Decolonising Spaces and the Exemplary Life of Tess Brill's Activism

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Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Thesis
Southern Cross University
June, 2011
Declaration of Originality

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution. I certify to the best of my knowledge that all sources of reference have been acknowledged in the body of the work.

Signed: ............................

Date: ...............................
Acknowledgments

My journey has led me to re-assess my relationship to the country which I have, at times tenuously, called ‘home’. An uneasy consciousness grew within my psyche which is what I have now come to understand as the beginnings of a process of personal ‘decolonisation’. As a result, I have discovered and created my own connections to those of the Bundjalung nation whom I acknowledge as the traditional owners of this land, the place where I was born and which I am able to respectfully call home.

The support, generosity and friendship of Tess Brill and Vic Brill have been integral to this project. Through sharing time, stories and occasional meals, I was not only privileged to a trove of unwritten local histories but was able to form an understanding of the lived consequences of some modern histories. Personal memories of these events, often sad to remember, not only engaged me morally, historically and genealogically to my own past and present but have made me, to coin Tess’s phrase, “all the richer for having known them” - thank you both.

Apart from supervising the evolution of this project, Baden Offord’s mentorship and passion for learning, teaching, listening and thinking has inspired me throughout the year and beyond for which I will always be thankful.

A generous community of academic peers and the library staff were often available at pertinent and sometimes serendipitous moments providing invaluable support, advice and feedback. Thank you Sharon Dean, Jo Kijas, Tracy Tees, Sharon, Marin and Lee, Kate Gahan, Karyn Rendall, Kath Whyte, to my Honours study-buddies and especially to Rob Garbutt and to Soenke Biermann, not least for asking “Why?”

I would also like to thank my parents and particularly my sister who have entertained children, cooked meals and helped in more ways than I can possibly mention.

To David, Sebastian and Isabella: I know this journey has cost a lot and in many ways you have paid the price, but I’ll pay you back – promise! ...and I’m really proud of your ability to forage food :>

Greatest of all is the acknowledgement due to Enrique – my life partner, soul mate, best friend and “technical support”. The opportunity to follow this path was something I never believed would happen but you always believed in me. Gracias.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Tess Brill who graciously embodies patience, persistence, generosity, wisdom and humanity. My hope is for this research to serve as a worthy testimonial to a woman who has worked tirelessly for many causes of social justice by offering the narrative of a lived past, which also touches our future

...because, while the past is past, it is not dead. Its hand is on our shoulder.¹

¹ Inga Clendinnen, True Stories: Boyer Lectures 1999 (Sydney: ABC Books, 1999), 103.
Abstract

Statistics continue to show that quantifiable disadvantages still exist today between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Australia, collectively referred to in common vernacular as ‘the gap’. This situation may be understood as an ongoing ‘echo factor’ of colonisation, but when ‘the gap’ is considered as metaphor, it may represent the ‘space of disconnect’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges and ‘alternative ways of knowing the world.’ By exploring this space through a lens of reflexivity, this thesis will consider not only the links between Australia’s colonial past and status as a settler nation but the potential of reflexivity as a decolonising process which encourages anti-colonial actions and ways of thinking. This is considered recognising that colonial and postcolonial spaces maintain structural imbalances and in the knowledge that theorists, social critics, academics and writers have identified that the issue for formerly colonised populations has become one of how to ‘decolonise the mind’. Therefore this thesis will also present, by way of exemplar, the history of a woman who negotiated both literal gaps and ontological spaces within her years of pro-Aboriginal Rights activism; a woman who recognised structural imbalances within her society enacted through the assimilation policy and, as this thesis will contend, engaged in a personal, intellectual and political process of decolonisation.

In the 1950s, Tess Brill saw incredible disparity from the train as it passed Cubawee, an Aboriginal reserve, on the outskirts of Lismore, a regional centre in the northeast of New South Wales (NSW). Minding this gap, she was moved to become involved with Indigenous communities on the Far North Coast region of NSW for fourteen years. During this time, she not only came to understand and value an Indigenous worldview, but was stimulated to engage in a process of self-reflexivity as she re-assessed her white society: its rhetoric, racism, religious ideals and the government policy of assimilation. Tess Brill’s experiences are not simply exemplary of a personal journey of de-colonisation but also encourage and support an exploration of the synchronicity between self-reflexivity, ontological difference, anti-colonial agency and ongoing structural imbalances within what Birch describes as ‘a nation that is yet to escape its colonial psyche.’ Furthermore, while the specific policy of assimilation which Tess Brill was countering in the 1950s is not currently enforced, it connects to what has been identified as an ongoing ideology of assimilationism, which makes Tess Brill’s activism relevant to contemporary debates as government policies struggle to eliminate the gap today.

3 Cathryn McConaghy, Rethinking Indigenous Education: Culturalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Knowing (Flaxton, Qld: Post Pressed, 2000), 123.
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Abbreviations and Explanatory Notes

ABC Australian Broadcasting Corporation
APB Aborigines Protection Board
AWB Aborigines Welfare Board
AWO Area Welfare Officer
CAAL Casino Aboriginal Advancement League
CWA Country Womens’ Association
DWO District Welfare Officer
FCAATSI Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders
LAAL Lismore Aboriginal Advancement League
LAWC Lismore (& District) Aboriginal Welfare Committee
LCC Lismore City Council
NSW New South Wales
P & C Parent and Citizens (Association)
UN United Nations

The protocol of Indigenous references

In using the words Aborigine/s and Aboriginal people (nouns), Aboriginal (adjective) as well as Indigenous / indigenous, I have maintained the protocols determined by Professor Eve Mumewa Fesl, and guidelines offered by Gnibi.5 The upper case word Indigenous is used when referring to the First Peoples of what is today known as Australia, the term Aboriginal peoples is inclusive of Torres Strait Islander identities and the lower case indigenous refers to other First Peoples of the world distinguishing them from an Australian context.

Referencing Style: Chicago 15th A

Map (not to scale) shows approximate jurisdiction of Lismore City Council. Map has been compiled from 'Map of the County Of Rous’ 1966 (sourced from Lismore City Council, Goonellabah) overwritten onto ‘Boundaries of the new City of Lismore’ in A Century of local Government 1879-1979: The Story of Lismore (Lismore: Lismore City Council, 1979), 181. Amalgamation of Terania and Gundurimba Shires into Lismore City Council occurred in 1977.
1. ...an open and honest dialogue

The personal, regional and national journeys invited by the knowledge of colonial history and Aboriginal culture and dispossession are intimately connected.

—Mark McKenna

Introduction

This thesis forms part of a journey which began in 2007 when I enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts degree. During one of the first Cultural Studies lectures I attended, a guest speaker mentioned an Aboriginal reserve called Cubawee, which had been located on the outskirts of Lismore. Cubawee closed when I was a small child but something about it – perhaps its unusual name or its obscurity – piqued my interest. The more I thought about it, though, I realised that I felt disturbed. How was it, considering I could technically lay claim to the title of ‘Lismore local’, that I had never heard of Cubawee until this time? Why had it never been mentioned when I was growing up? Echoing the sentiments of Henry Reynolds’ Why Weren’t We Told? I found myself asking the same question. As I started to investigate, I discovered official ‘white’ history in both the University and Regional libraries bereft of any substantial information or research on

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7 This expression, taken from the quote by Coghlan and Brannick (see below Chapter 3, ‘Action research and the meta-reflective process’), is an appropriate description of this chapter as it not only represents the style of my introduction, but also describes the condition of action research which aptly reflects the basis of Tess Brill’s engagement with Aboriginal people. Furthermore, ‘open dialogue’ has been identified as a condition of and for the enactment of decolonisation. See Deborah Bird Rose, Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2004), 21-2. Soenke Biermann predicates that ‘anti-colonial work’ should encompass ‘the crucial principle of respectful, equal dialogue’. See Soenke Biermann, “Knowledge, Power and Decolonization: Implications for Non-Indigenous Scholars, Researchers and Educators,” in Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Education: A Reader, ed. George J. Sefa Dei (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 396. Biermann also notes Raewyn Connell’s Southern Theory (2007) which posits a northern (dominant, Western, industrialised) theoretical framework which is deaf to southern (indigenous and majority-world, rural, colonised) voices, in Biermann, "Knowledge, Power and Decolonization: Implications for Non-Indigenous Scholars, Researchers and Educators," 395.

8 Mark McKenna, Looking for Blackfellla’s Point: An Australian History of Place (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002), 6.

9 Henry Reynolds, Why Weren’t We Told? (Ringwood, Vic: Viking/Penguin Books, 1999), 1-5.
Cubawee. It soon became obvious, though, that this was not the situation within the local Indigenous community.

Blainey writes that ‘every history...is a mirror of the author’s own interests’\(^{10}\) and this thesis will prove no exception. But as I began to research the reserve, my interest took an unexpected turn when I learned that one of the teachers at the Cubawee Aboriginal School, a non-Indigenous man, was still alive and living locally. Vic Brill had taught at Cubawee from January 1961 until July 1963,\(^{11}\) and when contacted, he kindly agreed to be interviewed in his home. During the course of our meeting, Vic’s wife Tess would occasionally contribute to Vic’s answers and it was clear that she remembered many of the people of Cubawee reserve as friends. When asked how Vic came to be the teacher at the Aboriginal school, Tess paused, then answered, “Well, I asked him if he would consider it.”\(^{12}\)

I discovered that Tess Brill has been an activist supporting various causes for more than fifty years and that her first area of activism, beginning in 1957, involved helping people at Cubawee. This led to her involvement with other Aboriginal communities on the Far North Coast for some fourteen years until ill health forced her to discontinue. What caught my interest was the respectful way she spoke about individuals, families and communities, describing her desire ‘to work for Aboriginal people helping them to achieve what they wanted to achieve [my emphasis].’\(^{13}\) I felt that this stance demonstrated an ethical integrity to her activism and that her views reflected a comprehension of the complexity of Indigenous – non-Indigenous relationships which I considered worthy of greater attention. Not only was her perspective of Cubawee and Indigenous issues in the

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\(^{12}\) Vic Brill and Tess Brill interview with the author Hastings Point, September 28, 2008.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.
1950s possibly unique, but as a feminist who still actively works for causes countering social injustice, this unassuming yet insightful woman came to interest me greatly.

Over subsequent interviews on her life of activism our relationship evolved from interviewer-interviewee to friend-mentor. I was given permission to access earlier interviews held in 2003 with Rob Garbutt, another local who had been researching the Aboriginal presence in Lismore. Within these transcripts, Tess described prevalent social attitudes, outlined her involvements with particular events and told stories of the issues which beset Aboriginal individuals, families and communities. What was also revealed was her process of learning and comprehending the intrinsic nature of local Aboriginal culture and the significance of its connectedness to land. Reading between the lines of these interviews, I could see that Tess Brill had earned the respect and trust of the Aboriginal people she worked with. She had been asked to help with various specific grievances\textsuperscript{14} and maintained that through helping resolve these problems, she never imposed her will on those seeking advice. Instead, she saw a greater benefit in encouraging, advising and supporting Aboriginal people to say what they wanted to say.

