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Australian backyard gardens and the journey of migration

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Abstract

Gardens have been an important site of environmental engagement in Australia since the British colonization. They are places where immigrant people and plants carry on traditions from their homelands, and work out an accommodation with new social and biophysical environments. We examine the backyard gardens of three contemporary migrant groups in suburban Australia, Macedonian, Vietnamese and British-born, and a fourth group of first generation Australians with both parents born overseas. There is strong emphasis on the production of vegetables in Macedonian backyards, and herbs and fruit in Vietnamese backyards. British backyards were more diverse, some focusing on non-native ornamental flowers and others favouring native plants, however the coherence of the respective groups is partly an artifact of our sampling strategy. These Macedonian and Vietnamese migrants share an affinity for productive humanized landscapes that reflects their rural subsistence backgrounds, and crosses over into their attitudes to the broader environment and national parks. The rural and village backgrounds help to explain why intensive backyard food production breaks down very quickly among the next generation in (sub)urban Australia, becoming part of heritage rather than everyday practice.

Keywords

dwelling, interviews, subsistence production, Sydney, vegetation

Disciplines

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AUSTRALIAN BACKYARD GARDENS AND THE JOURNEY OF MIGRATION*

LESLEY HEAD, PAT MUIR, and EVA HAMPEL

ABSTRACT. Gardens have been an important site of environmental engagement in Australia since the British colonization. They are places where immigrant people and plants have carried on traditions from their homelands and have worked out an accommodation with new social and biophysical environments. We examined the backyard gardens of three contemporary migrant groups—Macedonian, Vietnamese, and British born—in suburban Australia and a group of first-generation Australians with both parents born overseas. In Macedonian backyards, emphasis was strong on the production of vegetables; in Vietnamese backyards, on herbs and fruit. British backyards were more diverse, some focusing on non-native ornamental flowers and others favoring native plants. The cohesiveness of the respective groups was partly an artifact of our sampling strategy. The Macedonian and Vietnamese migrants shared an affinity for productive, humanized landscapes that reflected their rural, subsistence backgrounds and crossed over into their attitudes toward the broader environment and national parks. The rural and village backgrounds help explain why intensive backyard food production has broken down among the next generation in (sub)urban Australia, becoming part of heritage rather than everyday practice. *Keywords:* Australia, backyard gardens, dwelling, subsistence production, Sydney.

Most Australian gardens are both product and expression of immigrant experience. Although numerous records of Aboriginal gardening practices exist (Jones 1975; Hallam 1989), the gardens of the European colonizers wrought a different scale and intensity of landscape transformation. To analyze gardens, then, is to increase our understanding of the immigrants' complex and ongoing "coming to terms" with the Australian environment (Powell 1976; Bonyhady 2000). These issues have been explored in relation to Australian public and private garden spaces at various scales (Crittenden 1979; Seddon 1987; Baskin and Dixon 1996; Whitehead 2001). Much of the discussion has focused on gardens and the associated horticultural industries as conduits for the introduction and exchange of many thousands of plant species between Australia and other parts of the colonial world (Fox 2004).

Migration is a continuing feature of Australian life, but the source countries over the past fifty years have been much more diverse than were the dominantly Anglo-Celtic origins of the colonial period. That diversity has transformed the social and physical landscapes of cities like Sydney, where, in the 2001 census, 31.2 percent of the people were born overseas and 33.5 percent spoke a language other than English at home (ABS 2002). The backgrounds from which people come to terms with the Australian environment now span the globe.

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Our current research analyzes backyard gardens as places where key environmental engagements occur for that majority of Australians who live in cities and suburbs (Head and Muir 2004). Although backyards are usually well defined spatially, and valued by their owners as havens of privacy and freedom, we have found it useful to think of them also as membranes around webs of connectivity that extend across multiple scales. They thus serve well as sites for research into migrant engagements with place. Researchers are beginning to record contemporary migrant backyards as places where people carry on traditions from their homelands and maintain cultural identity (Armstrong 1999; Gleeson and others 2001). Following Helen Armstrong (2004), we think of migration as a process rather than as a trajectory with a clear beginning and end. Traditions are not maintained, translated, or reworked in any linear or predictable way. We ask how this complex process is inscribed in the domestic garden landscape (Armstrong 2004, 241).

Attention to complexity in contemporary processes reminds us that we must be similarly vigilant with regard to the historical record, in particular to the idea that early gardens were a simple transplantation of English plants and attitudes into the colony. Recent research has challenged the “commonplace that the invaders were not simply untroubled by their destructiveness but rejoiced in it, so great was their alienation from their new surroundings and their eagerness to turn the land to new uses” (Bonyhady 2000, 3). Tim Bonyhady documents a number of examples of indigenous plants, including gum trees and tree ferns, being fostered in the garden context. Australian trees such as Moreton Bay fig, bunya pine, and hoop pine were for sale in Sydney nurseries in the 1860s (Gelding 1983) (Table I). Victor Crittenden (1983) argued that the nostalgic Englishness of early gardens has been overstated, because many English plants did not survive in hot, dry conditions. Jacarandas from South America and peppercorns from the Americas did thrive and were highly valued for their shade. Colonial landscapes are increasingly being understood as the product of interaction, negotiation, and contest rather than as a unidirectional transfer (Morphy 1993; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995).

