THE LATROBE VALLEY: THE POLITICS OF LOSS AND HOPE IN A REGION OF TRANSITION

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ABSTRACT   This paper suggests that in places like the Latrobe Valley in south-eastern Victoria, Australia, that are undergoing significant change and transition, the narratives describing historical *and* contemporary feelings about such change are integral to a better understanding of how certain politics of emotion and affect are mobilised. Subsequently implications of this for regional futures are explored. The article traces the origins of the Latrobe Valley's coal industry and the establishment of its mining communities, with specific attention paid to narratives of communal belonging and loss as government involvement in the region shifted from a somewhat benign paternalism to the neoliberalist ideologies of the 1980s. This history is integral to current narratives about a perceived ongoing ignorance or lack of consideration on the impact of economic and social decisions made for this region. This paper focuses specifically on interview material that arises out of the work undertaken by the Community Wellbeing Stream of the Hazelwood Health Study. This interview material offers a means to examine participants' emotional connections and responses to change. Through an analysis of this material the aim was to uncover the role such narratives may play in mobilising responses to the region's current contexts and what this might tell us about future pathways.

KEY WORDS: emotions, transition, Latrobe Valley, coal, hope

1. INTRODUCTION

In a journal issue focused on regional futures, this article asks that careful attention is also paid to the ways in which regional pasts are woven into present lives and places, that are integral to shaping ideas and plans about the future. Geographers John Connell and Rae Dufty-Jones (2014) note that, fundamental to the definition of 'rural Australia' has been a focus on a framework of change, more specifically the extent, impact and spatial scales of such change (see also Tonts *et al*., 2012). There is a significant body of literature that explores narratives of change in rural and regional places, which in recent work in the Australian context has focused on such things as amenity-led migration, cycles of mining booms and busts, drought, rural land management and planning, biodiversity conservation, and the management and sustainability of rural communities (Connell and McManus, 2011; Connell *et al*., 2014; Luck *et al*., 2011). Yet, as historian and architect William Taylor (2014, p. 3) suggests in a recent discussion about transition in regional places, Australia's patterns of population tend to reinforce ideas as to "where things are 'happening' or not", and this in turn has led to

> "treating the meanings of places as given rather than as social constructions and therefore historically contingent [and thus] opportunities to reflect on the ideas accompanying these movement are few and often limited to thinking about consequences in empirical and mostly casual terms."

This notion of 'happening' or 'not happening' is important as these narratives around change tend to locate the life of rural and regional communities within discourses of national socio-economic sustainability that, while important, fail to register the emotional impacts of change. These emotional and affective dimensions of community are fundamental to the forming of social life, community connectedness, sustainability, wellbeing and resilience, but are often overlooked because of their perceived subjective and therefore 'suspect' nature (Ahmed, 2004). As geographers Lesley Head and Theresa Harada (2017, pp. 34-35) note, while researchers are now more prepared to talk about

> "their own emotional responses to traumatic subject matter…[n]onetheless, painful or troubling emotions receive little attention in the western cultural context of the practice of science, which is dominated by the importance of scientific rationality."

The emotional and affective dimensions of the everyday world are needed because without acknowledging the role these play in all arenas of daily life we fail to understand how we "both know, and intervene in, the world" (Anderson and Smith, 2001, p. 7). In referring to emotion and affect, it is acknowledged that while there are differing conceptualisations of these two terms (and often these are further complicated by association with terms such as feeling and sensation), emotion and affect are inherently part of a "relational, connective medium" (Bondi, 2005, p. 433) that assembles everyday emotional life as both an individualised and subjective experience, as well as something that "arise[s] and flow[s] between people" (Bondi, 2005, p. 443). In addition, these flows include things such as the materiality of our daily lives, and the processes and practices that shape social, economic and government institutions. Therefore, the authors' interest in emotion and affect lies in how these aspects of personal and social life are integral to concerns of place, power, and subjectivity, and how change 'matters' in these contexts.

