Misplaced Plants: migrant gardens and transculturation

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Introduction: gardens, contact zones, misplacements

> We have a lot of Italian gardeners here in Haberfield. And there are a couple of controversies. One Italian gardener is really upset because he enters the Haberfield Association's garden competition every year and never wins, because his style of gardening is not Federation. So, we were talking as the gardening committee about having a separate section in the competition, an Italian gardening category. (Angelina, 2018)

The story of the Italian gardener who enters a garden competition every year and who never wins was told to me and my co-researcher by Angelina, herself an accomplished gardener and daughter of Italian migrants from Treviso, in an oral history interview on the home gardens of Sydney Inner West. I chose to start with this story because it prompted me to think of gardening in relation to transculturation and place-making. How Italian migrants make place has been the continuing theme of my ongoing cultural research with Italians and Italian Australians in Sydney, exploring modes of belonging in relation to material culture. I wanted to understand some of the ways in which the dynamics resulting from the encounters of different actors and cultural formations in a multicultural city like Sydney are enacted in everyday practices[1] (Wise 2010). Gardening is one of such practices.

Figure 1 Front garden, some traces of the original Federation design and a copy of Michelangelo's David, Ilaria Vanni, 2017.

[1] Amanda Wise, 'Sensuous Multiculturalism: Emotional Landscapes of Inter-Ethnic Living in Australian Suburbia' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 6 (2010), pp. 917–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691831003643355.

In the context of this chapter I define gardening as social, cultural, material and environmental practices shaped by and shaping the relations between people and plants, and I propose an understanding of migrant gardens in terms of transculturation. Francesco Ricatti writing about Italian migration histories in Australia notes how transculturation can help to shift the discourse of migration to Australia, which 'still privileges a narrative of gradual evolution: from the complete rejection of migrants by Australian society, to a push towards assimilation first, integration later, and finally multiculturalism.'[2] On the contrary adopting a transcultural approach means to attend to reciprocal influences, exchanges and encounters. In this chapter I think of transculturation following its Latin American beginnings, as a set of concomitant and entangled processes, as Paul Allatson shows in his genealogy of the concept.[3] Two cultural theorists are especially relevant for their attention to place and transculturation, Mary Louise Pratt and Silvia Spitta.[4]

Pratt, in *Imperial Eyes: Writing and Transculturation*, used transculturation to stress the reciprocity of exchanges between colonial centres and peripheries and to query the way in which the peripheries influenced the metropolis, including 'the latter's obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself'.[5] Pratt also offers another useful, and influential, concept: the contact zone – 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other' and 'the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical

[2] Francesco Ricatti, *Italians in Australia. History, Memory, Identity* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

[3] Paul Allatson, *Key Terms in Latino/a Cultural and Literary Studies* (Maiden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 229–232.

[4] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Silvia Spitta, *Misplaced Objects: Migrating Collections and Recollections in Europe and the Americas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

[5] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes, 6.*

inequality, and intractable conflict'.[6] I borrow, move, and scale down, this concept to describe the entanglement and co-presence of trajectories and people previously separated by geographical and historical factors in Inner West Sydney suburban gardens. The gardens in this chapters are micro contact-zones where knowledge and practices are remixed and translated in a new environment: they materialize the movement and encounters of people, animals, objects and plants. Unlike contact zones, gardens in these multicultural suburbs are not sites of violent inequality and coercion, but are often a theatre of contentions where along the edges and fences, relationships and negotiations are played out.

Thinking about gardening entails also paying attention to the materiality, design, plant and animal life of gardens. Spitta's *Misplaced Objects* (2009), offers inspiration for the title of this paper and a frame to reflect on material culture and transculturation. To explain the idea of misplacement, Spitta tells the story of entanglements between objects that belong or not to certain places. Her first example is Moctezuma's headdress, which appeared in Europe around 1500 as a metonym of an unknown culture. Spitta, referencing Foucault (1973), asks what such an object did to the European 'order of things', the epistemological structure that ordered the known world. To answer this question, she explores the idea of misplacement. In the process of travelling from one place to another, misplaced objects disrupt the established order of things and force a 'profound reshuffle of the known'.[7] For Spitta objects are able to generate epistemological, cultural and geographical shifts as they migrate from one place to another. [8]As things move into new contexts, they appear 'incongruous' and make everyday spaces different, or they rearrange 'the order of things'.[9]

Transnational and translocal mobilities, such as the ones of Italian migrant gardens, also entail misplacements. Activities, things, memories, plants and language are not simply uprooted and lost, they are reshuffled and reconfigured out

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[6] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes,* 4, 6.

[7] Spitta, *Misplaced Objects*, 5.

[8] Spitta, *Misplaced Objects*, 4.