It was through such efforts, as well as instigating the Lismore Aboriginal Advancement League – while holding the position of honorary secretary and member responsible for reporting on health – that she came to see another side of her own culture and how it operated. She began to understand how white privilege and a system of disadvantage was supported by the Aborigines Welfare Board (AWB) with its aims to enforce the federal government’s assimilation policy which, while professing to improve the prospects for Indigenous people, simultaneously denied ascribing value to or recognition of Aboriginal identity or cultural practices.

\textsuperscript{14} Such as improper use of AWB land by white farmers, issues of police brutality and aiding workers at Baryulgil asbestos mines - see Chapter 3
She consciously realised that the government policies and religious ideals which her white society advocated could never be achieved as a lived reality and, as a consequence, began a process of personal self-reflexivity and re-assessment of the meanings systems and epistemological foundations of her own life. This process, which also catalysed the democratic principles she believed were worth defending, set her apart from acceptable ‘white’ behaviour and thinking of the time.\(^{15}\)

I felt compelled to write about Tess Brill and her activism, but I was no expert in biography and neither did she want to be represented as the subject of one. While she generously wished to help me with my ‘studies’ in any way she could, she had no desire to be placed on a metaphorical or moral pedestal. Tess also expressed concern that her memories of Aboriginal people and particularly the residents of Cubawee should be respected and regarded in non-exploitative ways. As I searched for a way to present her story as a meaningful narrative and contextualise her history while giving it contemporary relevance, I was guided by the concept of *decolonisation* which not only represents an appropriate theoretical approach, but its current status as a vehicle for theoretical critique within postcolonial paradigms makes it relevant to the contemporary space of Australia. By default, though, decolonisation connects to its linguistic precursor *colonisation* and the many consequences of its projects which are embedded in various and particular sites which cannot be ignored.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith recognises that within the colonial project lie ‘images of the Other’ which make ‘stories of a very local, very specific experience’ of colonialism part of ‘a grander narrative’ and it is this observation which has driven the design of my thesis: a connection between the local history of

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Tess Brill’s activism on behalf of Aboriginal communities in the Far North Coast region and the ‘grander narrative’ of decolonisation. Smith explains how academic research, conducted within Western epistemological traditions, is imbued with colonial structures and her extensive and revealing assessment of the historical, ethical, cultural and social implications of Western research practices demonstrates that the term decolonisation may be invoked as a transformative paradigm. Recognising decolonisation as a process which engages with colonialism and imperialism on many levels, Smith applies this premise to research methodologies. Further research has revealed that decolonisation has been applied with various interpretations to many areas of intellectual pursuit and lived situations. More importantly, all of these examples inspired and justified a re-interpretation of the concept of decolonisation as a process of reflexivity and self-analysis.

In an Australian context, this process necessarily involves a willingness to engage more openly and honestly with our histories, as this would not only create an awareness of ongoing and embedded colonial structures which persist in what is arguably a postcolonial site, but offers an insight into their effects. One such effect is the ideology of assimilationism (see Chapter Two) and its role in maintaining the ongoing gap of racial disadvantage in Australia making it necessary to explore gaps and spaces.

17 Ibid., 20.
18 For example Biermann’s Honours Thesis written from the disciplinary perspectives of Cultural Studies and Indigenist Research applies decolonisation to the field of Indigenous Pedagogy. See Soenke Biermann, “Indigenous Pedagogies for Decolonisation: Listening for Resonance and Making Connections” (Honours Thesis, Southern Cross University, 2008); See also Warley’s PhD Thesis which reviews contemporary indigenous and non-indigenous autobiographies by Canadians and Australians arguing that ‘autobiography participates in the broader political project of decolonization’ in Linda Warley, “Locating Subjects: Contemporary Canadian and Australian Autobiography” (PhD Thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1994), 8; Also, Ingersoll’s focus on neocolonialism in Hawai’i and the surf tourism industry offers a context within which Kanaka can incorporate the ‘indigenous enactment of surfing for decolonization’ in Karin E Ingersoll, “Seascape Epistemology: Decolonization within Hawai’i’s Neocolonial Surf Tourism Industry” (PhD Thesis, University of Hawai‘i, Manoa, 2009), xii.
Gaps and Spaces

*The story of cultural change is the story of the way in which space and time are reconstructed*  
—Greg Dening ¹⁹

While ‘evident for quite some time in Australia’, arguably around 220 years, ²⁰ the Indigenous – non-Indigenous ‘gap’ is in itself a site worthy of critique and its statistical presence undeniable. ²¹ In 1968, anthropologist and essayist, W.E.H. Stanner, voiced his concerns within *The Boyer Lectures*, frustrated that ‘after a decade and a half of assimilation...‘the gap’ between indigenous and non-indigenous life prospects was continuing, if anything, to grow wider.’ ²² In 2006, Treasury Secretary Ken Henry noted soberly that ‘[i]ts persistence has not been for want of policy action’ while acknowledging that ‘decades of policy action have failed.’ ²³ The latest strategy, signed in 2008, is a Statement of Intent between the Federal Government, peak Indigenous health bodies and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. Its goal is to achieve equality in health status and life expectancy by the year 2030, ²⁴ but there is no evidence to suggest that its outcome will be any more successful than those which have preceded it. ²⁵ This situation becomes more perplexing as outcomes of the indigenous populations of Canada, America and New Zealand, which also share a history of colonisation, show gains have been

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²⁴ Pholi, Black, and Richards, “Is ‘Close the Gap’ a Useful Approach to Improving the Health and Wellbeing of Indigenous Australians?.”
achieved over the past thirty years. The issue then becomes an exploration of why Australia, a former British colony and settler nation, is unable to effectively address, reduce and ultimately eliminate the gap.

When considering Australia’s particular colonial history and cultural links it is possible to accept that ‘the gap’ began as a disconnect of thought processes between those sent to establish a penal settlement and the Indigenous populations they encountered. Arriving in a place where the complete lack of familiarity combined with European cultural, linguistic, economic and epistemological groundings of racialised hierarchies worked to prohibit recognition of and engagement with Indigenous philosophies – particularly in relationship to land – the white men proceeded to recreate a European world. Therefore, while in contemporary language ‘the gap’ is a metonym for Indigenous disadvantage, this thesis will regard it instead as a metaphor: a ‘place of disconnect’ between Indigenous and Western worldviews, knowledge systems – epistemologies – and ways of being – ontologies. Doing so allows the language of decolonisation to traverse a landscape of colonisation. In this space, the synchronicity between processes of reflexivity, ideas of double-consciousness, methods of decolonisation, acts of anti-colonial agency, engaging with systems of knowledge and ways of being may be explored. This is undertaken in order to consider possibilities of cultural change while presenting a narrative interweaving national, regional and personal histories which will reconstruct space and time. Paradoxically, in this space, ‘the gap’ is no longer ‘an Aboriginal problem’, but becomes ‘a White one.’


This thesis, therefore, makes the following arguments. Firstly, that understanding contemporary relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians must happen through a process of decolonisation, where non-Indigenous Australians must face the causes and effects of ongoing colonising structures of power and whiteness, if there are to be advances in solving Indigenous disadvantage. Secondly, that Australia’s colonial history as a white settler-nation has created an environment, supported by government policies such as that of assimilation and the ideology of assimilationism, in which colonial patterns of thinking are inherently supporting ongoing structural imbalances, with the issue becoming one of engaging in a process of decolonisation. Thirdly, this thesis contends that Tess Brill’s activism exemplifies one woman’s attempt to counter colonial structures of power and whiteness which she recognised as embodied within the assimilation policy in the 1950s, and that through engaging in self-reflexivity, she began a process of personal decolonisation.

To support this contention, and noting that research was an integral part of Tess Brill’s pro-Aboriginal Rights activism, it is possible to align her work with the motivations, aims and goals of ‘action research’. Within this paradigm, the researcher engages in a ‘meta-reflective process’ which aptly describes Tess Brill’s re-assessment of her beliefs, values and those of the white society she was living in which changed her perceptions irrevocably. This is explained more fully in Chapter Three, demonstrating and substantiating how engaging in reflexivity may be deemed a process of decolonisation.

Rationale

We need...good history, true stories of the making of this present land, none of them simple, some of them painful, all of them part of our own individual histories.

–Inga Clendinnen

To date there has been no research undertaken of Tess Brill’s contribution to causes in this region of the North Coast of NSW. This thesis, therefore, will go some way towards filling a gap in Lismore’s local history and expose several aspects of her achievements. Furthermore, when located within the theoretical framework of decolonisation, her activism on behalf of Aboriginal communities and subsequent self-reflexivity in the 1950s-60s demonstrate her understanding of how disadvantage was maintained by an adherence to colonial hierarchies and systems of white privilege which were ensconced within the assimilation policy. But what place, if any, can this history assume in our national consciousness?

This thesis argues that Tess Brill’s history does connect to the current national gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as it may be regarded as not only exemplary of a willingness to negotiate the space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, but by contemplating her view of a white world from an Indigenous perspective, it offers an opportunity to see and think ‘other–wise’. The value of this is supported by Inga Clendinnen who sees the examination of ‘small long-ago events [and] the close analysis of past situations’ as having great significance. She believes that it ‘liberates our imaginations to taste experiences other than our own [and] expands our moral comprehension’, while also crediting such analyses with the potential benefit of knowing ourselves ‘more exactly and more critically.’ It is this stimulus to know ourselves through reflecting on

our history and how we may understand the mechanisms supporting the ongoing privileging of whiteness in Australia which I believe also makes Tess Brill’s history a worthy subject of research.

It should be acknowledged, though, that there are many histories of Indigenous – non-Indigenous interactions and that these were more prevalent after WWII. The formation of the United Nations and its aim to ‘build a better world’ with its focus on human rights countering racial, sexual and religious discrimination, led to a greater awareness of racism in Australia.\(^{33}\) The government, responding to growing international criticism of ‘the yawning gap between the discourse of universal human rights and the racial landscape of ‘White Australia’’, implemented a new policy of ‘assimilation’ which aimed to settle Indigenous people within white communities.\(^{34}\) Consequently, the number of national bodies seeking equality and citizenship rights for Indigenous Australians began to grow. There was an appeal to concerned individuals within white communities who were encouraged to form groups to facilitate change and work towards the assimilation of Aboriginal people into their townships.\(^{35}\) Tess Brill was part of this movement and coincidentally became involved in working for change in 1957, the year which internationalist, feminist and activist Jessie Street determined as ‘the psychological moment...[in time]...when activists could capitalise on events in their efforts to reform society.’\(^{36}\)

So what marks Tess Brill as unique? Why write about her rather than other members of Aboriginal Advancement Leagues established in that era? Researching biographical and womens’ histories in connection to


\(^{36}\) Jessie Street cited in Ibid., 15.
Indigenous communities has located other white women who exerted meaningful agency in various roles\textsuperscript{37} but my research still verifies that Tess Brill’s motivations, actions and the effects of her reflexive process were uniquely hers: an Aboriginal Rights activist with a feminist world-view who was driven to address social injustice by working for and with Aboriginal communities and people to achieve what they wanted to achieve. Furthermore, the insights and experience she gained from working with Indigenous people were applied to other causes where she saw social injustice, benefitting many in the Far North Coast area, particularly women.\textsuperscript{38}

