



PLACEMAKING AND TRANSNATIONALISM: RECENT MIGRANTS AND A NATIONAL PARK IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

A study of the way Arab and Vietnamese migrants engage with a national park environment in south-west Sydney, Australia, has highlighted the agency of these people as they not merely adapt to that environment but actively make places for themselves in it. The concept of placemaking is useful particularly in showing that 'place' can be constructed out of social practice, emotion and affect, and does not have to entail physical impact on or alteration of the existing environment. Migrants bring with them into the park many of the perceptual habits, cultural 'ways', and expectations about nature that were formed in their homelands. Participants in the study also reported that certain elements of the park environment, including the river, strongly evoked and triggered memories of their homelands. They experienced being in two places at once. The concept of transnationalism allows us to understand how a national park environment can, for certain people, be situated in transnational more than national space. Transnational connectivity is helping to destabilise park boundaries much the way that, from another perspective, wildlife corridors and the theory and practice of connectivity conservation view them as ideally porous.

KEYWORDS: migrant populations, Arab, Vietnamese, Sydney, Australia, placemaking, national parks

INTRODUCTION

The idea that national park visitors commonly engage in 'placemaking' activity in national parks – activity whereby humans construct cultural habitats for themselves – may seem at odds with the idea of protected areas as refuges safeguarding non-human species from the relentlessness of human placemaking elsewhere in the landscape. Most conservationists would probably concede, though, that the national park idea itself represents a certain Western tradition of placemaking. Placemaking, as described below, is one of the most basic characteristics of human culture. In a recent study of the way Arab and Vietnamese migrants in Sydney engage with a national park in their neighbourhood the authors and their co-researchers found the placemaking concept useful in understanding how these people become familiar with and give value to the park landscape.

The city of Sydney in New South Wales (NSW), one of Australia's six states, is unusual in having large areas of native bushland surviving in the very heart of the cityscape. These include the environment of the Georges River National Park¹, an area of bushland extending along both sides of a river approximately 20km

southwest of the central business district. Steep bush covered slopes run down to alluvial flats along the river, some of these flats having been extended by reclamation (infilling) of mangrove wetlands in the mid-twentieth century to form lawned picnic grounds. The picnic grounds were retained when the present national park was declared in 1992 in recognition of their importance to people in the neighbouring suburbs. At the top of the slopes the bushland extends for a short distance out into the flat surrounding country before it gives way quite abruptly to a suburban landscape of detached houses.

Pre-colonial Aboriginal occupation along the river has left traces in the form of rock paintings, shell middens and scatters of stone artefacts (Goodall & Cadzow, 2009). The British arrived in Sydney in 1788 and from the early nineteenth century the suburbs along the northern side of the Georges River (closest to the city centre) were being settled by successive waves of low-income Anglo-Celtic² working class families. From the 1930s, groups of these settler campaigned to have areas of bushland along the river reserved as parkland for the health and enjoyment of their families in a part of Sydney where parks were few and far between (Goodall & Cadzow, 2010). A community Trust managed this reserve until



Figure 1: Map of Georges River National Park. Office of Environment and Heritage NSW

1992 when the government-managed Georges River National Park was declared. From the 1970s these suburbs received new waves of migrants, including refugees fleeing post-conflict Vietnam (Thomas, 1999) and Arabic-speakers fleeing civil war in Lebanon and violence elsewhere in the Middle East (Dunn, 2004). These people are sometimes referred to as ‘recent migrants’ to distinguish them from early waves of mostly Anglo-Celtic migrants.

In the present day, the south-western suburbs of Sydney have the highest concentration of recent migrants in a city of 4.4 million people of whom 40 per cent in 2011 were born overseas³. Of the 360,000 people living in the south-west Sydney census area in 2011, 51 per cent were born overseas and 79 per cent had at least one parent born overseas⁴. In the early 2000s the Office of Environment and Heritage NSW (OEH) began studying how recent migrants engage with national parks in the Sydney area (Thomas, 2001; Thomas, 2002). More recently, research by OEH and the University of Technology Sydney carried out by the present authors and their co-researchers⁵, looked in detail at the way

Arab and Vietnamese migrants living in the suburbs near the Georges River experience the national park there (Byrne et al., 2006; Goodall & Cadzow, 2009, 2010). The results of this latter study, from which the present article is largely drawn, are available in the open-access on-line publication, *Place-making in National Parks* (Byrne et al., 2013).