[9] Spitta, *Misplaced Objects*, 4.

of their usual location and into new arrival environment. Migration can be experienced as *spaesamento* (loss of one's bearings, unhomeliness, bewilderment, feeling out of place) that demands a reorientation of relations among objects, language, practices, memories.[10] But this reconfiguration also changes the arrival environment, and reorganizes its 'order of things'.[11] Misplacement in this sense does not mean being in the wrong place or out of place. Instead this concept captures the double action of being changed by the process of translation part of transnational and translocal mobilities, and of altering the receiving cultures.

Figure 2, Planty transculturation in a front garden: flowers inspired by cottage garden design, a native fern tree, olive and mango trees, Ilaria Vanni 2017.

The plants I encounter in this research are also misplaced. They are plants in motion: they move and resettle, and in this process, they contribute to change places, practices, and in the case of some invasive species, entire ecosystems. The concept of 'misplacement' therefore, also entails changing and making new places. In the case of Italian and Italian Australian gardens in Australia misplaced plants, instead of being plants out of place, are key actors in place-making.

My argument therefore is that Italian Australian gardens are contact zones that make present transcultural processes in various ways: as rifts and remixes of established cultural and environmental landscapes, as translations of other places in a new environment, and as material and sensory entanglements between humans and plants, and sometimes animals. This sense of gardening as remix, translation and entanglements of cultural, social and environmental practices contributes to a more nuanced understanding of transculturation. It does so by focusing on gardening as an everyday practice and by directing attention to its material and sensory dimension. This particular focus also highlights how transculturation is not

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[10] Ilaria Vanni, 'Oggetti Spaesati, Unhomely Belongings: Objects, Migrations, and Cultural Apocalypses' *Cultural Studies Review Review* 19, no. 2 (2013), pp. 174–95 http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/csrj/index and Francesco Ricatti, *Embodying Migrants: Italians in Postwar Australia* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011).

[11] Spitta, *Misplaced Objects*, 4.

a matter that depends exclusively on humans, and that plants play a role in place-making in transnational Italies.

Misplaced gardens

As I write this chapter, I glance at my tiny urban garden of mixed ornamental and edible plants. There is a new addition. It is mustard greens (*Brassica juncea*). I grew these plants from seeds collected from a street seed library in Tasmania. *Brassica juncea* is not a common vegetable in Italian gardens, but it reminds me of a spontaneous brassica I used in wild green salads when I lived in Tuscany, la *senape bianca.* I was also interested in the loving care of the gardener that collected the seeds, and donated them to a seed library in a recycled envelope with a handwritten label; in the promise of flavours I haven't tasted in years; the passing of stewardship from the unknown gardener to me; and in the journeys of mustard greens. These trajectories, the relations they generate between localities, affects and people, and the material and sensory dimension they create, are key to an understanding of transnational place-making as embedded in everyday emotional lives.

Gardens loom large in these migrant geographies and are the subject of several studies and documentation projects.[12] *My Backyard, Your Backyard* (2012), for instance, a documentary conceived and produced by the Italian Social Welfare Organisation of Wollongong (a richly multicultural city in South East Australia) is an example of the pivotal role of gardens in the lives and emotional geographies of first-generation Italian migrants. Adopting a transmedia storytelling approach across different platforms, including documentary film and social media, *My Backyard, Your Backyard* tells the story of seven gardeners adopting various points

[12] Madeleine Regan, 'Veneti Market Gardeners 1927 : From the Veneto to Frogmore and Findon Roads 1920s to 1970s.' Adelaide : Madeleine Regan, 2006. https://encore.slsa.sa.gov.au/iii/encore/record/C__Rb3114260__SVeneti market gardens__P0,7__Orightresult__U__X1?lang=eng&suite=cobalt; Anna Du Chesne, '"It's in the Blood!" Belief, Knowledge, and Practice in Italian Migrant Gardens of the Northern Rivers Region.' Southern Cross University, 2016; Ilaria Vanni, 'Terra Sogna Terra, The Italian Garden Project, and My Backyard, Your Backyard.' *Italian American Review* 6, no. 1 (2016), pp. 142–146.

of view from the garden as memoir, as the site of material-cultural traditions such as tomato sauce making, as a place enabling social relations, or as a site of enjoyment, wellbeing and love.[13]

This interest is mirrored in the vast, multidisciplinary academic literature on gardening, too vast to be discussed in this chapter. Instead, I build on the growing portion of scholarship that focuses specifically on domestic gardens.[14] Researchers have examined plant–human relations in suburban gardens through the lenses of material practices,[15] environmental conservation,[16] sustainability,[17] emotions,[18] and sites of entanglements between the wild and the familiar.[19]

Gardens have also been considered as important sites to understand diasporic geographies in terms of continuities and changes of intangible cultural heritage.[20]

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[13] Vanni, 'Terra Sogna Terra'.

[14] Lisa Law, 'The Tropical Backyard: Performing Environmental Difference' *Geographical Research*, 2019, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12348; Ilaria Vanni Accarigi and Alexandra Crosby, 'Remapping Heritage and the Garden Suburb: Haberfield's Civic Ecologies' *Australian Geographer*, no. 0 (2019), pp. 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2019.1636754.