In this article we examine the backyard gardens of three migrant groups within our broader study—Macedonian (ten gardens), Vietnamese (sixteen gardens), and British born (thirty-four gardens)—and a group of first-generation Australians with both parents born overseas (twenty-two gardens). We pay close attention to everyday knowledge, attitudes, and practices, as expressed particularly in plantings. This is encapsulated in the notion of “dwelling,” which “helps to account for the intimate, rich, intense, making of the world” (Clope and Jones 2001, 652). For the Macedonian and Vietnamese groups, comparison with other studies that examine their engagement with public open space enables us to broaden the discussion to cross-cultural understandings of nature and environment.

SOURCES AND METHODS

During 2002–2003 we undertook fieldwork in 259 backyards in Sydney (Australia’s largest city), Wollongong (a restructuring industrial city of about 300,000 people)

TABLE I—COMMON AND BOTANICAL NAMES OF PLANTS IN AUSTRALIAN BACKYARD GARDENS

AUSTRALIAN COMMON NAME	BOTANICAL NAME
Agapanthus	<i>Agapanthus</i> spp.
Banana	<i>Musa</i> spp.
Bangalow palm	<i>Archontophoenix cunninghamiana</i>
Banksia	<i>Banksia</i> spp.
Bok choy	<i>Brassica rapa</i> , Chinensis group
Bottlebrush	<i>Callistemon</i> spp.
Bunya pine	<i>Araucaria bidwillii</i>
Camellia	<i>Camellia</i> spp.
Casuarina	<i>Allocasuarina</i> spp.
Cherry	<i>Prunus</i> spp.
Chestnut	<i>Castanea</i> spp.
Chilli	<i>Capsicum</i> spp.
Chrysanthemum	<i>Chrysanthemum</i> spp.
Cocos palm	<i>Syagrus romanzoffiana</i>
Crepe myrtle	<i>Lagerstroemia indica</i>
Cucumber	<i>Cucumis sativa</i>
Dahlia	<i>Dahlia</i> spp.
Date palm	<i>Phoenix dactylifera</i>
Frangipani	<i>Plumeria</i> spp.
Geranium	<i>Geranium</i> spp.
Grape	<i>Vitis</i> spp.
Grapefruit	<i>Citrus x paradisi</i>
Grevillea	<i>Grevillea</i> spp.
Gum tree	<i>Eucalyptus</i> spp.
Hibiscus	<i>Hibiscus</i> spp.
Honeymelon	<i>Cucumis melo</i> , Inodorus group
Hoop pine	<i>Araucaria cunninghamii</i>
Impatiens	<i>Impatiens</i> spp.
Jacaranda	<i>Jacaranda mimosifolia</i>
Lemon	<i>Citrus limon</i>
Lemongrass	<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i>
Lettuce	<i>Lactuca</i> spp.
Lime	<i>Citrus aurantifolia</i>
Longan	<i>Euphoria longan</i>
Loquat	<i>Eriobotrya japonica</i>
Mandarin	<i>Citrus reticulata</i>
Mango	<i>Mangifera indica</i>
Mint	<i>Mentha</i> spp.
Moreton Bay fig	<i>Ficus macrophylla</i>
Nectarine	<i>Prunus persica</i>
Oleander	<i>Nerium oleander</i>
Orange	<i>Citrus sinensis</i>
Orange jessamine	<i>Murraya paniculata</i>
Paperbark	<i>Melaleuca</i> spp.
Passionfruit	<i>Passiflora edulis</i>
Pawpaw	<i>Carica papaya</i>
Peach	<i>Prunus persica</i>
Peppercorn tree	<i>Schinus molle</i> var. <i>areira</i>
Pittosporum, native daphne	<i>Pittosporum undulatum</i>
Plum	<i>Prunus</i> spp.
Spinach	<i>Spinacia</i>
Sweet potato	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>
Radiata pine	<i>Pinus radiata</i>
Rockmelon	<i>Cucumis melo</i> , Cantalupensis group
Taro	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>
Tea tree	<i>Leptospermum</i> spp.
Tomato	<i>Lycopersicon</i> spp.
Walnut	<i>Juglans</i> spp.
Watermelon	<i>Citrullus lanatus</i>

Sources: Martin 2001; Department of Agriculture, New South Wales 2005.

and Alice Springs (a central Australian town of 26,000 people). Our sample encompassed a range of socioeconomic, ethnic, age, gender, and tenure variability. Forty-eight percent of participants were between the ages of thirty-six and fifty-five, and 61 percent were women. Ninety percent of the participants owned or were in the process of buying their own homes. Families constituted 47 percent of participants, 32 percent were couples, 20 percent were single households, and only 1 percent were shared households. Sixty-six percent were described as “middle class,” determined by applying the Australian Bureau of Statistics classification of occupations and level of education and skills (ABS 1996). When our initial approaches—for example, appeals through local media—yielded few participants from a non-English-speaking background, we worked through the Macedonian Welfare Association in Wollongong to obtain fourteen participants (ten interviews, including four couples) of Macedonian background who were interviewed through an interpreter. In Sydney we worked through the Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre to link up with sixteen members of the Vietnamese community. Ten of these interviews were recruited through the Vietnamese Support Group; five, through connections to the Buddhist Temple; and one, through the interpreter. The Vietnamese cohort was younger than the Macedonian one.