A PLACEMAKING PERSPECTIVE

Since the innovative work of Jane Jacobs (1961) and William H. Whyte (1980), urban planners, community groups, local governments, geographers and others have made an effort to promote understanding of the way the inhabitants of particular streets, neighbourhoods, villages and other localities have worked to make these spaces habitable by imprinting them with the patterns of their own local lives. Placemaking should not, though, be thought of simply as something humans *do to* the environment since it always entails response to the cues and possibilities of the environment. The process is dialectical. Historians, geographers and anthropologists have sought to better understand human placemaking (e.g., Feld & Basso, 1996; Ingold, 2000; Massey, 2005;

Stewart, 1996; Tilley, 1994). Place, or 'locality', is understood to be a social construct but, more pragmatically, it is understood to be an outcome and achievement of social 'work'. According to Arjun Appadurai (1996: 181), anthropologists working in many different parts of the world have noticed that people never take locality for granted; rather 'they seem to assume that locality is ephemeral unless hard and regular work is undertaken to produce and maintain its materiality'. This work may involve carrying out rituals and other cultural performances that gather people together at certain places, or it may consist of more mundane activities in which people, mostly unconsciously, become identified with localities via the action of memory, emotion, imagination and sociality. The work of making places out of spaces is now seen as a fundamental priority of human existence (Casey, 1993).

Placemaking has a special significance in the context of immigration. In leaving their homeland, emigrants are dis-placed in the sense of being temporarily without places of their own. Arriving in their destination country they cannot immediately adopt its existing place-scape as their own although over time this can and does occur. Local placemaking is a priority for recently arrived migrants because it gives them a spatial foothold from which they can go about the business of fitting in to the larger terrain of the new country and society. This, of course, is a simplification of a more complex process of adjustment: most recently arrived migrants, for instance, gravitate to residential enclaves already settled by friends, family, fellow-villagers and co-ethnics. They thus borrow places that have already been worked on to render them culturally felicitous, places that in some respects are hybrids of home and away.

Migrants are often buffered from the shock of displacement by socialising with people who are already familiar to them via kin ties or commonality of language and culture. This socialising often has a placemaking dimension. In the course of our interviews with Arab and Vietnamese recent migrants in south-west Sydney we found that the activity of picnicking in the national park enabled them to maintain and extend social ties and contacts at the same time as they acquainted themselves with the Australian natural environment. The picnics tended to be held at specific, chosen locations in the park and as these areas became more familiar they constituted a foothold for recent migrants in the park environment.

One element of the shock of displacement is the experience of finding oneself in a natural environment one neither understands nor possesses adaptive

strategies for. Depending on where they come from, migrants arriving in Australia experience subtle or dramatic differences in climate, seasonality, vegetation and fauna. Those arriving in Sydney from humid-tropical southern Vietnam in the 1970s and 80s often described their surprise and discomfort with what they perceived to be its dryness (Thomas, 2001). This resonates with research in the USA which found that many migrants arriving in Los Angeles from humid countries such as Vietnam perceive California's dry Mediterranean environment to be a 'wasteland' (Trzyna, 2007: 39).

PLACEMAKING AND PICNICS

In the case of both the Arab and Vietnamese migrant groups in our study, picnics in the park tended to involve groups larger than the nuclear family. For Arab-Australians interviewed, an average picnic would be attended by 10-50 people who were mostly members of an extended family: 'cousins and their cousins', as one young interviewee put it. Much larger picnics are also organised to mark special occasions, such as the birth of a child, or to bring large fraternities of people together. An example of the latter are the annual picnics held in the Georges River National Park by the families of emigrants from the village of Toula in northern Lebanon. Most picnics are held on weekends and public holidays and many people attend one almost every week of the year. While our interviewees described the picnics primarily as social events, it became clear that for most of them the picnics represented the primary vector that brought them into the national park and into contact with Australia's natural environment.