To research the many decades of Tess Brill’s diverse contributions as an activist to causes in this region is well beyond the scope of an honours project. Therefore I have chosen to focus on her Aboriginal activism as it


\textsuperscript{38} Tess Brill was a peace activist and ‘took a stand’ against the Vietnam War, printing and distributing her own leaflets in Lismore and Sydney in an individual capacity. She was a foundation member and mainstay for the establishment of the first Women’s Refuge on the Far North Coast; in the late 1970s, an era when breast cancer was not publicly discussed, she organised early detection of breast cancer seminars; she worked to establish the first Women’s Health Centre, and was the foundation member of the Lismore Community Aid and Information Centre (later the Lismore Neighbourhood Centre). In 1984 both Tess and Vic Brill were honoured with life membership of the Lismore and Richmond Valley Trades and Labour Council for their separate and individual ‘decades of service’ to the community. During these years Tess Brill has continually promoted environmental issues and her latest project, together with Vic and others, has been to stop the development of protected wetlands at Hastings Point. Consequently, academics, students and writers, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous (such as Professor Ann Curthoys, Dr Rob Garbutt, Dr Kate Gahan, Kerith Powers, Kevie Ann Reid and Inga Rieber) have contacted Tess because of her experience and knowledge of Indigenous issues on the Far North Coast and she has provided many hours of interviews. Throughout these years and until only recently Tess wrote letters to newspapers, particularly the local paper, \textit{The Northern Star}. She framed them as ‘political’ and ‘unemotional’ responses, countering intolerant, racist and sexist opinions she found within Editorials and published letters. The influence and feminist perspectives of this correspondence combined with her other areas of activism were recognised in 2008 when Tess was honoured with an \textit{Edna Ryan Award} for Community Activism, see \textit{welns}, “Edna Ryan Award 2008 - Tess Brill,” Webpage: \textit{welns}, http://welns.org.au/images/Ednas/Ednas2008/tess%20brill.pdf
not only connects to the current era of Indigenous disadvantage and the government policy of ‘intervention’ – a policy which Tess Brill recognises as having the same patriarchal authority and disregard for Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty as the assimilation policy of the 1950s – but speaks directly to the notion of a ‘colonial aftermath’ which is arguably an apt depiction of the space which non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians are negotiating today.\footnote{Leela Gandhi, \textit{Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction} (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 5-9.}

**Methodologies**

*When researchers study issues posed by decolonization they inevitably enter into a field of inquiry whose very subject is that of contest and change.*

–James D. Le Sueur\footnote{James D Le Sueur, ed. \textit{The Decolonization Reader} (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.}

Decolonisation interpreted as a process of reflexivity not only allows a critique of Australia’s ‘foundational white narrative’ created through historical British invasion,\footnote{Ann Curthoys, "Mythologies," in \textit{The Australian Legend and Its Discontents}, ed. Richard Nile (St Lucia: Univeristy of Queensland Press in Association with API-Network, 2000), 15.} but also comprises an anti-colonial act, a force countering what I contend is an ongoing societal practice of the colonial project, in this case, colonial thinking. Adopting this stance endorses Chen’s supposition that, as cultural studies practitioners, we should regard ourselves as the ‘articulating agents and linking points’ of decolonisation and that our research and discursive practices should form the ‘critical forces of [the] incomplete project of decolonisation, at least to decolonise ourselves’. Chen, recognising that Cultural Studies is a product of ‘the histories of world-wide decolonisation movements’, regards it as a major force ‘both within and outside academic contexts’, finding that, politically and epistemologically, Cultural Studies is an intellectual tradition driven to

Kincheloe and McLaren define critical inquiry as that which is linked to attempts to ‘confront the injustice of a particular society or sphere within the society’ and as such, ‘becomes a transformative endeavour unembarrassed by the label “political” and unafraid to consummate a relationship with an emancipatory consciousness’.\footnote{Joe L. Kincheloe and Peter L. McLaren, “Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research,” in \textit{The Landscape of Qualitative Research}, ed. Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998), 264.} Critical inquiry therefore becomes a foundational premise to this project as it invokes the possibilities of change while simultaneously reflecting the spirit Tess Brill embodied in her approach to the issues of disparity and disadvantage she saw in her society in the 1950s.

As a force engaging in contest and change, critical inquiry is not just a project of Cultural Studies though. Leela Gandhi advocates Postcolonialism as a ‘disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and crucially interrogating the colonial past’ while also recognising the ‘long history of colonial consequences.’\footnote{Gandhi, \textit{Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction}, 3-4.} Her critique of its purpose acknowledges the variants within postcolonial experiences, but concludes that its ‘reflective’ mode offers the ‘possibility of thinking our way through and...out of the historical imbalances and cultural inequalities produced by the colonial encounter.’\footnote{Ibid., 176.} As such, this thesis invokes the notion of anti-colonial agency and the possibility of thinking our way out of structural imbalances by engaging in processes of mental decolonisation. The actions of Tess Brill are exemplary of this and her experiences will be presented and contextualised by drawing on archival research, textual

analysis and transcripts of interviews which comprise an oral history of Tess Brill’s activism.

Oral histories are attuned to feminist research methodologies which value ethical, human and emotional perspectives and as Tess Brill identifies as a feminist it is appropriate to engage with these principles. Letherby captures the essence of feminist methodology noting that feminist researchers, amongst other considerations, ‘value the personal and the private as worthy of study, develop non-exploitative relationships within research [and] value reflexivity and emotion as a source of insight as well as an essential part of research.’ A review of literature on feminist methodologies and the practice of conducting interviews within feminist paradigms, has identified many affirmations and connections relevant to writing Tess Brill’s history. Reinharz’ conclusion is particularly appropriate noting the ‘blending of purposes that oral history affords – the writing of history, the encounter with other women and the development of new concepts.’

Bain Attwood’s study of the Anglo-Australian Burrage family and their particular experience of Indigenous interactions on Aboriginal reserves offers further pertinent insights into oral histories. In *A Life Together, A Life Apart*, he draws on the oral history of three adult siblings, the children of Charles and Elsie Burrage who managed reserves during the era of Aboriginal Protection. Attwood describes the processes and potential

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pitfalls of conducting and presenting oral histories noting the implications for his work as his role of interviewer evolved into friend of his interviewees. He also considers Indigenous representations within the text and reflects on his involvement in the interview process, explaining the motives of both himself and his interviewees. From his exploration of the nature of memory and its relationship to the creating of a narrative he determines that writing oral history involves far more than just selecting events from ‘real life...memory or...fantasy’ and placing them in order.  

His text mirrors many of my interview experiences and has been a valuable guide towards presenting Tess Brill’s oral history as a meaningful narrative – one which conveys a ‘singular’ lived experience’ while connecting to a ‘crucial dilemma of our contemporary social world.’ According to an epistemology which asserts that history is not the past but an enquiry into the past, Attwood espouses history as an act of interpretation, reasoning that

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\text{history or histories...do not simply exist in the past, independent of or outside historians; instead, history is made by the historian who gives birth to it by transforming the events of the past into patterns of meaning. The historian does so according to his or her own ideas, interests, and preoccupations, and so history is always by and for someone.}
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Acknowledging this to be accurate, I also admit that writing this history satisfies a personal quest. As a local who is reconciling her own sense of belonging to the land of her birth, I see my purpose as ‘not merely to research but to rethink, to revisit the past guided by a decolonized consciousness’ while making ‘no claims to new knowledge, only new interpretations.’

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50 Jerome Bruner cited in Ibid., 203.
52 Attwood, A Life Together, a Life Apart: A History of Relations between Europeans and Aborigines, 216.
54 Ibid., 5.
If power is... the qualitative difference or gap between those who have it and those who must suffer it, it also designates an imaginative space that can be occupied, a cultural model that might be imitated and replicated.

–Leela Gandhi

In order to begin the process of interpretation, we must first engage and embrace the imagination. The philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, identifies the development of what she calls the ‘narrative imagination’ – ‘the ability to see unobvious connections between sequences of human actions and to recognise their likely consequences, intended and unintended’ – as one of three qualities required for ‘responsible citizenship in a complex world.’

Therefore in the first chapter, ...an open and honest dialogue, I have re-interpreted the ‘gap’, currently understood as a metonym for disadvantage, into a metaphor, a space of disconnect so that it is possible, in later chapters, to contextualise an Australian present through an exploration of a colonial past while interpreting decolonisation as a process of reflection.

The second chapter, Decolonising the Mind, begins with a review of literature which reveals that the effects of colonisation on formerly colonised populations are ever-present and ongoing as they are maintained in thought patterns which maintain colonial dispositions. This is followed by examining the history of colonial encounter in Australia and the thought processes which determined prevailing Western attitudes of British invader/settlers towards Indigenous people they encountered. In Australia, a settler-nation in which ‘the colonisers didn’t go home’, it can be seen how thought patterns based on a colonial gaze have led to colonial racialised hierarchical structures being maintained through ambivalent government policies, such as assimilation. It has been argued that this policy connects to a more persistent ideology of assimilationism, which

when explained by an exploration of the ‘logic of colonial mimicry’,\textsuperscript{58} appears to underpin the postcolonial present we are experiencing in Australia today. Recognising how persistent ‘colonial hierarchies of knowledge and value’ work to support what Edward Said refers to as the ‘dreadful secondariness’ of some peoples and cultures,\textsuperscript{59} not only connects to the current space of disconnect in Australia, but also to the case study of Tess Brill who found herself ‘minding the gap’ in the era of 1950s assimilation.

The third Chapter, \emph{Minding the Gap}, begins with the ‘becoming’ of Tess Brill as she developed her value system and principles within the era of post-WWI, the Depression, her observations of hardship and oppression, all of which influenced her to become a feminist.\textsuperscript{60} Tess Brill’s connection to the Cubawee community and its impact on her thinking is explained, followed by a short history of the Cubawee Reserve, an outline of Lismore in the 1950s and the rationale of the assimilation policy of the era. In order to support the validity of reflexivity as an act of decolonisation, Tess Brill’s acts of research, her attitudes and self-reflexivity connected to her activism, may be aligned to the methods of Action Research which involves a ‘meta-reflexive’ process. Her involvement with local Aboriginal communities led to the inauguration of the Lismore Aboriginal Advancement League (LAAL) and its history illustrates local racism, rhetoric and assimilation issues which Tess helped the Cubawee community to negotiate. The Chapter ends with a particular story, told in Tess Brill’s words, which exemplifies the persistence, intelligence, ethical stance and dedication which she applied to her activism with Aboriginal communities on the Far North Coast.

\textsuperscript{58} McConaghy, \textit{Rethinking Indigenous Education: Culturalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Knowing}, 152.


\textsuperscript{60} ‘Becoming’ draws on the phrase of philosopher and feminist, Simone de Beauvoir, ‘One is not born a woman, but becomes one.’
This Chapter has been approached and mainly presented as an oral history which invokes a range of issues beyond the research of a singular, historical event as such. Oral histories are a particular type of primary source for understanding histories – they can be seen to share the essence of life histories in that they are ‘as near the past as anything that has survived’ and importantly, they serve the function of recording a social history. While it is arguably the case that the reliability of accounts by participants are subjective by default and are not infallible to factual fault, their overarching significance can serve to enlighten us as they provide unique insights into the human condition.