This discussion draws on interview material collected for the Community Wellbeing stream of the Hazelwood Health Study, a longitudinal study funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services. The Hazelwood Health Study is focused on assessing potential health outcomes for people who may have been exposed to smoke from the 2014 Hazelwood mine fire (refer to the Hazelwood Health Study's website for more details on this project: http://hazelwoodhealthstudy.org.au/). The aims of this particular component of the larger health study are to identify community perceptions of (1) the impact of the smoke event on community wellbeing; (2) the effectiveness of community rebuilding activities; and (3) to identify community perceptions of effective communication during and after the smoke event. Many of those who participated in this component of the study stated that the challenges faced by Morwell today need to be understood in the context of the Latrobe Valley's history. This is a place once talked of as the "economic and cultural centre of the whole industrial region" (Read, 1996, p. 29), however, privatisation and restructuring of the State Electricity Commission Victoria (SEC) led to major job losses and population decline that then "transformed the Valley into the most disadvantaged location in regional Victoria by most social and economic

indicators" (Tomaney and Somerville, 2010, p. 4). The authors suggest, that in places like the Latrobe Valley undergoing significant change and transition, the narratives describing historical *and* contemporary feelings about such change are integral to a better understanding of how certain politics of emotion and affect are mobilised, and what this may mean for regional futures.

This article starts with a brief overview of the origins of the Latrobe Valley's coal industry and the establishment of its mining communities, with specific attention paid to narratives of communal belonging and loss as state and local government involvement in the region shifted from a somewhat benign paternalism to the neoliberalist ideologies of the 1980s. This is followed by a summary of the 2014 Hazelwood mine fire, and an outline of the methodological framework for examining community perceptions of the impact of the smoke event on community wellbeing. The discussion focuses specifically on interview material that raised concerns about a perceived ongoing ignorance or lack of consideration on the impact of economic and social decisions made for this region. This interview material is drawn on in order to examine participants' emotional connections and responses to change. Through an analysis of this material the aim was to uncover the role such narratives may play in mobilising responses to the region's current contexts and what this might tell us about future pathways.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LATROBE VALLEY COAL INDUSTRY AND TOWNS

The Latrobe Valley and the wider Gippsland region contains 16 per cent of the world's brown coal reserves (DEECD, 2012: 22). The SEC was formed in 1919 following the decision to extract these coal reserves in order to generate Victoria's electricity (Fletcher, 2002; Gibson, 2001; Rainnie and Paulet, 2003). Coal mining began in the Latrobe Valley at Yallourn in 1924, and other communities were also established in the area specifically to service the coal industry, thus making the SEC this region's major employer (DEECD, 2012). In addition the SEC recruited a significant part of this workforce from the post-war migrant intake as a way to meet its workforce requirements (Rainnie and Paulet, 2003). The majority of post-war arrivals were from the UK but also included immigrants from the Netherlands, Poland, the Ukraine, Germany, Italy and Malta (Zubrzycki, 1964). On the whole, there were few links with those migrants who moved to the region prior to WWII attracted by gold mining,

the timber industry, quarry work and construction, apart from the Maltese community, who, through chain migration, had been migrating into the Latrobe Valley since the 1920s (Zubrzycki, 1964). The security of employment, housing and services was important as work at the SEC provided the chance for new, more prosperous futures for both migrants and locals, as well as for the towns and communities of the Latrobe Valley. Tomaney and Somerville (2010, p. 35) note that the impact of this recruitment led to the emergence of a relatively high income (largely male) labour force in the Valley and, in this respect, it became a particular expression of Victoria's distinctive state-led development agenda, which, according to Eggleston (1932, p. 1) constituted "the largest and most comprehensive use of State power outside of Russia." New mines and power stations were opened in the 1970s, and with these the development of ancillary manufacturing and service industries (Cameron and Gibson, 2005). Nevertheless, in acknowledgement that coal reserves are finite, a sense of precariousness has perhaps always been part of the Valley. A summary of this industry in the region is presented in Table 1.