Large group picnics have been a feature of migrant existence in a number of countries. The British Italian community, for example, has held picnics at Shenley near London (Fortier, 2000: 108). In Los Angeles, large annual picnics were held by those who had migrated from other states, particularly during the Depression years of the 1930s. These 'state picnics' included the famous Iowa Picnic at Bixby Park, Long Beach, which in 1940 attracted 100,000 people. These picnics were not about ethnicity, they were about homesickness, shared identity and a shared experience of being outsiders in a new city.

At the picnics staged by recent migrants in the Georges River National Park we observed that a sensory environment (sensorium) was created that enveloped the participants. Its elements included the smell and taste of food from 'home', the sound of music from 'home', the sounds of familiar language, and the sight of people of familiar facial features. At picnics by Arab-Australians it



Lebanese-Australians picnicking in Georges River National Park © Denis Byrne

included the aroma of the hookah (*sisha* in Arabic). The picnickers might seem to have created a microenvironment for themselves that rather than linking them to the environment of the park insulates them from it. The sensorium described above should not, however, be thought of as insulating picnickers from nature's sensorium: the scent given off by native vegetation baking in the sun, the sound of bird calls, the vision of the cloud patterns over the river and the bushland beyond. Rather, the two sensoria infiltrate each other and out of this intermingling a new place is made.

In the course of the picnics, associations are created between a locale and the social experiences people have there. Eisenhauer et al. (2000) have documented this in a well-known study of recreational use of public lands in Utah. Drawing on the work of earlier researchers they stress that 'activity at a locale is necessary for a space to be regarded as a place' (Eisenhauer et al., 2000: 423). Most park managers presumably would similarly recognise that the activities engaged in by park visitors are constitutive of the bonds they form with a park environment. Since the natural environment of a park is alive, active and 'vibrant' (Bennett 2010), the 'activity at a

locale' referred to by Eisenhauer et al. always has the aspect of a culture-nature *interactivity* – in other words, it is an amalgam of human and non-human agency.

Our interviewees spoke with great affection of places in the park where they had picnicked habitually. One of the authors (Denis Byrne) accompanied a group of young second generation Arab-Australians on a visit to a location they had often been brought to for picnics when they were small children, and then later came to by themselves when they acquired their first bikes. 'We grew up here', one of them said of the place. It was part of the familiar landscape of their growing up, at once unremarkable to them but also intimately known and fondly remembered (Byrne et al., 2012: 13). This was a close-knit group of young people, a number of whom were now at university, whose social cohesion had partly been formed during those long-ago afternoons down by the river. They had this place in common. On the occasion of our visit they pointed out to each other how much certain trees had grown since the days when they were children, implicitly if not consciously registering the fact that they and the place had grown up together.

Unlike some of the ‘wilderness’ parks in New South Wales, the Georges River National Park is a mosaic of bushland, lawns, car parks and river. One can spend a great deal of time in the park without ever being *in* the bush. ‘The bush’, in Australian popular parlance, can refer to any rural landscape, including agricultural areas, but most of our interviewees understood the term to refer to the forested country found in the large national parks to the north, south and west of Sydney’s urban expanse. Second and third generation migrants participating in our study who had gone to school in Sydney were generally relaxed about ‘the bush’ although for the most part they did not spend much time in it. They had little or no interest in ‘bush walking’ (a term which is Australia generally refers to long-distance walks in the forested environments, often involving overnight camping). They identified bush walking as something only Anglo-Australians did.

