, community standing, and ability to justify funding from the public purse, can only be enhanced if the social values of the landscape – the ways in which reserved lands enhance community life and interpersonal understandings – also assume primacy. In that regard, the greatest challenge presented here concerns the way NPWS defines and presents itself as an organisation.

**A UNIQUE ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY** While a certain degree of public disgruntlement and dissatisfaction is part of daily life for those working in NPWS, the data presented here gives cause for considerable optimism. As the researcher entrusted to carry out this project, I was frankly humbled by the generosity of the people whose experiences and testimony were shared so openly. I wonder how many other government agencies would find a willingness on the part of strangers to share revelations about such personal matters as migrating to a new country, describing the minutiae of family gatherings? How often are public servants entrusted with the contents of personal photograph albums?

That people were voluntarily prepared to give their time to this project is an indication of the affection they feel for national parks and suggests to me a high level of trust for the personnel who care for them. It also indicates their desire to be consulted should anybody take the trouble to inquire. In this respect, NPWS is uniquely privileged in being able to tap into the mood and experiences of communities.

## part 3

### CONCLUSIONS

Swimming at Bitola, Macedonia, 1968.  
From the album of Donka Talevska.



## AN EXAMPLE FROM NSW FISHERIES

**COMMUNITY LIAISON OFFICER APPOINTED** Part of the scope of this project was to consider initiatives taken by other agencies that negotiate ethnic diversity. I was frequently referred to an initiative of NSW Fisheries that in 1996 appointed Hai Chung as a Community Liaison Officer.

NSW Fisheries identified a particular need for educational programs conveying information to the Vietnamese community about bag limits, minimum catch size, environmentally protected zones, shellfish collection and other regulations. (These are issues also affecting some National Parks and Wildlife Service estates.) The Vietnamese community was targeted because of its extensive involvement in both recreational and commercial fishing. There was a perception that the state's fisheries were being endangered because of this community's unfamiliarity with the regulations. At the time of writing, 35 of the 57 vessels that comprise the Botany Bay commercial fishing fleet are run by Vietnamese operators. Their presence reflects the changing face of multicultural Australia. Previously, the fleet was dominated by fishermen of Greek heritage.

### ROLE INVOLVES EDUCATION RATHER THAN ENFORCEMENT

Hai Chung was initially employed as an Enforcement Officer, but in a shift that reflects the educative rather than adversarial nature of his position as it rapidly evolved, NSW Fisheries decided to make him a Community Liaison Officer.

Hai Chung regards cultural differences in attitudes to nature as fundamental to his work. In Vietnam, where the experience of war encouraged a survival mentality, it is assumed that any wild animal is available to anyone with the nous to catch it. Hai assures me that the majority of Vietnamese Australians are eager to comply with the regulations and are fearful at the prospect of large fines. His mission has been to convey information about fishing laws through community networks.

**ETHNO-SPECIFIC EDUCATION** In the past four years NSW Fisheries, at the instigation of Hai Chung, has taken a large number of fairly inexpensive initiatives aimed at community education. These include:

Conducting workshops with Vietnamese community associations in Marrickville, Liverpool, Cabramatta, Auburn and Wollongong. He also targeted a number of Vietnamese women's associations, arguing that although fishing is more popular among men, the women play an important role in conveying information.

Giving workshops at Vietnamese -language Saturday schools, which are attended by many children. Experience shows that children are often influential in spreading messages to older members of the family.

Working closely with Vietnamese language programs on SBS Radio. Community announcements in Vietnamese are aired at no charge. In addition, Hai has appeared frequently as a guest on talkback programs, fielding questions about fishing laws. He also organised competitions where correspondents gave written responses to quizzes about fishing regulations. One of these generated over 400 letters.

Distribution of Vietnamese translations of press releases and copies of regulations.

Fishing 'clinics' (ie schools) were organised for Vietnamese children. These free weekend classes, organised by NSW Fisheries and attended by children with their parents, taught all aspects of fishing from finding bait to tying a hook and also provided opportunity to familiarise students with regulations.

Establishing a NSW Fisheries information stand at the Vietnamese New Year Festival, held each year in February at Warwick Farm racecourse.

The merits of this approach are self-explanatory. Because Hai is working with his own community, speaking in Vietnamese, his understanding of how the community works, how knowledge is transmitted, when and why people get together, is much more comprehensive. NSW Fisheries claim the compliance to regulations is considerably higher as a result of this work. Little wonder the NSW Fisheries is frequently upheld as a model for other agencies in the cross-cultural field.