If colonialism ‘marks the historical process whereby the ‘West’ attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the ‘non-West’’ then it is the project of decolonisation to articulate ways, methods and practices which seek to redress this condition. The final chapter, Decolonising Spaces, will not only review the ideas presented in earlier chapters, but situates the thesis as a platform from which to consider the postcolonial space of Australia; to challenge non-Indigenous Australians to reflect on our white-settler history; to imagine an open and honest engagement with the present; and work towards a different future by engaging in the necessary process of decolonising spaces.

In order to initiate any conversation regarding decolonisation, though, it is useful, if not imperative, to reflect on the historical evolution as to how the colonial project has imbibed its structures within thought processes and patterns of thinking. The following Chapter begins with this in mind.

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64 Gandhi, Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction, 16.
2: Decolonising the Mind

The very habit and faculty that makes apprehensible to us what is known and expected dulls our sensitivity to other forms, even the most obvious. We must rub our eyes and look again, clear our minds of what we are looking for to see what is there.

–David Malouf

Even before the ‘half-century time span’ (1947-1997) of political decolonisation began, Mahatma Gandhi recognised the psychological effects of colonisation. Regarding colonialism as a moral issue and judging it by Christian values, he critiqued British rule in India and determined it to be ‘an absolute evil.’ While Ashis Nandy describes Gandhi as an ‘uncolonized mind’, Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj, a ‘polemical critique of Western civilisation’ and ‘proclamation of ideological independence’ written in 1909, offers an early and eloquent insight from a ‘colonised’ position from which he concludes that ‘colonialism was something to be overcome in our own consciousness first’.

In an historical context, decolonisation refers to processes of contestation and removal of colonial rule but it has been identified that the ‘emergence of a decolonized nation-state was not often accompanied by a transformation in the social structure of that nation state.’ Freedom from

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65 David Malouf, Remembering Babylon (Milsons Point, NSW Random House, 1993), 130.
68 Ibid., 176-77.
colonial rule did not alleviate colonial hegemonies which were preserved through residual systems of language, governance, law, land tenure and religious tenets. Consequently a body of influential writing has evolved, collectively forming the theoretical platform of postcolonialism, from which all dimensions of colonialism may be reconsidered, not only its oppressive form and inherent injustice but its psychological ramifications. The first expressions of a postcolonial theory are found within the works of Gandhi and the Martinique-born ‘anti-colonial Algerian revolutionary’ Frantz Fanon.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) Fanon, a psychiatrist, political activist and writer, explains the oppressive ‘mechanism’ of colonialism. Having treated those who suffered the effects of French colonial rule in Algeria, he advocated ‘the need of a complete calling in [to] question’ of colonial situations identifying that ‘colonial oppression works at the level of psychology as well as in material form.’ Fanon’s oeuvre has been described as ‘the most well-known of psychological attempts to theorize the effects of colonialism’ and connects to that of Gandhi as both treat

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73 Le Sueur, ”An Introduction: Reading Decolonization,” 3.
76 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 37. This work was written while Fanon was undergoing treatment for leukaemia and published posthumously in 1963.
‘the project of national liberation as an imaginative pretext for cultural self-differentiation from Europe’.\textsuperscript{79} This vision of exceeding, surpassing and improving upon the ideal of Western civilisation maintained a defiant refusal to accept the premise of lack or deficiency which both Gandhi and Fanon recognised as the ‘historical predicament’ of the colonised.\textsuperscript{80}

Drawing inspiration from Fanon’s work, Kenyan writer, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, felt impelled to write of his lived experiences of colonisation.\textsuperscript{81} Educated in English from the age of six and forbidden to speak his native Gikuyu, his treatise \textit{Decolonising the Mind} outlines the deleterious consequences such an education had on connections to his own culture, observing that the effects are far-reaching and culturally destructive leading to a ‘colonisation’ of thought and mind.\textsuperscript{82} Paulo Freire’s pivotal work, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed}, corroborates these observations identifying that teaching strategies mirror a colonial ideology of oppression through the ‘preservation of cultural hegemony.’\textsuperscript{83} Ashcroft explains that just as ‘childhood’ began in European culture with the task of learning how to read, so education and literacy become crucial in the imperial expansion of Europe, establishing ideological supremacy, inculcating the values of the colonizer, and separating the ‘adult’ colonizing races from the ‘childish’ colonized. Literacy and education \textit{reinforce the existence of the very gap they are designed to close}, the gap between colonizer and colonized, civilized and primitive; in short, the gap between adult and child [my emphasis].\textsuperscript{84}

Brazilian philosopher Marcelo Dascal explains Freire’s ‘mind-colonizing educational paradigm’ referred to as the ‘banking model’ in which teachers, (those assumed to have knowledge) deposit it into the minds of pupils (those assumed not to have it). Dascal deems that this model


\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{81} Capeheart, "Social Justice: Theories, Issues and Movements."


\textsuperscript{84} Ashcroft, “On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture.”, 46.
exemplifies the epistemic characteristic of mind colonisation, as knowledge is presumed to be a commodity which everybody desires ‘by virtue of its epistemic properties, namely truth and universality’ from which its uses and applications are drawn. His conclusion is that colonialism’s ‘more subtle and lasting manifestation...the colonization of the mind’ is a form of ‘epistemic violence’ which is enduring.\footnote{85}

Here Dascal cites Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak’s phrase ‘epistemic violence’ which refers to ‘the process of writing so-called empirical history in the West’ whereby that which is presented as fact is, instead, a ‘process of epistemic violence against those whose history is denied.’ The term has since been applied to colonising acts such as mapping, naming, speaking-for and translation. Iain Chambers explains how the power of naming, identifying, classifying, domesticating and containing simultaneously exercises the power to silence, negate and eliminate which effectively exerts epistemic violence on ‘alternative ways of knowing the world.’\footnote{86}

These experiences have been correlated by Renato Constantino who, witnessing the effects of American imperialism which replaced Spanish colonisation in the Philippines, recognises that colonial culture and education have produced a consciousness within the populace which has impaired perception and distorted reality creating ‘a people ignorant of the system under which they live, even as the system itself causes and deepens this ignorance.’\footnote{87} Thus, while the psychological ‘trauma and burdens of colonial relations’ have been recognised, the after effects, or in Leela

\footnote{85} Marcelo Dascal, "Colonizing and Decolonizing Minds," Website: philpapers - Online research in philosophy, 'Works by Marcelo Dascal' http://philpapers.org/autosense.pl?searchStr=Marcelo%20Dascal
\footnote{86} Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985) cited in McConaghy, Rethinking Indigenous Education: Culturalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Knowing, 123. See also Deborah Bird Rose, integrating Levinas’ analogy which equates ‘totalising monological narratives with war’, elucidates how the oppositional, hierarchical and binary relationships which dominate Western thought and action provide ‘powerful conceptual tools for the reproductions of violence’. These create ‘violent erasures’ which promote a nihilism that ‘stifles the knowledge of connection, disables dialogue, and maims the possibilities whereby ‘self’ might be captured by ‘other’ in Rose, Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation, 20-1.
\footnote{87} Constantino, Neocolonial Identity and Counter Consciousness, 277-78.
Gandhi’s words, the ‘postcolonial condition’, continues to ‘echo in contemporary debates’ and affect whole populations.\textsuperscript{88}

This condition could be reflective of Australia’s particular postcolonial population currently being rallied to ‘Close the Gap’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.\textsuperscript{89} Has Australia’s colonial history as a settler-nation created an environment, supported by government policies such as that of assimilation and ideologies such as assimilationism, in which colonial patterns of thinking are inherent and support ongoing structural imbalances which perpetuate the very symptoms which government policy seeks to address?

Tess Brill’s activism began in the 1950s, assimilation’s ‘heyday’,\textsuperscript{90} when she saw an incredible gap of disadvantage between residents of Lismore and Cubawee. Furthermore, it was the discrimination which she realised was inherent within the assimilation policy which stimulated her to re-asses her white society. But it is McConaghy’s assertion that assimilationism is an ideology which maintains structural imbalances which connects Tess Brill’s story to the present space of disconnect today.

\textsuperscript{88} Le Sueur, "An Introduction: Reading Decolonization," 4.
\textsuperscript{90} Haebich, Spinning the Dream: Assimilation in Australia 1950-1970, 9.
Assimilation and Assimilationism

*Assimilation is ‘built into the very fabric of Australian society [and] we cannot say that it came to an end; it continues in one form or another.’*

–Tim Rowse

In a comment posted on the LarvatusProdeoBlog on March 8, 2008, Anna Haebich comments that while assimilation is generally regarded as ‘an old policy for Aborigines and migrants, it is in fact more complex than this and far more important for all Australians.’ Cathryn McConaghy agrees but makes a distinction between the practice of assimilation – enacted through specific eras of policy implementation instigated at certain times, and the ideology of assimilationism which she argues has ‘persisted in many guises since the time of early invasion’ and has ‘been able to secure epistemic authority within Australian social policy.’

She explains that the term assimilation implies “to make like” or “to absorb into a system” – notions which are based on two fundamental premises: that the object to be ‘made like’ is different, and that the object to be absorbed is disconnected or apart, difference being ‘perceived in terms of character (essence) and space (distance).’ The ambivalence of its purpose, though, is demonstrated within the assimilation period of the 1950s and 1960s when a system of strengthened segregated communities, institutions and boarding houses were needed to achieve the desired transformation. Only the ‘part Aborigines’ or those who could effectively fit in to white society were targeted to be assimilated while others were to stay segregated creating a paradox in which assimilation strategies promoted segregation in order to achieve policy aims. Thus, while

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92 Firstly in South Australia from 1836-57; in the Northern Territory from 1951-70 and in most Australian states either officially or unofficially from 1930-70; and nationally since March 1996. See McConaghy, *Rethinking Indigenous Education: Culturalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Knowing*, 151.
93 Ibid., 151-2.
94 Ibid., 156.
assimilation was a contradictory and complex process of exclusion and inclusion,\textsuperscript{95} McConaghy finds that its resilience and sources of legitimacy as an ideology of assimilationism, are revealed through an evaluation of the logic of ‘colonial mimicry’.\textsuperscript{96}

Homi Bhabha identifies that there are intrinsic exclusions and limitations within colonial discourse which prevent the process of assimilation from achieving its goal of full transformation. This is due to ambivalence towards the Indigenous ‘other’, which is characteristic of colonial relations, and the simultaneous ‘derision and desire which is established by early culturalism’ that acts to construct the colonial subject as only a partial presence which is virtual yet incomplete.\textsuperscript{97}

In disavowing the culturally differentiated condition of the colonial world – in demanding ‘Turn white or disappear’ – the colonizer is himself caught in the ambivalence of paranoid [sic] identification, alternating between fantasies of megalomania and persecution.\textsuperscript{98}

Thus, he rationalises, ‘mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.’\textsuperscript{99} Deborah Bird Rose agrees, observing that the power within the system ‘depends on the subordinated other, and simultaneously denies this dependence.’\textsuperscript{100} Assimilationism’s persistence, though, also lies in its adjacency to the fundamental values of liberalism, capitalism, colonialism, culturalism, and economic rationalism which ‘provides it with a reasonableness of intent which resonates with the popular aims of capital accumulation, responsible citizenship, the

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 155.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 152.
\textsuperscript{97} Here McConaghy defines ‘culturalism’ as referring to ‘the use of particular anthropological notions of ‘culture’ by which ‘Indigenous culture’ enters the field as ‘already read’...[and] incorporates the ideologies and discursive regimes of universalism, cultural racism, and cultural incompatibility in order to construct and perpetuate a ‘two race’ binary.’ See Ibid., xi.
\textsuperscript{98} Homi K. Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture} (London: Routledge, 1994), 61.
\textsuperscript{100} Rose, \textit{Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation}, 20.
patriarchal ‘competition state’ and liberal notions of equality as sameness.’

