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**Women and the Environment:**

**An Indicative Study on  
Tamborine Mountain, Queensland**

**Thesis submitted by**

**Sandra Sewell  
BA (Sydney), BSW (University of Queensland),  
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**March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

**for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Discipline of Women's Studies  
School of Arts and Social Sciences  
James Cook University**

## Table of Contents

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Table of Appendices</b>   | <b>iv</b>   |
| <b>List of Plates</b>  | <b>v</b>    |
| <b>Statement of Access</b>   | <b>viii</b> |
| <b>Statement of Sources</b>  | <b>ix</b>   |
| <b>Statement regarding Contribution of Others</b>                  | <b>x</b>    |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>  | <b>xi</b>   |
| <b>Abstract</b>  | <b>xiii</b> |
| <b>Note on Style</b>   | <b>xv</b>   |
| <b>Preface</b>   | <b>xvi</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 1. Research Aims, Theoretical Framework and Context</b> |             |
| Research aims  | 2           |
| Theoretical framework  | 2           |
| Global to local contexts and concerns                              | 4           |
| Research location  | 12          |
| The nature of the research   | 15          |
| Three research stages  | 17          |
| Key research terms and perspectives                                | 18          |
| Women's liberation   | 18          |
| Feminism   | 19          |
| Ecofeminism  | 20          |
| Indigenous women's business  | 21          |
| Care   | 21          |
| Community  | 23          |
| Locality   | 23          |
| Community development  | 23          |
| Developmental work   | 25          |
| Place, environment, nature   | 25          |
| Thesis map   | 26          |
| <b>Chapter 2. Research Literature</b>                              |             |
| Aim of chapter   | 29          |
| Significance of literature   | 30          |
| Women's locality practice  | 31          |
| Australia  | 32          |
| England  | 35          |
| America  | 36          |
| Feminist locality practice   | 37          |
| Feminist locality practice and the environment                     | 42          |
| Men's care for the environment                                     | 47          |
| The contribution of Ecofeminism                                    | 50          |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Liberal Ecofeminism  | 53 |
| Cultural Ecofeminism   | 55 |
| Spiritual / Christian Ecofeminism                                      | 56 |
| Socialist Ecofeminism  | 57 |
| Women and ‘difference’, ‘country’ and place                            | 58 |
| Indigenous Australian women: “women do things differently”             | 59 |
| Luce Irigaray: women and ‘irreducible alterity’                        | 68 |
| Val Plumwood: critical ecological feminism – continuity and difference | 77 |
| Tamborine Mountain literature  | 84 |
| Conclusion: relevance of literature                                    | 85 |

### **Chapter 3. Research Methodology and Methods**

---

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Choice of methodology                                      | 88  |
| Towards a qualitative research methodology                 | 89  |
| Participatory research and feminist participatory research | 90  |
| Research stages and sequence – Stages 1-3                  | 94  |
| Local history research (Stage 1)                           | 95  |
| Interviews (Stage 2)                                       | 95  |
| Visual research (Stage 3 – photovoice)                     | 96  |
| Research Methods   | 98  |
| Local history research (Stage 1)                           | 98  |
| Interviews (Stage 2)                                       | 99  |
| Visual research (Stage 3 – photovoice)                     | 104 |
| Origins of Photovoice                                      | 106 |
| Participants and settings                                  | 106 |
| Steps and stages in the photovoice process                 | 107 |
| Outcomes   | 108 |
| Attrition  | 109 |
| Beyond the frame   | 109 |
| Raising expectations                                       | 110 |
| Photovoice projects with women                             | 110 |
| Photovoice projects with the environment                   | 111 |
| Data analysis and interpretation                           | 112 |
| Ethics   | 114 |
| Conclusion: constraints and opportunities                  | 116 |

### **Chapter 4. Precursors and Precedents: Staying Put (Findings Stage 1)**

---

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Purpose and nature of Stage 1 research | 120 |
| “Other languages and other champions”  | 120 |
| Hilda Geissmann (Curtis)               | 121 |
| Judith Wright McKinney                 | 126 |
| Joy Guyatt                             | 131 |
| Discussion: Staying put                | 133 |

### **Chapter 5. Caring for Country: Connected (Findings Stage 2(a))**

---

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Being connected to place        | 142 |
| “Belonging to Country” workshop | 143 |
| Conversations and reflections   | 147 |
| Deep learning                   | 147 |
| The custodial ethic             | 149 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Caring for my place  | 151 |
| Indigenous care for country  | 154 |
| Change   | 157 |
| Women’s business, men’s business, community business                         | 158 |
| Climate change   | 163 |
| Reflecting on deep learning  | 167 |
| Discussion: Being connected  | 170 |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>Chapter 6. Caring for Place: Committed (Findings Stage 2(b))</b>          |     |
| <hr/>  |     |
| Six conversations  | 181 |
| Thematic summary   | 182 |
| Doing the work ‘properly’  | 182 |
| Emotional /spiritual connections to places                                   | 185 |
| Local / global connections   | 188 |
| A sense of vocation  | 189 |
| Role of government and volunteers  | 190 |
| The importance of human community, and the benefits of<br>working in a group | 191 |
| Men and women work differently   | 192 |
| Discussion: Commitment   | 196 |
| - to place   | 196 |
| - to practice  | 198 |
| - to the Mountain  | 199 |
| Committed practice and organisational continuity                             | 201 |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>Chapter 7. Images and Texts: Reciprocity (Findings Stage 3)</b>           |     |
| <hr/>  |     |
| Images and texts   | 206 |
| Commitment   | 209 |
| Attention to detail  | 210 |
| Taking time to pause and reflect   | 212 |
| Balance and harmony  | 213 |
| Connections  | 214 |
| Knowledge  | 215 |
| Wonder   | 216 |
| Paradoxes and dilemmas (outside the frame)                                   | 217 |
| Permeability of nature and culture   | 218 |
| Discussion: Reciprocity  | 219 |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>Chapter 8. Summary, Reflections and Implications</b>                      |     |
| <hr/>  |     |
| Summary  | 223 |
| Reflections  | 228 |
| Implications for practice, education and research                            | 230 |
| Developmental locality practice  | 234 |
| Education  | 235 |
| Research   | 236 |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>References</b>  | 238 |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>Appendices</b>  | 289 |

## **List of Appendices**

|              |  |            |
|--------------|--|------------|
| Appendix 1:  | Human Research Ethics (HRE) Approval Stage 1 (H3990) | <b>289</b> |
| Appendix 2:  | Information Sheet Stage 1                            | <b>291</b> |
| Appendix 3:  | Informed Consent Form Stage 1                        | <b>292</b> |
| Appendix 4:  | HRE Approval Stage 2 (H4263)                         | <b>293</b> |
| Appendix 5:  | Invitation to Participate in Research Stage 2 (A)    | <b>294</b> |
| Appendix 6:  | Information Sheet Stage 2 (A)                        | <b>295</b> |
| Appendix 7:  | Workshop Program “Belonging to Country” 2011         | <b>296</b> |
| Appendix 8:  | Interview Questions Stage 2 (A)                      | <b>297</b> |
| Appendix 9:  | Informed Consent Form Stage 2 (A)                    | <b>298</b> |
| Appendix 10: | HRE Approval (H4176) Stage 3                         | <b>299</b> |
| Appendix 11: | Information Sheet Stage 2 (B) - interviews           | <b>301</b> |
| Appendix 12: | Informed Consent Stage 2 (B) - interviews            | <b>302</b> |
| Appendix 13: | Interview Questions Stage 2 (B)                      | <b>303</b> |
| Appendix 14: | Information Sheet Stage 3 - photovoice               | <b>304</b> |
| Appendix 15: | Informed Consent Stage 3 – photovoice                | <b>305</b> |
| Appendix 16: | Bioregional Quiz                                     | <b>306</b> |

## List of Plates

- Plate 1: Chapter 1 Title Page: The Road to Tamborine Mountain. 1  
Sandra Sewell, 2013.
- Plate 2: The Green Network. 14  
Tamborine Mountain Development Control Plan No. 1 – 1997.  
Beaudesert Shire Council.
- Plate 3: Clearing Timber on a Block, Mount Tamborine, c. 1912. 16  
John Oxley Collection, State Library of Queensland  
picqld-citrix04--2009-04-08-15-57
- Plate 4: Edmund Curtis jnr. and friend stop for smoko, c. 1921. 16  
Eve Curtis, 1988.
- Plate 5: Chapter 2 Title Page: Women authors. 28  
**Wendy Weeks:** Sourced  
[http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/newsletter/n5pdf/acssa\\_news5\\_wendy.pdf](http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/newsletter/n5pdf/acssa_news5_wendy.pdf). Accessed 11 January, 2014  
**Deborah Bird Rose:** Sourced  
<http://www.ecologicalhumanities.org/rose.html>. Accessed 10 November, 2013  
**Luce Irigaray:** Sourced  
<http://exchanges.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/exchanges/article/view/17>. Accessed 10 November, 2013  
**Freya Mathews:** Sourced  
<http://andrewjbrown.blogspot.com.au/2012/02/time-scissored-work-meaning-ful.html>. Accessed 10 November, 2013  
**Vandana Shiva:** Sourced <http://www.rightlivelivelihood.org/v-shiva.html>. Accessed 10 November, 2013  
**Val Plumwood:** Sourced  
<http://www.ecologicalhumanities.org/plumwood.html>. Accessed 10 November, 2013  
**Carolyn Merchant:** Sourced  
<https://www.acls.org/research/fellow.aspx?cid=78041cef-eea4-db11-8d10-000c2903e717>. Accessed 10 November, 2013 (recoloured)

|                 |  |     |
|-----------------|--|-----|
| Plate 6:        | How to Have a Youth Consultation.<br>Ken Butler in <i>I can Laugh Now, but.... Welfare Humour in Queensland</i> .<br>Ken Butler, Sandra Sewell and Anthony Kelly (eds.), 1988.   | 31  |
| Plate 7:        | Chapter 3 Title Page: <i>Pittosporum revolutum</i> .<br>Sandra Sewell, 2013.   | 87  |
| Plate 8         | International Women’s Day Display, Tamborine Mountain Library.<br>Sandra Sewell, 2013.   | 99  |
| Plate 9         | International Women’s Day Display, Tamborine Mountain Library.<br>Sandra Sewell, 2013.   | 100 |
| Plate 10:       | Chapter 4 Title Page: Women of the Mountain.<br>Photos sourced as described.   | 119 |
| Plate 11:       | Science Newsletter, August 28, 1937<br>Cover photograph and inside article in <i>Science News</i> by Hilda Curtis.<br>Sourced:<br><a href="http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/8864/description/From_the_August_28_1937_issue">http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/8864/description/From_the_August_28_1937_issue</a> . Accessed: 3 <sup>rd</sup> October, 2013. | 125 |
| Plate 12:       | Macleay Laurel.<br>Original watercolour by Elizabeth Russell.  | 132 |
| Plates 13 - 15  | Orchids of the Mountain.<br>Original photographs by Hilda Curtis, reproduced with permission.  | 140 |
| Plate 16:       | Chapter 5 Title Page: Woman moving around in her country.<br>A ‘burning’ by Lilla Watson (undated), reproduced with permission.  | 141 |
| Plate 17:       | Yugambeh Language Map.   | 144 |
| Plate 18:       | <i>Beaudesert Times</i> , 26 <sup>th</sup> October 2011.<br><i>Beaudesert Times</i> report of interview with Lilla Watson and Mary Graham for the “Belonging to Country” Workshop, 26 <sup>th</sup> October, 2011.   | 179 |
| Plates 19 - 21: | Chapter 6 Title Page: Images from the Photovoice Project.  | 180 |
| Plate 22:       | Rainforest.<br>Susanne Duncan, 2013. Reproduced with permission.   | 204 |
| Plate 23:       | Chapter 7 Title Page: Photovoice Images.   | 205 |
| Plate 24:       | Commitment: Sally  | 209 |
| Plate 25:       | Attention to detail: Maggie  | 210 |
| Plate 26:       | Attention to detail: Lyn   | 211 |
| Plate 27:       | Taking time to pause and reflect: Judy   | 212 |

|           |  |     |
|-----------|--|-----|
| Plate 28: | Balance and harmony: Lyn   | 213 |
| Plate 29: | Connections: Sally   | 214 |
| Plate 30: | Knowledge: Lee   | 215 |
| Plate 31: | Wonder: Naomi  | 216 |
| Plate 32: | Paradoxes and dilemmas ('outside the frame'): Joan   | 217 |
| Plate 33  | Permeability of nature and culture: Sally  | 218 |
| Plate 34  | Librarian (right) with some of the women who participated in the photovoice project, celebrating the launch of their work (seen in the background in the library window) at the Tamborine Mountain Library.<br><i>Tamborine Mountain News</i> , Vol. 1335, p. 17, September 4th, 2012. | 221 |
| Plate 35  | Chapter 8 Title Page: Old Mountain Road, Tamborine Mountain.<br>Sabine Bannard, 2013.  | 222 |
| Plate 36  | The Road to Tamborine Mountain.<br>Sandra Sewell, 2013.  | 237 |

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Sandra Sewell

March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014

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Date

## STATEMENT OF SOURCES

### DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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Sandra Sewell

March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014

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Date

**STATEMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS  
INCLUDING FINANCIAL AND EDITORIAL HELP**

Supervision: Dr Nonie Harris and Mr Peter Jones

Editorial Assistance: Ms Amanda Thorley

Financial Assistance: Pre-completion Scholarship, James Cook University

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I thank my supervisors, Dr Nonie Harris and Peter Jones, for their encouragement and skilled guidance of my doctoral studies. They have bridged the distance between Townsville and Tamborine Mountain with generous dollops of their time and with detailed attention to my work. Thank you. I also thank the off-campus staff at the Eddie Koiki Mabo library who have been unfailingly helpful over the six years of Masters and PhD study at James Cook University.

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administrative support and computer expertise I would have long since drowned in the ocean of detail that is doctoral research and thesis completion: Amanda, thank you.

## **Thesis Abstract**

### **Women and the environment: an indicative study on Tamborine Mountain**

In this thesis, I give an account of a doctoral research project to explore, understand and document women's care for the environment. The origins of the research have been in my observations that women care for place in ways that are distinctive and different from men's. The research reflects my concerns about the impacts of environmental degradation, climate change and consequent dislocations at local level, and indicates the contributions that women can make to care for the places where they live – in this case, Tamborine Mountain in Yugambeh country in the hinterland of south-east Queensland.

As a geographically bounded, consciously distinctive town of almost seven thousand residents, Tamborine Mountain provides a highly appropriate location for this research. The seven national parks on the Mountain offer local women a range of opportunities to care for their natural environment in practical ways, both individually on their own properties and collectively through programs such as Landcare. Similarly, there is a range of local sustainability initiatives on the Mountain, including a community garden, a local producers' market, and a Transition Town group. The 1.3 million visitors to the Mountain every year both underpin the local economy and put pressure on the environment they come to enjoy. As the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation become more marked, Tamborine Mountain women have compelling reasons – environmental and economic – to care for place. In this, the philosophy and practice of Indigenous care for country have much of value to teach.

The thesis begins with an examination of the nature and design of the research, the theoretical framework, and the sometimes contested meanings of terms such as 'difference', 'community', 'care', and 'feminism'. The review of literature reports on research-relevant literature through the lens of Indigenous care for country, feminist concepts of difference, feminist locality practice, and recent Australian ecofeminist analyses. In particular, I draw on and discuss the work of Luce Irigaray, Indigenous elders Mary Graham and Lilla Watson, and the late Val Plumwood's critical ecological feminism. The methodology chapter canvasses the nature and appropriateness of qualitative, feminist participatory research, including local history, interview and photovoice methods. Chapters 4 to 7 report the findings from the three research stages: local history research into past

environmental care seen through the lives and work of three Mountain women; a set of 11 individual interviews to discern the contribution that Indigenous ‘belonging to country’ can make, and six individual interviews to discern what difference organisational affiliation can make to women’s environmental practices; a photovoice project to make visible local women’s connections with and commitments to the environment.

In Chapter 8, the concluding chapter, I discuss the implications of the research findings for practice, education and future research in women’s environmental care at local level. The thesis concludes with a substantial bibliography as a potential resource for interested colleagues and scholars.

I hope the research reported here, through an indicative study on Tamborine Mountain, will help make women’s insights and environmental practices more widely known, especially at local level. In the tradition of feminist research, I hope it will also provoke thought and discussion, foster further research and, in doing so, honour the contributions that women can make to local environmental sustainability and well-being.

### **A note on style**

I have used a modified form of APA style for this thesis. For example, while citing an author by surname alone is the usual APA and academic convention, I have preferred to use authors' full names at first mention so that the reader can tell whether the authors are female or male.

Visual images have been a significant part of the research, both in terms of the research location and the photovoice research method. In this sense, the visual images in this thesis are not so much illustrations as they are content in their own right, adding meaning to the words and sentences on the page.

A conundrum I have tried to unravel, and only partly resolved, is how to give Tamborine Mountain more than a bit part in the research story – how to foreground what is so often backgrounded and how to represent in a thesis the environment in which researcher and research participants live and move and have their being.

## Preface

I moved to Tamborine Mountain twelve years ago, after living for 18 months in a cabin in the rainforest near the NSW/Qld border. I was born and raised in New South Wales, but with frequent visits to extended family in Queensland. While my mother tended one of the first ‘native’ gardens in Sydney, I played with friends in the bush opposite our house and on the muddy mangrove river banks at the end of the street. On yearly visits, I played, too, on the banks of the Brisbane River while my grandparents worked in their extensive vegetable garden and chook run. Not surprisingly, then, wherever I have subsequently roosted and for however long, plants and animals, bush and water have been a large part of my personal landscape – even when, as others, I have lived in cities to earn a living.

There is a Chinese belief that a person enters a new cycle of life at 60. For those in my age cohort, turning sixty coincided not only with the hoped-for Daoist “intelligent virtues”, but also with a heightened awareness of ever more urgent concerns about the planet - an environment under siege, climate changing, and an alarming fragility in life processes we had assumed to be forever resilient and forever forgiving. We now know better. Without urgently needed care, the bees may not keep on pollinating, the koalas breeding, the rivers flowing, the crops growing, the sea be clean enough to swim in or the air to breathe.

Soon after I arrived on the Mountain, I set about replanting the land where I live with indigenous natives, and putting in a veggie garden and chook pen. I joined local groups and, after a couple of years, set up a Land for Wildlife group with neighbours. As I eased into and was accepted into Mountain living, I began to hear stories of past and present Mountain women ‘environmentalists’ - quote marks because they didn’t and don’t see themselves as exceptional in the way that word might suggest – stories of men, too, but the women’s stories are less well known. I also kept hearing of women who have owned land on the Mountain, including the place where I live and a large parcel of land just down the road (“Tissie’s Pocket”), whether in numbers more or less than in other places, I don’t know. However, at a ‘get to know your Main Street’ event in the local library, I heard long-time Mountain resident Rhoda and her three daughters name and date every house, building and paddock on the provided map - and a surprising number of the names were women’s.

In local folklore, especially (but not only) among women, the Mountain is a women's place, and a place of healing. Indigenous elders say not. For them, it is rather the place of the wicked Little Men they were threatened with in childhood – and, “Anyway”, says Mary Graham, Kombumerri elder, “blackfellas don't like living on mountains”. With national parks, waterfalls and cool temperatures, the Mountain has always drawn visitors, even when it was a day's journey by horse and cart from Brisbane and offered only a couple of shops, a guest house and a pub. People have since come to live on the Mountain for various reasons, and in various guises – according to my friend Joy, basically in two groups, “Those who want to care for the Mountain and those who want to make a buck out of it”. I would want to be counted amongst the former.

I would want, too, to count myself amongst those Mountain folk whom our local mayor once famously described as “intellectually advantaged”, that is, as occasion demands, opinionated – especially when it comes to protesting inappropriate developments that contravene the planning scheme and savage the environment. For myself, I brought to the Mountain not only a background as a teacher, writer and editor and, more lately, a community development and locality worker, but also an interest in feminism, ecofeminism, and Indigenous philosophy and culture. These interests, some might suggest, are concerns of the late twentieth century, rather than this century: my response would be that they are, and should be, enduring concerns.

In 2007, I enrolled in a Masters of Women's Studies course at JCU as an external student, focussing on local women and their connections to the environment. Subsequently, I began the doctoral research which this thesis records, a research journey based on Tamborine Mountain with the participation of local women who care deeply about the environment and whose concerns and hands-in-the-earth commitment I very much admire and hope to honour in what follows. In telling their stories, I tell also the story of Tamborine Mountain - without which there would be no stories.

You know, the earth doesn't belong to us. We belong to the earth. And, looking at the whole of the Mountain, we need to protect it because people need it. It is a very small area, close to so much urban area, but the renewing that people get from being here sustains them - it renews you, gets your balance back.

*Maggie - research participant*

Lush Tamborine Mountain is a favourite destination for tourists who come seeking avocados, Devonshire tea, crafts, bed-and-breakfast style accommodation and dramatic scenery.

Tourists can visit "Gallery Walk" along Long Road at Eagle Heights. This is a row of shops selling homemade crafts, soaps, Australian bushcraft, natural produce and other delights. Visitors can enjoy everything from cappuccinos to Devonshire tea, rich cakes, casual food and elegant dining.

Around the mountain, visitors can find garden nurseries with teahouses, craft shops, art galleries and excellent restaurants. They can watch hang gliders launching off the escarpment, take bushwalks through rainforests to waterfalls, and visit the wineries and a distillery.

*Introduction to*

*"Tamborine Mountain", Scenic Rim Regional Council*

*<http://www.scenicrim.qld.gov.au/regioninfo/tamborinemtn.shtml>*

# Chapter 1: Research Aims, Theoretical Framework and Contexts



*Plate 1: The Road to Tamborine Mountain*

## **Research aims**

I have undertaken the research reported in this thesis to explore, understand and document women's care for the natural environment on Tamborine Mountain. Through a feminist participatory research methodology, and with the participation of a number of women active in environmental care on Tamborine Mountain, I have addressed the research question: "What are women's principles and practices of care for the environment on Tamborine Mountain?" Based on the findings of this indicative study and a review of relevant literature, I propose that women's care for the environment is different from men's in particular ways and that their contribution to ongoing environmental sustainability and well-being is therefore also different and significant in its own right.

As the study has evolved through the different research stages (see below), other questions have arisen: What are the stories from the past of women's care for the environment on Tamborine Mountain? What is and has been Indigenous care for country, and what might women learn from that? What do women see as the benefits and/or limitations of caring for the environment on their own or through local groups? What visual images do women choose to represent their care for the environment?

There is, too, a further question which bears directly on the relevance of the research and the research methodology: How indicative is this small-scale local study of women's care for the environment in other places, with what implications for practice, education and research? In other words, how might this research contribute to the knowledge base of feminism, ecofeminism, environmentalism, and locality/community development practice? These are questions I will address in what follows.

In this chapter, I first state the theoretical framework that has guided the research and from which I have taken bearings. I then highlight the global to local concerns that are the impetus and context for the research, describe the location and nature of the study, introduce key terms and research perspectives, and map a path for the reader through the thesis.

## **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical foundations of this research rest on critical inquiry. One of the first feminist participatory researchers, Patricia Maguire, writing of the differences between

positivist social science research and alternative research paradigms (1987), cited Jurgen Habermas' "three knowledge inquiry processes and forms of knowledge: technical, interpretive, and critical knowledge" (p. 16). Of the latter, she wrote:

Critical knowledge, a combination of self-reflection and a historical analysis of inequitable systems, is produced by emancipatory or critical inquiry ... critical inquiry is used to help people see themselves and social institutions in a new way in order to inform ... action ... [which, in turn] informs reflection ... The dialectical relation between inquiry and action or theory and practice is explicit (ibid).

From this point of view, she wrote, "the purpose of research is not merely to describe or uncover interpretations of social dynamics, but to do something about social contradictions and inequities" (p. 19). In binary terms, she characterised the differences between positivist empirical social science research and what she called 'alternative research paradigms' as:

objectivity vs. subjectivity; researcher distance vs. closeness to subject;  
generalisation or universality vs. uniqueness; quantitative vs. qualitative;  
social control vs. local self determination; impartiality vs. solidarity (p. 21).

Choosing a research paradigm is not, she noted, arbitrary: "Making explicit choices forces us to come to grips with our own values" (p. 33). In feminist participatory research (see Chapter 3), the researcher's values are explicit, and her values and theoretical frameworks are closely aligned with analyses - for example, feminist analysis - where an analysis is a lens through which she makes meanings of what she observes and the data she gathers. At a local level - indeed, at all levels - researchers, practitioners and educators need to use numbers of different analyses, including race, class, politics, environment, and power, in order to grapple with the dynamics and circumstances of people's lives.

That said, a researcher's analyses, values and choice of theoretical framework also emerge from, are shaped by and reflect her time/space circumstances, as well as the values of particular cultural, political, or religious traditions in which she may be embedded.

Amongst the values that inform this research, then, are those of the traditions across many cultures of mutual aid, respect for difference, compassion, simplicity, and nonviolence - where the Idea-Real is a continuum, or perhaps a spiral, but not a binary opposition, and where the Ideal is evocative, not prescriptive.

## **Global to local contexts and concerns**

While I review the relevant literature in depth in Chapter 2, it is useful here in this scene-setting chapter to briefly outline the urgent environmental issues at all levels – global to local – that are the impetus and context for this research, along with the gaps everywhere evident between environmental rhetoric and environmental action, gaps that many women, like those who care for the environment on Tamborine Mountain, are working to address. The gaps between intentions and actions are perhaps most glaringly evident at the global level in the many failed attempts to achieve agreements and commitments to address climate change, with devastating consequences for the world's poorest citizens (Rosa Braidotti, Ewa Charkiewicz, Sabine Hausler and Saskia Wieringa, 1994; Charlotte Bretherton, 1996, 1998; Tim Flannery, 2005, 2010, 2012; Jared Diamond, 2005; Barrie Pittock, 2005; Kate Rigby, 2006a; Michael MacCracken, Frances Moore and John C. Topping, Jr., 2008). Contributing both to the causes and the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation are globalisation, corporate capitalism and neo-liberalism: a detailed discussion of these political contexts falls outside the scope of this research, but are widely noted by political, social, community and environmental commentators (for example, Susan Hawthorne, 2002; Mark Everard, 2011; Margaret Ledwith, 2011).

In early 2012, the World Wide Fund for Nature published its biennial report, “Living Planet Report 2012”, where the authors sounded a warning:

We all need food, water, and energy. Our lives depend on it. Nature is the basis of our wellbeing and prosperity. Biodiversity has declined globally by around 30 percent between 1970 and 2008; by 60 percent in the tropics. Demand on natural resources has doubled since 1966 and we are currently using the equivalent of 1.5 planets to support our activities. High-income countries have a footprint five times greater than that of low-income countries. “Business as usual” projections estimate that we will need the equivalent of two planets by 2030 to meet our annual demands (2012).

In an accompanying report, “Living Planet 2012 and Rio+20”, the Fund authors hoped for positive outcomes from the then upcoming Rio+20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, yet another gathering designed to achieve global agreements. Sadly, they were to be disappointed.

In the lead up to Rio+20, Anita Nayar, a member of DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, a South world group of women activists), wrote a paper on behalf of the Women's Major Group with five calls for action.<sup>1</sup> The Women's Major Group's fourth and fifth calls were: to "halt the privatization and commodification of our commons and protect women's rights to land, water, energy and other resources ..."; and to recover the consensus that "the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable patterns of consumption and production ..." (Anita Nayar, 2012).

At the Summit itself, when it became clear that Rio+20 was going to be a major disappointment, both for environmentalists and feminists, DAWN issued the following statement:

While governments were locked in their semantic battles in the Rio+20 process, women and other social movements continue to fight on multiple fronts for human rights, justice and sustainability. These struggles take place on diverse territories and geographies including the body, land, oceans and waterways, communities, states, and epistemological grounds. Each of these terrains is fraught with the resurgent forces of patriarchy, finance capitalism, neo-conservatism, consumerism, militarism and extractivism (DAWN, 22 June 2012, Rio de Janeiro).

The Rio+20 Summit was widely seen to be regressive, both in terms of binding agreements on the environment and climate change, and on issues of gender. Mary Robinson who chaired the Women Leaders' Forum was particularly scathing, accusing global leaders of "backsliding on fundamental texts" agreed at the Cairo and Beijing summits, and pointing out that this "failure of leadership" could have a devastating effect on some of the world's poorest and most powerless women (Jane Martinson, DAWN, 2012).

Similarly, George Monbiot, the climate change campaigner in Britain, called the Rio+20 Summit "perhaps the greatest failure of collective leadership since the first world war":

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<sup>1</sup>The first call was for governments to reaffirm that gender informs all development issues and is central to sustainable development; second, the recognition that women carry an "unequal and unfair burden ... in sustaining our collective wellbeing"; third, the need for "universal social protection ... social security and health care including comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services".

The Earth's living systems are collapsing, and the leaders of some of the most powerful nations – the US, the UK, Germany, Russia – could not be even bothered to turn up and discuss it. Those who did solemnly agreed to keep stoking the destructive fires ... (George Monbiot, 2012, p. 20).

Global issues require global commitments and agreements, spelled out in global policies and global mechanisms to monitor and enact them, but Rio+20 didn't provide them.

An Australian woman<sup>2</sup> who attended Rio+20 reported, "People left saying that if governments weren't going to do it, they would have to do it themselves".

In similar vein, George Monbiot wrote that, "while we may have no influence over decisions made elsewhere, there is plenty that can be done within our own borders":

Giving up on global agreements ... is almost a relief. It means walking away from decades of anger and frustration. It means turning away from a place in which we have no agency to one in which we have, at least, a chance of being heard (ibid).

He suggested that there were three reasons why people should not give up: to draw out the losses for as long as possible for the sake of future generations, to preserve what we can in case things do change, and to pursue 'rewilding', "the mass restoration of ecosystems which offers the best hope we have of creating refuges for the natural world" within our own borders (ibid; see also Monbiot, 2013).

George Monbiot would be disappointed, then, to hear Kate Crowley's and KJ Walker's analysis (2012) of what is happening, or not happening, within Australian borders.

Introducing their edited collection of papers on environmental policy failure in Australia, they wrote:

Australian policy makers have persistently ignored the limitations of the Australian environment; physical, climatic, and ecological. The consequences have been dire, affecting every aspect of the nation's ecological support system: over-allocation of water from the Murray-Darling river system; peri-urban development in areas of high fire danger; destruction of

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication. She also reported that the People's Summit was located two and a half hours travel from the main venues, which seemed to her to speak volumes about inclusive decision-making processes (or lack of).

native forests by logging and wood-chipping; extensive land clearing for agriculture, grazing and settlement; conversion of fertile land for plantations, roads and houses; and atmospheric, inland aquatic, marine and estuarine pollution. And population growth on the fragile Australian continent, where lifestyles are amongst the most consumptive and wasteful in the world and where only the margins are habitable and arable, continues to deliver unsustainable ecological impacts (2012, p. 1)

Searching for historical reasons for environmental policy failures in Australia, they cite as a contributing factor the long-standing “quarry Australia” mentality, the view that “Australia’s mineral and energy assets, essentially coal, [are] its greatest riches”, whatever the costs to the environment (ibid). This view, they argue, derives from the very earliest British settlement when colonies were regarded primarily as a resource to be exploited for the mother country (then, the British Empire), not places in their own right with, as in Australia, very real environmental limits – we are, for example, the driest continent on earth with comparatively little arable land for agriculture (see also Jackie French, 2013). Today, the “greenhouse mafia”<sup>3</sup> - that is, mining companies and powerful others - continue to unduly influence and distort national resource and environment policies. They are doing so, in fact, at an unprecedented rate – locking farmers and local communities in bitter disputes with mega-rich transnational companies who want to explore and/or exploit the land (most recently, for coal seam gas) in tandem with the governments who back them. Against this background, Kate Crowley and KJ Walker (2013) stress the fragility and complexity of Australia’s ecologies, and warn, with Jared Diamond (2005), that civilisations tend to collapse under the weight of irreversible ecological problems such as those that beset Australia today. We need, they say, to observe the precautionary principle, to guard against “the ecological damage that may result from our ignorance and uncertainty”: the central message of the precautionary principle is “holism, connectivity and complexity” (Crowley and Walker, 2012, p. 7), concepts reprised again and again in the findings of my research (see Chapters 5, 6, 7). There is, it seems, no lack of agreement on how we should go about doing what needs to be done.

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<sup>3</sup> In KJ Walker, 2012, who attributes the phrase to Guy Pearce. (KJ, without full stops, is the author’s self-ascription.)

Amongst the solutions the authors in the Crowley and Walker collection (2012) propose is for governments to devolve environmental responsibilities to the regional and local levels through such programs as Landcare, even though, as Geoff Cockfield (2012) comments, this strategy can simply be a way for government policy makers to pass on the problems, and the hoped-for solutions, to local communities. Landcare itself has been criticized both as a program that governments use in order to be seen to be acting on environmental concerns and for delivering fragmented outcomes; the Envirofund's scatter-gun approach and lack of regional connectivity is criticised for the same reasons (ibid).

Again, as at global level, national environmental issues need national commitments, leadership, policies and programs. Devolving government responsibilities to local level has now been part of global neoliberal ideology for some decades - in bald terms, an ideology of small government and bootstrap self-help (Sandra Sewell, 1997; Denise Thompson 2009). As with the de-institutionalisation policies in the 1980s, where vulnerable people with disabilities were passed from state institutions to local communities to look after (Dawn Wilson, 1991), it is both ineffectual and unjust to devolve national responsibilities to already hollowed-out local communities without also devolving adequate resources.

In 2005, Jared Diamond outlined eight environmental problems that have put civilisations at risk of collapse in the past: deforestation and habitat destruction; soil erosion, salinisation and loss of soil fertility; water mismanagement; overhunting; overfishing; introduced species outcompeting native species; human population growth; and increased per-capita impact of people. He added four new ones: "human-based climate change; buildup of toxic chemicals in the environment; energy shortages, and full human utilization of the Earth's photosynthetic capacity" (pp. 6-7). Who but national governments can address such risks in a comprehensive manner? Some participants in this research made that point very forcibly: others, in the absence of clear national leadership, seemed unsure what personal or local efforts were worthwhile in order to mitigate climate change and halt environmental destruction. In USA in 2008, individuals and the household sector generated roughly only 30 to 40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, the so-called 'low hanging fruit' of greenhouse gas reductions (Michael P. Vandenburgh, Jack Barkenbus, and Jonathon Gilligan, 2008) – and most household recycling is done by women.

Peter Ferguson (2009) would claim that anti-environmentalism has been a longstanding phenomenon in Australia, whatever the government's political persuasion. Certainly, at

state level in Queensland, the environmental record has been mixed. The Labor governments of Goss, Beattie and Bligh were oriented to state growth, although they did chalk up a few environmental gains, such as the Wild Rivers legislation in north Queensland (now at risk again). Before and after the Labor governments, the environment policies of Joh Bjelke-Peterson and now Campbell Newman have reflected the ideologies of conservative governments who resist anything construed as infringing state rights, especially when it might cut across resource exploitation (including the tourist resource). Premier Newman's policies embody what Geoff Cockfield (2012, p. 60) has described as the "unstable accommodation of two ideologies": "[e]nvironmentalism drives the demand for the preservation and, desirably, the enhancement of natural capital, while market liberalism drives the demand for limited government intervention and the protection of private property rights." The struggle over tree clearing on rural properties is a classic example, and Premier Newman appears to have set out to drive a wedge between pastoralists and environmentalists on this issue, amongst others – as demonstrated in his speech to Agforce on March 8, 2013:

Mr Newman had been discussing his government's much applauded reforms to vegetation management legislation which has given landholders some long awaited autonomy over managing their own landscapes. ... After listing the reforms and the plan for further legislative changes in the coming months, Mr Newman looked up from the lectern and did not return to his prepared speech for the following five minutes. ... Instead Mr Newman discussed candidly the greatest threat posed to enacting these future reforms – the green movement, which has long been adept at hijacking public debate.

"I know the agriculture peak bodies do not always see eye to eye, but they should be united on tackling this green agenda issue," Mr Newman said. ... "They need a concerted campaign to brief media. They need to take the case directly to South East Queensland and tackle the green radical agenda. ... We are a government who are on the side of the landholder and will stand up for them, but it is important the rural groups provide their weight to the argument" (Troy Rowling, 2013).

In 2012, it was instructive how quickly Campbell Newman's newly-elected Liberal National Party government moved to dismantle environmental programs and agencies - amongst others, the climate change unit, the environment and climate change programs in schools,

the Environmental Defenders Office – to disregard UNESCO’s concerns for the Barrier Reef off Gladstone in favour of port facilities for mining exports, to promote ecotourism resorts in national parks, and to open ‘uncared for land’ to logging (Peter Ogilvie, 2012; Ian Lowe, 2012; Libby Connors, 2012). They also moved against women’s services (Queensland Working Women’s Service, Breast Screen and Family Planning, for example), public housing tenants, and other vulnerable groups, as well as public servants – allegedly, “luxuries” Queensland could not afford<sup>4</sup>. While much of this dismantling has been ideologically driven – ‘private is better than public’ – the fact that women, environmentalists and other vulnerable groups were first targets is not accidental: it seems they are all viewed as marginal.

Beyond ideological posturing and political payback, Liberal/conservative governments, such as the current ones in Queensland and Canberra, have a structural difficulty coping with environmental planning: conservative politicians are wedded to individual property rights and state’s rights that cut across the kind of bioregional planning that ecological issues require, for example, in the Murray-Darling basin (Daniel Connell, 2012). Australia’s system of federal and state jurisdictions cuts across natural ecosystems – watercourses and species do not confine themselves neatly within state borders - and thus across efforts to care for them in an effective and consistent way. Our system of governance is, according to Michael Howes and AySin Dedekorkut-Howes, a late nineteenth century model that is ill suited to twenty-first century realities (2012). Further, the global trend to privatisation and economic managerialism has stymied both state and national environmental policies by putting common assets (like water) in the hands of businesses whose operations are predicated on profit and competition. This has also been true at local government level in Queensland, with the move to larger local government areas with larger rate bases (see below) and a corporate mindset that encourages the elected and the appointed to view the environment (not to mention their constituents) as entities to be ‘managed’ and ‘developed’ for economic gain. Within this mindset and whatever the rhetoric, the natural environment is regarded as peripheral.

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<sup>4</sup> Personal communication from worker in Logan (2012) who was told by a public housing tenant (with a disability) that a Centrelink worker had rebuked her for expecting “luxuries the government can’t afford” – the ‘luxury’ in question being assistance for occasional lawn mowing.

Against this policy dystopia is the emergence of global movements to legislate rights of nature (Peter Burdon, 2010; David Grinlinton and Prue Taylor, 2011) – as in Ecuador’s 2008 constitution – national movements like the work of the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (<http://www.earthlaws.org.au>) seeking legal avenues to protect nature’s rights, the work of Polly Higgins (2010) to legislate ecocide as a crime against peace, and local actions such as those of the Lock the Gate Alliance (2013). The achievements are considerable:

The rapidly growing Rights of Nature movement seeks to weigh and balance the rights of humans against those of the whole Earth community. Ecuador have recognised Mother Nature in their constitution, Bolivia and more than a dozen municipal governments in the USA have Rights of Nature legislation and in New Zealand, the Whanganui River ecosystem has been granted personhood rights (AWLA email to members, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2013).

And Tamborine Mountain? After the 2008 boundary redistributions, Tamborine Mountain became the easternmost edge of the newly constituted Scenic Rim Regional Council (SRRC). At the time, local opinion was divided between joining the Gold Coast shire to the east and becoming another theme park, or staying with the old Beaudesert Shire to the west and being squeezed by a traditionally conservative rural constituency: Unfortunately, there wasn’t an option to downsize back to the Tambourine (sic) Mountain Shire Council (1904-1949). On the contrary, there has been ongoing debate in the Scenic Rim about expanding the shire boundary (and so swelling the rate base) to take in Yarrabilba just below the Mountain, a Lendlease development of 45,000 people in 17,000 dwellings (see Yarrabilba website, [yarrabilba.com.au](http://yarrabilba.com.au)) on what used to be prime agricultural land.

As noted above, and true to the national mindset, the Mountain is under constant pressure from proposed developments: for example, a supermarket development opposed by almost a third of Mountain residents and in contravention of the local development control plan which nevertheless went ahead after (some local residents claimed, “dodgy”) Council intervention, and a resort development opposite one of the primary schools, successfully opposed by the Progress Association who bankrupted themselves in the process.

A commercial operator continues to truck water from the Mountain aquifer to Coca Cola and breweries on the Gold Coast, and in 2011 the Council and State government agreed to retain the Mountain dump and green waste site next to a national park (access through the

main street of town and national park). There is a small and vocal band of residents who oppose and resist such developments, and some of the women who participated in this research are publicly active in these efforts (see Tamborine Mountain Progress Association newsletters, 2001 – 2014). The Scenic Rim Regional Council is yet to release their revised environment policy, a very long time in the making. The current policy is couched in the language of management - as in the wording of the Objective, “to ensure our unique natural environment and landscape is proactively and responsibly *managed* ...” (my emphasis) - and draws heavily on the language of environmental ‘services’ and ‘resources’.<sup>5</sup> (See Scenic Rim Regional Council website, <http://www.scenicrim.qld.gov.au/>).

### **Research location**

Tamborine Mountain is 90 km south-west of Brisbane in the Gold Coast hinterland of south-east Queensland. It falls within the Yugambeh language region, and the Mountain is Wangerriburra country, although we are told by Yugambeh elders (Mary Graham, personal communication; Ysola Best and Alex Barlow, 1997) that Aboriginal people never lived here: they came up the Mountain to hunt and dig the native yams, but preferred to live near the Coast with the benefits of both sea and land tucker (see Yugambeh language map, Plate 17, Chapter 5).

From the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans came to the Mountain, first for its timber – red cedar, in particular – and later for dairy farming and fruit and vegetable growing. As a condition of land tenure, the ‘scrub’ had to be cleared, and early photographs of Tamborine Mountain are replete with images of men straddling massive tree trunks with saws and ropes (see Plates 3 and 4). Taking advantage of the cool climate and abundant 1500 mm per annum rainfall, women on the Mountain have traditionally grown flowers to supplement the family income, and some still do. The Mountain is 8 km long and 4 km wide and now has a population of almost seven thousand people, concentrated in three main ‘villages’. Tourist buses, mostly from the Gold Coast, bring 1.3 million tourists to the

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<sup>5</sup> Following up on an earlier enquiry in August 2012, I spoke with a planning officer in Scenic Rim Regional Council on 9/5/13, and he advised that the policy could take another 6 to 12 months to finalise. Yet another enquiry in December 2013 brought the response that Council does not have an environment policy because it would be “too broad to be meaningful or too detailed, as to be restrictive”. Instead, the various sections in Council ‘green’ their work. Council is, as others, preparing a Biodiversity Strategy. An example of a Shire’s upfront commitment to their environment is in Noosa Shire: see <http://www.noosacouncil.org/>.

Mountain each year – for the crafts, wineries and wedding chapels, but also for the annual garden festival and for the national parks.

There are seven national parks, and one of them, Witches Falls, was the first declared national park in Queensland and the second in Australia (Eve Curtis, 1988). The cool temperate rainforests have long attracted naturalists, bush walkers, bird watchers, and weekend family picnickers, and there are numbers of environmental groups on the Mountain who are committed to protecting them – Landcare, Bush Volunteers, Natural History Association, Rainforest Trust, and private property holders in the Land for Wildlife program, for example. In fact, the care of the rainforests is largely in the hands of local volunteers, many of them women: the Mountain lost its Queensland Parks and Wildlife base some years ago, and is now served intermittently from the Gold Coast base. There is also a community garden, a local producer’s market, and a Transition Town group.

Tamborine Mountain people are conscious of being a geographically distinct community, evident in such phrases as “off Mountain” (as in “I’m going off Mountain to ...”) and “lowlanders” (as a joke, people who don’t live on the Mountain). In recent years, two high schools and two primary schools have attracted young families to live on the Mountain, but the demographic is still skewed to middle-aged and older retirees: the median age is 47, compared to the national median of 37 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). The median weekly income is well below the national median for persons, families and households, reflecting a large proportion of the population who live on fixed incomes. Country of birth and parents’ countries of birth are overwhelmingly European/Australian: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent only 0.7% of the Mountain population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

There is at least one of each basic service on the Mountain, for example, a medical centre in two locations, a post office and agency, and a library, but no public transport, no reticulated water and no public sewerage system. In terms of size and community facilities, the Mountain community sits somewhere between a regional town and a ‘village’ but, unlike other townships in the Scenic Rim Shire, it is not a service centre for surrounding rural areas. As agricultural land is increasingly given over to housing and commercial

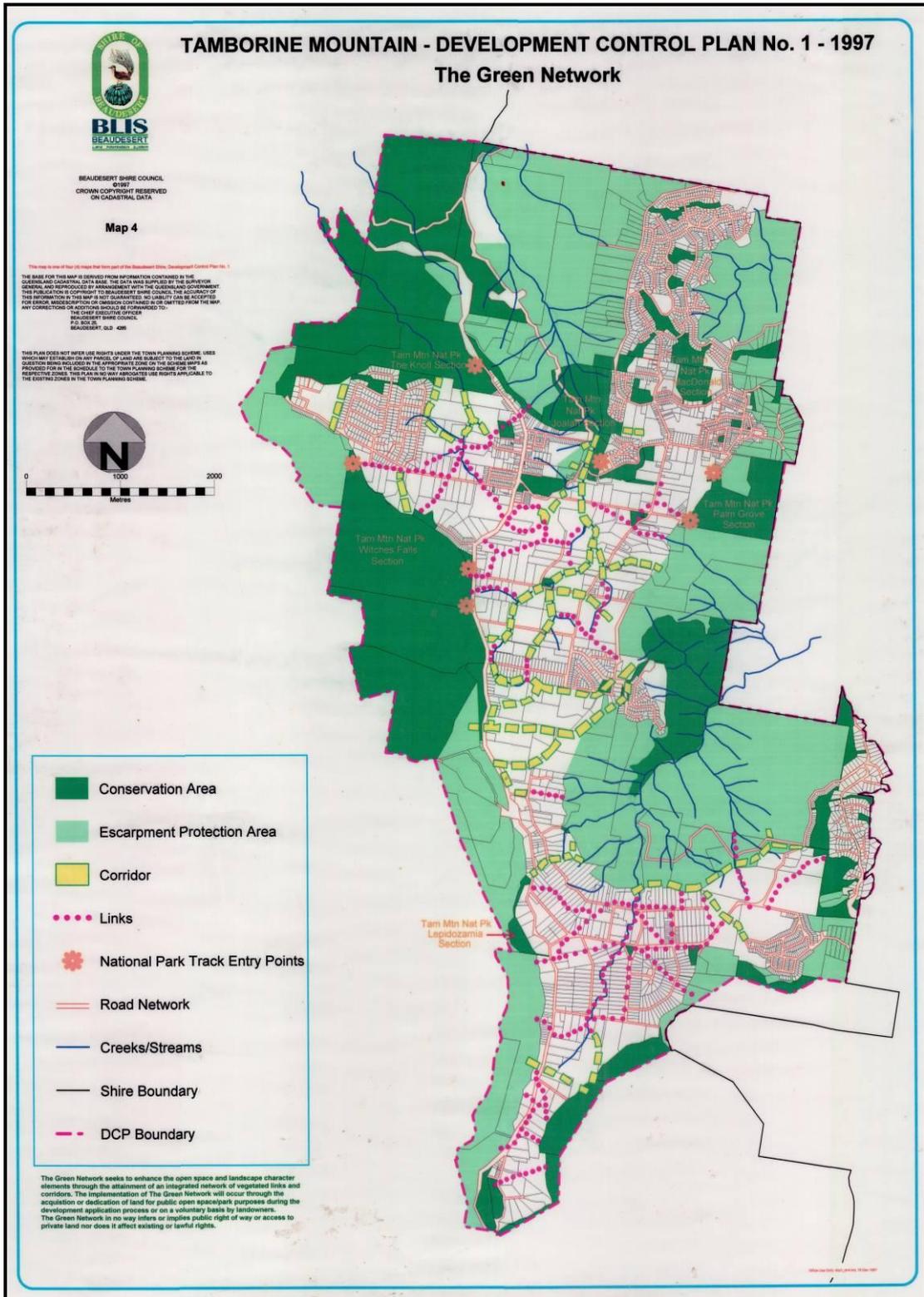


Plate 2: The Green Network.

development, the economic base of the Mountain depends ever more on tourism and special events.

Tourism on the Mountain is contentious. There is a belief that the Mountain economy needs the jobs tourism brings, whereas studies suggest that, on the contrary, tourism elicits few jobs for locals and those often casual and part time (David B. Weaver and Laura J. Lawton, 2001; Benoni L. Amsden, Richard C. Stedman, and Linda E. Kruger, 2011; Jodi George, 2011). There is also an insidious argument, advanced by developers and some in Council, that it is selfish for Mountain residents to deny others the benefits and beauties of the Mountain - an argument which fails to factor in the impacts of development on the natural environment, the very aspect that draws people to visit in the first place – as, for example, is happening in Bali (Bruno Philip, 2012). In a 2001 study of Mountain resident's attitudes to tourism, the authors found that one half of respondents were ambivalent about tourism (mainly because of the belief about jobs), one quarter in favour and one quarter opposed (David B. Weaver and Laura J. Lawton, 2001). The researchers asked *only* about tourism, not about alternatives, and they appear to have assumed that residents in exurbia eventually adjust and resign themselves to tourism, an assumption that, judging from letters to the editor in the local papers, doesn't necessarily hold true on Tamborine Mountain. Further, while noting that Mountain "residents are fiercely attached to the uniqueness of their community" (Weaver and Lawton, p. 451), the researchers did not explore the nature of that attachment, an oversight that this research will, in part, address.

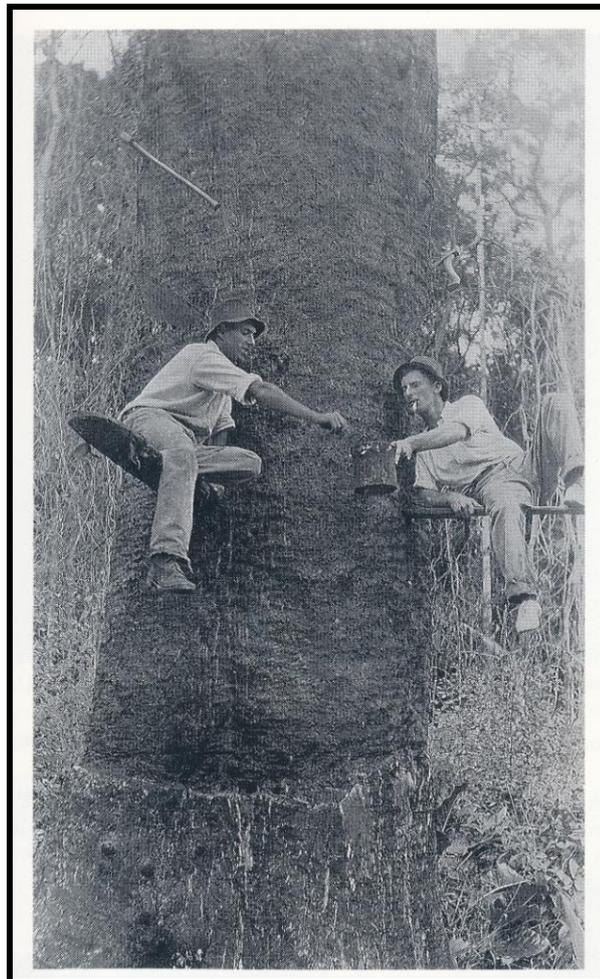
### **The nature of the research**

When personal experiences on the Mountain led to an interest in the research topic and its associated questions, I decided that the best way to undertake the research was by means of a qualitative participatory research methodology designed to be feminist, inclusive, exploratory, local, in-depth, small-scale and indicative. As a resident of Tamborine Mountain, I have been an 'inside' researcher (Joan Acker, 2000), with all the advantages, disadvantages and cautions that research standpoint brings (see Chapter 3).

The research has been feminist in that I have privileged women's concerns and practices, in their own right, without reference to men's concerns or practices. (I have, however, included a section in Chapter 2 on literature relating to men and the environment.) I am,



*Plate 3: Clearing Timber on a Block, Mount Tamborine, C. 1912.*



*Plate 4: Edmund Curtis jun. and friend stop for 'smoko', ca. 1921.*

however, aware of the difficulty (impossibility?) of disentangling ‘women’s business’ from the Western patriarchal culture in which it has long been embedded and obscured. Because that history includes the very language in which we think and speak, this research will make only a very modest contribution to the ongoing project of women’s liberation. The choice of methods has, however, favoured women’s preferred ways of giving and sharing information - through conversations and dialogue in individual interviews and group discussion (Corinne Glesne, 2011; Ruthellen Josselson, 2013).

Because it is hardly possible to live on the Mountain without a strong sense of the visual - it is simply a beautiful place to be - the research has had a strong visual element, reflected in the methodology and in the photovoice method in particular. As many of the women who participated in the research have said, the Mountain is a special place, and I have wanted to communicate that by making space for it in the thesis as a visible presence, just as it is in the lives of people who live here, particularly the women who care for it.

Finally, as an inside researcher, I have designed the research to be as developmental and reciprocal as possible – that is, to contribute to the well-being of local women and to give something back from the research both to them and to the Mountain community. In Stages 1 and 3 (see below) I have reached out to the community through a display of research findings, and the first set of Stage 2 research interviews followed an Indigenous seminar offered to all Mountain residents.

### **Three research stages**

The research has evolved through three stages, each stage yielding data to shape the following stage and/or enhance understanding of preceding stage(s). Data gathering has therefore been an exploratory and cumulative process, a research journey.

In Stage 1 of the research I examined and displayed the work of past women ‘environmentalists’ on Tamborine Mountain in order to ground the research in time and space. In Stage 2 of the research, I firstly interviewed 11 women who attended a “Belonging to Country” Indigenous seminar in order to see how they might view their care for place/environment in light of what they had learned of Indigenous care for country, and I then interviewed 6 women who care for the environment through environmental organisations (one as a government employee) to ask what strengths and limitations they

saw in programmatic care for place. In Stage 3, I brought together 7 women (drawn from Stage 2 and Stage 3 interviews) to take photos and write accompanying texts to document their care for place in words and images, in a photovoice project.

Through the three stages of the research, I have held together three threads and their associated analyses – women/gender, locality/community practice, environment/ecological issues – in order to discern, unravel and weave together their possible interconnections. (Race analysis, through the post “Belonging to Country” interviews, has been a fourth thread, but not a primary focus of this research.)

### **Key terms and research perspectives**

The terms I bring together in the title of this thesis – women, care, environment – are words in common use, with apparently self-evident definitions. In many social/political contexts, however, they can be slippery, even controversial, terms, so I want to be clear about what I intend them to signify.

#### **Women’s liberation.**

‘Women’s liberation’ is a term that has fallen – or been pushed – out of fashion. That is a pity, because the term implicitly associates the liberation of women with the liberation of others – men, oppressed minorities, colonized peoples, other species – and situates women’s liberation within the human tradition of struggles against, for example, slavery, religious and ethnic discrimination, the violence of war, exploitation, grinding poverty, and the ravages of colonisation. Germaine Greer was clear about what the loss of the term has meant:

In 1970 the movement was called ‘Women’s Liberation’ or, contemptuously, ‘Women’s Lib’. When the name ‘Libbers’ was dropped for ‘Feminists’ we were all relieved. What none of us noticed was that the ideal of liberation was fading out with the word. We were settling for equality. Liberation struggles are not about assimilation but about asserting difference, and insisting on it as a condition of self-definition and self-determination ... Women’s liberation did not see the female’s potential in terms of the male actual; the visionary feminists of the late sixties and early seventies knew that women could never find freedom by agreeing to live the lives of unfree men ... Liberationists sought the world

over for clues to what women's lives could be like if they were free to define their own values, order their own priorities and decide their own fate (1999, p. 1).

In the liberationist tradition, with which community development and locality practice are closely associated, it is neither possible nor ethical to privilege one form of liberation over another. As noted above, locality practitioners have to employ an array of multidimensional analyses – race, gender, class, power, social, structural, economic, and political – and remain alert to the ways that oppressive attitudes and institutions interconnect to poison the lives of vulnerable people. In this thesis, while locating myself in the tradition of women's liberation and making use of multidimensional analyses, I have employed a feminist analysis as a particularly appropriate lens through which to make meaning of the research findings.

### **Feminism.**

The term 'feminist', prefix for many of the theories and perspectives relevant to this thesis, has perhaps a sharper focus, although not necessarily a narrower one, than 'women's liberation'. There are, of course, many 'feminisms' – liberal, socialist, spiritual, and radical, to which we might add postmodern, transnational, and political (Betty McLellan, 1995, pp. 20-21; 2010 *passim*) and ecofeminist – which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2. 'Feminist' can describe both a social movement and a personal frame of reference. In this thesis, I use 'feminist' to indicate an awareness, analysis and prioritising of women's circumstances and concerns, as Denise Thompson (2001) has made clear:

Feminism is a thoroughgoing critique of male domination wherever it is found and however it is manifested. It is a working towards ending male impositions of whatever form, and the creating of a community of women relating to women and creating our own human status unencumbered by meanings and values which include women in the human race on men's terms or not at all (p. 21).

As a definition of radical feminism, the above definition offers a framework that, I suggest, is unique to women. That doesn't mean that men can't employ a feminist *analysis* – in fact, that would be a bonus – but it means that, just as I can't be a Black or Indigenous person, men can't be women, and a man can't *be* a feminist. As a lesbian activist might say,

“Women do women’s liberation” (Sherna Berger Gluck, Maylei Blackwell, Sharon Cotrell and Karen S. Harper, 1998, p. 65).