Speaking with first generation migrants, most of whom were middle-aged or older, the authors found them similarly disinterested in bush walking. In addition, many of them had quite negative views of the bush, often regarding it as dangerous, mostly due to the presence of venomous snakes and the possibility of wildfires (Byrne et al., 2012: 103). They enjoyed seeing the bush from a distance but had little desire to enter it. Some said they enjoyed short walks in the bush provided there were clearly marked tracks or, preferably, constructed ‘pathways’. Many spoke of enjoying having the bush as a backdrop to picnics taking place on the wide lawns of the national park. They preferred to observe the bush from a distance. A number of them mentioned enjoying a riverside boardwalk which crosses a particular area of mangroves because it allowed them to ‘be in’ nature, while still being somewhat removed from it.

EMPHENERALITY AND LOOSENESS

This disinclination of people to engage directly with the bush lends a particular significance to the picnics. They provide for people what is perhaps their ‘closest’ experience of the natural environment. It also lends significance to the spaces in the national park where the picnics are held: a band of flat, lawn-covered land situated along a three kilometre length of the north side of the winding river and extending in from the river bank from about 30 to 200 metres. This space can be considered liminal in that it lies in between the river and the bush-covered slopes but also in that it is conceptually transitional between the suburban streetscape and the natural environment.

A particular aspect of the places ‘made’ by the activity of picnicking is that the making results in few if any physical alternations to the landscape. The picnic infrastructure of portable barbeques, folding chairs, blankets and straw mats, sun umbrellas, CD and MP3 music players, is packed up and taken home. The picnic leaves a footprint only in the form of flattened grass or scraps of food quickly removed by insects, birds and other animals. In its physical aspect, the picnic is ephemeral. The ‘place’ in one sense dissolves after each picnic only to reform again at the next staging. These places do however have a continuous existence in the minds of ‘repeat-picnickers’ who come to think of them as *their* places. This is a non-exclusive claim, one that recognises that other people use the same space at other times. There is competition for these spaces, though, and on summer weekends an advance party of the picnic fraternity may go to the park early in the morning to stake their claim to the familiar spot. While, as mentioned earlier, Appadurai (1996: 181) has stressed the need to maintain the materiality of locality, locality (or placeness) can often be sustained even where materiality is ephemeral.

Anthropologist Setha Low and her co-workers (Low et al., 2005) have studied the way Latino and other migrant groups became a presence in parks in New York. In their research at Jacob Riis Park, New York, for the US National Park Service, they observed that Latino groups picnicked in the ‘back beach’ area of the park where they ‘enjoy music and dancing – especially Latino rhythms and salsa – and would enjoy summer afternoon concerts that remind them of home (and bring a bit of home to their new beach)’ (Low et al., 2005: 125). Low and her colleagues make the point that, for all their ephemerality, these places are of key importance to migrant groups at a time when they are tentatively establishing a presence in national parks. Low et al. maintain that park staff should not merely welcome people of all ethnicities but be sensitive to the kind of placemaking behaviour their research documented. While robust in some ways, there is nevertheless a particular fragility about places that come into being in this way. Their invisibility (to outsiders) means they are unlikely to appear on management plan maps and thus may be vulnerable to revegetation or park development works.

If picnic sites have this aspect of ephemerality, it may also be said that national parks are attractive to recent migrants partly because they constitute what Catharine Ward Thompson (2002: 69) calls ‘loose space’ – space that is not ‘fixed’ or ‘constrained’ in the way that built

urban space is. National parks are relatively unstructured and unsupervised spaces that are far more open and unconstrained than most of the built public spaces of cities. From the point of view of the migrant park visitor, the river and the native bushland (and its associated biodiversity) are also 'loose' in that they are culture-neutral. They can be encompassed by private or state property rights but their life essence is non-proprietary: it cannot be owned by any one culture group.

SPIRITUALITY AND PARK SPACE

Vietnamese Buddhists are known to go to national parks in the Sydney area to meditate (Thomas 2002: 102) and Thai Buddhist 'forest monasteries' have been established in bushland on the outskirts of the city (Byrne et al., 2006). The association of forests with meditation is deeply established within the Buddhist Theravada tradition as it exists in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. It appears now to have been extended to embrace the Australian bush.