We visited each participant’s backyard, where we conducted semistructured interviews. Questions related to the activities of different members of the household, changes that had occurred over time, people’s feelings about the space and what sorts of plants and animals belonged there, wider environmental attitudes and practices, and major influences. The backyard was mapped and photographed, and checklists were created on the demography of the household and the structures in the backyard. The biogeography was summarized in both structural (percentage cover in herb, shrub, and tree layers) and floristic (dominant taxa in each layer, including whether native or non-native) terms, but complete species inventories were not made.

The interviews were transcribed and imported into the qualitative analysis program N6. Analysis of the interviews was structured on a number of different levels as themes emerged through an initial reading and content coding. For example, interviewees might have talked about what they grew, including in their response a variety of reasons as to why they grew vegetables. They might also have suggested attitudinal shifts in how they felt about this practice and discussed generational shifts toward the backyard as a productive space. To capture such diverse ways of talking about the backyard and about participants’ attitudes and emotions, multiple nodes were created and text coded at those nodes where content (what was being talked about), philosophy of gardening, emotional reaction, and polarity (positive or negative inscription) overlapped.

Demographic information was then imported from quantitative databases (FileMaker Pro and Excel), and this fixed information was cross-tabulated with interview data in matrix-intersection searches. Further biogeographical information used in the analysis related to vegetation types at the herb, shrub, and tree layers. Matrix-intersection tables were useful in generating numbers of people who spoke about a particular issue or theme, indicating the strength or importance of that

theme to particular groups of people. It also revealed absence of discussion of some themes.

Pseudonyms are used for all participants named in this article. The Macedonian and Vietnamese interviews were transcribed as translated into English. The Macedonian transcriptions emerged as much "thicker" ethnographic evidence, rich in detail and explanation. The Vietnamese transcriptions were thinner, partly as a result of participant shyness, but we believe the differences mainly reflect the relative skills of the interpreters.

THE MIGRANT GROUPS AND THEIR BACKYARD GARDENS

It is important to emphasize that the four groups analyzed in this study were constituted in different ways by the research process. As described above, the Macedonians and Vietnamese were sought out to provide case studies of non-English-speaking participants. The Macedonians were the most cohesive of the groups. All of them were elderly, most were retired post-World War II migrants, and a number of the men had worked in the Port Kembla steelworks. The British-born and first-generation groups were extracted from the general study population using the demographic information. They varied in many other respects, including age, location of residence, and socioeconomic status. Neither of these groups was cohesive.

MACEDONIAN BACKYARD GARDENS

Nine of the ten Macedonian backyards were in older suburbs, with houses built in the 1950s and 1960s. Most of these backyards were relatively large, between 200 and 299 square meters. The exception was a new house built for an extended Macedonian family, which had a very large backyard that extended onto farmland. The importance of flower, vegetable, and herb production in this group is indicated both in Table II, based on participants' descriptions of their backyard, and Figure 1, which shows the main plant types in the herb layer. The most common flowers were dahlias, chrysanthemums, and geraniums, valued for their showy colorfulness. Seven of the ten Macedonian backyards had vegetable gardens, which tended to occupy a large proportion of the available space (Figure 2). All of these vegetable gardens contained chillies and tomatoes, with salad greens (cucumbers, lettuce, spinach) common. As Figure 2 shows, these gardens were neat and structured, with bare earth between the rows, often channeled, and with the soil around the plants hoed to keep it aerated and to reduce the number of weeds. Weed matting was observed in at least two backyards, and soil was frequently discussed: "I always try to keep the soil clean around the plant because if one [weed] is allowed to start growing between the plants it takes all the goodness from the soil and from the plant" (Gordanna of Port Kembla).

Shrub-and-tree layers were dominated by fruit or nut trees (Figure 3), most frequently stone fruit (nectarine, peach, cherry), followed by lemon and mango. Only two had native trees. Non-native trees usually consisted of only one small flowering tree. Camellia, crepe myrtle, frangipani, and oleander were observed in these backyards.