Assimilationism therefore effectively maintains colonial hierarchical expectations because, while its overt and stated goal is to create equality ‘with the consequent disappearance of the ‘problem’ population’ who are to enjoy the status of equality, its effect is to represent Indigenous people as ‘always becoming’, and ‘establishes an ideal which is never attainable.’

In contending with this paradigm of assimilation, though, I am reminded of Tess Brill, who, when hearing a particular stance, candidly cautions that we start in the middle from where we’re coming from but you can’t get the [whole] picture until you go back. Therefore it may be useful to consider the observation of Antonio Gramsci, the Marxist Italian political philosopher, whose theorisation of power and domination, renowned as a theory of hegemony, is regarded as ‘an organising principle for the production and reproduction of ideology.’ Gramsci believed that the starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is knowing “thyself” as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited...an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory...therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory

Accepting the view that ‘the postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation’, “knowing thyself” therefore calls for a review of the Australian colonial encounter. This is undertaken not only as an opportunity to reflect on the history of

102 McConaghy, Rethinking Indigenous Education: Culturalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Knowing, 157.
105 McConaghy, Rethinking Indigenous Education: Culturalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Knowing, 32.
Indigenous – white-settler relationships and ascertain how the gap, a space of disconnect, has evolved, but also to explore the validity of Tony Birch’s critique that Australia is in fact ‘a nation that is yet to escape its colonial psyche’.  

The Colonial Space of Australia

*Aborigines...were hit by the full blight of an alien way of thinking...[by] a people who never credited that there could be cathedrals of the spirit as well as of stone.*

—Kevin Gilbert

As he voyaged around the South Pacific, Captain Cook decided that what he saw of Aborigines in 1778 did not match the meanings of the words ‘humanity’, ‘civilisation’ and ‘culture’ which he carried in his mind. His impressions, along with those of his fellow travellers recorded in journals, expressed amazement at the Aborigines’ ‘cool indifference to trade’ and their ‘material minimalism’ concluding that they were without coherent social structure or culture. These observations compared less favourably to those made of the Maori in Aotearoa who were assessed more positively having been ‘eager to engage in trade [and shown]... considerable, if primitive, cultural accomplishment.’ The historical consequences of these impressions were vast and far-reaching, also demonstrating how comparisons become evaluations when a particular set of definitions are assumed to be the ‘fixed standard’ to which all others are measured and most likely, found lacking.

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110 Brittan, "Australasia," 77.
112 Brittan, "Australasia," 78.
This draws on aspects of Western ‘ways of knowing’, or epistemology, which evolved from Renaissance humanism emanating from Italy in the fifteenth century, and seventeenth century European Enlightenment. The ‘underside’ of this Western humanism produced the dictum that ‘since some human beings are more human than others they are more substantially the measure of all things’,\textsuperscript{113} which works to locate colonised people as ‘lacking the same levels of humanity, and human rights as the European colonizers’.\textsuperscript{114}

Nevertheless, in January 1788, when Captain Arthur Phillip and a fleet of eleven ships carrying a human cargo of 1030 people, including 736 convicts,\textsuperscript{115} set sail from England bound for Botany Bay, his mandate from King George III was to ‘develop friendly relations’ with the native population and
to endeavour by every possible means to open an intercourse with the natives, and to conciliate their affections, enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them.\textsuperscript{116}

The purpose of Phillip’s journey was to establish a penal colony in order to alleviate the problems of overcrowded prisons in Britain, compounded by the refusal of the newly formed United States of America to accept any more British convicts. On the basis of Cook’s earlier judgement, the British parliament conveniently deemed that Australia was a \textit{terra nullius} – a legal fiction which considered the land to be ‘waste and unoccupied’ negating the need for treaty or compensation for the Aboriginal inhabitants, while

\textsuperscript{116} David Hill, \textit{1788 the Brutal Truth of the First Fleet: The Biggest Single Overseas Migration the World Had Ever Seen} (North Sydney: William Heinemann, 2008), 221.
allowing the presumption of historical settlement rather than conquest or negotiation of Aboriginal land.¹¹⁷

The heart of the empire may have issued its directives of benevolence towards an ab origine population,¹¹⁸ but colonialism inevitably transforms place, reorganising and restructuring the environments it settles while changing the people involved on all sides in colonised locations.¹¹⁹ Thus, those on the frontier, disconnected from its authoritative centre, came to follow another more violent and genocidal path.¹²⁰

In his reflection on settlement, Paul Carter finds that adjustment to a new environment is dependent on firstly discovering similarities ‘between it and the home left behind’ and that ‘the very possibility of comparison implies a conceptual vocabulary that can be transported from one place to another.’ He analogises the comparison of the new with the familiar as a bridge which allows humans to navigate a chasm in space, defying rather than accepting the ‘impasse’.¹²¹

Many writers agree that to see, describe and evaluate a new place only or even primarily in imported terms may prevent people from actually understanding the world around them, inhibiting contact with the new and the unknown as it becomes disguised as the familiar.¹²²

Mark McKenna expresses it more simply, noting that in Australia ‘they could only discover what they were able to see’¹²³ with Robert Hughes providing a literal example observing that ‘it took two decades for colonial

¹¹⁷ Reynolds cited in Hollingsworth, Race and Racism in Australia, 77.
¹¹⁸ The word Aborigine is derived from Latin meaning ‘from the very first, from the source or origin’, The Macquarie Dictionary, 3rd ed., s.v. “ab origine.”
¹²² Ibid.
¹²³ McKenna, Looking for Blackfellla’s Point: An Australian History of Place, 26.
watercolourists to get the gum trees right, so that they did not look like English oaks or elms." Consequently, a society was re-created whose dominant consciousness and order of life was, and arguably still is, based on the institutional and imaginative context of Eurocentrism. This unwillingness by the dominant cultural group ‘to engage with Indigenous philosophical and intellectual traditions’, regarded as ‘irrelevant’, has led to the devaluing of Indigenous systems of knowledge, epistemology, and ways of being, ontology; the disavowal of a society in which everything is ‘inextricably interwoven with, and connected to, the land.’

Tess Brill understood that this connection to the land was integral to Aboriginality: “They didn’t have a written language” but they did...it was written in the land itself...[for example] there’s Tibrogargan... it’s so clear...if you’ve been told the story of those mountains and their shapes... There was a young man...his responsibility in the social structure was to the old people...looking after and respecting them...[but] he always wanted to go to sea. He wanted to break away from the land...and...by turning his back and gazing and dreaming out to sea, he failed in that responsibility... [something] overtook the tribe and they were virtually wiped out...You’ve got the young man, the shape of the mountain and you can see the Aboriginal head, it’s got the eyebrows, the chin...and he’s still looking out to sea. But the other mountains...the rest of the tribe, turn their back on him, he was an outcast. Those mountains, they’re making a statement: “That’s your responsibility. If you break that law, this is the

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124 Hughes, The Fatal Shore, 3.
127 Located in the Glasshouse Mountains, South East Queensland.
punishment”...the rest of the tribe turned their back on him and all was lost. He was lost and nowhere.\textsuperscript{128}

Aborigines were seen to have little to offer while Europeans had everything to give but the price was high. This condition of imbalance influenced virtually all European–Aboriginal interactions, the most prominent being the ‘theme of civilising’, meaning Europeanisation. While this process forced Aborigines to adopt new economic value systems and learn new work patterns, it was essentially a process of one-way assimilation. Even various welfare policies which advocated specific outcomes involved increasing European control and influence which ignored or discredited the importance of Aboriginal knowledge.\textsuperscript{129}

This has led to a pronounced state of dependence and repercussions which have extended to the present day as these government policies have systematically dislocated Indigenous people from their traditional lands,\textsuperscript{130} a process which has been linked directly to poor health and welfare outcomes.\textsuperscript{131} As Mick Dodson explains, ‘[r]emoved from our lands, we are literally removed from ourselves.’\textsuperscript{132} Consequently ‘gaps’, ongoing ‘echo factors’ of the colonial project,\textsuperscript{133} while tangible and statistical, are also metaphorical as they represent a space of disconnect circumscribed by an historical unwillingness to meaningfully understand and respectfully engage with Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Tess remembers that the...Government’s policy, it certainly was assimilation, but it would only [happen]...well, put it this way, Cubawee

\textsuperscript{129} Berndt, The World of the First Australians: Aboriginal Traditional Life: Past and Present, 519.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Cited in Connell, Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science, 195.
\textsuperscript{133} Le Sueur, “An Introduction: Reading Decolonization,” 4.
would never change in any manner if it adversely affected or offended the white community. ¹³⁴ This reflects not just an unwillingness to engage with Indigenous people, but ‘maintains privilege while denying any opportunity to question or confront the problematic moral foundations of white possession of the land.’ ¹³⁵

Reflexivity and Whiteness

_History has clearly shown that good intentions must be accompanied by critical reflection, particularly within the area of Indigenous affairs._

—Pholi, Black & Richards ¹³⁶

_Whiteness exerts a force that is both global and colonizing in its effects._

—Barbara Heron ¹³⁷

Damien Riggs believes that in the field of whiteness studies and critical race theory, reflexivity is one of the most significant and appropriate research methods as it describes the author’s ‘engagement with their own location and histories as well as the potential for using particular theoretical approaches’ to highlight particular social conditions. More importantly, he deems reflexivity ‘fundamental’ when considering ‘colonial practices and elaborating modes of resistance’ while it simultaneously and significantly asks ‘whose account is privileged, and what does reflexivity actually reflect?’ ¹³⁸

Donna Haraway argues that self-reflexivity is a ‘bad trope’ as it can leave the impression of ‘access to a ‘truer’ knowledge of the world.’ ¹³⁹ Paula

¹³⁵ Soenke Biermann, personal email to the author, June 6, 2011.
¹³⁶ Pholi, Black, and Richards, “Is ‘Close the Gap’ a Useful Approach to Improving the Health and Wellbeing of Indigenous Australians?”
¹³⁷ Barbara Heron, Desire for Development: Whiteness, Gender, and the Helping Imperative (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 9.
¹³⁹ Cited in Saukko, Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An Introduction to Classical and New Methodological Approaches, 64.
Saukko agrees, accepting that if the scholar is allowed to ‘dwell on her...sentiments’ without critical interrogation, then emotional credibility may lend support to preconceptions. She also believes though, that when self-reflexivity is interpreted critically, it ‘enables the scholar to become acutely aware of the always situated and limited nature of [one’s]...worldview, thereby, opening up space for different interpretations of other people’s as well as our own realities.’