Many definitions of feminism based primarily on equality do not, in my view, go far enough. To seek equality alone is to risk being stranded in reform and to pass up opportunities for radical and liberating change. Denise Thompson again:

The meaning, value, truth and reality of feminism... is its identification and opposition to male domination, and its concomitant struggle for a human status for women in connection with other women, which is at no one’s expense, and which is *outside male definition and control* (emphasis mine) (2001, p. 1).

In this thesis I draw on the work of French philosopher Luce Irigaray (2000a) who, while eschewing the tag ‘feminist’, has theorised woman as Other, that is, ‘outside male definition’, an ‘irreducible alterity’ - not Other of the Same (see Chapter 2). Despite concerns about essentialism, I will suggest that, across cultures and for different purposes, there are possible correspondences between Luce Irigaray’s understanding of women’s ways of being in the world and Indigenous ‘women’s business’ (see below), at least in the dignity that inheres in both. I will also consider the reluctance on the part of many women today, including women who participated in this research, to identify themselves with feminism, while manifestly living lives predicated on the gains of feminism. No woman whom I interviewed referred to feminism or women’s liberation, or self-identified as a feminist: the exception was one woman who said that she was not a feminist.

### **Ecofeminism.**

The somewhat awkward term ‘ecofeminism’ was coined by Francoise d’Eaubonne in 1974, and taken up by North American writers like Charlene Spretnak and Fritjof Capra (1985) and Ynestra King (1990). Ecofeminism became a movement in its own right in the 1980s, particularly in the West (Caroline Merchant 1995a, p. 5). While it is a handy tag to describe a distinctive body of feminist literature and area of practice, it is important not to read the term as simply an add-on extra to feminism. It is rather the edge of a significantly different way to think about, act with and care for land – at its broadest, a different way to live. I use the terms ecofeminism and ecofeminist with that in mind – and also with the caution that some women who care for land (Indigenous women, in particular) would not care to

be described as ecofeminists. Indeed, some women would not recognize themselves in either the ‘eco’ or the ‘feminist’. Nevertheless, ecofeminism seems to be making something of a come-back in feminist literature (Greta Gaard, 2011), after being consigned to feminist history of the 1970s on suspicion of leanings towards essentialism. In this thesis I draw on the work of Val Plumwood (1993a, 2003a) and her theorising of a ‘critical ecological feminism’ (see Chapter 2) that both addresses concerns about essentialism and signals feminist cautions about supposedly gender-neutral environmentalism.

### **Indigenous women’s business.**

I use the term ‘Indigenous’ to refer to peoples and cultures of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origins. I use the Indigenous term ‘women’s business’ to point to matters that are for women to discuss and decide in their own time and space and on their own terms. There is no intention here to co-opt or colonise Indigenous language and culture. Rather, as Indigenous women understand it, the term points to the authority and legitimacy of women’s rightful spheres of knowledge and action that settler-descended Australian women might themselves wish to claim – even given the difficulty of enjoining the respect that ‘women’s business’ deserves. I will discuss Indigenous women’s understandings of ‘women’s business’ in the following chapter, where I draw on the work of Indigenous philosopher Mary Graham (1999 2013), Kombumerri elder of the Yugambeh peoples’ country, of which Tamborine Mountain is part, and the work of Lilla Watson (1994, 2008), Burrigubba elder<sup>6</sup>. In the post-Belonging to Country interviews (see Chapter 5), two women self-identified as Indigenous, and one woman spoke of trying to trace an Aboriginal forebear.

### **Care.**

Despite ‘care’ being the operative word, the active verb, in research conversations and group discussions, no respondent questioned the concept of ‘care’. All used the term freely, often with a sense of mutuality and reciprocity – I care for the environment and, in turn, the environment cares for me – and some offered explicit analogies with the care they saw women extending to children and others. The phrase ‘caring for the environment’ has

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<sup>6</sup> A Murri woman elder gave a possible definition when, pressed to define the term, she said, “‘Women’s business’ is whatever women fucking say it is.”

possibly suffered the same fate as the term ‘community’, losing all meaning from its current blanket, sometimes banal and pious usage.<sup>7</sup>

Following the well-known work of Nel Noddings (1984) in education and Carol Gilligan (1982) in psychology, feminist theorist Christina Hughes (2002) has written:

Overall, care holds a contradictory and ambiguous place in feminist theorizing. For example, it is both posited as a hallmark of woman’s difference and it is viewed as an entrapment of subservience from which women must escape. Ethics of care feminists argue that care is a higher order trait ... because care offers an alternative to the hegemonies of individualism and atomism ... [ethics of care feminists are, however,] critiqued not only for their perceived propensity to essentialism but also for the ways in which they offer rather sanitized conceptualizations of the connection and relatedness that lie at the heart of care (p. 108).

She concludes that, paid or unpaid care “operates as a cluster concept through its connections to issues of dependency, responsibility and autonomy”, and she points out that “feminist care ethicists have sought to counterpose care to the individualism of rights-based discourses” (p. 129). While Hughes does not include care for the environment in her discussion, it is interesting to reflect that what can be seen to be a difficult hiatus between care and justice in human terms is not necessarily so in environmental terms – especially when nature has its own legislated rights *and* people are committed to care for it.

In developmental work (see below), as in social work and related disciplines, practitioners learn to be alert to care slipping into control – the coerced dependency Hughes mentions above – instead of ‘doing/walking alongside’ individuals, groups and communities. In Indigenous terms, care is a concept of interdependency, expressed for example by Burrigubba elder Lilla Watson in this way: “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” It is in this latter interdependent sense that I use ‘care for the environment’ in this thesis – what some research participants called a reciprocal relationship, that is, a relationship between people and non-human nature that sustains the well-being of both.

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<sup>7</sup> Perhaps ‘look after’ might have been a better choice?

### **Community.**

There are hundreds of possible definitions of the word ‘community’. Here I propose a paraphrase of an earlier definition of ‘community building’ I myself helped construct: “to build community is to live in a place with people we care about, and to share and join together in activities that we agree are important”: that is, ‘community’ presupposes an interdependence of place and people and shared activities (Anthony Kelly and Sandra Sewell, 1988, p. 24). This definition has been shaped by the nonviolent tradition of community development – not only the Gandhian tradition of which I have been part, which has drawn heavily on Indigenous and Third World practice, but also, for example, the Quaker pacifist tradition and the nonviolence tradition more generally (see, for example, M.K. Gandhi, 1927 (rep.1983); Gunnar Jahn, 1947; Gene Sharp, 1973; Virginia Coover, Ellen Deacon, Charles Esser and Christopher Moore, 1981; Berenice Carroll, 1989; Robert Adams, 2011).

### **Locality.**

In this thesis, I use the word ‘locality’ in preference to ‘community’<sup>8</sup>. ‘Locality’ is a neutral term to describe physical space and the life - flora, and fauna, including humans - within it. It is also a term that has come into recent prominence through renewed interest in ‘re-localisation’, for example, in the Transition Towns movement (see, for example, Rob Hopkins, 2008; Raymond De Young and Thomas Princen, 2011). ‘Community’ evokes a host of meanings, some of which I do not intend: ‘community’ can describe everything from an informal group of like-minded friends to a virtual community on the web, and does not always include the other-than-human natural environment. ‘Locality’ is firmly grounded in place, with both feet on the earth.

### **Community development.**

While ‘community development’ is also a term with fluid meanings and resists formal definition - with as many definitions as there are people who practise, critique or advocate this method of work - I use it with specific meaning here. Historically,

the community development tradition has its origins in peoples’ struggles for social, political, cultural and economic freedoms ... a method of choice in places where people are experiencing or emerging from

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<sup>8</sup>Because much of the literature relevant to this research uses the word ‘community’, both ‘locality’ and ‘community’ appear in this thesis.

colonisation and so, by extension, in situations where people are exploited, marginalised or excluded from participating in processes and activities that affect their lives.

It is sometimes known as the re-structuring methodology because workers aim to work both with people on the ground ... *and* with people in vertical structures, in such a way that the vertical re-structures in favour of the horizontal, devolving “the necessary *authority* and adequate *resources* in order for people on the ground to undertake *a real job of work*” (emphasis in original, Sandra Sewell, 2005).

There are many examples of successful community development work, where people in, say, community organizations, have been able to do a devolved job of work and, in the process, have skilled local people to carry forward local processes and structures after those in the vertical structures (almost inevitably) have pulled the plug on funding. Unfortunately, people on the ground rarely get the job of work with adequate resources and with sufficient authority, leading some observers to critique the method as compromised and oppressive (Iris Marion Young, 1990; Martin Mowbray, 1996).

Ann Ingamells (2010, p. 3) has made helpful distinctions between “differences of emphasis” in community development work. She writes that “some [workers] stay closer to the horizontal work, committed in their communities to building solidarity with people who are usually marginalized and excluded”, for example, the Waiters Union in West End, Brisbane, who live alongside and work with people who are homeless and/or disabled. Others, she says, “work at the intersection of vertical (social structures) and horizontal (community relations) ... to bring about wider changes that makes institutions more responsive to community articulated needs and aspirations”, for example, those in Mackay’s Regional Council for Social Development. A third group are “those with a place base, or specific group focus” who are “concerned to enhance residents’ identity with a place, fostering awareness and resident voice to secure better resources and supports for a range of groups, mindful always of the least advantaged, in a local place” (ibid).

Since she offers no example for this third group, I volunteer this study as a possible candidate. Even though there was no intention in this research to secure resources or

supports, there was an intention to enhance residents' awareness of their place and their work within it.

It is worth remembering, however, that traditions of community development vary, both across the world and across Australian states. The American tradition is salted with adversarial tactics, deriving from 1960's stirrers like Saul Alinsky (1971) and arguably still evident in the community organising of women like Nancy Naples (1998, 2003), while the British tradition has been closely associated with Marxism and local authorities, as for example in the writings of Lena Dominelli (1995, 2006). The traditions in places like India, Africa and South America are, of course, different again: the Nobel Women's Initiative offers many outstanding examples (Nobel Women's Initiative, 2013).

### **Developmental work.**

'Developmental work' refers to work which aims to enhance people's knowledge, analysis, leadership abilities, program/project management, skills and techniques, and affirm values such as mutuality, reciprocity, inclusiveness and co-operation. Because the term 'community development' has had such a vogue, especially in the 1980's and 1990's, and has been co-opted for so many contradictory purposes both by bureaucrats and grassroots workers, there was a move in the 1980's to reposition another term – 'developmental work' – to be broadly encompassing of all work that enhances peoples' skills and understandings, such that they can make a positive difference to their own and others' lives.

Developmental community practice can occur within any or all community practice methodologies – service, action etc – because it is a way of working that, at best, equips people to design and sustain their own flourishing. In this thesis, I use the term 'community development' to refer to a specific method of work, and 'developmental' to refer to an overall approach to work in locality.<sup>9</sup>

### **Place, environment, nature.**

Similarly, I use the words 'place', 'environment' and 'nature' in a specific sense to refer to the natural, physical, geographical, ecological environment - in this case, a mountain plateau in south-east Queensland. The environment of which I am a part and which is part of me is a dry sclerophyll and temperate rainforest, habitat for a range of animals and plants,

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<sup>9</sup> I avoid the term 'praxis' since it often describes 'head-and-hand' practice – apparently omitting 'heart'.

some specific to this area and many common to the surrounding region which was shaped by a former active volcano, Mount Warning. It is also the air and the temperatures at 578 meters above sea level, the distinct seasons, and all the many overlapping and intersecting ecologies of people and place. While some take 'environment' to mean everything, animate and inanimate, surrounding a given location, including the built environment - for example, city tenements, open cut mines, highways and main streets - here I use 'environment' with the circumscribed meaning traditionally associated with the word 'nature': the world/ecology of plants and animals in the rainforests, the creeks, the air, and the soils of Tamborine Mountain, interdependent with humans but existing in their own right, with their own rights. It is the nature of those connections that is important in this research, that is, the relationship between women and their particular environment.

### **Thesis map**

The first three chapters are Context, Literature and Methodology. After this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 opens with a review of the literature relevant to the research. The literature that has informed and, in some cases, inspired this research is multi-faceted: firstly, the literature of community/locality practice, including feminist community practice and feminist locality practice and the environment; secondly, literature on women and 'difference' and women and the environment, highlighting the work of Luce Irigaray, Indigenous elders Mary Graham and Lilla Watson, and Val Plumwood; and thirdly, the small collection of Tamborine Mountain literature. I have also included a brief section on the literature addressing men and the environment. In Chapter 3, I recount the research activities that have constituted the methodology of the research, including local history research, two sets of individual interviews/conversations, a group discussion and a photovoice project. Within a qualitative, feminist and participatory research framework, these methods have evolved as opportunities arose within the research location and as the research logic required. The relatively new photovoice method, marrying text and image, has proved to be a particularly appropriate research method for a study of this kind, and has merited extended discussion.

There are four chapters of research findings. In Chapter 4, I report past women's care for the environment on Tamborine Mountain, demonstrated in the work of Hilda Geissmann (Curtis), Judith Wright McKinney and Joy Guyatt. In Chapter 5, from a first set of conversations, I recount and discuss women's reflections on Indigenous care for country

and their own care for place, following a “Belonging to Country” workshop, and in Chapter 6, I discuss a second set of conversations to elicit women’s care for the environment as members of local environmental groups. In Chapter 7, I present and discuss the outcomes of the photovoice project.

In Chapter 8, I conclude the thesis with the possible implications of the research findings for future practice, education and research in the fields of women’s studies, locality and environmental work.

# Chapter 2: Research Literature

Wendy Weeks



Deborah Bird Rose



Luce Erigaray



Freya Mathews



Vandana Shiva



Val Plumwood



Carolyn Merchant



Plate 5: Women authors.

The way to study from books requires that you avoid confusing your perceptions by literalism. You should pick out the ideas, to accord with the heart. Then set the book aside to cull the principles. Then set aside the principles to get the effect. When you can get the effect, you can absorb it into the mind. After a long time, if you are completely sincere, the light of mind will naturally overflow, the spirit of knowledge will leap, all will be penetrated, all will be understood. When you get to this point, you should keep it and nurture it. Just do not let it gallop off ...

Wang Che (1113-71) <sup>10</sup>

### **Aim of chapter**

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the research in its literature context, that is, in the context of relevant theories, insights, research and practice in other places and other times. In the first part of the chapter, I consider the literature from my practice base in locality (community) work which, as we shall see, has been until recently a literature with a patchy record in feminist and environmental awareness. Therefore, following a survey of the literature on locality practice, I consider the literature on feminist locality practice, and on feminist locality practice and the environment. I turn then to a brief review of men's care for the environment, before looking at ecofeminism's contribution to our understanding of women and nature/environment.

In the second part of this chapter, I present the work of women from whose theories, practices and commitments I take interpretive bearings: European philosopher Luce Irigaray who has theorised the feminist concept of 'difference' as 'irreducible alterity'; elders Mary Graham and Lilla Watson and Australian Indigenous concepts of 'country' and 'women's business'; and Australian environmental philosopher Val Plumwood's critical ecological feminism. I conclude the chapter with an account of the small body of local literature in the research location on Tamborine Mountain, and with brief comments on the overall relevance of the literature in this research.

Please note that I have held over a literature review of research epistemologies and methodologies until Chapter 3.

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<sup>10</sup> Taoist master of the Northern School of Complete Reality Daoism, said to have received the 'gold pill' of enlightenment. In Thomas Cleary (Trans. and Ed.) (1991). *Vitality, Energy, Spirit: a Taoist sourcebook*. Boston: Shambala Classics, p. 131.

## Significance of the literature

Literature has had a prominent role in this research – in fact, it is fair to say that the research journey began in the literature. At a time when I was living in a natural environment – controlled and, in my view, degraded and exploited by men – literature on women and the environment, that is, broadly ecofeminist literature, helped me make sense of what I was experiencing: it deepened my understanding of areas of wider ecofeminist concern, such as loss of biodiversity, climate change, and loss of Indigenous ecological wisdom, and alerted me to areas of potential action, such as environmental locality work. Later, with the move to Tamborine Mountain, hands-on work in the local environment led to further reading and, ultimately, to academic study and doctoral research. In this way, literature has been origin and context of this research, and research data in its own right.<sup>11</sup>

The reasons for the central importance of the literature lie, I think, in two sets of circumstances. Firstly, ecofeminist literature, as the literature specifically concerned with women and their environmental concerns, has been under suspicion since its heyday in the late twentieth century, due mainly to fears of its alleged essentialism (see below). Accordingly, it is not often a topic of public conversation, even among feminists, and may seem of only specialist or historical interest. It is also hybrid, joining areas of traditionally marginal mainstream concern – ‘women’ and ‘environment’ – so perhaps doubly invisible. Secondly, and as a consequence, it has been difficult to point to examples of ecofeminist practice, at least not in the same way we might point to examples of community practice or even feminist community practice. Notwithstanding the magnificent examples of women’s environmental work everywhere evident – Wangari Maathai (2003, 2006) and Vandana Shiva (1993, 2012) come immediately to mind – in a situation where examples of ecofeminist practice, boldly named as such, are thin on the ground, ecofeminists may seem to be stranded in, but also most accessible through, the literature.

The above situation has been compounded in recent times by another set of contradictory circumstances. On the one hand, there has been scant regard for locality as a possible site of expertise or innovation, evident in superficial so-called community consultations (see Plate 6). On the other, governments continue to off-load social and environmental

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<sup>11</sup> Because, as we shall see, ecofeminism has suffered an eclipse in the academy over the past few decades, some of the literature I discuss originates in the 1980s and 1990s and earlier.

concerns, especially the tricky ones, onto local communities: action on climate change is one example (Amanda Lynch, 2008, 2009; Chris Cuomo, 2011), environmental conservation another (Geoff Cockfield, 2012). I begin, therefore, with a survey of locality practice literature, especially literature on women’s practice, and women’s local environmental practice.

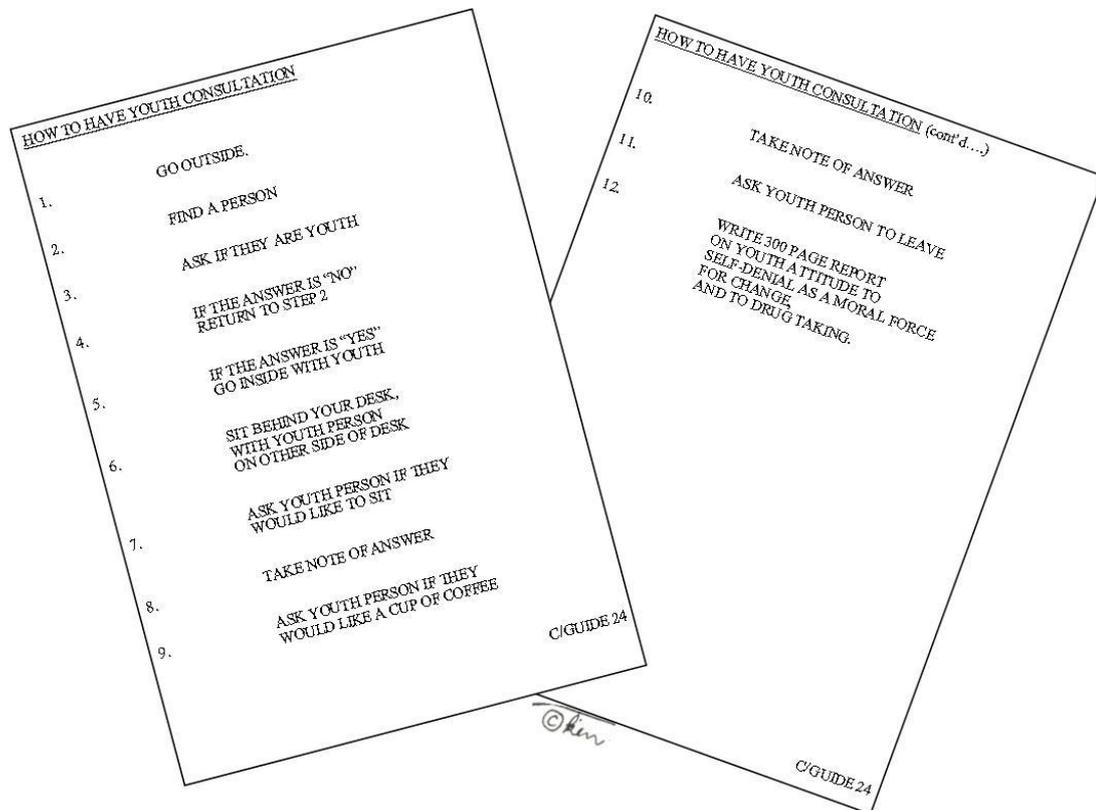


Plate 6: How to Have a Youth Consultation

### Women’s locality practice

In Marjorie Mayo’s 1977 collection, Elizabeth Wilson wrote that feminists have “... critiqued community workers for failing to take seriously how gendered power relations are played out in all models of community work. Their analyses have shown that women are usually left in supporting roles while men take the leading ones, even in cases where the majority of activists are women” (Wilson, 1977, p. 9). Some would argue that Wilson’s comments must stand (Donna Baines, Sara Charlesworth, Ian Cunningham and Janet Dassinger, 2012). What has happened in the intervening years, however, is that feminist community practitioners have been increasingly able to name and differentiate the salient characteristics of their feminist principles and practice (see, for example, Gil Dixon et al, 1982). Here, I will consider Australian, British and American texts on feminist

community practice. This is not to ignore Majority World women's practice but to situate the research in my research participants' culture and to stay within the necessary limits of this thesis.

### **Australia.**

In Australia, significant women writers on community practice include Ros Thorpe and Judy Petruchenia (1992), Jane Dixon (1993), Wendy Weeks (1994), Helen La Nauze and Shirley Rutherford (1999), Wendy Weeks, Lesley Hoatson and Jane Dixon (2003), Susan Kenny (2007), Yoland Wadsworth (1997, 2010), and Ann Ingamells (2010).

In 1985, Ros Thorpe and Jude Petruchenia published *Community Work or Social Change: An Australian Perspective* which, as they frankly note in the introduction to the revised edition in 1992, leaned heavily to the socialist Left and to New South Wales experience. While they acknowledged the work Mary Lane (Lane, 1990) achieved with local women in Sydney as "a major feminist achievement of local community development" (p. 14), they were otherwise scathing about the shortcomings of locality practice. In her chapter on "Community Work and Ideology", Ros Thorpe claimed that "the protagonists of the non-violent approach are implicitly, if not explicitly, antifeminist, with their emphasis on self-sufficiency and all that invariably implies about increased demands on women as caretakers" (p. 31). This blanket charge of 'anti-feminist' appeared to discount the efforts of the many women in the sector who not only challenge masculinist attitudes and practices, but also work in front-line community services for and with women.

In 1993 Jane Dixon addressed many of the same concerns about community practice as Thorpe and Petruchenia, although in more measured terms. She called on feminist practitioners to distinguish between a socio-political analysis and a personal-political analysis (p. 24), and to emphasise the former. However, by lauding "the contestual activism of prostitutes' collectives, local action committees, trade union committees, as well as the consensual processes of self-help groups, policy committees and government machinery" (p. 27), she appeared to conflate the local and the social (as did Thorpe and Petruchenia, 1989), and nowhere seemed to ground politics in place - the *sine qua non* of locality work.

Writing fourteen years after Dixon, Susan Kenny (2007) is fully aware of place, location and environmental issues. In addition to presenting feminism in its own right, she weaves

feminist comment throughout her text: for example, feminist critiques of the ideological use of the concept of community (p. 94); feminist views on working with the State (p. 132), and feminist views on working with bureaucracy (p. 208). While she credits feminism with the significant contribution of ‘the personal is political’ analysis, her account of the “feminist contribution to community development” (p. 94) is muted, and bedded down in cautions to workers to be aware of not reinforcing the current sexual division of labour or the “vertical gender segmentation” in the community sector workforce. Her six “possible directions and choices for community development over the next five to ten years” are gender-neutral: security or risk taking; strengthening global activity; strengthening activism; leading cross-cultural competence; demonstrating the power of deliberation and negotiation in conflict situations; gathering and telling stories (pp. 385-6).

Wendy Weeks (1994, 2003) has been one of very few Australian writers to spell out features of feminist community practice, as well as name the problems in established services that led feminists to develop new models (1994, p. 12). In 1994, having surveyed 78 feminist women’s services, Weeks identified common themes in the philosophy of these services (p. 305) and the organisational features that feminist services have pioneered (pp. 307-8). It seems, however, that many of the themes Weeks identified – for example, empowering practice approaches, avoiding victim blaming, aiming at excellence – would be common to most developmental practice. Substitute the names of other disempowered or marginalised groups – asylum seekers, homeless people, people with disabilities – and the themes read as values that might (even *should*) inform all developmental practice. The same could be said of the quite similar practice principles that Roselyn Melville proposed in the same volume (1994, p. 133).

It is the pioneering features Weeks identified in women’s service organisations (1994) that begin to take on a more distinctively feminist cast: addressing causes as well as symptoms (social change as well as service); collective and participatory decision-making (eg salary sharing, shared or rotated work tasks, shared leadership); fit with workers’ family responsibilities; effective organisational work (reflection, negotiation, support); establishing a community of support; attending to working conditions; safe space for women and workers; inter-organisational relationships. Of these, the standout (feminist) differences from generally developmental work are, for me, shared leadership and participatory decision-making: neither of these is easy to implement in government-funded services, nor

is it always easy to negotiate decision-making and leadership in mixed gender groups, as some research participants (see Chapter 6) remarked.

Similarly, Helen La Nauze and Shirley Rutherford (1999) noted in their work with women in Albury, New South Wales, that “worker’s practice and approaches were defined, named and *constrained by the nature of the services* they provided” (my emphasis - that is, government funded) and, while it was essential to sustain a feminist analysis, “whether or how to identify publicly with feminism *per se* are perhaps strategic questions to which there is no single response” (p. 134). Certainly, community consultants are often called on to unpick organisational knots caused by feminist workers’ attempts to marry horizontal (feminist) processes to vertical bureaucratic structures (primarily to do with funding accountability). As early as 1986, Hilary Barker warned of the dangers of ‘false equality’ and the tyranny of structurelessness, both of which can breed informal power and be more difficult to address than the formal power in hierarchical structures and processes. Helen La Nauze (1999, quoted in Weeks, 2003, p. 4) lists eight community practice principles that she considers distinctively feminist: but, again on the substitute test above, these principles seem to be generally developmental rather than specifically feminist – with the exceptions of “linking the personal and the political” and “recognizing sisterhood in the context of diversity” (p. 14).

Where Weeks broke new ground was in her appreciation of what many women could learn from Indigenous women, in essence “that there is separate women’s business as well as men’s business and common community business” (1994, p. 1). Consistent with this stance, Weeks argued strongly for autonomous women-only services. Whilst aware of the dangers of disengagement and isolation, Weeks stood against the mainstreaming of women’s services into generalist agencies (p. 3) because, where feminist community practitioners have been able to hold on to their autonomy, they have begun to develop their own practice methodologies, compatible with their principles. One of the pioneering experiments of this kind, as described by Sasha Roseneil (1995), was at the women’s peace camp at Greenham Common and, as the Greenham women and others have found, it isn’t always easy.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See also Alison Bartlett’s (2013) account of the 1983 Pine Gap peace camp, and Barbara Harford and Sarah Hopkins, 1984.

## **England.**

Many English feminists come from a socialist Left tradition - Sheila Rowbotham (1989), for example - and tend to presuppose inherently conflictual social relations. As Thorpe and Petruchenia (above), they are often suspicious of 'community', viewing it as an apolitical and romanticised concept, devoid of class consciousness, through which the State strives to pacify, control and impose agendas on powerless ('backward') people – in effect, a patronising, colonising form of social engineering (Lena Dominelli, 2006, p. 9, p. 14). The British tradition of community work is certainly different from the Queensland nonviolent community development tradition which, while preferring to work 'bottom up', recognises both the advantages and the limitations of working at different levels - local, social and global. When Marxist feminist writers such as Lena Dominelli (2006), Iris Marion Young (1990) and Ros Thorpe and Judy Petruchenia (1992) locate themselves at the social level, at the same time advocating community action, they confuse, in my view, what *scale* of action is possible at what level.

However, while Lena Dominelli may be seen to blur the social and the community arenas as well as the politics of feminism and the politics of socialism, her analysis of how feminists have sharpened and broadened traditional community practice is very useful. She claims - rightly, in my view - that feminists have tackled issues that community workers have otherwise shunned, and cites the following as the new features feminists have introduced to community practice: new methods of organising (for example, consciousness raising and emotional healing); redefinition of private troubles as public issues (for example, domestic violence); demand for equal power relations between men and women; advocating win-win solutions; highlighting women's contribution to community well-being; connecting women's responsibilities in the home with their paid work; creating services by and for women; developing forms of community work that enhance the welfare of all (men, women and children); and highlighting the impacts of pollution, out of control development and environmental degradation on quality of life (Dominelli, 2006, p. 18).

Similarly, British community development writer, Margaret Ledwith (2011), drawing on Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci, has proposed a Freirian-feminist-anti-racist pedagogy as the basis of a radical community development agenda in women's work, both in their localities and in environmental initiatives. One of her special contributions, in my view, has been her emphasis on social/political analysis and critique, for example, the necessary

critique of corporate capitalism as the cause of many problems community workers (and environmentalists) are funded to address.

### **America.**

The American community practice tradition, as evidenced for example in the Nancy Naples (1998) collection of case studies, is very much about women's place-based organising, aimed at shifting the policies of vertical structures, and therefore often about urban planning (see also Jacqueline Leavitt, 2003). Aware of race, class and ethnicity, the writers in Naples' case studies illustrate how women use home-based skills to move local issues, such as threats to their local neighbourhoods, on to the public agenda. Naples writes that the accounts in the collection are "activist in spirit, participatory in design, and dialogic in analysis" (pp. 14-15), with diverse vantage points reflecting the multiplicity of women's community actions and their varying definitions and experiences of community (p. 20). As elsewhere, however, the case studies also reveal how women in horizontal networks find it difficult to influence or change decisions made in vertical structures (for example, funding or infrastructure decisions), for all the passion and momentum they are able to generate at local level (Ledwith, 2011, p. 168). In the final chapter, Naples comments that, while community organisations had been forced back into survival mode through funding cuts and a right wing backlash, they were holding on and might yet turn out to be building blocks from which to generate broad-based movements (such as feminism) for social change (pp. 345-6), a comment that seems to imply that it is possible to 'aggregate up' a number of community actions into a social movement (a dubious project, in my view), and a comment at odds with her earlier observation that some women may fear identifying as feminist lest it undermine their community credibility (p. 334), a concern that La Nauze and Rutherford (1999) also raised in their work in New South Wales.

One of the most vivid accounts of women's community practice in the Naples collection is that of Roberta Feldman, Susan Stall and Patricia Wright, "The Community Needs to Be Built by Us" (1998). They suggest that the community that women create through their everyday activities becomes "the third element" that mediates between the public and private spheres, and becomes the base for a new politics (pp. 260-1) – a space for 'women's business', perhaps. Women, they say, build their political networks outwards, by means of what they term 'neighbouring' (p. 263), out from their homes into the community and

sometimes wider. (This may also be the way women get to know the natural environment – see Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 in this thesis). “Grassroots activism,” they write, “is implicitly place-bound; that is, the networks of relationships and the activism that they support more often than not are located in and may involve conflict over places” (p. 261). The example they provide is the story of women in public housing in south Chicago who took on the White Sox baseball club who wanted to build a huge new stadium in their neighbourhood – with the result, however, that the women, with the skills they learned during their campaign (which they lost), took over the management of their own housing and any future decisions associated with it (pp. 265-271). Feldman, Stall and Wright commented that, with unemployment and funding cuts to services, people were increasingly being turned back into their own localities, and that there might well be more such campaigns: Mary Pardo in the same volume observes that, “[f]or many working-class women, the community is both a living space and a worksite” (p. 275). While such community campaigns may not solve the issues which stem from social and global dynamics, such as climate change and structural unemployment, they do make a difference to people’s lives - as Vivien Lowndes (2000, p. 537) describes it, they give space for the ‘small democracies’ where friendship, caring, neighbourliness, and practical support make for dense and resilient women’s networks.

Not everyone - not even all feminists - would agree.

### **Feminist locality practice**

Early on, Elizabeth Wilson set the oppositional tone with her definition of community as “a portmanteau word for a reactionary conservative ideology which oppresses women by silently confining them to the private sphere without so much as mentioning them” (quoted in Lena Dominelli, 2006, p. 62). As already noted, there are numbers of feminists, particularly socialist feminists, who take a dim view of community. The often-quoted Iris Marion Young is one of the most strident. She writes (1990) that, while community is an “understandable dream”, it is a dream which, by suppressing differences, is unsuitable for “mass urban society” (p. 301). She advocates a feminist politics of difference and an “openness to unassimilated otherness” which she finds in the “unoppressive city” - living amongst strangers with the advantages of anonymity, social and aesthetic inexhaustibility, accessible public space for all, difference and freedom. Jacqueline Leavitt (2003), too, is suspicious of community, seeing it as oppressively uniform, intolerant of difference and

others (particularly ‘outsiders’), a fertile ground for conservative thinking (p. 212). She believes that feminism has been muted, diffused, marginalised and institutionalised in community development (p. 217), an observation with which many of us would readily agree. Nevertheless, we have to wonder in *which* communities these feminists have had such negative experiences and *what* their experiences were. Unfortunately, they don’t say.

What, then, are distinguishing features of feminist community practice? Taken together, the feminist community practitioners whose texts I have considered answer the question, *What is feminist community practice?* in the following terms:

pro-woman; the personal is political; ends and means are congruent; inclusive; respectful; non-hierarchical structures and processes; shared (or no) leadership; shared tasks and roles; reflexive; attentive to individual and personal well-being; empowering; safe space for women (both workers and clients), sometimes women-only; informed with a feminist analysis; consensus and/or participatory decision-making; preference for small group processes; care for the environment; avoidance of victim-blaming and ‘martyrdom’; valuing the non-rational (intuition, emotion, spirituality); not perpetuating women’s subordination to men within community practice; cooperative; expertise demystified; skilled in negotiation and networking; relationships are of value in themselves; part time and/or voluntary commitment, without blame or guilt; decentralized (as proposed by, amongst others, Ann Gallagher, 1977; Cynthia Hamilton 1989; Helen Brown, 1992; Wendy Weeks, 2003; Jane Dixon, 2006; Lena Dominelli, 2006).

Lesbian activist values, according to Sherna Berner Gluck, Maylei Blackwell, Sharon Cotrell and Karen S. Harper (1998, p. 65) are similar: egalitarianism, collectivism, ethic of care, respect for knowledge gained from experience, pacifism, cooperation, and sometimes separatist – “women do women’s liberation” (see also Susan Hawthorne, 1991).

Many of these features are not the sole preserve of feminism and, as I point out below, are often (but not always) features of developmental practice. As we shall see (in Chapters 5, 6, and 7), the women who participated in this research cited many of the above descriptors as aspects of their work in the environment, without once mentioning feminism.

With that in mind, we might well ask, *How then does men's – or 'gender-neutral' – practice differ from feminist practice and, if different, why have women allowed that to become normative?* According to Lena Dominelli (2006), men's style of community practice is instrumentalist: men require people to take sides, obey instructions and undertake specific acts; they practise in a top-down hierarchical mode. She believes that women have failed to counter men's dominance and gain the prominence their women's practice deserves for the following reasons: women are not seen as knowledgeable; domestic work is not seen as contributing to community well-being; waged work still has gender gaps; men are seen as (natural) leaders; and the women's movement has become fractured and has struggled to put and keep feminist issues on the public agenda.

Almost thirty years earlier, Ann Gallagher (1977) said much the same, observing that women may: lack confidence in mixed groups; have partners who are threatened by their public involvement; have difficulty attending night meetings; tend to underrate themselves and overrate men's opinions and seek their approval; find other women are jealous and obstructionist; find community conflicts difficult to handle. Gill Dixon, Chris Johnson, Sue Leigh and Nicky Turnbull (1982) have commented that credibility in community work is often associated with being seen, being 'out there', and that few women have housekeepers (wives) who will cook, clean and look after the children, whereas men who work very long hours often do. As well, men don't easily cede the leadership which they see (and encourage women to see) as their normal and natural right, and some feminists are wary of self-identifying publicly because of how it might affect their work credibility (Helen La Nauze and Shirley Rutherford, 1999; Ann Summers, 2013).

That still leaves the question of feminism and developmental practice, especially the nonviolence tradition which prides itself on its sensitivity to racism and sexism. *Does feminist community practice differ from developmental community practice and, if so, how?* On the evidence of the developmental practitioners noted above - for example, Wendy Weeks, Lena Dominelli, Margaret Ledwith and Nancy Naples - the answer is, yes, it does differ. The significant differences include: the feminist stance against martyrdom and self/other-sacrifice; the collapsing of the distinction between the public and the private; the preference for distributed (or no) leadership; the flexibility to embrace a part-time and voluntary commitment; the importance of women-only times and spaces; the significance for many women of building out first from home and community into social and political

arenas; and perhaps feminist irreverence ('tactical frivolity', Pam Alldred, 2002). On the flip side, what developmental practice can offer to feminist practice, at local level, is a firm grounding in place, an understanding of and respect for the different scale of actions possible at local, social and global levels, and an insistence on working with multiple analyses, which often seem to be elided in Third Wave feminism (C. Orr, 1997; Pam Alldred and Sarah Dennison, 2000; Barbara Epstein, 2001; Denise Thompson, 2001).

Anecdotally<sup>13</sup>, some women who work in locality say it is the masculinist assumptions, conscious or unconscious, that they find galling: men's leadership is natural ... feminism is an add-on extra ... gender-neutral means business-as-usual means men's ways of doing things ... women are willing to be conscripted to support men's leadership and causes ... (see further examples in the research conversations in Chapters 5 and 6). Such assumptions are not easy to shift. In the environment arena, moreover, masculinist assumptions about environmental locality practice have been shored up by men's traditional associations with scientific expertise and outdoor pursuits (Joni Seager, 1994; Simone Fullagar and Susan Hailstone, 1996).

In terms of locality practice, it is fair to say that feminist practice and developmental practice have much in common. They are both liberating in intent. They spring from a common human impulse toward freedom and diversity (or difference), based on a belief that things could be otherwise ... and joyously so. They have similar values and principles, and they keep faith in times of abeyance or repression (Weeks, 2003, p. 1). Both have difficulty translating the momentum they build in the horizontal into a force that can displace or disrupt power in vertical structures, and both have to resist being co-opted into the mainstream, being gutted or trivialised by the media, and/or being dismissed as irrelevant.

I nevertheless doubt whether it is possible or desirable to graft a social movement (feminism) on to a set of practice methodologies (locality practice), as Naples (1999) and others have suggested. Jalna Hanmar (1977, p. 92) wrote that, "[t]echnically, one can't join a social movement", at least not in the same way one would join a community organisation: participating in a social movement is about psychological identification, rather than formal

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<sup>13</sup> By 'anecdotally', I refer to passing comments made in personal conversations, not public statements.

membership. It may therefore be more practical to work towards alliances of mutual respect and understanding (Ledwith, 2011) – and, in particular, to emphasise the need for multiple analyses (gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, dis/ability etc). Some environmentalists and Third Wave feminists seem to make heavy weather of analyses other than their own; locality practitioners, because they work with all sorts, have to build them purposively into their practice frameworks. Social movements, which gather force from a single issue focus, can find this difficult but, unless they can hold multiple analyses, they find themselves in conflict (or manoeuvred into conflict) with people who could be comrades but who feel similarly anxious to promote the primacy of their cause and win maximum recognition and resources. The ongoing argy-bargy on Cape York between Indigenous peoples, conservationists, graziers, and Federal and State governments over the Wild Rivers legislation is a case in point (The Conversation, 2012).

To return to Wendy Weeks' suggestion (1994) that we learn from and adapt Indigenous 'women's business' as a model for feminist activities: this model is certainly attractive, with possible connections to radical feminism and to feminist work on 'difference' (for example, that of Luce Irigaray, see below, and especially as developed by Penelope Deutscher, 2002), and would give women time and space and opportunity to determine their own ways of being in the world. However, Indigenous 'women's business' comes with some provisos that may not gladden the feminist heart. For instance, Lilla Watson, from whose insights Wendy Weeks drew inspiration, has said that we need to *avoid* struggling for equality: "To make that the goal is to fall into the trap of using male terms of reference. If strengthening women's terms of reference is the goal, the question of equality does not arise. Then men would have to redefine their own terms of reference in relation to women" (Lilla Watson, 1994, pp. 95-6). She has also stated that women need to recognise that their "emotional well-being does not come from men" (ibid). These statements would be difficult, differently for different women, to accept. Further, Indigenous women's authority has come from their land, that specific land over which they have final say, and it is not clear how far that is still the case nor, without that land base, how powerful 'women's business' now is or is seen to be (see below) – nor whether that could work the same way for non-Indigenous women. Certainly, in many cultures, a woman's right to own land and property, her right to be able to care for and make her own decisions about that land and thus to be economically independent, is a crucial element in her ability to be free of men's control –

and, often enough as well, from exploitation and violence (Gil Rose, 1993; Judy Adoko and Simon Levine, 2009).

### **Feminist locality practice and the environment**

Today, when the Earth is under increasing threat from climate change, exploitation and degradation, men and women are joining together in the environment movement and in many kinds of local groups to preserve and care for the natural environment. In these situations, what is the nature of feminist locality practice, and what are its distinguishing characteristics? There appears to be limited literature that addresses the characteristics of women's environmental practice, *as practice* – certainly very little in the nature of Lena Dominelli's (1995, 2006) and Wendy Weeks' (1994, 2003) detailed examinations of women's locality practice. For a number of reasons, this should not come as a surprise.

First, environmental practice has traditionally been men's domain, and community practice women's. It is only in the last fifteen to twenty years that writers have started to identify the crucial links between women, the environment and sustainable development (Barbara P. Thomas-Slayter, and Dianne E. Rocheleau, 1995; Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, and Esther Wangari, 1996; Diane Warburton, 1998) and, courtesy of ecofeminists, the close connections between women and the environment (Val Plumwood, 1993; Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, 1993; Carolyn Merchant, 1995; Karen Warren, 2000; Maria Mies and Joel Kovel, 2004; Vandana Shiva, 1990, 1998, 2012). Secondly, it is in comparatively recent times that women even in social/community work - traditionally, a woman's domain - have written about how they practise and how that differs from the ways men practise (as in Weeks, 1994, and Dominelli, 1995, 2006). Social workers' self-awareness about practice may well stem from the social work tradition of supervision which, in its professional rather than managerial sense, environmentalists do not share. Thirdly, as in many other spheres, environmental practice is generally taken to be gender neutral – or, put another way, men's practice is seen as normative. Fourthly, as with the traditional male socialist Left, the urgency of The Cause (environmental, in this instance) tends to sweep aside gender considerations as unnecessary distractions. Fifthly, if environmentalists tend not to be self-aware of, or interested in, their practice styles and behaviours, neither have they always shown interest in 'community': as Crescy Cannan (2000, p. 372) pointed out, 'the real life' community "is one of the least analyzed [concepts] in green political discourse".

Conversely, social work and locality practitioners have not always included the environment in their understanding of 'place' (Michael Zapf, 2009).

Margaret Ledwith (2011), for example, writes:

Community development has taken more interest in the environment over recent years, particularly with the development of Local Agenda 21 programs.<sup>14</sup> The challenge for community development praxis is that our analysis of social justice should not compromise the life chances of future generations or the lives of those in the developing world. Social justice and environmental justice come together in places where we offer alternatives to the values of capitalism (p. 171).

Margaret Ledwith cites Fair Trade, LETS, community gardens, Transition Towns, and credit unions as alternatives that promote co-operation rather than competition (pp. 167 - 171). She believes that "capitalism has been conflated with democracy" (p. 182), and that community development teachers and practitioners need to challenge that misconception. Ledwith also comments on ecofeminism's analysis of the critical connections between patriarchy and environmental destruction, "reflecting women's concerns for preserving life on earth over time and space" (p. 168).

In general terms, there is, of course, a substantial literature on women and the environment, and some on men and the environment (see below). In Australia, feminists and ecofeminists such as Freya Mathews (1991, 2003), Val Plumwood (1993, 2008), Ariel Salleh (1997, 2009), Margaret Somerville (1999, 2004), Susan Hawthorne (2002, 2009), and Maggie MacKellar (2004) have written about women's relationships with nature and the environment, and others have written about Indigenous women's embeddedness in 'country' – for example, Diane Bell (1983), Deborah Bird Rose (1992, 2002), Mary Graham (1999), Zohl de Ishtar (2005, 2005a), Ambelin and Blaze Kwaymullina (2010), and Australian men who have written about men's relationships with the environment (see below) include, for example, Mark Tredennick (2003), Tim Winton (2003, 2008), John

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<sup>14</sup> Local Agenda 21 is a sustainability plan, an outcome of the UNCD conference in Brazil in 1992, designed to encourage environmental initiatives at all levels, including within local governments (*Earth Summit: Agenda 21*, United Nations, 1992). Writers like Susan Buckingham (2000, 2004) would attribute Local Agenda 21 to the persistent lobbying efforts of women.

Cameron (2003), and Tim Flannery (2004). There is, too, a wide-ranging and ever growing literature on environmental concerns, including climate change, written both by men and by women (for example, Judy Christie, 2004; Tim Flannery, 2005; Nicola Markus, 2009) where gender hardly rates a mention. An exception is Drew Hutton's and Libby Connor's (1999) history of the Green movement in Australia which does discuss women's contributions to environmental action (see also Margaret Skutch, 2002; Ana Isla, 2009; Sherilynn Macgregor, 2013).

More than 20 years ago in Australia, the Fourth National Women's Consultative Council undertook a consultation on women's concerns and priorities for the environment. The report, *A Question of Balance: Australian Women's Priorities for Environmental Action* (1991), identified women's priorities as: management of wastes, loss of biological resources, and the effects of militarism, poverty and consumerism (p. 6). Despite their ongoing efforts in paid and unpaid work, the almost 3000 women surveyed said that they felt "excluded from environmental decision-making [and] at risk of having their time and skills exploited by current environmental programs" (p. v). These findings echo those reported in studies of Australian farm women's experiences in Landcare (Margaret Alston, 1994, 1995; Ruth Beilin, 1995, 1998; Sarah Ewing, 1995; Allan Curtis, Penny Davidson, and Terry de Lacy, 1997; Ciel Claridge, 1998). In 1991, one-third of Australian farmers were women.<sup>15</sup> There is little reason to believe that the findings of the 1990s would read much differently if similar surveys were conducted today.

In Australia, the literature reporting farm women's experiences points up distinctive features of Australian women's environmental practice, if specifically the views and experiences of women on the land. Ruth Beilin (1995) found that the women she surveyed in Landcare reported three kinds of 'invisibility' – exclusion, pseudo-inclusion and alienation – all the while their presence was required to legitimise Landcare as a 'community group'. As 'helpers', she found, they were perpetuating traditional female roles, as were the men by claiming leadership and the authority to make decisions. Ciel Claridge and Shankariah Shamala (1995) reported, on the contrary, that Landcare was a vehicle for women's leadership – a minority view, it seems, in the literature. Ciel Claridge herself (1998), in her research in the South Burnett region of Queensland, found that farm

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<sup>15</sup>Trish Glazebrook (2011) writes that 70% of the world's farmers are women who produce between 60% and 80% of the world's food.

women not only lacked the skills to participate in public forums but also lacked the opportunities to learn them. The women she interviewed said that they assumed that male ways of doing things were unlikely to change any time soon, so women needed to learn skills in leadership, decision making, assertion, group participation, negotiation and communication (p. 195). The women believed their own (women's) skills were: 'a holistic approach', seeing issues clearly, taking a long-term perspective, an ability to set goals, and a capacity to build relationships, particularly as 'enablers'. Claridge suggests that farm women's skills also lie in cooperative and collaborative leadership, intuitive problem solving, empathy and rationality – above all, as many women in Claridge's study said, women and their skills are the glue that holds a group together.

A popular perception is that rural/farm women are opposed to feminism. Some studies (for example, Margaret-Ann Franklin, Leonie M. Short and Elizabeth K. Teather, 1994; Margaret Alston, 1995) have supported that view. They give three possible reasons: the rural/farm women they interviewed misunderstood feminism; they lined up with their men on the rural side of the rural/urban divide; and, lacking public power, they feared losing their private power (secondary gains). Also, the rural women said they were attached to the places where they had brought up their families, and they didn't want to jeopardise their family well-being by being marked out as feminists (Claridge, 1998, p. 185). Further, as Margaret Alston (1994, p. 26) remarks, "Hostility towards men is unacceptable in a system that depends on a high degree of cooperation" – even if that cooperation may be one-sided. In recent times, women have increasingly substituted for hired labour, and their work has become a lot more than 'helping out': as early as 1994, Brian Roberts, writing about rural conservation work, proposed that men needed to share the home-based workload so that farm women didn't end up working a double day.

In Sarah Ewing's 1995 study of women in Landcare, there was an interesting comment from one farm woman who suggested that women's presence in Landcare, tentative though it often is, may well be temporary. In the past, she said, women have become involved in Landcare because it has been about planting trees, but if it were to become more about profitable farming and pasture improvement, women's participation would be seen as irrelevant. (Her remarks were prescient: the Newman government in Queensland has recently – November, 2013 – reallocated millions of dollars earmarked for Landcare to their program for farm drought relief, as reported on the 7.30 Report, Wednesday

November 6, 2013, ABC TV). Tree planting, she said, is commonly seen as women's work. Ruth Beilin (1998) has suggested that, for some women, tree planting can mean they leave a mark on the landscape, even 'author' or construct the landscape. Sarah Ewing, as Claridge and Alston, saw Landcare as reinforcing traditional gender roles and inequalities. Participants in this research (Chapters 5 and 6) had mixed views.<sup>16</sup>

Feminist geographers, such as Janice Monk (1984, 1992), Gil Rose (1993), Joni Seager (1993), Libby Robin (1995, 2005, 2007) Mona Domosh and Joni Seager (2001), Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia and Bonj Szczgiel (2005), have a particular interest in women and place. Some (for example, Dowler et al, 2005) have proposed that women learn to see, dwell in and cultivate their environment (in their terms, the landscape) in markedly different ways from men. Janice Monk (1992) writes that, while landscape has been constructed primarily by men and reflects gendered power relations, "[w]omen have found ways to manipulate restrictive landscapes for their own purposes" (p. 136). But, since men often claim expert knowledge about the environment, especially their own land, this hasn't always been easy. Joni Seager (1993) for one, has been a strong critic of men's colonisation of science, including environmental science, where what is accepted as 'knowledge' is male-constructed, 'objective' and 'rational', and emotions, politics and values are 'pollutants': in her famous phrase, emotions are where "reasonable man meets hysterical housewife" (1994, p. 111).

There is a substantial literature on women's role in sustainable development, written both by Indigenous women themselves (for example, Vandana Shiva, 1996, 2009, 2012; Sinith Sittirak, 1998; Ela Bhatt; 2009) and by Western writers (for example, Rosa Braidotti, Ewa Charkiewicz, Sabine Hausler and Saskia Wieringa 1994, 2009; Charlotte Bretherton 1996, 1998; Diane Warburton, 1998; Barbara Thomas-Slayter and Dianne E. Rocheleau, 1995; Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, and Esther Wangari, 1996; Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999). This literature highlights women's central role in agriculture as well as the dire consequences for women of biopiracy, indiscriminate and illegal logging, monoculture farming, privatisation of the commons and, most recently, climate change (Ledwith, 2011). As well, Patricia Howard (2003) has emphasised women's essential role in biodiversity conservation, and the need to value women's local knowledge.

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<sup>16</sup> A Landcare woman cautioned me, when we were setting up a local environmental group, "Remember - if it's successful, Sandra, the boys will take it over!"

In this, as noted above, land ownership is often crucial, giving women the authority to make decisions about what happens on the land they use and care for (Judy Adoko and Simon Levine, 2009). There are also, in Australia and elsewhere, accounts of women's grassroots activism in rural and urban communities threatened by toxic waste, pollution, and dirty industries (for example, Nancy Naples, 1998; Lisa M. Benton and John Rennie Short, 1999; Sharyn Munro, 2013; Drew Hutton, 2013). Not all of this literature is feminist, nor would all the writers describe themselves as such.

### **Men's care for the environment**

Men who write about men and the environment don't, of course, focus on women's environmental practice, but some do go some way towards describing men's practice – at least, men's relation to nature. Mark Allister (2004) has assembled a collection of North American essays through which he sets out to “complicate” nature and masculinity. The contributors, some of whom are women, do not believe that gender is any more an exclusive source of identity than “class, sexual orientation, race, religion, family upbringing, age, mental abilities, one's birth order, physical abilities, resistance to addictive behaviors”(p. 8). In my view, there is more than a hint in this collection of over-reaching for evidence and of exasperation with the claims of ecofeminism - as well as an indication that the writers are comparing women and men within male terms of reference.

Another writer, Andrew Ross (1992) opens his article with the question, “Does anyone really want to listen to stories about the victimisation of men?” - an attention-grabbing but strangely misleading question, given the content of the article that follows. Ross is cutting about the men's therapy industry, built on what he sees as the manufactured crisis of ‘eco-man’. He notes: “It has to be assumed that men who actually do write about [the crisis of] heterosexual masculinity are, in some sense, involved in a process of reasserting their own authority ... All ruling groups use the rhetoric of crisis to reconsolidate their power” (p. 217). Robert Connell (1990) is more sympathetic to men's plight, charting the life histories of six men who, as young men, embraced feminism during their time as wilderness activists, and some of whom ended up in later life feeling ‘suspended’, stranded between their male peers and feminist colleagues. This is understandable if we accept Simone Fullagar's and Susan Hailstone's (1996) view that outdoor education and wilderness experiences are premised on masculine self-mastery and suppression of the feminine, epitomised in the Outward Bound motto of “Maximum Hardship: To Serve, To Strive, and Not To Yield” (p. 23). Certainly, much of the traditional masculine writing about the

environment has emphasised the 'doing' – hiking, camping, climbing, kayaking – and many male environmentalists might well struggle with Fullagar's and Hailstone's injunction to respond with 'wonder' rather than with grit and sweat. Little wonder the men in Connell's study felt conflicted: no doubt many women did too.

Marti Kheel (quoted in Mary Mellor, 1992) believes that "women and men are looking for different things in the wilderness experience" – for men, it's a search for individual experience, for women, "relational expandedness" (p. 89). As Mary Mellor goes on to comment, "There is a danger that the idea of wilderness embodies the same masculinist values of excitement, struggle and adventure that have destroyed the natural environment. It is not nature-centered, it is human-centered", with "more than a whiff of the frontier in the battle for wilderness preservation" (ibid).

In the eyes of the faithful, the worthiness of the battle, *The Cause*, can seem to justify all kinds of excesses and omissions – and women's concerns are often the first to be brushed aside (Sheila Rowbotham, 1989). *The Cause*, as men may see it, is a social or a global phenomenon which men and women join, and men characteristically lead. But it is at the local level that many women may find their 'cause', particularly when it comes to environmental issues - "Locality is ... where environmental issues matter most to most people" (Dianne Warburton, 1998).

The literature on 'place' does not always highlight gender, but the language and the concepts often seem to reflect women's practice, as in Sue Clifford's and Angela King's work with *Common Ground*, the UK movement that has encouraged people to celebrate the localities where they live (Paul Kingsnorth, 2006).

The focus is on the small-scale, the parish, the neighbourhood, the locality, the arena in which people feel at home, which they feel they own through familiarity. It is non-exclusive, it does not elevate the rare, the spectacular, the wild, the beautiful or the endangered, but helps people raise their own questions about its meaning and particularity – about local distinctiveness (Sue Clifford, 1998, p. 232).

The Australian philosopher Freya Mathews (1991) has similarly advised us to stay with and commit to our particular place, however damaged, and begin the slow work of restoring it

to health. 'Place' is, as Deborah Bird Rose (2002, p. 311) describes it, a partner in dialogue - for Indigenous Australians the country where they 'sit down', land to which they give unswerving commitment and from which they receive life and sustenance. The Common Ground understanding of 'place' is, by contrast, very English – indigenous English – and of a piece with the English pioneering of organic gardening, allotment and community gardens and, most recently, Transition Towns. Clifford, again:

We have located our activities where nature and culture come together – in *place* - and we have spread our interest over everyday nature, ordinary histories, common place buildings, vernacular landscapes, popular stories, particular legends, great and subtle variegations in cultures. Places have meaning to people. This declaration of value and significance must be part of the definition of place, setting it apart from the abstract notions of 'site', or 'resources' or 'environment' (Clifford, 1998, p. 232).

Some studies and surveys have reported that men's and women's attitudes to the environment barely differ at all or are at least as much influenced by class as by gender (Paul Mohai, 1992; Mark Somma and Sue Tolleson-Rinehart, 1997; Terry Leahy, 2003). Terry Leahy (2003), for example, has argued, on the basis of his study in Newcastle NSW, that working class women's allegiances are class-based: they are loyal to their class, to their men, to capitalism and to consumerism. They are politically unengaged and emphasise their femininity. They regard environmentalists as 'ferals' who reject the work ethic, cleanliness and sexual propriety, and are anti-consumerist and anti-technology. Somma and Tolleson-Rinehart (1997), extrapolating from three major surveys of attitudes in America, Europe and their own World Values Study, found no significant difference between men and women in their concern for the environment, except that men who supported feminism were more likely also to support environmental causes. These authors, however, regard ecofeminism as an apolitical "sub-culture", and claim that men can be feminists, so their 'extrapolations' may well reflect these assumptions.

Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter and Esther Wangari (1996), to the contrary, insist that the differences are real and that women define 'environment' differently, organise differently and participate differently. They claim that the characteristics of a vibrant ecology, such as interdependence and interconnectedness, mirror the ways that women want to operate, and that terms such as 'self-sufficiency' and 'resource management' are male terms, concepts that are inherently atomistic and disconnected.

Another view is that of Third Wave feminists, Pam Alldred and Sarah Dennison (2000), who claim that feminism is ‘already an ingredient in the pot’, doesn’t help environmental and other activists ‘do’ it, and may alienate some co-activists. Ecofeminists would not agree.