TABLE II—AUSTRALIAN STUDY PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF PLANTS AND ACTIVITIES IN THEIR BACKYARD, BY GROUP

	GROUP				
	Macedonian (<i>n</i> = 10)	Vietnamese (<i>n</i> = 16)	British (<i>n</i> = 34)	First Generation (<i>n</i> = 22)	All Others (<i>n</i> = 177)
<i>Type of Plant</i>					
Grass or lawn	5	9	29	20	137
Flowering plants	6	7	24	13	113
Vegetables, herbs	9	13	17	13	113
Fruit trees, vines	8	14	9	14	81
Ornamental shrubs	2	1	10	10	49
Native shrubs	3	3	24	12	86
Trees	4	3	22	18	99
Palms	2	1	10	6	40
Plants in pots	2	5	15	5	52
<i>Type of Activity</i>					
Gardening, weeding, pruning	6	14	29	13	163
Sitting, thinking	2	11	23	12	123
Animals' activities	3	1	1	1	23
Eating, entertaining	1	5	16	12	82
Children's activities	14	13	3	9	72
Mowing	4	9	22	16	96

Analysis of the interview data indicated that the Macedonian participants' discussion about their shrub-and-tree layer was inseparable from a discourse on production—that the backyard should yield food. Participants talked about grapevines, passionfruit vines, and nut trees (chestnut, walnut), as well as melons (watermelon, rockmelon, honeymelon) and fruit trees. The emphasis was on stone fruit (peach, nectarine, plum), but the participants had mixed success at growing these fruit trees in the Australian conditions that were drier than those in their homeland. Dragica of Port Kembla, however, had only good things to say about her trees: "Happiness is the only thing I feel. The trees are like, the fruit trees around, I go there, I pick the fruit that I like, I eat it. I go at the back, I pick a plum and look around, look at the sky, the trees, the grass and I feel happy, content." She was less content with the banksia and melaleuca her daughter had purchased from the local council's Greenplan, describing how the banksia had been moved because of its sprawling branches and another tree had been removed because it had grown too large. Laze, also of Port Kembla, offered a similar comment: "I said big trees are not to be grown in the backyard, you grow a fruit tree or something small that look nice and something that can give you fruit, peaches, plums, lemons whatever. Nothing that grows big."

FIG. 1—Percentages of different groups of backyard gardeners with various plant categories in the herb layer of their backyard. The herb layer is defined as plants less than 1 meter high, excluding lawn.

Study participants with vegetable gardens all talked about the first walk around the backyard each morning to check how everything was growing. They had established a strong sense of daily connection to their backyard through the temporal rhythm of their “small walk.” Many study participants of varied ethnic backgrounds reported taking the same walk around their backyard, sometimes in their night-clothes, often with a cup of tea in hand, to check on it. The characteristic features of the Macedonian experience was that it was tied into a cycle of food production and that the morning walk was the preface to the day’s activities in the backyard. With some exceptions, the Macedonians did not generally use their backyard as a place to sit or to eat (Table II).

VIETNAMESE BACKYARD GARDENS

Thirteen of the sixteen Vietnamese participants lived in detached houses with backyards, and three participants lived in townhouses with small courtyards. Herb layers in the Vietnamese gardens were dominated by edible herbs (several kinds of mint, lemongrass) and vegetables (sweet potatoes, chillies, taro, bok choy), with minor plantings of non-native flowers and shrubs. High proportions of available backyard space were utilized for vegetable and herb production (Figures 4 and 5). The numbers underestimate the total production, for they exclude pots and containers, which the Vietnamese participants used for much of their cultivation. As Figure 6 shows, for example, seedlings and herbs were frequently started in white

FIG. 2—Gordanna (left), a Macedonian participant, shows interpreter Verica Sajdovska the vegetable garden in her Port Kembla (Wollongong) backyard. (Photograph by Lesley Head, November 2002)

foam boxes. One explanation for why the Vietnamese participants placed less emphasis on vegetable production than did the Macedonian participants may simply be a seasonal one: The Vietnamese interviews were conducted in the winter (July and August) of 2003, whereas the Macedonian interviews were conducted in the spring (October and November) of 2002.

Shrub-and-tree layers were dominated by fruit producers, mainly tropical fruits (mangoes, pawpaws, loquats, longan), followed by a variety of citrus trees (grapefruit, mandarin, lemon) and bananas. Sixty-three percent of participants had at least one fruit tree in the backyard, and 53 percent had between 80 and 100 percent of the shrub-and-tree layer planted in fruit trees (Figure 7). Vietnamese participants did not deliberately plant other shrubs or trees in their backyard, but they did retain some that previous residents had planted.

When asked to describe their backyard, Vietnamese participants began with the fruit trees (thirteen of the fourteen who had fruit trees). One single parent lamented that she did not have enough time to grow fruit trees. The Macedonians' responses, in contrast, began at the herb layer, with a description of the types of vegetables they produced, then moved to fruit trees. The Vietnamese emphasis in the backyard is clearly found at this fruit-tree layer. Informal conversations conveyed partici-

Percentages of Types of Plants in the Shrub-and-Tree Layer of Australian Backyard Gardens, by Group of Participants

FIG. 3—Percentages of different groups of backyard gardeners with various plant categories in the shrub-and-tree layer of their backyard.