Australian historian Peter Read's 1996 publication, *Returning to Nothing: The meaning of lost places*, is a collection of stories about place attachment, loss, trauma and grief for those whose homes had been demolished by nature, war, migration, forcible dispossession or lost through government planning. One of the examples he included was that of Yallourn, a town intentionally established so that SEC employees could "live close to, yet not be dominated by, the vast open cut brown coal mine" (Read, 1996:, p. 77; see also Fletcher, 2002). Its architect, A.R. La Gerche, designed, and the SEC maintained, "one of the brightest but briefest flowerings of the garden city movement interpreted in Australia" (Read, 1996, p. 77; see also Legg, 1992). Nonetheless, as Read goes on to tell, residents also had to endure a range of adverse conditions, including the deep whine of the power station turbines, the constant presence of coal dust, as well as a 'paternalistic way' of life that was coordinated by the SEC (Read, 1996, p. 79; see also Fairbrother and Testi, 2002). Indeed, prior to WWII, the SEC maintained strong control over Yallourn, including control over housing and business, and "all decisions either made outside of the region, in Melbourne, or settled by a third party such as the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission" (Rainnie and Paulet, 2003, p. 156). Leonard Stretton, judge and royal commissioner who investigated the cause of a major fire at Yallourn in February 1944, was critical of the township, describing it as a pleasant town where people "enjoy all that the heart of man could desire – except freedom, fresh air and independence"

(Stretton, 1944 as cited in Fletcher, 2002, p. 114). Construction of Yallourn commenced in 1921 and the town was destroyed in the early 1970s as the SEC sought access to the brown coal located under its buildings and streets.

Table 1. Brief overview of industry history in the Latrobe Valley.

This region in Victoria belongs to the Braiakaulung people of the Gunai-kurnai nation.	
1836	Squatting legalized.
1840s	Pastoral runs.
1870s	Closer settlement – smaller holdings selected, land cleared for dairy and grazing.
1880s	Great Morwell Coal Mining Company open cut mining of brown coal and briquette manufacture.
1918	State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) established; Victorian State Government appointed in role of "Electricity Commissioners" responsible for generation and distribution of electricity throughout the State.
1921	Sir John Monash appointed Chairman of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria; Yallourn site prepared for open cut mining; asbestos used in homes, buildings and mine because of its fire-retardant qualities, strength and durability.
1924	First transmission of electricity from Yallourn to Melbourne (first brown coal station outside of Germany).
1928-1962	Completion of Yallourn Power Station complex.
late 1930s	Australian Paper Manufacturers established paper pulp plant at Maryvale near Traralgon.
1950	Capacity at Yallourn Power Station expanded.
late 1950s	New mine opened at Morwell, with power station, briquette factory and coal gasification plant constructed.
1960s	Hazelwood power station constructed south of Morwell; town of Churchill developed.
1971	Hazelwood Power Station completed.
1972	Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education established.
1980	Yallourn West Power Station completed.
mid 1980s	Yallourn town removed in order to access brown coal reserves beneath the town.
1990	Monash University took over operations of Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education
1993	Loy Yang A Power Station completed; SECV's role in supplying electricity to Victoria ended, and this was split into generation, transmission and distribution companies.
1996	Loy Yang B Power Station completed.
late 1990s	Privatisation of the Victorian power industry.
2014	Hazelwood Mine Fire; Ballarat University and Monash University Gippsland merged to form Federation University Australia.
2017	Closure of Hazelwood Mine; Morwell Mill closed due to timber supplier (Hancock Victorian Plantations) unable to supply hardwood; Heyfield Timber Mill closed because Australian Sustainable Hardwoods cannot source hardwood needed to plant sustainably.

Source: the Authors.

While a 1980 report on the resettlement of Yallourn residents concluded that residents "had not suffered much pain or grief" (Wardley and Ballock, 1980, cited in Read, 1996, p. 99), Read (1996) notes how residents described the loss of Yallourn in ways analogous to the death of a person, described by some in terms of the SEC choosing to "rip something out like that you rip out people's roots" (quoted in Read, 1996, p. 90). Reviews of Read's book point to the significance of the "myriad relationships between people and places… [and] how the severance of these ties represents a loss that both traumatises and bereaves" (Strang, 1997, p. 72). For many, these feelings of grief and grievance remain a significant undercurrent in nearly all relations with those outside the Valley's boundaries.

