

Site Unseen: Invading Species 2012

I live and work on Dharug and Gundungurra Country within The Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. This breathtakingly beautiful place, draws millions of visitors every year. However, on its fringes are neglected places.

This series, *Site Unseen*, was taken at an old industrial site close to my home before it was partially developed into a petrol station. The site contained the remnants of a factory dating back to the 1930s. It was overrun by all sorts of exotics weeds, flowers, plants and trees. Blackberry bushes, and possible snakes made it uninviting.

I passed it often to and from home. It constantly drew my attention partly because of my life-long interest in ecology, but also because I identified with these landscapes.

I am an Australian-born child of Maltese migrant market gardeners. My formative landscape was the Dharug Country of Western Sydney. When I was growing up there in the 1960s and 1970s, this was a vast rural area of market gardens, orchards and dairy farms.

Ethnic discrimination against migrants was open and common in Australia until the introduction of anti-discrimination laws. So, I experienced racism first-hand at school, and at various workplaces. This left me, into my late 20s, with the feeling of belonging to 'no country'. If I belonged to any country, it was this 'imported' generic rural landscape. I felt an empathy for these kinds of landscapes that seemed to belong to no-one, including this industrial site.

This site with its large area of dense suckering exotic trees made my heart sink.

I began weeding when I was five years old, and now weed my own native garden. My partner and I also weed the vacant land surrounding our garden, which does not belong to us. So I know just how difficult it is to eradicate such invasive weeds. Suckering exotic trees and other weeds continue to flourish on the remaining strip of industrial land next to the petrol station. They will require heavy machinery to remove them. If left, these weeds will choke out the local native flora.

To me, these invading weeds are a living reminder of Australia being overrun by early colonists who, conveniently declared it *terra nullius*, and then proceeded to treat it as such.

First Nations People like Elder, Uncle Daly Pulkara, see such degraded landscapes as '*wild*' places of *deep loneliness*. This wild country is contrasted with '*quiet country ... the country in which all the care of generations of [Aboriginal] people is evident to those who know how to see it*'¹

There certainly is a feeling of haunting loneliness when standing in these kinds of landscapes.

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¹ Rose, DB 1996, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra, pp19-20.