Percentages of Herb Layers in Australian Backyard Gardens under Vegetable Production, by Group of Participants

FIG. 4—Percentages of the herb layer under vegetable production for each group of backyard gardeners.

FIG. 5—Percentages of the herb layer under edible herb production for each group of backyard gardeners.

pants' pride in the quantity of fruit produced and the practice of bringing citrus seeds from Vietnam, believing the fruit from those seeds to be superior in size and flavor. Discussion of other types of shrubs and trees was minimal.

Gardening for food production was the most frequently discussed backyard activity among the Vietnamese, with sitting and relaxing also important (Table II). Eating was less important: Messy cooking took place outside, but most eating occurred inside, except during gatherings of extended families.

BACKYARD GARDENS OF BRITISH-BORN MIGRANTS

Backyards of British migrants were more diverse than were those of the Macedonians or Vietnamese. Sixty percent of the British gardens contained flowers, most frequently geraniums, agapanthus, and impatiens. Color was important in discussions of flowers. Shrub-and-tree layers combined natives (most commonly gum tree, native daphne, and tea tree) and non-natives (camellia, jacaranda, frangipani, hibiscus) and palms (mainly cocos palm or date palm, with some native bangalows). Fruit trees were primarily citrus (lemon, lime, orange) and stone fruit (peach, plum, nectarine). In comparison with all of the other groups, British-born participants grew the fewest fruit trees in their backyards, and the emphasis on citrus usually translated to a single tree, most frequently a lemon tree. They did not say much about the relative benefits of having such trees or the use made of them; instead, they provided a straightforward listing of them as they described their yard. In this sense, the British seemed to have invested less in such trees, in terms of either productivity or attachment, than had the Vietnamese and Macedonian participants.

FIG. 6—Vietnamese participant Hiep uses white foam boxes as herb planters underneath his grapefruit tree in Green Valley (Sydney). (Photograph by Eva Hampel, July 2003)

FIG. 7—Tam, a Vietnamese participant, with fruit trees in a paved section of his Bonnyrigg (Sydney) backyard. (Photograph by Eva Hampel, July 2003)

Seventy-one percent of the British participants had native plants in the shrub-and-tree layer and spoke positively of them, either in terms of how they attracted birds or because they needed less water and were perceived to require little maintenance. One-third of this group either did not like or did not want to grow native plants.

We started off with just a few little things and we put the natives in as you can see but we've also put the trees in that we like. . . . So we've got flowers and things coming out all the time, flowering things, but in spring and summer it's beautiful because nearly every tree has a flower on it, it's very nice. (Peg and Bruce of Forest Grove) (Figure 8)

We don't have a huge amount of natives in the garden. We've both come from elsewhere and we're mad on seasonal change. Not to say that natives don't give you that . . . but the whole nuance of the garden was to kind of awaken to the nuance of different times of year. We love colour, we love scent so we try to create that. (Maxine of Balmain) (Figure 9)

Gardening was talked about frequently, not specifically in regard to food production but as a more general activity, including weeding and pruning. Sitting, often with a book or a cup of tea, was also mentioned frequently, as was eating with family or friends. British participants spoke of mowing more than the other migrant groups did (Table II).

BACKYARD GARDENS OF FIRST-GENERATION MIGRANTS

The twenty-two first-generation participants had both parents born outside Australia. Thirteen of the participants had one or both parents from continental Europe; within that group the most numerous were the five participants with one or two Italian parents. Six participants had one or both parents born in Great Britain.

Ten of the twenty-two participants talked about why they grew vegetables, but never on the scale we observed among the Macedonian migrants and several elderly Italians. The first-generation group had the highest proportions of all groups with native plants, in both the herb (for example, prostrate grevillea, native orchids) and the shrub-and-tree (gum tree, bottlebrush, casuarina) layers (Figure 1). Every one of these participants had at least one native plant, but for only nine of the seventeen who spoke about natives had the choice to grow them been deliberate, many participants having inherited native growth with the purchase of their house. Flowers (geranium, agapanthus, impatiens) were popular, as were flowering non-native trees and shrubs (hibiscus, jacaranda, camellia, orange jessamine). Fruit trees, most commonly citrus, were present in the backyards of half of these first-generation participants, who linked their desire to grow fruit trees to memories of the production backyards of their childhood.

The memory of backyards under heavy subsistence production influenced participants both for and against becoming producers themselves. Lex of Alice Springs told us: "You get things from your parents. My parents are migrants from Europe, from the Ukraine after the war. To them having a garden was all about getting some

food out of it. . . . We had the typical migrants' garden in the western suburbs of Melbourne—potatoes, sunflowers, corn, peas." But Deanna of Berkeley, whose Italian father was a keen and generous vegetable gardener, felt little incentive to garden: "I just think they're too much effort trying to keep the bugs out of them and everything."