In the Georges River National Park it is common to see Muslim Arab migrants standing or kneeling to pray at the times designated by their religion. One of our Muslim interviewees remarked that since all of nature is God's creation, to be standing or kneeling on the ground in the park is about as close to God as one could be. Islam maintains there is no such thing as a profane world: in the words of the Prophet, 'the whole of this earth is a mosque' (Wersal, 1995: 545). Muslims praying in the Georges River National Park face towards the *Kaaba* in Mecca. The invisible line orienting and connecting them to Mecca, as well as the act of praying itself, might be thought of as bringing Islam into the park or as placing the park within the cosmography of Islam. Meditating or praying are not, however, acts which colonise park space for particular religions, rather these acts occur partly because individual actors experience the park environment as conducive to spiritual experience (Byrne et al., 2006). Or, in the case of Muslims, it may simply be that they happen to be in the park at prayer time and the 'looseness' of park space allows them to pray there whereas in another public space, such as a shopping mall, football stadium, or public library, it would not.

There seems no question that religious ritual and spiritual experience can play a role in placemaking but, as in the case of picnicking, the places it helps make in national parks are ephemeral and non-proprietary. In this regard they are suited to the ideal of national parks as culturally open spaces.

NATIONAL PARKS AS TRANSNATIONAL SPACE

In Australia and perhaps other countries with a high and culturally diverse migrant intake, immigration is widely perceived as a one-way movement of people that entails a process of adaptation to the host country. This is reflected in the way 'migrant heritage' is framed by heritage institutions and practitioners under the themes of settlement and adaptation, a framing that 'contains' the migrant story within Australia's borders. Multicultural policy in Australia is designed to enable the continuance of distinctive migrant cultures within the broader social fabric of the host country and contained by its borders. What this view fails to notice is that each migrant group is also likely to see itself as belonging to a diasporic ethnic community, a 'belonging' experienced by some migrants as intense and pervasive and by others as situational and less intense.

In Australia, as in Canada, the USA and other settler colonies, everyone who is not indigenous is a migrant and most migrants belong to diasporic communities. This of course includes Australia's Anglo-Celtic majority as well as its Chinese, Greek, Lebanese, Vietnamese and other minorities. Looked at in this way, Australia sits within the overlapping fields of numerous diaspora. Since the 1990s there has been a burgeoning interest in the humanities and social sciences in the concept of transnationalism. The term is generally used to refer to a kind of cross-border social connectivity that, while it has long characterised migration and sojourning (for example, that of the Chinese on the nineteenth century goldfields of California and Australia) has from the late twentieth century been amplified by relatively cheap air travel and advances in electronic media (Appadurai, 1996; Ong, 1999). In this aspect of globalisation, certain villages in countries like Lebanon and China are now more intimately connected to suburbs in Sydney than they are to other population centres in Lebanon and China. Transnationalism is a concept with significant implications for the way national parks are socially constituted in Australia: the parks draw migrants to them but park space is also drawn into transnational space.

The dynamics of transnationalism are perhaps most easily seen in the setting of urban migrant enclaves. When, for example, a group of Lebanese men gather in south-west Sydney to listen to the news from Lebanon on the radio they are situated in a Lebanese diasporic 'ethnoscape' (Appadurai, 1996). They can see Beirut quite clearly in their minds, which is to say they can spatialize what they are listening to, often in great detail. But this is also an embodied experience: the way they sit



Arab-Australian children enjoying Georges River National Park © Denis Byrne

around the table, they way they sip their tea, the gestures of their hands in response to what they are hearing, all signal that their bodies and minds are in a space that is neither Beirut nor Sydney but, rather, a Beirut-Sydney continuum. This is the 'diasporic state of mind' that Ien Ang (2011, 86) writes of.