[15] Emma Power, 'Human–Nature Relations in Suburban Gardens' *Australian Geographer* 36, no. 1 (2005), pp. 39–53.

[16] Lesley Head, Pat Muir and Eva Hampel, 'Australian Backyard Gardens and the Journey of Migration' *Geographical Review* 94, no. 3 (2004), pp. 326–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2004.tb00176.x.

[17] Sumita Ghosh and Lesley Head, 'Retrofitting the Suburban Garden: Morphologies and Some Elements of Sustainability Potential of Two Australian Residential Suburbs Compared', *Australian Geographer*, 40 (2009), pp. 319–46 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049180903127754

[18] Mark, Bhatti, Andrew Church, Amanda Claremont and Paul Stenner, '"I Love Being in the Garden": Enchanting Encounters in Everyday Life', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 10 (2009), pp. 61–76 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360802553202

[19] Franklin Ginn, *Domestic Wild: Memory, Nature and Gardening in Suburbia*, *Domestic Wild: Memory, Nature and Gardening in Suburbia* (London & New York: Routldge, 2016).

[20] Helen Armstrong, 'Migrants' Domestic Gardens: A People Plant Expression of the Experience of Migration', in *Proceedings of International Conference,*

Gardens are where the complexities of engagement with place come into being in multiple variations that depend on ethnicity, as well as generation.[21] The relation between gardens and migration has also been explored in terms of maintenance of cultural relationships and as site of nostalgia but also as a way to develop a sense of ownership and control over the environment.[22] Migrant gardens inject diversity in the landscape of Australian suburbia, through creative and material labour that shapes spaces of connection to the country of origin as well as to Australia and other cultures, changing with class as well as with ethnicity.[23] More recently, gardening practices have been recognized as a form of everyday multiculturalism through which complex negotiations involving senses, sensibilities, and emotions between migrants and non-migrants take place.[24] Gardens here are intended as assemblages engaging with the environment and with cultural difference. Shan and Walter for instance relate gardens to 'ways through which human and nonhuman beings come together to foster everyday multiculturalism, which we define not only as coexistence but also the production of hybrid knowing and knowledge across cultural differences'.[25] In relation to cultural diversity van Holstein and Head point also to the 'pluralism of environmental relationships' brought by

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Towards a New Millennium in People-Plant Relationships, ed. by Tarran & Wood Burchett (Sydney: University of Technology Sydney, 1998), pp. 28–35.

[21] Lesley Head, Pat Muir, and Eva Hampel, 'Australian Backyard Gardens and the Journey of Migration', *Geographical Review*, 94 (2004), pp. 326–47 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2004.tb00176.x>

[22] Sonia, Graham and John Connell, 'Nurturing Relationships: The Gardens of Greek and Vietnamese Migrants in Marrickville, Sydney', *Australian Geographer*, 37 (2006), pp. 375–93 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049180600954799

[23] George Morgan, Cristina Rocha, and Scott Poynting, 'Grafting Cultures: Longing and Belonging in Immigrants' Gardens and Backyards in Fairfield', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 26 (2005), pp. 93–105 <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256860500074094

[24] Hongxia, Shan, and Pierre Walter, 'Growing Everyday Multiculturalism: Practice-Based Learning of Chinese Immigrants Through Community Gardens in Canada ', *Adult Education Quarterly* , 65 (2015), pp. 19–34 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713614549231

[25] Shan and Walter, 'Growing Everyday Multiculturalism', p. 21.

migrant communities.[26] Domestic garden literature reveals a further aspect, the sensory work that happens in gardens: plant choices, garden design and care are for instance affected by sensory experience and perception.[27] Drawing on this body of research, to foreground sensory, environmental and material practices and emotional geographies, the fieldwork for this paper was designed as a combination of sensory ethnography and oral histories.

These methodologies can be defined as a set of practices based on qualitative methods that take into consideration sensory categories, experiences and perceptions to investigate how knowledge and meaning are produced through embodiment in everyday life.[28] Participatory observation, ethnographic interviews, visual research like video and photography are some of the associated methods employed.[29] Paying attention to the sensory dimension is also relevant in studies of multicultural situations to explore how cultural practices shape and are shaped by engagements and regimes of the senses.[30] A focus on senses other than sight to analyze culturally diverse urban spaces as 'sensecapes',[31] has led to a growing

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[26] Elle van Holstein, and Lesley Head, 'Shifting Settler-Colonial Discourses of Environmentalism: Representations of Indigeneity and Migration in Australian Conservation', *Geoforum*, 94 (2018), pp. 41 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.06.005; see also Lesley Head, Natascha Klocker, and Ikerne Aguirre-Bielschowsky, 'Environmental Values, Knowledge and Behaviour: Contributions of an Emergent Literature on the Role of Ethnicity and Migration', *Progress in Human Geography*, 43 (2019), pp. 397–415 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132518768407

[27] Chris Tilley, 'The Sensory Dimensions of Gardening', *Senses and Society*, 1 (2006), pp. 311–30.