Thus those who grew vegetables did so to value the traditions of an older generation, not because they were driven by thrift and necessity. Participants talked about saving money and relaxing in the vegetable garden, but their emphasis changed from need to a desire to continue the particular practices. They valued the benefit of having fresh vegetables or fruit but construed the value as a choice rather than a need. Participants with migrant parents talked mainly about mowing and gardening in a general sense of planting, pruning, and weeding, as well as sitting, either with tea or with something to read (Table II).

THE THERE AND HERE, THEN AND NOW

Memory, tradition, and change were reflected in people's engagement with their backyard gardens. For many migrants, the production of food in their backyard in Australia continued the pattern of life from their homeland. This could be a transplantation of practices, ideas, and, sometimes, plant varieties. "And every tradition from there we brought it here so that's why we are making gardens and trying to produce chillies and tomatoes or something little, in a way to remind us of there, but somehow to have the taste from there brought here, and to continue the tradition of making produce and something from the soil" (Gore of Figtree) (Figure 10).

Macedonian participants' memories were about land: usable land, what was grown on it, and by whom. Because nine out of the ten Macedonians came from villages, their definition of backyard was extended to include work in the surrounding fields. Their memories were about chores and seasonal changes, and they told few stories about play. Vietnamese participants' memories were about the different types of fruit trees and vegetables grown, with land area commonly described as smaller than the backyards of western Sydney. Chickens and pigs were the animals they described, and they said little about what they did in their childhood backyard in terms of chores or playing space. Eleven of the sixteen participants had had a backyard in Vietnam. The remaining five had lived in a city.

Elderly people were concerned that these traditions are unlikely to be continued. They commented on the pace, demands, and affluence of their children's lifestyles. This was not confined to recent migrants but reflected a generational concern among the study participants. Older people were more likely to emphasize the importance to them of hard work, self-reliance, community support, and thrift and to contrast those attributes with the twenty-first-century lifestyles of their children and grandchildren.

When my daughters-in-law were living together with me here in the house, every time I would get the chillies and bake them then I need to fill them, to do something with them, they would hide themselves in their room and go to sleep instead of

FIG. 8—British participants Peg and Bruce in their Forest Grove (Wollongong) backyard, with an extensive native and non-native shrub-and-tree layer planted behind the retaining wall to attract birds and provide flowers. (Photograph by Pat Muir, July 2002)

FIG. 9—Flowering annuals in hanging baskets are a reminder of seasonal change for British-born Maxine of Balmain (Sydney). (Photograph by Eva Hampel, September 2003)

FIG. 10—Macedonian participants Gore and Lile with their crop of chillies and cucumbers in their Figtree (Wollongong) backyard. (Photograph by Lesley Head, November 2002)

come and help me. . . . They don't like home made they prefer to buy it in the shop. (Nada of Towradgi)

My mother sold a few eggs, sold the milk to buy the socks and the shoes. There was no money. In Australia the parents and the children have too much money and they spend too much. In my country we worked in the garden and we did not spend much. I grew the grapes, I made the wine. (Maria of Port Kembla, Italian)

Some elderly participants recognized that conditions had also changed in the places they left behind, as encapsulated by Gore of Figtree, who said, "It's not just the difference between there and here as it is from before and now. . . . People are working. They have no time. They are time bound to take the kids to school or to activities, to go to work . . . and there's no time or not enough time to devote it to growing a vegetable garden."

But these attitudes were mentioned just as frequently by elderly Australian-born study participants who had grown up in more frugal times. It was clear that the shift in practices between migrants and their Australian-born children had been heavily influenced by the profound socioeconomic changes of the past few decades. For younger generations, gardening was only likely to be undertaken if it was seen as a relaxing, leisure activity. A desire to reduce maintenance was mentioned by the

FIG. 11—All of the available space in Italian-born Lorenzo and Caterina's Coniston (Wollongong) backyard is given over to production, with extensive vegetable areas, chickens for eggs and meat, and rabbits in movable cages—also for meat. (Photograph by Pat Muir, May 2002)

British participants and by the participants with migrant parents, either wanting to keep the back or front yard low maintenance or having a backyard that looked after itself and was easy to manage (British = 13, first generation = 10). Choosing plants because they were low maintenance was not a consideration for either the Macedonian or the Vietnamese participants. The former spoke of the need to look after the plants they had put in the ground and of the time and care they expended on them.

PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY

Only a few participants would be self-sufficient in their backyard food production, but the ways in which people discussed growing or not growing food demonstrated a set of wider concerns with productivity and creativity. Among many elderly migrants, particularly those of Macedonian or Italian background, the production of food continued the pattern of life from their homeland. This was partly an issue of the economics of food production and partly about the routine of life in a particular historical context, something shared with elderly participants who had grown up in Australia (Figure 11). The importance of such activities in the daily rhythm was particularly poignant when elderly people could no longer manage to live in-

dependently, as Jillian of Mangerton revealed in her response to the interviewer's comments on her abundant spinach crop and how much she must like spinach:

No, I don't; there's a Yugoslav man who lives across the road who lives in a unit. . . . He had a farm in his home country and now he's living in a small unit and he just hates the fact that he's not growing anything and so he comes over and plants all of these vegetables and tends them and all the rest of it and takes what he wants for his family, and I'm happy to have him do that because it helps me to keep the place in some sort of order. So no, I don't like spinach much.