This loss was exacerbated with the decision to privatise the SEC in the 1980s, which led to significant changes in the Valley. While over 9000 people – "almost a third of the Latrobe Valley's labour force" (DEECD, 2012, p. 22) – were employed by the SEC in the mid-1970s, this had dropped to 1 800 by 2002 (Tomaney and Somerville, 2010), which meant that some power stations lost up to 75 per cent of their workforce (Cameron and Gibson, 2005). This in turn led to the withdrawal of other associated industries and services (Rainnie and Paulet, 2003). While the state Labor government of the 1980s commenced the process of privatisation with the part sale of the Loy Yang B power station in 1990 (Doig, 2015), the Kennett Coalition Government accelerated the privatisation process, selling the remaining generating plants in 1996 and 1997 (Rainnie and Paulet, 2003). In 1996, the Hazelwood power station was sold to International Power (a British company) for $2.35 billion, and GDF Suez (later Engie) took over International Power in 2010 (Doig, 2015). Although there had been plans for a staged closure, the Hazelwood power station and Morwell mine were closed in March of 2017. Engie had declared the plant no longer economically viable, and stated that "last-ditch calls for the government to step in … [were] too late and too expensive" (Anderson, 2017 online). The cost for rehabilitation of the mine, demolition of the plant, and restoration of the surrounding area was estimated to be around $AU743 million, bringing the total cost of closure to almost $AU 1.1 billion (Gordon, 2017 online).

Prior to privatisation "the Latrobe Valley had been accustomed to near full employment and continued growth" (Cameron and Gibson, 2005, p. 149) but post-privatisation unemployment and decline have become the norm. Between 1991 and 1999 the number of people receiving unemployment benefits increased by over 78 per cent (Rainnie and Paulet, 2003). In 1996, Moe and Morwell had the highest unemployment rates for

men in the whole of Victoria, and within Morwell 33 per cent of men aged 25-34 were unemployed (Birrell, 2001). Many jobs also became part-time; in 2001, part-time work accounted for over one-third of all jobs (Rainnie and Paulet, 2003), and over this time, taxable income "fell from a level six percent above the Victorian average to three percent below it" (Rainnie and Paulet, 2003, p. 163). Privatisation also resulted in population decline in this region, yet this decline was uneven. Between 1991 and 1996 the population was reduced by over 4000 people (Birrell, 2001); however, nearly a third of men aged 25-44 years who lived in Moe, Morwell and Traralgon in 1991 had left by 1996 (Birrell, 2001). Further to this, the benefits of privatisation were perceived by Latrobe Valley communities as accrued mostly to Melbourne domestic, industrial and commercial consumers while the costs were born by the people of the Latrobe Valley (Birrell, 2001).

This ongoing period of change had significant impact on community wellbeing. For example, in research conducted in 1997, geographer Katherine Gibson (2001) records the disaffection of those who were employed as electricity workers, particularly as to how this region was "disciplined and managed" (p. 643) and then "devastated" by "massive retrenchments from the electricity and mining industry and privatization of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria" (p. 641). As one of her informants told her,

> "The problem with the Valley, it's a place that's been artificially manufactured and that's the problem, that's how I see the problem. The Valley was built by the government and the government wiped their hands of it when they had the responsibility to take it on to look after it. You'll never get over what happened because the Valley is definitely an orchestrated built area. It was built to supply a need and the Valley took on the people, and the governments encouraged the people to come here, but when the hard word went on, they wiped their hands of the place" (Gibson 2001, p. 643).

As this informant went on to explain, his role as a supervisor meant he was part of the decision making in terms of who was retrenched. Gibson describes the visceral and emotional impact this had: his "voice faltered, tears came to his eyes, and for a brief moment he was so overcome that he was unable to speak" (Gibson 2001, p. 649). Geographers Katherine Gibson and Jenny Cameron along with psychologist Arthur Veno (1999, p. 24) comment that "a narrative of victimhood seemed to be predominant in the Latrobe Valley region" and a sense "of hopelessness engendered in

people and of their ability to fight back or exert their rights". The economic and social impact of privatisation was devastating for this region, which came to be described as "The Valley of the Dole", Australia's version of a trailer trash community (Proctor, 2005, p. 22). These perceptions of the Latrobe Valley communities have had important ongoing impacts into the present, as became evident during our interviews with members of the community following the mine fire event.