In Australia, our ‘reality’ has also been shaped by the legacy of the White Australia policy which meant that historically, whiteness came to bestow ‘citizenship, status, power and privilege.’ According to anthropologist Ghassan Hage, White Australia is defined as a discourse based on an overarching belief in the superiority of British civilisation which has been ‘forged from the attributes of British racial stock and upheld by the British race.’ Thus all other races and cultures ‘were believed to be inherently inferior and their presence represented a threat to the nation’s racial and cultural purity and its civilised standard of living.’

In theorising whiteness at a local level, Rob Garbutt discusses the creation and maintenance of its geographical space, and considers acts which ‘keep Aboriginality at a safe distance’ enabling comfort in unproblematic local white belonging while simultaneously distancing its subject from the history of injustices inherent in Australian society. This ‘safe white distance

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140 Ibid.
141 This policy reflected the hopes of the ‘founding fathers’ that Australian society would be a projection of a White racial identity, that Australia would remain an expression of a constitutive Whiteness and an example of what the White British race could achieve.’ This spawned a domestic policy which encouraged the ‘continuing extermination of the culture of the colonised Indigenous people and an immigration policy [which excluded] non-Whites from Australia and Australian citizenship.’ See Ghassan Hage, Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society (Annandale: Pluto Press, 2003), 52-54.
143 Ibid.
‘shape[s] Australian destiny’\(^{144}\) and, finding safety in distance creates a tyranny not only of distance but, as this thesis argues, a tyranny of *disconnect*. Garbutt argues that overthrowing this tyranny in time, place and mind provides ‘whiteness with a critical pedagogical purpose, moving beyond description, taxonomy, or white apologia.’ Overcoming the tyranny of white distance calls for an overturning, a deconstruction and a transformation ‘moving beyond the view of whiteness as simply a trope of domination’, and for this to take place, ‘critical and self-reflexive spaces are required.’\(^{145}\) Therefore the position of critical self-reflexivity as a means of reducing this distance, traversing the space of disconnect, would be to recognise colonial structures which support imbalances and engage in a practice of decolonising thought processes.

Tess Brill’s Aboriginal-Rights activism represents a local example of such a practice, and her story could be regarded as a ‘recuperative’ history, one which is ‘not aimed towards dialectical opposition or overcoming’ but offers hidden, local possibilities which ‘illuminate alternatives to our embeddedness in violence.’\(^{146}\)


\(^{145}\) Ibid.

3. Minding the Gap

The more radical the person is, the more fully...she enters into reality so that, knowing it better...she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider...herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but...she does commit...herself, within history, to fight at their side.

—Paulo Freire

“Becoming”

On January 28, 2011, Vic and Tess Brill quietly celebrated 65 years of marriage. They have shared hard times and tragic loss but both feel they have had a fortunate life together. They met in Sydney while Vic, from Matong, was enrolled in a teacher training course. After graduating, he took up a teaching position but soon volunteered to serve in World War II, joining the RAAF. He trained as a flight navigator, was based in England for three years and on returning home in 1946, was finally able to marry his sweetheart, Tess Johnson.

Tess’s older brother, Alf, travelled from Sydney to Ganmain for the marriage and brought a carefully boxed bouquet from the local florist in Gladesville for the ceremony. As no professional photographer was able to record the event, when the couple travelled to Sydney, Tess organised a studio photographer to take a wedding photo. Realising she had no bouquet, Tess visited the florist who worked out of her home in Gladesville.

148 Ganmain and Matong are approximately 60km North West of Wagga Wagga, South-Central NSW.
I asked, could she make me up a little posy - I didn’t ask for a copy of the bouquet I had at the wedding because it was more than two feet long. The original bouquet she had made me was beautiful...I said, “it doesn’t matter - just some soft green fern leaves with a few flowers will do”...“That’s alright m’dear,” she said, “I’ll do that for you. You come back this afternoon.” When I arrived back there was a replica of my bouquet and I was surprised and dismayed – I couldn’t afford it and I thought how am I going to pay for this? And she said, “No.” She said she wouldn’t take anything for it...[emotional pause] She said “No...my son recognised you when you came to the door earlier...You were the little girl who looked after him in primary school.”

Martin, the florist’s son, had developed polio as a young child. He recovered but wore iron braces on his legs. If you weren’t normal...children can be very hurtful... but when bullying is happening, you don’t stop to think...you just do what’s needed at the time. That’s the situation and you do it.

Martin wasn’t the only recipient of Tess’s protection. Derek had a hormonal growth problem [and] his mind never developed beyond the age of about ten, but he was a giant...about six foot seven, and very thin...he was a very harmless, a very loving, a very gentle boy. He was about my age...And of course, growing up...he was the butt end of jokes and things like that...Derek could never go to school but wherever Derek went and if I was around, well, I used to protect him. They’d either throw stones at him or jeer or laugh and so on – so yes, that’s what I would do.

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150 Pseudonym
152 Pseudonym
153 Tess Brill interview with Kerith Powers. Transcript sourced from Tess Brill personal papers, n.d.
Such actions would appear to be evidence of a nascent awareness of injustice but for this generation, a ‘learning of goodness and the finding of faith pervaded every part of growing up’\textsuperscript{155} and according to Janet McCalman, ‘middle class Australians remained morally and psychically shaped by organized [sic] religion and most believed that they believed.’\textsuperscript{156}

\textit{On a religious point of view the community was divided...my mother taught us to be respectful of a person’s religion. She was anti-church but not anti-religion – she explained the difference...[catholics] were entitled to their choice of religion just as we [protestants] were...[but] you were either catholic or you were protestant. It was a terrible situation when you think about it.}\textsuperscript{157}

While ‘Christianity taught them how to be good...not all who endeavoured to live Christian lives believed that one did so in order to save one’s soul.’\textsuperscript{158} \textit{My mother gave us the choice of going to church...and I did. Sunday came and I went to church, then fellowship, then Sunday school in the afternoon. But...I questioned everything. I can remember asking about the belief that God knew everything...I asked “How about the grains of sand?” and “Yes, God knew, [he] understood every grain of sand.” So I would sit on the beach and I would look north, south, and I’d think of the ocean bed going way out into the ocean right across the other side of the world...and it did seem a bit far-fetched, [chuckles] I always found that very difficult.}\textsuperscript{159}

McCalman’s award-winning research of the middle class generation born in Melbourne during the five years after World War One includes archival research, oral histories and draws on findings from a detailed survey of six

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{157} Tess Brill interview with the author, Hastings Point, July 21, 2010, 4.
\textsuperscript{158} McCalman, \textit{Journeyings: The Biography of a Middle-Class Generation 1920-1990}, 113.
\textsuperscript{159} Tess Brill interview with the author, Hastings Point. July 21, 2010, 7.
\end{flushleft}
hundred and sixty three people of this particular demographic.\textsuperscript{160} While McCalman’s focus is on Melbourne, her study identifies many common experiences and influences within this era which resonate with Tess Brill’s memories: the effects of the First World War and the depression, the role of women in society, Victorian attitudes towards children, the emotions and memories connected to Anzac Day ceremonies, the Protestant-Catholic religious divides, and attitudes towards the education of girls.

Contextualising the era, McCalman points out that ‘the two world wars were the great engine houses of social and political change last century’ and that ‘few citizens of the combatant nations evaded the transformations that...war brought to their society.’\textsuperscript{161} Tess Johnson was born between them in Sydney, 1923. She describes her parents as working class, yet the family lived in the middle class suburb of Gladesville.

This was ‘an uneasy world.’ The First World War had passed on its legacies and ‘its new sense of values’\textsuperscript{162} and yet it had been ‘one of the most creative generations in our recorded history – creative because it first knew stringency and war before it knew comfort and security.’\textsuperscript{163} Like many others’ experiences outlined in McCalman’s Journeyings, Tess’s early life could easily be construed as a threnody of loss, particularly when reflecting upon the era from her mother’s perspective.

\textit{There were the war years, two of my mother’s brothers were in World War One, then there was the [Spanish] flu.}\textsuperscript{164} My mother was nursing her

\textsuperscript{160} McCalman, Journeyings: The Biography of a Middle-Class Generation 1920-1990, viii.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 159.
\textsuperscript{162} Wynwode Macdonald cited in Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 299.
\textsuperscript{164} The effects of this epidemic ‘which raged throughout 1919’ were unprecedented causing more deaths worldwide than WW1 and it is estimated that over a fifth of the world’s population, between 20 and 40 million people, were infected. The virus, most likely brought into the country by returning troops, killed 12,000 Australians before it was eradicated. See p11 Mawland Quarantine Station Webpage – Q Station: 40 Days for Schools, “5.2 Spanish Influenza,” www.qstation.com.au; Richard White, Inventing
mother-in-law [who] was dying of cancer...[and] she would have been pregnant with a baby that only lived a few weeks after birth...it was...18 months to 2 years older than me...[then there were] the depression years. I try to think of her as a young woman with a young family – the pressures that she would have been under...she had no family support at all...she lost her own mother tragically...her father was a merchant seaman [and for the most part absent].

These losses aside, Tess felt she had a happy childhood. She adored her sister Nell who was thirteen years older, and was ‘sandwiched’ between her two brothers – Alf, seven years older and Oscar, five years younger. Throughout the depression years her father worked for the Dunlop-Perdriau (Rubber) Company which operated out of a large galvanised shed in Rozelle. He had been employed there since its inception in 1929, had become a foreman and owned a car so the family was able to go on camping trips to bushland in the holidays which Tess credits as the beginning of her lifelong awareness of the environment. Other family members though were not so fortunate.

I can remember [my uncle] coming to my mother and crying - it was the first time I had seen a grown man cry - with despair at the worry trying to feed and clothe his family. Their diet consisted mainly of saveloys and tinned condensed milk...[and] I felt very envious of my cousins, they had this wonderful diet. When I think back now, they couldn’t afford anything else.