### **The contribution of Ecofeminism**

I want here to acknowledge the major contribution of ecofeminism to understanding women’s relationship to the environment, but without framing this review of the research literature in ecofeminist terms. That is because I have found most interpretative relevance for this research in the work of four women who would not describe themselves as ecofeminists or, in the case of Val Plumwood, only with qualification. My survey of ecofeminist literature is therefore brief and selective.

Coined by Francoise d’Eaubonne in 1974, the term ‘ecofeminism’ was intended “to represent women’s potential for bringing about an ecological revolution to ensure human survival on the planet ... new gender relations between women and men and between humans and nature” (Carolyn Merchant, quoted in Irene Diamond, 1990, p. 100). Ecofeminism was taken up by North American writers like Rosemary Radford Ruether (1975), Charlene Spretnak and Fritjof Capra (1985), and Ynestra King (1990), and became a movement in its own right in the 1980s, particularly in the West (Merchant, 1995). While it is a handy tag to describe a distinctive body of feminist literature and practice, it is important not to read the term simply as an add-on extra to feminism. It is rather a significantly different way for women and men to think about, act with and care for land – at its broadest, a different way to live – as the literature demonstrates.

In her 2006 article, “Back to Nature? Resurrecting ecofeminism after poststructuralist and third-wave feminisms”, Charis Thompson has called for renewed feminist appreciation of ecofeminism, after decades of its being “sidelined within feminist theory because of critiques that it is marred by ethnocentrism and by an essentialist identification of women with nature” (Thompson, 2006, p. 505). Similarly, Kathy Rudy (2012) has written that feminist theory “often comes up short on the question of nature”, even though “attention to nature and animals should be at the forefront of any feminist agenda”: citing the Indian Chipko and the Kenyan Green Belt movements and the animal rights movements in the West, she claims that women have almost always been “the primary agents of ecological

change” (pp.1036-8). Chaone Mallory (2010) goes further. Her research, she says, has led her to conclude “that the underlying reasons for the rejection of ecofeminism have more to do with the challenge ecofeminism poses to androcentric and anthropocentric power than on [sic] its putative irrationality, biological determinism, and/or supposed indifference to politics” (p. 69). Her research focussed on the spirituality and rituals that the women-only ‘forest defenders’ in the Pacific north west USA found essential to sustain their actions - the site also of Judi Bari’s stand against logging of old growth forests and, ultimately, against vicious abuse from her Earth First! male colleagues (Judi Bari, 1994; Jeffrey Shantz, 2002 ).

The fault lines within ecofeminism tend to run between constructionist/socialist and social/cultural ecofeminists (sometimes critiqued as ‘essentialist’), and between feminists for whom the welfare of animals, as expressed in vegetarianism or veganism, is central to their practice (amongst others, Josephine Donovan, 1990, 1993, 2006; Marti Kheel, 1990, 1993, 1996, 2008; Greta Gaard, 1993, 2011; Carol J. Adams, 1993, 1994; Joni Seager, 2003; Emily Gaarder, 2011) and feminists for whom it is not (for example, Val Plumwood, 2008, 2012).

In 1994, Elizabeth Carlassare questioned whether the essentialism charge against ecofeminism would stick, and if it was not, rather, a tactical move by socialist feminists to distance themselves from what they regard as apolitical feminisms where issues of class, power and race are elided in the interests of a universalising feminism. In 2011, Greta Gaard, in an extended review of the history of ecofeminism, concluded that it merited recuperation, “both for the intellectual lineage it provides and for the feminist force it gives to contemporary theory” (pp. 42-43). If not ‘ecofeminism’, she asked, “What shall we name this approach, so that future generations of feminists can find its history, its conceptual tools and activist strategies, its critique of economic imperialism, cultural and ecological colonialism, gender and species oppression?” (p. 44). With its “diversity of positions ... voice and modes of expression”, Gaard suggested it might help if we consider ecofeminism, not as “a unified, coherent epistemology”, but rather as a discourse characterised by the “shared desire of its proponents to foster resistance to formations of domination for the sake of human liberation and planetary survival” (pp. 51-52). In today’s global environmental crises, where old solutions and old paradigms no longer seem to have traction, it may be that a recuperated ecofeminism – by whatever name - and other

marginalised knowledge systems could help halt the damage being inflicted on human and other-than-human habitats (Susan Hawthorne, 2002; Val Plumwood, 2012; Germaine Greer, 2013; Jackie French, 2013). Certainly, ecofeminist analyses can help women map a path through the entanglements, and sometimes complicity, with the patriarchal mindset that violates the environment and marginalises Others, in ways which many women writers have long claimed are inherently interconnected (Ursula Le Guin, 1986; Vandana Shiva, 1990; Mary Mellor, 1992; Val Plumwood, 1993; Ariel Salleh, 1997).

Within the broad spectrum of ecofeminist praxis, there are numbers of typologies or 'approaches' which differentiate various philosophies, theories, perspectives and practices. These approaches mirror to a large degree the significant strands in feminism itself, at its broadest and most inclusive, and reflect the same kind of slippages and overlapping categories as there are in the women's movement generally (Karen Warren, 2000; Carolyn Merchant, 2003). The different approaches register both the diversity within ecofeminism and the potential for the insights of one approach to enhance others.

Within Australia, Ariel Salleh (1996), for example, proposes bringing together the strengths of feminism, socialism and ecology, to which categories she adds liberal, spiritual, Rainbow (for example, women living in intentional communities), and professional and social movement women. Patsy Hallen, another Australian, sees ten types: liberal (reform), radical (direct action), cultural (earth-based spirituality), social (bio-regional), socialist (Marxist), ecological (science-based), deep ecological (critical of human-centredness), critical/transformational (critical of dualism and rationality), Aboriginal and native (living close to the earth and re-sacralising), and Third World (critical of maldevelopment) (quoted in Merchant, 2000 p. 207). Similarly, in North America, the historian of ecofeminism, Carolyn Merchant, has named six approaches: liberal, socialist, social, cultural, Third World, Indigenous (1995, pp. 209ff). Another North American, Karen Warren, identifies ten varieties of ecofeminism: historical and causal, conceptual, empirical, socio-economic, linguistic, symbolic and literary, spiritual and religious, epistemological, ethical, and political (2000, p. xvi).

Such differences in approach are not merely of theoretical interest. In all forms of activism, the beliefs that people hold shape their actions, as well as their judgements of other people's actions, and being clear about differences as well as commonalities and

common cause is a sound basis on which to build co-operative effort (Margaret Ledwith, 2011). When Carolyn Merchant suggested in 1995 that Australian ecofeminists could be the vanguard third wave of feminism, it was with the proviso that they combine their activism with that of “women engaged in the day-to-day struggles of resolving the contradictions between ecology and production and production and reproduction” (p. 208). Given the continuing backlash against feminism and the repressive nature of recent conservative politics in Australia (Anne Summers, 2013; Anna Goldsworthy, 2013) that seems unlikely, but it is nevertheless true that there are distinctive and differing voices in Australian women’s writing about their relationships with land, and about their care for the environment.

Taking a midway path through the differences, I will here very briefly review liberal, cultural, spiritual/religious and socialist ecofeminist writing in Australia, the strands of ecofeminism that are discernible in the research findings. It is important, in what follows, to be clear when ‘ecofeminist’ is a self-identification (as, with qualifications, for Carolyn Merchant, Ariel Salleh, Val Plumwood) and when it is a term I am using to broadly characterise women’s practice, particularly liberal ecofeminist practice. I have held over Indigenous women’s practice until the following section where I discuss Mary Graham’s and Lilla Watson’s teachings, and I discuss critical transformative ecofeminism in the section below on Val Plumwood.

### **Liberal ecofeminism.**

Let’s begin, then, with liberal ecofeminism, which is where most participants in this research might choose, if pressed, to locate themselves. They, as many others who care for the environment in Australia, would not call themselves feminists, let alone ecofeminists. There are many thousands of women who work with Landcare and Land for Wildlife, who support organisations like the Wilderness Society, Greenpeace and the Australian Conservation Foundation, who read and write in to magazines such as *Grass Roots*, *Earth Garden* and *Organic Gardener*, who believe that rehabilitation of the land and reform of exploitative attitudes to the land can be (even *must* be) achieved alongside men and within existing social and cultural norms. If they connect feminism and the environment at all, it tends to be in the form of muted complaints about men ‘taking over’ in local groups, and jokey asides about ‘the boys’. Not many would see the domination of women and nature as related. Most would be dismayed by the outer reaches of radical ecofeminist thought,

such as the ‘wild politics’ of Australian ecofeminist Susan Hawthorne: on the Mountain, the volunteers working for national parks would endorse her critiques of eco-tourism in national parks (see also Peter Ogilvie, 2012), but might struggle with her critique of national parks *per se*, especially when they are declared over Indigenous lands (2002, p. 196).

Patrice Newell, in her 2006 book, *Ten Thousand Acres: A Love Story*, serves as an exemplar of liberal ecofeminism. She is a strong and independent woman, with a passionate commitment to land: “[m]y commitment to this land is far stronger than when we first took ownership. Then my feeling for it was wondering, awed, tentative. Now, like my olive trees, it is deeply rooted, convinced” (2006, p. 5). Newell is a biodynamic farmer – “To be a good farmer, you must keep the land alive” - raising olives, fat lambs, and honey, and revegetating worn out pasture, and she is determined “to turn the tide. We farm with new ambitions, never forgetting that there is no degree of separation between us and nature. We are its children” (2006, p. 6). Ecofeminists would certainly endorse such statements. What is striking, however, is the absence of other people in Newell’s story, except those people who work for her. In common with the many women and men who write in to magazines to say they have finally found their “very own little piece of Paradise” or are “successfully rehabilitating this property”, her efforts are individualist and gender-neutral. Personal ownership and ‘the good life’ are assumed (Linda Cockburn, 2006), and there doesn’t seem to be much to distinguish liberal ecofeminism from men’s praxis: see, for comparison, the chapters by Stuart Hill, John Seed, and David Tacey in John Cameron’s edited collection (2003).

The liberal reformist attitude to land is by far the most common in White Australia. It is not, however, monolithic and there are versions and varieties shading towards other approaches. In recent years, gardening magazines in Australia have veered away from a sole focus on articles about, for example, the Open Garden Scheme and the Chelsea Flower Show, towards articles on organic gardening, water-wise gardening, community gardens and eco-villages. Some women gardening writers - Jackie French (1997, 2007, 2013), Annette MacFarlane (2003), Katie Holmes (2005) and Helen Cushing (2005) are prime examples - have taken up issues such as genetically modified seeds, gardening to mitigate climate change, soil degradation, and loss of biodiversity, although they are generally silent on issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Many research participants’ responses fell within this spectrum – see Chapters 5 and 6.

It is easy to criticise liberal reformist ecofeminism for not going far enough, and some of that criticism must stand, but popular garden writers, women amongst them, have helped mainstream environmental concerns for a wide Australian readership. They have eased the transition from northern hemisphere ‘exotics’ to more climate and soil appropriate Australian natives without, in the main, preaching or finger-pointing. It is, after all, just a few hundred years since our European forbears lived in indigenous relationship with their land and their communities, before the enclosures of the commons, famines, and the massive dislocations of the industrial revolution stripped all that away, and people migrated or were transported to newly colonised lands like Australia (W.G. Hoskins, 1955; Richard Mabey, 1990; John Cameron, 2003; Jackie French, 2013). What a local Queensland Parks and Wildlife ranger has lamented as the “bowderlised and bastardised” environment we have created here by clearing and settling the land on Tamborine Mountain is, arguably, the result of our own historical dislocations, reinforced by the rootlessness endemic in global capitalism (Mark Everard, 2011). While the so-called pioneers on the Mountain were colonisers and invaders of Aboriginal land, they needed to survive and, in the early years of colonial White settlement, clearing ‘the brush’ was often a legal condition of securing land and livelihood (see Plates 3 and 4, and Chapter 4).

### **Cultural ecofeminism.**

While Liberal ecofeminists and Indigenous women who care for land have some public profile in Australia, if sometimes a controversial one, cultural ecofeminists are less well known. Their thinking and practice cuts deeper than liberal ecofeminism to challenge the dualistic thinking that underpins the destructive dichotomies we in the West have inherited, and still enact, including nature/culture, reason/emotion, male/female, and mind/body. Moving outside the thrall of dualism, Australian ecofeminist writers like Freya Mathews (2004), Ariel Salleh (2009), Kate Rigby (2003, 2009) and Val Plumwood (2002) propose in their different ways a non-dualistic approach, one that is relational, co-operative, nonviolent, liberating, respectful and nurturing of both women and nature, and grounded in the kind of reciprocity that permits all life forms to flourish.

Carolyn Merchant (1995) writes that, because cultural ecofeminism is based in the analysis that both women and men are dominated by patriarchy and its products, cultural ecofeminists tend to veer away from technological and scientific views of nature towards a spirituality of care. The Australian environmental philosopher Freya Mathews who, while

not anti-technology as such, cautions against a worship of the modern at the cost of environmental destruction illustrates many of these features in her publications (1999, 1999a). Alongside her philosophical writing and teaching, however, Mathews is also explicit about her practice, particularly as a member of CERES, the Melbourne community garden and environment education centre from where she and two women companions traced the Merri Creek to its source, as recounted in *Journey to the Source of the Merri* (2003), one of only a handful of accounts of ecofeminist practice in Australia. Freya Mathews has moved closer to Daoism over time, seeing all life forms from the cosmos to the smallest particle as ecological selves with an inherent right to flourish. She espouses ‘countermodernity’, letting the world (including cities) grow old without interference and without ‘improvement’, and resisting or re-defining our attitudes to consumerism, commodification, productivity, progress, efficiency, industry, development, profit, automation, and property (1999, 1999a) – the idols worshipped in many contemporary Western lifestyles. Mathews’ feminism is muted, but her grounded sense of place and her commitment to cherish the places where we live – be they urban or rural, townhouse or mansion or slum, heritage building or parking lot, as well as the trees, plants, animals, streams and bush that share those places with us – has been very influential in my own thinking about place. Her sense of home and inclusive neighbourhood as beginning points for a new way of living is, in many ways, complementary to Indigenous women’s views. Her pragmatism recalls Mary Graham’s caution that, “[t]here never was and never will be a paradise” (1999, p. 109), and her inclusiveness Lilla Watson’s advice to “work with the people in your own neighbourhood – racists included”.<sup>17</sup>

### **Spiritual/Christian ecofeminism.**

Freya Mathews unsettles some feminists by her emphasis on a spirituality of place: spirituality and religion do not always sit easily with feminists who are aware of the history of the church as a bulwark of bullying patriarchy, and the consequent risks for women of being essentialised as madonnas or whores or, more recently, as ‘angels in the ecosystem’ (Karen Warren, 2000, p. 193-195). There is a difference, however, between what people mean by spiritual and what they mean by religious: for some feminists, spiritual ecofeminism - as, say, based on Indigenous spiritualities - appears to have escaped some of the worst excesses of institutional malestream control. There is also a difference between eco-feminism and eco-spirituality.

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<sup>17</sup> Response to participant in 2007 “Belonging to Country” workshop.

There is an abundance of Christian ecofeminist literature from North America, early and famously by Rosemary Radford Ruether (1975), as well as by writers like Anne Primavesi (1991), Sally McFague (1993), and Mary Grey (2003). In Australia, it seems there is a lot of Christian ecofeminist and eco-spirituality activity, facilitated in particular by women in religious orders, but not a lot written. One informant, a religious who runs an eco-spiritual retreat centre outside Brisbane, has suggested that there are not many Australian women writing specifically on eco-spirituality from within the Catholic/Christian tradition because the church is "still too anthropocentric".<sup>18</sup> Elaine Wainwright (2012, 2012a) is an exception, as are Anne Elvey (2012) and Veronica Littleton (2007). Australian religious often draw on Indigenous spirituality (Eugene Stockton, 1995), and sometimes it also goes the other way - for example, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr's reflection (1988) on the connections between the Aboriginal concept of "dadirri", or deep listening, and her Christian spirituality.

Outside the church, some feminists are wary of Christian eco-spirituality because of the conservative Christian tendency to take cover under God's inscrutable purposes, even if that involves environmental holocaust. Inside the church, those brought up in the social justice traditions of the Christian religion find some expressions of eco-spirituality- for example, Starhawk (1979) – socially naïve and dangerously apolitical. The latter might agree with Douglas Ezzy (2004) that 'new age' religions tend to 'manage' environmental issues rather than acknowledge their structural causes.

### **Socialist ecofeminism.**

In many ways, socialist ecofeminists set out to inject reality into ecofeminist ideals. Prominent Australian socialist ecofeminist Ariel Salleh proposes an 'embodied materialism' that can bring together feminism, ecology and socialism. She says she has focussed on social change movements because she has "wanted to find a common denominator which brings together hitherto single issue struggles for equality and sustainability" (1996, p. 1), without which "an ecology movement flounders, searching for self understanding and theoretical coherence" (1996, p. 45). Salleh advocates working simultaneously to increase women's political voice, to dismantle patriarchal views of nature and to incorporate women's ways of living with nature into society at large (in Carolyn Merchant, 1996). She

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<sup>18</sup> Personal communication.

not only critiques the gender blindness in Deep Ecology<sup>19</sup> but also feminist concerns about essentialism, arguing that, as Janis Birkland (quoted in Merchant, 1996, p. 202) has suggested, essentialism is more of a problem of patriarchal projection than a problem for feminists. I take up a discussion of feminist essentialism in the context of Luce Irigaray's work (below).

### **Women and Difference, Country and Place**

I turn now to highlight the work of four women whose understandings of women and the environment illuminate the findings of this research: Luce Irigaray's 'difference' and 'irreducible alterity'; Mary Graham's and Lilla Watson's Indigenous care for country and 'women's business', and Val Plumwood's critical ecological feminism, Master narrative, and 'continuity and difference' discourse.

As I use it here, 'difference' is a term that signifies the hypothetically different ways women think, act, and feel, both as individuals and in relationships with others, men in particular. It also signifies the differences amongst women themselves. Differences are biological as well as cultural, and subject to the dictates (subtle or not) of ethnicity, religion, philosophies and value stances, sexual preference, class and economic status, ability, age and race. While theories of male/female difference are contested, the hypothesis and underlying assumption of this research is that differences between men and women exist, that they are observable, and that women can articulate what meanings male/female differences make, both positively and negatively, in their lives.

It is neither possible nor relevant here to survey the whole spectrum of literature on 'difference', which ranges from the biological and neurophysiological to the cultural and counter-cultural. For the purposes of this research, I confine myself to the understandings of difference that have informed and inspired this research and shed light on the findings.

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<sup>19</sup> Deep Ecology, associated with writers like Arne Naess and Joanna Macey (see, for example, Joanna Macey, Pat Fleming, Arne Naess, John Seed, 1988), stresses protection of wilderness, population control and simple living. In its stress on merging with nature, some feminists see an elision of gender issues.

### **Indigenous Australian women: “women do things differently”.**

“Women do things differently and, until people realise that, men will dominate.”

Lilla Watson.<sup>20</sup>

To write of Indigenous women’s understandings of differences between women and men is, for a White woman, to remember that any written or spoken account must come with qualifications, and to accord respect to what she may never completely understand. Indigenous culture is not static, not everywhere the same, and not always available to interested White enquirers, however well-intentioned. It is easy to get it all very wrong, as events of the past have demonstrated (Aileen Morteton-Robinson, 2000, 2003; see below). Who has told what to whom, where and when and to what purpose (Helen Verran, 2002, p. 756), can make a large difference to accounts which White readers might assume to be ‘the facts of the matter’. Beyond differences in time, pre- and post- invasion and colonisation, degrees of cultural dislocation, and the geographies of country, there are differences in relationships which determine who can or cannot properly hold and pass on knowledge. For all these reasons, I stay close to the words, spoken and written, of Mary Graham, a Kombumerri elder whose country takes in Tamborine Mountain, and also to the words of Lilla Watson, a Burrigubba elder: Mary and Lilla are colleagues and teachers of many years standing. I do not mean by this to imply that I have been granted privileged information – simply, having been ‘born’ into this country,<sup>21</sup> I have responsibilities, including the responsibility to acknowledge the limits of my understanding.

To begin with the Land which, as the Law, is the basis of all Life, as Mary Graham explains:

The land is a sacred entity, not property or real estate; it is the great mother of all humanity. The Dreaming is a combination of meaning (about life and all reality), and an action guide to living. The two most important relationships in life are, firstly, those between land and people and, secondly, those amongst people themselves, the second being always contingent on the first. The land, and how we treat it, is what determines our human-ness. Because land is sacred and must be looked after, the relation between people and land becomes the

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<sup>20</sup> Personal communication.

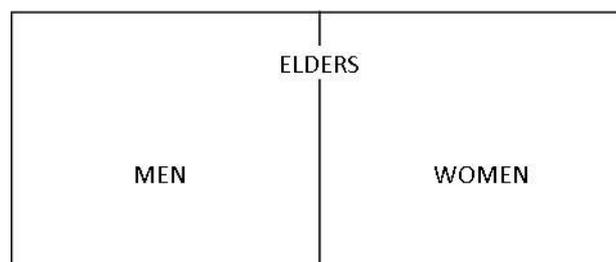
<sup>21</sup> At two of the “Belonging to Country” workshops there have been rituals to close the workshops where participants are ‘born’ into country.

template for society and social relations. Therefore all meaning comes from land (1999, p. 106).

Land, 'country', is multi-dimensional: "it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings; underground earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water, and air" (Deborah Bird Rose, 1996, p. 8).

Based in the Law and the Land and people's responsibilities for country, there is men's business and women's business and, in an area of overlap, community (or public) business (Fay Gale, 1974, 2005; Deborah Bird Rose, 1992; Lilla Watson, 1994; Mary Graham and Lilla Watson, 2008). It is a lateral system where women's business has its own independent value, even while it may complement and, in some cases, overlap with men's business.

In traditional Aboriginal society female and male worked in co-operation and this continues today. There are some areas where male and female concerns overlap, and there should be agreements about this 'public' business, that is community issues, housing, jobs, children, health and education. Some parts of those areas are 'women's business' (Lilla Watson, 1994, p. 92).



*The diagram that Mary Graham and Lilla Watson draw on the board at seminars to illustrate what they term the "lateral system" of relationships between men and women and their deference to elders of both genders.*

It is from the standpoint of women's business that Lilla Watson has cautioned White women against struggling for equality. Women's emotional well-being, she says, does not come from men, but from other women, and women have their own terms of reference: "To make [equality] the goal is to fall into the trap of using male terms of reference" (Lilla

Watson, 1994, pp. 95-6).<sup>22</sup> Indigenous Law is about balancing – women with men, person with person, person with country, country with country. Both men and women ordinarily go to a lot of trouble to avoid opposition and confrontation (Kenneth Lieberman, 1985; Deborah Bird Rose, 1996, 1992), and some would say that, in the face of past and continuing colonisation, men’s and women’s relations have only been strengthened by their coinciding interests to achieve justice (Peggy Brock, 2001). It is therefore considered neither culturally proper nor strategically wise to sow discord between men and women.

Drawing these threads together, Mary Magulagi Yarmirr of the West Arnhem, Northern Land Council, wrote:

We are fighting beside men for recognition and for our country. Women still carry out roles we have always carried out in relation to the cultural, spiritual, environmental and social maintenance of our land, community and law. ...

Our tribes of people formed a land council of both men and women on their own land which is still our land in a traditional sense. Both men and women each had special responsibilities and Aboriginal women knew their place. Aboriginal men accepted and recognised women’s rights to country and for indigenous women to hold responsibility to forbidden women’s areas such as sacred sites and story places on land as well as sea. ...Today’s women are not “Women’s Libbers” but “fighters” who have taken their traditional lifestyle a step further where they are seen to work beside their men, fighting for recognition and fighting for their country to make the wider community aware that there is and has always been a law that controls the land and its people as one (1997, pp. 80-93).

The Law that “is and has always been” has come from the Dreamings. Deborah Bird Rose has written about how the Dreamings have created gendered places:

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<sup>22</sup> This can be very difficult for White women, as one respondent (Cath) commented after the workshop: “I think when Lilla was saying ‘men’s business, women’s business, separate but equal’, that’s very different in my culture, ‘cos I think there is men’s business and there is women’s business, but they’re not equal and they never have been equal.” See Chapter 5.

Dreaming men and women sometimes walked separately and thus created gendered places. There are now women's places and men's places ... because Dreaming made it that way. There are varying degrees of exclusion: places where men may go but must be quiet, places where they can look but not stare, where they can walk but not camp, and then there are places where men cannot go at all, ever. ... And of course the same is also true with respect to men's places, men's country (1996, p. 36).

During the time of the Dreaming, Yarralin people say, women had most of the Law and many of the ceremonies. "Men who are living now know that knowledge was stolen from women ... and it was not right ... but it happened in Dreaming and so it stays that way" (Rose, 1996, p. 50). Accordingly,

[a] woman's primary obligation in life, like that of a man, is to take her rightful place: to maintain the care of country which she shares with her brother, to find and nurture a new generation of owners, to teach the public and secret knowledge which sustains people and country (Rose, 1992, p. 178).

Each gender is both independent and interdependent, and secret business preserves and demonstrates autonomy, as well as sustains person-country relationships (ibid). While "men and women control separate and secret domains of knowledge and action", Deborah Rose says she has invariably found that

while men promote the value of their own knowledge and ritual, they do not do so by denigrating women's knowledge, and the reverse is equally true. The division of labour in daily life is clearly complementary and non-hierarchical; so too, in my experience, is the organization of gender-specific domains (1996, p. 28).

The phrase, "in my experience", is critical. In 1988, Francesca Merlan wrote that "[g]ender, and the issue of [Indigenous] women's situation, are explosive", explosive, that is, for White commentators. "We approach Aboriginal societies from our own," Merlan wrote, "with our deeply dichotomous and competitive ideas of gender relations" (1988, p. 34). When Merlan surveyed the literature on gender of the twenty-five years, 1961-86, she noted that it was overwhelmingly about Aboriginal women's participation in society, rather than

men's. She saw this as redressing the past imbalance in the literature, based on White male anthropologists' assumptions that "men's activities were the most salient" (p. 17), as well as academics' reluctance to "give as serious consideration to the contemporary situation and the transformation of Aboriginal societies" (ibid). While arguing her position that, on the evidence to that point, "men are socially superior, women inferior and subordinate" (p. 21), she concluded:

No adequate description of social structure can be given using only 'traditional' terms of reference ... In many places their 'traditional' forms are ideological reference points for only some people. [Research has been driven by] European concerns about the nature of women's involvement in society ... rather than about the current situation, and the specific nature of continuity and change ...Aborigines who have written for the outside world have seen the main issue as their oppression within Australian society. Their chief concern has been survival of Aboriginal society in some form they can recognize (1988, pp. 63-64).

Similarly, in Peggy Brock's 2001 work on Aboriginal women's access to native title, she cautions readers in her introductory chapter that all authors in the book

agree on the gendered nature of Aboriginal societies, but do not attempt to establish a dichotomy which contrasts men's rights with women's, or to suggest that one sex is more powerful in terms of knowledge and political influence than the other (2001, p. 17).

She did note, however, that it has been difficult for Indigenous women to "articulate their rights to land" and it "is not clear from the literature to what extent Aboriginal men were complicit in this process of disempowerment" (p. 9). There is anecdotal evidence that Aboriginal women consider that Aboriginal men have not always been "transparent and inclusive" in processes such as native title<sup>23</sup>, and a CSIRO report (2008) on the Northern Land Council's "Caring for Country" program reported some Indigenous women as saying that their views had been overlooked (pp. 25-27).

Peggy Brock (2001) recounts in brief the White story of Indigenous male/female relations from the earliest times when the invaders saw Aboriginal women as chattels and slaves of

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<sup>23</sup> Personal communication.

savages, and early (mostly male) anthropologists who assumed that women were lesser persons and of less interest than men, through to the women anthropologists like Phyllis Kaberry who attempted to correct the male bias, albeit via a European interpretation, down the years to now when anthropologists like Diane Bell and Deborah Bird Rose argue that Aboriginal women and men have separate and equal domains. In none of these cases, Brock believes, has it been “productive to view gender relations in terms of the opposition of men’s and women’s interests”, but rather in terms of “interests and rights, obligations and actions associated with them [that] are inextricably entwined in dynamic and complex ways” (p. 159). Brock leaves open the question whether continuing colonisation has strengthened or subverted Aboriginal women’s interests.

Diane Bell (1983, 1991; Diane Bell, Pat Caplan, and Wazir Jahan Karim, 1993), for one, is strongly of the view that European colonisers, by removing people from their country, eroded many aspects of Indigenous culture, including relationships between men and women. Writing of the Kaytej women at Warrabri in Central Australia, she says:

I have argued that male-female relations are in a constant state of flux and that the impact of the changes of the last century has been devastating. ... Women’s role in maintenance of harmonious relationships has been taxed, eroded and usurped in a century of white colonization of desert lands. ...both men and women strain to consolidate their position ... It is the settlement life style which is the greatest impediment to the consolidation of women’s power (1983, pp. 230-231).

Once women lost rights of access to land, they lost both the means of sustaining their families and the authority they derived from land. This authority passed to men who, as labourers and sometimes paid workers on White land holdings, became, and were expected to be, principal economic supports for their families. “It is in the shattering of the ritually maintained nexus of land as resource and spiritual essence that I have located a shift from female autonomy to male control, from independence to dependence”, Diane Bell wrote (1983, p. 247). Men, of course, also lost rights of access to land and, importantly, access to cultural rites of passage, leaving many men, as one Aboriginal woman has described it, “hollow and bereft”.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Personal communication. It is a view shared by Germaine Greer (2008).

In a sense, however, it is impossible for Aboriginal men and women to 'lose' country: Aboriginal people are born into an inalienable relationship to country where Land 'owns' people as much as any person or group 'owns' Land. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a continuing tradition of land-based women's rights and responsibilities, and continuing actions to assert them – for example, in the Hindmarsh Island bridge struggle (Jane Jacobs, 1989) and, as described by Zohl De Ishtar (2005, 2009), in efforts to establish a women elders' centre at Kapululangu in north-western Australia.

It is worth repeating at this point that, while there is a strong and continuing tradition of Indigenous women's business, Indigenous society is not monolithic or static, and there are plenty of variations in male/female relations across time and space and circumstances. Further, as Deborah Bird Rose (1988, p. 378) cautions, "[t]here is always the possibility that people who perceive a lack in their own culture will be drawn to a romantic and nostalgic glorification of other cultures and seek to transplant another culture's ethical system into their own", including a glorified version of Indigenous male/female relations. There is always the possibility, too, as I noted at the beginning of this section, that things can go very wrong. White women's views about Indigenous male/female relations can be ruled out of order, as not their business, and Indigenous women can strongly resist universalising assumptions about what is proper male/female conduct and what elements of that it is proper for whom (including 'outsiders') to report.

A well-known, and still topical, example is the bitter dispute that erupted between Diane Bell and her critics in the late 1980s in Australia. The Whiteness studies writer Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000, 2003) has recounted in detail what happened when feminist anthropologist Diane Bell, with the assistance of her Aboriginal friend, Topsy Napurrula Nelson, published an article, "Speaking about rape is everybody's business" in *Women's Studies International Forum* (12(4), 403-416).

Both White women and Aboriginal women activists, Jackie Huggins (1991) in particular, critiqued the article, and the debate, via articles and counter articles and conference presentations, went back and forth over the next few years. The arguments turned on Diane Bell's presuming to have the right and the authority, as a White woman, to speak on behalf of Aboriginal women "without the appropriate deliberations of the Indigenous communities concerned" – rape in Indigenous communities, it was asserted, was the

business of Indigenous people (Moreton-Robinson, 2001, p. 78). Bell's position was that rape is rape wherever it occurs, and that silence on the subject was continuing to hurt Aboriginal women. (Similar disputes arose over the recent Northern Territory 'intervention'.) Topsy Napurrula Nelson seems to have been caught in the middle, and her status as informant or co-author contested by both sides. Aileen Moreton-Robinson wrote:

Indigenous women in Australia know that we live in a society in which we will never be sufficiently powerful to reverse the conditions of our existence. For Indigenous women all white feminists benefit from the continued dominance of their culture and the exploitative effects of their freely exercised power over our people, our lands and our place in our own country. If we enter feminism and its debates, it is not on our terms, but on the terms of white feminists whose race confers dominance and privilege. What sort of sisterhood can be constructed when we begin from such unequal positions within a politics that defines our racial difference yet masks its own? (2001, p. 77).

Taking up Moreton-Robinson's theme and reflecting on the life of one of her (White) female ancestors, Victoria Haskins (2006) suggests that White women have both collaborated with and subverted Indigenous/European race relations in Australia. She notes Jackie Huggins' comment during the dispute with Diane Bell: "Just because you are women doesn't mean you are necessarily innocent. You were, and still are, a part of that colonising force" (Haskins, 2006, p. 5; see also Jackie Huggins, 1991). Haskins suggests that we can attempt to reach beyond the ambiguity of White women's position by being conscious of, and transforming, the roles White women have played, and continue to play, in relations with Indigenous peoples. Helen Verran (2002) hopes for 'postcolonial moments' when respect for the differences between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing (in her case, with regard to fire regimes in northern Australia) become opportunities for reciprocal learning. For her part, Diane Bell (in Brock, 2001) has outlined three principles she has distilled from her research with Indigenous women: ask *her* (the woman herself); decentre the male view; and make the research self visible.

For me, what is striking is the certainty with which many Indigenous women, particularly older women, speak of their position, past and present, *vis à vis* relations with men. In

2007, Mary Graham, Lilla Watson and others from the Kummara Women's Association in Brisbane convened a seminar, to which I was invited, to discuss what preparations Indigenous women might make to respond to and survive climate change. There was no sense that men had to be asked or told not to attend, and there was no sense that the women were doing anything unusual in meeting together to discuss significant concerns. I find it difficult to imagine such confidence in White Australian women convening an all-women meeting about climate change, firstly because climate change in Australia has been framed in Western scientific terms, still mainly the preserve of men, and secondly and consequently, because many White non-professional women would hesitate to claim they had anything to offer which would be seen as useful and relevant – that is, they would benchmark their potential contribution against men's. This is an attitude which feminists have worked hard to subvert and transform.

In Lilla Watson's words:

For women, women's business is more important: knowing about men's business will not enhance women. It is women's business that will enhance women, and that is where your direction is ... directed towards women's business (1994, p. 94).

I have heard indigenous women say that because women's culture escaped some of the worst savaging by colonisers (settlers and anthropologists long believed that women didn't have any culture), Aboriginal women have sometimes been able to salvage more of their Law than men (Lilla Watson, 2007). By contrast, men were more brutalised, and therefore more vulnerable to being co-opted by White terms of reference. Certainly much of the forceful Indigenous speaking about country has come from Indigenous women like Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1970), Mary Magulagi Yarmirr (1997), Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2003), Ambelin Kwaymullina (2005), Lola Young (2007), Jessica Weir (2009), and through what they have shared with White women writers like Diane Bell (1983), Deborah Bird Rose (2004) and Zohl De Ishtar (2005). A strong indigenous voice close to home is that of Mary Graham whose country takes in the Mountain where I live. Mary Graham writes eloquently about custodial responsibilities, and encourages Aboriginal people in modern Australia to work out "ways in which we can continue carrying out custodial responsibilities to land, achieve economic independence and not fall prey to the seductions of individualism" (1999, p. 111).

As noted above, Diane Bell proposed that it was when Indigenous women in northern Australia were displaced from their land, lost their economic independence and had to forgo their custodial responsibilities that their autonomy was “shattered” (1983, p. 247), an experience shared by vulnerable women in Africa, Malaysia and India (Vandana Shiva 1990, p. 191; Susan Hawthorne 2002). When Indigenous women’s connections to the land that provides livelihood and sustenance are ruptured, and ‘developments’ in the form of dams and mines and agribusinesses take their place, women not only become the lowest paid wage labourers but also, commonly, the sole heads of their families, as men find they have to move to cities or other countries to find employment (International Centre for Research on Women, 2005). Land is not, then, just a ‘backdrop’: it can mean identity, and physical, economic, psycho-social, and spiritual survival. Sadly, it isn’t always straightforward to restore severed connections to land, as Indigenous women in Wirrimanu (Balgo) found in their efforts to establish Kapululangu, a women elders’ cultural institute (De Ishtar, 2005).

Connection to country, or more commonly ‘place’ in Western terms, resonates strongly with many White people, including a number of women who participated in this research (see Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7). Zohl de Ishtar believes that some of us, as privileged White Australian women, have been trying to learn to live *in* the land rather than just on it (2005, p. 199). We cannot be “patterned into the land” in the same way an Indigenous woman can, we have no Dreaming (Mary Graham, 1999, p. 112), and we certainly don’t want to appropriate Indigenous wisdom, but perhaps it is possible to craft a practice that, respectful of Indigenous knowledge and respectful of the land, can take us beyond reform and repair to a sustainable and reciprocal relationship with the environment. To move in that direction, it seems we need to change not only what we do, but how we think.<sup>25</sup>

### **Luce Irigaray: women and ‘irreducible alterity’.**

It may seem odd to juxtapose Mary Graham and Lilla Watson with Luce Irigaray - and neither might thank me for it – but there are traces of something very similar to Indigenous women’s business in Irigaray’s writings on ‘differance’. I don’t want to force connections or distort what is proper to each, but rather show how one, sitting beside the other, may

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<sup>16</sup> As one participant (Judy) after the 2011 workshop said, “I got it on a deep level... It’s just completely changed the way I look at things. Quite profound.”

enhance our thinking about difference and women's distinctive practices of care for place. I will then, in the next section, consider the work of Australian ecological feminist, the late Val Plumwood, whose environmental praxis is woven from these and other strands and embodies both feminist and Indigenous insights.

Luce Irigaray (1930 -) is a Belgian philosopher, linguist and psychoanalyst who lives and teaches in Paris. She eschews the label 'feminist', as she eschews most others, and she has written little about women's relations with place or environment. She is a writer steeped in, if critical of, European philosophical traditions, even though she has in recent years turned her attention to Eastern traditions, especially yoga (Irigaray, 2005). Amongst some English commentators, feminists included, she has often been accused of essentialism, that is, of locking women into allegedly 'essential' and pre-determined attributes that perpetuate stereotyping and oppression (Margaret Whitford, 1999, p. 3). She has frustrated some feminists, especially Lesbians, with her "deeply heterosexual" approach (as one Lesbian friend put it), others by her interest in spirituality, and still others by her critique of equality feminism. She is not the only philosopher, or even the only feminist philosopher, to write about difference, but she is, in my view, the most thorough-going and, in possible practice applications, the most wide-ranging (Grace Jantzen, 1997).

There are three aspects of Luce Irigaray's work that enhance our understanding of difference and women's care for place: the concept of women's and men's 'irreducible alterity' (arising from sexuate difference), her criticism of feminist equality politics as not going far enough, and her writings (few though they are) on nature.

During her early career in the field of psycholinguistics, Luce Irigaray found in the speech patterns of schizophrenic patients not only speech utterances that marked their illness but also patterns that marked their gender. She followed up these initial studies with research on speech patterns of other groups, including children, and the research led her to conclude that the most fundamental and universal difference of all is sexuate difference: "[i]n the whole of humanity, there exist only men and women" (Irigaray, 2008, p. 137).

Along with most feminists, Luce Irigaray rejects a "male subjectivity that pretends to both neutrality and totality" (2008, p. 142). Going further, she asserts that men and women have different subjectivities, arising from sexuate difference - "*sexuate* and not sexual ... because the latter term reduces the difference between two subjects to a mere biological

fact and to a sexual choice...” (Emilie Dionne, 2010, p. 708). In Irigaray’s terms, sexuate identity “is determined by both the morphology of the body and the relational environment which goes with the body” (Irigaray, 2008, 142). This focus on sexuate difference is what makes some feminists uneasy and where, wary of the risks of essentialism, they depart from Irigaray.

For Irigaray, sexuate difference requires that women and men respect each other’s ‘irreducible alterity’. This does not, however, have to cut across their willingness to engage:

Each subject must come to a standstill before the other, respect the irreducible alterity of the other. The help that each provides to the other’s growth must be appropriate to each one’s initial ... becoming ... Whoever helps has to remain faithful to their own [becoming] ... [maintaining] the distance and the difference between the two subjects (2002, pp. 113-4).

“Sexuate difference”, writes Irigaray, “means that man and woman do not belong to one and the same subjectivity, that subjectivity itself is neither neutral nor universal ... the encounter between them requires the existence of two different worlds ...” (2004, p. xii). But sexuate difference is not something that most (mostly male) Western philosophers have countenanced since, to do so, they would have to acknowledge that women are something more than opposite to, complementary with, or the same as men. Sexuate difference has been “an excluded possibility ... a kind of femininity that has never become culturally coherent or possible” (Penelope Deutscher, 2002, pp. 29-30).

Penelope Deutscher (2002, pp. 29-30) writes that when Irigaray “refers to the feminine, she does not refer to a buried or repressed truth”, but neither does she envisage “a utopian new possibility”: the feminine “is not empirically known, except by its exclusion ... It is a hypothetical possibility on the border of histories of representation of femininity.” Far from being prescriptive, Irigaray will not speculate on what an ideal femininity might look like.

We are asked to imagine a pair of empty brackets, “sexual difference”, whose emptiness is necessary to phallographic culture and the source of its ailment. Irigaray deems the empty brackets to be filled with meanings yet to come ... [But] just thinking of a set of empty brackets is a therapeutic improvement on a culture that places a premium on discourses of equality, sameness, negation, and

complementarity ... Sexual difference is, at least, thought of as absent (Deutscher, 2002, p. 107).

Sexuate difference (A/B) is not the same as dichotomy (A/not-A) (Penelope Deutscher, 2002, p. 32; Elizabeth Grosz, 1989, p. xvii), and it implies that men and women, as two irreducible subjectivities, have to take into account what Irigaray terms “a triple dialectical process: one for each subject and one for the relation between the two” (2004, p. 127). A possible physical bridge between these different subjectivities is the caress, “an awakening to you, to me, to us ... to intersubjectivity, to a touching between us which is neither passive nor active” (2000, p. 25; 2002, p. 164). Another bridge is wonder, a response to the natural world and a response now often reserved for God, but one which ought as well to be found in sexual difference. “To arrive at the constitution of an ethics of sexual difference, we must at least return to what is for Descartes the first passion: *wonder*” (quoted in Margaret Whitford, 1991, p. 171). Neither a caress nor wonder is possessive, and neither aims to appropriate, whereas more often ... “[o]ur manner of reasoning, even our manner of loving, corresponds to an appropriation....”

We want to have the entire world in our head, sometimes the entire world in our heart. We do not see that this gesture transforms the life of the world into something finished, dead, because the world thus loses its own life, a life always foreign to us, exterior to us, other than us (Irigaray, 2005, pp. 121-2).

It is not that Irigaray proposes separatism, except perhaps as a transitional strategy. Quite to the contrary, she is at pains to point to ways that women and men might enjoy non-exploitative, loving relationships. What has been most problematic for many feminists is Irigaray’s view that the relationship between a man and a woman is *the* most basic and the most universal relationship, the model for all other relationships – between women, between same sex couples, between mothers and daughters, between different cultures and races, and between humans and other living beings. This Irigarayan standpoint is often criticised, and in my view misunderstood, as essentialist.

Luce Irigaray herself writes that, “[t]o affirm that man and woman are really two different subjects does not amount for all that to sending them back to a biological destiny. Man and woman are culturally different” (2005, p. 129). As Emilie Dionne (2010, p. 712) notes, the charge of essentialism won’t stand up, “insofar as (1) if there is an essence in her

thought, it is not situated in hierarchical opposition to culture and (2) such an identity isn't fixed but is in constant relational becoming." Irigaray does not tell us what 'woman' is, writes Margaret Whitford: "this is something which women still have to create and invent collectively" (1991, pp. 9-10). And a woman's 'becoming' is not undisciplined or self-indulgent. It is not

capriciousness, dispersion, the multiplication of her desires, or a loss of identity. She should, quite the contrary, gather herself within herself in order to accomplish her gender's perfection for herself, for the man she loves, for her children, but equally for civil society, for the world of culture ... (Irigaray, 1996, p. 27).

Irigaray is very clear that "the properties of feminine identity remain yet to be thought...", but she also hopes that there might well be benefits in this endeavour for all: "a cultivation of the to be woman ... may even be capable of redirecting man to his own to be ..." [rather than to] "a violent, uncanny world, which exists through the domination of nature, of animals, of other humans" (Irigaray, 2000, p. 72).

Similarly problematic for many feminists is Irigaray's disavowal of feminism and, in particular, her criticisms of equality politics. While some, like Penelope Deutscher (2002), have insisted that Irigaray is a philosopher with a feminist commitment (in that order), Irigaray herself has said that she is "completely willing to abandon this word [feminist] ... because it is formed on the same model as the other great words of the culture that oppresses us" (quoted in Deutscher, 2002, p. 11).

I have many times protested against the fact that I could be called a feminist. I have repeated that I do not want to belong to any 'ism' category – these words ending in 'ism' allude to something both too rigid and too evanescent ... I work towards women's liberation and more generally human liberation. And this requires us to favour singularity with respect to all kinds of gregariousnesses that, in my opinion, the words ending in 'ism' presuppose (Irigaray, 2008, p. 74).

For these and other reasons, her relations with the women's movement have not always been smooth. She acknowledges that women's liberation has achieved many things, she realises that cultural change takes time, but she does not believe that women to date have achieved a "civilly autonomous feminine becoming" (2005, p. 112).

... women's liberation extends far beyond the framework of current feminist struggles, which are too often limited to criticizing the patriarchy, creating women's space [*l'entre-femmes*], or demanding equality with men, without proposing new values that would make it possible to live sexual difference in justice, civility and spiritual fertility (1994, p. xiv).

Irigaray therefore wants to see sexuate rights encoded in law as civil rights "that give women a civil identity and not only a natural one" (2000, p. 87): "... since 1970 I have regularly worked with women or groups of women who belong to liberation movements, and in these I've observed problems or impasses that can't be resolved except through the establishment of an equitable legal system for both sexes" (1993, p. 82). Such radical legal reform would, in her view, change the structures of power.

When [women's] movements aim simply for a change in the distribution of power, leaving intact the power structure itself, then they are resubjecting themselves, deliberately or not, to a phallocratic order. This latter gesture must of course be denounced, and with determination, since it may constitute a more subtly concealed exploitation of women (quoted in Deutscher, 2002, p. 11).

Like Lilla Watson, Luce Irigaray sees the struggle for equality as insufficient and misguided:

To demand equality as women is, it seems to me, a mistaken expression of a real objective. The demand to be equal presupposes a point of comparison. To whom or to what do women want to be equalized? To men? To a salary? To a public office? To what standard? Why not to themselves? (1993, p. 12).

The rights women have gained in the last few years are for the most part rights that enable them to slip into men's skin, to take on so-called male identity. These rights do not solve the problems of their rights and duties as women towards themselves, their children, other women, men and society (1994, p. 79).

While women's dependency on men may well have led them to struggle for equality, this does not solve the problems of the amorous economy between men and women, nor between women for that matter. Identifying with men allows them a sexuality which seems more free and 'sporty', part masculine, part feminine. It does not fulfill them either emotionally or culturally (1982, rep. 1992, p. 3).

Penelope Deutscher (2002, p. 22), however, defends Irigaray's stance on equality, believing that she "supports a politics of transformation and (re)invention of sexual difference ... A transformed politics of difference is one that reconfigures equality, equivalence, and sameness". For Deutscher, Irigaray "means her feminism of difference to act as a useful transformation, not an abandonment, of equality politics" (ibid). That may be so, but it is not always how her work is understood.

As a theorist, teacher and writer, Irigaray's value, I suggest, is that she can look beyond the basic justice many women are still struggling to achieve and propose something that is much more radical, visionary and enduring. For those who have to earn their livings in malestream structures, Irigaray's impatience with the shortcomings of equality politics may seem, understandably, a luxury they can ill afford. Asked in 2008 whether she was still active in political feminism, she answered that "... trying to define a way of thinking, being, living and speaking appropriate to woman is a political activity" (Irigaray, 2008a, p. 164). She went on to say that she gives talks, writes articles, does research, organizes international seminars for PhD students and, of course, teaches.

Liberation movements need all kinds, and no one person can contribute everything. Similarly, no one person can contribute to every movement, especially someone like Luce Irigaray who dislikes 'isms'. Nevertheless, in terms of this research, Irigaray's writings on the environment and the environment movement are disappointing, few and unspecific. When Irigaray writes of 'nature', she encompasses all that is 'natural' (Luce Irigaray and Mary Green, 2008), rather than specific places or ecologies. Sometimes she speaks of nature as a backdrop, for example, somewhere to walk and to find refreshment. "Nature is a place of re-birth. Nature is a second mother ... Nature offers an alternative place for life and sharing in relation to the human world, the manufactured world" (2000a, p. 180). There is little sense of a specific place, a specific landscape, a specific ecology or geography.

At a theoretical level, she accords nature its own autonomy, beyond its utility to human beings.

Two privileged dimensions allow us to open the structure of the world in which we are included from the very beginning: relations with nature as an autonomous living world and relations with the other....

Natural life has its own finality. Bending it too simply to his own project, man deprives himself of a fruitful opening for the elaboration of his world. ... Some epochs or some civilizations have understood their role towards nature... others have behaved as exploiters or rulers of the life surrounding them. Which little by little, but implacably, has turned against humans and their own existence ...

...Behaving like a master towards the nature that surrounds him, man has appropriated that which could be used as a space of meeting between all living beings, between all that exists (2008a, pp. 66-7).

The first quote (above) brings to mind Indigenous elder Mary Graham's statement – "The two most important relationships in life are, firstly, those between land and people and, secondly, those amongst people themselves" (1999, p. 106) - and the second takes us towards ecofeminist territory and Val Plumwood's analysis of the Master narrative (below).

Luce Irigaray's recent writings allude to nature in a personal way, for example, in *Everyday Prayers* (2004). She writes a poem - in her terms, a prayer - every morning. The poems in the 2004 collection are arranged seasonally and they are, as she writes, "a homage to life":

Hope for a future to which the present offers its own experience, and not a consecration of today weeping for the past. ... I would ask nature, or the other, to open the horizon of the expected more widely, to disclose to us what we do not yet imagine. Not through extraordinary events, but through an unveiling still to come of the most humble everyday: both within us and outside us (2004, pp. 30-32).

Irigaray encourages us to "leave nature be, to let it, in a way, say itself and so remove it from its utilitarian destiny or status" (ibid), as Freya Mathews (1999) has also said. Luce Irigaray writes:

... a letting be is what is most difficult for us. It forces us to relinquish the ideal of mastery that has been taught to us, not as an aptitude for staying within our limits in order to respect the other, but as an ability to dominate everyone and everything – including the world and the other – without letting them blossom according to what or who they are (Irigaray, 2008, p. 58).

Karen I. Burke (Luce Irigaray and Mary Green, 2008, p. 198) believes that “Luce Irigaray’s cultivation or culture of nature could be the foundation of a fully-fledged environmental ethic”. What Irigaray proposes is, however, a managed nature:

[a] positive program for managing natural places and communities of organisms. Legal and financial support will be given to the careful study of the natural mechanisms and balances; and action will be taken to aid ecosystems on their own terms (Karen I. Burke, 2008, p. 199).

While “on their own terms” might give comfort that this would not be the usual project of ‘improving on nature’, Irigaray would want to accommodate both feminine and masculine relations with nature, and ecofeminists might fear that the latter could turn out to be the business-as-usual masculinist control, destruction and exploitation. It is, however, an approach that Indigenous people would appreciate. As Mary Graham would say, there is not one inch of Australia that has not been tended and shaped by humans. There is no ‘wilderness’. Healthy country is ‘quiet country’, country which has been tended and managed by its custodians. ‘The wild’ is uncared-for country (Deborah Bird Rose, 2004). As many Indigenous peoples, Luce Irigaray refuses to split nature and culture; she applauds “female aboriginal traditions [which] respect nature and living places” and which are “quite different from later Indo-European patriarchal tendencies” (2000, p. 61).

While Irigaray does not understand ‘place’ in the way that many ecofeminists would, her theory of nature/culture is of a piece with her theory of sexuate difference. In all her writings, she theorises relationships of respect and reciprocity, of a possible mutuality based on respect for difference.

When Luce Irigaray was asked in an interview, “What do you hope for in the future for women?”, she replied, “[t]hat they reenter culture and affirm their identity which is a special identity, that is, women should not simply be reproducers of the existent roles, they should also be cocreators of this world” (Elaine H. Baruch and Lucienne J. Serreno, 1988, p. 164). This is not a static, essentialist view of women. In fact, one of the strongest features of Irigaray’s work is its fluidity (Hanneke Canters and Grace Jantzen, 2005, p. 4) - which isn’t to say that it is always an easy read. Her style is “exceptionally elusive, fluid and ambiguous ... ambiguities that proliferate rather than diminish meanings” (Elizabeth Grosz, 1989, p. 101). She can be irreverent, playful, mocking, outrageous. For Irigaray,

...the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal ... [not woman as lack, deficiency or imitation, but rather] ... a *disruptive excess* ... on the feminine side (Margaret Whitford, 1999, p. 126).

A 'disruptive excess on the feminine side' might well describe the work of Val Plumwood, Australian environmental philosopher, feminist and activist.

### **Val Plumwood: critical ecological feminism - continuity and difference.**

In her 1993 book, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Val Plumwood described herself as coming "from a background in both environmental philosophy and activism, and feminist philosophy and activism" (p. 8). She wrote that the aim of that book, now regarded as a classic of ecofeminism, was to "help develop an environmental feminism that can be termed a *critical ecological feminism*, one which is thoroughly compatible with and can be based in feminist theory" (p. 1, my emphasis).

Val Plumwood was born near Sydney in 1939, and grew up surrounded by the New South Wales forests which she spent so much of her life fighting to save. She studied philosophy at University of Sydney, and subsequently taught at various universities in Australia and the United States. Freya Mathews, philosopher and friend, writes that Val Plumwood was a key member of a 1970s group at Australian National University who developed "a radical critique of the traditional western concept of nature, in which only human beings mattered and nature was not morally significant", a critique which developed simultaneously in Norway with Arne Naess and the Deep Ecology movement (2008, p.42).

Val Plumwood (then Routley) and her partner Richard Routley saw the need for a new ethic, an environmental ethic of nature, which they elaborated in their joint 1974 book, *Fight for the Forests. The takeover of Australian forests for pines, wood chips and intensive forestry*. Matching words to deeds, they bought 100 hectares of forest outside Braidwood where, after their divorce in 1981, Val Plumwood lived by herself as, in her terms, a member of a community of animals and plants, and with a legendary knowledge of the natural history of the area (Mathews, 2008). She took a new surname, Plumwood, after the Plumwood Mountain area where she lived and which she protected under a Voluntary Conservation

Agreement and willed on her death to National Parks and Wildlife Service. In an interview with James Woodford (2008, p. 10), she said, “My allegiances are to this place ... this is nature in its free state”, a connection she acknowledged in the opening lines of *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*:

An adequate acknowledgement of debts has to begin with the basic but culturally unacknowledged life-debt to the earth. To this I add gratitude for the stimulation and sustenance my forest home daily provides. Without these things this book would not have been possible (1993, p. ix).

It would be difficult even in this brief account of her life not to mention the crocodile attack she survived while kayaking alone in Kakadu in 1985 (Val Plumwood, 2012). The remarkable story of her survival involved being death-rolled and clawed badly three times by the crocodile and then, having escaped, crawling through swamps for hours to find help for the serious injuries she had sustained. She was lucky to survive, and the story brought unwelcome notoriety, but the experience, understandably, changed her deeply: she came back from Kakadu with “near-death knowledge, the knowledge of the survivor and the prey”, a “striding warrior woman”, as friend Jackie French described her (in James Woodford, 2008, p. 10). Some of that fierceness is displayed in her later scathing attack on vegetarianism (Plumwood, 2008) but, by all accounts, she wasn’t always an easy colleague or friend (Jackie French, 2008). When she died in 2008, Freya Mathews wrote that, for her, Val Plumwood’s legacy was her integrity: “[s]he energetically lived the life she theorised and never failed to speak out on behalf of non-human others ... She showed how philosophy could not only diagnose the world’s ills, but become more than words: a way of life” (Mathews, 2008, p. 42). Faithful to that fearsome integrity, she was described by one friend and neighbour as “a difficult personality with a brilliant mind ... someone you needed but dreaded to consult on all local environmental matters”.<sup>26</sup>

Val Plumwood’s diagnosis of the world’s ecological crises began with an ecofeminist analysis of the Western dualism that has subordinated ‘women and nature’ to ‘men and reason’ (see also, for example, Carolyn Merchant, 2003). Building on that analysis and with particular attention to processes of colonisation, Plumwood developed an explanatory theory of the Master narrative, the Mastering and the ‘Othering’ that has underpinned the subjugation and colonisation not only of women and nature but also of slaves, classes,

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<sup>26</sup> Personal communication.

races, ethnicities, homosexuals, and all marginalised others (human and other-than-human) who do not count as White rational European male (1993, 2002). These oppressions, she maintained, are inter-connected: “[f]orms of oppression from both the present and the past have left their traces in western culture as a network of dualisms, and the logical structure of dualism forms a major basis for the connection between forms of oppression” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 3). Dualisms include, amongst others: self/other (egoism/altruism); culture/nature; reason/nature; male/female; mind/body (nature); master/slave; reason/matter (physicality); human/nature(non-human); civilised/primitive (nature); public/private (Plumwood, 1993).

