Stirling's Garden

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By the formation of gardens and by leaving stock, I performed Acts of Occupation upon which at any time a just claim to the Territory might be founded and maintained.

-James Stirling, report to Admiralty, 31st August 1827

It is the month of March,
too early for autumn rains
in Swan River country.

Forged metal slices river loam
like a knife through dark cake.
Picks and spades tear holes,
scrape trenches and mounds,
and into this mixture is sown
the simple act of occupation,
the seeds of peas, radishes, and cabbages
the soft stones of precious potatoes
and carefully wrapped cuttings
of English peach trees.

Homesick in unfamiliar soil
the seeds seek the things they know
clouds, humus, water,
and in the absence of these
split open and abort
their contents onto the hot ground.

The green of a garden is inscribed on a map
but is indifferent to cartography;
lost amongst a tangle of wild grasses,
the colonised have eaten the invaders.

Nandi Chinna was born in Adelaide in 1964. Her poetry has been widely published in journals and anthologies. Her first collection Our Only Guide is Our Homesickness was published by Five Islands Press in 2007. She is currently a PhD candidate at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia, for which she is writing poetry about wetlands and walking.