Moving to the situation of national parks, Vietnamese migrant interviewees in our study spoke of how the Georges River would often evoke for them the rivers of Vietnam on which or near which many of them had grown up. More than just a remembering of the homeland, this evocation took the form of an embodied experience: they felt like they were *in* their homeland or, in our terms, in a transnational space that transcended the borders of Vietnam and Australia. For some people, the simple act of holding a fishing rod triggered 'embodied memories' (Connerton, 1989) that took them back to those times they had stood beside a river with a rod in the old country (Goodall et al., 2009). As researchers, we began to appreciate that when we saw a Vietnamese person walking beside the Georges River, while they were ostensibly wholly within the bounds of the national park they were nevertheless situated in a transnational space (see also Low et al., 2005: 33). We could not accurately describe what the national park meant to these visitors without also describing what Vietnam meant to them. The presence of Vietnamese-Australians in the park implied that Vietnam, in transnational form, was also present there.

TRANSNATIONALISM AND CONNECTIVITY CONSERVATION

Transnationalism unsettles the idea of the nation as a spatially bounded entity. It might also be said to challenge the conventional way of thinking of national parks as firmly bounded and stable units of space. The national park concept had its origins partly in Western romantic conceptions of 'wilderness' (Schama, 1995) but was also very much bound up with the emergence of the national state. National parks helped provide the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006) of the nation with a tangible, iconic topography (Thomas, 2001: 23-25; Crusin, 2004: 22-29). They helped the nation's citizenry to grasp the physical-geographic totality of the nation, described by Thongchai (1994) as the national 'geobody', and to develop a sense of belonging to it. IUCN and other international conservation bodies have given the national park concept an aspect of internationalism but this has not diminished the close engagement of the concept in national identity formation.

We have found it productive to think about transnationalism in relation to the concept of connectivity as it pertains in the fields of nature conservation and protected area management. The concept of wildlife corridors and the broader theory and practice of connectivity conservation (Bennett, 2003; Sandwith & Lockwood, 2006) appear to have originated in an appreciation that the boundaries of protected areas are more likely to have been drawn in relation to the geometries of a cadastral grid and to political considerations than to the spatiality of species distribution and mobility. This view and the management approaches flowing from it reconfigure national park boundaries as permeable and conditional rather than solid and fixed.

In a parallel development, the field of nature conservation has acquired a new consciousness of indigenous and local people's dependency on the resources of protected areas and of their cultural connectivity to landscapes, both of which are frequently cut across by protected area boundaries (Peluso, 1995; Zerner, 2003). 'Countermapping' approaches have been devised to assist indigenous and local people to contest the kind of state boundary-marking that has often seen protected areas created without local informed consent (Byrne, 2008; Harwell, 2011; Peluso, 1995; Ross et al., 2010) and, in Australia, Indigenous Protected Areas have been created and joint-management agreements over national parks negotiated. There is also a growing appreciation of the social and emotional connectivity that

exists in places like Australia between national park landscapes and those non-indigenous people who formerly owned and farmed that terrain (Brown, 2012).

While there continues to be an appreciation that what protected areas are protected *from* are human processes inimical to the wellbeing of humans and other species, there is an increasing awareness that human social connectivity with, and valuation of, these spaces is critical to their existence and functioning. The concept of transnationality provides a perspective in which social connectivity can be considered in the wider, cross-border frame that modern-era migration and sojourning has given rise to.

CONCLUSIONS

In the context of protected area management, placemaking theory offers a useful way of viewing visitor behaviour and values. In the case of national parks, it is conducive to a management approach that acknowledges the agency of visitors as they socially reconfigure park space. Rather than simply passively enjoying or actively learning from a park environment whose meaning is stable and fixed, they make their own places in it and out of it. It is proposed that for recent-migrant visitors tentatively establishing a presence in parks, placemaking takes on a particular significance. Their development of a sense of ownership of park space, via placemaking, is fundamental to the development of a sense of responsibility for that space. The interest park managers have in respecting and even facilitating migrant placemaking lies to a great extent in the fact that these visitors represent a growing proportion of the constituency national parks rely on for support.