The logical structure of dualisms operates through and requires the processes Val Plumwood (1993, 1999, 2002) identified as:

- ❖ radical exclusion (hyperseparation) and
- ❖ homogenisation (stereotyping),
- with the addition of*
- ❖ denial (backgrounding),
- ❖ incorporation (assimilation), and
- ❖ instrumentalism (denial of agency and exploitation)

In her 1999 contribution to a text on environmental philosophy, Plumwood tackled the hegemonic ‘centrism’ – androcentrism, eurocentrism, ethnocentrism, anthropocentrism – that have been the focus of many liberation movement critiques, and showed in detail how they shape and reinforce the behaviour of the Master (1999, pp. 100-122). Later, in her 2002 work, *Environmental Culture: The ecological crisis of reason*, she showed how dualisms manifest in anthropocentrism, the Othering of nature.

*Radical exclusion* marks the Otherised group as both inferior and radically separate. The woman, for example, is “set apart as having a different nature ... part of a different, lower order of being, lesser or lacking in reason” (2002, pp. 101-102). The hyperseparation and exaggerated differences justify, in the mind of the Master and coloniser, the inferior treatment of the Other – an attitude which can, as we know, also be internalised by the Other. That, in fact, is one of the strategies of Othering, to have the unequal arrangements accepted as normal, as ‘natural’. She cites examples of racial purity (‘half-caste’, ‘one drop’ rule, etc), ‘widely different privileges and fates between men and women’, ‘exaggerated

cleanliness', 'civilised' or 'refined manners', 'body covering', and 'alleged physiological differences', 'less than human, without souls'.

*Homogenisation*, by contrast, lumps inferior Others together, without distinction or differentiation, the notorious "they": in racist terms, "darkies", "slits", "boongs", "gooks", and in sexist terms, "sluts", "cows", "chicks", and worse. Homogenisation breeds stereotypes.

Men are stereotyped as active, intellectual, inexpressive, strong, dominant and so on, while women are represented in terms of the complementary as passive, intuitive, emotional, weak and submissive. To counter polarization it is necessary to acknowledge and reclaim continuity and overlap between the polarized groups as well as internal diversity within them (2002, p.103).

Radical exclusion and homogenisation are the two chief props of centrism, but enlist the further colonising features of denial (backgrounding), incorporation and instrumentalism.

'Terra nullius' is a prime example of *denial and backgrounding*. Not only were Australian Indigenous peoples dispossessed of their country, their ecological knowledge and agency was disregarded, "while the heroic agency of white pioneers ... was strongly stressed" (1999, p. 104). In the case of women, their contributions to collective undertakings can be denied, treated as inessential or as not worth noticing, that is, backgrounded, which allows their work to be appropriated and exploited, but also sets up a dependency which the Master has, of course, to deny.

*Incorporation or assimilation* defines the Other as deficient, inferior, lacking in reason, justifying the "the assimilating project of the coloniser... to remake the colonised and their space in the image of the coloniser's self-space, own culture or land, which is represented as the paradigm of reason, beauty and order" (Plumwood, 2002,p. 105). Assimilationist policies towards Indigenous and immigrant groups in Australia are illustrations, as are the pressures on women in public life to conform to masculine modalities and the remaking of Australian land into English gardens and European landscapes.

In similar fashion, *instrumentalism* denies the agency and value of the Other, downgrading their intrinsic worth and justifying their service to the Master – a servant, for example, becomes a ‘boy’ or a ‘house Mary’, a woman ‘a good wife and mother’, nature a ‘resource’. In terms of her analysis of the Othering of nature, Plumwood writes that “we can categorise as anthropocentric those patterns of belief and treatment of the human/nature relationship which exhibit this same kind of hegemonic structure”, that is, where nature and other species are constructed as Other “in much the same way that women are constructed as Other in relation to men, and those regarded as ‘coloured’ are constructed as Other in relation to those considered ‘without colour’ or ‘white’ (2000, p. 106). Accordingly, the hyperseparation of nature as a lower order and humans as outside nature – a kind of super species - produces a “strong ethical discontinuity ... at the human species boundary” (p. 107) which justifies ‘mastering’. Nature is also homogenised – “you’ve seen one redwood, you’ve seen them all” – and humans seek to improve on nature through, for example, genetic engineering, and to exploit nature indiscriminately for human ends. Nature is allowed no intrinsic ends of its own, no inherent value, no standing of its own.

Plumwood says her analysis of Mastering and Othering replaces

phallogocentrism as the chief concept of cultural analysis by the identity – at once more specific and more universal – of the master subject who has held and shaped most of the high ground of western culture ... it is a legacy, a form of culture, a form of rationality, a framework for selfhood and relationship which, through this appropriation of culture, has come to shape us all (1993, p. 190).

To escape the logic of mastery and colonisation, what is needed, Plumwood argues, “is a way of recognising the other as a different self without denying continuity” (1992, p. 54). Human identity is continuous with nature, part of our planetary ecology, and differences between species are occasions for respect, care, sympathy, responsibility (1993, p. 41) – an empathy with other species that can make us kin, as she argued in “Sealskin”, written about the slaughter of seals in Tasmania (1992). She found much to admire in Indigenous peoples’ embeddedness in nature (Plumwood, 2008), particularly Bill Neidjie’s dialogue “directed towards instructing the west, not only about his own people’s wisdom, but about what is radically maladaptive in theirs” (2000, p. 224):

The world around Bill Neidjie is never the unconsidered background for human life – the land is in the foreground, as ‘country’ – a giver of meaning, a communicative source to be read as a book. ... We are not set apart (Plumwood, 2000, p. 226).

She was, as many feminists, critical of Deep Ecology for the merging it advocates, the submersion of differences, including male/female differences (1996, p. 163).

Deep ecology locates the key problem area in human-nature relations in the separation of humans and nature, and it provides a solution for this in terms of the “identification” of self with nature. “Identification” is usually left deliberately vague, and corresponding accounts of self are various and shifting and not always compatible ... all are unsatisfactory from both a feminist perspective and from that of obtaining a satisfactory environmental philosophy ... (1996, pp. 163-4).

She was also critical of what she termed “the feminism of uncritical equality”, as well as of “the feminism of uncritical reversal” (1993, pp. 28-30). With Lilla Watson and Luce Irigaray, she saw that the feminist goal of equality does not get to the nub of the problem, which is domination itself: a feminism of reversal risks affirming characteristics which are the products of powerlessness. She had no wish to move “the angel in the house” of Victorian times to a twentieth century “angel in the ecosystem” (1993, p. 9). She did, however, allow that by virtue of their history women have a particular relationship with nature:

To the extent that women’s lives have been lived in ways which are less directly oppositional to nature than those of men, and have involved different and less oppositional practices, qualities of care and kinds of selfhood, an ecological feminist position could and should privilege some of the experiences and practices of women over those of men as a source of change without being committed to any form of naturalism (1993, p. 35).

She wanted both men and women to “challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises human identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature” (1993, p. 36).

Both men and women can stand with nature and work for breaking down the dualistic constructing of culture, but in doing so they will come from different historical places, and have different things to contribute to the process. Because of their placement in the sphere of nature and exclusion from an oppositional culture, what women have to contribute to this process may be especially significant. Their life-choices and historical positioning often compel a deeper discomfort with dualistic structures and foster a deeper questioning of a dualised culture (ibid).

Val Plumwood reasoned that Mastery ultimately fails (1993, pp. 195-6). In the first three stages of the Mastery project (justification, invasion/annexation, and appropriation), the Master progressively divides, devalues and denies the colonised Other. However, unless he can access an alternative rationality which encourages mutually sustaining relationships, the Master enters a fourth stage where he begins to devour his own means of survival. Denying dependency, “he misunderstands the conditions of his own existence and lacks sensitivity to limits”; he clings to illusions of his identity as being outside nature and is unable to grasp his own peril - in this sense, the Master and coloniser is “profoundly unintelligent”, short-sighted, ignorant of consequences and, thus, self-destructive (ibid). As with the fall of most empires, however, the Masters often plan to escape the worst of the immediate damage, and the rich can buy their way out of it. People who are under-resourced, poor, colonised and vulnerable bear the brunt of the destruction, and the environment sustains land degradation, loss of biodiversity and climate change.

Val Plumwood had a lot to say about place, about how people can or can't belong to place, about forced mobility and forced loss of place, about the illusions of self-sufficiency, about eco-justice, and about a (materialist) spirituality of place (2002a). She thought that Western peoples now have only one of three place modalities available to them, what she called “place-sensitive” (2000, p. 233). (“Place-centred” was still available to some Indigenous societies, and “place-bound” characterised feudal societies.) The women who participated in this research could well be described as ‘place-sensitive’ (see Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7).

Val Plumwood would not perhaps have wanted to be known as an ‘ecofeminist’, but she and Australian women such as Freya Mathews, Deborah Bird Rose, Kate Rigby and others (for example, in the online *Ecological Humanities* journal – now, sadly, discontinued) have

worked within a broad ecofeminist framework to reveal how the ways of nature, the ways of Indigenous peoples and the ways of women have been disregarded and often exploited. They have called for respect for difference and diversity, stood against the homogenising forces of globalisation and, in their lives and in their writings, grounded themselves in place. While Karen Warren has argued (2000, p. 211) that “rearranging one’s thinking is an important part of the process [but ...] not enough”, and that is true, it is also true that Australian ‘ecofeminist’ thinkers and writers have worked from a grounded locality base: they have been farmers, teachers, gardeners, conservationists, and activists, as well as researchers and writers, and their writings are replete with relationships, between humans, and between humans and nature. Val Plumwood’s particular contribution, in my view, was to insist that we need to work with both difference and continuity in order to subvert patriarchy and its colonising agendas and to care for the environment. She hoped that inspiration for change would come from cultures cast aside as outside reason and dualism (Indigenous stories, and women’s stories of care) to create new and less destructive ways to live, stories with “happy endings” (1993, p. 196).

### **Tamborine Mountain literature**

There is a small collection of local Tamborine Mountain literature that has informed this research, primarily, *The Turning Years* by Eve Curtis (1988, 2012), but also natural history literature such as *The Natural History of Tamborine Mountain* by Joy Guyatt (1988, 1997), *Rainforest Journal* by Raymond Curtis (2003), and *Wildlife in a Wild Garden* by Glynn Aagaard (2000). There are also relevant articles, as yet uncollected, such as Hilda Geissmann’s articles and photographs published in *The Queenslander*. There are poems by Judith Wright McKinney written about the Mountain, as well as a biography (Veronica Brady, 1998) and collections of her letters (Patricia Clarke and Meredith McKinney, 2004, 2006; Bryony Cosgrove, 2007). In a local history genre, there are local publications (many self-published) such as that by Louise Piper (2005), and a history of the Zamia theatre by Lyn Beattie-Howard, Lyn, Janis Bailey and Warwick Bailey (2009). These publications have, in their various ways, helped shape the Mountain’s identity in the minds of local residents, and are held in collections at the local library and the Tamborine Mountain Historical Society.

Joy Guyatt’s natural history of the Mountain has been thoroughly updated as *Tamborine Mountain Flora and Fauna* by Mike Russell and others (2013). The book covers the flora and fauna surveys undertaken over time, the ten plant communities on the Mountain (and

where to find them), and extensive lists of plants, weeds, birds and other animals. The book acknowledges the long history of plant surveys on the Mountain: “It is probable that Tamborine Mountain is one of the most intensively surveyed areas for biodiversity of this size in Australia” (p. 8). I will track some of this history in Chapter 4, through the lives of three Mountain women.

### **Conclusion: relevance of the literature**

Luce Irigaray, Mary Graham and Lilla Watson, Val Plumwood: these women ask a lot, don't they? Living towards what could be in the empty brackets, connected by life-long custodianship to the well-being of one's country, confronting the destructive Master narratives in all their forms, within and without ... these are not easy asks, especially in the rough and tumble of locality practice, with all its and our imperfections. It is fair to say that most of us, most of the time, won't measure up.

The research literature is not, however, intended to be prescriptive, or a measuring stick with which to beat oneself or others about the head. My intention in this chapter has been to open up a space where researcher and readers can 'dialogue' with other thinkers and writers, both similar and different, in order to discern the wider and deeper dimensions of the research topic.

I began this chapter with the observation that my research began in the literature, and subsequently took early shape in hands-on practice. Then, recognising the limitations of developmental locality practice in the areas of feminism and the environment, I set out to understand the interconnections between women, the environment and locality work, both in the literature and in the study reported in the following chapters. I have surveyed recent Western locality practice, the contributions of ecofeminist theory, feminist theory (in the work of Luce Irigaray), Indigenous Australian wisdom about care for country (Lilla Watson and Mary Graham), and critical ecological feminism (Val Plumwood), as well as, in brief, literature on men and the environment, and the small collection of writings about women and the environment in the research location, Tamborine Mountain.

I also began this chapter with Wang Che's advice that, “You should pick out the ideas, to accord with the heart”, and his assurance that, “if you are completely sincere, the light of mind will naturally overflow, the spirit of knowledge will leap, all will be penetrated, all will

be understood” (Thomas Cleary, 1991). To reach Wang Che’s goal, with or without promise of the gold pill of enlightenment, the next step is to test theory and analysis in a small indicative study of women’s environmental locality practice - and, to that end, craft an appropriate methodology. That is the content of the next chapter.

# Chapter 3:

## Research Methodology and Methods



*Plate 7: Pittosporum revolutum.*

### **Choice of methodology**

A helpful insight of developmental practice at local level is that the ideal-real is not a polarity but a continuum (or perhaps a spiral). Locality workers start with the possible and actual and move along a continuum towards the desirable, as far and as fast and as well as they can. This is no less so with locality based research. So when it came to shaping a methodology to research women's care for the environment on Tamborine Mountain, I was acutely aware of immediate realities (real) and future desirables (ideal).

Immediate realities included my status as resident in the research location, an 'inside researcher' (Joan Acker, 2000), and a resident with a pre-existing community profile. Personal realities included the intellectual isolation of being an external student at some distance from campus, and a 'mature age' student which is, in itself, a complex reality, bringing with it prior work experiences and, as in my case, prior publications and degrees. All these realities pressed hard when I determined to approach the PhD research methodology with fresh eyes and fresh strategies.

As always, the ideal - future desirables - made quite a list: research outcomes that would contribute to local and academic knowledge bases; research processes that would engage local women and honour their environmental care/work; research that would strengthen emerging local projects to 'future proof' the Mountain as a sustainable place to live and survive global threats (such as climate change and resource depletion); and, methodologically, a research method that could inscribe the physical environment, the Mountain itself, as a presence in the research and as more than just a backdrop to human lives.

I could have chosen a quantitative research methodology. Through study of documents and statistics, and perhaps a community survey, I could have researched and reported such information as the sex ratio of men and women in local environmental groups and their attitudes to care for the environment and to women's participation, all matched for age, level of education, household income and so on. These methods would have put some distance between me and research respondents, not necessarily a bad thing given my 'insider' location.<sup>27</sup> Also, I could have shared these data with a range of local players as well

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<sup>27</sup> 'Insider' is a term sometimes used in locality work to refer to a person's local status and knowledge.

as interested colleagues.

### **Towards a qualitative research methodology**

Why, then, choose a qualitative methodology? There were a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted to ensure that the methodology I chose would yield the richest possible data to answer the research question(s) – “What are women’s practices and principles of care for the environment on Tamborine Mountain?” Since I wasn’t sure who was willing to participate in the research, and on what basis, I wanted to take the research step by reflective step (Joan Williams and M. Brinton Lykes, 2003) and, as far as possible, let the research methodology evolve to fit circumstances and opportunities, without pre- or proscription. Secondly, on the evidence of the literature (Ann Oakley, 1981; Marjorie Devault, 2004; Karen Dullea, 2006) I could expect that women would prefer talking about issues rather than ticking boxes, especially since, in my experience, gender issues are often well-camouflaged in Mountain conversations and need to be winkled out. Thirdly, as I sallied forth in research mode, I found few responses that a quantitative study would do justice to: a comments book at the first library display (Stage 1 research) and the evaluation questionnaires filled out at the “Belonging to Country” workshop (Stage 2 research) yielded comments that, while positive, were non-specific. Further, while some of the women who participated in the Indigenous seminar were keen to discuss their experience and integrate what they had learned into their practice, others wanted to debrief their experience – for example, to talk through a decision to retrace their family origins. By signalling to women participants at the workshop that there would be an opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview, I felt I was not only asking for their participation in the research but also taking responsibility to hear any issues they wanted to debrief. Lastly, the first couple of ‘test run’ face-to-face interviews yielded abundantly rich and complex data that I doubted would translate easily into, say, a questionnaire format.

It was on both practical and ethical grounds, then, that I chose a qualitative and exploratory research process. From a locality worker’s point of view, a research process with local people is intended to be inclusive, developmental and accountable: the methodology of choice is therefore often participatory research, that is, the choice of methodology is value-based. As Castleden, Garvin and Huu-ay-aht First Nation (2008) comment, community-based participatory research “is both a philosophy and a methodology that includes research participants as equal partners in problem definition, methodological development,

data collection analysis, and the communication of findings” (p. 1394). Corrinne Glesne (2011), in the introduction to her text on qualitative research, endorses a participatory approach in these terms:

I believe in the wisdom of local people ... I believe there are “organic” intellectuals everywhere, working to keep traditions alive and also to shape a changing future. I continue to be partial to inquiry approaches that involve research participants more fully in the work ... designing research that will be useful to the people involved (p. xv).

### **Participatory research and feminist participatory research**

Participatory research, a qualitative approach, is commonly held to have originated in the Majority World in the 1970s and 1980s, the prime example being that of O. Fals-Borda (1987) and the ‘conscientization’ work of Paulo Freire (1970) in Brazil. Its genesis in adult education was as a tool to critique the failed aid and development programs that had only extended the domination of colonising cultures at the expense of poor and un-free peoples. Alice McIntyre (2008) cites early work in India, Africa, Europe and North America in areas such as education, health, agriculture, and women and development; Patricia Maguire (1987) cites the work of adult educators in America, and Margaret Ledwith (2011) attributes the genesis of participatory research to the work of Paulo Freire. Certainly, the emancipatory values and aims of participatory research are integral to all dialogic, transformative education, in explicit contrast to traditional ‘jug-mug’ approaches (Mary Brydon-Miller et al, 2011). Reflecting these values, ‘participatory research’ is also known as ‘collaborative research’ and ‘community-based research’ or, with an action emphasis, ‘participatory action research’.

Sara Kindon, Rachel Pain and Mike Kesby (2007, p. 21) list some negative effects of participatory approaches: de-legitimisation of research methods that are *not* participatory; participants are constructed as *requiring* research and development; participants are expected to perform appropriately; researchers retain control while presenting themselves and their research as benign and beneficent; researchers are cast as experts in the participatory approach; local knowledge is romanticised; existing power hierarchies are reinforced; local knowledge is privileged because it came from participatory processes; participatory research appears to legitimise neoliberal institutions and their programmes (for example, The World Bank) that also use participatory approaches and/or techniques (see Mike Kesby, Sara

Kindon and Rachel Pain, 2007). It seems, however, that many of these side-effects, or cautions, would apply to many research methods, the difference being that participatory researchers strive to be conscious of and avoid the worst of them.

With its clearly articulated value base and probing analyses, participatory research sits well with feminist-oriented research, especially where feminist theory and analysis is *integral* to the research process, as in feminist participatory research – not an add-on or optional extra (Patricia Maguire, 1987). There is no ‘feminist research methodology’, as such: when Shulamit Reinharz (1992, p. 24) proposed ten themes of feminist research, her first was that “feminism is a perspective, not a research method” – that is, it is a lens and a hermeneutic, not a how-to manual or prescription. She went on to say that feminists use a multiplicity of research methods: guided by feminist theory, feminist research involves ongoing criticism of nonfeminist scholarship, aims to create social change and represent human diversity and, because it is often transdisciplinary, frequently includes the researcher as a person (in her own right) who develops relationships with the people she studies, with colleagues and with readers.

The choice of a qualitative feminist participatory research methodology does not mean that the research process will necessarily be easier, faster, or ‘purer’ than others - in fact, often quite the opposite. From the outset, I was aware that neither a ‘pure’ feminist participatory research process nor action outcomes (which often characterise participatory research and distinguish it from other research modes) might be possible. With “immediate realities/future desirables” in mind, I would have to modify my intentions to fit presenting circumstances. For example, women participants would come from disparate networks, they had (to my knowledge) indicated no need to make common cause or take collective action – in fact, they were already and separately committed to environmental action - they did not perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage, in need, or treated unfairly; and none had identified herself (to me, at least) as a feminist. Nevertheless, a qualitative, feminist participatory research methodology was, in my judgement, the methodology that would best fit my research purposes. Within this framework, I could employ flexible and multi-sensory research methods, in keeping with the inclusive aims of the research. I could also include visual research data which, following the work of Claudia Baldwin and Lisa Chandler in Noosa (2010), I knew could both engage women in hands-on research and illuminate the findings. Taken together, this mix of research methods could enrich the data,

triangulate the data (Shulamit Reinharz 1992), and enhance local women's experiences of the research.

In 1987, Patricia Maguire published *Doing Participatory Research: a feminist approach*, based on her PhD research with women escaping domestic violence in New Mexico in the early 1980s. While there have been articles and papers on feminist participatory research to follow, Maguire's book is still, in my view, the most detailed and reflexive account. (Patricia Maguire also co-edited the very useful 2004 collection of case studies, *Travelling companions: Feminism, teaching and action research*, with Mary Brydon-Miller and Alice McIntyre.) She situated participatory research as a 'qualitative, alternative research paradigm', in contrast to a 'dominant paradigm view of society' which she described as quantitative, objective and 'scientific'. In the alternative paradigm, she saw the focus of critical inquiry to be on researchers "understanding how human interaction produces rules governing social life, rather than on discovering universal laws" (p. 16). She wrote that "critical inquiry is structured to uncover the systems of social relationships and the contradictions which underlie social tensions and conflicts. Through self-reflection, analysis of social systems, and action, people come to understand and try to change supposed 'natural' constraints" (ibid), such as the dictates of patriarchy.

Patricia Maguire contrasted 'dominant' and 'alternative' research paradigms in terms of: objectivity vs. subjectivity; researcher distance vs. closeness to subject; generalisations or universals vs. uniqueness; quantitative vs. qualitative; social control vs. local self-determination; and impartial advice vs. solidarity and action (pp. 20-21). She went on to name nine elements researchers needed to include or consider in a framework of feminist participatory research: exposure of androcentric aspects in both dominant and participatory research; expanding research discussions to include a focus on gender, race, culture, and class; an inclusive feminism that celebrates diversity; attention to issues of gender in all phases of research; explicit attention to how both men and women, as a group, benefit from the research; attention to gendered language; attention to gender in research evaluation; attention to gender in reviews of participatory research as social transformation (pp. 128-133). Patricia Maguire was one of the first to bring feminist theory to participatory research. Critical of male dominance in the field, she later (2006) questioned whether it was even possible to undertake participatory research *without* a feminist analysis.

Another feminist participatory researcher, Alice McIntyre (2008), has suggested that feminism has made a key contribution to participatory research by “providing perspectives that have evolved out of a refusal to accept theory, research and ethical perspectives that ignore, devalue and erase women’s lives, experiences and contributions to social research” (2008, p. 3). She believes that feminist participatory researchers are “making the invisible visible, bringing the margin to the centre, rendering the trivial important, and [putting] the spotlight on women as competent actors in the life of the everyday” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 248, quoted in McIntyre, 2008, pp. 3-4). Underlying the varying contexts, research practices and ideologies of participatory research, Alice McIntyre proposed four basic, shared tenets: (a) a collective commitment to investigate an issue or problem, (b) a desire to engage in self- and collective reflection to gain clarity about the issue under investigation, (c) a joint decision to engage in individual and/or collective action that leads to a useful solution that benefits the people involved, and (d) the building of alliances between researchers and participants in the planning, implementation and dissemination of the research process (2008, p. 1).

For all that, feminist/participatory research does not, no more than any other, guarantee ‘successful’ research outcomes (Bev Gatenby and Maria Humphries, 2000). As one researcher observed, summing up the outcomes of his research process, ‘No revolution resulted!’ (quoted in Maguire, p. 52). As with most developmental work, feminist participatory research can take longer and make more demands on researchers and participants than other research modes. Patricia Maguire cites as common difficulties the mixed role of researcher/educator - where the researcher is committed to transfer skills and analysis to participants - and the need for institutional and financial support. Similarly, while the research topic ideally arises from local people or groups, Maguire writes that, realistically, “participatory research projects are more likely to be initiated by outside researchers” (p. 53) and that, even when a project does come from within a local group, it may be at the expense of the least vocal and most marginalised members.

Participatory research projects commonly result in the formation of a community-based organisation - a structure to support ongoing collective effort – but, as Maguire says, a community organisation can be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, “[p]eople require both the will and the resources to participate and act collectively” (p. 53), often in short supply in a community, especially amongst the most marginalised people (Jim Ife, 2012), and on

the other hand, gaining funding takes time and planning, and accepting funding brings conditions and constraints. The most serious limitation, Maguire concludes, is the time required to do it properly, moving at the pace of the participants rather than at the pace set by institutions or funding timelines. Time, however, is a factor that an insider researcher has on her side, in that much of the preparatory listening and observing has already taken place in the course of everyday living in the research location. This can be an advantage, provided the researcher remembers to ‘make the familiar strange’ (Darrin Hodgetts, Kerry Chamberlain and Alan Ridley, 2007, p. 272), and not fail to see what may be obvious to an outside researcher. Overall, Patricia Maguire writes,

... participatory research imposes a heavy agenda on both researcher and participants. ... conducting the ‘ideal’ participatory research project may be overwhelming, if not nearly paralysing ... it may not even turn out to be the most appropriate way to create ... knowledge (p. 57).

Maguire’s honest assessment of potential difficulties reminds researchers to shape their research methodology and research methods to the situation and the research question, rather than impose them, and to keep in mind the overriding aim of feminist participatory research – women’s liberation.

### **Research stages and sequence - Stages 1-3**

Patti Lather (1990, quoted in Reinharz 1992, p. 185) has suggested that feminist research is most emancipatory when it includes: interviews where researchers self-disclose; multiple, sequential interviews; group interviews; negotiation of interpretations; and dealing with false consciousness without being dismissive. To her list I would add research methods, such as a photography project (see below), that can include and engage women with varying abilities - for example, women who communicate more readily through visual rather than verbal modes of expression. However, Lather’s remarks describe the intent, if not every feature, of the three research stages in this study, stages that were both multi-method (Reinharz, 1992, pp. 213ff) and multi-sensory, offering women varied opportunities to explore ‘caring for place/environment’ – alone and with others, through words and through images, and with time for reflection during and between research stages.

As the research progressed through three stages, each stage yielded data which shaped the following stage and/or enhanced understanding of preceding stage(s). While data gathering was therefore an exploratory and cumulative process, the three stages held together three threads and their associated analyses – women, locality, and environment– in order to discern, unravel and weave together their possible interconnections. Race analysis was a fourth thread, but not a primary focus of this research.

### **Local history research (Stage 1).**

With the assistance of the librarians at Tamborine Mountain library, and in consultation with women who are the daughters or close relatives of women (now deceased) on Tamborine Mountain who worked in the environment and had a strong sense of place, I put together a display of their work to mark International Women’s Day on 8 March 2011 (Appendices 2 and 3). Drawing on published writings and memorabilia that the participants contributed, I wrote texts to accompany the display, and published some of the background material in the local papers. Preparations for Stage 1 occurred through February and March 2011, and the materials were on display in the community library for four weeks. The aim of this Stage was to ground the research in its location and to signal and spark interest in the research. The findings from Stage 1 are reported in Chapter 4.

### **Interviews (Stage 2).**

Stage 2 of the research had two parts, A and B.

In Part (A), I interviewed 11 women who had attended an Indigenous workshop – “Belonging to Country” - to seek their views on belonging to and caring for country/place (Appendix 5). These interviews occurred during November 2011.

The aim of follow-up interviews a month after the workshop was to see how women would view their care for place/environment in light of what they had learned about Indigenous care for country. The workshop in October 2011 was taught by two Indigenous women, Lilla Watson (a Burringubba elder) and Mary Graham (a Kombumerri elder), and was the third of its kind on the Mountain. In these one-day workshops, Mary and Lilla explain Indigenous concepts of country and belonging, with reference to Aboriginal philosophy and issues such as gender differences and climate change (see Appendix 7 for

Workshop Program and Appendix 8 for Interview Questions). I present the findings from these interviews in Chapter 5.

In Part (B), I interviewed seven participants who belong to Mountain organisations (and one who works in a state government department). The aim was to explore how these women view their work alongside others on the Mountain and their commitment to the work. These interviews occurred between April and May 2012. On their request, I provided interview questions in advance of meeting with them (see Appendix 13). I present the findings from these interviews in Chapter 6.

Given a choice of locations, the majority of respondents preferred to be interviewed at my home, except for two Brisbane-based women whom I interviewed at places of their choice in Brisbane, and one woman who chose a telephone interview. The interviews were semi-structured, with questions chosen to stimulate and explore participants' views, and ranged in length from one hour to almost two hours. Interviews were recorded and later professionally transcribed, except in two cases in the first set of interviews: in one case, a telephone interview, I took detailed notes and subsequently emailed the transcript to the woman for her to verify accuracy, which she did, with the addition of a couple of extra sentences. In the second case, where the machine failed to record, I had fortunately taken handwritten notes, so I was able to write up the interview from the notes I had taken, and I sent an interview summary to the woman interviewee, who verified its accuracy. I did not share the interview transcripts with participants, nor did I share their transcripts with other participants. However, I sometimes offered non-identifiable, contrasting comments from previous interviews to stimulate discussion.

For both sets of interviews, the women received Information Sheets prior to the interviews and signed Consent Forms at the time of the interview (see Appendices 6 & 9, and 11 & 12.) The interviews, ranging from one to two hours, were recorded and transcribed. To my knowledge, no participant was adversely affected by the interview process; in fact, most commented positively on their experience.

### **Visual research (Stage 3 – photovoice).**

For the photovoice project, I invited women (from Stage 2) to take photos and write accompanying texts to document their care for place in words and images (Appendices 14

and 15). Seven women agreed to participate. The aim of the photovoice project was to provide an opportunity for the women to demonstrate their sense of place and 'care for environment' through the photographs they took. Following a group discussion of their work, they agreed to share their work with the community in a display at the local library, for which we wrote brief accompanying texts. I employed an assistant to help with recording and transcribing, and with organisation and presentation of the display.

We (the assistant and I) began the project with a meeting to which I invited both the women participants and a local woman photographer (also a member of Landcare) who gave a short presentation, suggesting some nature photography techniques and advising us on safety and ethical issues. The instructions at the end of this 'tutorial', as one woman called it, were for the women to go forth and take photos to illustrate their place and how they cared for it, to choose two or three to send to us (by email, where possible) in time for us to assemble them for a second meeting in a month's time. We offered to provide the women with disposable cameras, but they all chose to use their own digital cameras, which meant they could both email their photos to us and also stay in touch if they had any queries or problems between meetings. We undertook to provide each woman with enlarged copies of her own photos in the display, as well as a full set of all the project photos.

In preparation for the second meeting, we printed and mounted seven sets of photos on cardboard sheets, one sheet for each woman, and put them up on the walls. Six of the seven women attended the meeting to speak to their photographs - the reasons they took particular photos and the meanings attached to them - and to take part in the group discussion about their experiences of the project. This meeting, lasting about an hour and a half, was recorded and later transcribed. The women agreed to write brief texts to accompany their photos, and also agreed to display them at the local library. (In the event, most of the women asked me to prepare a text from their presentation at the group meeting which they then edited to their satisfaction.) When the texts were completed, we re-mounted the photos with the texts and hung them on foam board in the library, marking the occasion with an 'opening' which most of the women were able to attend. We did not identify who took which photographs, but we did (with permission) acknowledge by name all the women and those who had assisted on a separate panel which described the purpose of the project.

The photographs and texts, as mounted for the library display, will be returned to the women participants after displays at other locations (to which the women have readily agreed). I have retained copies to document research outcomes. Because I hope that one of the contributions of this research will be to highlight how useful visual research methods can be for work with women in their local environment, I give an extended account of the photovoice method in the next section.

## **Research Methods**

### **Local history research (Stage 1).**

Scoping or ‘eyeballing’ is an essential task for a locality worker (see, for example, Janet Fink, 2012). A local history project can ‘make the familiar strange’ for local people, reminding them of where they are now in the evolving time/space story of where they live. One could say that, just as there is no view from nowhere, there is no local story without local history - without precedents and precursors, however unheralded (Val Plumwood, 2002a, 2005; Freya Mathews, 2003; Mary Graham, 2013).

More than thirty years ago, in an early and influential community work text, Paul Henderson and David N. Thomas (1983, pp. 52-53) suggested that, in order to ‘get to know the community’, there were 6 areas in which workers needed to gather data: history, environment, residents, organisations, communications, power and leadership. Under ‘environment’, in this very English and urban-oriented text, the only items of the natural environment they mentioned that might be of interest to workers were ‘provision of public open space’ and ‘land usage’. The language throughout was gender-neutral, there was no index entry for ‘nature’ or ‘the environment’, and there were a bare two entries under ‘women’. - situation normal in 1980, and often, as noted in the previous chapter, still the case today. More recently, Yoland Wadsworth (1997, p. 59), citing Henderson and Thomas as still ‘one of the best references’ in community studies, updated the two relevant categories to read ‘history and change that has taken place over time’ and ‘physical environment’, and her text refers explicitly to women on a number of occasions. Both Wadsworth and Henderson and Thomas assume an outside researcher who needs to familiarise herself with an unfamiliar locale.

By contrast, I began this research with insider knowledge, including knowledge of the environmental work, past and present, of Mountain women. It was therefore relatively

straightforward to assemble local literature, stories, and photos for a display in the local library to mark International Women’s Day in March 2011. Also, none of the women I chose to profile was alive, which solved the problem of who amongst the living should be showcased, and I knew where to go for information I didn’t already have, for example, to the local historical society. However, while helpful and interested, the local history buffs had little to offer this research - most of their holdings focus on tools, farm equipment, and buildings, reflecting in the main men’s stories of the Mountain. The Queensland State Library provided copies of journal articles and photos that Hilda Geissman/Curtis had published in Queensland magazines in the early 1900s. With renewed publishing interest in Judith Wright McKinney, I was able to access information about her 30 years on the Mountain through books and articles and through correspondence with her biographer and with her daughter. The daughters of two women whose environmental work I displayed were eager to provide and write up materials, and the Botanical Art group, a long-standing collective on the Mountain, was keen to contribute samples of their work. The display was advertised by means of articles in the local papers and opened by Eve Curtis, the long-time resident who has written the only detailed history of the Mountain. I present the materials and outcomes of Stage 1 in Chapter 4.

### **Interviews (Stage 2).**

As noted above, in the second stage of the research I conducted two sets of interviews with a total of 18 local women.



*Plate 8: International Women’s Day Display.*



*Plate 9: International Women's Day Display.*

The first set of interviews was with 11 women who had attended the 2011 “Belonging to Country” workshop. The workshop itself was not formally part of this research, but rather provided an occasion for follow-up interviews, which were, of course, very much part of the research process. The elders, Mary Graham and Lilla Watson, had offered two previous seminars on Tamborine Mountain (which I had helped organise), and we had agreed that, following the third workshop, I would share the findings of the research interviews with them as part of their ongoing evaluation of workshop processes and outcomes. The findings from the interviews, detailed here in Chapter 5, were passed to my Indigenous colleagues in de-identified and summary form.<sup>28</sup>

Before considering the interview as a research method, I want first to look briefly at the benefits of cross-cultural work – and, to give us some distance, through the eyes of a scholar of Eastern philosophies and religions. In 2000, J. J. Clarke, writing of Chinese Daoism’s potential contribution to the West, set his work in a wider context, as follows:

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<sup>28</sup> While the workshop was open to both men and women (four men and 16 women attended) and while Mary and Lilla spoke at some length about ‘women’s business’, they did not and do not identify as feminists. In terms of this research and interview findings, the leap from ‘women’s business’ to ‘feminism’ is one for White women alone to make.

The task that we now face as a global civilization is to create a framework of ideas and values, not in order to arrive at universal consensus or a new global narrative, but in order to facilitate the harmonious co-existence of different beliefs and to encourage the flourishing of divergent ways of thinking and being (2000, p. 210).

In Clarke's view, East and West have been to each other the ultimate Other, where the East has hovered as an "epistemological threat" on the borders of Western consciousness for centuries (p. 176). (We hear in this an echo of Luce Irigaray's and Val Plumwood's theorising of 'Othering'.)

Contrasting world-views, Clarke writes, represent "an inevitable challenge to the sturdy confidence in the exclusive veracity of one's own indigenous belief systems": however, at best, cross-cultural engagement can go beyond a 'fusion of horizons ... a complete merger or synthesis ... a simple act of appropriation ... [or] an incommensurable difference' (p. 176). It is, rather,

an agonistic encounter ... in which we try to enter into and thrive on differences rather than seek to obliterate them, a potentially subversive engagement in which we are compelled to confront the assumptions, limitations and fractures in our own cultural traditions ... *experiencing ourselves as other* ... (my emphasis, pp. 11-12).

Differences can be, in other words, a possible 'bridge between', of benefit to both. That has not, tragically, been the story of the last two centuries in Australia where only a very few European Australians have faced down the "epistemological threat", experienced themselves as Other, or found much to appreciate and respect in Indigenous culture. To paraphrase Clarke, Indigenous culture does not have to be seen as a "utopian, backward-looking irrelevance, but as a challenge to ingrained habit and unthinking conformity, provoking us into rethinking our lives in the present": that is, seeing ourselves as 'Other', seeing alternatives, seeing possibilities in other ways of thinking, feeling and doing (p. 206). For many participants, those have been outcomes of the "Belonging to Country" workshops, and it was their recent experience of 'difference' that I drew on to prompt the 11 women research participants to re-examine their connections to land and place.

“Interviewing is a human interaction with all of its attendant uncertainties”, writes Corrine Glesne (1999, p. 67) “The opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry” (p. 69). She lists desirable interviewer attributes as being: anticipatory, alert to establish rapport, naïve (in the sense of setting aside one’s prior assumptions), analytic, nondirective and therapeutic, aware of status differences, and patiently probing (1999, pp. 82-88). She categorises possible interview questions as tapping experiences and behaviours, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory responses, and background/demographic information - but not, apparently, social/global analysis, a feature of some of the interviews in this research. She also comments that “research talk differs from other talk because it is driven by research purposes. The distinguishing mark of a good interview is not good conversation but good data” (1999, p. 84). Glesne’s attributes, categories and comments are useful guides, and she conveys some of the enjoyment in research interviews, as well as techniques and dos and don’ts.

Complications arise, however, when the researcher is, as here, interviewing friends or neighbours in a shared location about shared concerns and common activities. In the post “Belonging to Country” workshop interviews, there was also the complication that I was known to be an associate of the presenters, leading interviewees to be perhaps less frank than they might otherwise have been about their workshop experiences. In the interviews with women members of local organisations, my lack of membership or inactive membership of those groups may have been an issue for interviewees. If the interviewer who is known to her interviewees cannot be as ‘naïve’ as Glesne proposes, she is more likely to have pre-existing rapport (if not, interviewees may well have refused to participate).

Interviewing is a well-established part of feminist research. In Ann Oakley’s 1981 benchmark article, she argued that women’s interviews include:

the social/personal characteristics of those doing the interviewing; interviewees’ feelings about being interviewed and about the interview; interviewers’ feelings about interviewees; and quality of interviewer-interviewee interaction; hospitality offered by interviewees to interviewers; attempts by interviewees to use interviewers as sources of information; and the extension of interviewer-interviewee encounters into more broadly-based social relationships (p. 38).

She went on to say that

[t]he entire paradigmatic representation of 'proper' interviews in the methodology textbooks owes a great deal more to a masculine social and sociological vantage point than to a feminine one. For example, the paradigm of the 'proper' interview appeals to such values as objectivity, detachment, hierarchy and 'science' as an important cultural activity which takes priority over people's more individualised concerns. Thus the errors of poor interviewing comprise subjectivity, involvement, the "fiction" of equality and an undue concern with the ways in which people are not statistically comparable. This polarity of 'proper' and 'improper' interviewing is an almost classical representation of the widespread gender stereotyping (ibid).

She argued that the "objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives" (p. 58).

In the interviews for this research I, the interviewer, was known to all interviewees, in some cases as a close friend already 'admitted into their lives'. As Nonie Harris (2002) has observed:

The story of when researcher and respondent are friends is complex, impacting on the interview process in positive and negative ways. Issues arising from this circumstance are sometimes only relevant to the researcher and at other times only to the respondent, and often relevant to both ... (p. 50).

She realised in the course of her research that "[t]he friendship had life before and after the research event. ... Recognition of this circumstance meant I could not help but consider, while undertaking the research, the possible impact of the research on my valued friendships" (ibid.). This led her to wonder, "[d]uring the research process, with the preservation of the friendship in mind, did I ask the 'hard' questions or continually steer the interview into 'safe' areas?" (pp. 50 -51).

It was a question that also pre-occupied me during the research interviews. Reading over transcripts, I would wonder whether I might have challenged the interviewee, probed harder, if she had not been a friend, neighbour or local. In a relatively small locality like

Tamborine Mountain, locals are likely to meet and greet a couple of times a week, at the shops, post office, library, and so on, and the boundary between personal (or private) and public (or professional) can become blurry. During the research interviews, I found I needed to strike a balance between conversations that were ‘neighbouring’ (Roberta Feldman et al, 1998, p. 263) and the good data ‘conversations’ that Corinne Glesne advised (see also Ruthellen Josselson, 2013).

Marjorie Devault (2004) has suggested – helpfully, in my view – that “women interviewing women bring to their interaction a tradition of ‘woman talk’”; they help each other develop ideas, and are typically better prepared than men to use the interview as a ‘search procedure’ - they cooperate “in the project of constructing meanings together” (p. 233). She cites the ubiquitous, ‘you know’, which also featured in my research interviews:

I became aware that my transcripts were filled with notations of women saying to me, "you know" ... I see that these words often occur in places where they are consequential for the joint production of our talk in the interviews. In many instances, "you know" seems to mean something like, "OK, this next bit is going to be a little tricky. I can't say it quite right, but help me out a little; meet me halfway and you'll understand what I mean ..." [it] appears to signal a request for understanding (pp. 235-236).

In similar vein, Douglas Ezzy (2010) has argued that interviewing is an embodied emotional performance where emotions – and, I would add, pauses and apparent contradictions and tangents - are research content rather than distractions in the interview process.

### **Visual research (Stage 3 – photovoice).**

Photovoice is a relatively new research method and warrants an extended account of its origins, applications, and outcomes, as well as associated research issues.

The use of the arts, including the visual arts, is commonplace in locality work (Rod Purcell, 2009). Community development and community arts workers have helped build a sense of shared locality by organising community arts events. These events have sometimes included photography, but it has usually proved too expensive a choice for cash-strapped workers in localities that are already under-resourced and have pressing social and economic needs to address.

In recent years, researchers have put cameras in the hands of research participants and promoted photovoice projects, in conjunction with other research tools such as interviews, group discussions, and surveys, as a way to give local people another 'voice' and, in particular, to communicate their needs and concerns to policy and decision makers. These researchers have often had institutional, state or other resources to make such projects possible, although funding, of course, brings both advantages and constraints.

Photography is in itself a tricky proposition. Photos frame and freeze an image in the eye of the photographer (and, photovoice researchers hope, in the minds of viewers). Photos can elicit more visceral responses than words – think, the Franklin River, the Vietnamese girl fleeing the fire bombs, the anguished woman in dustbowl America, captured Aboriginal warriors in neck and ankle shackles, the blue and green Earth jewel in space. A photograph is, in that sense, sleight of hand – an evocation, rather than a comprehensive representation of an object or situation, where nuances and contradictions are 'edited out' by the viewfinder or perhaps later photoshopped to an assumed perfection. In terms of hoped-for results, evocative photo images are also a risky strategy because it isn't always possible to predict viewers' responses: a photograph of a rainforest may represent, variously, sacred ground, an ecosystem to map, a timber resource to exploit, an eco-tourism opportunity, traditional country for an Indigenous family group, a habitat for one or more endangered species to save from extinction, and much else besides. To move beyond evocation, photovoice needs words and stories, dialogues and discussions to explain or expand the data that the photos provide (Keith Kenny, 2009).

As with any research tool, photovoice can become a fad, a mask for purely bureaucratic agendas, or a kind of fly in/fly out research exercise which may well bring local issues to the attention of policy makers in a new and graphic way but, ultimately, leave people in the lurch, without the skills or resources to hang in for the long haul to realise desired changes. We must be cautious, therefore, about the merits of photovoice as a research method or an instrument of change. For one thing, it commonly operates within an existing system, addressing a specific failing in that system - for example, the provision of health or other information to a hard-to-access community group. For another, it doesn't appear to have the reach or the will to tackle the system itself and effect radical, transformative or lasting change. (In this research, the photovoice project could be said to have operated within, but not challenged, the boundaries of patriarchy.) It has, however, proved itself to be a very

useful way to form a baseline understanding of issues that are of concern to women and to research that lends itself to visual as well as to verbal presentation.

### **Origins of photovoice.**

In her 2003 article, Alice McIntyre situates photovoice firmly within feminist participatory action research, and writes that it is

a methodology that (1) enables people to record aspects of their daily lives from their own perspectives, (2) provides opportunities for people to attend to aspects of their lives and communities that they take great pride in, or have greatest concerns about, and (3) uses photography to catalogue social issues in the hope of influencing social policy (2003, p. 48).

McIntyre's account of photovoice echoes the stated aims of the 'photo novella' that Caroline Wang, Mary Ann Burris and Xiang Yue Ping (1996) first proposed in their health research with Chinese village women: "(1) to empower rural women to record and reflect their lives ... (2) to increase their collective knowledge ... and (3) to inform policy makers and the broader society about health and community issues that are of greatest concern and pride" (Wang, Burris and Yue Ping, 1996). In 2004, Wang et al. described what was now called photovoice as "a participatory-action research methodology based on the understanding that people are experts on their own lives" (Wang et al., 2004, p. 911). Caroline C. Wang is among the most well-known of photovoice researchers, and remains, in my view, one of the most honest about the limitations of the method and one of the most scrupulous about ethical practice (2001).

### **Participants and settings.**

While photography has long been a feature of social research, anthropology in particular (in the form of photo-elicitation), the origins of photovoice as a research tool are said to stem from the empowerment education of Paulo Freire, the valuing of the everyday (the material reality) in feminist theory (Dorothy Smith, 1990, 1999; Karen Barad, 2003), and the opportunities that documentary photography offers for participants to graphically highlight their personal and social concerns (Caroline Wang, Mary Ann Burris and Xiang Yue Ping, 1996). Accordingly, researchers have used the photovoice method with a wide variety of participants in varied settings. In America, for example, Tamara Baker and Caroline Wang (2006) have worked with older adults suffering chronic pain, Leila Kramer, Pamela

Schwartz, Allen Cheadle, J. Elaine Borton, Merrick Wright, Charlie Chase and Corina Lindley (2009) with health promotion activities, and Caroline Wang, Jennifer L. Cash and Lisa S. Powers (2000) with homeless people in Michigan. In Canada, Janet Newbury and Marie L. Hoskins (2010) used a modified form of photovoice in their work with adolescent girls with drug addictions, Heather Castleden, Theresa Garvin and HUU-ay-aht First Nation (2008) with Indigenous peoples, Lynne R. Duffy (2010) with lone mothers, Brigette Krieg and Lana Roberts (2001) with marginalised people in Saskatchewan, and Cheryl Sutherland and Yang Cheng (2009) with immigrant women in Ontario. Close to home, Lisa Chandler and Claudia Baldwin (2010) employed photovoice, along with survey and interviews, to canvas attitudes to climate change during a festival in Noosa Shire, and in Melbourne Matt Dixon and Morgan Hadjialexiou (2005) worked with homeless youth on health issues. (Note how many of the above authors are women.)

Kenneth C. Hergenrather, Scott D. Rhodes and Gerta Bardhoshi, in their 2009 review of photovoice, also list as participants people living with HIV AIDS, Latino adolescents with health issues, people with intellectual disabilities, and African-American breast cancer survivors. (The community health field seems to have taken up the photovoice method with special enthusiasm.) Photovoice sites on the web mention, in addition, child workers and street children, travellers, young people in post-tsunami circumstances, orphans, sex workers, prisoners and their families, young offenders, refugees, survivors of human trafficking and people with mental health issues.

### **Steps and stages in the photovoice process.**

The photovoice researcher follows what has now become a predictable and well-trodden path (Hergenrather et al., 2009, p. 695):

- ❖ identification of a community issue (either by the locals themselves, by researchers, or by policy and decision makers (and funders));
- ❖ recruitment of participants and training in camera use and techniques;
- ❖ photography assignment;
- ❖ individual interviews (before, during and/or after the photography activity);
- ❖ selection of photos (either by researchers alone or in tandem with participants);
- ❖ group discussions of the photos (all or a selection);
- ❖ data analysis;

- ❖ exhibition or presentation to a broader group – community, policy makers. conferences etc.
- and, Hergenrather et al. add,
- ❖ action plans (ibid.).

Within this framework, there are, of course, variations (Hergenrather et al., 2009).

The numbers of participants may vary from under ten to over 100; all or only a few may stay with the process which may take a matter of weeks or a couple of years (see, for example, Lynne R. Duffy, 2010, and Alice McIntyre, 2003); the researchers may be from within or outside the community; policy makers may be included in the process from the beginning or brought in later; some participants may be paid, especially when the research requires a substantial time commitment; some participants retain the cameras or are thanked and gifted in other ways; some researchers use all the photos, which can amount to thousands (Heather Castleden et al., 2008), and some ask participants to select the ones they prefer (Elizabeth D. Carlson, Joan Engebretson and Robert M. Chamberlain, 2006).

Hergenrather et al. (2009) surveyed 189 articles on photovoice method, out of which they chose 31 for detailed analysis, with an emphasis on health and disability studies. They found that, in the majority of cases, community issues were predetermined by the researchers, and just under half were funded - for example, by foundations, universities, health centres and councils. The numbers of participants ranged from four to 122 (mean number 20.9), and nearly half had 11 or fewer participants. All studies reported gaining informed consent and providing photovoice training.

### **Outcomes.**

The outcomes that Kenneth C. Hergenrather et al. (2009) noted were: identifying community concerns; influencing advocates and policymakers; action plans; and presentation of results (including online). On the basis of their study, their recommendations to future photovoice researchers were that they “should clearly present the researcher in a process-facilitating role”, report “the participants’ experiences with photo-discussion triggers”, “clearly state the process by which community members review and validate the study findings”, explain “how participants create a plan of action, identify influential advocates, and hold exhibits and community forums to impact policy”, and “report the perceived impact of the action plan and influential advocates on program and policy change” (pp. 695-6). With the omission of policy advocacy, I have tried to reflect

the above methodological issues in this research, while noting that the recommendations appear to reflect (perhaps unwarranted?) concern about research ambiguities or variations, intellectual rigour and integrity, and in particular concerns about outcomes.

There is a pervasive anxiety in much of the photovoice literature about action outcomes, firstly, in stressing that photovoice can produce them and, secondly, in proving that it does/did. It is well, I think, to ask questions about what kind of outcomes are required, for whose benefit and at whose urging they are produced, and with what lasting effect (Wang et al, 1996; Kramer et al, 2009). Does the rush to deliver outcomes, the imperative to ‘deliver’, squeeze photovoice research to semi-predictable outcomes? Who decides or assumes there have to be outcomes, and why? Do we tend towards control and surveillance (Esther Prins, 2010) or fraudulent ‘consultation’ when we succumb to outcomes anxiety? In fact, the reported outcomes of photovoice projects appear to be modest – new or improved or enhanced services, identification of community themes and influential advocates (see the summary in Hergenrather et al, 2009). To their credit, some (for example, Leila Kramer et al., 2009) say they intend returning after an interval of a few years to reassess outcomes and see if they have lasted.

### **Attrition.**

Photovoice researchers have reported participant attrition, particularly where the research has been drawn out and time consuming. Unless a photovoice project has completely missed the mark, participants’ stickability will most often depend on their circumstances: homeless people may be happy to engage in an interesting activity (Wang, Cash and Powers, 2000), but other groups, especially those including time-poor policy makers, might not be willing to commit to extended timeframes. Baker and Wang (2006) attributed the attrition in their research to their project having too many steps, while Keith Kenney (2009) has suggested that some people just want to learn photography rather than enter into a community process. Karen Dullea (2005) found, however, that the women in her study stayed the distance by changing the photovoice research aims to suit their own needs, which was primarily to be heard rather than take action – a finding also in this research.

### **Beyond the frame.**

Darrin Hodgetts, Kerry Chamberlain and Alan Ridley (2007) caution that researchers need to be attentive to the photos that are *not* taken as well as to the material that “lies outside

the frame”. Their point is that people ‘make’ photos rather than ‘take’ them. When researchers ask people to photograph aspects of their lives, they are asking more of them than the ‘happy snaps’ of weddings and celebrations: they are being asked to attend to what may previously have been mundane and unremarkable and to engage in “a different, deeper way of exploring, viewing, considering, and accounting for their life worlds” (Hodgetts et al., 2007, p. 267). It is a way “to make the familiar strange” (ibid, p. 272; see also Prins, 2010). The photos that people don’t take can be just as significant as those they do: perhaps the weather was bad, the moment passed, the camera failed, they didn’t have the time or the access they needed, meaning that some photos just didn’t materialise. This is where the researcher is grateful for follow-up interviews and discussions. Wang et al. (1996) also caution about the potential for perceived or actual voyeurism, and the need for continuing scrutiny of the project for possible breaches of ethics. There are also cultural sensitivities about being photographed. These were issues we canvassed in the initial photovoice meeting, the ‘tutorial’, for this research.

### **Raising expectations.**

Modest or limited project aims are sometimes preferable to raising false hopes. Katherine Side (2005), for example, seems comfortable that the outcomes of her work had benefits for a small number of women and their families, and Newbury and Hoskins (2010) are frank about their aim to understand rather than undertake social action. Wang, Cash and Powers (2000) remark that, “Several participants noted that the project enabled them to notice their surroundings in a deliberate fashion, to observe their environment with new curiosity, and to imagine the world from another person’s point of view” (p. 86), an observation very much in keeping with the photovoice project in this research. Alice McIntyre (2003), writing about the women in Belfast, conceded that, while the photovoice experience would not stop the violence, it had enabled the women to tell their own stories of that violence – a prelude to healing. From the beginning, Wang et al. (1996) suggested that “visual anthropology is ultimately carried out to increase our empathy” – in their work in Chinese villages, “to promote outsiders’ empathy – rather than paternalism, condescension or idealism ...”. These aims and outcomes are valid in themselves.

### **Photovoice projects with women.**

Of special relevance to this research is photovoice work with women, for example, that of Alice McIntyre (2003) with Belfast women’s reflections on the violence they experienced

during The Troubles, Alice McIntyre's and M. Brinton Lykes' (2004) work with Chajul women in Guatemala, Karen Dullea's work with women recovering from sexual violence (2006), and Katherine Side's work (2005) with The Moyle Women's Forum in Ireland. These women researchers tend to stress the long-term relationships and solidarity they developed with women photovoice participants. Joan Williams and M. Brinton Lykes (2003), for example, write of the learnings that came from living amongst the women in their Guatemala study, and Alice McIntyre (2003) spent time backing and forthing to Belfast, building relationships, before the women on Monument Road decided they wanted to undertake a photovoice project with her. In their reports, there is little sense of urgency to meet anyone's expectations, except those of the women involved. In this research, however, the women were well aware that the project was part of my doctoral research: I doubt that any of us felt 'urgent' about the project, or had specific expectations, but there was certainly the sense of the women contributing to research I had chosen, being willing to give what they could, and then (most often) finding the experience worthwhile and enjoyable.

#### **Photovoice projects with the environment.**

It is interesting, in terms of this research focus, that most community and neighbourhood photovoice projects do not seem to take account of the physical world of nature – Lisa Chandler and Claudia Baldwin (2010) are amongst the exceptions. Perhaps Janet Fink's 'walking the neighbourhood' research (2012) or a version of a 'go-along' interview (Richard M. Carpiano, 2009), together with relevant prompt questions, might elicit responses about people's other-than-human environment? Pam Stein (2006) gives a fine example of what is possible in her account of counselling in the car in the Northern Territory, driving hundreds of kilometers while talking with Indigenous women about the sexual assaults they experienced - while they, in turn, told her the Indigenous stories of the country they were passing through. Many projects have, of course, been urban-based and concerned with the life struggles of poor and disempowered people who have, for reasons of work and services, often to live in cities, leading a researcher like Alice McIntyre (2003, p. 47) to describe 'place' as "a psychosocial setting and a web of situated life episodes".

To my knowledge, there have not yet been photovoice projects where researchers have worked with women caring for their physical environment ('Nature'). This is surprising because a visual research method would seem to be ideally suited to studies of people and

their environments. In part, the research I have undertaken on Tamborine Mountain has been a test run for the potential advantages of photovoice as a social/environmental research tool. The Climate Institute document, *Climate of a Nation* (2010), emphasised the importance of face-to-face communication in helping people accept and adapt to climate change (p. 132), and the Institute has actively encouraged people to monitor and report changes in their localities. As Alison Shaw, Stephen Sheppard, Sarah Burch, David Flanders, Arnim Wiek, Jeff Carmichael, John Robinson and Stewart Cohen (2009) put it, “make it local, make it visible, make the connections” (see also Stephen R. J. Sheppard, 2012). Because the photovoice research process requires participants to be out and about in their world, looking and reflecting, and bringing their observations, concerns and questions back to group discussions, it seems a useful way for researchers to tap into both personal and local issues about climate change and also concerns about environmental degradation more generally. That was certainly the case in this photovoice project.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis for all three stages of the research has been by means of manual thematic analysis. (The Nvivo data-sorting program is not available to external students at James Cook University.) The major risk inherent in thematic analysis is well known: the researcher’s conscious or unconscious assumptions and biases, that is, her own fallible subjectivity (Glesne, 1999). The risks are fewer where the researcher submits her research to the scrutiny of supervisors and colleagues – in this case, two supervisors at James Cook University and three critical readers. A program that sorts and collates data eliminates some of the most glaring errors of judgement but, as Yoland Wadsworth has observed about participatory action research, in the absence of a computer program, you may well have to “use your brain as the computer and your common sense as the program” (personal communication).