It was a combination of all those things that influenced my parents’ lives and...also had a very big impression on me. I was a good listener and I was


166 Tess Brill interview with Kerith Powers transcript sourced from Tess Brill personal papers.
taking all the human reactions that I was observing in the community especially the effects of the depression...the local shopkeeper was having such a struggle to survive that he attempted to take his life...my mother [told] us...[that] while we still had to go to the small goods shop, we were warned not to look at Mr R’s wrists because he had cut [them] in an attempt to end the struggle he was facing....there were [several] instances where others had taken their lives.167

Racism existed in those days – there were large Chinese [vegetable] gardens in the suburbs of Ryde and Gladesville...the general view was that they were “Chinks” or “slanty-eyed”...[but] my mother always forbade us to address them in those terms. Likewise, all fruit shops throughout the various suburbs were, in the main, Italian owned and run...“dago” was a derogatory term and we were forbidden to ever refer to them in those terms...So, I suppose from the beginning there was an influence to be respectful.168

My mother was always very generous with my energy. If there was an errand to be run or chore to be done, well “Tessie will do it” [she would say] and Tessie went up and down the streets.169 On Saturdays after five or six “messages” to the shops, lumping the groceries down the big hill with the dog along for company, the reward was to go to the pictures...Tess was there with five or six little ones in tow – all the little neighbourhood children I was responsible for.170

To serve and to live for others...was in fact the basic ethic of the times...It was the most powerful and morally significant social ethic of Australian society, taught in homes comfortable and poor and in schools religious and

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168 Ibid., 2.
169 Ibid.
170 Tess Brill interview with Kerith Powers. Transcript sourced from Tess Brill personal papers.
secular. And with it came a certain diffidence.171 ‘It was just part of life.’172

Within her childhood years though, she had also been aware of the particular lived situations of women. I go to the supermarket today and I see the men pushing their babies or toddlers in the pram doing the shopping with their wives...that was something totally unheard of in my generation. I don’t ever remember my father nor did I see other men walking in the street...carrying babies, holding their children’s hands, shopping – that just wasn’t done, that was women’s work.173

I would lie awake at night and...assess the households that had girls in it or women...and how there’d be at least one woman out of the household that was expected to remain unmarried so that they could look after their parents...I observed that because of my own sister...when the engagements and the weddings came round I was observing...how women fitted into the community.174 In those days, if a young [unmarried] woman fell pregnant then she was completely ostracised by society and I can still remember some of the neighbours, young women, lovely decent young women, who were unfortunate enough to experience that in their lives...they were absolutely ruined...never to be forgiven.175

When asked if she was the one who was expected to stay home and look after her parents, her answer was No...Because that was a different era...the war broke out, and as Marilyn Lake affirms, by the end of World War II there could be no return to the pre-war social order.176

172 Amelia Friend cited in Ibid.
In the 1920s and 30s, an era when ‘death in war [was] seen as the ultimate sacrifice for the nation [and the] fallen [were] revered as martyrs who gave up their lives for the benefit of the community’\textsuperscript{177} Anzac Day marches and Remembrance Day commemorations were especially poignant events for many young people. These ceremonies deeply affected Tess and became the cornerstone for her understanding of the principles of democracy.

\textit{Anzac Day was very meaningful for me and every day in the city when I passed the cenotaph...I always managed or found the need to just stand quietly against a wall or a bank building somewhere and...to stand there with my eyes closed and respect – think of the men [emotional pause].}\textsuperscript{178} I believed sincerely that all the sacrifices they made were for democratic rights, democratic principles.\textsuperscript{179}

In April, 1937, tragedy struck the family when Tess’ father was killed in a car accident effectively signalling the end of her childhood and her formal education. The impact was compounded as the family had also lost their means of financial support.

\textit{As a result of my father dying without a will and women not having any property rights...a representative from the bank visited our home and he went through every room, opened up every cupboard and drawer and took a detail of everything. I can remember him noting down my mother’s black dresses she had to wear for mourning...And after going through our house, he was sitting at the end of the dining room table and my mother was very quiet and emotionally obviously very upset. She said, “Well, that’s everything – there’s nothing more.” And he said, “There is Mrs Johnson, I’m sorry.” And she said, “What is that?” He said, “There’s your wedding ring” [emotional pause]...I can remember my mother – in those days women...}

\textsuperscript{177} Reynolds, \textit{Why Weren’t We Told?}, 176.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 10.
wore aprons – and I can remember her throwing the apron over her face and crying, “No, no, no. That’s mine, you can’t take that.”  

My mother was struggling [financially] and I remember her going down to my school...explaining to the headmistress the need for me to get [a vocational] education...at a business college...so that perhaps I could get a job earlier. Fourteen was the leaving age for school at the time...I left school at thirteen but I did have the advantage of twelve months of secretarial training. There was always this guilt that I should have been working so I would go into town and go around the shops – anywhere – just to look for a job...it was terrible...you knew there was nothing...As a result of the course [though] I got a job...in Plaistow’s Hotel in the office, at [Circular] Quay. This job petered out...there was a recession...I would go around the shops [looking for work] and one day, as I was walking along George Street, I saw ‘Help Wanted’ in this bread shop window, so I went in and I got the job...I stayed there till I married.


Recently I was asked “How did you become a feminist?” The year was 1946, and as a newly-wed I found myself living in a small house surrounded by wheat and sheep paddocks, no phone and my nearest neighbour three miles away...but I did have a small radio and I discovered our wonderful ABC.

At that time women’s voices were considered unsuitable for broadcasting – too high and not pleasant to the ear, so when a woman announcer was included in the “Country Hour” program I became a regular listener.

On this particular program, a young farmer’s wife – mother of three children – wrote explaining how she carried out her household duties efficiently, cooking cleaning etc, attended to the children’s interests and education needs, managed in the main the book-keeping and business side of the farm and helped, when required, with many outside jobs. Her problem was her husband, when retuning home each evening and showering had

182 Tess Brill interview with the author, Hastings Point. August 21, 2009, 4-5.
the habit of leaving his heavy dirty work-clothes in heaps on the bathroom floor – she requested him to be considerate and pick them up – he refused. This issue was causing an upset in their otherwise good relationship. What should she do to resolve the problem?

The reply – she should pick them up – it was her duty as a wife to care for her husband – tend to his needs and keep harmony in their relationship. I am pretty sure it was at this point of time I became a feminist.\(^{183}\)

While Tess identifies this as the moment of her “becoming” a feminist, she is conscious that it was not until much later in the 1970s that she verbalised or specifically acted in the name of feminism. While living at Cullivel from 1946-1950, she had limited access to personal interactions outside the home. There were no women’s groups to join, no meeting place for support, nor opportunity for discussion of her observations. The people were very ... hospitable, wonderful ...[but] women’s lives were hard...listening to the women...they never [gossiped] ...they weren’t [complaining] at all, it was just life. But I [was] observing it...\(^{184}\)

Seeing how women bore hardship formed an indelible part of her world view which was developing and growing, co-existing with her belief in democracy, democratic rights and democratic principles, which invoked notions of social justice and equality stimulated by a recognition of oppression. For Tess, unaccustomed to the isolation of country life, ABC radio programs became an important link to world events and movements, and marked the beginning of an informal education in political and critical thinking.

\(I\ \text{was an avid listener of the ABC, and every day on the end of the Agriculture Hour...they would have a political discussion or a report...I listened to these programs, and that was really my first introduction to}\)
political thinking...They were very broad, they covered all topics...[and were] very balanced reports...Just listening and thinking, just listening and thinking. The way I learn [is] I listen. I know there are always two sides, so I’m prepared to listen and then I have to, in my own way...to apply...otherwise someone else does our thinking for us – and that’s how I operate [chuckles].

In 1951 Vic was transferred to teach at the Meerschaum Vale School on the Far North Coast of NSW. It was while living here for five years that the Brills, visiting family, would travel back to Sydney by train from Lismore. The Aboriginal reserve called Cubawee was sited only metres from the track at Tuncester, seven kilometres west of Lismore, and from the train window Tess could see the harsh reality of disadvantage. Every time I passed by the settlement on the train I used to think ‘Oh dear God...what do they [do]...how do they survive? ...it was such an injustice...[I thought] in this day and age that should never be.

According to David Miller, when an aspect of society is judged to be just or unjust, it is necessary to explore the underlying principles that people use to develop a social justice understanding. Tess Brill’s principles were foundational to her way of thinking and she consciously rationalised that one’s actions can be explained and are determined by understanding one’s principles. More importantly, she believed that if she didn’t stand up for her principles in times of peace, it dishonoured those who defended principles of democracy in times of war. The consequence of Tess Brill’s particular principles and understanding of social justice – her activism – is

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supported by Capeheart’s assertion that social justice ‘exists both in human thought and in our deeds.’

Cubawee Reserve

...dispossession in every case was a local story
—Raewyn Connell

By the time Tess had seen Cubawee, it had existed as a reserve for twenty years. When the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) decided to install a manager at the Modanville (Dunoon Road) Reserve in 1929, the Aborigines who had been living there since 1903 abandoned it, with most moving back to North Lismore, camping along the riverbank near the Robert White Bridge. In July 1930 the APB approached the Lismore City Council (LCC) about possibly acquiring land off Wyrallah Road but the Council was in favour of the Aborigines being transferred to Cabbage Tree Island.

The impasse between the APB and the LCC was resolved by the local police who, in July 1931, ‘removed the North Lismore Aborigines to a portion of a Pastures Protection Board Reserve at Tuncester...in the Gundurimba Shire. Here there were no huts provided, the inhabitants being under canvas.’ The APB and the Pastures Protection Board (PPB), under whose jurisdiction

189 Ibid.
190 Connell, Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science, 204.
191 Located approx. eleven kilometres North of Lismore.
194 Bass, Education in Lismore: A Century and a Quarter of Progress, 96. It should be noted that this contradicts the account of events given by JJ Fletcher who it would appear has mistakenly referred to ‘Cubawee station’ as existing in 1928 instead of Dunoon Road Reserve which did become a station. See J.J. Fletcher, Clean, Clad and Courteous: A History of Aboriginal Education in New South Wales (Sydney: J. Fletcher, 1989), 128-9. Cabbage Tree Island was a managed station located on an island in the Richmond River between the villages of Broadwater and Wardell.
this land was held, came to an arrangement whereby ‘six acres of Travelling Stock and Camping Reserve No. 10862 at Tuncester was...set apart for Aborigines’ with an equivalent section of the Dunoon Road Reserve made available for travelling stock.\(^{195}\)

In New South Wales, local government councils often acted to restrict Aboriginal people from living within town boundaries. By doing so they supported the opposition of many local whites to a ‘visible residential presence’ in towns. This was integral to a form of ‘spatial politics’ which invoked anxieties regarding racial mixture and sexual relationships as well as satisfying an overarching need to control access to public places which kept Aboriginal people defined as ‘outsiders’.\(^{196}\) Through such actions, local councils were also deferring any obligation to provide services such as electricity and sewerage.\(^{197}\) This established or reinforced social barriers which were rarely crossed and those living in such situations became ‘caught in a trap of increasing...poverty’.\(^{198}\)

In 1937, Frank Roberts, a farmer and Pastor at Cabbage Tree Island was forced to leave the island which he believed was an indirect result of his refusal to allow two of his sons to be taken to live at Kinchela Boys Home some years earlier.\(^{199}\) Roberts had successfully farmed ten acres of sugarcane on the island, owned a car and a boat, was well educated, articulate and an experienced public speaker. He settled at Tuncester...
Reserve with his wife and four youngest children becoming the unofficial spokesperson for the community as well as the Pastor ministering at the centrally located Church building for the next twenty-five years. With his father, Lyle Roberts (Senior), and son, Frank Roberts (Junior), he organised a series of fourteen annual ‘Cubawee Conventions’ in the style of Pentecostal evangelism.

While many communities on reserves shared similar experiences of poor living conditions and ambivalent treatment by the APB, which later became the Aborigines Welfare Board (AWB), each had their own particular character determined by their unique histories and the surrounding environments. The Aboriginal word for the land at Tuncester, Cubawee, means ‘plenty food’ and while it had been used by the white pastoralists as a travelling stock reserve, it had more than likely been a camping place for Aboriginal people travelling between the Casino, Kyogle and Lismore areas long before this, due to an abundance of ‘porcupine’, possum, goannas, turtles and fish in the creeks and surrounding lagoons.