For the Macedonian participants, the notion that we refer to here as "productivity" encompasses three important, distinctly physical engagements between the gardener and the soil, smell and taste, and the temporal rhythms of life:

So I dug the garden, I brought the manure and new soil to enrich it and I worked it over, I turned over the soil and the manure to make it more richer and then when I planted the chillies, oh the chillies, you should have seen back then were nice and big. (Laze of Port Kembla)

In Macedonia even the wild things in the mountains in the valleys that would grow by themselves, they have a nice smell, a nice look. Even though they are wild they look like they've been grown by someone, maintained and everything is ripe and ready to be eaten. Everything smells, the flowers, even the fruit trees when you go by. (Gore of Figtree)

It grows here as well as it grows in Macedonia but the difference is in the taste. When you taste it, it never tastes as good as it tastes in Macedonia no matter if it's the chillies, the tomatoes or the cucumber. (Nada of Towradgi)

The first thing that I do of a morning is I get out of the house, I go and walk through the backyard it's like a small walk. . . . I like to be the first one to see how the things grown a little bit more comparing to yesterday or I would like to be the first one to see the first chilli coming off the plant or the first tomatoes. (Lile of Figtree)

When you are alone but it gives me a reason to get up in the morning and get out here and have something to do. It's my entertainment, my pastime for the whole day. (Gordanna of Port Kembla)

The main feature in the backyard is the garden that in a way keeps me alive. I go over there, I work, I love going in there and work. (Nada of Towradgi)

The idea here that food production must be understood as also producing a variety of social goods echoes Andrea Gaynor's (2001) analysis of postwar home food production, which she contended was more prevalent among the middle class than the working class and could not be explained by necessity alone, because it was sometimes more expensive to produce food than to purchase it. "It is argued that where food is produced by a household, it is often produced not as 'food', but as 'home-grown food', a distinctive category of produce" (p. 27). Our Macedonian study participants were divided on the cost factor, some saying that the cost of

enriching the soil and dusting or spraying made the produce more expensive than shop-bought vegetables, and one stating that this was the reason he was not growing vegetables. On the other hand, Gordanna from Port Kembla grew far more vegetables than she could consume by herself and sometimes sold them in her neighborhood.

FRESHNESS, FOOD, PEACE, AND HAPPINESS

How do Vietnamese and Macedonian experiences of backyards and backyard production compare, given the similarities in themes of tradition and pride in self-sufficiency? Differences do exist, because as a group the Vietnamese were significantly younger than the retired Macedonians were. The Vietnamese interpreter used one participant's response to a question about garden influences to articulate a broader Vietnamese philosophy of food production: "Because the Vietnamese people, when they go to anywhere they grow trees there. So to make it look nice and it has fruit to eat. So they can also save money because they don't have to go to the shop and buy vegetable. . . . And they grow without chemical fertiliser. They just use natural fertiliser." This elderly Vietnamese participant, Cuong of Fairfield, had virtually the entire garden space devoted to food production and was proud of the fact that the extended family (of at least eight) did not need to buy any vegetables at all (Figure 12). Another participant, Liem of Cabramatta, reinforced the utilitarian purpose of these gardens by explaining: "Actually my mum, she planted. Plant is for food, for eating. The main point for eating, not for . . . looking good . . . good for your health. You can eat fresh food. Don't need to pay."

Like the Macedonians, the Vietnamese expressed the need to be able to go outside, to do things, to observe, and to think. Their connectedness to the backyard was found in sections of text coded in participants' emotional responses to it. They consistently spoke of the backyard as a place that made them happy. Because most of the Vietnamese participants were in the labor force, those contemplative moments were often found after work. As the interpreter emphasized in summarizing a succession of participants' remarks:

He happy with the garden. Sometimes after work, he come home and go to the garden, look at the plants and he feel happy with it. (Huy of Edensor Park)

So when I feel a bit tired or a bit, I want a bit of moving [from computer study] so I come to backyard and have a look and then go around and see how they going. And try to understand, try to find out how this plant going. Something like that. A sort of possession. The thing that I have. (Hoi of Bonnyrigg)

My main feeling in my backyard is connect to me in what I'm feeling happy, I am sad. Or sometimes if I am angry or I go to outside there, maybe when I see my backyard I feel the angry gone. (Tam of Bonnyrigg)

A strong sense of thrift and "making do" is not explicit in the Vietnamese interviews but is inferred from numerous makeshift structures in backyards constructed

FIG. 12—Cuong, a Vietnamese participant, tending vegetables in his Fairfield (Sydney) home, where almost the entire backyard is planted with vegetables, herbs, fruit trees, and vines. (Photograph by Eva Hampel, August 2003)

from recycled materials and the widespread practice of using polystyrene boxes as seed planters.