[28] Sarah Pink, *Situating Everyday Life: Practices and Places* (London: Sage, 2012)

[29] Sarah Pink, 'Sensory Digital Photography: Re-Thinking "Moving" and the Image', *Visual Studies*, 26 (2011), pp. 4–13 <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2011.548484>

[30] Wise, 'Sensuous Multiculturalism'.

[31] Emiliano Battistini and Marco Mondino, 'For a Semiotic Multisensorial Analysis of Urban Space. The Case of Ballaro and Vucciria Markets in Palermo Introduction: From Landscape to Urban Sensescape', *Punctum*, 3 (2017), pp. 12–26 <https://doi.org/10.18680/hss.2017.0003>

body of studies in a variety of disciplines including education,[32] linguistics,[33] and sociology.[34]

If we consider sensory preferences from a transcultural point of view, we can see how, for instance, growing a certain type of chicory from seeds from Italy, as one of the gardeners we met does, is a way to extend to Australia a taste for bitter greens. Similarly, bananas, begonias, ferns reference the childhood landscape of tropical North Queensland, where one of the gardeners we met grew up, and where the lushness of the native environment inspired her life-long love for gardens. In brief the way a garden looks and feels, and if it looks and feels 'right', is determined by culturally bound sensory preferences. These preferences, though, are not fixed, but rather they are a process of reconfiguration and regrounding.

Figure 3, Bananas and olive trees, Ilaria Vanni 2018.

Reconfigurations: Storied Gardens

Alessandro Portelli has described oral history as 'work of relationships' between past and present, memory and narrative, interviewer and interviewee, and orality and written or recorded narratives.[35] Unlike other forms of interviews oral histories are characterized by storytelling and by 'moments of realization, awareness, and,

[32] Stephanie Springgay, '"The Chinatown Foray" as Sensational Pedagogy', *Curriculum Inquiry*, 41 (2011), pp. 636–56 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2011.00565.x>

[33] Alastair Pennycook, and Emi Otsuji, 'Making Scents of the Landscape', *Linguistic Landscape*, 1 (2015), pp. 191–212 <https://doi.org/10.1075/ll.1.3.01pen>

[34] Low, Kelvin E.Y. Y, 'The Sensuous City: Sensory Methodologies in Urban Ethnographic Research', *Ethnography*, 16 (2015), pp. 295–312 https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138114552938 and Elaine Swan and Rick Flowers, 'Lasting Impressions: Ethnic Food Tour Guides and Body Work in Southwestern Sydney', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 25 (2018), pp. 24–41 <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12178>

[35] Alessandro Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different', in *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*, ed. by Luisa Del Giudice (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 21-30.

ideally, education and empowerment during the narrative process… Oral histories allow for the collaborative generation of knowledge between the researcher and the research participant. This reciprocal process presents unique opportunities, continual ethical evaluation (heightened in the electronic age), and a particular set of interpretive challenges.'[36]

Most importantly Portelli notes, oral histories allow the study of a process, which is important if we foreground transculturation as a set of processes. During our interviews the relational character of knowledge making described by Portelli came to the surface in the form of conversational tangents and wanderings through gardens. Plants often diverted the narrative with their presence, played cameo-roles in vignettes and brought memories into focus, prompted the remembrance of other places and social relations in the space of the garden, and lead to sudden realizations on gardening as a process. We learned, for instance, about experiments gone wrong (a hot house is too hot in the Australian summer and seedlings die, tomatoes are planted but the soil is sandy and too dry and requires continuous watering) and tinkering gone well (native violets that reclaim the space of a Japanese garden among the pebbles, compost that sprouts trees). The garden as a whole, and particular plants, generated storytelling around broader historical contexts, such as Italian migration to Australia and the history of a particular suburb. This 'plant-based' storytelling also illuminated some of the social processes embedded in the gardens, whether sharing practices with friends and families, or developing social connections around cuttings and the common interest in gardens, or disagreements with neighbours.

Two oral histories, one from Gina, a first-generation Italian gardener from Pescara, in central Italy, and one from Angelina, a second-generation gardener from North Queensland, offer a counterpoint to the more common representation of Italian Australian gardens in terms of kitchen gardens producing an abundance of

[36] Alessandro Portelli, 'Oral History. A Collaborative Method of (Auto)Biography Interview', in *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia L. Leavy (London and Thousand Oaks, CA, 2005), pp. 149–94 <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book224935>

Italian vegetables.[37] Instead, these two stories illustrate well the diversity of Italian Australian gardens, and the processes of translation, reshuffling and entanglement that, as discussed above, are at the core of transculturation. These two gardens, with their co-presence of misplaced plants coming not only from diverse eco-regions but also from diverse cultural histories, can be read as botanic contact zones.