## CHALLENGES FOR NPWS

**A VERY BROAD CONSTITUENCY** While the innovative program initiated by NSW Fisheries provides inspiration and possible models that could be adapted by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the challenges NPWS faces in addressing the cultural complexity of contemporary Australia are considerably greater. As the premier conservation agency in the state, NPWS cannot hope to fulfil its obligation to encourage environmental awareness and responsible park use by targeting a single ethnic community. It is no exaggeration to say that people from all over the world (including overseas visitors and Australian residents) visit NPWS estates. Its off-park responsibilities in the areas of education, flora and fauna protection, and guardianship of Aboriginal sites flow through to every member of the community.

**RE-INVENTION REQUIRED** In this study we have seen that NPWS has traditionally been run as what some of its own staff describe as a 'white organisation'. A survey of field officers and rangers, of people who volunteer for public programs, and of those likely to find their way into NPWS employment would almost certainly reveal a continuing culture of 'Whiteness'. A reading of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* indicates that this culture is unwittingly written in to the very legislature that constitutes the agency.

Throughout the Act one finds references to our responsibilities in relation to 'European heritage'. One might retort that it is perfectly obvious that this term, which distinguishes 'European' from Aboriginal heritage, is in fact referring to the full gamut of non-indigenous cultures. This said, however, we might speculate as to whether a Lebanese or Vietnamese reader would be convinced that their cultural heritage is accounted for by the authors of the Act and the people it appoints. Surely they would be justified in maintaining a degree of scepticism.

No doubt such prejudices and anachronisms still haunt a great deal of the legislature. In a 'real world' situation, we are not so literal that we bulldoze Chinese heritage because it is not protected in the Act. Legislation can remain inert while society and social attitudes change dramatically. And government agencies can also suffer inertia, replicating an entrenched historical culture, unless mechanisms that allow it to move with the times are firmly put in place.

Even in its infant stage, this research has opened insights on the significance of reserved parkland to a community whose perspective has generally been overlooked. That members of the community were prepared to share their perspective, and that we in turn have been ready to listen and give it serious attention, could be seen as a sign of a certain awakening. My many discussions with immediate colleagues and other NPWS personnel suggest that the need to understand and embrace the multicultural complexity of contemporary society is recognised as an overwhelming imperative.

The impact of migration heritage upon Australia is not confined to 'ethnic others'. It is integral to who we are as a society. Its legacy is written across our landscapes. NPWS has not traditionally seen itself as a custodian of migrant history. Yet it has within its estates what is probably the most prominent monument in the history of NSW immigration: the Quarantine Station on the North Head of Sydney Harbour. Appropriate visitor access and educational or interpretive programs concerning this site could allow NPWS a most prominent role in communicating the centrality of migration heritage.

NOT JUST A WHITE ORGANISATION Something is of course overlooked when staff complain about our being a 'white organisation'. I refer of course to our specific responsibilities pertaining to Aboriginal heritage – responsibilities that include the listing and protection of all Aboriginal heritage sites across the state.

This charter has inevitably involved the direct input of many Aboriginal people. Aboriginal Sites Officers are employed across the state; Aboriginal people are employed to maintain the Aboriginal Sites Register; others are involved in interpretive activities, such as the Discovery Ranger program. Consultation with Aboriginal communities is part of daily business for those staff working in the Cultural Heritage Division of NPWS.

BICULTURAL OR MULTICULTURAL? While many might complain that Aboriginal issues still play second fiddle to flora and fauna protection responsibilities, nonetheless we must acknowledge that NPWS has opened itself to Aboriginal voices in its operation and corporate identity. In creating identified Aboriginal positions and asserting that consultation with Aboriginal people is central to decision-making processes, we have, at least to some extent, established ourselves as a bicultural rather than a purely monocultural agency.

This observation offers perhaps the greatest hope that NPWS has the potential to truly recognise and embrace ethnic diversity. While the profound differences between recent migrants and indigenous Australians must be borne in mind, this discussion provided moving testimony of possible synergy between the two. The older Macedonians described the many Aboriginal people they came to know as migrant workers on the factory floor. The younger generation spoke eloquently about their concern for Aboriginal welfare, informed by personal meetings and communication. With

the long history of ethnic conflict in the Balkans close to their hearts, they could speak with conviction about reconciliation, not as some abstract concept but as a principle vital to the moral health of society. Acknowledgment of such connections might facilitate the ultimate recognition of difference and permit us to countenance the ultimate reality of a multicultural landscape.

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