3. EXAMINING THE HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE THROUGH AN EMOTIONAL METHODOLOGIES FRAMEWORK: BRIEF BACKGROUND TO THE 2014 MINE FIRE

The Hazelwood mine fire was ignited by a bushfire that had spread into the Hazelwood open-cut coalmine and burned for approximately 45 days in February and March 2014, shrouding the surrounding communities – especially nearby Morwell – in smoke (Fisher *et al.*, 2015). As Fisher *et al.*, (2015, p. 6) point out, "at peak times the concentrations of particles and carbon monoxide were very high and exceeded standards" and that "the smoke contained numerous contaminants, with particle and CO concentrations exceeding standards." Local communities became increasingly concerned about the perceived health risks of exposure to the smoke and gas emissions from the burning coal as members of the community noted increased ill health in family members, neighbours and friends (submissions to the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Report 2014). Thus, this fire, initially treated as a fire emergency, "evolved into a chronic technological disaster … and a significant and lengthy environmental and health crisis" (Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Report 2014, p. 28; see also Duffy *et al.* 2016).

There was a strong community call for an investigation into the health impacts, culminating in a petition with over 21 000 signatures. In response, the Victorian Department of Health (now Department of Health and Human Services) made a decision to fund a 10-year longitudinal Hazelwood Mine Fire Health Study (HMFHS) to start in early 2015 This study was designed to identify potential long-term health outcomes, with the understanding that this would need to continue for sufficient time to capture latency outcomes like cancers. The need for this study was also confirmed by the Commission of Inquiry into the fire, which recommended that the project should be extended to 20 years (Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry, 2014).

4. METHODS

After human ethics approval was granted by the Federation University's Human Research Ethics Committee (B15-067), the interviews conducted as part of the Community Wellbeing Stream's work for the Hazelwood Health Study sought to create a broad narrative evidence-base of community perceptions of the impact of the smoke event on community wellbeing. The overall aim was to gain a detailed understanding of the impact of the Hazelwood mine fire smoke event on community wellbeing, resilience and vulnerability. This study uses qualitative research methodology, specifically interviews with key informants and media analysis. This article focuses on material collected from two interview-based methods: semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. Potential community groups in Morwell were recruited through the Hazelwood Health Study website and Community Advisory Committee, as well as through community notices. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants over the age of 18 years, who were recruited from organisers, supporters and participants in community recovery activities following the 2014 mine fire.

The interview material presented here was drawn from nine interviews and one focus group session. Participants were asked to talk about their perceptions of the effects of the Hazelwood coalmine fire on the community's health and wellbeing, if any particular groups or people in the community were affected, and what sort of recovery activities had occurred and whether these had proved effective in addressing community wellbeing. The open-ended nature of the semi-structured interview results in 'conversations with a purpose' that enable us as researchers to better understand people's interpretation of their lived experiences (Minichiello *et al.*, 1995), and allowed participants to discuss what was important to them (Brinkman, 2014) in the context of the mine fire's impacts, thus enabling participants to "play an active role in framing and filling in their narrative" (Chamlee-Wright and Storr, 20011, p. 620). Given that participants elected to participate in this study, it is acknowledged that there will be some bias in the interview material and that not all members of the broader Latrobe Valley community will be represented in the data collected. For example, the coal industry is one among a number of industries in this region that have suffered economic decline. In addition, the Latrobe Valley, and Morwell itself, has undergone demographic change with comparative newcomers including recent refugee communities from Sudan (from both the north and the south although

mostly from the south) and Burma (the Karen people) (Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2009).

The interview material was transcribed and then analysed thematically; that is, through an inductive process that identified significant patterns of narrative within the interview material. This was followed by a process of analysis and representation using an approach sometimes called poetic transcription, research poems or poetic representation. In brief, it is about taking the words of participants, paring them back or distilling them and then (re)presenting them in a poem-like format rather than as prose or verbatim quotes. This approach is not about writing poetry but uses some of the formatting and structure of poetry – white space, short lines, spoken rhythms – to help access the emotional content of interview material (Leavey, 2009). One of the advantages of poetic representation is that it distils and condenses the data, a process that imbues the story with greater emotion. These poetic representations, "[make] one pause, reflect, feel. [they] give pleasure first, then truth, and its language is charged, intensified, concentrated" (Glense, 1997, p. 214). This approach, therefore, provides a powerful avenue for accessing and re-presenting the emotional impact of what participants choose to talk about. These poetic representations have not been ascribed to any one individual so as to maintain anonymity, which the authors felt was particularly important given the small sample size and possibility that individuals could be identified. In the section that follows the four major themes that arose in interviews are presented and discussed: (1) Anger, grief, and loss; (2) feelings of abandonment; (3) hopes for the future; and (4) the meaning of transition for the community.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED AFTER THE 2014 HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE

Theme 1: Anger, Grief, and Loss

One of the common – and perhaps dominant – perceptions of the Latrobe Valley is one characterised by "an overarching sense of despair" (Cameron and Gibson, 2005, p. 274). These perceptions continue in the thoughts of some members of the community who had witnessed these earlier changes, and who spoke of apparent neglect during the mine fire as part of a longer history of disregard for this community. In 2000, the then State Labor Government established a Latrobe Valley Ministerial Taskforce. Yet, as

sociologist Bob Birrell (2001, pp. 26-27) notes, while the report acknowledged,

> "the regrettable economic and social dislocation endured by the community of the Latrobe Valley, and the community's sense of abandonment by State and Federal Governments over the last decade… there was no acknowledgement … that the State Government has a responsibility to compensate the community affected."

Since privatisation, in part due to the job losses and in part due to the lack of government intervention and assistance for the community, social and economic disadvantaged has become entrenched. This has led many members of the community to be deeply dissatisfied and mistrustful of authorities, as reflected in this poetic transcription of interview material:

> The Valley doesn't trust the government,
> and we don't trust the companies
> We were the first,
> the pilots
> of the privatisation thing,
> we lost seven thousand jobs
> right across the valley
> we used to be the high socio economic group
> We were all well paid
>
> There was security,
> everybody worked
>
> We've been decimated
> and
> it's just like nobody
> really gives a fuck about us
> seven thousand jobs
>
> When people aren't looked after
> they become depressed,
> then they don't act
> they lose all self esteem
> physically and mentally
> in the end
> just can't do anything
> The thing with the SEC

> they had a purpose to get out of bed
> They had a life

Following as it did on the destruction of Yallourn, the impacts of the privatisation process and the resultant social and economic disadvantage that have come to define Morwell and the Latrobe Valley more broadly, have shaped people's responses to the 2014 mine fire event, how they understand and made sense of the event, and their expectations of the recovery process.

Theme 2: Feelings of Abandonment

There was a strong sense that this community and region had been abandoned, and this sense of abandonment was exacerbated by inadequate and at times conflicting information from government agencies, which did not seem to reflect the community's experiences of the smoke event. Residents were told it was safe to stay in Morwell even as they suffered breathlessness, sore eyes and throats, and a general lethargy and 'fuzziness' (Wood *et al.*, 2015), poignantly expressed in this poetic transcription of interview material:

> We were left to our own devices
> and forgotten,
> nobody cared
>
> It took the Health Department
> two weeks to come down here
> They have no idea
> They fly in,
> they're here for half an hour
> make an announcement,
> and fly out
> while the community is going,
> what do we do?
>
> There was no information
> it was just,
> everything's fine,
> just keep your windows closed
> And everyone said the same thing,
> we're not fine

>Your eyes are burning
>You're coughing
>you can't breathe
>we were just treated
>like we were whinging,
>complaining about nothing
>
>they were evacuating
>government departments
>but we were all left here
>
>We just
>keep being lied to
>over and over and over
>That's where the trauma came in
>an
>absolute
>feeling
>of
>abandonment
>
>It didn't matter
>if we lived or died
>we were expendable,
>seems to be
>that's still the case

Contributing to people's sense of abandonment was a perception that the rest of Victoria, in particular Melbourne, did not care about what was happening even though Morwell and the Latrobe Valley supplied 'their' electricity. Community members believed that if a similar event had happened in Melbourne a more appropriate response would have been swiftly put in place, as exemplified in this poetic transcription of interview material:

>If you had a fire in the city
>in a suburban setting
>a toxic factory is burning
>and there was a school next to it
>Between
>when the fire arrived
>and getting the children out
>that would be within the hour,
>that'd be the first thing you'd do

> Why would it be
> more than two weeks here?
>
> They don't care is a definite,
> they don't give a damn,
> they don't care about us,
> we're just in Latrobe Valley,
> as long as they've got their power,
> what does it matter,
> you know,
> it doesn't really matter

The sense of abandonment, mistrust and of being lied to, was perhaps more keenly felt as it reinforced and echoed the community's sense of abandonment when privatisation had occurred and few or no programs, interventions or money were allocated to assist the community to recover and adapt; as encapsulated in this fragment from an interview with community members:

> So I think when
> The fires occurred
> I think there was
> still a lot of residue
> from the privatisation
> and the diminishment
> the emotions carried over into that

The community's perception of an ongoing lack of support from the State government was echoed in the Latrobe City Council's submission to the second Mine Fire Inquiry (2015; full transcript is available online at hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au/2015-public-submissions/index.html).