We start in Marrickville, a large, mixed low and high density and mixed residential and light industrial suburb that is home to several waves of migration, most notably Greek and later Vietnamese. In recent years Marrickville is also home to a younger demographic and is earmarked as one of the creative hubs of Sydney. Many of the houses in the low-density areas have established gardens. The multicultural history of the suburb, with the support of local wildlife that helps to spread seeds and pollinate, is materialized in these gardens with abundant cross-overs of plants from different geographical and eco-regions. During one of our research walks for instance my co-researcher drew my attention to a backyard where a mango, a papaya and an olive tree stand side by side. This kind of botanical remix of the tropical and the Mediterranean is common in Sydney's Inner West. In the backyard we could also see broad beans, peas, a fig tree, salad leaves, broccoli, herbs, including parsley growing everywhere, fennel, and tomatoes, and decided to talk with the gardener.

Figure 4, A backyard in Marrickville remixes tropical and Mediterranean plants, Ilaria Vanni 2017.

Gina migrated to Australia from Pescara in the 1960s. Her family lived in a *masseria* (a farmhouse with land), where the family grew all their vegetables. They

[37] Oral histories: Gina, 20 July 2017; Alexandra Crosby, Angie Gallinaro, and Ilaria Vanni Accarigi 'Trees, Urban Gardening and the Importance of Birds: A Conversation with Angie Gallinaro - Mapping Edges', *Mapping Edges*, 2018 http://www.mappingedges.org/project/angie-gallinaro/; Alexandra Crosby, Vincent Crow, and Ilaria Vanni Accarigi, 'The Garden Suburb: A Conversation with Vincent Crow - Mapping Edges', *Mapping Edges*, 2018 http://www.mappingedges.org/project/vincent-crow-garden-suburb/.

did so helped by farm animals, like cows, chickens and sheep, that produced abundant manure, and contributed to eat food scraps. When she relocated in Sydney Gina started a garden in her backyard. This quite literal regrounding entailed a series of adaptations and translations, which construct place by remixing memories and experiences of agricultural practices and knowledge in Italy with the requirements of the new environment. This remixing become clear in the way Gina uses her current garden as a mnemonic device to bring back memories of the *terra* near Pescara. Her narrative connects together plants, animals, and gardening techniques from Italy with her Australian urban backyard. Switching smoothly across the two temporal dimensions of the past back in Italy, spoken in the present tense, and the Sydney Inner West present, Gina highlights a series of translations and reconfigurations, both at a material and linguistic level.

'My mother used to have a piece of land near the river, you could put beans there, *fava*, spinach, and you never have to water because when you dig the soil there is water underneath, and everything grows.' The river plays a central part in Gina's understanding of soil composition, as she explains the sediments produced abundant black, fertile soil, bore water ensured the soil did not dry up, and 'we have a lot of manure because everybody, every house, have farm animals'. By contrast, her Sydney backyard is built on silty sand: it dries up quickly and needs to be fertilized with manure. Manure needs to be bought, because Gina cannot keep animals in the city. Her brother, with whom she arrived in Australia, lives in the hills outside Adelaide, and 'has chickens everywhere' so that he can grow a variety of plants, including olive trees to make oil. 'He believes in chickens', she explains, because they eat food scraps, so that nothing goes to waste. In the city, although chickens are allowed, Gina was threatened with a fine because her rooster used to wake up the neighbourhood at dawn. So, her chickens had to go, and now food scraps are buried in the backyard.

This is how the papaya we saw from the street happened to be in Gina's garden: it just grew from seeds. Gina is particularly proud of her papaya, an exotic tree in Italy: pawpaw, she corrects us, not papaya (both papaya and pawpaw are from the same tree *Carica papaya*, native of Mexico, and wide-spread in South East Asia and now Australia. In Australia the yellow fruit is called pawpaw, while the red-flesh fruit is called papaya). The mango, papaya and mandarin are good trees for Sydney's climate, and couldn't be grown in the *masseria* where winter are

much harsher. Also, they are not so easily attacked by fruit flies. Queensland fruit flies (*Bactrocera tryoni*) play an important role in her narration: fruit flies, she explains showing us the ubiquitous plastic bottles with honey traps dangling from fruit trees in Sydney, deposit their eggs in vegetables such as tomatoes and cucumbers and stone fruit. These particular fruit flies, she continues, appeared because one of their neighbours from Lebanon has a pomegranate tree, and let the fruit spoil on the ground. Gina's family had nectarines, peaches, pears and apples in Italy, but 'peaches are very bad with fruit flies'. That is why peach trees are often replaced by thicker skinned mangos. Other fruit trees, like *nespoli* (*Eriobotrya japonica*) grow in Gina's garden like they did in her family's *orto*, but she explains 'in Italy the *nespole* taste different, because different soil produces different fruits, and because the city is polluted. Everything tastes different, everyone complains: the spaghetti don't taste nice, the meats don't taste nice, the water tastes different because there is no calcium'.