The locality research in Stage 1 was drawn primarily from published sources, such as accounts of the work and lives of past Tamborine Mountain women, written by family members, biographers and others, and conversations with people who knew them. In discussions with local informants, there were as everywhere plenty of local politics affecting access to materials and views of the three Mountain women I chose to highlight, including the relative value of their contributions. Ultimately, I had to make my own judgements of what to report of their lives and work, which I did as accurately and fairly as possible.

The interviews/conversations in Stage 2 provided a wealth of data. Reading and re-reading the transcripts, annotating and summarising, discerning themes, similarities and differences, I finally decided to analyse the data in terms of *thinking*, *feeling* and *doing* (head, heart and hand) responses: within that process, I also did a content analysis of the use of the key research terms, ‘women’ (feminism), ‘environment’ (place) and ‘care’, within and across interviews. I kept in mind the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and Mary Field Belenky et al (1986, 1997) and the constraints on women’s ‘voices’. I will report the research findings in detail in the chapters that follow, but I give here two examples of the data analysis process to illustrate what the analyses brought to light.

Example 1: the thinking/feeling/doing analysis revealed that, partly because of the nature of the exercise and the questions I asked, ‘thinking’ was the most frequent response, followed closely by ‘feeling’, with ‘doing’ a rather distant third. This was an ironic result, since most of the women I interviewed are notoriously active and hands-on people! Had I phrased the questions differently, for example, “Tell me what you do ...”, I expect I would have had different responses. Also, some women said that they relished the opportunity that the interview situation provided to reflect on their work, and most would have assumed (rightly) that I anyway had a fair understanding of the kind of work they do.

Example 2: one of the findings of the content analysis was that there was only one use of the word ‘feminist’ in at least 20 hours of interviews, and the word was used in that interview in a dismissive sense. As noted in Chapter 1, ‘feminism’ has come in for a battering in recent times, but I was still surprised by that finding. It made me go back to look more closely at the interview data, and remember how difficult it had been (in most interviews) for women to give concrete examples of differences in the ways men and women care for the environment.

To turn to data analysis in the photovoice project: the suggested method of data analysis in photovoice is SHOWED: “What do you **S**ee here? What is really **H**appening here? How does this relate to **O**ur lives? **W**hy does this situation/ concern / strength exist? How can we become **E**mpowered through our new understanding? What can we **D**o?” (Hergenrather et al., 2009, p. 694). Some participants have found this constricting, and have designed their own versions (Alice McIntyre, 2003; Karen Dullea, 2006; Caitlin Cahill, 2007). SHOWED is, in essence, an expanded version of the basic Joseph Cardjin “See-

Judge-Act” framework popularised by the Young Christian Workers movement in the 1950s and 1960s and adapted and adopted ever since.<sup>29</sup>

Photovoice is commonly paired with interviews, group discussions and other verbal data – as in this research - rather than used as a stand-alone method. The analyses people use to collate the data include “coding, content analysis, grounded theory, ethnography within-case-analysis, cross-case synthesis, and critical reflection” (Hergenrather et al, 2009, p. 164; see also G. Rose, 2007, on visual methodologies). The literature suggests that researchers and participants often undertake data analysis together. Alternatively, some researchers choose to make an initial analysis and establish themes which they later present to participants for comment and discussion. In this research, as described above, we did a mixture of both, and I later analysed both the transcript of the discussion and the images and texts, identifying themes and patterns of responses.

### **Ethics**

Before undertaking research activities, I applied for and was granted ethics approval from the James Cook University (JCU) Human Research Ethics committee: Stage 1 (H3990); Stage 2 (H4263); Stage 3 (H4176). While engaged in the research, I ensured accountability to JCU through monthly progress reports and phone supervisions with supervisors, and accountability to the local community through articles in the local papers and displays in the local library. At all times, I ensured that research participants were fully informed of, and comfortable with, the aims of the research, and at the completion of conversations and discussions I made time for participants to debrief their experiences. Further, while I was not engaging directly in research on or with Indigenous people, I was nevertheless mindful of the ethics and protocols of cross-cultural research (Mary Graham, 2012).

There are now numbers of guidelines to ensure ethical cross-cultural research. For example, James Cook University website refers students to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NH&MRC) publication, *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research*: the Council’s six guidelines in the health area are: spirit and integrity; reciprocity; respect; equality; survival and protection; responsibility. Similarly, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.ycw.ie/aboutus/founder.php> and <http://www.ycw.ie/resources/see-judge-act-resources.php>.

Studies' (AIATSIS) publication, *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*, outlines 14 principles, under the following headings: rights, respect and recognition; negotiation, consultation, agreement and mutual understanding; participation, collaboration and partnership; benefits, outcomes, and giving back; managing research: use, storage and access; reporting and compliance.

As noted in Chapter 2, Diane Bell observed three research principles in her work with Indigenous women: ask *ber* (the woman herself); de-centre the male view; and make the research self visible (in Peggy Brock, 2001). Of these, 'asking' is, in my view, critical. When White researchers remember to 'ask', they signal respect for Aboriginal terms of reference. During the "Belonging to Country" workshop, Mary and Lilla repeatedly reminded participants to observe Aboriginal terms of reference and encouraged them to stop trying to translate what they were hearing into White terms of reference – implicitly, they were asking participants to walk across the 'bridge between' and "confront the assumptions, limitations and fractures in [their] own cultural traditions" (J.J. Clarke, 2000, p. 12), that is, to stay with and respect difference.<sup>30</sup>

I was also mindful of the ethics of photovoice projects. Caroline Wang and Yanique Redwood-Jones (2001) have identified numbers of issues that need to be fully addressed with participants in orientation and training sessions. While their discussion is based on American privacy laws, especially where these relate to photographs of people, the same general principles would apply in most settings. They include: the capturing and the public use of a person's image; intrusion into someone's private space; disclosure of embarrassing facts about individuals; placing people in a false light by means of images; protection against the use of the person's likeness for commercial benefit; common voyeurism. In this research, we suggested that participants refrain, if possible, from taking photos where people were identifiable and, because of the nature of the project – care for the natural environment - participants did not find that inhibiting. During the photography 'tutorial', we gave examples of how to take photos that "tell stories", by means of symbols and icons that people readily recognise – for example, a spade, a hat and a pair of gloves to represent gardening.

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<sup>30</sup> One participant later remarked, "If you want to learn anything, you suit up, show up and shut up".

As with all research, there are also ethical issues in recruitment, with full disclosure of the purposes of the project, and in the participation of project personnel, such as ‘outside’ facilitators and professional photographers who need to be fully briefed and monitored (Lynne C. Manzo and Nathan Brightall, 2007). Caroline Wang and Yanique A. Redwood-Jones suggest that minimum best practices include the use of informed consent forms, workshops on the use of cameras, power and ethics, an explanatory brochure for each participant to carry with them on photography assignments, an explanatory letter beforehand to institutions like schools, courtesy prints to people who have consented to have their photos taken, emphasis on the personal safety of participants, and constant mentoring and monitoring (2001, p. 569). We observed all the above practices in the photovoice project, except for the letters to institutions (not required) and courtesy prints to people photographed – in place of the latter, we gave each participant a full set of project photos, as well as larger prints of those of her own photos we selected for display.

### **Conclusion: constraints and opportunities**

Reviewing the feminist participatory research methodology I employed in this research, I recall Patricia Maguire’s caution that “participatory research imposes a heavy agenda on both researcher and participants. ... conducting the ‘ideal’ participatory research project may be overwhelming, if not nearly paralysing” (Patricia Maguire, 1987, p. 57). I also recall Shulamit Reinhartz’s belief that feminist participatory action researchers are “making the invisible visible, bringing the margin to the centre, rendering the trivial important, and [putting] the spotlight on women as competent actors in the life of the everyday” (quoted in McIntyre, 2008, pp. 3-4). My research experiences affirm both those statements: participatory research certainly made for a lot of work, but one of its most satisfying rewards was revealing women “as competent actors in the life of the everyday” care for their environment.

Along the Ideal-Real continuum, what might I have done differently? What, with the wisdom of hindsight, might I change, were I to repeat the exercise?

While acknowledging what could be seen as the limited scope of this research – local and indicative (‘do-able’, in terms of a PhD study) – I see a number of benefits in having based small-scale, in-depth research in the place where I live. Insider research fits well with participatory research because both depend on relationships, however complex they may

sometimes be, and the researcher knows the *lokniti* (local politics) of the place well enough to avoid some of the bruising misunderstandings that can occur in other people's settings. In terms of feminist participatory research, the location on Tamborine Mountain certainly helped draw the support and interest of local women, however much they eschewed the tag 'feminist', and the photovoice project made for cross-fertilisation of ideas amongst women who mostly knew of each other rather than worked closely together.

The Mountain is a small, relatively homogeneous community of six and a half thousand to seven thousand people, and I have lived here for 12 years, so participants could well have selected in or out of the research on the basis of what they knew of me as much as for their interest in the study itself. That might have been partly remedied by recruiting local women through organisations, resulting in a more random selection of participants, rather than (as I did here) through direct contact with individuals I knew. However, because this study was local and exploratory, I didn't set out to recruit large numbers of participants - which requests to organisations might have made strategically necessary - nor did I expect such small samples to be representative of class, age, race or ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation on the Mountain - or, indeed, elsewhere. As noted in Chapter 1, the Mountain demographics are skewed in particular ways.

The three research methods were labour-intensive, but well worth the effort, especially to see similar themes emerging across time and across research modalities. That made the data analysis tricky, but also enriched the findings through triangulation of data themes and patterns. The photovoice project, as the third research method, brought together numbers of dimensions and put the data and some of the interpretations in the hands of participants themselves - I found it an appropriate and engaging method for participatory research with local women in their environments. I wouldn't feel impelled to wrench action outcomes from another photovoice project, unless that was the given aim, but I'd moderate the injunction about not taking photographs of people because the absence of people in the photos may sometimes skew meanings and messages in unintended ways.

If I were to undertake similar research in the future, I could perhaps build in organisational participation from the very beginning - involving, for example, Landcare, Bush Volunteers, Chamber of Commerce, Scenic Rim Council, Visitor Information Centre, Tamborine Mountain History Association, Tamborine Mountain Progress Association and Natural

History Association. (If, however, I were to stay with ‘*women’s* care for the environment’ only, this could exponentially complicate the research processes). With or without organisational involvement, I would certainly schedule a formal meeting to report the findings of the research, rather than convene the kind of informal gathering that marked the end of the data gathering phase in this research.

Other improvements I’d make would be to find and employ a research assistant earlier in the research journey, someone who (like the person I did eventually find) was insightful, understood the research aims, was a whizz with computers, had an eye for detail and could both transcribe and display the data in a professional manner. As an external student removed from campus conversations and opportunities, and for all the wisdom and generosity of my supervisors in phone contacts, this close-at-hand practical support has been invaluable.

Having considered methodology and methods, I turn next to the findings of the research.

The next 4 chapters present the findings of the three stages and their associated methods:

Chapter 4 reports Stage 1 local history research;

Chapter 5 reports the results of the Stage 2 post “Belonging to Country” research interviews;

Chapter 6 reports on the Stage 2 interviews with women working with environment groups;

Chapter 7 gives an account of Stage 3, the photovoice project.

# Chapter 4:

## Precedents and Precursors:

### Staying Put



**Hilda Geissmann**

*Photo—Eve Curtis, Private Collection*



**Judith Wright McKinney**

*Photo—Meredith McKinney, Private Collection*



**Joy Guyatt**

*Courtesy Kit Guyatt, Still from private film*

*Plate 10: Women of the Mountain.*

When the American poet Gary Snyder was once asked to discuss at length how individuals could best help resolve the environmental crisis, he responded with two words: “Stay put”. Only by rediscovering a sense of place, he suggested, a commitment to a particular piece of ground, will we be able to redefine our relationship to the planet (Robert Michael Pyle, 2007, p. 1.7).

### **Purpose and nature of Stage 1 research**

In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings of Stage 1 of the research, the precedents for and precursors of women’s care for the environment on Tamborine Mountain. I draw on the lives and work of three local women – Hilda Curtis (née Geissman), Judith Wright McKinney, and Joy Guyatt - whose lives collectively spanned 100 years on the Mountain, from the very earliest days of White settlement until just a few years ago. While the details and textures of these women’s lives are in themselves historically significant – women’s work so often goes unremarked and unrecorded (Sheila Rowbotham, 1983, p. 172) – they also raise issues about the nature of women’s belonging to and caring for place, past and present.

### **‘Other languages and other champions’**

In the mid 1980s in England, Sue Clifford and Angela King co-founded Common Ground, now a movement which encourages people to value ‘local distinctiveness’. In 1998, Sue Clifford wrote:

All manner of things change if you take as your starting point that people know things, that they care about nature, value their surroundings, want quality in their lives and are willing to put in effort if they feel they can influence things.

Thousands of years of ‘empirical research’, in almost every corner of the earth, have provided us with an extraordinary bank of knowledge about nature; cultural evolution in parallel has borne diverse value systems.

Scientific knowledge, in a handful of centuries, has added vast amounts to our understanding and capabilities; it has focused on facts, replicable states, leaving aside anything difficult to count, cost, exchange or substitute. Intangible

benefits, subjective perceptions, emotional attachments and expressions of value need other languages and other champions (Sue Clifford, 1998, p. 230).

In Chapter 1, I described Tamborine Mountain in factual detail, but not in terms of the “emotional attachments and expressions of value” that Sue Clifford reminds us are significant. For these dimensions, I turn to the stories of local women – three, in particular - whose commitment to the Mountain’s natural environment led them to step outside the norms of their times and circumstances and outside what their contemporaries might have expected of them – women who spoke ‘other languages’. Some, like Hilda Curtis (née Geissmann), grew up on the Mountain. Some, like Judith Wright McKinney, moved to the Mountain as young women and lived here for an extended period of time. Others, like Joy Guyatt, moved to the Mountain by degrees, first for weekends and holidays and later, in retirement, for good. In committing themselves to care for the Mountain’s natural environment, they played a large part in preserving it for their human and their other-than-human descendants.

### **Hilda Curtis (née Geissmann)**

In her book, *Brilliant Careers*, Judith Mackay remarks that, “[w]omen in Queensland have been particularly active as collectors of plants, shells and insects, and as birdwatchers. These activities were compatible with domestic duties and within the range of skills expected of a ‘good bushwoman’” (Judith Mackay, 1997, p. 3). Either by necessity or by choice, most women collectors worked from home base, and they collected, Mackay writes, for the joy of discovery. As amateurs and as women, however, they were not always acknowledged for their expertise, or for their years of collecting activities that underpinned the research publications of eminent - mostly male - botanists (Penny Olsen, 2013).

An exception in this regard was Victoria’s Government Botanist, Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, who had a nation-wide network of women collecting and sending specimens to him and whom he did acknowledge by name. Penny Olsen (2013) has documented the lives and activities of some of these women - unfortunately, not including Hilda Geissmann who was one of them. Although women made up only about 10% of his 3000 collectors, they figured large in his correspondence - on his own estimate, he wrote between 2000 and 6000 letters every year. He advertised for collectors in the following terms:

There are already many ladies living in these far distant parts of the colony, bereft, to a great extent, of those intellectual pursuits to which many of them have been accustomed ... we would impress the interest they might derive from actively aiding our great Australian botanist in his valuable researches. Much has been done in this way by the ladies in the settled districts and a still larger field is opened for those who have followed their husbands and brothers into the remote and less well-known portions of this vast territory (Olsen, p. 10).

Penny Olsen comments that, in times when women were not admitted to universities, excluded from the professions, not permitted to attend scientific gatherings, and were not used “to being treated as equals, let alone by a celebrated scientist, many ladies would have read his letters over and over”; for his part, he was true to his word to acknowledge his collectors, and “the more successful collectors saw their names mentioned in his publications, in newspapers, or enshrined in the name of a plant” (p. 15). Nevertheless, despite women collectors often being accomplished botanical artists in their own right, von Mueller used male illustrators in his publications, and was of the view that women were best suited to domesticity. He wrote, for example, to one woman that he would not want her to pursue her botanical interests too seriously, for “if you incurred special toil for that it would disturb your happiness and might withdraw you from filial and domestic duties” (p. 18). Olsen remarks that Georgina King, a geologist and anthropologist and a friend of von Mueller was “advised never to marry if she intended to develop her scientific talents”. She wrote in her unpublished autobiography, “I was one of those pioneer women who have had a hard time, but I was making things easier for women coming after me” (p. 18). Olsen also notes a rumour that von Mueller proposed to Georgina King and that she refused him.

Among the women collectors of those times, Tamborine Mountain’s Hilda Curtis was an outstanding example. Syd Curtis has written of his mother that her “enquiring mind and empathy with the things of nature led [her] to develop an unsurpassed knowledge of the local plants and animals, not from books (they were yet to be written) but from her own observation” (Mackay, 1997, p. 34). Hilda also took photographs, developing the plates in her darkroom, and sending the prints off for publication to papers such as *The Queenslander* and *Science News* (see Plate 11). She reportedly refused an engagement ring in preference to

a dark room, on the basis that she usually had her hands in the earth or in chemicals.<sup>31</sup>

Hilda Geissmann was born in 1890 in Brisbane. When she was eight, her family moved to Tamborine Mountain. She grew up with access to 200 acres of bush backyard where she spent many hours gaining the knowledge and experience she later drew on to guide visiting naturalists, botanists, ornithologists, and notables (such as Queensland Governors) in the rainforest. Keith A.W. Williams described Hilda, or Hillegei as some called her, as “a small, enthusiastic and very energetic individual”, “the little lady in the floppy-brimmed hat [with] her inevitable well-used binoculars” (Keith A. Williams, 2001, pp. 4-6). He wrote:

A more knowledgeable and reliable person could hardly be found. Hilda knew the Mountain like the back of her hand and I don't think that anything that stood, walked, crawled, flew and squeaked in the bush escaped her notice. Having spent a lifetime in the area it was easy to understand her love of all things in nature. One easily got the impression that she knew every individual plant and tree, but her great love was the birdlife of the area. Big or small, common or rare, they were all the same to her and equally loved. There was always a good population around her home and she said that while they were there she was never alone (Williams, 2001, p. 4).

Francis Ratcliffe, the English biologist, visited Tamborine Mountain with a friend in early 1928. He wrote about his guide, Hilda Curtis, in the book he later published, *Flying Fox and drifting sand: The adventures of a biologist in Australia* (1947).

My friend had been a naturalist since his schooldays, and I had spent a year in the bush as a professional biologist; but in her company we could only listen and learn. She had spent her whole life on the mountain, and knew ... the habits of every bird and beast that lived there, and where the rare ferns and orchids could be found. She had made friends with them, photographed them ... She showed us her camera, an unwieldy plate affair, looking absurdly old-fashioned beside our modern and expensive articles; yet either of us would have been proud to claim the photographs hanging on the wall (Francis Ratcliffe, 1947, pp. 19-20).

On Ratcliffe's visit, she led him to a colony of grey-headed flying foxes he had asked to see,

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<sup>31</sup> Excerpt from Hilda Curtis' unpublished diary, in possession of Susan Cantrell, Armidale, New South Wales.

and left him there because she knew he would be shooting a couple of specimens – “... she disliked the idea of killing things”. In fact, as he writes, she was “the least aggressive person I ever met, [but] one thing alone could stir her to anger – cruelty. She fought cruelty with a quiet resolution that spared no one”, neither Governors going on duck shoots nor visiting botanists collecting unnecessary numbers of flower specimens. On this as on many occasions, she took her baby son with her, putting him on the ground to sleep in the hollow of a fallen palm leaf while she waited for the two men to return from the fox colony. Ratcliffe marvelled at her sure-footedness in the bush: “...that little woman in the cotton dress walked ahead as unconcernedly as if she were on the footpath of a city street”, while the two men stumbled after her, tripping over logs and entangling themselves in lawyer vines (Ratcliffe, 1947, pp. 10-22).<sup>32</sup>

After birds, orchids were Hilda’s special interest, and she sent specimens and photographs far and wide, including to ‘the orchid man’, the Rev. H.M.R. Rupp, and to W.H. Nicholls, who named a *Pterostyllis* orchid after her (*p. hildae*). Her photographs of orchids appeared in interstate publications such as Melbourne *Punch*, and in the 1925 Naturalists’ Society exhibition in Sydney. Rupp wrote to her on the latter occasion, “You are a genius at these photographic studies” (Australian National Herbarium, 2008). She was an active member of the Queensland Naturalists’ Club and was made an Honorary Life member in 1964. She forwarded specimens and photos to the Queensland Museum and the Queensland Herbarium, and cycad specimens and photos to Professor Charles Chamberlain at the University of Chicago who, in return, sent her a microscope and chemicals for her work.

Currently, two women<sup>33</sup> on the Mountain are researching a book on Hilda’s work, not an easy task when her papers are scattered and people who knew her well are now dead or very elderly. They speak of the hard physical life Hilda led, always short of money, working with her mother and sisters to run their boarding house, growing flowers with her sister Elsie (a talented pianist), and still fruit-picking in Stanthorpe at age 80. She married late at 36 and had a son, then a miscarriage, followed by continuing ill health for the rest of her life. In 1980, at the age of 90, she had a stroke and, after a stay in hospital, was taken

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<sup>32</sup> Like many Mountain visitors then and now, he awarded the leeches first place in order of unpleasantness, shuddering to recall hearing “your own blood squelch in your boots, and see[ing] it ooze through the lace-holes”! (Ratcliffe, 1947, pp. 10-22).

<sup>33</sup> Julie Lake and Susan Cantrell.

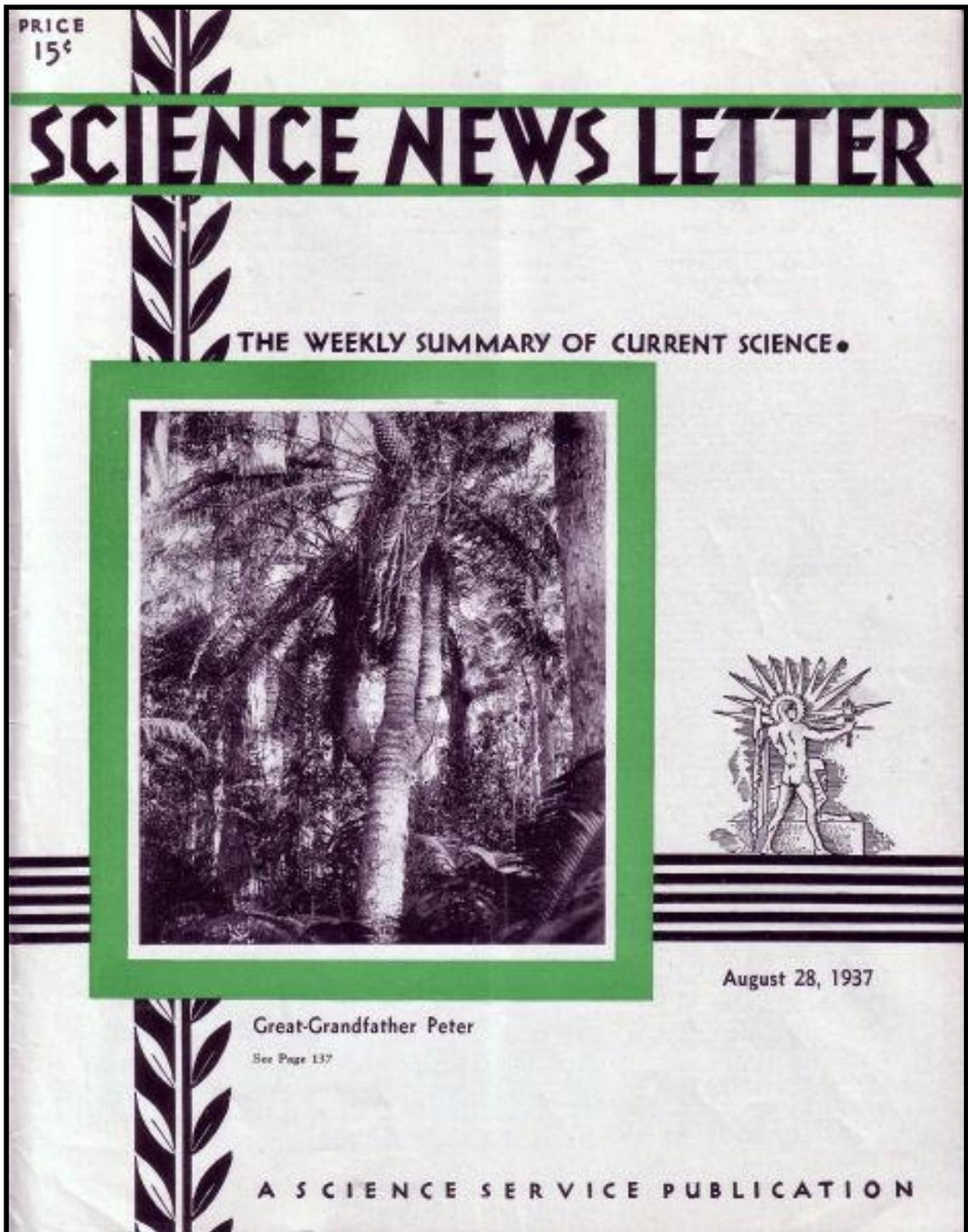


Plate 11: Science Newsletter, August 28, 1937.

to Mt Olivet in Brisbane. When she died in 1988, she was buried at Mt Thompson, far from the Mountain she loved. A Mountain resident, one of the researchers mentioned above, arranged for a commemorative plaque on Curtis Road which reads: “A true pioneer of natural history. We remember her on the mountain she loved.”

Hilda's family report that she attended a technical college in Brisbane for a couple of years when she was in her early 20s but they don't know what she studied (Botany? Art?), nor how she learned to use her camera and to develop plates. It is also unclear why she suddenly stopped collecting, writing and photographing, after 20 years of well-regarded work. We might assume that being mother, wife, farm worker – and much of this during the Depression – swallowed her whole, as it did many women of that period (Anne Summers, 1975: see Chapter 12 especially). It appears that almost everyone who knew her has kind words to say about Hilda. People liked her as a person, even if they didn't really understand the significance of her work. Both she and Elsie, intelligent and talented young women, and very close as sisters, married local farmers and pitched in like everyone else to make a living from the land. There were rumours that she was a lesbian and/or that she had had an affair with one or more of her male collector friends. It is not surprising that Hilda, an unusual woman for her time, attracted such rumours – but sad that her talents and love for the Mountain have been so poorly recognised and honoured.

### **Judith Wright McKinney**

Hilda Curtis and Judith Wright McKinney both lived in North Tamborine, not too far from each other. Judith wrote of Hilda that her “photographs of the rainforest orchids were remarkable considering she only had an old plate camera ... [her] garden had a number of plants brought in because the birds used them” (Patricia Clarke and Meredith McKinney, 2006, p. 384). It doesn't seem, however, that the two women were friends, despite similar love for the Mountain.

Hilda Curtis came to the Mountain as a child of eight and lived here the rest of her life. The poet Judith Wright McKinney (1915-2000) came as a young woman in her twenties, looking for a quiet place where she and her partner Jack McKinney could write, and she stayed almost thirty years. For most of that time she was, in the words of those who remember her, “just Mrs McKinney” who sat on the environment committee of the Tamborine Mountain Progress Association and, as her daughter Meredith (born in 1950) grew up, helped out in the school tuck shop, drove her daughter to ballet lessons and pony club, and raised poultry to sell eggs to support the family. It was 1948 when she moved to the Mountain and, looking back in her autobiography, she wrote:

We were lucky in living where we did. Tamborine was still a secluded place, invaded only by occasional tourist buses. ... Jack and I were so obviously poor,

living in three rooms and on a scrap of land too small to be described as a hobby farm, that we were seen as harmless lunatics, writers who survived by a miracle (Judith Wright, 1999, p. 260).

They lived in a little house that Jack christened “Quantum”. Judith said that the birth of Meredith “sealed our occupation at Quantum”, and they moved from being classified as “no-hopers – those who drifted into and out of the Mountain’s society and tended to vanish overnight” – to something approaching locals (Wright, 1999, p. 261).

It was only a few years after the end of the war, and most farmers were surviving by growing vegetables (and the famous Mountain rhubarb) for Brisbane markets, as well as for the nearby army base at Canungra. Many women grew flowers (violets, narcissus, Erlicheers, daffodils) which, also sent down to Brisbane, augmented family incomes. Most of the magnificent beech trees and red cedars had already fallen under the axe of timber getters or had been cleared for farms, it being a condition of taking out a selection that people ‘improve’ their land by clearing it (Eve Curtis, 1988, p. 7), so that “[a]lmost all the forest had vanished from the top of the Mountain” (Wright, p. 263). Few Mountain residents had an appreciation of the rainforest in and of itself: one commented to Jack McKinney that he loved to see the smoke of cut down trees going up because he had been “fighting trees all his life” (cited in Veronica Brady, 1998, p. 158). By contrast, Judith wrote that she and Jack would spend their afternoons walking in the rainforest, “marvelling at the wealth and variety of life there”:

To both of us, the beauty of the mountain had endless fascination as we tried to identify trees, ferns, palms, birds and insects. There were scarcely any books of reference to tell us what we wanted to know and not many of the mountain’s own residents had names for them. Indeed, there was a kind of hostility still to those deep forests – since most of the descendants of the few early arrivals had spent much of their childhood and youth battling the forest for a niche on which to farm and live. Only a few had much knowledge or interest in the forest. One of these was Hilda Curtis ... she had learned as much of the forest as anyone at that time (Wright, 1999, p. 248).

Happily, in 1964, with an Encyclopaedia Britannica award of 5000 pounds, Judith and Jack were able “to buy that bit of land, or help Forestry to buy it, up above the road at Joalah

Park; it's lyrebird country and they have never had the money to buy it and put it into the Park, and I have been scared for years that it would be sold and burned" (Patricia Clarke and Meredith McKinney, 2006, p. 162).

Just before Meredith turned two, the McKinneys moved to a nearby house they bought and named "Calanthe", after a local white orchid. Judith raised poultry to help make ends meet and, as at Quantum, looked after an extensive vegetable garden – "two ten-foot rows of potatoes, six rosellas, six red-pepper plants, a dozen tomatoes, a bed of cabbages – the mind reels at enumerating more", as she boasted to Kathleen McArthur in 1953 (quoted in Brady, 1998, p. 159). She also wrote about the wattles and narcissus, and the local wildlife - bowerbirds and hares and a couple of resident pythons. The family settled in to "Calanthe", and Tamborine Mountain became home. These were, she wrote, among the best years of her life (Clarke and McKinney, 2000, pp. 195- 6).

In 1962, Meredith started high school in Brisbane as a boarder, and then in 1966 Jack McKinney died. Inevitably, there were changes. Judith was drawn more and more into state campaigns through the Wildlife Preservation Society which she had co-founded with Kathleen McArthur some years before. She was away a lot, and "Calanthe" and the Mountain became both a comfort "where I can breathe again" and a "land of lost content" (Clarke and McKinney, 2006, p. 179). There is a snapshot of her busy life in the letter she later wrote to the director of National Parks and Wildlife Service in Sydney: "I have for the last fourteen years been president of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland ... [helped establish] Nature Educational Areas near Brisbane, produced and edited its journal *Wildlife in Australia*, and been "an honorary ranger under the Queensland Forestry Department's National Parks section ... [and] managed two acres of land on Tamborine Mountain ... with a view to conservation and encouragement of native fauna" (Clarke and McKinney, 2006, p. 274).

She always returned home with pleasure: "I haven't had time to get back to Tamborine yet and I physically ache for it" (Clarke and McKinney, 2006, p. 182); "... we are [back] on Tamborine and I am a real person again ... I really live to get back here" (Bryony Cosgrove, 2007, p. 206); from London in 1968, "[w]e sail on the *Arcadia* on the 16<sup>th</sup> and I will be very glad to get back, this roving life is not for me and I am lonely for Tamborine" (Clarke and McKinney, 2006, p. 187).

But there was also ambivalence. She wrote to Martin Robertson in September 1968, two years after Jack's death:

I'm alone here taking up the threads ... I love this place; it is a little Mountain plateau, rainforest country with farms and a couple of townships, where we've lived since before Meredith was born, and I know all the people. A fine place for writing, though I get myself so involved in so many things that I give myself little time for that worse luck (Clarke and McKinney, 2006, p. 193).

Again in October 1968:

It's rather beautiful, sub-tropical, high rainfall country with simple easy people on the whole; I don't want to leave it, since the best of my life has been lived here, but it will be a big job to look after by myself; especially as I'm deeply concerned in Queensland wildlife preservation and conservation societies and the battle takes up a lot of my time apart from writing and university work [she was giving poetry tutorials at University of Queensland]. Here, I can at least escape a little from the telephone and get myself firmly seated at the desk (Clarke and McKinney, 2006, p. 195).

The Mountain itself was changing, with an influx of new residents and tourists, bitumen roads, a large housing development just down the road from "Calanthe", and the Gold Coast apparently creeping ever nearer. "It doesn't matter where you go for escape, bulldozers and gravel trucks and their consequences always follow", she wrote to Barbara Blackman in November, 1974 (Clarke and McKinney, 2006, p. 265).

In contrast to a woman like Hilda Curtis, whose home the Mountain was and who never travelled far from it, the Mountain for Judith was primarily a base, a setting for the work she and Jack did, and the place where they brought up their daughter. They were happy years - in terms of poetry, perhaps the most productive years of her life – she loved the rainforest and was aghast at the destruction it suffered, and she and Jack donated land to preserve lyrebird habitat with money they could ill afford to give away. There was nothing half-hearted about her time on the Mountain.

She finally took the decision to move in 1976. The Mountain had been intimately linked to Jack and their life together and, after he died, she found it hard to write. Also, she was

constantly on the move, engaged in national campaigns to save the Barrier Reef and Fraser Island from mining. When she came back to the Mountain from her ever-increasing number of commitments elsewhere, it was difficult to feel she belonged, and the care of the luxuriantly growing garden on two acres was getting to be a burden. Meredith was in Japan, but maybe returning to work in Canberra, and Judith felt stifled both by the Queensland heat and by Queensland conservative politics under the then premier, Joh Bjelke Petersen. As well as seeing more opportunities to influence policies and policy makers from a base in Canberra than from her base on Tamborine Mountain, she also wanted to be closer to her partner Nugget Coombs (Fiona Capp, 2010). She wrote to a friend that she was moving because, “I can’t really manage this two acres and big house much longer, and Long Road has an enormous new development” (Cosgrove, 2007, p. 312).

She returned to visit Tamborine Mountain on a few occasions, for example, in 1988, “to have a look at my old Tamborine dwelling and meet survivors from my time once again. It is terribly developed but at least the national parks there are more or less safe from entrepreneurs” (Clarke and McKinney, 2006, p. 428). She was saddened to learn that a lot of the people she and Jack had known had succumbed to rate rises and others lived “in terror of total bulldozery” (Cosgrove, 2007, p. 537). She saw the consequences, material and spiritual, of destroying the environment. In this, she was convinced that, in order for people to act to protect the environment, they had to care: “Whether scientists like it or not, it is **feeling** that sways public opinion ... that spurs us to protest and act ... [we] must begin to enlist not only rational recognition of the problem, but human concern, distress and love” (Judith Wright, 1970, p. 4).

In 1968, she wrote in “Conservation as a Concept” that “the whole basis of the scientific and technological revolution” [has led to the] “separation of ourselves from our own background ... [which we see as something] wholly apart from ourselves” (cited in Brady, 1998, p. 293). She cited Aldo Leopold approvingly: “Civilisation is not ... the enslavement of a stable and constant earth. It is a state of mutual and interdependent cooperation between human animals, other animals, plants and soils, which may be destroyed at any moment by the failure of any of them” (cited in Brady 1998, p. 205). She wondered whether “we ourselves are regenerable and adaptable enough ... versatile enough to help us become [earth’s] rescuers”. Her answer was “only if we care enough ... the public is

man, who can and will wreck nature if he can't be made to care. And being part of what we ruin, we will rue it" (Wright, 1970, p. 8).

### **Joy Guyatt**

In the mid-1960s, Joy and Kevin Guyatt bought a block of land at Tamborine Mountain.<sup>34</sup> At the time, they were both still working in Brisbane where Joy was a librarian at the University of Queensland, and the inaugural librarian of the Undergraduate Library. Always interested in history, she had studied in later life for a Master's Degree in Australian History, and she subsequently wrote widely on Labor History, and contributed several entries to the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

The block the Guyatts bought was covered in bladey grass, with just one standing tallwood tree. They worked hard to create a garden and a haven for wildlife and, with their neighbours, bought the block of land between their homes to preserve the existing trees. The Guyatt land later became a Land for Wildlife property.

Kevin and Joy retired to the Mountain around the time of the 1974 floods. Then, and until quite recently, the Mountain roads were cut by water and/or landslips when it rained heavily, and supply trucks couldn't make deliveries. Joy was struck by the fact that every member of the community was visited to make sure that they were well and had plenty of food. "It made her realise that this place, with a population of only 650, was a caring community where people looked after each other" (*Tamborine Mountain News*, 17 August, 2010).

Joy was secretary of the Tamborine Mountain Progress Association for ten years, and later president. She and Kevin were early members of the Tamborine Mountain Field Naturalists' Club, working at what is now Dickson Park, and participating in the many field trips, walks and birding excursions. In 1988, Joy contributed to and edited *A Natural History of Tamborine Mountain*, a project funded by the Australian Bicentennial Authority. On the Mountain, she was an active member of Landcare and a founding member of the Escarpment Project. She supported the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and, in earlier days, the Aboriginal Advancement League. In 1992, she was made

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<sup>34</sup> Adapted from the Obituary which appeared in the *Tamborine Mountain News* Vol. 1285, August 17, 2010.

a Life Member of the Australian Labor Party, and, in 2002, an Honorary Life Member of the Tamborine Mountain Natural History Association.

For many years, Joy collected seeds, propagated plants, and distributed hundreds of seedlings indigenous to the Mountain for replanting in public parks, regeneration areas and private gardens. “Much of the regeneration of rainforest on the Mountain is due to her untiring efforts” (*Tamborine Mountain News*, 2010). She kept meticulous records of what plants were in which places in her garden, and in 2006, after years of persistence, she finally managed to have a large part of her land covered by a Voluntary Conservation Agreement – a means to ensure that future owners respected and retained the rainforest she had spent so many years planting and tending.

In the early 1980s, when artist and then resident Del Price met Joy Guyatt, she found that they shared a fascination for indigenous rainforest plants. Del suggested that she start illustrating the plants that Joy was cataloguing. By the time Del moved from the Mountain in 1998, she had painted 165 of the more than 500 identified Mountain flora. The year before, in 1997, Del and a group of local women artists had begun meeting, and they eventually formed the Botanical Art Group whose current project is to continue the work of Del Price – and perhaps Hilda Geissmann, Judith Wright and Joy Guyatt as well – by recording and illustrating every indigenous plant species on the Mountain<sup>35</sup>.



*Plate 12: Macleay Laurel.*

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<sup>35</sup> One of the research participants, Naomi, remarked during her interview (Chapter 6): “My admiration for [Joy] knows no bounds. So many Progress Association meetings that we were at ... she would come to meetings, and people would be blathering backwards and forwards, and Joy would say, “Well, I think we have had enough discussion. I would like to move a motion that dadadada”, and she would just sort of sum it all up. Oh, where is that wisdom now?”

## Discussion – ‘Staying put’

“It just may be that the most radical act we can commit is to stay home.”

(Terry Tempest Williams, quoted in Marilyn Welker – Northwest Institute, 2007).

What can the lives and work of Hilda Geissmann, Judith Wright McKinney and Joy Guyatt tell us about past women’s care for the environment on Tamborine Mountain? Certainly, they were women who, in Sue Clifford’s terms, ‘knew things, cared about nature and valued their surroundings’ (Clifford, 1998, p. 230). From what we know of their lives, it seems that the Mountain was both a base in which and from which they lived their lives and a valued place in itself, that is, more than what Val Plumwood termed “unconsidered background” (Val Plumwood, 2000, p. 22). Each woman, in her own way and time, cared for the Mountain environment and ‘stayed put’ in the Mountain community to which, it seems, she felt she belonged.<sup>36</sup>

Val Plumwood (1999) has suggested that there are three ways people can inhabit and relate to place: people can be *place-bound*, as feudal serfs bonded to their lords, or as slaves owned by their masters; *place-centred*, for example, where Indigenous peoples have lived continuously on ancestral lands; and *place-sensitive* which, in her view, is the option available to contemporary Western people. She wrote that “[p]lace attachment and place-sensitivity are vitally important ingredients in personal and community identity formation and in a good human life, much frustrated in current lives of excessive mobility and time-poverty” (1999, p. 232).

‘Place’ is, as all concepts, constructed (Doreen Massey, 1994, p. 153). Place is the bundle of individual and collective meanings people ascribe to a particular patch of Planet Earth, in this case, Tamborine Mountain. In contrast to, say, ‘bioregion’ or the Indigenous

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<sup>36</sup> We have the letters and texts from Judith Wright to evidence her relationship to the Mountain but, in the absence of such materials for Joy and Hilda, have to infer that relationship. I was, however, fortunate to have known Joy well in the last decade of her life.

concept of ‘country’, ‘place’ is an artificial concept<sup>37</sup> and, in colonised lands like Australia, often named and claimed in European colonisers’ terms (Plumwood, 2005). People may value a place and not live there but, for residents and visitors alike, Clifford’s “emotional attachments and expressions of value” (above) that places evoke can be powerful: Walden Pond, Pilgrim Creek, Uluru ... Tamborine Mountain. People may also carry the name and image of a place as a kind of talisman, without claiming ownership: on the Mountain, Bush volunteers weed and plant on the Mountain once a month, with both the co-ordinator and some members travelling from Brisbane and surrounds to do so. There are, in that sense, numbers of possible ways to be place-sensitive.

To be place-sensitive is not to be blind. As Val Plumwood said, we need “both emotional and critical approaches to place, and this must include an understanding of place that is rooted in memory (including community memory) and experiences, *and* an understanding of the hegemonic social relationships expressed in places and between places” (Plumwood 1999, p. 233 – my emphasis). While “[n]arratives of individual attachment to places are important, [they] often leave unidentified and unchallenged the larger *structural* obstacles to developing a place-sensitive society and culture” (Plumwood, 2002, p. 232 - emphasis in original). Along with hegemonic social relationships, there are barriers and obstacles to being place-sensitive, both within and without. Within place, the hierarchies of belonging may operate by class, by race, by gender, or just by length of residence. Also, the currently fragile or eroding economic bases of small towns can force many people’s choices of where to live. Outside place, and impacting on it, are demands for job mobility, long hours to commute between home and work, families dispersed over geography (for example, in and between mining towns and home), and the consumerist and entertainment lures of big cities. Sensitivity and attachment to place may not always seem feasible.

Then, too, for some people ‘staying put’ in place is not an option – nomads and gypsies, for different reasons, keep on the move, and those fleeing war, persecution and poverty and, increasingly, those fleeing the consequences of climate change have to uproot

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<sup>37</sup> While all names are ‘artificial’, the names and extents of the wider sectors that describe us – shire, region, state – are often named for and serve administrative purposes. Once known to Indigenous people as Wongelpong (S.I. Ross, 1997) and once with its own local Council, Tamborine Mountain is, however, a place with obvious natural boundaries. This didn’t prevent the Queensland Electoral Commission running a divisional boundary through the middle of us in the 2009 re-distribution, thereby illustrating how irrelevant landform and its inhabitants can be for administrative purposes.

themselves and their families and move elsewhere as a matter of survival. 'Place' - and the possibility of 'staying put' in place - is intimately linked to all the Master narratives Val Plumwood identified and critiqued – colonisation, capitalism and globalisation, patriarchy and androcentrism, anthropocentrism, Eurocentrism ... (1999, pp. 100-122).

However, provided that 'staying put' is not coerced, it can make a statement about the nature of people's commitment to place. On the Mountain, Hilda Geissmann, Judith Wright and Joy Guyatt 'stayed put', for varying amounts of time and in different ways. They valued the environment, grew some of their own food, participated in Mountain events and organisations, and committed themselves to the well-being of their place. Keith A.W. Williams, impressed by Hilda's intimate knowledge of the Mountain, wrote Hilda into the Mountain – "Hilda knew the Mountain like the back of her hand" (Williams, 2001, p. 4). Judith makes frequent reference in her letters to her love and concern for the Mountain, and Joy, like Judith, bought land on the Mountain in order to protect it from development. They walked the Mountain, explored the Mountain, and became familiar with its plants and creatures. It is possible in this way to journey *within* place, as these women did, and as told in Freya Mathews' place-sensitive account of her *Journey to the Source of Merri Creek* (2003). Paying tribute to Gary Snyder, Patsy Hallen (1996) has written that, "[w]e should focus on the place [where] we live, love it, nurture it, tend it, protect it, fight for it, write about it. ... a good way to change a situation is to imagine, even to declare, that you will stay where you are, in your locale, for the rest of your life" (p. 85). Of course, Hilda, Judith and Joy were then, as some women are now, exceptions. While the Mountain has probably always been a source of identity for residents, where both men and women have said they 'come from', most have not known the environment well or cared as deeply about it as others: Judith Wright observed that "[o]nly a few had much knowledge or interest in the forest" (1999, p. 248).

Staying put doesn't have to mean being 'stuck' or unable to come and go. "Journeying is an important dimension of life", Val Plumwood wrote (1999, p. 233), a dimension also acknowledged by Indigenous women (see Chapter 2). Hilda, Judith and Joy appear to have had a strong sense of place and the Mountain community, but they also had extensive contacts off the Mountain. Hilda sent specimens, nature articles and photographs to Brisbane and interstate, and corresponded regularly with off-Mountain collectors and associates; Judith worked in Brisbane for much of the time she lived on the Mountain, and

travelled back and forth on speaking engagements and for meetings with the Wildlife Preservation Society and Save the Barrier Reef; Joy was active in party politics and made regular sorties off the Mountain for plants, books, friends and family. Belonging to place, living in and being committed to a small community was not for these women incompatible with concerns and interests in other places.

Notwithstanding the plethora of books and articles that have been written about a 'sense of place' in the last 20 years (for example, Peter Read, 2000; John Cameron, 2003; Mark Tredennick, 2003; Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, 2005), place in the form of 'small town' or 'local community' has not always been well-regarded. J.E. Malpas (1999), in his investigation of the "philosophical topography" of place and experience, suggested that what he saw as the "neglect of place" was reflected "not only in the relative absence of place as a significant concept in philosophical discussion, but in a tendency for place to be viewed as secondary to and derivative of spatiality" – that is, derivative of the social (p. 27). He believed that, due to the triumph of the natural and social sciences in the period of modernity, "any serious talk of place has been regarded as regressive or trivial ... place has been regarded as an impoverished second cousin of Time and Space", the two concepts that have towered over modernity (p. 27).

The feminist geographer Doreen Massey, drawing on the history of locality studies in the United Kingdom, has argued that the changing Western world of the 1980s and 1990s "clearly unnerved a lot of people" and drove a return to the local (1994, p. 162). In this,

The most commonly argued position ... is that the vast current reorganisations of capital, the formation of new global space, and in particular its use of new technologies of communication, have undermined an older sense of a 'place-called-home', and left us placeless and disorientated (p. 163).

"But is it really so?" she asked. She thought not. She went on to say that "it has long been the exception rather than the rule that place could be simply equated with community, and by this means provide a stable basis for identity"; again, "places have for centuries been more complex locations where numerous different, and frequently conflicting communities intersected" (p. 10); further, places – cities, in particular – are now, she said, sites of complex local/global connections. Her concern was that "some culturally specific symbolic association of women/Woman/local" persists (ibid.), such that home and the

local are the site of women who 'stay put' in the interests and service of patriarchal males (what she termed 'patriarchal stability', p. 123), and are not free, as women are in the relative anonymity of the city, to pursue lifestyles of choice, including perhaps especially Lesbian lifestyles.

In concert with writers like Elizabeth Wilson (1977), Iris Marion Young (1990), and Marilyn Friedman (1989), Massey does not see communities as necessarily "spatially concentrated", or spatially defined (pp. 163-4), but as groupings of like-minded individuals. That is not the sense of community Hilda, Judith and Joy would have shared, because it leaves out the environment, the natural world that was such a large part of their lives. While Massey does mention 'Nature', in association with 'Woman' and 'nostalgia', she does not mention Nature or environment in association with either locality/community or the city. Similarly, while she writes of attitudes to place as being 'progressive' or 'reactionary', she doesn't explain what these descriptors mean, or would mean, differently, to different people. It is difficult not to feel, within the terms of her argument, that one has to choose, and that the 'progressive' and woman-friendly choice would be, in Iris Marion Young's well-known phrase, the "unoppressive city" (1990, p. 301), rather than an allegedly reactionary community.

As noted in Chapter 1, 'community' is a term loaded with meanings, made to bear expectations from within and without, evoked to justify or disparage. While feminists rightly voice concerns about the "patriarchal stability" of some localities/communities (Massey, 1994, p. 123) which, much like some marriages, can trail a history of stifling oppression, if not outright brutality, for women, Massey's conflicts, nostalgia, intrusions and parochialism (1994, *passim*) are not the sole preserve of small communities. They are surely also apparent within cities and between cities, and within and between different groupings in cities. Doreen Massey and writers of her persuasion seem to conflate the nature of the social and the local, forcing choice where there isn't a need to choose and imputing virtues and vices that are arguably common to both. As I discuss in Chapter 8, some of the hostility to and suspicion of community, and some of the disrespect for small towns, may stem from a loss of 'neighbouring' skills, skills which our forbears and people in less individualistic cultures have long taken for granted.

There is, of course, some truth in Massey's cautions. Teresa V. Abbruzzese and Gerda R.

Wekerle (2011) made the following comments about the suburban women who fought to save the Oak Ridges Moraine outside Toronto:

For the most part the women in our study did not recognise their positionality as white middle-class women living in suburbia and the privileges this bestowed, including not only political efficacy but also the ability to utilise state power to preserve natural areas close to where they lived. Women activists tended to accept a traditional defensive politics of place-based environmental movements, emphasising a combination of objectives that included family well-being, environmental stewardship, preservation of green space, and maintaining biodiversity (p. 140).

It is a description that fits Hilda, Judith and Joy and also, as we shall see in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, many of the women who participated in this research. We don't know what Hilda's position on Indigenous peoples would have been, but we do know that Judith Wright and Kath Walker were close friends and that Judith wrote *We Call for a Treaty* (1985) with H.C. Coombs, and about her family's relations with Indigenous people in New England, New South Wales. Joy was a member of the early Aborigines Advancement League. These were, of course, exceptional women. Even so, and without resorting to special pleading, we do well to remember their times and circumstances, as well as their talents and courage. Val Plumwood (1993, 2002) identified explicitly the links between the Master narratives of 'othering', which assign inferior status to women, 'natives' and nature in very similar ways, and it is likely that many women in the past 'knew' the truth of that at some level, perhaps viscerally if not verbally: as Joy once said to me wistfully, "In our day, we just didn't know those things".

If the three women profiled in this chapter were exceptional for their time and place, they saw themselves as part of the Mountain, even if as 'harmless lunatics' in Judith's phrase (1999, p. 260). Unlike many of us today, as some participants in this research acknowledged (Chapters 5, 6, and 7), they knew the Mountain environment in extraordinary detail. They would have breezed through a bioregional quiz, such as the one devised for the North West Earth Institute course (2007, p. 111.3), in Appendix 16. (Reader, you might like to try it yourself.) They participated in local, social, and global issues, while still committing to this place, the Mountain, and its long term well-being. In the light of their examples, it would be hard to justify how we could leave the care of the

Mountain to others – governments or individuals – who have no stake in its future and regard it as something to be managed and regulated, not loved and cherished as an essential part of one’s life.

Two of the three women profiled here - Judith and Joy - are buried on the Mountain, but there are few markers of the work of any of the three. The Council have just spent a third of a million dollars on a new toilet block for tourists, a similar sum on a new war memorial for dead soldiers, and another third of a million dollars on a reconditioned Mountain dump – but we have only managed two plaques and a short walkway to honour the work of three significant Mountain women.

Does it matter that the efforts of these past women environmentalists – these ‘other champions’ – have been so passed over, ‘backgrounded’? After all, people have continued to build on their efforts: where Hilda Geissmann observed, photographed and collected the Mountain’s flora and fauna, many for the first time, there are now academic publications and research projects to record and monitor that data; where Judith Wright worked to establish organisations to advocate for the environment, the organisations she helped establish now do that advocacy; where Joy Guyatt propagated indigenous seedlings in her own backyard for Park rangers and others to plant on the Mountain, a team of volunteers now raise indigenous stock in two local nurseries, one run by Bush Volunteers and the other by Landcare, both organisations which Joy supported and helped establish.

I propose that it does matter. Women in this research have said that, in terms of the environment, they think and act differently to men (Chapters 5 and 6). Val Plumwood wrote (1993, p. 36) that, because of “their [historical] placement in the sphere of nature and exclusion from an oppositional culture”, women may have something “especially significant” to contribute. It is important that stories of women’s care for the environment are remembered and recounted.

## The Forest

When first I knew this forest  
its flowers were strange.  
Their different forms and faces

White violets smudged with purple,  
the wild-ginger spray,  
ground-orchids small and single  
haunted my day;

The thick-fleshed Murray-lily,  
flame-tree's bright blood,  
and where the creek runs shallow,  
the cunjevoi's green hood.



When first I knew this forest,  
time was to spend,  
and time's renewing harvest  
could never reach an end.

Now that its vines and flowers  
are named and known,  
like long-fulfilled desires  
those first strange joys are gone.



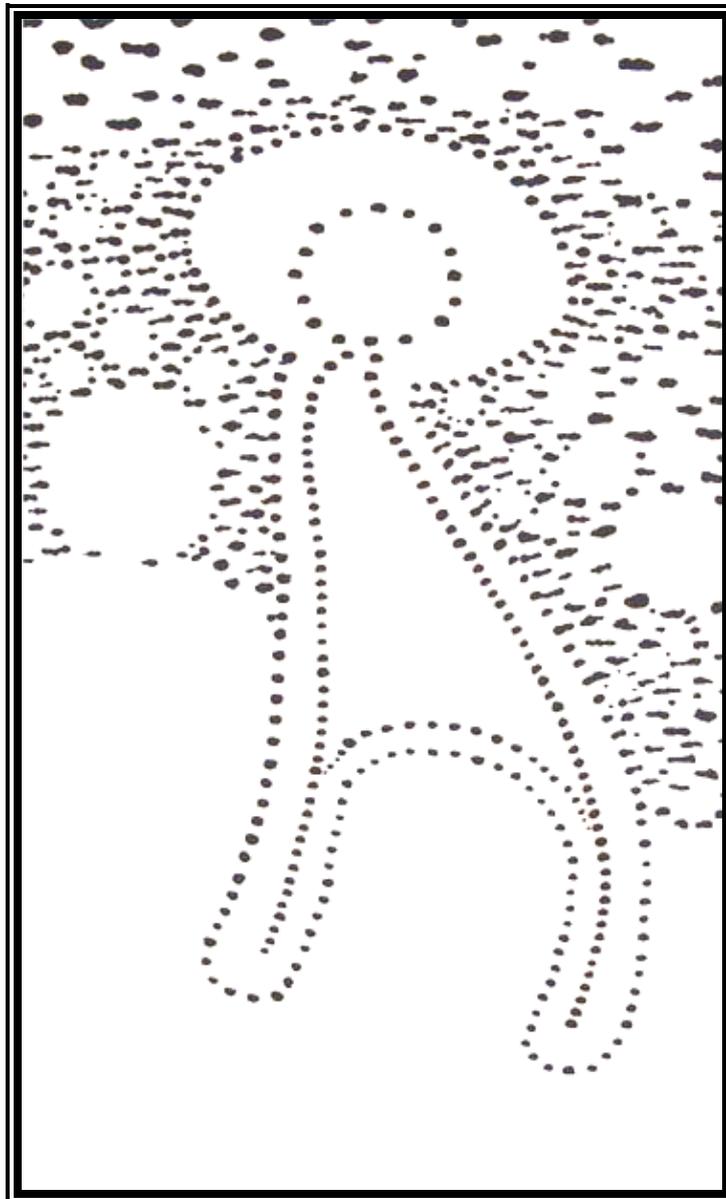
My search is further.  
There's still much to name and know  
Beyond the flowers I gather  
that one that does not wither –  
the truth from which they grow.

*Plates 13—15:  
Orchids of the Mountain.*



*Judith Wright McKinney  
(with kind permission Meredith McKinney)*

# Chapter 5: Caring for Country: Connected



*Plate 16: Woman Moving around in her Country.*

Many White Australians are concerned to be involved in the maturation process of Australian society, through support for Aboriginal people/Reconciliation; they are searching for a new identity – politically or sociologically. The best way of achieving these ends is to start establishing very close ties with land, not necessarily via ownership of property but via locally-based, inclusive, non-political, strategy-based frameworks, with a very long term aim of looking after the land (Mary Graham, 1999, p. 107).

In the discussion of the findings of Stage 1 of the research, I suggested that, on the evidence of the past work of women on Tamborine Mountain, *staying put* is a significant dimension of caring for place. On the basis of the findings in Stage 2 of the research, I suggest that two other significant dimensions of caring for place are being *connected* (Chapter 5) and being *committed* (Chapter 6). The conversations reported in this chapter tell us what the women thought and felt about being *connected* to country/place.

