I am an Australian-born child of post World War II Maltese migrants.

My formative landscape was the Dharug Country of Western Sydney. When I was growing up there in the 1960s and 1970s, it was a vast rural area of market gardens, orchards and dairy farms. From birth, I was surrounded by bush and native plants, insects, and domestic and native animals. This ingrained in me a deep love of nature.

One of my earliest memories from when I was around four years old, was holding onto my mother’s skirt as I witnessed a giant gum healthy tree being brought down on my family’s market garden to make way for a dam. I can still see and hear that tree and its vast canopy crashing to the ground. The immediate feeling of visceral sadness at this scene stayed with me, and seeded my life-long ecological conscience.

I have an ongoing interest in degraded and neglected landscapes, those places which seem to be neither natural nor cared for. They are overlooked and rarely, if ever, photographed for their own sake. Paradoxically, this landscape and many others like it, exist on the perimeter of Katoomba that sits within a World Heritage site visited and photographed each year by millions of tourists.

*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 potential presence of snakes made it uninviting. I passed it often to and from home. It constantly drew my attention partly because of my interest in ecology, and also because I identified with these landscapes.

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 place, it was to a ‘imported’ generic rural landscape. I feel an empathy and sadness for these kinds of landscapes 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 a large area of vacant land surrounding our garden, which does not belong to us. So, I know just how difficult it is to eradicate invasive weeds. Suckering exotic trees and other weeds continue to flourish on the remaining strip of industrial land beside the petrol station. They will require heavy machinery to remove them. If left, these weeds will choke out the local native flora. On a more positive side, I see that nature will colonise any anthropogenic landscape, and not all exotic plants crowd out the native ones.

However, these invading weeds are also 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]](#footnote-1)*

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

1. Rose, DB 1996, Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness, Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra, pp19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)