The second garden is in Haberfield, which, as described at the beginning of this chapter, is a historic suburb in Sydney Inner West. The significance of Haberfield as the 'Garden Suburb' is the result of a campaign by a group of committed residents who starting in 1974 lobbied for the recognition of Haberfield as an urban conservation area.[38] The architectonical style is called Federation because it was in fashion when the six Australian colonies became the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. Stylistically it is a remix of Queen Anne, Arts and Crafts, and Californian Bungalow (this later style emerged around 1913/14 and continued into the late 1920s, and reflects a growing US influence on urban design in places like Australia and New Zealand), with decorative elements inspired by Australian flora and fauna. The wide-tree-lined street and the federation houses surrounded by gardens were decisive factors in the recognition of the heritage value of the area. Haberfield is also famous as one of the suburbs where Italian migrants settled in large numbers and introduced a different way of gardening based on productive *orti*. Angelina, the gardener of this story, identifies herself and her gardening style as Italian Australian, to stress the difference between her garden and that of first-generation Italians, and from the British-inspired cottage and Federation gardens in the area.

[38] Crosby, Vanni and Crow 'The Garden Suburb', and Vanni Accarigi and Crosby, 'Remapping Heritage and the Garden Suburb'.

As such her garden is an interesting counterpoint to the way Italian gardens are often imagined as kitchen gardens.

Figure 5, Garden whimsy in Haberfield, Ilaria Vanni 2018.

Angelina's story starts in Far North Queensland, where her parents migrated from Treviso. After nine years as a cane cutter her father bought a tobacco farm. This meant that Angelina's parents did not have much time to dedicate to tending an *orto*, although her mother had a vegetable patch. Her love for gardening did not start, as in the case of Gina's, in her family farm, but in the lush Australian bush: 'the most important thing is that I grew up in the country and I have a major appreciation of nature. You will see the influence of being from Queensland: at the back I've got a rainforest, a wet forest. Alongside there is also a dry forest, because I grew up in Mareeba. Then I have the orchard, my passionfruit and my bananas, which reflect where I grew up.' In Haberfield this love of nature means experimenting in the garden, learning from and being guided by native plants growing in the area, and making a significant contribution to the environment by maintaining trees that are part of a green corridor where native birds live. Gardening, in this sense, is an act of environmental stewardship that recognizes that gardens are part of wider urban ecologies.

Moving to Haberfield in the late 1980s meant translating and remixing the love of nature and native plants with Federation heritage, but also with the vegetable garden and orchard left by the previous owners of her house. Having a career meant that Angelina needed a garden that required only minimum care, and an interest in vegetables started only after retirement. This interest was sparked by her involvement as a volunteer in an edible schoolyard program that teaches primary school children to grow vegetables, compost and eat garden-to-table, and not by family traditions. Growing vegetables in this story acquires different meanings, shifting from a symbol of necessity to a lifestyle choice. This particular regrounding highlights cultural differences, and it is played along the North-South divide that at times persists in the self-representation of Italian Australians. Cultural difference is materialized in the choice of plants and finds its iconic image in the prickly pear (*Opuntia ficus-indica)*:

> There were Sicilians who lived here before me and they had their typical prickly pears. And their fig trees. They had citrus trees. The citrus

> trees, I've relocated along the fence, what I call my orchard. I got rid of all the prickly pears because I'm from Northern Italy so prickly pears is not something that I particularly like. Unfortunately, I got rid of all the fig trees and I'm really very disappointed about that because I now appreciate fig trees, but that's where I put the native forest.[39]

Cultural differences are further articulated, and explained as a difference in taste, and in the understanding of gardening as a practice, on one hand gardens are about producing food, on the other about the appreciation of nature. 'There are cultural differences in our suburb…Italians like tidy gardens, they like everything to be productive, and they don't like leaf litter. They like everything clean. I want to feed the birds and trees create a lot of shade which keeps the house cool.'

Migrant gardens as contact zones therefore are made through remixes and reshufflings of cultural and social practices, and of plants and environments which were previously separated by geographies and histories. Gardens are also sites of intense reconfigurations and readjustments that create new environments are made through the material and sensory entanglements of humans and plants and animals.

Regrounding: gardens as translators and mediators

> I think of my garden as a series of rooms. Angelina Gallinaro, 2018

In the stories of Italian Australian gardeners, gardens are described as fundamental components of homes, not simply in a real estate sense of land ownership (although of course there is also that), but as symbolic and material sites that make settling and the sense of 'feeling at home' possible. Gardening is important in the context of transnational mobilities because it generates place through a continuum of practices and sensory worlds. It is, quite literally, the materialization of 'uprooting and regrounding', as Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier and Sheller's defined the relationship between home and migration.[40] In their book, home is not understood

[39] Crosby, Vanni and Gallinaro 'Trees'.