What I mean by ‘connected’ is perhaps more commonly – and, in my view, unsatisfactorily – expressed as ‘belonging’. John Cameron (2003) and Mark Tredinnick (2003) are just two Australians who have compiled collections of papers to examine the concept of ‘belonging’ in settler Australia, with some contributors strenuously claiming they do belong and others hesitating to claim what might be construed as a ‘Master’s right’ in a colonised land (Val Plumwood, 1990, 1993). In both cases, many writers, both women and men, seem to imply that ‘belonging’ is something one can achieve through effort of will or hard physical work, that is, a one-directional relationship. On the contrary, many women in this research, both those who had recently attended the Indigenous workshop and those who worked through environmental organisations (next chapter), would see ‘belonging’ as reciprocal, that is, a two-way, two-directional relationship between themselves and their environment, where they care for the environment and the environment cares for them – put another way, they see themselves as, or wish they could be, connected.

From the responses in the second set of conversations, reported in the next chapter, it seems that being *connected*, along with *staying put*, builds ongoing *commitment* to place and to its well-being. Who speaks for the well-being of a place if no one stays put, no one is connected, and no one is committed to its long term well-being? These are questions and dilemmas that I invite you to consider, along with the women in the conversations reported

in this and the next chapter. I use the word ‘conversation’, following Norman Denzin (1989) who has suggested that research interviews are conversations with a purpose: I have found that ‘conversation’ is a term that sits well with the purposeful exchanges in this study.

While it might appeal to our sense of story to present each woman’s responses separately, woman by woman, rather than report responses to the questions thematically, I have chosen the latter in order to highlight common themes. In the interests of confidentiality, I have also given the women pseudonyms and, where the content of quotations is identifying, I have resorted to “one”, “another”, and similar circumlocutions. I apologise for what may seem an awkward compromise between the necessary requirements of academic research and a community tradition of people being prepared to put their names to their words.

#### **“Belonging to Country” workshop**

... the genius of Aboriginal Australians finds its greatest expression in a theory and practice of place (Deborah Bird Rose, 2009, p. 320).

“Not I think, therefore I am”, but “I am located, therefore I am” (Mary Graham, 2013).

In this chapter, I present the findings from the first set of conversations in Stage 2 research: individual interviews with eleven women who participated in a “Belonging to Country” workshop on Tamborine Mountain<sup>38</sup> led by Indigenous women elders, Mary Graham and Lilla Watson. The aim was to address the research question, *What is Indigenous care for country and what might Tamborine women learn from that?* I was interested to see whether the opportunity to learn about Indigenous belonging to country and care for place might prompt women to reflect on their own experiences of connecting with place and practices of care, and, if so, in what ways.

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<sup>38</sup> Over time, elders and participants have used both ‘seminar’ and ‘workshop’ to describe the event.

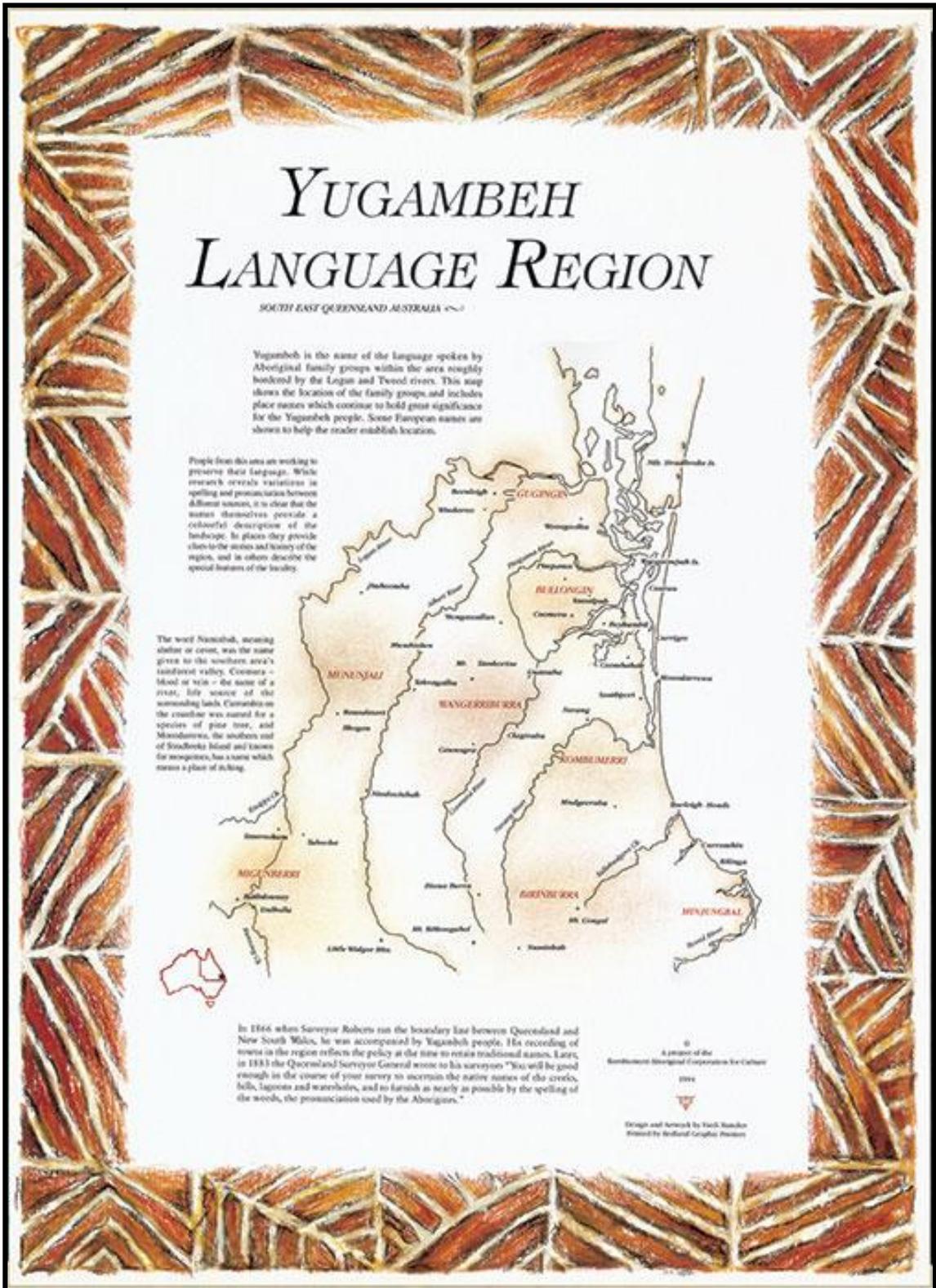


Plate 17: Yugambeh Language Map.

Ambelin Kwaymullina has written that, “In an era of global environmental challenges, we all need to listen to the voices that offer a way of seeing and relating to country that will allow the earth not only to survive, but also to thrive” (in Sally Morgan, Tjalaminu Mia and Blaze Kwaymullina, 2008, p. 7). Perhaps that is, at least in part, why people sign up for a “Belonging to Country” workshop with Mary and Lilla. I expect, though, that most people are anticipating an interesting cross-cultural experience, an opportunity to learn more *about* Aboriginal culture. If so, they often get more than they bargain for.

As far as I can ascertain, the seminar that Mary and Lilla offer is one of a kind<sup>39</sup> and I have found scant literature bearing directly on this area of research. My own first experience of their seminar was as a community work student when, all of us younger and sharper-edged, Mary and Lilla challenged me to confront my own and others’ racism. It was and is an absorbing experience, sometimes painful and affronting, but ultimately liberating because it gives access to other ways of thinking, feeling and doing, including a different way of relating to country/place.

In the three workshops we have held on Tamborine Mountain, I have watched Mary and Lilla work the same magic: one minute the room is full of people chatting, scraping chairs, checking mobiles and iPads, coming in late, and the next minute the room is very still, very quiet, very attentive and respectful, a whole with 20 breathing parts – and it stays that way for the next six hours (lunch is silent). I still don’t know how they do it, but where the women in the conversations below have reported life – and thought-shifting experiences, they have not been exaggerating or being overly dramatic – not all women, and not all to the same degree, but the ‘deep learning’ that Mary and Lilla offer can be an intense experience<sup>40</sup>. Mary and Lilla describe what they mean by ‘deep learning’ as follows:

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<sup>39</sup> Auntie Ann and Uncle Ted Guboo offered guided Dreaming journeys at Wallaga Lake until recently, and there are numbers of workshops to prepare researchers for work in Aboriginal communities, including at James Cook University.

<sup>40</sup> It is well to remember, as Ambelin Kwaymullina and Blaze Kwaymullina (2010, p. 196) remind us, that “The perspectives held by Aboriginal peoples of Australia are many and varied, informed as they are by the specific Aboriginal country from which we each come, the people to whom each of us belong, and our individual and collective experiences of the trauma of colonisation”.

## **Deep Learning**

The method Deep Learning has emerged out of long continuous discussions between Lilla Watson and Mary Graham; as such it is a work in progress. ... Deep Learning is the method of learning that Aboriginal people use to acquire and pass on knowledge, understanding, skills or behaviour

**Although the term isn't used by Aboriginal people, the component parts of activities that are associated with, and emanate from DL [Deep Learning], are familiar to most Indigenous people. The component parts are:**

**The importance of Place**

**The reflective motive**

**The Custodial Ethic**

**The crucial importance of Feeling in Deep Learning (Bill Neidjie)**

**Aboriginal logic – all perspectives are valid and reasonable**

**The importance of ritual and ceremony**

**Deep Learning is not solely objective reasoning or critical thinking.**

(Mary Graham and Lilla Watson, "Belonging to Country" seminar handout, 2011).

Learning, Aboriginal-style, is grounded in relationships, and participants may experience what Deborah Bird Rose (2011a, pp. 2-3) describes as two of the major shifts in worldview necessary for Westerners to change and survive:

... the end of certainty and the end of atomism. From certainty the shift is to uncertainty. From atomism the shift is to connectivity. ... The West has reached these big shifts through the working of its own intellectual and social history. From our current position it becomes possible to open up new conversations with people whose histories are completely different, but whose worldviews work with uncertainty and connectivity. This is a moment for new conversations and new synergies (pp. 2-3).

She defined connectivity in three ways:

(1) In ecological science, connectivity refers to exchange pathways (for energy, information, living things); the greater the number and complexity of pathways, the greater the biodiversity; (2) more widely, exchange pathways may include stories, songs, forms of address; (3) at the foundation – the bonds that sustain the life systems of Earth (2011a, p. 11).<sup>41</sup>

### **Conversations and Reflections**

To be willing to listen and learn is not the same as to imitate or appropriate. It is not only compatible with but requires respect, humility, and self-critique (distinct from self-flagellation) (Val Plumwood, 2005a, p. 375).

To give readers a sense of the interview process, retain the integrity of the data and let you, the reader, hear the women's voices, I will first give a brief summary of the responses to the questions I asked. After the summary, I will comment on the nature of connections, or lack of connections, the women discussed in post-seminar interviews.

The seven (7) questions covered the women's overall responses to the seminar, as well as points of comparison with, or reflections on, Indigenous care for country, and their own thoughts, feelings and practices of care for place. There was also a question on 'women's business' and a question about climate change (see Appendix 8).

### **Deep Learning.**

I began the conversation with each woman by asking her to think back to the day of the seminar, to recall what her overall response had been and whether there were particular thoughts she had taken away. The question was designed to help participants both to recall the workshop and to settle in to the interview.

Without exception, the women expressed appreciation for the workshop and the presenters. Some women spoke explicitly of the presenters' kindness and generosity: "I

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<sup>41</sup> Rose also described what Mary Graham and Lilla Watson would call 'learning to be human'. "BECOMING HUMAN: Humanity is an interspecies collaborative project; we become who we are in the company of other beings; we are not alone" (2011a, p. 11). The text adds: "With thanks to Anna Tsing, Paul Shepard, and the Aboriginal philosopher Mary Graham" (ibid.).

really enjoyed being in their presence – [they were] very generous” (Laura); they brought a “a sense of kindness, a sense of wisdom, a lack of judgement” (Diana); “[I appreciated] being able to ask my questions – they were very, very generous and I now understand the generosity of Aboriginal people, and the way they allow people to come to their own sense of understanding” (Judy); “I particularly appreciated the notion of Whites ‘catching up’ – it was said in an unpatronising way, a reality check. I’d love to go back and explore the basis for that” (Therese). The comments reflect the quality of the relationships Mary and Lilla establish with participants early in the workshop, a firm basis for the ‘deep learning’ and all its challenges that they go on to offer.

While all 11 women acknowledged the value of the workshop, some first time participants spoke of their inability to take it all in: “I was amazed and exhausted by how much information was given out” [Penny]; “the subtlety and the hugeness of it was really too much for me to take in all at once” (Maggie); “the culture is so very different, and I [had] understood that it was different, but I understood that in one small way how it was *really* different (Judy)”. Anna, a second-time workshop participant said: “... how valuable this is for a group of people who come from a variety of backgrounds ... coming to learn about the Indigenous people of this country and their values ... what their spirituality is, and how they do their learning”, and Cath said how this time she had understood “the non-White yarning way” of teaching. As these women imply (and I would agree, from my own experience) Indigenous ‘deep learning’ takes time, over time. It is not a once-only learning event, but evolves and deepens over time, through repeated and varied engagements with Indigenous teachers.

Some women contrasted Indigenous values with what they perceived to be their own or their culture’s failings, particularly in terms of care for land: for example, “there was a non-judgementalism and I can see how that works to produce a superior custodial ethic ... it’s not viewing the land as there to be exploited, which kind of comes naturally in the Protestant Christian ethic” (Laura); “[the non-hierarchical, ‘flat’, social arrangements] really made me start thinking about how our services are organised, and how the Intervention is organised, and just how antithetical that is to [Indigenous ways of organising]” (Cath).

Maggie spoke about what she described as her

deep yearning for us to be able to learn about [Indigenous] culture. We want to be able to feel, whether we're born here or whether we're not, that we have a stake – you know, I always think, this country, we have an opportunity to get it right. We've almost lost it, but, "Hurry up, guys!" - you know? I'm a White person living in a Black country.

She said that "we need to grasp what we did to this country", because the observation of country is "where your intelligence comes from". We also, she said, "have to face the catastrophe we are making for our great-grandchildren": we need to "quieten the mind," listen, and learn from Indigenous people.

Judy, having recently bought land in the vicinity of the Mountain, described "some sort of spiritual connection" with the land that she'd never felt elsewhere. She saw the workshop as timely – "serendipitous" - in expanding her understanding of that connection:

I got it on a deep level... I got it when she [Lilla] said that I should put my own way of viewing the world to one side, and not try to make sense of the Aboriginal world view from that perspective. How do we do that? How do we make that shift? ... How amazing is it to have been in the right place at the right time and have [had] the privilege of actually going along [to the workshop]! It's just completely changed the way I look at things. Quite profound.

### **The custodial ethic.**

The women went on to recall Mary Graham's teaching about relationship and connection, which bears repeating here:

The two most important relationships in life are, firstly, those between land and people and, secondly, those amongst people themselves, the second being always contingent on the first. The land, and how we treat it, is what determines our human-ness. Because land is sacred and must be looked after, the relation between people and land becomes the template for society and social relations. Therefore all meaning comes from land (Mary Graham, 1999, p. 106).

Overall, the women I interviewed re-affirmed their need to connect to and care for the land. Melissa, an Indigenous woman, said that "[the workshop] reinforced that I am of the

land. Indigenous and non-Indigenous don't pay enough attention to the land. It is so important". Similarly, Diana, a non-Indigenous woman, said the workshop "just rang true for me, because it gave me a way to be grateful for where I live and what I see every day", and another reflected that "[the workshop] made me very conscious that it is not 'our' land, that we can't own it, and it is not even an 'it' – it's a living organism [which became] very clear through Mary and Lilla's input" (Maggie).

Feelings of connection and gratitude prompted women to reflect on whether what they were doing to look after the land was enough: "I've always worked wherever I am to garden or to help with wildlife, but I haven't been doing enough of it. So that's what I'll have to do, into my older age, get more involved helping conserve the land and the creatures in it" (Nicole); "[I am] conscious of my lack of care of the land, and [I] haven't really found, personally, a good way to deal with that in my current situation. I drive cars, I go in aeroplanes, I do all that stuff ... I am aware of a huge gap" (Therese).

For some women, caring for country flowed from their sense of connection to a particular place. Judy spoke of the land she had recently bought near the Mountain:

It was a bit of a train wreck. ... I remember thinking when I walked on it, 'Oh, god - you just need to be loved back into life'. I even said it out loud to myself. Like, that's my job. ... I feel emotional about it now [crying] ... I think I'm picking up on the sadness of relating to that land.

Living on the Mountain seemed to heighten some women's experience of connection to place. This was evident on the day of the workshop itself when, at the beginning of the first session, women introduced themselves to the group and many spontaneously spoke of their close connection to the Mountain. Reflecting on that in her interview, Diana said:

I [have] never had that feeling that 'I belong here and this is right for me'. But I have it here. I like the peace and the greenness and the freedom to enjoy what's really around you ... like, I'm walking around here and looking at how beautiful it all is. You could have that in Melbourne, maybe, but it's like ... it's part of everybody's [everyday] life up here on the Mountain. [When I moved here] I knew it was a pretty place, but I didn't have any idea of its mystery or its grandeur or anything.

Laura, a more recent arrival, said:

Well, it's a process of increasing awareness, I suppose, and I'm just growing into this particular country, 'cos I've only been here for 15 months. ... I was reminded [at the workshop] that it's a privilege to be in this particular place. I already knew that, but it's good to be reminded ... I would like to think that it gets deeper.

Nicole thought that people who live here "have always been fond of attributing the Mountain an identity of its own ... [its] healing abilities and mysterious qualities. I think they're correct in thinking that".

Not all women in the interviews said they experience a connection to place. Cath spoke honestly about her lack of a sense of belonging and connection to place and the reasons for it:

That's a really hard one for me because ... I don't think I have ever kind of experienced a belonging to place ... maybe because we moved a lot when I was a kid ... I think I identify with the whole of the land rather than particular places in it. ... what meant more this time round [her second workshop] was the responsibility, which is a bit scary, but also a kind of peacefulness about that. For Lilla and Mary, this has always happened, and people have always been born, and been able to survive... at least it balanced out a bit of all that horrible [destruction of the environment that is occurring] and what a dreadful job we're doing of being custodians.

### **Caring for my place.**

When I asked the women how they saw themselves caring for country, for their 'place', most stressed the need to protect the land, to nourish it, and to do that on their own patch. Many said, like Therese, "I am much more conscious of the need to care, also of the ancientness of the land". Judy, whose place was 'a bit of a train wreck' (above), gave a detailed account of what she was doing to care for place:

... what I'm trying to do now is to put some nourishment back into the land. I don't feel like it's been nourished. ... So I have bought a bit of nutrients ... I need to bring a lot of mulch on next. I know what I have to do. So – I want – I need to raise the energy of the place, and it will nourish itself. *I don't have to do*

anything. All I have to do is bring the goodies there, and the earth can look after itself, and [I'll try to] not get in the way. Which is what we do as humans. ... I'd like to think that I am actually going to be contributing to the betterment of the land ... regeneration and rejuvenation.

The scale of the land to care for did not seem to be important. Laura observed:

Just on a very small scale, there's looking after our little patch of land ... 891 sq m ... backing on to the escarpment, so it feels quite seamless. We treat all those mountain ranges as part of our backyard. There's side boundaries to neighbours ... but there's no back boundary.

Maggie also spoke of neighbouring fences, remembering when she lived in the country and, horrified by wildlife dying on wire fences, asked her neighbours (unsuccessfully) to make corridors for wildlife to move through safely. She said, "We do need to look at protecting what we have ... it's true, we have to step up. It takes energy and it takes courage".

For some women, gardens were the places where they felt they could best care for the land: "I tend my garden, and I tend to the animals that are in the area ... I mean, I was never a really huge gardener, but I love gardens ... I've just never had the time or whatever" (Diana); "I've always been a gardener" (Nicole). For some women, that meant protecting the land from chemicals: "I don't want to bring any chemicals on that are going to harm the country ... if I won't have it on my own skin, why would you put it on the ground?" (Judy); "[I try to] practise permaculture methods very broadly ... compost, mulching, re-using stuff ... not buying too much in the way of fertilisers and things" (Laura); "I've never been an environmentalist or whatever, but I don't kill the little things [she gave an example of flicking a tick back into the bush] ... whatever you put into the earth or your environment will come back, you know, good or bad" (Diana).

Two women emphasised that the workshop affirmed what they were already doing. Judy thought that, "it actually gave me a sense of 'You're on the right track'". She was impressed by the concept of "learning to be human" rather than having to be perfect. What was important, Diana thought, was "not so much belonging to country ... that rang true ... it was [that] ... I had an insight, just a small insight, into a different way of thinking ... that impacted me way more than belonging to country". She saw caring for place "the

other way round ... the country, or place, cares for me actually ... very energising ... really serene". Melissa, one of the Aboriginal women, told of her father taking her into the bush as a child and saying, "You see what you need to know in the bush". She regards looking after country as a spiritual as well as a physical task, and now takes her own children into the bush and teaches them to observe what the land is telling them – for example, what land needs burning. She spoke of the country where she was born and the country where she now lives, and of feeling "right at home" in both.

Some women did not see themselves as able to care for place. Anna spoke regretfully of the time and energy demands of her current work situation which constrain her:

I think I have got a long way to go. I love the beauty of the land [but] I don't believe I am very good or very committed to taking care of it very well. I still read a bit, I still plant a few trees, but the kind of work I'm doing ... brings me home exhausted. I just need to survive a lot.

When I asked what might help or change that, she replied that nothing would help until she finished her current job. Cath thought, instead, she cared for her place through people relationships: "I don't identify with caring for place at a local level or a Brisbane level or a Queensland level ... so I suppose my place is really the [human] *relationships* of place ... that's how I see myself caring for the country, for the people, rather than direct caring for the land".

Deborah Bird Rose's assessment of Indigenous and Western differences in terms of connection to land was this: "As I see it, the problem for Westerners is to acknowledge the brokenness of our intersubjectivities [including with other species], and to recuperate connection without fetishising or appropriating Indigenous people and their culture of connection" (1999, p. 182). In the above responses, there is an acknowledgement of 'brokenness' but also a desire to 'recuperate connection' in ways that the women in their own personal circumstances might find possible. Perhaps the acknowledgement of how broken the connections are can circumvent fetishising and appropriation? Certainly, the women's responses were made in the context of relationships, however brief, with physically present Aboriginal women – not in the abstract.

### **Indigenous care for country.**

Responding to my question about what the women had understood of Indigenous care for country, in comparison with their own current practices, the main similarity and difference they noted was respect for the land, or the lack thereof.

The women who identified as Indigenous were particularly forthright in their views. Melissa described standing in a devastated, treeless landscape in outback Queensland, looking down into an open cut mine. While the White people who were with her saw nothing wrong, she protested: “The land is weeping, and now you are digging down to her soul!” People, she said, are selling off “our heritage, our ancestors, sending the land off to Asian countries, to whoever will pay for it”. In a vivid image, she explained that when she dies she expects to go back into the earth, and it disturbs her that the ground holding her remains may be sold and sent to other countries. Yes, she said, there is a “buy-off” in terms of jobs for Indigenous people, but is it worth it? Money and possessions don’t mean as much as “going out and sitting under a tree for half an hour and seeing what that can do for you”.

But it can be, personally, very complex. Penny thought that, “Whitefellas care more about the possessions they own, like the home they bought or live in, or the car that they have, whereas I find that Indigenous people have more respect in the land and in caring for that and in their traditional places” – but, because of her White upbringing, “I sort of feel right in the middle of it. Like, which way do I lean?”

Non-Indigenous women also spoke of the need to respect the land. Cath saw more similarities than differences in Indigenous and non-Indigenous concern for what is happening to the land:

[especially] the importance of nurturing relationships ... and a respect for every bit of the earth, like a respect for those tiny creatures that are dying off, respect for the soil we are trashing ... respect for all that land we’re mucking about [with] to get coal seam gas out of.

Nicole was hopeful that

Australians are becoming far more aware of the necessity to use local indigenous plants, because we have had a water problem – I think a good percentage of this generation does genuinely care, and I think they will teach their children to do so.

But it is, Diana said,

more than just a respect ... the place we choose to live is a part of who we are. I chose the land [where she currently lives] more than I chose the house ... just the way the land is, it creates just a perfect place to live ... it's just a *deep* respect.

Living in and feeling deep attachment and respect for a place is not the same, however, as being born into country as an Indigenous person, with rights and responsibilities. For some women, this was a conundrum. Laura, for example, spoke of

the universal need to belong to a place. But in the West we've had to learn to be a bit more flexible [putting down roots in different places]. We've lost a lot from that, and I can see why people do need to reclaim it.

She said that Mary and Lilla seemed “to be talking in a more ethereal sense about belonging to country”.

*Sandra:* Spiritual?

*Laura:* Yes. They didn't talk about many practical applications. And for them it was belonging to the country they grew up in, not where they live now. I asked them actually whether it was transportable, and they seemed to be saying, ‘Yes, you always go back to where you're from’. But, for me, I start putting down roots in the new place ... I grew up [elsewhere but] I don't have any kind of natural roots there.

This was also “a difficult question” for one woman who spoke of the “spirit feeding” she experiences when she takes a day trip into a national park:

What I cling on to is that I do have a sharper consciousness about [caring for place] than I used to have ... that is what I rely on, that extraordinary beauty to kind of keep me a little bit on track. I don't want to lose it, yeah, but I am not contributing a lot to it – I am just soaking it up (Anna).

Therese also saw herself as in process: “My care for country doesn’t have a spiritual basis – it’s dawning and on track, but I haven’t yet made the leap to country as spirituality”, although she is much more aware of country “as the basis of life”.

Most women said they felt that the workshop affirmed what they have been trying to do to care for their place, in however an imperfect way, even though they have had to seek out knowledge rather than draw on what they thought Indigenous people already have “in their genes”. The land where Judy now lives is “adulterated [but]... it doesn’t matter that this has happened. What matters is my response ... acknowledge it and then try to improve it”. She went on to say:

The workshop affirms my process – it affirms that I’m doing the right thing. [It] allows me to actually feel that if I do make choices along the way and then learn later that I’ve muffed it up a bit, I don’t think I’ll feel the same guilt that I would have felt in my Western way of viewing the world. ... Aboriginal people I don’t think see it in those terms: you’re trying to do the right thing and you’re basing it on the information you have now; more information may come to pass that makes that wrong and something else right – ‘Okay, we’ll do that then’. I don’t have that, ‘cos of my heritage [but] I’m going to sort of actively look for some of that information.

Cath explained the difference in thinking about care for place as follows:

I think the main difference is that, from an Indigenous point of view, the relationships [in place] are all always being strung together, whereas for me ... I’ve had to unravel a kind of thinking, get some more knowledge and ... try to integrate it. But it isn’t integrated – it’s fairly tattered. [And] I don’t have any sort of, ‘Once I get there, it’ll all be OK’. I think it’s ongoing, until the day you die.

That isn’t always comfortable.

You know, [my connection to place is] all about discovery, but it’s not part of me. I hate saying that – I want to be given the gift. You know, lay it on me. They can continue with their [ways], and I’m *looking* for the ways. They have them already (Maggie).

It is also hard sometimes to put that together with other people's practices, for example, when a neighbour buys an adjacent block and promptly cuts down 75 trees:

The difference is, I guess, that I tend to draw a line where my property ends. ... I feel as though I have my plot and he has his plot, and he's doing what I don't respect in his plot, but I'm probably keeping my comments to myself ... I did put my hand up at the beginning and they got very nasty with me (Diana).

### **Change.**

I was interested to hear whether what the women had heard at the seminar had changed the ways they thought about and cared for place and, importantly, what examples they could give. Many of the women found this question, one of the nitty-gritty research questions, difficult to answer. Cath paused for quite some time before, laughing, "I'm finding it hard to nail it!" Another said, "No, it hasn't", and another, "No, I don't think it has really changed me ... no." Others answered at a tangent or from an attitudinal rather than a practical point of view – that is, with an emphasis on 'think about' rather than 'care', and two considered that they had already addressed the question in previous answers and had nothing to add.

Against that trend, Maggie gave a physical, embodied response, speaking of her decision to go barefoot, at least in the house:

I realise that I need to *physically connect* for my well-being – physical, spiritual, in every possible way, so it has been alerting ... God help me that I don't fall back, you know, into a lack of total appreciation for this amazing, amazing country.

Answering in terms of a change in attitude, Judy said: "I think it's actually changed the way I move in the world" and, having spoken previously about minimising her impact on her land, she said that the workshop had shown her a different way to look at it: "But, you know, there's something about the evolution of the world that that needed to happen anyway, so that's just part of the drill, isn't it? ... And they're waiting for us to get it. [Sandra: As in, we've 'only been here 200 minutes?'] Yes."

As in previous responses, some women reflected on the differences between Indigenous experiences of belonging, connection to country, and their own.

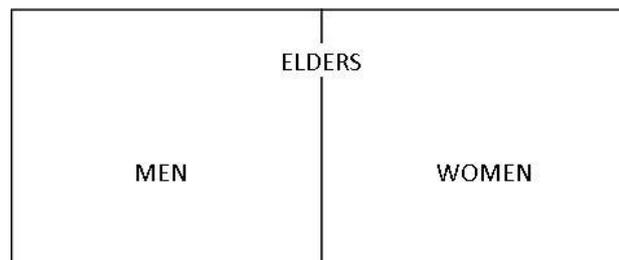
Well, no, it hasn't [changed what I think and do]. There's been more of an appreciation. I've thought a lot about my actual country, where I came from, and wondering why I don't have a connection to it, and why I don't long to go there ... wondering why I don't have a pull there ... I think that Mary, particularly, was very definite about that – it's not where you live now, it's where you're from. That's your country, and I can't interpret that really in my life, because I feel so at home here [on the Mountain] ... We don't have that [connection to our place of birth] as part of us (Laura).

The disjunction between an Indigenous and non-Indigenous connection to place led Cath to note the difficulty of making changes:

I think it's just made me a lot more cynical about ... practically everything to do with how our community and society is organised, to do with how it's run and legislated ... it's made me much more aware of how much we are plundering, and plundering, and plundering, but what I've done about that is probably not a lot [laughs ruefully].”

**Women's business, men's business, community business.**

We recall the diagram (Chapter 2) that Mary and Lilla drew to illustrate what they term the 'lateral system' of relationships between men and women and their deference to elders. The workshop discussions of the interdependence between men and women, including each their own areas of authority, made a deep impression on many of the women I interviewed.



All women had a great deal to say about differences between women's and men's care for the environment and, because these responses go to the heart of the research, I will give extended examples.

Some immediate interview responses were: “Yes, quite different”; “Well, I think, no, they are not the same”; “No, not really [the same]”; “I’d say not”; “No, not the same, not the same at all”; “No, I don’t think it’s the same, in my experience”. Variations included one woman preferring to speak of “a female principle and a male principle”, and another seeing herself, by reason of life circumstances, “as a woman with a lot of male in her”.

Again, however, many found it difficult to give *specific* examples of differences, and two women said that they wanted to give it more thought (outside the interview). Some were eager to affirm that men’s ways were just as valid as women’s: “that’s important”, Joan emphasised, adding that “it’s just natural that it is different, good that it is different, because as I have observed, men’s and woman’s brains *are* different.” Two Indigenous women said they hoped that men’s and women’s relationships would “evolve”, and Maggie thought that “essentially, it’s changing... [there used to be the belief that] we were lesser than they [men] were, somehow. Um ... not that I believed it!”

In terms of possible reasons for gender differences, there was a striking contrast in two women’s responses. One attributed differences, at a social or cultural level, to the way Australia was settled, and the other attributed the differences, at a personal level, to her age and life circumstances. At the social or cultural level, Cath explained:

The whole of Australia being colonised, or free settled in WA, the whole country has been stamped with male ways of *not* caring for place and country – and place, country, the earth are really the things, the kind of stuff, we can make a quid over ... and be powerful chaps [laughs]. ... I think it’s probably still primarily women who nurture, not just children, but who nurture all sorts of relationships, and who nurture all sorts of conversations, and who nurture all sorts of values that I still think ... wouldn’t last a nanosecond in a man’s mind.

She went on:

And I guess at the general level my example would be what’s happening with coal seam gas at the moment: and it’s interesting because a lot of the people I’ve heard objecting about that are women, not their husbands – I mean, there are men involved, I know, but the voices I hear on the radio are women’s voices. So I think when Lilla was saying “men’s business, women’s business, separate but equal”, that’s very different in my culture, ‘cos I think there is

men's business and there is women's business, but they're not equal and they never have been equal.

By contrast, the other gave a personal explanation:

I've been caring for my child, you know, from the beginning, by myself, so I've had to be both male and female. So when you ask me how I do things as a woman ... how do I care for my place as a woman? I do both. ... I don't have the advantage of being 'just a woman' [laughs]. You know, I have to be tough. I mean, women are tough, I know. But I have to sort of put on the man's suit, oftentimes in my life ... in the raising of a child, and being in business, and not being taken advantage of ... by handymen, or whatever. So I have a hard time distinguishing the female part of me and the male part. The female part is coming more into play now as I get older ... I smiled when she [Mary] said 'men's business and women's business' because I remember as a young woman thinking, 'We're all the same. Men and women are all the same. The guys just don't try being sensitive and, you know, women are just not tough enough'. ... but, really, as I get older, the more distinctions I see ... and I see the male and female in myself all the time. But that's a tough question for me to answer.

Some specific differences women noted were women's "attention to detail" and men's preference for "the big stuff" in, for example, revegetation and gardening work: "most women are more observant of details ... whereas men tend to be more singularly focused ... and woman can be chatting and working at the same time". Therese went on,

For me, it's about little by little, starting with the immediate and working, spreading out from there, organically as things change, not a grand picture. For a man, it's more like a project, with a lot more happening, not so interested in detail.

She then qualified her comments: "But that's a large generalisation. Someone like [male participant] at the workshop might see it like me. [However], for men, it's the big picture stuff rather than the small details women are more interested in." The women in the second set of conversations (Chapter 6) made essentially the same observations.

Some women spoke about the differences they saw in themselves and their partners.

Maggie, for example, explained that her partner is

very interested in keeping everything ship shape ... women are more sitting down in it ... his vegetable garden is very productive, and I'm [down] looking at the florettes on things because I'm going to draw them [laughs].

But Laura wasn't sure "... that it splits down gender lines ... you could call it a female principle and a male principle, rather than what men do and what women do". She went on to say that women are "... good at recycling ... they think about the long term consequences ... [perhaps] thinking about looking after the land for the next generation". She thought, though, that "men could equally feel that responsibility".

A few women leaned towards sympathising with men: "women have been in our society ... so focused on changing men ... to make them into good partners or women or whatever, that we've almost taken away their male-ness; and in doing that, men have struggled"

(Judy). She seemed somewhat ambivalent, however, because she went on to say:

So what have men done in it? Well, men have not been equal partners, and so they haven't actually worked on men's business. So, in a way, they perhaps [have] needed to take responsibility for their own business, 'cos women have been overly responsible. Men have been – you know – really, just choofing along having a good time, not being responsible and not living up to their obligations necessarily. So I think that some of it is about that issue of responsibilities and obligations, and that really came home to me in the workshop.

Judy said that she had grown up with the belief that women should be equal and, when she saw Mary's diagram of 'separate but equal' on the whiteboard, she thought:

Why don't we get that? ... [It's] only in the last few years [I've] become really aware of the separate ways women and men view the world, and how they see things ... and I say to myself, 'Oh, god, I wish I'd got this when I was 20 ... when I was 30 ... or 40!' [laughs]. But I have it now.

If it is about men having to give up power, "... in that [Aboriginal] society, power was always equal, so there wasn't anything for anyone to give up. I really liked that. That works for me!" (Judy).

As an Indigenous woman, Melissa thought that, for women, caring for country is "more intrinsic", while for men, it is "more learned". She told of attending a workshop which some women found "life changing", but which most men seemed to treat as "having a good time". She thought that, while in Indigenous society women have been traditionally seen "as followers", that is now changing and "women are taking more pivotal roles".

At a personal level, Nicole believed that "men and women are distinct, different creatures and their [men's] thought patterns are almost alien to me sometimes. I just think their priorities have always been usually different to women's." Asked to give an example, she went on: "Just the way my husband went about feeding our daughter. Just totally different actions, and ways of coming at things, and reasons for doing things ... [men] have a sense of nurture, but it's different to a woman's sense of it." At a social/political level, Cath commented on the ways men operate in a political party:

I think it's probably fair enough to say that [the party] would not be saying 'men's business, women's business, separate but equal'. I think they'd be saying, '[the party's] business', but I think in fact, at my local level, the boys run the show. I don't know whether they do throughout the party: I think that varies a lot, and certainly within the [party] men are different in the sense that I think they do have a nurturing and some kind of caring, some kind of being responsible for what they're doing to the earth. I think that's different, but then I imagine that's different with ... there'd be people like that in [other parties] as well. ... I don't know what they do in Bob Katter's party!<sup>42</sup>

She went on to say that she thought:

It's men rather than women who believe that this whole contraption of more and 'better' development and growth and productivity can keep going, and that the wheels are not going to fall off – and I think women know it is. Not all women, but I think women are itchy about it.

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<sup>42</sup> Bob Katter is an outspoken, deeply conservative north Queensland politician, leader of Katter's Australian Party.

Anna told a story about being involved in a State planning process with predominantly male planners, and how hard it was for women and Indigenous participants to shift men's views, which they [men] regarded as normative: "With a lot of the professional areas that women go into, it takes them a long time to change the culture, if they can ... it's really hard to ... actually confront that very powerful culture ... [to challenge] how the males see it." Male planners, for example, talked of 'land use', while Indigenous participants consistently spoke of 'land rights', "and they are trains [train tracks] that absolutely don't meet".

Some women spoke of having, as a woman, a spiritual connection with the land. Maggie said that she can "feel the presence of something there in the forest ... Trees do emanate a spiritual thing to us or a connection to us in some way that's [even] beyond spiritual." She spoke of a creek which had been the site of a massacre of Aboriginal people many years ago, and how she felt "there was a cry there ... that story has not been told." Compared to her then husband, "I pick[ed] up the vibrations of the place – that seemed more important to me than to him". Judy, another woman who spoke of a spiritual connection, this time to the Mountain, also used the term 'vibrations': "[it was important] hearing that from an Aboriginal viewpoint, this place is quite sacred, and it does have a high vibration level".<sup>43</sup> She told a story of a couple's relationship that broke up because the man, whose family had lived on the land for generations, "simply couldn't leave: I think that you can't help but be connected to it, after a period of time".

### **Climate change.**

We've had these aggressive weather patterns ... you know, it's either really so dry that everything dies, or it's so wet that everything rots, or you have hail where it pummels the plants, and animals, and everything. So it's just that, unsettled. It's as though there's no peace. It's almost as though we're in ... the beginning of ... I imagine that it will become more severe ... at the very beginning of a changed way of looking at everything (Diana).

I wanted to ask about climate change, partly to give some urgency and context to discussions about caring for the environment and partly to explore what 'solutions' the women might offer and at what level (local to global).

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<sup>43</sup> Mary Graham's comment about the Mountain during the workshop.

At the personal level, Anna observed:

For me, again, it is very basic. It is about water, it is about planting native trees, it is about eating food that is not brought from the other side of the world. It is about use of electricity and it is about use of petrol ... I guess the one I am least likely to change is the use of petrol, which is a bit of a worry.

In her household, “we are actually doing a lot of self-education ...we set ourselves a task every month, and it’s basic tasks like use of plastics, and how you use power and cleaners in your house, that kind of stuff, and use of cars ...”.

Like Anna, a number of women had concerns about car use, especially for people who live on the Mountain and commute to work:

I think it may be interesting to see what happens with the price of petrol. All the people that drive off the Mountain, including me and my husband, twice a week. I’d love to be able to be independent of car travel, but I can’t ...I don’t have to go in 5 days, but I’d rather not go at all. Or go every second week. So, if I can, I’ll be moving towards that (Laura).

Similarly, Joan spoke of how, in her household,

we are working towards having a self-sustaining garden and access to water and, you know, not purchasing new things so we are not contributing to a bigger footprint on the earth, not using the car unless it’s absolutely necessary.

Nicole said that, as a renter, “everywhere I go, if I know I can stay a while, I do grow my own [vegetables] ... If I were a home-owner ... I’d be using all the government schemes to help prepare my home [for climate change].”

Two women spoke of how, moving to the Mountain (where there is no reticulated water), had made them aware of water use:

Well, we’re certainly much more aware of water as a fixed resource, an unpredictable resource. ... we’ve just been putting in grass seed ... and the amount of water that’s gone into producing a very patchy lawn is pretty indefensible. ... And I really can’t see the point, myself [in having a lawn] (Laura).

And:

... the changed conditions mean that there's either no water or an abundance of water, an overabundance. So that has a huge effect on how healthy the land is really. I have three tanks. Two tanks are for our use and one tank is for the garden ... the thing is, we're also responsible for the over-abundance of water ... if the climate changes to the point that it's dry for extended periods, this is going to affect everything (Diana).

One of the Indigenous women spoke of growing up in northern Australia and noticing recently how the seasons are changing:

... the Dry seasons and the Wet seasons are changing a lot – and specially this year. ... the Wet season came a lot sooner than what it used to, and the heat started up and everyone was complaining about it. And it shocked me, I guess, 'cos I went – wow! – like, I knew it was happening but it was *real* ... Yeah. But I'm acknowledging it more and I guess I'm not too sure what I can exactly do about it, 'cos I don't understand it completely (Penny).

Melissa made the distinction between Indigenous and 'Whitefella' understandings of climate change: "Climate change is more a Whitefella term ... but, yes, because of how we have abused the land, the changes are bad now. We have gone over the precipice."

Most women answered the question from within their own personal concerns and local experiences – stressing the need to recycle, mulch, plant native and drought resistant plants, grow their own food as much as possible – but made few references to the actual or potential roles of governments at any level.<sup>44</sup> However, the time of the interviews coincided with local media reports about the possibility of coal seam gas mining (or fracking) in the area, an issue that many in the Scenic Rim have taken up with passion. As Laura explained: "The Scenic Rim protest [about coal seam gas] is going to be a big issue up here in a couple of years, I think, when it all starts happening. It's quite scary, how far they can get on the basis of apathy – people like me!"

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<sup>44</sup> Household efforts, such as recycling, are the "low hanging fruit" of carbon emission reductions, often initiated by men but carried out by women, and not the large-scale changes that need to occur to keep climate change temperatures at or below 2 degrees (Michael Vandenburg, Jack Barkenbus, and Jonathon M. Gilligan, 2008).

Judy had particular concerns about the Australian government selling land to overseas interests, particularly for mining, and contrasted that with what her family tells her occurs in New Zealand:

What does an overseas/Chinese company give two toots about the land in Australia? Their connection is very removed. ... It's outrageous that we are ... not looking after our farmers, so that they can look after the land. ... [In New Zealand] if you've got a mine ... you've got to regenerate. It's got to go back to what it was before. You do not do what they're doing here, because it's out of the sight of the general public. Just raping the land and leaving it pillaged. They don't even feel a responsibility to put the dirt back over and plant a few trees. Ridiculous. It's outrageous.

Cath was not hopeful.

I think in terms of how I live my life and, you know, care for whatever I care about, it's [climate change] probably not going to make much difference for now, but on the broader front, as the population is displaced and people see their place is taken away, I don't know, I'll probably get involved in re-housing refugees. Because the effects are going to be massive, and I mean our food security and our water security ... and that doesn't worry me so much about me, because I think I can use electricity less ... but in terms of the whole population of Australia, it scares me shitless, because I think way down the track we're just going to see wars and horribleness, and 'I've got to survive by killing the guy next door', so ... I'm not real hopeful about all that ... and I don't know really well how to talk about it. ... I don't think people care a lot about species becoming extinct, really ... It's the animals and plant life and things in the ocean that are the weakest and most vulnerable, and on the earth it's going to be the weakest and most vulnerable and poor ...

Therese thought that we are in a transitional period, and that we will be forced to make changes - because "we're going to have to understand our reliance on country, on the land" - and Maggie thought that Australia could play a leading role in adapting to and mitigating climate change, especially by learning from Indigenous Australians:

I don't think you can give in to the idea that, you know, we're powerless ... We could be the place where people can come to renew ... We have an opportunity

to look after this country, and we can get so much from the Aboriginal people here, and [they can] show us the way, and take us in, and renew us. I'd love to see that. I would love to see that. I would love to see us survive.

But, in order to survive, Judy thought, we have to be mindful of our responsibilities and obligations. Referring to Indigenous cultures, she said:

What constrains people to their obligations and responsibilities ... is the watchful eye of other people in a society. 'You can do that if you want to, but I won't say it's okay. Not going to say that's good. It doesn't fit with our philosophy. But you can do it. That's for you to do.' And I do have a belief in ... what you reap is what you sow ... what you do is what you receive, and the Aboriginals [knew that]. Like, 'Okay, you can step out of line, but we do have a line and, you know, if you do the wrong thing, you're going to get consequences'.

### **Reflecting on deep learning.**

While praiseworthy efforts have been, and are being, made to engage with Aboriginal understandings of the world, the historical dominance of Western knowledge systems and the damage wrought by colonisation mean that there is still much work to be done before there can be a true and lasting meeting of minds, hearts and worlds (Ambelin Kwaymullina and Blaze Kwaymullina, 2010, p. 195).

Taking up the offer to add to what they had already said, all 11 women took the opportunity to express again their appreciation for the workshop: "Thank you to Lilla and Mary. I got a lot more out of it this time, and I'd go again ... We are going to have to look to Indigenous people in this country to learn how to care for our country"; "it allowed me to look at things, not from here, not necessarily from over there, but I look at things differently now and that's a really positive thing".

Judy found the workshop life-changing:

I could go on and on and on – how does it affect me? In so many ways that I can't even express. That I'm not even aware of. Just intrinsically part of how I'm probably moving through the world now. ... Maybe that connection [with

my land] is more spiritual than I realised. I don't know ... All I know is it's right ... It feels right. It feels right.... It's actually about – it's about us. We are part – of it – and it is part of us.

She thought that Westerners don't have “a box for that stuff ... and that's what I think I got from the workshop particularly. ... Aboriginal people use *all* their senses, not just their brain – all their physical senses, their feelings”:

... my land, you know, 7 acres. People thought I was crazy ... [although] I do have a background of ... my grandfather was a dairy farmer, so I have a connection with land. Probably, if I think back, you know, I probably haven't thought about it before now [but] there is that connection anyway. In my family. But ... I don't live there ... But I know now, just from talking, actually, that maybe that's a re-connection. So, it's a different country? Doesn't really matter. Land's land.

Reflecting on the workshop process prompted some women to tell stories. One of the Indigenous participants told a very personal story:

When Lilla was talking and we just sort of put everything out of our mind ...

*Sandra: Going to see the woman in the rainforest? Lilla's guided visualisation?*

Yeah ... I'd had a dream a couple of months back about this lady coming to me in the mirror; and she said - like, she was a very Aboriginal woman, very black – and she said, 'I'm your grandmother'. And I said, 'You can't be because both my grandmothers are very fair skinned'. And she came to me in that vision and it was ....Yes, it was, like, whoa! .... It felt like – she came to me in that dream because of what was going to happen later on [at the workshop]. ...

Another personal story was about moving to the Mountain:

I came [to the Mountain] because I was ... in need of a place to recuperate ... I was divorcing and I had a young child ... seeing the Mountain, and having missed the greenery so much ... once I was here, I knew that this was the place I'd like to bring up my child ... I've been lucky enough to stay on the Mountain. [As a child] I was dragged from pillar to post. My dad was nomadic. I think I

went to nine different primary schools before I hit high school. So [my own] kids really loved the fact that they were able to go to the same school, and keep the same friends. So the Mountain is important to us.

Asked what her 'place' meant to her, Anna (who had said she felt little attachment to place because of current circumstances) answered with feeling:

I can only answer that by saying that this is what I love: I love being in the bush, I love sitting beside creeks, I love sitting under a tree on a moonlight night, I love our native animals ... and what I don't like is being part of a society where the dollar is more important than that life.

Living with those contradictions can be difficult. While Laura remembered with pleasure how she had learned to live with and appreciate the environment when she lived in a cabin in the rainforest for some time, she was also aware of her "privileged position":

Living ... in a cabin in the rainforest for the best part of a year, and seeing how nature balanced itself when there was no interference – and that there was plenty. It just felt ... my overwhelming impression was one of abundance ... this self-sustaining cycle that, if you just left it alone, it would look after itself perfectly well. And, ah, that was good for me. Cos, you know, it's fundamentally positive. I went up there with quite a negative attitude towards most things and that life force, I suppose, just was very, very strongly positive up there. Yes, very peaceful. ... But then I was in a privileged position, working on a solar-powered computer ... I wasn't trying to make a living off the land, so I could see it was a very unusual, unique position to be in. It's not like I was a farmer, trying to run cows or something. ... Nothing's very simple when it comes to being custodians of the land – with competing interests.

Maggie was acutely aware of the losses, both of ancestral lands during the enclosures in the Scottish Highlands as well as of wild places in Australia where she used to take her children camping:

I wonder if some of the feelings that I have about displacement comes from the fact that some of my family, ancestors, were ... in Scotland in the Highlands, [during] the Clearances. ... We're going to lose what we do have [in Australia], and it's so tragic. It really is. I just would love to give [my grandchildren] that

experience. I don't know where I can take them now. ... just the whole idea of going somewhere where there's not people. ... here we are, with this vast country, and we're running out of places that we can get lost in, if you like. That's sad, isn't it?

Reflecting on the wider implications of what she had learned at the workshop, Cath said: ... when I try to think about current Indigenous issues, the view from Mary and Lilla about all that thinking and belief in the Law ... if you put that in context of current Indigenous issues ... a lot of that stuff, I think, has been fractured and crazed ... maybe it is [this] generation of Indigenous people that are doing a melding, that are taking something from their values and the Law, but maybe have been brought up in pretty much White man thinking, and they're somehow trying to marry the two.

There is, as Ambelin Kwaymullina wrote, "still much work to be done before there can be a true and lasting meeting of minds, hearts and worlds" (2010, p. 195). But there is also, as some of the women hoped, the prospect of being connected in the best way one can manage.

If I am able to understand that I am disconnected, and if I am pained by this existential loneliness and wish to find connection, then I may fall prey to the monological idea that I am responsible for reconnecting myself to the world. Indigenous ethics suggest that one's proper lifework is to care for others with whom one shares situatedness, and to care for one's self by being available (Deborah Bird Rose, 1999, p. 185).

### **Discussion: Being Connected**

... connectivity is potentially empowering. It enables a becoming that calls us to take care of the places and people with whom we are connected. It offers an expanded concept of self, and thus an expanded concept of self-interest. It reconfigures dialogue to include place, and brings us face to face with the real here and now of our lives. A permeable and becoming self is an unfinished project and thus invites considerations of mutual care. An ethic of care could thrust itself into our bodies and minds through awareness of our own unfinished vulnerability. Ecological selves require an ecological dialogue in order to sustain

the country in the self and the self in the country (Deborah Bird Rose, 2002b, p. 322).

Reviewing the above conversations, I was struck by the way women used stories to answer questions. Stories featured prominently, for example, in the 'Finishing' segment of the discussions where, in answer to the question, "Is there anything you'd like to add?" most women did have something substantial to add, very often in the form of a story: as Laura said, "I was hoping to have a chance to say that ...". Given that the women had consciously and with aforethought brought the stories with them, it seems that, even in preparation, many women were 'thinking and feeling in stories', as a narrative researcher might conclude (Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire and Maria Tamboukou, 2008). It might also have been that the women's stories of past events, relationships, places and times, memories and understandings helped them connect, context and personalise the new information they had taken away from the Indigenous workshop. Possibly, too, the stories were a way to throw a bridge - a way that women, in particular, throw a bridge<sup>2</sup> - across the space between themselves and me, the interviewer. And, finally, stories are, as one woman observed, an integral part of Aboriginal teaching by 'yarning'. Stories, bridges, yarning ... these are long-time ways that people have designed to connect with each other, across cultures, time, and geography.

However, it also seemed clear that, because I asked women to reflect on (that is, think about) their experience of the workshop, the women responded in those terms, offering thoughts and insights about care for and connections to place, often in comparison to Indigenous care for place (both in answer to the specific question about comparison and in answer to other questions). While a few women stayed with mainly 'thinking' responses for the duration of the interview, most moved through stories and reflections into 'feeling' responses, or joined 'feeling' with 'thinking' responses. Some women also answered, unprompted, with examples of current or anticipated 'doing', that is, actions they currently undertook or were hoping to undertake in the future, but most found it difficult to offer 'doing' responses, and some ruefully acknowledged that difficulty. Where women did report or suggest actions, they were usually at the personal, household or local level: only a few women framed possible actions at a political or wider social level. As Teresa V. Abbruzzese and Gerda R. Wekerle (2011) have observed, women who want to take action tend to start out from their own base.

Having recently attended a workshop on Indigenous ‘belonging to country’ and asked to reflect on what they had learned, women readily compared their own sense of connection, or lack of connection, with that of Indigenous people. As I have already noted, the concept of ‘belonging to place’ or ‘sense of place’ has had quite an airing in recent Australian literature, sometimes leaving the impression that, as settlers and immigrants and as descendants of invaders and colonists, Australians have struggled to feel they belong in this country. True or not, it was arguably some sense of unease that the former prime minister John Howard tapped into when he railed against “a black armband view of history” (Geraldine Brooks, 2011, pp. 19, 47). However, in the conversations above, while the women acknowledged Australian racism and colonisation, and admired, even envied, Indigenous connection to country, they also expressed their own (inevitably, different) attachment to land and their desire to care for it.

The difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous concepts of connection to land lies, I think, in differing concepts of land ‘ownership’, that is, a Western *individual’s* connection to land and an Indigenous *family or group* connection to land, where the former is usually defined in Western terms as ‘property’ (my patch), and the latter in Indigenous terms as ‘country’ (Yugambah country). Historically, there has been a long Western tradition of efforts, variously successful, to establish co-ownership of and co-responsibility for place, for example, through intentional communities such as kibbutzim, communes, eco-villages and different kinds of co-operatives. There is archaeological evidence of prehistory communal land ownership in matrilineal societies (Judy Foster and Marlene Derlet, 2013), and there are also, of course, nomadic relationships to land. Individual property ownership is only one of a number of possible ways for people to be connected to land. But striving to make or rebuild connections with land, to repair tattered relationships, as one woman described them, is not the same as being embedded in one’s birth country: “an ecological self is materially embedded in specific places, as well as being consubstantive with the universe. The emplaced ecological self is permeable: place penetrates the body, and the body slips into place” (Deborah Bird Rose, 2002, p. 312).

Indigenous peoples describe themselves as being as much ‘owned’ by the land as owning it (Mary Graham, 1999), with rights and responsibilities that Europeans may find mystifying or constricting. Structurally and personally, Australian settler descendants are accustomed to valuing choice, including (where possible) the choice of where to live. Some

interviewees were puzzled by the elders' teaching that the land where you are birthed is your country, where you belong, the land which always draws you back. Many women said they felt little or no connection to the place where they were born, their 'place of origin' (Geraldine Brooks, 2011): "for me, I start putting down roots in the new place ... I grew up [elsewhere but] I don't have any kind of natural roots there" (Laura); "I can't interpret that really in my life, because I feel so at home here [on the Mountain] ... We don't have that [connection to our place of birth] as part of us" (Diana).

In previous workshops, Lilla and Mary have concluded the day with a 'birthing into country' ceremony where each participant has been 'birthed' into country on the Mountain. At this last workshop they decided against it because, Mary said, they had determined the workshop was an inappropriate setting for the ceremony. (She has suggested that, next time, participants might want to plant a tree at the conclusion of the workshop.) It would have been interesting to see how differently the women from this workshop might have viewed their 'country' had they been 'birthed' into it. It is doubtful, though, whether any of the women would now be able, even if they wanted, to return to the piece of land or the family home where they were born and raised. Their parents, siblings and extended families are as likely to have moved on to other locations as the women themselves. Australians move numbers of times during their lifetimes, especially if they are children in army or teacher families, as two of the women mentioned. In 2007-08 in Australia, for example, among recent movers aged 15 years and over, almost half (46%) had moved once, 19% had moved twice, 17% three times, 8% four times, and 11% had moved five times or more.<sup>45</sup> It is likely that the most feasible way for most of us to connect to land is to be 'place-sensitive' (Val Plumwood, 2002, p. 233).<sup>46</sup>

In Indigenous society, the clan, and the clan's connection with country, is never extinguished:

Aboriginal people have a kinship system which extends into land; this system was and still is organised into clans. One's first loyalty is to one's own clan

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30Dec+2010>.

<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, at a previous "Belonging to Country" workshop, where Lilla and Mary asked people to introduce themselves in terms of their own 'country', many people wept as they recalled the places where they grew up and which they evidently still cherished.

group. It does not matter how Western and urbanised Aboriginal people have become, this kinship system never changes ... Every clan group has its own Dreaming or explanation of existence. We believe that a person finds their individuality within the group. To behave as if you are a discrete entity or a conscious isolate is to limit yourself to being an observer in an observed world (Mary Graham, 1999, p. 106)

By contrast, research participants rarely questioned Western assumptions about the rights of the individual to his or her ownership of property. If the emerging call for land itself to have legal rights (see, for example, Peter Burdon, 2010; David Grinlinton and Prue Taylor, 2011; Michelle Maloney, 2013) is more widely heard and enacted, it will unsettle Western concepts of land ownership, and may perhaps craft something closer to Indigenous custodianship.

Most women seemed to be at peace with the elders' assertion that Europeans cannot experience connection to country/land in the same way that Indigenous people do: "I'm a Westerner, I'm not going to be able to live a life in the way an Aboriginal person would, just through their heritage, be able to do. But I can improve what I do" [Judy] – and content to learn from Indigenous wisdom:

I think for me, personally, this has really opened up a responsibility ... I think I do have to sort of up my ante on how I do look after it ... maybe I need to pick that up a little bit and put more effort into it ... engage myself more in the processes and learn more – it has come out of [the workshop] strongly [Maggie].