Transnationalism theory offers its own attractions for park management. Ideas about national parks now readily flow backwards and forwards between Australia and Vietnam along diasporic lines. The Georges River National Park, for instance, is now 'known' in southern Vietnam courtesy of photographs and phone videos, increasingly frequent homeland visitation and other vectors. At a broader level, ideas about nature conservation also flow from Australia to places like Vietnam and Lebanon via diasporic networks. Moving in the other direction, traditions and contemporary practices of nature appreciation and nature visitation in Asia and the Middle East now inform patterns of park visitation by many thousands of migrants in Australia.

For park management, multiculturalism and transnationalism are not so much challenges as assets – assets that we are still learning to capitalise on. As hyper-

development in Asia degrades that region's environment (e.g., Wen and Li, 2007), Australia has come to be valued by many in Asia as a tourism and migration destination on account of its 'environmental assets'. There is a transnational sense here in which Australia is becoming one of Asia's protected areas, or a protected area of an Asia-Pacific transnational field. Whatever qualms some Australians might have at this prospect, it carries the implication of a vastly expanded potential support base for the country's protected areas.

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NOTES

¹ For more information see the park homepage: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/nationalparks/parkHome.aspx?id=N0080>

² 'Anglo-Celtic' refers to Australian settlers from Britain and Ireland

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Greater Sydney Statistical Division, 2011 census. http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/1GSYD (Consulted Feb 2013)

⁴ ABS Sydney South West Statistical Division, 2011 census. http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/127 (Consulted Feb 2013)

⁵ The authors' co-researchers on this project were Dr Allison Cadzow of the Australian National University and Dr Stephen Wearing of the University of Technology, Sydney

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RESUMEN

Un estudio sobre la interacción de los migrantes árabes y vietnamitas con relación a un parque nacional en el suroeste de Sydney, Australia, ha puesto de manifiesto que estas personas no sólo se adaptan al entorno, sino que se hacen lugar en dicho entorno. El concepto de hacer lugar es útil sobre todo para demostrar que el 'lugar' puede construirse a partir de la práctica social, la emoción y el afecto, y no tiene por qué implicar repercusión física en o alteración del entorno existente. Los migrantes traen consigo al parque muchos de sus hábitos perceptivos, estilos culturales y expectativas sobre la naturaleza que fueron formados en su país de origen. Los participantes en el estudio también informaron de que algunos elementos del entorno del parque, incluyendo el río, evocaban y activaban los recuerdos de su tierra natal. Experimentaron la sensación de estar en dos lugares al mismo tiempo. El concepto de transnacionalismo nos permite comprender cómo –para algunas personas– el entorno de un parque nacional puede situarse en un espacio más transnacional que nacional. La conectividad transnacional está ayudando a desestabilizar los límites del parque de manera muy parecida a como, desde otra perspectiva, los corredores de vida silvestre y la teoría y la práctica de la conservación de la conectividad los ven como idealmente porosos.

RÉSUMÉ

Une étude portant sur le comportement des migrants arabes et vietnamiens dans un parc national situé dans la région sud-ouest de Sydney, en Australie, a mis en avant un phénomène intéressant. En effet, il est apparu que ces populations font plus que s'adapter à cet environnement : elles y trouvent activement leur place. Le concept de création d'espaces est donc utile, notamment pour montrer que l'espace peut être construit à partir de pratiques sociales, d'émotions et d'affect et qu'il n'implique pas nécessairement d'impact physique ou d'altération de l'environnement existant. Lorsqu'ils sont dans le parc, les migrants apportent avec eux leurs habitudes perceptuelles et culturelles et leurs attentes sur la nature, qui puisent leurs origines dans leurs pays nats. Les participants à l'étude ont également rapporté que certains éléments du parc, notamment la rivière, leur faisaient fortement penser à leurs terres natales. Ils avaient ainsi le sentiment d'être à deux endroits en même temps. Le concept de transnationalisme permet de comprendre comment un parc national peut, chez certaines personnes, être transnational – et donc dépasser le simple espace national. Ainsi, la connectivité transnationale nous aide à dépasser les frontières du parc tout comme, considérés sous un autre angle, les couloirs de la vie sauvage et la théorie et la pratique de la conservation de la connectivité qui considèrent, dans l'idéal, les frontières comme poreuses.