[40] Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller, *Uprootings/ Regroundings. Questions of Home and Migration* (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2003).

as a static point of origin or of destination. Rather both home and mobility are part of the same dynamic and are in relation to each other through material, symbolic and affective connections. The authors call the constellation of practices that generates these connections 'uprooting and regrounding'.[41]

Gardens are a fundamental part of this process exactly because they require a continuous cycle of uprooting and regrounding, through which place is made. This place-making shapes and is shaped by everyday life with its accumulation of actions, knowledge, experiences and memories. For instance, choosing specific plants, using certain tools to cultivate the garden, designing a container garden of herbs or the support for tomatoes in a particular way, or planting in a determined order provide a continuity of practices and memories. Continuity in this context is not intended as repetition of the same, but rather as the ongoing translation of a practice, gardening, into different circumstances and environments. Like other processes of translation this continuity is not seamless, as it involves misplacement and readjustment.

Peach trees are a good example of a misplaced plant in Sydney and of the reshuffling described by Spitta.[42] Many gardeners we met had tried to grow peach trees, but they all came to the same conclusion: that peach trees suffer in the subtropical climate of costal South East Australia, and that they are easily attacked by fruit flies, which spoil the fruit. Peach trees are, literally, misplaced in Sydney. The loss of peaches, though, entailed the introduction of a new fruit tree in Italian gardens. Mango trees, native to South Asia, and producing fruit with a thicker skin, are now planted in the place of peaches side by side with olive trees, in gardens and verges in Sydney suburbs (such as in the garden described earlier). This creative response (planting a tropical tree) to a gardening problem not known in Italy (fruit flies) entails a translation of flavours: the sweet summer stone fruit from peach becomes mango.

Figure 6, Mango and olive trees, Ilaria Vanni 2017.

[41] Ahmed, *Uprootings/ Regroundings*, p. 2.

[42] Spitta, *Misplaced Objects*, p. 21.

The adjustments described above are reflected also at a linguistic level. Gina, for instance, would use words from her Italian linguistic repertoire when she needed to indicate specific configurations of land, animals, people and plants that have no equivalent in Australia. Words such as *la terra*, *la masseria, l'orto*, while they can be translated as land, farmhouse and vegetable garden, fail to capture the specific relations between house and land, the distance between the productive zone and the house, and the presence of farm animals. The documentary *My Father's Backyard* makes examples of translanguaging: *fensa* (the garden fence), *blocco* (block), *yarda* (backyard). These words are created by adding a vowel at the end of an English word and appear in several conversations with other Italian Australian gardeners. These words are not simply semiotic innovations. Rather, they capture material transformations because they indicate new physical elements, and the practices they engender, that exist in the contact zone of Italian Australian gardens but that did not exist in Italy. Italian village houses and farmhouses generally did not have a wooden fence delimiting a block of land. They do not have a yard, or backyard either. As Gina recounted during our interview, vegetables were grown in *orti*, and *orti* were either in a productive zone, often including animals such as chickens, at some distance from houses, or, in the case of people living in villages, in smaller allotments in the surrounding areas. Migrating to Australia many Italians had to translate these place-making practices and hide the production of vegetables at the back of the house, maintaining the front for ornamental plants, because: 'If you grew vegetables in your front garden as well as the back, you were considered a real Wog'.[43] As the narrator in *My Father's Backyard* remarks: 'The Italian backyard in Australia is very Australian.'[44]

As it is clear from the examples above, when thinking of translation processes, I refer to a specific understanding of the term that captures tinkering, substitutions and readjustments. John Law illustrates this dynamic in his description of metaphors to describe the transitions between different types of 'order rubbing against each other'. Law explains: 'translation also implies betrayal: *traduction,*

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[43] Helen Armstrong, 'Migrants' Domestic Gardens'

[44] Sandra Pires, *My Backyard, Your Backyard* (Australia: ITSOWEL/Why Documentaries, 2012)

trahison. So, translation is both about making equivalent, and about shifting. It is about moving terms around, about linking and changing them.'[45]

Similarly, the gardens and plants in this chapter act as translators, shifting the terms of uprooting and regrounding, moving between different orders, locations, sensory worlds and histories. Seeding, propagating, growing, taking care of plants, sometimes of small animals like chickens, rabbits and birds, attending to visiting wildlife, simply 'being' in the garden, thinking about the design of specific areas, experimenting, cutting flowers, exchanging cuttings with other gardens, learning about native plants, harvesting, cooking, eating, recycling scraps are some everyday practices through which place is made. In addition to be a regrounding practice, gardening also involves the speculative ability to imagine what a site will look like and plan it in collaboration with plants. Plants actively contribute to place-making: gardeners for instance talk about trees generating welcoming, shady sites, of gardening as following what plants want to do, for instance transplanting seedlings popping up in the compost heap, or letting native plants grow freely. The result of the interplay between past experience, imagination, design and plant life generates particular aesthetics: places made of smells, flavours, sights, sounds, moods and textures.