Some women, however, seemed to equate 'Indigenous' with 'environmentalist', perhaps because they assumed that Indigenous and Western women would share a common concern to protect the environment. But, as Mitchell Rolls (2005, p. 57) has written, "Aborigines are not natural conservationists, nor were they ever". More recently, Marcia Langton (Boyer Lectures, 2013) has forcibly argued that Western assumptions of Aborigines being 'closer to nature' have stymied their economic and political advance in Australian society. For her part, Mary Graham would say, "There is no paradise and never will be", that is, no paradise in the sense of a 'pristine' or 'untouched' wilderness: humans have been living on and working this country for over 40,000 years ("Belonging to Country" workshop, 2010). In this, Aborigines' connection with country is, I suggest, both

more pragmatic and more spiritual than Europeans'. However, many Indigenous peoples justifiably resent being positioned as 'more natural' (read, primitive, exotic, and non-achieving in Western economic and social terms) when that advances others' interests at the expense of their own. In terms of native title, for example, Ambelin Kwaymullina has remarked dryly: "So, while Australian law moves into the future, Aboriginal people are faced with the unhappy task of proving they have never left the past in order to have rights recognised in the present" (2005, p. 199).

If Aboriginal women are not necessarily environmentalists, they are not necessarily feminists or climate change activists either. But neither, it appears, were the women in these research conversations. No one breathed the word 'feminist', and it is doubtful whether anyone would have raised climate change without my asking the question. Some women would say that there are now few public discourses through which women can express gender concerns and that, when women do, they may well be accused of 'playing the gender card' as, for example, in the case of former Prime Minister Julia Gillard when she spoke out about misogyny (Jane Caro, 2013). Kari Marie Norgaard (2011) has suggested that public discourse is similarly lacking for men and women to express concerns about climate change. It is difficult to raise public concerns without a common public language.

There were, in fact, very few mentions of relevant social movements - such as, to name a few, environmentalism, reconciliation, climate justice, animal welfare, anti-globalisation, the women's movement - or of necessary political leadership on these issues. It is true that I didn't ask specific questions about social movements, and also true that the conversations we had were one-to-one: it is possible that a group discussion might have yielded different discussions of wider issues. While I couched my questions in personal and local terms, I did so with the expectation that our conversations would move through many different levels. For all that, it is still striking how often the women responded in personal and local terms, without reference to social movements. (Landcare is a community-based but government-initiated program, not a movement – see Rob Youl, Sue Marriott and Theo Nabben, 2006.)

What was also striking was how difficult it was for some women to give concrete examples: in particular, and as noted above, examples of the different ways they saw men and women

caring for place, examples of how the workshop had changed their own practices (where they agreed that it had), and examples of how future climate change might affect their care for place.<sup>47</sup> It would be possible to conclude that reflecting on different ways of thinking and feeling about, and practices of caring for, place (as in a *Belonging to Country* workshop) does not necessarily result in changed behaviours and actions that participants can readily name. We do know, though, from the first two workshops that people go on thinking and talking about Indigenous care for place for some time afterwards, and sometimes do take actions they attribute to the workshop experience (such as volunteering at the local Yugambah Cultural Centre). They also return. For 5 women, the workshop was their second. Perhaps the primary, or initial, connection women make is to the workshop presenters themselves and the learning they offer – the ‘unsettling’ that Anna mentioned – and actions follow later.

Deborah Bird Rose (2009), commenting on writing about place and place-centred studies, makes observations that are, I believe, also relevant to place-centred workshops. She writes:

If an author takes a place-centred approach to research and writing he or she destabilises many of the conventional concepts of twentieth-century western knowledge. This destabilisation is one of the great promises of writing place ... the conventions of the dominant western system of knowledge are taking us deeper and deeper into the ecological and social crises we face today.

Destabilising this system is critical to finding ways of thinking and acting that may help us start to face these crises (Deborah Bird Rose, 2009, p. 64).

She goes on to point out that, “Place requires you to be intercultural, inter-temporal, open-minded to the imperatives of the lives that are lived there. ... you have to destabilise a lot of boundaries and a lot of conventions. You thus go against the grain of established power as well as established thinking” (ibid, p. 67). Mary’s and Lilla’s ‘deep learning’ destabilises a lot of mental boundaries and past assumptions.

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<sup>47</sup> In the case of climate change, Indigenous women said climate change was ‘a Whitefella term’, and they preferred to talk about destruction of the environment.

Looking for specific examples or changed practices may anyway be misleading. In the interviews, some women seemed well underway with changed environmental practices, and some of these women had been drawn to the workshop for just that reason: there were, for example, the women who had just moved onto land, one on the Mountain and one nearby, who had been learning about the land and how to restore its health. Perhaps, too, the changes wrought by the workshop are, in the first instance, attitudinal and affective, and the changed practices, with the ability to describe them, will follow. Diana explained that, “I had an insight, just a small insight, into a different way of thinking”, and Judy recounted how she ‘got it’ when Lilla suggested she put away comparisons: “I got it on a deep level... I got it when she [Lilla] said that I should put my own way of viewing the world to one side, and not try to make sense of the Aboriginal world view from that perspective ... It’s just completely changed the way I look at things”. ‘Deep learning’ stretches participants and sometimes, as for my younger self, affronts – but so far no one has walked out, no one has complained or even aggressively argued a point.

... when you stretch yourself, you are asking others to stretch themselves too.  
... If you choose to work at the edges your strength rests with the people who are also at the edge. If you are working on the edge, you know that it is the most interesting place to be (Deborah Bird Rose, 1999, p. 69).

Finally, women responded to ‘women’s business, men’s business and community business’ in varying ways. The concept of ‘separate but equal’ was attractive - “that works for me!” - but women doubted whether that was true, or perhaps even possible, in Western culture: “they’re not equal and they never have been equal”. Some women spoke of their views changing as they got older; one preferred to think of a male and a female principle; another spoke of her spiritual connection with land; and some leaned towards sympathising with men. The Indigenous women saw ‘separate but equal’ as an evolving process in their relationships, and two women spoke of the difficulties women face in public work. The differences the women cited were in the details of the way men and women acted, and in the details that women noticed and men didn’t, something that women also raised in the second set of conversations (Chapter 6). In my view, the women’s comments, with some exceptions, did not demonstrate an explicit gender analysis - nor, in terms of Indigenous content, a race analysis - although the workshop was an opportunity for women to begin or to continue to grapple with both.

Did, then, the conversations and discussions reported in this chapter answer the research question, *What is Indigenous care for country and what might Tamborine women learn from that?* I think they did. The women acknowledged that they do not and probably could not belong to country or care for country as Indigenous women do, but they were clear that, through what they had learned at the workshop from elders Mary Graham and Lilla Watson, they not only appreciated what more they could do to care for their place, but they had also gained insights into a different way of thinking about and being connected to place. While they might have struggled to apply some Indigenous concepts to their own circumstances, such as a life-long connection to birth country, and sometimes struggled to come up with concrete examples, they also felt affirmed in their concerns for the environment.

In the next chapter, we hear from six women active in local environmental care who, in describing what they are doing to address the long term well-being of Tamborine Mountain, voice similar concerns.

## Link to land discussed



*Aboriginal elders Lilla Watson and Mary Graham spoke at the Belonging to Country workshop.*

THE relationship people have with the land was a strong point of discussion at a cross cultural awareness workshop at Tamborine Mountain on the weekend.

The Belonging to Country workshop, which also included Aboriginal insights into how to handle change, was booked to its full capacity of 20 people.

Kombumerri Elder Mary Graham and Burrigubba Elder Lilla Watson led the discussions at the St John the Baptist Church hall.

Ms Graham said there had been a positive response at the workshop.

"People were very curious, with lots of questions and we shared a lot of ideas together," she said.

"All the insights, the experience over a vast period of time that Aboriginal people have, might be of some use to people now, now that they're worried with all of the developments happening."

She said issues such as mining development were particularly topical at Saturday's workshop.

*Plate 18: Beaudesert Times article, 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2011.*

# Chapter 6

## Caring for Place: Committed



Naomi



Sally



Lee

Plates 19 - 21: Photovoice images.

## Six Conversations

Find your place on the planet, dig in, and take responsibility from there

(Gary Snyder).<sup>48</sup>

*Sandra: So, it is like a lifestyle for you?*

Geraldine: Oh, yeah, I am living it. I think about it a lot, I think about it all the time.

In this chapter I present the findings from a second set of conversations, this time with women who are actively involved in environmental care on Tamborine Mountain. Through their affiliations with local environmental organisations, the six women in the second part of Stage 2 research have thought long and hard about the environment, have worked on environmental issues and/or with their hands in the soil on an almost daily basis, and say they have been environmentally aware for a very long time, often from childhood. These women not only are, or are presumed to be, connected to the environment, they are publicly committed to caring for it.

The local organisations (and, in one case, state government department) with which they work include: Tamborine Mountain Landcare, Community Garden, Transition Town (now called Tamborine Mountain Sustainability Group); Tamborine Mountain Progress Association (TMPA), Bush Volunteers, and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Most of the women belong to more than one group – for example, both Landcare and Bush Volunteers, both Transition Towns and Community Garden, and both TMPA and Landcare.

The six women – Geraldine, Jane, Lee, Lyn, Naomi and Sally - are all of European descent, all live on the Mountain, and their ages span early 30s to mid 70s. Four of the women currently live with male partners. While the women are not representative of women on Tamborine Mountain, or of women generally, they may well have much in common with women who work or volunteer elsewhere for environmental organisations (Ruth Beilin, 1995, 1998; Sarah Ewing, 1995; Allan Curtis, 1997; Lynnette Zelezny, Poh-Pheng Chua and Christine Aldrich, 2000; Margaret Gooch, 2005). Two women had previously attended a

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted without reference on front cover of Northwest Earth Institute, *Discovering a Sense of Place*, 2007.

“Belonging to Country” workshop (not the most recent one), and one woman had undertaken Indigenous studies in the past.

The questions I asked these women were a variation on the questions I asked women after the “Belonging to Country” workshop (see Appendix 8). All but one of the six women asked for the questions in advance - it sometimes felt as though a woman had already done the interview in her head before she arrived - so their responses were noticeably more ‘composed’ than responses in the post “Belonging to Country” discussions, although not for that any the less research-relevant. Further, their responses often took the form of theme and variations – the theme was announced in a woman’s response to my first question, and thereafter elaborated in our ongoing conversation. You will meet five of these six women again in the next chapter (Chapter 7).

Following a thematic summary, I will discuss the nature of the women’s commitment to caring for the environment, and address the research question, *How do women who work through groups and organisations view ‘caring for place’?*

### **Thematic summary**

In conversation with the six local Tamborine Mountain women, the following major themes emerged:

- ❖ doing the (environmental) work ‘properly’, on the basis of current information, research and experience;
- ❖ emotional and spiritual connections to past and present places;
- ❖ keeping in mind local to global connections (e.g. global impacts on local situations);
- ❖ a sense of vocation and a sense of urgency in the work;
- ❖ the role of government and the role of volunteers;
- ❖ the importance of (human) community, and the benefits of working in a group;
- ❖ men and women work differently.

#### **Doing the work ‘properly’.**

All six women were very knowledgeable about and committed to using informed practices and principles of environmental care. They said that it is important to do, or learn to do, environmental work properly, even scientifically.

When I asked Naomi what ‘caring for place’ brought to mind, she said her immediate answer was ‘local’. But then she realised that the phrase ‘caring for place’ actually had many different meanings:

The suburb level, the plateau of the Mountain, the region, O’Reilly’s, Binnaburra, the valley below ... south-east Queensland ... the state, country, global ... so, yeah, the caring extends that far and, in all of that, I am basically referring to the natural environment ... And as far as the caring, it is again at different levels, so there is my own physical involvement in [the] local, in the plateau basically, mostly in my own suburb.

Naomi works with a number of environmental organisations on the Mountain ... “and meanwhile my own garden goes to wrack and ruin!” She has “tried to choose the ones that I think are going to do it most effectively ... the way that they go about it quite scientifically, that they actually do the research, they monitor their results, they learn from their results”.

Similarly, Lee was concerned that there are “very few people who know a lot about it, what’s here ... weeds, for instance. Working with people in the parks, there are very few people who know what they are doing, or what’s there, or what should be there, or what shouldn’t be there”. She was keen that on-the-ground volunteers go about it the right way, with accurate knowledge:

[for me] it brings to mind the Aboriginal concept of caring for ... the place where you live, and particularly appreciating the natural environment surrounding you and the special features of that place. It means ... developing a close relationship with the land and getting to know it, and getting to know the impacts of what you do on the land. ... so that you are aware of changes, and the causes of those changes, and taking action to protect the land from negative impacts.

Jane explained her approach in this way:

I am trying to do things [in] a scientific way, by following expert surveys that have been surveying areas with flora and fauna. ... I will look at their list of species and try, if I am working on a site near there, I will try to plant things that are meant to be in that particular area. I think that is almost bordering on a

good principle to be trying to do the right thing by the forest ... not just saying, 'Well, I'll just have a tray of mixed trees and shove them in somewhere'. I am thinking, 'Well, what will work here? What do the wildlife need for food in this particular area? So let's put in things that were originally here from the close-by national parks or whatever'. So I guess that is principle and practice. ... to the point where they're all ... the trees are almost like another entity or something, [and] you don't just, well, sort of shove them in the ground. ... You are actually caring. Sometimes you even go, 'You'll be ok, little guy'. It's crazy! But I think you have to have high principles. I don't know, that is not the right word I am trying to think of. 'Integrity' I think is more ... I hope I am doing things with integrity.

As for many people on the Mountain, Jane had to start from scratch and seek out information:

I knew basic gardening and I had always planted native trees, but I didn't know the indigenous plants up here and I wanted to learn more and more ... I couldn't get enough of reading about the local plants, and I knew that Landcare was involved in only putting in indigenous plants, and that seemed the right thing to do ... it seemed the right way to go about it.

Sally, too, stressed how important it is to "understand the ecology ... just how inter-related everything is, and how everything has its place, and how wonderful and valuable that is ... so education comes into that as well".

However, from long experience, Naomi knew how tricky that can sometimes be. The Mountain is, she said, "a difficult environment to actually work into, in a way, because [in a scientific sense]... it has no connection really to its rainforest past":

It has rainforest around it, yes, but it doesn't have the sequential growth of the different plants ... and we are too impatient to wait. And it would not necessarily work anyway that you plant the first things, and then you plant the second growths ... certainly, there is an amount of sequential planting, but basically it is sort of allowing big trees to grow ... you can't just hop in there and replicate the environment.

But we can care for it, and the ‘caringness’ [her word] is in the detail: “I have come to understand that I love weeding, and that it is a nurturing thing ... Here’s this little plant that is struggling because it has got weeds around it: take out the weeds and give it a go ... give it some help”.

In fact, one of the activities many the women said they enjoyed most was weeding - an activity in which most men did not participate but, for the women, an essential part of caring for the environment:

I’m a, yeah, I can’t resist weeding ... what’s the word? Addicted, compulsive, yeah, compulsive. [Naomi and I] decided we were both compulsive weeders, and it is hard to walk past a weed. ... we have been able to show just what a difference it makes doing it by hand, against spraying [Lee].

I love weeding! ... you see so much when you are doing it, and you are freeing up little native trees from the competition ... and I think it is ... ‘therapeutic’ is not the right word. Yes, satisfying [Jane].

### **Emotional / spiritual connections to places.**

Emotional connections to place figured large for Lyn:

... at the very base, grassroots of caring for place, being places that you emotionally connect to and ... [take physical care of]. And, you know, it sounds a bit hippy..... but an emotional care for that place ... being in tune with that place, and its needs, and your needs ... how you harmonise and live with place ... caring for place is [for me] ... existing in that place ... doing no harm and it doing no harm to you ... caring for place to me is about a balance. It is not about a smothering of something, and trying to push your will on something, or make it into what you believe it should be. It is just a harmonisation of you as a, for want of a better word, a foreign body coming into place and respecting it.

... for me, as much as my little house and my little immediate plot of land that I supposedly own on the face of the earth is my place, in a very, I suppose, White, traditional sense of the word ... my place ... is anywhere that I have spent a fair bit of time, and either had a big emotional connection with or invested a lot of energy into. So ... [a nearby] National Park would be my place because of my

emotional attachment ... getting married there, spending a lot of time there and appreciating it for what it is ... and, you know, [parts of a southern city] would be place for me as well, because I spent years sweating and bleeding into the soil, regenerating it, in a physical sense ... just nurturing it and just trying to reverse the damage that had been done by previous generations. Yeah, so really a place is anywhere, for me, that I have an emotional connection to and sense of belonging.

Sally spoke of a place she loved in the past:

The first place of my heart was where I had all my summer holidays ... that was about a conjunction of hills and sea and bush and birds and creeks, and, you know, it was all ... it was that package, if you like. And it still is very dear to me. So I cared for that as a child does, exploring it, learning about the birds and the trees ... Being in it ... When I came to Australia, I felt that I was in exile for a long time. It was dry, it was hot. ... I felt alienated for a long time, for years.

For her, 'caring for place' is about valuing:

Appreciating ... liking the beauty of the place ... but valuing it, I suppose, for what it is, not just for how it can be *used* in any instrumental sense, so valuing it in itself ... 'place' for me is a matter not just of any narrow sense of territory, although locality is important for me ... you know, a local, almost bounded, definable place is important. ... place for me is not simply about ... the terrain, it is also about community, because there are also inhabitants [including non-human] ... and [they] need to take their place within that place [too]. ... so caring for place involves, therefore ... doing something to express that valuing. So [it] involves action. Caring is not just something that happens when you are sitting in your living room, looking out at the view, and saying, 'How lovely is this!' Important though that is.

It is difficult, she said, to care for place as a tenant:

I have never been able to put my hands in the soil - this sounds awful! - I have never been able to put my hands in the soil where I don't own the land, where it is not mine. And I think that has to do with a sense of long term commitment. Being a tenant, you know, you are just not committed in the same sort of way.

Some women said they felt a spiritual connection with place, although they were quick to qualify 'spiritual' with 'not religious', not 'hippy', not 'new agey'. They tended instead to stress their very practical approach to caring for place – “that kind of practical, on the ground action, working with others, is really important” (Sally). Geraldine explained:

... I am not a religious person, I am a spiritual person, I think. I love nature, and that is my spiritual temple, if you like, but I don't think Christianity and Judaism and all that, they don't do it for me. ... Action! I hate bloody sitting around a table and talking about stuff. I just hate the talking, I just want to *do!* I am a doer not a talker! I can't stand talking about insurance and all that kind of rubbish ... anyway, it is not my thing. I don't like it. I find it not very stimulating.

Lyn spoke of her principles and practices of caring for place in these terms:

Well, walk softly. You know, I suppose for me these things are very much ... more of a spiritual type ... having those principles of doing no harm, and ensuring that you're not having a negative - well, as much as you possibly can when you have to drive off the Mountain every day to work! - not having a negative impact on your place. And listening, stopping and listening and making sure, you know, you're *here!* Not somewhere else in your head.

Jane said she had been thinking about 'place' and, as others, “originally I thought of the here and now, and what this place means to me. But then I thought, 'No, it goes back a lot further'”. She told how she grew up “with this little bit of inherent sadness” that her parents had had to leave their place [in war-torn Europe]: “I think that really affected me for a long time - that my mother could never go back to where she thought of as her place.” Jane spoke of a number of places where she had lived as a child, where “we always had a huge backyard full of fruit trees and vegetables”, and of her emotional connection to the Mountain:

So I guess the sense of place is wherever I am at the time, and I seem to connect with the area, whether it is open country or whatever. [But] it wasn't really until ... I moved to the Mountain, where I suddenly felt that this is where I belong ... which sounds a bit ... I don't know, I am not spiritual, I am not religious, so I don't know why I felt [like that].

After a first look at the Mountain,

I rashly said, 'Yes, this is where I want to live', and went home that night and found my little cottage on the internet and said, 'I want to live there!' I came back the next day and bought the house without looking at anything else ... I moved up and started to plant up my garden, and it was the best thing I ever did.

As some women said after the "Belonging to Country" workshop, the Mountain is a special place and, for some, a place they immediately 'recognised':

I came up the Mountain and by the time I got to Joalah [National Park], I knew I had to live here. It was just so significant, a recognition, that in fact, if I didn't live here, I would be doing terrible damage to my soul - not that I believe in my soul! - but, you know, there was that strong a feeling of instant recognition that this was the place where I could find my place. ...so, quite clearly, this is my adopted place. I mean, there have been other places of my heart, if you like, but this is it now ... (Sally).

### **Local / global connections.**

Geraldine saw herself as "a global citizen". Just as emotional connection was of primary importance for Lyn in caring for place, so was awareness of global issues for Geraldine.

... things happening in Syria, you know, that is all part of caring for your place, too ... trying to stop things like that happening. ... this also is caring for place, learning how to be a better ... learning how to be a more respectful person of the earth. There is always more learning to be done ... doing what I can to protect and respect ... help those less able to help themselves against the onslaught of man's current path, which is desecration and destruction. ...

... conserve, conserve, look after things, protect them and keep them, it is a resource ... coal seam gas mining ... anti-whaling ... global warming ... women's rights, saving the Tarkine ... 'place' for me is my family, my home, my community, my local area, my state, my country and the earth. It is everything, you know, and so you have got to be passionate about everything, to protect [it] ... I kind of feel like you have to be passionate and almost like a warrior for a lot

of it, because ... there are a lot of people who are unconscious, who are not protecting it, and it has got to be protected.

... living with a light footprint on the earth. ... Wise use of resources, not being wasteful. Being a shepherd not a plunderer. Trying to encourage, by education, others to live with a more conscious lifestyle. .... What else have I got down? [consults notes]. Opposing unjust practices via direct action, protests, letters, emails, petitions.

*Sandra: So, it is like a lifestyle for you?*

Oh, yeah, I am living it. I think about it a lot, I think about it all the time ... I think people have to become more aware of their place and appreciate their place, and [the best way to] understand and really want to care for their place is to go travelling, meet people who don't have it. ... go to other cultures, have your eyes wide open, learn different things. ... a lot of people should get out there and live and work in different countries and see what it is like. And then come back and ... see how much they respect their own place and where they live.

### **A sense of vocation.**

Geraldine's sense of urgency about local/global issues was echoed in others' urgency about the challenges of preserving the natural environment on the Mountain. Some women have found or pursue a 'vocation' in environmental work, to the point of it being a major part of their lives. Jane told a personal story:

... this is what I should have been doing years ago! I've finally found what I should have been doing as a career. ... my one regret is that I am not 20 years younger and I could do it as a profession and study it, and have it as a profession. ... I think of it as a job that I go to, an unpaid job. I finally feel that this is what I was meant to do. ... it has been good for me all round, you know, the way I am caring for the Mountain. ... I go past an area, and I go, 'Wow, I planted that' or, you know, 'I fixed that up'. I just want to do more and more and more. I feel like ... I am doing something worthwhile. I think we all sort of need that. I didn't think I did. I guess I spent a lot of years just bringing up

children, being lost in that sort of the family thing, and now that I have got time, I desperately need to do it. Fill my days.

### **Role of volunteers and government.**

Lee, however, on the basis of many years' experience in the environment sector, reflected that "the job's just too big for individual volunteers to deal with", and governments need to take leadership.

I just don't think the environment is rated highly enough in any of the political fields at the moment, and that has to change. We can't ... volunteers can't do it without some sort of political will, and there is certainly not much in the Federal field, and not much in the State - I don't see any prospect of assistance in the State – and, locally, I don't know, I don't think so.

For her part, Naomi said she would love to see "an Australia led by a government that would embrace the concepts of innovation [for example, solar power] much more thoroughly ... [because] all of these things will come back to affect the Mountain". She also commented on the leadership style of women politicians:

What I have found disappointing recently is a feeling that our women leaders are too blokey, they are trying to lead in what I see as a masculine way. ... I just sort of feel, "Look, for goodness sakes, let your feminine side come out. Lead us from a feminine point of view". And I can understand that they are working with men but....

*Sandra: What would that look like? You see a different style ... so what would it look like?*

Well, I think it would be a more caring, gentle, accepting perhaps of innovation ... There is so much learning out there, and so much knowledge, and the politicians are just not making use of it, I feel. I can understand that they have got an awful lot on their plates, and I can imagine that after a hard day at the office, you don't want to go home and read all sorts of alternative literature, etc, but ....

*Sandra: Are you suggesting that women might be able to get that across better than men?*

Well, I would like to think that women would be more interested in it ... I would like everybody to be interested in it. But ... I expect that women could see the value in it, of it, sooner... certainly, sort of social justice type things. I sort of feel as though women leaders should be able to have a more compassionate point of view as far as sort of disability services and pensions and all those things go - that they should be aware of the impacts on family. They're the ones that have to care for ... women are the ones who generally have to care for elderly relatives, youngsters, and ones with disabilities etc, and you would think that somewhere along the line that they would be learning just how difficult it can be for people, and have a focus, a slightly more generous focus towards those sort of issues.

**The importance of human community, and benefits of working in a group.**

Caring for place is also, the women said, about human community. For Geraldine, “[It is important that] local people ... become more resilient as a community, being more self-sufficient so they have less reliance on outside resources. When we first came here, we wanted to be self-sufficient, but then we realised that if you don't have community, you don't have it anyway”.

Naomi valued meeting like-minded people at the local shops:

... it is important to me to be recognised by certain people on the Mountain, to be able to go to the shops and meet people that I know ... people that I value ... There have been some marvelous people on the Mountain, for whom I have had a lot of respect ... alternatively, there are people up here who are just driving me nuts at the moment, [such as] letter writers to the editor! Have you seen the *Tamborine Times* today?! Very blood pressure raising!<sup>49</sup>

Naomi has church connections and works through both an environmental group and a social justice group, acknowledging that issues often fall into both camps:

In fact, with these two groups... it is sort of like, ‘Oh, hang on ... are we doing this in the Social Justice one or are we doing it in the Environmental one?’ And coal seam gas is one that goes across ...

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<sup>49</sup> That issue of a local paper included a Letter to the Editor about the ‘need’ to cut down trees.

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, most of the women belong to more than one group. When Geraldine spoke of “being part of a positive, caring community, and that means, for me, being part of action to make the place better”, she mentioned Landcare, Transition Town, and the organics movement in particular. One other such group is the community garden where, as Sally explained, “[it’s] the sense of a shared enterprise that you are participating in [which] is pretty good. At the same time, of course, you have ‘ownership’ of your own plot, so it is not as if everybody is working on the one area. So you do have that kind of responsibility and control, if you like, as well as the engagement with others in the garden.” She thought that having a plot at the community garden, although not technically ‘hers’, was about shared ownership (see Robyn Lynn, 2000, 2001).

I asked Jane whether she thought that Landcare had helped her keep going in the work:

Yes, I wouldn’t have been able to achieve all that on my own ... Because I needed to go out and work physically, and where can you work except in a ... I mean, how could I ... replace all the weeds with trees if I wasn’t working with a group? ... I don’t think I could have achieved any of that without being in a group, because I don’t know how else you could do that.

But she also acknowledged how much she enjoys working on her own, feeling connected to the environment:

I spent a lot of time on my own working, and I still do, and I find that much more rewarding than working with a group. It is nice working with a group and socialising, but I love to go down to a creek or whatever with a few little trees to plant, or weed all morning and get cobblers pegs all over me. And just to sit there quietly, without everyone chattering, and just watch the little birds, and lizards and snakes or whatever. And that is when I feel connected, because I am there by myself, just feeling it quietly. I think too many people who go walking through all the national parks, they talk the whole time ... I used to go for long walks in the rainforest by myself.

### **Men and women work differently.**

The last theme – the differences between men’s and women’s practices of care – bears directly on the research question, so I will report the conversations in greater detail.

The women were in agreement that most men in local environmental organisations like to take on the big projects, often with machines.

Men ... in caring for the environment tend to like to slash and burn and plant ... and by far most of them are not particularly keen to get down there and weed on the very intimate level. They do spraying, hoeing and things like that, but [not] down on the hands and knees, weeding little things [Lee].

[Some men] tend to have more of almost a conqueror connection to place... a bit of control, a bit of this need to assert their dominance ... whereas I suppose for myself, I feel a balance between having a mother role for the place that I am looking after, and also being the child, in that it is a symbiotic relationship ... whereas, I suppose, in general, in the few men that I would say don't have the same goals as me in looking after place, yeah, there is definitely almost a sense of putting their stamp upon it and saying, 'Look, this is what I did'. Not necessarily in a very negative way, but there is, I think, just a subtle difference ... where women feel as though they are, you know, an equal, the men feel as though they need to conquer [Lyn].

Women, on the whole, "just get on with the job", and do a lot of the detailed work (like weeding).

... [Weeding is about] patience. Nurturing ... well, for me, it is about wonder. If you get down and weed face to face with the earth a foot away from you, you find all sorts of little things growing, just starting out, that you can't see from standing up using a Whipper Snipper, or a spray [Naomi].

Some women, like Jane, had to stop and think:

I looked at that [question], and I thought, 'Oh, no [no difference]', but then I think, 'No, there is a difference'. The women, when they are working ... this is a bit of a generalisation ... but I find that women when they are working in any garden or that sort of situation, they take the time to look at things and care about things. Men seem to want to use the big machines, and chop things down, and do things in a hurry ... strong, masculine types ... and I think the women gently go around and... no, it is just more of a gentle approach. I am

not saying that all ... there are a lot of men that are very sensitive ... yes, [but] as a general thing, I think that women just seem to have a softer nature.

Sally found it “hard ... to disentangle gender from personalities”:

I mean, of course, there are some assertive women, just as there are some aggressive, ego-driven men. Let me see, I would think that, by and large, the women in the organisations that I am involved with at present are more interested in just getting on with it ... Just getting on with the job. ... in a practical kind of way ... and in a way that is not self-aggrandising. They are not big egos. Although I have known some women with big egos elsewhere, of course. But these ones are ... quite collegial, not interested in hierarchy, and they are very enabling.

Geraldine, however, had a definite view about the basis of the differences:

I don't think men have as much of a conscience as women do. Like, I think of the consequences of minute things that may affect my children. ... I think women, because they are the primary carers for offspring, I think you care about your children, and you want the best for them, and you think about absolutely everything to make that happen. And caring for them is also caring for the environment, because that is what they are going to inherit.

Jane wondered whether contractors sometimes humoured her and whether she was reinforcing gender stereotypes by going back to sites to tidy up. The men's lack of attention to detail irritates her, and she always finds “a little bit undone”, even though she thinks that “it is a very female thing, to go in after the blokes have finished and tidy things up”.

It is still a very blokey area, contractors ... I feel sometimes they are just humouring me a little bit ... but, then again, it might just be my neuroses ... but sometimes I just still feel that they don't take you as seriously as if a man would have come along and asked the same thing.

Lee has found she has always had to battle “to get things done the way I want them done ... they [the men] are certainly very ready to give me advice on what should be done. But I try to steer things the way I want them”.

Some women were ambivalent about leadership roles and public recognition, and Naomi was explicit that she didn't want to be a leader:

I don't want to be a leader as such, I have no aspirations to do that, I am just quite happy to be told what to do. This needs to be done – OK, I will do it – but I do not necessarily want to be the one saying this needs to be done. I prefer to be physically involved with getting it done rather than planning.

To my surprise, Naomi used the term 'volunteering' to describe her very skilled work at regional and state levels. Jane was also self-deprecating about her work, fearing she might come across "as a bit of a goody two shoes", and wanting to sneak in to a site "so that people don't see me there all the time, and say, 'Oh there's [Jane] again, you know, doing the weeds'". But she was also proud of what she was doing, and glad to see people acknowledge her efforts: "I feel like ... I am doing something worthwhile".

Preferring to work in a team, Naomi said she was uneasy about her public profile.

A lot of the things I did ... I did because they were there to be done. I didn't see them as *my* doing them, as such. It was just that they had to be done, somebody did them ...there was a lot of support there, there were other people doing things, so I didn't see it as being me doing it and me being responsible ...

*Sandra: It was a public profile?*

Yes ... but now that I am aware of how many times people see my face in so many different places, it is obvious that ... people do know who I am ...

*Sandra: And are you comfortable with that?*

Oh, yeah, but it just surprises me, I guess, because I just sort of feel that I am just doing my thing under the radar ... and then it's sort of, like, 'Oh, no! Actually people do know'. ... Basically, what I am doing is roughly within my comfort zone ... I don't see it as being anything special, but alternatively, if I look at it, I sort of say, 'OK, I was the only person who was prepared to do it. If I hadn't done it, nobody would have. It would not have happened'. And, yes, there are now people who are now respecting my opinion to some extent, even

though I don't exactly, I don't value my opinion highly, as against sort of like [prominent Mountain people] or anybody's really ... [but] I do know I have got something to contribute.

### **Discussion: Commitment**

#### **... to place.**

How [can we] hope to find roots without taking the far greater risk of commitment? Far greater even than the risks attendant upon an unrooted, floating-free life that may, at first glance, appear 'adventurous' and/or 'dangerous'? The leap into commitment, in love, or in work, or in religion, demands far greater courage (May Sarton, 1981, pp. 178-9).

What, then, is the nature of these Tamborine Mountain women's care for the environment? In the above excerpts from conversations, the women are noticeably self-effacing. As in the previous chapter, no one used the word 'feminist', or 'eco-feminist', and some women seemed to want to emphasise their very practical approach to environmental care – in Sally's phrase, "just getting on with it" – even while demonstrating in their stories both emotional connection and vocational commitment, and considerable expertise.

'Commitment' was not a word the women used, nor is it a popular concept in neoliberal society. (The same could be said of 'staying put' and 'connection', except where they have instrumental ends.) The first definition of 'commitment' given in the Oxford English Reference Dictionary (1995, p. 291) is framed in terms of constraint: an "engagement or (espec. financial) obligation that restricts freedom of action". Such a definition tends to stick in the throat.

What I mean by 'commitment to place' is closer to what Freya Mathews (1999a, p. 245) describes as 'becoming native':

To describe a person as a native is not only to say of them that they were born in a particular place – since this after all can be said of everyone – but that they belong to that place, that they are made of its matter and imbued with its distinctive character. To be native is to have one's identity shaped by the place to which one belongs: one is a creature of its topography, its colours and textures, saps and juices, its moods, its ghosts and stories. ... A particular place,

then, is an irreducible part of the identity of the native. To belong to place in this 'internal' way however is to bypass, to a degree, the mind matter dualism of the Western tradition. ... To experience oneself as part of the fabric of the world, in this deep metaphysical sense, is to experience the world as fundamentally continuous with one's own nature, rather than as an alien and lower realm of sheer 'mindless' externality.

Mathews critiques the Western materialistic perspective and, from her panpsychist perspective, thinks we can do differently by "relinquishing materialism, and reinvesting things with an inner presence or animating principle":

Places will also have their own unique presence and personality, so that to live in a particular place will be to enter into relationship with it, a relationship that can come to claim us so powerfully that [it] may become internal to our identity ... When every part of the earth has become 'home' to someone in this way, then this will indeed be a loved and flourishing world (1999a, p. 248).

To frame a connection with the natural world in such intimate interpersonal terms is what some theologians might call pantheism, others anthropomorphism or romanticism.

Val Plumwood (2007) would take a different view. She wrote that, "[a]n important part of the project of re-enchanting and re-enspiriting of the realm designated material" has been to discredit the "bullying concepts and jargon such as anthropomorphism that have helped delegitimize richly intentional ways of understanding the world". We need, she said, to "find new critical and experiential bases that enable us to transcend this impoverishing ideology and self-confirming reductionist practice". Provided we do this in good faith, "accompanied by, even led by, the re-materialisation of spirit as speaking matter", we are freed, she wrote, "to re-write the earth as sacred, earth exploration as pilgrimage, earth knowledge as revelation". She went on to stress, though, that "to be honest and solid, such a [re]writing must be grounded in corresponding cultural practices that can re-materialise spirit as everyday wonder and material, bodily labour" (pp.18-19). It is striking that words like "wonder" and descriptions of "material bodily labour" featured prominently in these research discussions and also, as we shall see, in the images the women produced in the photovoice project (Chapter 7).

Freya Mathews, Val Plumwood and Luce Irigaray draw to varying degrees on Indigenous concepts of care for place (Plumwood and Mathews explicitly reference Mary Graham's work). In particular, they point to what we might learn from Indigenous peoples about living within environmental limits: this is not a matter of replicating or appropriating Indigenous care for country – anyway, impossible – or counselling the return to an illusorily less complex past, but rather attending to the *kind* of connection and commitment to place that could inform an interdependent relationship with the environment, instead of a ruthlessly exploitative one – that is, a different and embedded practice.

**... to practice.**

The commitment which the women described is, I suggest, commitment to a *practice* - more than to one, and one only, place. All six women told stories of places that had formerly been special to her, to which she had felt connected and, in some cases, still did:

[I care for place] through the work that I do. I've always been involved in this sort of thing to some extent. ... I grew up in the bush, I have always been very aware of the natural environment [Lee].

I had a difficult time when you asked about caring for ... *what's your place?* That was the only thing I thought: Was it that your place was really so many different places all wrapped up into one? And how you care for them can be different from one area to another, and from one end of your life to another? ... I will always carry a sense of place, but ... perhaps it won't recognise me if I went back there. You know, perhaps you wouldn't have that, you know, that ... spiritual connection to a place, and you will feel as though you have both moved on – but there would always be something in there [Lyn].

In the almost 25 years since Gary Snyder encouraged us to find our place on the planet, “dig in and take responsibility”, the social, political and economic forces of globalisation seem to have made that an increasingly difficult option for all except the most wealthy. It is not easy to ‘stay put’ and, as noted previously, few of us can go ‘home’.

It has changed so dreadfully, and it's all industrialised. The area where our farm [was] has been declared an industrial site. People were getting sick from the tar sands processing plant, so they finally declared it an industrial site, and the land's all been resumed, all good agricultural land [Lee].

Efforts to 're-wild' are similarly fraught with difficulties – either the kind that Naomi described, where people hope to replicate a rainforest in a few short years, or the more exotic kind that George Monbiot (2013) has advocated in his project to re-wild Britain with the great beasts (bison, lions, forest elephants, scimitar cats, rhinos, hyenas and cave bears) of Europe's past - that is, great beasts to *hunt*, as it turns out. As Simone Fullagar and Susan Hailstone (1996) have suggested, wilderness experiences can be premised on masculine ideals – with “the same masculinist values of excitement, struggle and adventure that have destroyed the natural environment” (Mary Mellor 1990, p. 89).

If Western women are not born into birth country, if we can't always return to where we were raised or to the “special places of our heart”, if wilderness experiences are either transient and/or fraught with paradox, what we can do is exercise a practice of care ... and the great benefit of a practice of environmental care is that it is portable.

#### **... to the Mountain.**

There may well be, as Freya Mathews has said, something about women and mountains (personal communication). Is there, she has wondered, some more than individual significance in the numbers of women, herself included, who are finding their way to mountains? Val Plumwood was a mountain woman, living on and taking her name from Plumwood Mountain, Sharyn Munro (2007) has written of her experiences of living in relative isolation on a mountain, and there are also, as I noted in Chapter 2, numbers of Australian women who have written about their property, farm or garden (for example, Jackie French, 1997, 2013; Kate Llewellyn, 2005; Patrice Newell, 2006; Holly Forsyth, 2006; Linda Cockburn, 2006; Germaine Greer, 2013). Women in Stage 2 conversations spoke of their attachments to particular places where they have lived and which they cherish, including Tamborine Mountain. In this, Sally's comment that Tamborine Mountain has a “sense of boundedness”, “a kind of coherent identity which makes it easier to mentally encompass ... to think of it as a place apart” is helpful. Its very separateness, she said, is important, as is its beauty and “its intactness as an ecology”. It is likely that many people who live on the Mountain would agree, conscious of living in a relatively small locality with distinctive environmental characteristics.

While the separateness of a place can promote exclusiveness and conflict as well as inclusiveness – as we have seen in the review of the literature, a frequent criticism of community – it is not inevitable. In a small society or in a society where people live close together, as say in Japan, people develop protocols to maintain peaceful relations and manage conflict, and they become skilled in the arts of diplomacy (Mary Graham, 2013). Tamborine Mountain is not a closely settled locality, but residents have had to learn to exercise diplomacy on two fronts. Firstly, they may well want to share the Mountain's special environmental beauty and increasingly rare intactness with others, but they do not want, through unrestrained tourism, to destroy it:

So I say something like, “I don't want to see any more subdivision on the Mountain”, and others might say, “Well, that is locking people out of the experience of the Mountain”. But if we don't 'lock them out', the experience of the Mountain won't be there (Naomi).

Secondly, within the Mountain locality, those who are committed to a practice of environmental care are often under siege from what often seems to be an environmentally-averse Council and its supporters and from fly-in-fly-out business and tourism development. For those who choose to live here, to 'stay put' at least for a while, the attachment to the Mountain can be both compelling - although Aboriginal people didn't live on the Mountain, Yugambah peoples knew it had very strong energy<sup>50</sup> – and “blood pressure raising” (Naomi).

While very clear about their attachment to the Mountain and its rainforest, the women in these conversations seemed a little embarrassed to talk about it: 'I suddenly felt that this is where I belong, which sounds a bit ... I don't know, I am not spiritual. I am not religious, so I don't know why I felt like that'. The hesitation was as true for those who had attended a prior “Belonging to Country” workshop (where the elders had frequently used the word 'spiritual'<sup>51</sup>) as for those who had not. A similar hesitation or awkwardness is evident in the title of the 2005 Queensland Community Development conference, *Flirting with Spirituality: Re-enchanting Community*, where 'flirting' allows for a tentative engagement with what some might regard as a peripheral or less than legitimate area of workers' interest. Yet, even

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<sup>50</sup> Mary Graham in answer to a question at “Belonging to Country” workshop, 2011.

<sup>51</sup> Mary Graham, “Conversations” with Richard Fidler, repeated for NAIDOC week in 2013, spoke of life as “a spiritual journey”.

amongst the allegedly hard-headed farmers whom Bev Buckley interviewed on Tamborine Mountain in 2010, she was surprised to hear talk of the land in ‘spiritual’ terms.

One of the surprising outcomes from doing the interviews [with the farmers] was identification of the trend towards a greatly enhanced level of awareness of the complexity of natural systems and an enhanced level of spiritual development, [not] what one would expect to find in farmers generally (p. 272).

If the women avoided religious and spiritual language, they described their feelings about the Mountain and the rainforest in terms often associated with spirituality, terms such as ‘wonder’ and ‘doing no harm’. With the collapse of organised religion as a cultural given in many Western people’s lives, perhaps many of us lack ready language to describe more-than-personal feelings and experiences, including those in nature. Perhaps, too, some view spirituality as a space that only ‘new age’ or ‘hippy’ types occupy. Certainly, the Mountain has its share of floridly alternative people and practices.

For those on the Mountain who ‘dig in’, the attachment is heartfelt, if not always forever. The women in this research were clearly committed to their environmental practice on the Mountain, some even seeing it as a vocation, yet it is doubtful if any one of them could commit, unequivocally, to staying on the Mountain, committing to the Mountain, forever.

### **Committed practice and organisational continuity**

There are all kinds of reasons people have to move from the Mountain – family, health, employment – and, as people come and go, it is the local organisations who provide continuity. The aim of the second part of Stage 2 research, therefore, was to answer the question, *How do women who work through groups and organisations view ‘caring for place’?* As reported above, the six women are well-known for their environmental work: they are knowledgeable, grounded, and committed. I don’t intend to compare them with the women from the post “Belonging to Country” workshop because they came to speak with me with different expectations and in a different context. In the excerpts quoted above, however, it is clear that the women with organisational membership have a clear focus on the work they do and why they do it, and that they choose to work through at least one organisation (as well as on their own).

The six women volunteered few direct comments about their organisations, instead focussing on the principles and details of their practice. Jane said she would not be able to do the work that needed to be done on her own, while Sally thought that socialising on site was an enjoyable part of the activity, as well as a way to help build community. Much as Ciel Claridge found in her 1998 study of farm women in New South Wales, the women spoke of their hands-on work and of collaboration with other women as “just getting on with it”. But the women also spoke of doing the work properly, that is, on the basis of proven environmental research: this would be at odds with the view of some, such as Mona Domosh and Joni Seager (2001), who suggest that men occupy the role of expert in the environment. Further, to my knowledge, all six women undertake environmental work on their own initiative, not primarily as helpmeet to a partner, unlike some of the farm women in Sarah Ewing's Landcare study (1995) who thought their contribution was peripheral and might turn out to be temporary. In this, the women in this research were either dissimilar to those in other studies or reflect some progress in gender relations over the last two decades (or both).

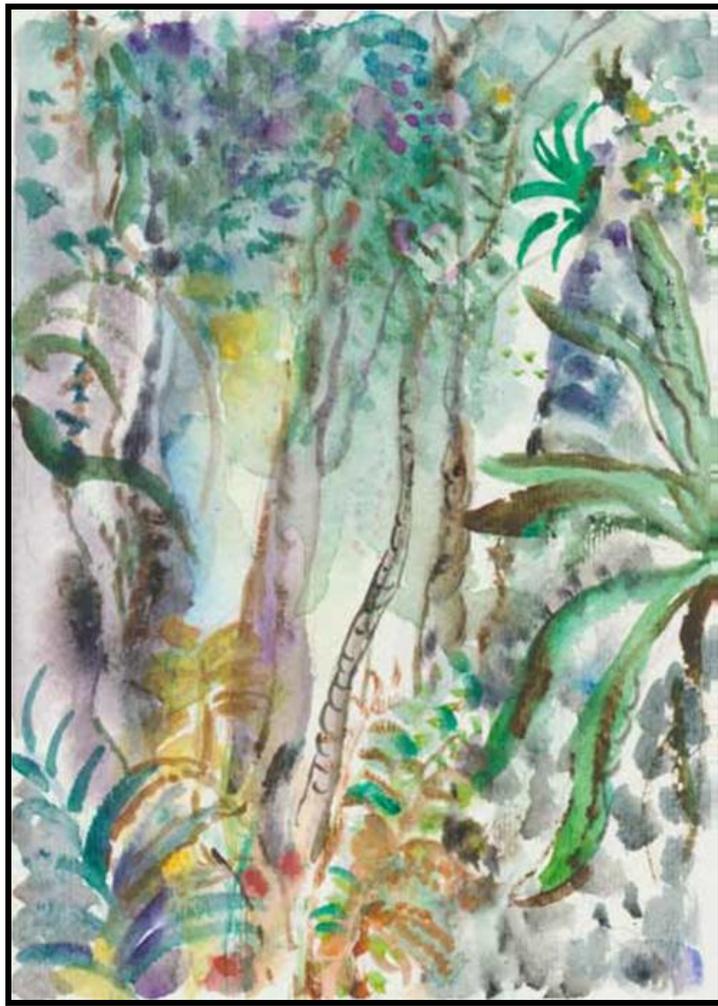
Nevertheless, many of the gender differences reported in the literature in Chapter 2 (see Feminist locality practice and the environment) still pertain, both positive and negative: for example, women in this study also tended to avoid leadership and some felt excluded from decision-making, while most celebrated the collaboration and relationship-building women were able to sustain.

So what of the organisations themselves? Landcare has been a success story on the Mountain, entrepreneurial, apolitical and uncontroversial. The Landcare committee attracts funding from the shire, from local businesses and large corporations, and attracts participation from local schools, Bond University and groups such as Green Corps. Other local environmental groups, such as Bush Volunteers, Tamborine Mountain Sustainability Group, Tamborine Mountain Progress Association, and Tamborine Mountain Community Garden, are either unfunded or depend on small non-recurrent grants from government, including local government. The Progress Association, one of the first such associations in Australia, recently celebrated its 50th birthday, and is the only local organisation that takes on legal/political issues (such as planning decisions that contravene the Local Development Plan and - currently a hot issue – inappropriate development applications for commercial water extraction). While the Tamborine Mountain Sustainability Group has

struggled to engage locals in discussion and action on wider issues such as peak oil and climate change, local groups pop up from time to time to address local issues, such as a protest against a cable car tourism venture to the Mountain from the Gold Coast. There is one community development worker in Scenic Rim Regional Council for a shire of approximately 40,000 residents. The worker has been used in the past to facilitate Council community consultations but, to my knowledge, has not initiated projects, events or gatherings within or on the request of localities in the shire. There is, as elsewhere, decreasing knowledge of helpful and democratic community organisation processes, and increasing adoption of often inappropriate managerial models, with consequent ebbs and flows of initially enthusiastic and later disaffected members. The work is left to the often-cited 'few' and there is, as some women noted, insufficient government leadership on environmental matters. It seems that, just as Luce Irigaray argued that women's 'sexuate rights' had to be legislated, we need to legislate rights for nature: the international Earth Charter movement, for example, has encouraged countries to include rights of nature in their constitutions. In Australia, the Australian Wild Law Alliance (Advocates for Earth Centred Law and Governance) take legal projects forward through groups such as the Environmental Defenders Office (sadly, now de-funded both by the Queensland and Federal governments).

Few participants in this research volunteered their views or concerns about climate change, unless I asked a specific question. There have been vociferous debates on the subject in the local papers, but the debates have mostly been conducted at a theoretical level, invoking proofs for and against the 'science' of climate change, rather than at the practical level of what changes the Mountain might experience, and how soon. Of interest, therefore, are the efforts of Alison Shaw, Stephen Sheppard, Sarah Burch, David Flanders, Arnim Wiek, Jeff Carmichael, John Robinson and Stewart Cohen (2009) to make climate change 'real' and relevant to people in local communities by computer modelling future scenarios of probable physical changes in the places where they live. Shaw and her colleagues suggest that, for people to grapple with the consequences of climate change and move beyond 'out there' rhetoric and debate, they need to "make it local, make it visual, and make it connect". It would be useful to develop such a project, with appropriate expertise, on Tamborine Mountain or, perhaps even better, on the Gold Coast. I have taken a similarly visual, if less technical, approach in my research area of interest –

Tamborine Mountain women's care for the environment - by means of a photovoice project, which I report in the next chapter.



*Plate 22: Rainforest.*

# Chapter 7: Images and Text: Reciprocity



Plate 23: Photovoice images

## Images and texts

“It is that love of reciprocity that motivates us, doesn’t it?”

Sally (photovoice participant)

It is not nature-as-a-picture that we encounter here ... but a sense of nature which is not external – which is co-extensive with ourselves, including and permeating us.

Roy Jackson Exhibition, March 2013, Defiance Gallery, Sydney<sup>52</sup>

I ask readers to think back to the Preface and the Scenic Rim Regional Council’s introduction to intending tourists to “lush Tamborine Mountain ... a favourite destination for tourists who come seeking avocados, Devonshire tea, crafts, bed-and-breakfast style accommodation and dramatic scenery”. There are numbers of photographs of these attractions in tourist brochures but, oddly, amongst all those photos, not one of the Mountain, as a mountain, itself.<sup>53</sup> (The photos of the Mountain in this thesis I took myself.) Tamborine Mountain is clearly visible from the Gold Coast and from hinterland vantage points, a well-defined outline against the skyline and, as an Indigenous woman pointed out to me, one of the ranges the Rainbow Serpent made as it passed through this country – but, by its absence in the public domain, apparently ‘external’, not ‘co-extensive’, Val Plumwood’s ‘unconsidered background’ (2000, p. 226).

By contrast, the images from the photovoice project (below) invite the viewer into the Mountain’s natural environment, and also, through the supplementary texts, into the seven women’s experience of that environment. The images are about ‘seeing’ and ‘interacting’ and, collectively, they illustrate the reciprocal relationships with the environment that the women described in their interviews.

In Chapter 3, I explained the logistics of the photovoice project. To recapitulate briefly, I planned the project to offer women another modality through which to express their care for place and their connections with the environment. Environmental work – revegetation for example – is very ‘visual’ work, and requires both keen observation and an eye for

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<sup>52</sup> Notes to Roy Jackson 1963-2013 Retrospective Exhibition, Defiance Gallery, Sydney, March 2013. <http://www.defiancegallery.com/artists/roy-jackson.htm>.

<sup>53</sup> Enquiries to Council’s relevant section drew a blank, and I found nothing on the web.

detail. (In retrospect, it is not surprising that some of the women who participated were practising artists, including botanical artists.) Not everyone is primarily ‘verbal’, some people express themselves best through other modalities, and everyone can take a photo. I was looking for supplementary visual data for a research topic with strong visual elements: what I hadn’t anticipated was that the photovoice images would so vividly encapsulate themes from previous research conversations. Reciprocity, the theme that emerged from my analysis of the photovoice images and texts, draws on connections and commitments and is (or can be) grounded in place. What the women produced was, in effect, a summary of the preceding research data.

What was ‘new’ in the photovoice data was the women’s emphasis on taking time, pausing, stopping to look, to appreciate, and to ‘interact’. The women had made similar comments in their interviews – for example, about taking time to observe details while weeding – but the comments were much more to the fore in the photovoice project, particularly in the group discussion. Perhaps the physical pause, when the women had to stop to consider a subject and frame a photograph, brought home the significance? But it was not only taking time to connect with the environment. The women stressed that people need to take time to interact both with nature *and* with each other.

*Lee:* It is something to remember, sort of taking the time to interact. We don’t, even with our closest relationships, we don’t give ourselves time to talk about what is going on inside us, or in relation to what we are doing in the day.

*Judy:* And I think that is why there is an urgency in people who have to get on Facebook and say it anyway, you know, because no-one’s listening. No one is listening to me, so I am just going to say it anyway, and everyone is going to hear it!

*Maggie:* Yes, and somebody will reply and tell you how fabulous you are, and everything will be all right.

*Judy:* Or watching to see if somebody ‘Likes’ us. It is just a very futile way ... it is what we have created ... it is sort of this lack of human interaction, and I think this is reflective of nature, of that lack of interaction with nature.

[Excerpt from photovoice discussion, June 9<sup>th</sup> 2012.]

Ironically, there are few human figures in the women's photographs. As noted in Chapter 3, this is because, in the initial 'tutorial', we stressed the ethical issues involved in taking a photo of someone who would be recognisable to others, either through a possible public display of the work or through the public nature of this thesis. Some women got around that restriction by, for example, Lyn including her partner's shadow in a photo and Sally taking a photograph with a blurry figure in the background. While the caution was necessary in a formal sense, it arguably distorted the choices the women made of what to photograph, especially since most participants had stressed in interviews and in some of the texts accompanying the photos their belief that 'place' is as much about people as about flora and non-human fauna. The photovoice images are not always faithful to that message, and may seem to portray more of a personal, individualistic approach to care for place than was the case.

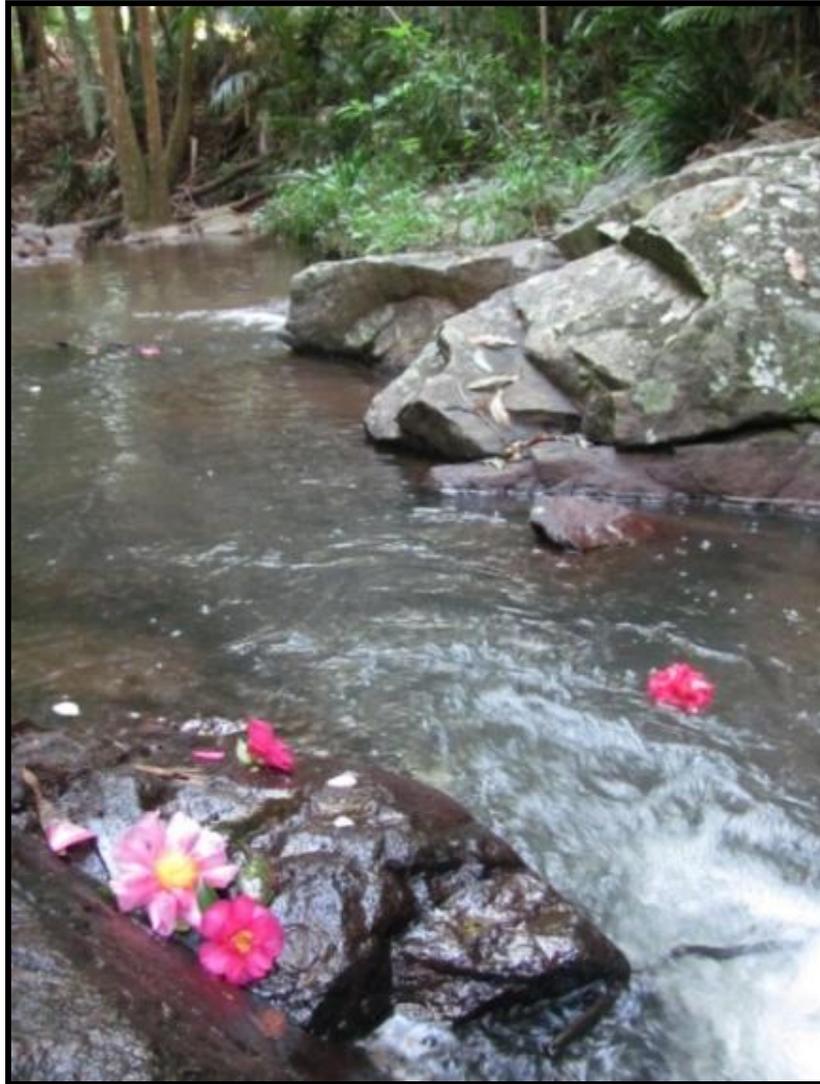
As noted above, what emerged strongly in the images, texts and group discussion was the sense of 'reciprocity', that is, caring for place/environment and being cared for in return. I have selected images and texts (below) to illustrate how the seven women chose to represent their connections and commitments to the Tamborine Mountain environment. Their sense of reciprocity included connections with particular plants or animals, places or parts of places, with people and locality, and with the Mountain itself. Reciprocity takes time, time to pause and reflect, to gain an intimate knowledge of the environment, to pay attention to details, and to hear the environment 'speak'. The women's experiences of reciprocity are replete with feelings such as wonder, surprise, harmony, joy and gratitude. As always and everywhere, there are paradoxes and dilemmas, but they were less evident in the photovoice project than in previous conversations – instead, it was and felt like a celebration.