> "While the first report on the Hazelwood Mine Fire discussed our community's heightened emotional sense of abandonment, it did not canvas the possibility that this sense of emotional desertion has been intensified by the significant long term health impacts of the power generation industry. For many residents, being made redundant from the State Electricity Commission was an emotional and personal trauma, a trauma which some sectors of the community have struggled to reconcile and recover from."

Theme 3: Hopes for the Future

A key issue that emerged during community consultations for the first Mine Fire Inquiry was the desire for the development of a long-term vision for Morwell and the Latrobe Valley (Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry, 2014, p. 47), which was reinforced in the second Mine Fire Inquiry (2015/2016, p. 63):

> "The Board heard that involving the community in rebuilding pride in the Latrobe Valley, and progressing a vision for the economic future of the Latrobe Valley, is an important part of improving the health and wellbeing of the population."

As noted in the interview material collected, people want to know what the future holds and they want to have an active voice in those discussions and to be part of the decision-making process, which is clearly expressed in this poetic transcription of interview material:

> I don't think
> it's so much about
> just that mine fire event
> People want to know what their futures are
> What is their future *here*,
> do they have one?
> If we had a clear plan
> of what's going to happen
> with this area
> and where it's going in the future
> I think you would see people
> start to settle
> and go -
> oh! actually I'm going to stay here
> and make my home here
> because I'm very excited
> about Latrobe Valley
> being whatever it may be
>
> You've got to realise
> the history of the Latrobe Valley
> in 2000 with the privatisation
> when even this building
> that we're sitting in here now
> the Government wanted to close

> People really are worrying
> about employment
> because in 2000
> we lost over 10 000 direct employees
> from the power industry
> Now less than 10%
> work in the power industry
> when I was growing up
> it was more like 90%
>
> We haven't healed from 2000
> we fought a lot
> We were fighting
> for jobs at the power station
> we fought for this library
> there was a pool
> which was going to close,
> which has now been upgraded
> So we fought
> and we won
> but we don't want to
> go through that again

There is a perception in the community that the mine fire event created a lot of negativity towards Morwell and that a future vision for the town can help to erase that negativity and give people a positive outlook and sense of pride in and identity for Morwell.

Theme 4: The Meanings of Transition for the Community

A major component of a plan for the Valley's future is about the future of coal mining and a transition away from coal-fired electricity generation in the light of climate change. The implications of such a transition loom large for the community in terms of economic and employment prospects but perhaps also in terms of community identity. Questions were raised as to who can a person be in 'the Valley' when its *raison d'être* is not based on coal? What are the possibilities? Such questions are, in part, what the conversation about transition from coal is about. Indeed, rather than transition from coal, some people were concerned that the town would be dug up for coal and their town would disappear, just as Yallourn did in the 1970s and 1980s (Fletcher, 2002). This uncertainty about the future is clearly heard in this poetic transcription of the interview material:

Long term,
you know people forget
that this town
is actually very short term
Before the power industries
it was farming and swampland
It's only the power industries
that have changed it
and turned it into a town
So now if we look
to be transitioning away from that,
what is going to be
the impact to the town,
what makes it stay here
if it's going to stay here,
I don't know

What's it going to be
once the coal mine is finished
do they just pick up the town
and move it somewhere

Transition to a coal-free future may also be, in part, about changing the narrative of Morwell and its identity. Transition is one of the possibilities for Morwell, and also acts as a proxy for the desire to create a positive future vision, as described by a number of participants, and clearly stated in this poetic transcript:

We need to create jobs
that we can move to,
rather than away from
we're moving away from Hazelwood
but there's a tunnel there,
it's a dark tunnel
that we don't know where we're going to
So we've got to give people
hope
that they've got something to move to