Plants also mediate social relations, for instance through sharing, as recounted by the narrator in one of the seven short films in the documentary *My Backyard, Your Backyard,* and titled *My Father's Backyard*: 'A big part of gardening is giving, and we always had enough veggies to share with everyone'. In this sense, plants can be seen as assembling artefacts: conduits that mediate across geographies, environments and histories and create new meanings and relations at the intersection of people and social practices.[46] Garden fences are also assembling artefacts: in another short film in *My Backyard, Your Backyard* two neighbours, Frank and Fred, are separately interviewed about each other's gardens. The

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[45] John Law, 'Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics', in *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, 2009, 144. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444304992.ch7>

[46] Alastair Pennycook, and Emi Otsuji, 'Fish, Phone Cards and Semiotic Assemblages in Two Bangladeshi Shops in Sydney and Tokyo', *Social Semiotics*, 27 (2017), pp. 434–50 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2017.1334391>

following is an excerpt of the conversation and illustrates well what I call 'fence relations' to indicate the complex relationships generated by the encounter of cultural diversity along garden fences:

> Fred: 'They buy a pig and make salami, this can go on for two or three days… boiling the pig or whatever, the fire going, the smoke coming across our washing.'
>
> Frank: 'Here no one calls anyone. All my neighbours are on my side. I give him pizza and this and that and he says thank you'.
>
> Fred: 'I had a small garden myself, but after watching Frank in action, the expanse of his garden, I thought I can't compete with this man and I might as well join him and find whatever information I can get out of him to make my garden better.'
>
> Frank (giggling): 'He has done a bit here, a bit there, he has three sections… He doesn't want anything from the garden… the fico d'india (prickly pear – classified an invasive in Australia) he doesn't want, figs, olives, he doesn't want.'
>
> Fred: 'The only thing Frank doesn't have is rhubarb. Frank says non piace non piace (I don't like it) so I keep it for my family.'[47]

Sometimes fence relations are conflictual, and become fence feuds, as Angelina put it: 'There are cultural differences in our suburb. I've been here 30 years. My family is from Northern Italy by the way, and I am a divorcee. For instance, my neighbours are Sicilian, married. My trees were already here when they bought their house, right, I think it was probably 10 years later. They invited me in for coffee, and then the next day they asked me to cut all my trees down and get rid of my dogs. That was the beginning of the end so to speak. The beginning of our feud.'[48]

Figure 7, A fence, prickly pear, gorse, and olive tree, Ilaria Vanni 2018.

Fence relations are interesting because they show how the entanglement between gardeners and plants generate different and often incommensurable senses

[47] Pires, 'My Backyard, Your Backyard'.
[48] Crosby, Vanni and Gallinaro 'Trees'.

of place: productive kitchen gardens and ornamental ones, gardens designed for vegetable consumption and gardens designed as environmental stewardship, lush and barren gardens and so on. When considering specifically Italian migrant gardens, these choices have also class and generational connotations: first generation migrants had to cultivate *orti,* because many of the vegetables in their diet were not available in Australian green groceries, and because having an *orto* was a way to eat well and be resilient. Second generations garden as a choice and lifestyle, because as it is explained in the short documentary *My Father's Backyard* 'parents wanted a better life for kids, and that meant not having to produce one's own veggies'.[49]

Conclusion

This chapter has explored what gardens may mean in the context of transnational Italies. It began with the definition of transculturation as a set of processes and it focused on transculturation in relation to place-making. It did so following Mary Louise Pratt's concept of contact zone as spaces of encounters between people and things previously separated by historical and geographical factors, and Silvia Spitta's notion of misplacement as the uprooting and reshuffling of cultural configurations. It brought this literature together with recent writing on migrant gardening as cultural and social practices. This strategy allowed me to explore gardens as contact zones at the intersection of transculturation, place-making and plants-humans entanglements.

What has emerged from this study is that migrant gardens are not sites where sensory worlds from other places, in this case Italy, are recreated. They are instead sites of complex entanglements and of cultural, social and environmental mediation. The understanding of gardens draws attention to the material and sensory dimension of transculturation and to the way in which transcultural practices occur and make place. For instance, a liking for prickly pears is linked to being from South Italy, soil is described in terms of how it feels to touch, rich and wet, or sandy and dry; papayas, banana and mango trees are adopted for their flavour; growing 'Italian' fruit and vegetables means growing a sensory landscape, even when 'everything tastes different'. It is important to stress that the kind of

[49] Pires, 'My Backyard, Your Backyard'.

place that is made through gardening is at the same time deeply localized and produced by the entanglements among Australian geology and nature, Italian horticultural knowledge, people, cultivated plants and plants that decide to grow spontaneously, soil, small animals, wildlife, personal memories, ideas from contemporary gardening trends, the wider history of migration, and social relations in a multicultural suburb. The attention to material and sensory entanglements is important in order to expand the notion of transculturation beyond discursive practices, which while significant tend to pass over the relevance of embodied experiences of transculturation in everyday lives.

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