The following images illustrate elements of reciprocity the women identified in the photovoice research project - commitment, attention to detail, taking time to pause and reflect, balance and harmony, connections, knowledge, wonder, paradoxes and dilemmas ('outside the frame')<sup>54</sup>, and the permeability of nature and culture. I have noted the images and texts as well as, in some cases, excerpts from the group discussion.

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<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 3: Darrin Hodgetts, Kerry Chamberlain and Alan Ridley (2007) caution researchers to be attentive to the photos that are not taken as well as to the material that "lies outside the frame". Their point is that people 'make' photos rather than 'take' them.

## Commitment.



*Plate 24*

### **New Year ritual**

Each New Year's dawn, after watching the sun rise, I walk around the bowl of my valley, gathering twelve flowers, one for each month, then go through the Botanic Gardens to a beautiful creek. This was once hidden under lantana, before the Landcare group I lead cleared it out. I "baptize" myself in the creek and send the flowers floating, as a way of renewing my commitment to this place.

Sally

**Attention to detail.**

When I got to take the photographs, it was raining. I went into my garden with the rain and tried to take ... pick out the things, the nurturing things, really, that I wanted to photograph. This observing and choosing certain things to photograph, it is a very female thing to do. And as I was doing it, I put the hat and the book there, because for the little effort that I put into that garden it gives me back so much more.

Maggie



*Plate 25*

In my backyard, there is a tree that I look at from my kitchen window, and I asked our lovely past neighbour Jim what it was, and he said it was a brush box, and it is *huge*. I have been looking forever for the flowers, it has got a beautiful flower, and I have a relationship to that tree. I can sort of talk to it, if you like. I have watched it grow, it is so huge now and, as my next door neighbour said, “Bye bye studio when the wind blows!”

Maggie

### Attention to detail.

I have got to start from the ground up [by] putting a tiny little tube stock in the ground and nurturing the earth ... The birds and the wind and the water do a lot of the work for me ... this one I sort of call 'noticing the small things', in that I have planted these beautiful trees, but this for me is probably more rewarding.

Lyn



Plate 26

### Small Things

I didn't plant this native geranium (*Geranium solanderi*), it has come into the garden of its own accord, a gift from the surrounding forest. I love the fact that I can prepare the canvas, plant pioneer species, and Nature will do the rest. ... So for all the hours I have spent digging, planting and mulching, this is probably the greatest triumph ... when things that you haven't planted or forced your influence on just come up by themselves. ... It is something the earth has given me for the sweat and effort I gave trying to nurture the earth.

Lyn

### **Taking time to pause and reflect.**

... focussing on the small things in life ... there is so much joy in the small things of life ... just being fully present ... when your thinking is connected to your heart, you see some of the other things [you otherwise don't notice].

Judy



*Plate 27*

Sunset is a time of day when traditionally people take time to take stock or reflect on how life is going. Often, these days it takes a crisis or old age for people to do this. Growing up on the land, you realise how connected to the seasons we are and the day/night variation.

Sunset was often the time when work on the land finished for the day. Sitting on the veranda at sunset and discussing the needs of the land, how things have gone and what [was] needed in the days coming up, was an important part of connecting with the family and nature. ...

In our relationship with nature, as with all relationships in life, we need to spend time with it, respect and nurture it for it to grow.

Judy

### Balance and harmony.

[It's about] finding that balance between your human self and how you relate to nature. This image is about finding that balance between my human life (and all the selfish needs that go with it) and the beautiful environment that is 'my place'. This flooded gum (*Eucalyptus grandis*) lives approximately 2 metres off the veranda of my new house. The builder was adamant it would have to be removed as it presented too great a risk to have it living that close to the new building. This was the last thing my husband and I wanted but it was a choice between having a place to live or the life of this beautiful tree. Lyn



*Plate 28*

I had just resigned myself to the fact that we would lose her when the soil report came back; the tree had to stay because it was stabilising the whole slope. I was over the moon and the builder agreed to proceed with the build. I was able to maintain a balance with nature by fitting my plans in with her template. Nature said, 'No, I'm sorry, your human will is nothing; I am going to have to stay'. We are, however, well insured! Lyn

**Connections.**

It is wonderful that I, from my study, can observe him so close, and it makes me feel connected ... yes, there is a relationship there.

Sally



*Plate 29*

This white brown scrub wren comes to my study window several times every day to scare off his own reflection. I love it that we can look one another in the eye like this. I planted this tree and many other shrubs, so my garden's become much more enclosed and hospitable – almost a bower for these little creatures.

Sally

### Knowledge.

I have gotten to know that park so well that I could lead you to most individual trees. There is a pleasure in just getting to know an area [in detail].

Lee



*Plate 30*

My special place on Tamborine Mountain is John Dickson Conservation Park, a 3.5ha council park in the Forest Park area, where I have been working since 2000. ... I have come to know the Park intimately and have enjoyed watching it evolve and grow from a weed-infested area to one with a mature rain-forested gully ... I have watched the diversity of birdlife increase and... have recorded increasing numbers of other native ground-dwelling animals. Recently we have begun attaching name labels to mature trees ...we began a walking track through the Park and installed a picnic table...to encourage people to use the Park and enjoy it ... but also to follow a defined track so that natural regeneration is not restricted or damaged. For many years I have been concerned that our open areas are becoming over-run with exotic species ... By encouraging and educating the public to appreciate the natural environment ... I hope I am making a small contribution towards the long term conservation of natural areas.

Lee

### Wonder.

For me, that is just the absolute wonder of being here and finding these extraordinary things ... Hardly a day goes by without something that you sort of think, 'Oh, I just want to share it with the world' .... And, you know, it makes you think that there are all these other things out there that you just don't see.

Naomi



*Plate 31*

Not its scientific name, not even its general name, but for me 'the lichen creature' it will always be. It was thoroughly camouflaged on a palm tree trunk amongst moss and lichen until it was unintentionally sprayed with water and moved. What a wondrous creature it is. What questions it raises. How marvellous it is that it and its kind are living out their lives around us and mostly we are unaware of them. What other creatures are out there of which we know nothing? I am awestruck.

Naomi

Paradoxes and dilemmas ('outside the frame').<sup>55</sup>



*Plate 32*

Participating in the photovoice project gave me an opportunity to consider the Mountain environment with a new awareness. For eleven years it has been my home and during those years I have often rekindled past memories of visits here as a child, learning about the rainforest, the red soil and the ancient volcanic residue.

It is a privilege to live here, to feel a connection to this place, and to share our photos with the wider community.

Joan

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<sup>55</sup> Some photos conceal paradoxes and dilemmas, 'outside the frame'. For example, the photo above of the entrance to the Knoll National Park (the road on the left) illustrates not only the beauty of the Mountain but also the difficult, and as yet unsuccessful, struggle to relocate the Council dump (down the road to the right) from the vicinity of the Park and its ecosystems. As elsewhere, practices of care come up against powerful interests on and off the Mountain, and heartache is often inherent in people/nature reciprocity.

## The permeability of nature and culture.<sup>56</sup>

### Visible woman

This “visible woman” stands on the windowsill of my studio. There at her heart you can see the autumn colours of the tree outside. In the same way my garden has a place in my heart, and it also finds its way into my art. I paint, and I plant here, and this place nurtures me.

Sally



*Plate 33*

... the unexpected gift with this photo was just that you can see reflected through her in the region of her heart, some of the lovely autumn colours that are just outside my studio, and there, of course, is both nature and art, in so far as there are some coloured pencils there, too. So I suppose I am saying by that, again, that is about me caring for place ... I have made that natural environment, but that it also nurtures me, in the area of my heart, and it also finds its way into my art. So, once again it is that love of reciprocity that motivates us, doesn't it?

Sally

<sup>56</sup> “The pursuit of wholeness, the indivisibility of the natural world, the continuum of human experience spanning all times and cultures, and the permeability of nature and culture.”  
*Roy Jackson: Retrospective 1963-2013* Drill Hall Gallery, ANU. Terence Maloon and Sioux Garside.  
<http://dhg.anu.edu.au/events/roy-jackson>.

## Discussion: Reciprocity

Luce Irigaray, who writes a poem every day, might well appreciate the poetry of the above images and texts. In an interview recorded for International Women's Day (March 12, 2013), she was asked what values are significant for women today. She replied:

I believe women have a lot more respect for life, whether life itself, or the environment, the [milieu] of life. We're finally beginning to show interest in ecology issues – with a lot of contradictions, because we want to be involved so long as it won't prevent us from making money! – and that is a value that women today can promote: respect for life and respect for the environment that sustains life.

She went on to say that a second (and, I suggest, related) value was 'hospitality', in its original sense of reciprocity: "the original culture of hospitality was a feminine culture ... I think women could bring a lot to non-hierarchical, non-money related hospitality".<sup>57</sup>

What people understand by 'reciprocity' can be instrumental and pragmatic, as in 'trades' ('keeping the trades even'), barter or exchange, and giving and receiving favours in mutually advantageous ways. Another and more open-ended meaning of reciprocity, closer to what Irigaray intends, is expressed in Via Campesina's Reciprocity Principle:

For us, Reciprocity simply means '**a focus on the other**': our ability to move away from an exclusive focus on our own perspectives and seek to understand the perspectives of those we are in partnership with ... The ability to act reciprocally is fundamental to the on-going development of in-depth shared understanding and shared agreements: the foundations of sustained partnership success [emphasis in the original] (Via Campesina, 2013).

The writers here are, of course, speaking of relations between people. Via Campesina, established in 1993, is "the international movement which brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world" to defend small-scale

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<sup>57</sup> A third value was 'intimacy', the values of proximity. Of these three values, she said: "If you listen to the most progressive speeches today, these are the values you'll hear about". "Of relations and rights: interview with Luce Irigaray." Radio 86 channel. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODDB-wayDhM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODDB-wayDhM).

The above quotations from the interview are adapted from the English sub-titles.

agriculture and “oppose corporate driven agriculture and transnational companies that are destroying people and nature” (Via Campesina, *ibid*). Via Campesina and movements like it – since 1956, the worker cooperative at Mondragon in the Basque region of Spain has been a stand-out example (K. Bradley and A. Gelb, 1983) - are founded on values of cooperation, mutuality and reciprocity: indeed, there is a long human tradition of cooperatives, large and small, which have illustrated the benefits of reciprocity between human beings (Bill Metcalf, 1995, 2004).

Reciprocity is, at a minimum, a two-way relationship. In terms of people ‘caring’ for one another, it is, I suggest, an advance on altruism with its potential pitfalls of hubris, control and inept judgements about others’ needs. Reciprocity is, rather, the kind of interdependency expressed by Burrigubba elder Lilla Watson in this way: “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” - a text one can see displayed in the offices of some local Brisbane organisations. Reciprocity is, of course, as open to manipulation as any other cultural practice. Reciprocal gift-giving, for example, can escalate to ruinous levels. At best, though, it can be a force for interdependence and resilience, especially where relationships are ongoing and concerns are congruent. If we - white, European, well-resourced peoples - have been able to sustain a tradition of cooperation, mutuality and reciprocity between people, how might we build a similar tradition of reciprocity between us and our environment?

At first glance, people/nature reciprocity seems obvious: human beings and other species can’t exist without an environment of earth, water, air, sun and shade, plants and animals. Yet it is proving difficult to change the Western mindset of nature as an ‘out there’, limitless resource and, instead, view nature as our partner with both limits and inherent rights. Arguably, as noted in the previous chapter, we need to legislate rights of nature, as advocated by movements such as Earth Charter, Pachamama in Ecuador and Australian Earth Law Alliance. What we can’t legislate is a change in mentality - the ‘respect’ that Luce Irigaray says is needed, the ‘feelings’ that Judith Wright said were pivotal, the connection to and interdependence with country that Mary Graham and Lilla Watson describe, the commitment to place and its continued well-being that the women in this research have demonstrated ... “a sense of nature which is not external – which is co-extensive with ourselves, including and permeating us”. To build these kinds of

relationships between people and the natural environment, it seems we need multiple strategies, and it is these I consider in the next chapter.

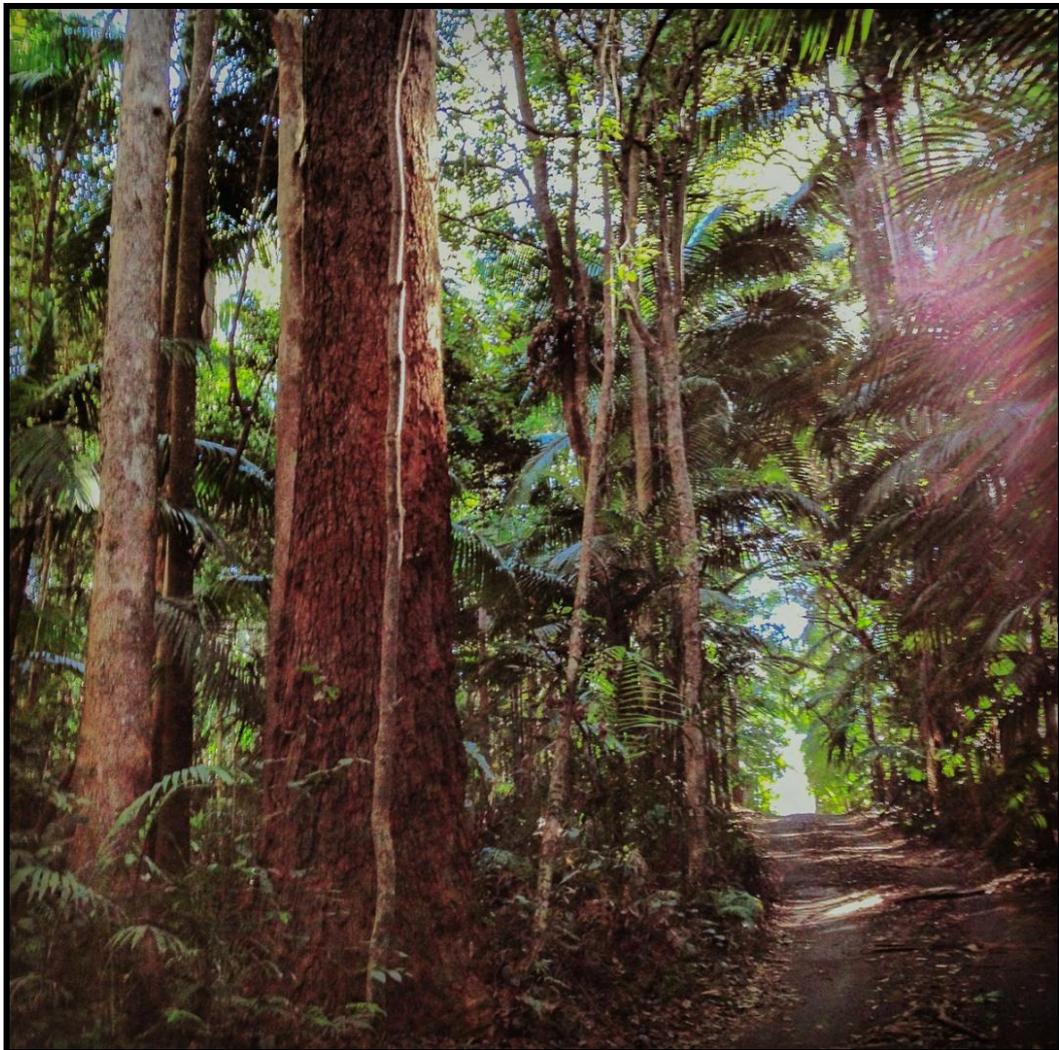


*Plate 34: Librarian (right) with some of the women who participated in the photovoice project, celebrating the launch of their work (seen in the background in the library window) at the Tamborine Mountain Library.*

Source: *Tamborine Mountain News*, Vol. 1335, p. 17, September 4th, 2012.

# Chapter 8:

## Summary, Reflections, and Implications



*Plate 35. Old Mountain Road, Tamboorine Mountain*

## Summary

Developing intelligible, plausible descriptions, and articulating and circulating them well, are among the most challenging epistemic-moral-political tasks, especially for projects of developing transformative knowledge and revisionary successor epistemologies. Inserted into the public domain, good descriptions, attentive to empirical evidence, become catalysts of ongoing deliberation, contestation, negotiation, and action. More to the point ... better descriptions are crucial for ongoing survival.

Lorraine Code, 2006 (pp. 193-4)

In this concluding chapter, I draw together the threads of the research, summarise and reflect on the findings, the literature and the methodology, and suggest some implications of the research for developmental practice, education and research.

Qualitative feminist participatory research reaches out and engages women in thinking about their situations and experiences. The researcher listens to and records what women say and, drawing on theory and relevant literature, makes the best possible and most perceptive meanings of that material to pass on to interested others. In that process, there is a lot that can go wrong as well as a lot that can go well, but every researcher hopes at least to make a contribution, however modest, to her field of inquiry. For myself, while I am well aware that this research has been small-scale – although, I believe, indicative - and that conclusions, as in any worthwhile dialogue and conversation, are tentative and open to ongoing discussion, I also believe that the research findings may be “good descriptions [which], attentive to empirical evidence, become catalysts of ongoing deliberation, contestation, negotiation, and action” and, further, that they answer the research question, *What are women’s principles and practices of care for the environment on Tamborine Mountain?*

If the research canvas has been small and the women local, the almost seven thousand women and men on Tamborine Mountain are in no way immune from the effects of environmental degradation, climate change, pollution, the ‘quarry Australia mentality’ and related concerns that I explored at the beginning of this thesis. Often, it is just such threats to the well-being of their locality that impel women to care for place. In the conditions in

which we now live, with the future scenarios we are told we can anticipate<sup>58</sup>, it seems clear that women, along with Indigenous peoples and marginalised Others, may offer, *by their very exclusion*, particular insights and alternative practices we would do well to consider. To recall Val Plumwood's words:

To the extent that women's lives have been lived in ways which are less directly oppositional to nature than those of men, and have involved different and less oppositional practices, qualities of care and kinds of selfhood, an ecological feminist position could and should privilege some of the experiences and practices of women over those of men as a source of change without being committed to any form of naturalism (1993, p. 35).

That said, the experiences and practices reported here, just as the research processes and outcomes, have not been dramatic – “No revolution resulted” (Patricia Maguire, 1987, p. 52). There were virtually no mentions of feminism, and the ‘sexuate’ differences the women cited were subtle, not oppositional - either to nature or to male colleagues and partners - and some of their comments veered towards Val Plumwood's naturalism (above). However committed, able and well-informed they indisputably are, the women who participated in this research are surprisingly self-deprecating. To different degrees, we are all, it seems, enculturated in the Master narrative (Val Plumwood, 2002).

It may be, as the literature suggests (see Chapter 2), that environmental theory and practice is still largely a male preserve, linked to men's traditional, patriarchal associations with science and property ownership. The few studies that have been undertaken in Australia - with, for example, Landcare groups (Sarah Ewing, 1995; Margaret Alston, 1995; Ruth Beilin, 1998; Ciel Claridge, 1998) – confirm local women's experiences of a predominantly male profile and leadership in environmental groups. While that image belies women's

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<sup>58</sup> Tim Sherratt, Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin, 2005; Barrie Pittock, 2005, 2008; David Lindenmayer, 2007; Michael McCracken, Frances Moore and John C. Topping, 2008; Kari Marie Norgaard, 2011; Tim Flannery, 2012; American Meteorological Society Report, 2012; Lynda Chambers and Marie R. Keatley, 2013; IPCC Report, 2013.

evident presence in on-the-ground work, it is of a piece with the reluctance of many women to take public leadership.<sup>59</sup>

Following Julia Gillard's departure from office of Prime Minister in mid 2013, there has been a spate of books written about misogyny in Australian public life – for example, by Jane Caro (2013), Anne Summers (2013), Kerry-Ann Walsh (2013), Anna Goldsworthy (2013) - and little of what they report would tempt women to stick their heads above the trenches. In the current neo-liberal climate, much the same could be said both for locality and environmental work, with funding conditions and constraints forcing a retreat from the socio-political analysis that Margaret Ledwith (2011) lamented as lacking. Whatever the personal outrage and the fierce ongoing conversations amongst women and amongst locality workers, the trenches must seem to many the safest place to be. Happily, while some of us opt to keep a low public profile, we go on talking with one another, taking what action is possible, and writing and reading books.

In Chapter 2, I proposed that the feminist literature of difference, Luce Irigaray's in particular, along with a broadly ecofeminist analysis, offers fertile ways to understand women's care for their natural environment at local level. Given that ecofeminist literature has been in some decline since the 1990s<sup>60</sup>, the writings of Australian women such as Val Plumwood, Freya Mathews, Ariel Salleh, Susan Hawthorne, Germaine Greer and Jackie French and, in an Indigenous context, Deborah Bird Rose, Diane Bell and Zohl de Ishtar, take on increased importance, keeping the feminist and ecofeminist questions, analysis and action options alive. In locality work, too, Australian writers such as Wendy Weeks and Yoland Wadsworth have kept women's locality work in view.

Roberta Feldman, Susan Stall, and Patricia A. Wright (1998, p. 263) and Teresa V. Abbruzzese and Gerda R. Wekerle (2011) have proposed that women build their political networks outwards, out from their homes into the community, by means of what Feldman

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<sup>59</sup> On my enquiring, "Where are the women?" with regard to a recent environmental event where the three speakers were all men, the organisation's communications officer replied: "We approached a number of possible panelists (including a number of women), but unfortunately they were unavailable.... It's also a shame that there are fewer and fewer women in high profile roles to be able to approach."

<sup>60</sup> There has recently been a modest resurgence of ecofeminism, for example, in Greta Gaard's (2011) recuperation of ecofeminist theory.

et al call 'neighbouring'. It seems from this research that it may also be the way Western women get to know their natural environment. In conversations with women who participated in this research, most women spoke of local concerns and personal experiences, all were aware of neighbourhood issues, positive and negative, and in the photovoice project, six of the seven women who participated took photos in their immediate surroundings. It may be that some of the hostility to community noted in Chapter 2 may stem from the current cultural demeaning of 'neighbouring' skills, skills which people in many other cultures take for granted. By whatever name, interdependent relationships at local neighbourhood level can be a very necessary means of survival. They were a necessity for women in earlier times, such as those on the Mountain (see Chapter 4) who, 'staying put' by choice or because of life circumstances, relied for their well-being and that of their families on their interdependence with neighbours.

In Indigenous cultures, interdependence is a given, both between people and between people and their environment. Mary Graham tells of the song that adults sing to babies to teach them sharing from their earliest years. Deborah Bird Rose (2002) writes of what interdependence means for the MakMak people in northern Australia:

The people, the other living things, the waters and soils, rains and winds, all bring each other into being, nurturing and impacting on each other ... dynamic, symbiotic, kinship-based, mutually nurturant and sometimes predatory relationships between people, non-human beings and place ... all have long term commitments to these relationships that nurture their lives. MakMak people expect to remain in their country 'forever'. Accordingly, changes in the place, even the most damaging, must be lived with. There are no 'greener pastures' for them, because they belong right here (p. 116).

Belonging to birth country in this way, with lifelong custodianship rights and responsibilities - whether active or not - is one of the factors that distinguishes Indigenous from settler Australian connections with place. The eleven women who shared their reflections with me after the "Belonging to Country" workshop (Chapter 5) puzzled over the notion of birth country as 'where you come from' and decided that it was not possible for them - nor, some thought, was women's business. Where they found common ground and affirmation, however, was in their wish to look after land, as individuals and households. This was in large part what they took away, along with an engagement with

Deep Learning and Aboriginal terms of reference, from the workshop with Mary Graham and Lilla Watson.

While it is not possible to emulate Indigenous belonging to country, it is certainly possible for non-Indigenous women to connect to place and to commit to a practice of care. As reported in Chapter 6, when the women with local organisational affiliations discussed their principles and practices of care, they spoke of the following: doing the work properly (on the basis of accurate information and research), being aware of local/global impacts, acknowledging emotional and spiritual connections to places, and lobbying governments to provide support and leadership. Some women saw their work as a vocation or an unpaid job of work, and all saw differences in the ways women and men view and carry out environmental tasks. Their commitment, it seems, is a commitment to a practice of environmental care, more than a commitment to a specific place: it is a portable practice they have developed over time through connections with what one woman termed 'places of the heart'.

It was 'places of the heart' that the women portrayed in their images and texts for the photovoice project and, in doing so, summed up the research findings. That was a surprise. In terms of the research methodology, I had planned the photovoice project as a third 'leg' of three feminist participatory research modalities: local history, interviews and photography. It would, I hoped, enable me to synthesise and cross-check the data ('triangulate' in Shulamit Reinharz's terms, 1992, p. 197), as well as enhance local women's experiences of the research. In the event, the themes that emerged from the three methods are consistent and complementary and, cumulatively, demonstrate that Tamborine Mountain women's principles and practices of care for the environment are based in reciprocity, that is, the sense that relationships between people and nature are reciprocal. Further, staying put, being connected and being committed have been significant elements of that reciprocal relationship between the women and their natural environment.

Neither the photovoice project nor the feminist participatory research process itself was 'pure', most especially in the fact that the research agenda came from me and there was no intent for the research to involve or underpin advocacy for any marginalised group of people. I adapted all three research methods to my research purposes. Within ethical guidelines, I also endeavoured to make the research experience as rewarding as possible for

participants. A feminist participatory researcher strives to work with people, rather than on them, and to ensure that research benefits are shared as widely as possible (Patricia Maguire, 1987). I therefore found it difficult at times to ask people to participate in a research project with no explicit community benefit – in effect, I was asking the women to help me in my doctoral studies - and I sometimes found it difficult to have no formal, local organisational auspice to whom I would report. So I didn't earn, but was heartened to receive, this generous comment from one of the participants: "I guess I have basically entered into what it is that I think you need ... so I haven't held back as you can see ... that comes from that same feeling of sort of loyalty, integrity, that you are making an effort, therefore you are given as much as I can."

### **Reflections**

Would I do it differently and better another time? Undoubtedly. Better? To answer, it is tempting to echo Patricia Maguire (1987): "Big deal, big revolutionary real. Trying to organize nine or ten women in a small, dusty southwest town. Surely the real revolution is elsewhere" (p. 192). If the real revolution is elsewhere, not in a small southwest town in America or on a medium-sized mountain in southeast Queensland, the findings of this research may yet be illuminating, even provocative, especially if we can translate them into education, research and practice. I say, 'provocative', because at the heart of this research has been the radical and often contested concept of women's 'difference'.

"Women and men are different", Lilla Watson has said, and she encourages women to define their own terms of reference, rather than measure up to men's. We recall her caution:

To make [equality] the goal is to fall into the trap of using male terms of reference. If strengthening women's terms of reference is the goal, the question of equality does not arise. Then men would have to redefine their own terms of reference in relation to women (in Wendy Weeks, 1994, pp. 95-96).

Germaine Greer wrote in similar vein:

Women's liberation did not see the female's potential in terms of the male actual; the visionary feminists of the late sixties and early seventies knew that women could never find freedom by agreeing to live the lives of unfree men (1999, p. 1).

The feminist concept of difference, Elizabeth Grosz (1990) writes, implies “a major transformation of the social and symbolic order”, resistance to “the homogenisation of separate political struggles” (without ruling out the possibility of strategic alliances), acknowledgement that “men’s challenge to patriarchy is necessarily different from women’s”, and the need for “the very structures of representation, meaning and knowledge [to] be subjected to a thoroughgoing transformation of their patriarchal alignments” (p. 340). In a radical understanding of difference, the charge of essentialism doesn’t hold, since one cannot ‘essentialise’ what doesn’t yet exist and is always becoming.

She wrote (1990, p. 340):

For feminists, to claim women’s difference from men is to reject existing definitions and categories, redefining oneself and the world according to women’s own perspectives. ... The right to equality entails the right to be the same as men; while struggles around autonomy imply the right to either consider oneself equal to another or the right to reject the terms by which equality is measured and to define oneself in different terms.

That’s a hard call. Whatever we may say to one another in the relative safety of the trenches, out in the public realm it is gender neutrality and gender equality that attract least hostility (Adele Horin, 2009). However, it is also in the public realm where education, research and practice take place and where we try to bring on stream (that is, into the mainstream) the kind of care for the environment that is, as the women here said, not only informed and effective, but also connected, committed, and reciprocal.

If the feminism of difference was a preoccupation of so-called second wave feminism (Denise Thompson, 2001), the central dilemma it posed has not gone away: how are women to self-define as women in terms that are not within, complementary to, or in opposition to men’s terms of reference? As we are well aware, it is not a dilemma that can be solved all at once: Western languages, cultures and institutions are saturated in male terms of reference, and have been so for a very long time. Nevertheless, taking the long view, I propose that the feminism of difference is a strategic path women may take, in company with marginalised others, towards a different way of being in the world: a movement towards filling in Luce Irigaray’s empty brackets, towards something approaching the authority of Mary Graham’s and Lilla Watson’s women’s business, and a

challenge to the Mastering domination and colonisation Val Plumwood identified as ruinous to the planet. If this research can encourage women to take that path in their environmental work, it is, in my view, a very good start – perhaps “crucial for ongoing survival” (Lorraine Code, 2006, pp. 193-4).<sup>61</sup>

### **Implications for practice, education and research**

As I was preparing to write this chapter, I attended a workshop, read a book and was reminded of a story, all three of which helped frame my thinking about the possible implications of the research I have undertaken on Tamborine Mountain.

The workshop was an Australian Earth Law Alliance event, “Finding New Ways to Protect Our Local Ecosystems: Exploring Community and Nature’s Rights” (30 September, 2013). There was a number of speakers from Australia and overseas<sup>62</sup> and the predominant theme of the day was the need to work outside the law, because the law itself is the problem.

Two American environmental lawyers, Thomas Linzey and Mari Margill of the Community Environmental Defense Fund, traced the history of British Law, from its earliest beginnings to its current form underpinning the laws of America and Australia, to illustrate how it has ever been skewed in favour of commerce, property and individual rights (particularly of the elite). They stressed that corporations don’t have to change the law to achieve what they want, anywhere they want it – mines, factory farms and waste dumps in your neighbourhood and mine – because the law inherently safeguards their interests. The onus is on others (for example, local residents) to find legal fault with the details of their development applications, often in the realm of the technical minutiae that are easily remedied by corporate lawyers. Thomas and Mari shared case studies of small towns, beginning with a small town of 400 people in Pennsylvania who have begun to ‘pass’ their own local ordinances to prohibit environmentally destructive industries in their localities. These towns, acting outside the law, are taking strength from similar local actions across

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<sup>61</sup> In Val Plumwood’s (2002a) analysis, the Master progressively divides, devalues and denies the colonised Other, until eventually he begins to devour his own means of survival.

<sup>62</sup> Nati Greene from Fundacion Pachamama, Thomas Linzi and Mari Magill from the Community Environmental Legal Defence Fund in America, Annie Kia and Drew Hutton from the Lock the Gate Alliance, Jo-Anne Bragg from Brisbane Environmental Defenders Office, and Aidan Ricketts from Southern Cross University.

counties and states, and are now joining together in a national association to call for legislative changes in Congress.

Annie Kia and Drew Hutton told similar stories of Australian communities and landholders going outside the law to sign up to Lock the Gate against coal seam gas mines in their localities, including one outstanding action on the Liverpool Plains in north-west New South Wales where a group of adjacent landholders have locked the gate and, in the process, ringed a national park that was under threat of mining exploration. What the workshop brought home to me was the power of local people who are prepared to engage in civil disobedience to protect their environment – that is, to go outside the system – as well as, less dramatically, the power of local people to do the slow and steady work to change the system from within, pushing relentlessly up against bureaucratic inflexibility and outdated rules and assumptions. In both cases, as Nati Greene said, timing and preparation are often of the essence: at the moment when Ecuador was re-writing her constitution, there were the ‘right’ people with firm will and appropriate expertise, prepared well in advance, to press successfully for the constitution to include rights of nature. While direct nonviolent action is, as Drew Hutton said, “great theatre”, theatre that can rattle complacency and force rapid change, developmental locality work is slower and takes longer, because it is based on place-sensitive relationships that people expect to endure on a daily basis over time. Both are necessary.

The book that came into my hands<sup>63</sup> as I was thinking about the implications of the research was Germaine Greer’s erudite account of her project to rehabilitate the 60 hectare property she purchased in 2002 at Natural Bridge in the Numinbah Valley – *White Beech: The Rainforest Years* (2013). Searching for a piece of land to help heal back to environmental health, she found (or was found by, she’d claim) an old dairy farm near the Queensland and New South Wales border covered in lantana and every kind of noxious weed, but also habitat to still-flourishing species of local flora and fauna, some of them rare. She spent a decade and a great deal of money on the rehabilitation of what is now Friends of Gondwana Rainforest, a registered charity on its way to becoming a not for profit

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<sup>63</sup> Another book that was published about the same time was Jackie French’s *Let the Land Speak: A history of Australia. How the land created our nation* (2013). Following on from her 1998 place-sensitive account of her 40 years in the Araluen Valley (*Seasons of Content*), her recent book charts the ways that the nature of the Australian land has formed our history. It includes a chapter on Indigenous women’s connections to the land, sourced from information provided by Indigenous women in her locality.

Australian company which she has set up to care for the land in perpetuity. In a time when governments want to exploit rainforests for eco-tourism dollars, and simultaneously under-resource the very departments that are charged to protect them, Germaine Greer concludes that private landholders are probably best placed to defend what still exists. By this, she does not mean that she owns the land – in fact, she says, the land owns her.

Again, what appeals and instructs is a woman's initiative to do differently, to flout expectations (and, in Greer's case, cynicism) and to find ways through and around the outdated formal arrangements that assist those who would destroy the environment and thwart those who would protect it. I appreciate, too, the way Greer has contexted her work within the Indigenous and European history of land use in the Valley. It is, of course, a history very similar to that of nearby Tamborine Mountain, starting with timber getting, dairying, and small-scale farming, and ending with tourism which is, potentially, just as environmentally damaging as any other resource-exploitative activity.

Reading the book, I knew that the women in this research would both readily grasp the botanical details Greer provides and also envy the financial means she has had to protect her particular patch of earth. Many women in this study also work on their own properties, but they do so within the limits of their own resources, since most funding for this kind of environmental care goes to large-scale properties. All such patches, the pieces of the environment to which women give time and energy, may help provide the *refugia* (Paul Donatiu, 2009) to which species will need to retreat as the climate warms and habitats change. A long-held hope on the Mountain has been to establish environmental corridors to encircle the Mountain, linking together the existing 'patches' in ways that will give species the range and diversity they may require to survive and thrive (Anthony Janetos, 2008). On a personal note, I also read Germaine Greer's book with the sense that I had come full circle, because it was during the 18 months I lived in a cabin in the rainforest on an adjoining property at Natural Bridge that I began thinking about and researching the connections between women, locality and environment.

The story I remembered was of Les Halliwell, the first community work lecturer in Queensland. He was famous for his invariable answer to any student who asked, "What should I/we do?" Les would reply, "Ask the people." In his honour, there is a Les Halliwell Lecture at the beginning of every Queensland community development

conference, given by a notable practitioner. In 2009, the lecturer was Ela Bhat from the Self-Employed Women's Association based in Ahmedabad. If Les Halliwell were still amongst us today, he might agree with Ela Bhat that, in asking the people, we remember to "Ask the Women". These are excerpts from her speech:

The world is torn with conflicts, violence and hunger. The refugee camps are swelling on several country borders. What do we do?

In my experience, women are the key to rebuilding a community. Focus on women, and you will find allies, who want a stable community. The woman wants roots for her family. In woman, you get a worker, a provider, a caretaker, an educator, a networker. She is a forger of bonds—in her, essentially, you have a creator and a preserver.

Women's leadership needs to be nurtured, since that is the only hope, if an inclusive just society and a sustainable environment are to be created. ...

... Closely linked to Nature, our task has been to hold, to contain, that will allow people and groups to grow. That is how women's organizations and networks have grown and have let others grow, worldwide. In the women's way, there are goals but also there are values, the process of unfolding and learning from the process. The feminine has a different sense of time: the work may take whatever time is needed. SEWA has taken 30 years to reach a million people. ....The feminine aims at: inclusion instead of domination, at process more than end-goal, group over individual, integration over fragmentation (Ela Bhatt, 2009).

In the above excerpts, Ela Bhat could have been speaking about the women participants in this research. We recall, however, that many of them explicitly eschewed leadership. Similarly, they affirmed but found it difficult to offer examples of how their principles and practices of care differed from men's. Why the discrepancy? I wonder if it is possible for women to be sufficiently confident to take up environmental leadership in the absence of a public discourse for, by and about women, a discourse through which women would feel able to speak without fear of mockery, dismissal or reprisal. How might we get to such a future discourse from where we are now, and sooner rather than later? I want to suggest,

briefly, three interconnected routes – developmental locality practice, education, and research.

### **Developmental locality practice.**

Like its social work cousin, developmental locality practice has come late to environmental issues (Mick Hillman, 2002; Peter Jones, 2006, 2010; Michael Zapf, 2009) and, for the same reasons as in many social movements, has promoted and believed itself to be gender neutral. Further, constrained by the guidelines of government funding, locality workers have increasingly had to focus on specific target groups (for example, people with disabilities, single mothers, the ‘socially excluded’) rather than on places, localities and neighbourhoods. By contrast, this research suggests that some women see themselves as working differently to men, and that they understand ‘community’ to mean human and other-than-human life. Accordingly, when locality practitioners, their boards and committees are able to lift their heads above the trenches – not easy, I grant – they might begin to think in terms of bio-regional constituencies and issues of scale<sup>64</sup>, as well as women’s particular ways of working. Both would challenge received notions of community constituencies, the nexus between public and private work, and the concept of ‘community’ itself. As the townships in Pennsylvania and on the Liverpool Plains found, it is a task for groupings of organisations – and groupings of women - who can stand together.

If Germaine Greer (2013) is right about private properties offering the best protection for the local environment, locality workers might seek out, support and network with women who are engaged in such work on their land, advocate this kind of ‘custodianship’, and lobby existing programs to support them - for example, by persuading the Land for Wildlife and the Voluntary Conservation Agreement programs to lower their land area requirements. In the light of the Australian and American examples cited above, locality workers could also initiate (or support) actions that go outside the law to ‘pass’ local ordinances to prohibit destructive developments in their localities. In this, telling the stories and “neighbouring” are skills women have long honed and made their own, and remembering to ‘ask the women’ might elicit the women leaders whom Ela Bhat described

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<sup>64</sup> For example, while most Noosa residents will welcome de-amalgamation from the Sunshine Coast Council, environmentalists will find it a more complex scenario because their work makes better sense at the broad bioregional scale.

as “the only hope, if an inclusive just society and a sustainable environment are to be created”.

### **Education.**

Broadly speaking, what appears to be lacking in education, at all levels, is critical analysis (Margaret Ledwith, 2011; Anne Summers, 2013). To address this gap in the environment field, the Environmental Defenders Offices in Australia run series of public lectures and presentations, and Thomas Linzey and Mari Margil (above) have established Democracy Schools. These talks and workshops assist people understand how society actually works – what used to be known as ‘structural analysis’, the core of consciousness-raising in the women’s movement and in Paulo Freire’s literacy education projects in Brazil (1970). A similar venture, focused on environmental issues, is the Discussion Course of the Northwest Earth Institute in Oregon (2007), a course of readings and exercises to assist local people become environmentally literate, although the course appears to be oriented primarily to personal rather than collective change.

These are locality-based strategies, and it is to localities, I suggest, we now need to return. The bridge between academia and the field is two-way and, in recent decades, it has been the universities who have been able to provide safe haven for women’s studies and locality practice education. If, as it seems, universities now have to curtail critique and critical analysis for funding security, it is time to relocate to the field, finding a home not only in the remaining neighbourhood and women’s centres but also in places like local libraries and with sympathetic community groups (U3A, for example). In this research, it was the women at the Tamborine Mountain library who agreed to host the International Women’s Day display at the beginning of this research, and the photovoice project at its conclusion. Tamborine Mountain library hosts sessions to welcome new residents, sponsors school art displays and provides space for relevant interest groups and visiting authors/speakers, functioning as a de facto community centre.

Education does not have to be monocultural or classroom bound. The “Belonging to Country” workshops on Tamborine Mountain have shown the benefits of learning to think and see through other cultural lenses. Mary Graham, for one, believes that students should be taught philosophies (Western and others) so that they learn how to think in different cultural terms. In the Tamborine Mountain area, the annual three-day Drumley Walk,

which follows the path a local Aboriginal man (Billy Drumley) allegedly took to travel from Beaudesert to visit family at Southport, attracts increasing numbers of people who like to learn ‘on the hoof’.

### **Research.**

The research questions and projects that might help us jog rather than limp to a sustainable future would flow from the above, but would also – importantly - include research with women, by women and in women’s voices. Katherine Weiler (quoted in Caroline Wang et al, 1996, p. 1392) noted three themes that characterise a feminist methodology: “the appreciation of women’s subjective experience, a recognition of the significance of that experience, and political commitment”. Possible research questions could include: What might constitute a public discourse by and about women, a public dimension of women’s business, through which women could speak and be heard? Is women’s preference for distributed leadership compatible with a public profile? What would a practice of critical ecological feminism look like and are there current examples? In my locality? In yours?

If this research is, as I believe, one of only a few to seek and report women’s thoughts on their environmental principles and practices, let us ask women in other locations the same and similar questions - questions about ‘staying put’, about kinds of custodianship, connections and commitment to place, about reciprocity – and, more widely - about strategies to protest and resist the kind of sexism directed at our first woman prime minister and at those women who risk public profiles and leadership in environmental and other arenas. There is no lack of questions. And there are creative solutions aplenty, especially if we ask in the spirit of women’s difference, rather than in comparison to men and male norms or with the expectation of gender-neutral responses.

The world today needs more feminine leadership, because we face one of the most challenging tasks of transformation of our times. And the feminine is needed not just in the form of more women leaders but also in the form of men honouring the feminine within them ... Feminine leadership is needed to balance the very masculine models that abound, which do not always produce the world we want (Ela Bhat, 2009).



*Plate 36: The Road to Tamborine Mountain.*

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**\*Please note that, as I stated in Note on Style (p. xv), I have used a modified form of APA Style.**

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## **Appendix 1: Human Research Ethics (HRE) Approval Stage 1 (H3990)**

**James Cook University**  
**Townsville Qld. 4811 Australia**  
Research Services Ph: 47816575; Fax: 47815521



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## APPENDIX 2: Information Sheet Stage 1



### INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: **Women caring for place: discerning principles and recent practices in Australia**

#### **STAGE 1: Tamborine Mountain Women Care for Place: the power of the past informs the present**

**You are invited to take part in a research project to understand and celebrate the environmental contribution of past Tamborine Mountain women**, which will culminate in a month-long display in Tamborine Mountain library from March 8, 2011, International Women's Day. The study is being conducted by Sandra Sewell and will contribute to the degree in Doctor of Philosophy at James Cook University.

**If you agree to be involved in the study, you may be invited to be interviewed.** The interview, with your consent, will be recorded in note form, and should take less than 1 hour of your time. The interview will be conducted at a venue of your choice or, if preferable and necessary, by telephone or email. You will also be invited to contribute memorabilia for the display which, with your consent, will be recorded for the display, but will remain your property.

**Taking part in this study is completely voluntary** and you can stop taking part in the study at any time without explanation or prejudice. You may also withdraw any unprocessed data from the study.

**If you know of others who might be interested in this study**, would you please pass on this information sheet to them so they may contact me to volunteer for the study.

**Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential.** The data from the project will be used in the preparation of the PhD thesis and in research publications. You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

**If you have any questions about the study, please contact Sandra Sewell (see details below).**

**Principal Investigator:  
Sandra Sewell  
Centre for Women's Studies**

## Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form Stage 1



### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR | Sandra Sewell  |
| PROJECT TITLE:         | PROJECT TITLE: Women caring for place: discerning principles and recent practices in Australia<br><br><u>STAGE 1: Tamborine Mountain Women Care for Place: the power of the past informs the present</u> |
| SCHOOL                 | Social Work and Community Welfare (Centre for Women's Studies)   |

I understand the aim of this research study is to understand and celebrate the environmental contribution of past Tamborine Mountain women, which will culminate in a month-long display in Tamborine Mountain library from March 8, 2011, International Women's Day. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written information sheet to keep.

I understand that my participation may involve an interview, and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the information sheet.

I acknowledge that:

- taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
- that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval.

(Please tick to indicate consent)

|  |                          |     |                          |    |
|--|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|
| I consent to be interviewed  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No |
| I consent for the interview to be recorded   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No |
| I consent to contribute memorabilia for the display (the items I contribute to remain my property) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No |

|                        |       |
|------------------------|-------|
| Name: <i>(printed)</i> |       |
| Signature:             | Date: |

## Appendix 4: Approval for Stage 2



**James Cook University**  
Townsville Qld. 4811 Australia  
Sophie Thompson, Human Ethics and Grants Administrator  
Research Services Ph: 47816575; Fax: 47815521  
email: [Sophie.Thompson@jcu.edu.au](mailto:Sophie.Thompson@jcu.edu.au)

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## Appendix 5: Invitation to Participate in Research

### An invitation to participate in research

Please find attached an Information Sheet about the PhD research I am currently undertaking at James Cook University, Townsville.

If you would be willing for me to contact you and invite you to participate in an interview a few weeks after the seminar, please fill in the details below and leave the form with me before you leave today.

Many thanks.

Sandra Sewell

Name: .....

Address:.....

Contact phone number: .....

Email address: .....

When is the most convenient time to call you? .....

*Please note that it is not essential that you live on Tamborine Mountain in order to participate in the study.*

## Appendix 6: Information Sheet Stage 2

**James Cook University**



### **INFORMATION SHEET**

**“Women caring for place: discerning principles and recent practices in Australia”**

#### **Stage 2: Learning from Indigenous belonging to and care for place**

**You are invited to take part in a research project** to explore Tamborine Mountain women’s care for the environment. The project involves an interview, at a time and place of your choosing, approximately a month after your participation in the Indigenous “Belonging to Country” seminar on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011.

The study is being conducted by Sandra Sewell and will contribute to the degree in Doctor of Philosophy (Women’s Studies) at James Cook University.

If you agree to be involved in the study, you will be invited to be interviewed. The interview, with your consent, will be audio-taped, and should only take approximately 1 hour of your time. The interview will be conducted at a venue of your choice.

**Taking part in this study is completely voluntary** and you can stop taking part in the study at any time without explanation or prejudice. You may also withdraw any unprocessed data from the study.

**Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential.** The data from the study will be used in preparation of the PhD thesis and in research publications. You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

**If you have any questions about the study**, please contact Sandra Sewell or Nonie Harris (see details below)

**Principal Investigator:**  
**Sandra Sewell**  
**Centre for Women’s Studies**  
**James Cook University**

## Appendix 7: Belonging To Country Program

### Belonging to Country

Time: 9.15am to 5.00pm Saturday October 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Venue: St John the Baptist Church Hall Beacon Rd Mt Tamborine

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>9.15am – 9.30am</b>  | <b>Opening Address and Welcome</b>   |
| <b>Session 1.</b>       | <b>The Land is the Law</b>   |
| 9.30am – 10.30am        | Aboriginal Metaphysics – The Dreaming<br>Aboriginal Law<br>Logic, Time and Space<br>Importance of Place          |
| 10.30am – 10.50am       | Morning Tea  |
| 10.50am – 11.30am       | Discussion   |
| <b>Session 2.</b>       | <b>Journey into Country</b>  |
| 11.30am – 12.30pm       | Journey Concept<br>Exercise<br>State of Being<br>Contemplative Period (No eye contact, no talking)               |
| <b>12.30pm – 1.30pm</b> | <b>Lunch</b> (Continue Contemplative Period throughout )   |
| 1.30pm – 1.50pm         | Discussion   |
| <b>Session 3.</b>       | <b>Belonging to Country</b>  |
| 1.50pm – 2.50pm         | Relationship – Land and Society<br>A Non-ego Based Society<br>Social and Political Structure<br>A Gendered World |
| 2.50pm – 3.20pm         | Discussion   |
| 3.20pm – 3.40pm         | Afternoon Tea  |
| <b>Session 4.</b>       | <b>Spirit and Protocols</b>  |
| 3.40pm – 4.40pm         | Intellectual (Logos)<br>Ethical (Ethos)<br>Feeling (Pathos)<br>General Discussion                                |
| 4.40pm – 5.00pm         | Closing Ceremony   |
| <b>5.00pm</b>           | <b>Close</b>   |

Materials to be handed out to participants

## Appendix 8: Interview questions Stage 2

**Preamble:** *You recently participated in an Indigenous “Belonging to Country” seminar. I’d like to ask you some questions about your responses to the seminar and, in particular, what your thoughts and actions may have been since then.*

**1.** Thinking back to the day of the seminar, what was your overall response to what you heard from Lilla and Mary? Were there some things in particular you took away with you when you left that afternoon?

**2.** I expect that you may have found yourself thinking about the seminar in the weeks since you attended. What are your thoughts now about belonging to the land, the custodianship ethic, and caring for country?

**3.** How would you regard yourself as ‘caring for country’, caring for your ‘place’?

**4.** Thinking about Indigenous care for country and the ways you yourself care for your place, what similarities and differences do you see?

**5.** How has what you heard at the seminar changed the ways you think about and care for your place? Could you give me some examples?

**6.** As a woman, and thinking back to Mary’s and Lilla’s comments about women’s business and men’s business – separate but equal - do you think the ways you think about and care for your place are the same as the ways men think about and care for place? Could you give me some examples?

**7.** How do you think the changed conditions of climate change might affect the way you care for place/country?

**Finishing:** *Is there anything else you’d like to add?*

## Appendix 9: Informed Consent form Stage 2

**JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY**



**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**“Women caring for place: discerning principles and recent practices in Australia”**

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b> | Sandra Sewell   |
| <b>PROJECT TITLE:</b>          | <b><u>STAGE 2: Learning from Indigenous belonging to and care for place</u></b>                               |
| <b>SCHOOL:</b>                 | <b>Social Work and Community Welfare (Centre for Women’s Studies), James Cook University, Townsville 4811</b> |

**I understand the aim of this research study is to explore Tamborine Mountain women’s care for the environment.** I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written information sheet to keep.

I understand that my participation will involve an interview at a time and place of my choosing, approximately one month after my participation in the “Belonging to Country” seminar on Tamborine Mountain on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011. I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the information sheet.

I acknowledge that:  
 taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;  
 that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval.

*(Please tick to indicate consent)*

|   |                          |            |                          |           |
|---|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| <b>I consent to be interviewed</b>                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Yes</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>No</b> |
| <b>I consent for the interview to be recorded</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Yes</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>No</b> |

|                               |              |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Name:</b> <i>(printed)</i> |              |
| <b>Signature:</b>             | <b>Date:</b> |

**Principal Investigator:  
Sandra Sewell  
Centre for Women’s Studies  
James Cook University**

## Appendix10: HRE Approval (amended) Stage 3

**James Cook University**

**Townsville Qld. 4811 Australia**

Research Services Ph: 47816575; Fax: 47815521



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## Appendix 11: Information Sheet – Stage 2B

### INFORMATION SHEET



**PROJECT TITLE: Women caring for place: discerning principles and recent practices in Australia**

### **STAGE 2B: Interviews with Tamborine Mountain women**

**You are invited to take part in a research project to explore Tamborine Mountain women's care for the environment. The project will involve an interview, and possible contribution to a research photography project.** The study is being conducted by Sandra Sewell and will contribute to the degree in Doctor of Philosophy (Women's Studies) at James Cook University.

**If you agree to be involved in the study**, you will be invited to be interviewed. You will also be invited to contribute to an exhibition of research photographs illustrating care for place/country.

You may choose to use your own camera, or be provided with one. The photographs, as research data, will remain the property of James Cook University, but selected prints will be provided to participants, if they wish.

The interview will, with your consent, be audiotaped, and should take about 1 hour of your time. The interview will be conducted at a venue of your choice or, if preferable, by telephone or email.

**Taking part in this study is completely voluntary** and you can stop taking part in the study at any time without explanation or prejudice. You may also withdraw any unprocessed data from the study.

**Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential.** The data from the project will be used in the preparation of the PhD thesis and in research publications. You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

**If you have any questions about the study, please contact Sandra Sewell (see details below).**

**Principal Investigator:  
Sandra Sewell  
Centre for Women's Studies  
James Cook University**

## Appendix 12: Informed Consent form Stage 2 (B) interviews

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM



|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>PRINCIPAL</b>      | <b>Sandra Sewell</b>   |
| <b>INVESTIGATOR</b>   |  |
| <b>PROJECT TITLE:</b> | <b>PROJECT TITLE: Women caring for place: discerning principles and recent practices in Australia</b><br><br><b><u>STAGE 3: Interviews with Tamborine Mountain women</u></b> |
| <b>SCHOOL</b>         | <b>Social Work and Community Welfare (Centre for Women's Studies), James Cook University, Townsville 4811</b>  |

**I understand the aim of this research study is to explore Tamborine Mountain women's care for the environment.** I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written information sheet to keep.

**I understand that my participation will involve an interview, and a possible exhibition of project photographs.** I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the information sheet.

I acknowledge that:

- taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
- that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval.

*(Please tick to indicate consent)*

|   |                          |              |                          |           |
|---|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| <b>I consent to be interviewed</b>                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Yes</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>No</b> |
| <b>I consent for the interview to be recorded</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Yes</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>No</b> |
| <b>Name:</b> <i>(printed)</i>                     |                          |              |                          |           |
| <b>Signature:</b>                                 |                          | <b>Date:</b> |                          |           |

**Principal Investigator:**  
**Sandra Sewell**  
**Centre for Women's Studies**  
**James Cook University**

## Appendix 13 – Interview Questions Stage 2 (B)

### Interview Questions – Stage 3

\*What does the phrase ‘caring for place’ bring to mind for you?

\*What is your ‘place’ and what does it mean to you?

\*How do you see yourself caring for place? In the past? Now? In the future?

\*What guiding principles or particular practices do you think are important?

\*What differences do you see in the ways that you, as a woman, care for place, and the ways men do? Similarities? Examples?

\*Is there anything you’d like to add?

## Appendix 14: Information Sheet Stage 3 Photovoice

### INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: **Women caring for place: discerning principles and recent practices in Australia**



### STAGE 3: Photovoice project with Tamborine Mountain women

**You are invited to take part in a research project to explore Tamborine Mountain women's care for the environment. The project will involve taking photographs, an interview, and participation in a group discussion.** The study is being conducted by Sandra Sewell and will contribute to the degree in Doctor of Philosophy (Women's Studies) at James Cook University.

**If you agree to be involved in the study**, you will be invited to attend an orientation session, to undertake a photography assignment, to be interviewed and to participate in a group discussion. There may also be the possibility of a group exhibition of project photographs, subject to participants' consent.

You may choose to use your own camera, or be provided with one. The photographs, as research data, will remain the property of James Cook University, but selected prints will be provided to participants, if they wish.

The interview and the group discussion will, with your consent, be audiotaped, and each activity should take about 1 hour of your time. The interview will be conducted at a venue of your choice or, if preferable, by telephone or email. The group discussion will be conducted at a venue on the Mountain suitable for participants.

**Taking part in this study is completely voluntary** and you can stop taking part in the study at any time without explanation or prejudice. You may also withdraw any unprocessed data from the study.

**Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential.** The data from the project will be used in the preparation of the PhD thesis and in research publications. You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

**If you have any questions about the study, please contact Sandra Sewell (see details below).**

**Principal Investigator:**  
**Sandra Sewell**  
**Centre for Women's Studies**  
**James Cook University**

## Appendix 15: Informed Consent Form Stage 3 Photovoice



### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR</b> | Sandra Sewell  |
| <b>PROJECT TITLE:</b>         | <b>PROJECT TITLE: Women caring for place: discerning principles and recent practices in Australia</b><br><br><b><u>STAGE 3: Photovoice project with Tamborine Mountain women</u></b> |
| <b>SCHOOL</b>                 | <b>Social Work and Community Welfare (Centre for Women's Studies), James Cook University, Townsville 4811</b>  |

**I understand the aim of this research study is to explore Tamborine Mountain women's care for the environment.** I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written information sheet to keep.

**I understand that my participation will involve an orientation session, a photography assignment, an interview and/or a group discussion, and a possible exhibition of project photographs.** I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the information sheet.

I acknowledge that:

- taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
- that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval.

*(Please tick to indicate consent)*

|  |                          |     |                          |    |
|--|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|
| I consent to be interviewed  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No |
| I consent for the interview to be recorded                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No |
| I consent to participate in a group discussion                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No |
| I consent to contribute the photographs I take to the research project | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No |

|                               |              |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Name:</b> <i>(printed)</i> |              |
| <b>Signature:</b>             | <b>Date:</b> |

**Principal Investigator:**  
Sandra Sewell  
Centre for Women's Studies  
James Cook University

## Appendix 16: Bioregional Quiz

### A Bioregional Quiz

1. Trace the water you drink from precipitation to tap.
2. How many days until the moon is full – plus or minus a couple of days?
3. Describe the soil around your home.
4. What were the primary subsistence [practices] of the culture(s) that lived in your area before you?
5. Name five edible plants in your bioregion and their season(s) of availability.
6. From what direction do winter storms generally come in your region?
7. Where does your garbage go?
8. How long is the growing season where you live?
9. On what day of the year are the shadows the shortest where you live?
10. Name five native trees in your area.
11. Name five resident and five migratory birds in your area.
12. What is the land use history of humans in your bioregion during the past century?
13. What primary geological event/process influenced the land form where you live?
14. Name one species that has become extinct in your area.
15. What was the total rainfall in your area last year?
16. From where you are reading this, point north.
17. What spring wildflower is consistently amongst the first to bloom in your area?
18. Name five wild animals that live in your bioregion.
19. What kinds of rocks and minerals are found in your bioregion?
20. What are the primary energy sources for electricity in your area? What are the potential sources?

This quiz was adapted from Bill Devall and George Sessions (1985) “A Normal Way to Organize Bioregions”. In *Deep Ecology*, Gibbs M. Smith.

Source: Northwest Earth Institute (2007). *Discussion Course on Discovering a Sense of Place*. Portland, Oregon: p111.3