ATTITUDES TO NATURE, ENVIRONMENT, AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

Recognizing its responsibility to an increasingly multicultural community, the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service recently commissioned research on attitudes to and use of national parks by members of the Macedonian and Vietnamese communities (Thomas 2001; Thomas 2002). Among elderly Macedonians, the similarities with our research are striking in terms of the importance of smell. Martin Thomas (2001) records a number of examples in which smell emerged in memories of Macedonia and people regarded the Australian bush as not having a smell. “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" (Paul Stephen, quoted in Thomas 2001, 62). Thomas reports strong attachments to Australian plantations of introduced radiata pine as the nearest equivalent to the "intoxicating" smell of Macedonian pine forests—to the extent that people buy holiday houses near them. Associated with these memories was "great nostalgia for the rural life, where the food was healthy, the water pure, the air clean" (p. 67). In strong resonances with the reasons our study participants gave for growing vegetables in their backyard, Thomas argues, "the flavour of the earth, as manifest in fruit, air and water, seemed important to all the informants" (p. 68).

The importance of sounds and smells is also mentioned frequently in relation to the densely populated Vietnamese landscape. "That the Australian bush is scentless and soundless is often commented on" (Thomas 2002, 81). Paddy fields figure prominently in memories of Vietnamese life and landscape. The majority of people in Vietnam live in rural areas, so the relationship between subsistence and nature is strong.

For both Macedonian and Vietnamese groups the daily integration of people with the environment in village or rural life translates into different understandings of parks than does the wilderness ethic that has underpinned much of the Australian national parks movement. This is expressed by the centrality of people in family photographs of Macedonian national parks and in descriptions of beautiful places in terms of the actions that took place there. "There was no sense of photographing a mountain, a tree, a river, for its own sake. . . . [Nature] is something in which people are always imbricated" (Thomas 2001, 69). Moreover, "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" (Novica, age 27, quoted in Thomas 2001, 82).

For most of Mandy Thomas's Vietnamese group, "the flora and fauna of Vietnam is equated with fruit, flowers and farm animals, and not 'wild' animals. Rather than a 'wilderness' the landscape was domesticated and viewed as a resource" (2002, 71). This sense of a domesticated landscape has several related expressions. On one hand, "They try to grow Vietnam in the backyard!" (Cuong, quoted on p. 76). On the other hand, in parks people are not interested in walking too far from human settlement. "This reflects their experiences in Vietnam where it is unlikely even in rural areas that people were very far out of earshot of others" (p. 98). "You don't need to go far, your backyard is your national park" (Minh, quoted on p. 59). Nevertheless, members of both Macedonian and Vietnamese groups talked of a gradually increasing affection for the Australian landscape that they had first experienced as empty, dry, and lacking in smell.

LANDSCAPES OF MIGRATION

The process of migration is inscribed on the post-World War II Australian suburban landscape through the food-producing activities of Macedonian, Vietnamese, and Italian migrants, among many others. Particular combinations of foods result

in distinctive landscapes that can be identified with particular ethnic groups. For example, extensive plantings of chillies and tomatoes indicate Macedonian, or at least southern European, influences; tropical fruit trees and polystyrene planters of Vietnamese mint and lemongrass denote Vietnamese. Yet the details of daily interaction as described by our study participants support Tim Ingold's argument that "nature is not a surface of materiality upon which human history is inscribed; rather history is the process wherein both people and their environments are continually bringing each other into being. . . . Human actions in the environment are better seen as incorporative rather than inscriptive, in the sense that they are built or enfolded into the forms of the landscape and its living inhabitants by way of their own processes of growth" (2000, 87).

Among Macedonian participants, the strongest memories, and thus the strongest experience of difference with Australian conditions, were the smell and productivity of the soil, summarized by Martin Thomas (2001, 68) as "the flavor of the earth." Vietnamese participants combined utilitarian attitudes to garden production—"Plant is for food, for eating, . . . not for . . . looking good" (Liem of Cabramatta)—with a valuing of even small green spaces for their contemplative possibilities. For all their differences, these two groups reflected a shared rural, subsistence background in which humans were embedded in their environment through physical labor. Ingold's use of the term "incorporative" reminds us of the importance of the physical body—through senses, labor, daily rhythms—in these environmental relationships.

When our sample group was more diverse with respect to factors other than ethnicity, as in our British-born group, the gardens were also more diverse. Indeed, it would be difficult to ascribe "Britishness" to any particular garden landscape or feature. The British seemed to split between those who enthusiastically adopted Australian plants and those who maintained an ordered, ornamental approach in their garden but did incorporate the occasional flowering native.

Gardens of intensive food production virtually disappear within a generation of migration. Among the first-generation Australian born they are more likely to be reflected in motifs that echo tradition—pots of herbs, a few tomato plants, an outdoor oven as centerpiece of an entertaining area, favorite flowers—than in any intense day-to-day engagement. This has less to do with adapting to unique Australian environments than with the socioeconomic conditions of contemporary urban life.

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