

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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✪ DR. HEAD is a professor of geography at the University of Wollongong, Wollongong 2522, Australia, where Ms. MUIR and Ms. HAMPEL are research assistants in geography.