Coal in itself
has got a limited life
Yallourn W and Yallourn Energy
have announced
that they will be shutting

around 2030
So what will sustain people,
not just economically,
but emotionally, psychologically?
Will this become just a social ghetto
like the coal areas of Wales and Scotland
after Thatcher
We need to come up with -
I'm thinking solar farms, windmills
Why don't we build a windmill here?
it's do-able
It'll be on the hill,
so everyone can see it

The community
They've seen what privatisation
has done to the community
and they're terrified
what happens when you shut down these places
So if you've got a positive,
let's create something
that's really important

Having Melbourne people
they get their power from us
they've got to understand
what we're going through
They look at Hazelwood
and say, shut it down!
Get rid of it!
Tie myself to it,
shut it down,
And we've said,
no, hang on,
take a step back now;
this is people's livelihood
This is our community,
this is all we know,
You can't shut it down
until you create something
that people can move to
you've got to create something first

People are now talking about transition

> it was absolutely taboo
> to talk about transition
> 2 years ago, we were dodging bullets
> but slowly since [the mine fire]
> It's turning

In many ways, the mine fire event was a trigger for conversations in the community about the long-term viability of the coal-fired power industry. Calls for transition started long before the mine fire, especially with the plan to close the Hazelwood mine, yet these two are not necessarily independent in the eyes of community members. However, it appears the mine fire has given impetus to the debate and awakened many in the community to want a say and to be consulted in deciding the future of their community. People want to know what the future holds for Morwell and the Latrobe Valley as climate change precipitates a need to transition from coal based systems. The experience of privatisation left many in the community feeling change had been 'done to them', and they now want an opportunity to be part of the decision-making process that will shape their future. This is evident in the following poetic transcript of interview material:

> But it's the community
> actually being able to take control
> communities working together,
> rather than being told
> because we've always been told
> I think it's time
> that the community has their voice
> and can actually be part of what happens
> What would you like for the future?
> What do you think we could create
>
> Let's just put this on the table
> and then people that live here,
> community
> can make informed decisions

6. CONCLUSION

While a narrative of grief, loss, frustration and anger can be written around the cumulative impact of such things as the loss of Yallourn, the privatisation of the SEC, the 2014 mine fire and closure of the Hazelwood

mine in 2017, what has also emerged are conversations about recovery and transition. Hence what has been mobilised is a politics of emotion and affect, as members of the Morwell and Latrobe Valley communities reconfigure the Hazelwood mine fire as a catalyst that

> "wasn't just about the fire anymore. This was about what the local economy needed to thrive after an industrial disaster, after privatisation, after coal. This was, as President of Voices of the Valley [a community activist group that formed in response to the mine fire] Wendy Farmer says, about jobs and hope. Two things the Valley had been in want of for a long time" (Wattchow, 2016, p. 22).

Through analysis of interview and focus group material, the authors suggest that the politics of emotion and affect are fundamental to such transformative change. As the interview material presented demonstrates, such a politics is relational; emotional responses and the ways in which affective forces move between community members also include a range of other 'things' including the materiality of places of the valley, its mines, homes and industries, as well as the history and memories captured within these sites. What has arisen in this time and place is an emergence of hope, yet, as Anderson and Fenton (2008: 78) point out, hope "flicker[s] between absence and presence and intermingle[s] with and merge[s] with linked phenomena such as despair, trust, confidence, hopelessness, and faith."

The transition from coal needs to be read in the context of privatization and indeed the history of creating Latrobe Valley as a place of coal mining and power generation and the engine for much of Victoria's economic prosperity. Privatisation ruptured the 'contract' between the people and communities of Latrobe Valley and the State (Gibson, 2001). Without that rupture, talk of transition from coal would be more difficult or perhaps even unlikely. Privatisation limited the benefits of being a place of coal mining; people perceived themselves as expendable and, indeed, were expended – and this perception has circulated again not only with the closure of Hazelwood, but also the perceived lack of response to the mine fire in 2014. However, the mine fire itself created another opening or rupture that facilitated a desire to talk about what Morwell, the Valley and its people can become without coal mining and coal-based power generation. The discussion about the transition to a coal-free future is about more than just being coal free; it is transformative in many ways – it is about how the town sees itself, its future, and its capacity to act and

influence that future. It is also, in part, about recovery from the loss of place and the impacts of privatisation that have mobilised community participation and debate about the Valley's future.

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