Cubawee was surrounded by fruit and vegetable farms and seasonal employment was available from the Italian farmers who were more than happy to employ Aboriginal fruit pickers. In 1945, a further eighteen

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202 The APB was reorganised and renamed the Aborigines Welfare Board in 1939 due to the increase in white support for the Aboriginal movement. See McGrath, ed. Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown., 88.
203 Pastor Frank Roberts (snr), "A Native Pastor Tells His Story," United Aborigines Messenger (June 2, 1947): 9. Also understood to mean ‘plenty place’ and ‘full plenty’ as told to the author in conversation with former residents.
205 As described by former residents in conversations with the author.
206 Ibid.
acres was added to the original six acre reserve and by the 1950s there were fifteen families, approximately 120 people, permanently living at Cubawee with most connected through kinship ties.\footnote{Waters, "Documentary Historical Report on Cubawee (Tuncester) Reserve, Lismore, NSW," 21-2.}

The severe flood in February, 1954, the worst in the district’s recorded history, was devastating for the community. Roberts (Senior) wrote a moving account published in \textit{The United Aborigines Messenger}.\footnote{Roberts writes, ‘On the 20th, the Cubawee Creek [sic] broke its bank and we were almost caught; on the 21st we were compelled to leave our homes, and exodus commenced. After placing the church organs as high as possible, we made a hasty trip to the hill. In about 15 minutes Cubawee was under six feet of water. As darkness was falling, we looked back on the scene, and it was a heart-breaking experience to see our homes and church almost submerged. We camped in the school; about 84 people were crammed into two small rooms; we slept with blankets; many had no blankets, no clothing. The flood water rose so rapidly there was no time to collect anything.’ Cited in Pastor Frank Roberts (snr), \textit{The United Aborigines Messenger} (April 1, 1954):8.} While the community rallied and re-established itself after the flood, in 1955 the AWB continued to apply pressure to move the residents off Cubawee, this time back to Modanville.\footnote{"Aborigines May Be Moved from Tuncester," \textit{The Northern Star} (Lismore), August 11, 1955.} As with previous efforts throughout the years, whenever moves to re-locate the community closer to white settlement were discussed, it had often been seen as a potential threat to white society. With the AWB not willing to ‘pour money down the drain’ by undertaking any building at Cubawee the situation was at yet another impasse.\footnote{“Critics of Cubawee Move Should Read Bible," \textit{The Northern Star} (Lismore), August 26, 1955.}

As was the case with many reserves, stations and missions in New South Wales, the lack of provision of adequate infrastructures by the AWB such as housing, sewage and clean water led to poor health outcomes. Infant mortality, gastroenteritis and hookworm infestation were high in Aboriginal communities, due not to neglect by mothers or cultural attitudes, but due entirely to poor quality food, poor sanitation and
contaminated water. At Cubawee the ‘burial of night soil on the bank of [Leycester] creek...used as a source of water supply’ contaminated the water which had been deemed unsafe and unfit for human consumption.

Another flash flood in 1956 had dire effects on the already tested housing on the site. While the housing was described in 1959 as ‘18 shanties, most tilted at a crazy angle, [which] are shakily constructed of rotting timber, battered galvanised iron, kerosene tins and bagging’ it should be noted that whatever the material deprivations, the people were on their land together with the old people, without a white manager overseeing and controlling. Therefore, moving in to town would mean not only leaving their land, but leaving a situation of freedom from a ‘white gaze’. In the same article Roberts (Senior) responded to the criticism, succinctly articulating that the situation for the 133 inhabitants was the result of ‘buck passing between the Welfare Board, the State Government and the City Council. No one wants to shoulder the responsibility of giving us decent living conditions’ describing the situation as a confusion of assimilation, integration and segregation.

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212 “Cubawee Reserve Described as Hell on Earth,” *The Northern Star* (Lismore), September 1, 1961.
213 Garbutt, "'White on White: Surveying the Boundaries' - Appendix 4 in 'Locals Only'? Identity and Place in Australian Settler Society", A4-12.
Assimilation in the 1950s

*the policy of assimilation...was inviting the Aborigines to relinquish what it was that made them a distinctive people...was asking them to ‘un-be’*

—W.E.H. Stanner

Suggested as a government program in 1934 by Stanner’s former teacher, the anthropologist A.P. Elkin, assimilation was described as a ‘positive policy...where for the first time explicitly, eventual extinction [of Aborigines] was no longer assumed.’ But the full project of this era of assimilation was not actively enforced until after WWII by a government promoting a ‘common, homogenous Australian way of life’ which would be threatened unless ‘outsiders’ – migrants and Aborigines – conformed to it. Reaching its ‘high point’ in 1958, the policy was also imposed largely in response to growing criticism overseas.

In a further bid to dispel this criticism, the federal government began to inundate the public with visions of old settlers, migrants and Aboriginal people living together harmoniously in a new and modern Australia united by ‘a shared common culture and a new commitment to equal citizenship and living standards for all.’ While these visions represented an attempt to create a distance from the White Australia policy which had, since Federation in 1901, encouraged ‘discriminatory treatment of non-British...

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216 Being the only professor of anthropology in Australia, Elkin advised Bertram Stevens, the NSW premier in 1937 and was later appointed to the Board of the AWB in 1940 as the Aboriginal ‘expert’. See Gahan, "Live Like Us: An Examination of the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board’s Assimilation Discourse and Some Aspects of Policy Implementation at Cabbage Tree Island Station and Cubawee Reserve, 1939-1969", 28-34.
migrants and Aboriginal people’; the reality was that assimilation during the 1950s ‘remained embedded in race ideology and practice’, a reality which Tess Brill saw was the experience for the Aboriginal people around Lismore.

As E.H. Carr observes, though, no real understanding of the past or the present can be arrived at if ‘we attempt to operate with the concept of an abstract individual standing outside society.’ Therefore the context of the years of Tess Brill’s Indigenous activism must be considered as it was, set for the most part in the era of the Liberal Menzies Government (1949-1966). Lisa Milner notes that a cursory investigation of this booming Australian economy and the improvement of social circumstances for many also reveals that ‘life after World War Two was not all consumer culture and suburban bliss.’ This era is also remembered as ‘a period of intense activity and conflict, with incidents such as the Petrov affair, the Labour party split and the activities of the trade union and peace movements creating an era of uncertainty and tension, which also describes the situation for the white residents in Lismore.

Lismore in the 1950s

...the 1950s were an ‘age of anxiety’

–W.H. Auden

During this decade, Lismore remained a Country Party stronghold with conservative views. These are elucidated in no uncertain terms within an entry of a Lismore City Council publication celebrating 100 years of local government. Titled ‘The Fears of the Fifties’, the author admits that

We had peace of a sort, but there lingered always some feeling of insecurity. The world was not safe...We were fearful of Communism; we dreaded the terrific potential of

223 Ibid., 24.
nuclear power...Then again we were being called upon to make some readjustments, to learn to deal with Asians, but now we had our Colombo Plan (1951) and even in Lismore groups of visiting Asian students. Some were well enough received into our homes, though most of us still held to our old reserve. These were people we were willing to help, but we would not wish our daughters to walk out with coloured men. The inbred conservatism of a blue-ribbon Country Party electorate still remained...227

This is evident whenever efforts were made by the AWB to locate the residents of Cubawee to a site closer to Lismore’s amenities, protest meetings were held by residents citing that moving the group together was segregation and that full assimilation was the only way. Yet when single houses were sought for the assimilation of individual families, Tess remembers, it got that way that the [AWB] Area Officer had a blue Holden, and if that blue Holden came into any street in Lismore all the alarm bells went up. He was looking for a house or a site.228

The AWB, as part of its post-war policy, created a network of District Welfare Officers (DWOs)229 who were based in towns regarded as ‘troublesome’ with the specific goal of assisting and guiding Aboriginal people to successfully assimilate.230 Mr Eddy Morgan was the DWO based in Lismore and Tess says that his responsibility was to create a meeting between the Aborigines and the white community with the aim of enforcing assimilation...[and, in order] to draw attention [to Indigenous people]...he invited Professor A.P. Elkin up as a guest speaker...in the [Lismore] Council

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230 Goodall, Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972., 265-6.
Chambers. The purpose of this meeting was to engender support from within both white and Aboriginal communities to form a committee.\textsuperscript{231}

Vic saw a notice in the paper and...said, “You’re always worrying about the Aboriginal people, go down.”...That was my first entrance into public [meetings] – that was a new experience...I didn’t know what to expect – it was held in the...Council Chambers... Elkin spoke as an anthropologist...[he] said, “if you were to write on...every inch of those [wooden dado] panels the Aboriginal people could identify their family group, their tribal group”...he spoke along these lines but then question time came and I asked him, “What welfare assistance do the Aboriginal people get?” – at that time, the only assistance we got was the child endowment...and so I thought well they must at least be entitled to that. His reply was, “I am here as an anthropologist and I do not intend to answer any question that deals with the social issue.” So I was promptly put down [chuckles] and then when the meeting ended it was decided that the best action to take would be to form a committee that could work and have representatives from the Aboriginal community...a coming together, and having announced that, he then said, “and I would recommend that that woman over there” – which was me who’d asked the question – “that [she] be on the committee.” So that’s how I got launched. I didn’t know what I was getting myself into then [chuckles].\textsuperscript{232}

A public meeting, called by the Mayor on behalf of the LCC in early 1958, led to the formation of the Lismore and District Aborigines’ Welfare Committee (LAWC) and Tess was a committee member. The LAWC intended to apply to commonwealth and state departments for grants in order to construct adequate housing for the Cubawee residents once land

\textsuperscript{231} Tess Brill interview with Rob Garbutt, Hastings Point. June 23, 2003, 8.
\textsuperscript{232} Tess Brill interview with the author, Hastings Point. August 21, 2009, 12.
was acquired, 233 but when Lismore residents learned that the reserve was to be moved into the town as four units of housing at four locations, white resistance ensured that a space of distance and disconnect was maintained. 234 For their part, the residents of Cubawee also lodged a petition to Council objecting to the plan as they did not wish their community to be broken up. 235 By August 1958, three members of the LAWC resigned citing differences in the group’s interpretation of assimilation. While the remaining members favoured integration, the rift was symptomatic of greater misunderstandings and the group disbanded soon after. 236

Reflecting on the committee’s shortcomings, Tess came to the conclusion that [it] really folded because [we] didn’t know anything about the Aboriginal people 237 and so she decided to go and find out for herself. She visited Cubawee alone, and found that the people didn’t want “do-gooders” out there. 238 She explained that she had been involved in the committee which had folded, but that she would like to help in any way the community needed help. Pastor Frank Roberts (Senior) suggested that she should return the following Sunday and address everybody at a group meeting in the Church building. She did, and so began a fourteen-year relationship with Aboriginal communities on the Far North Coast. 239 Tess identified that the main issues for the Cubawee residents were to access

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235 “New Moves in Aboriginal Homes Plans,” The Northern Star (Lismore), March 27, 1958.
236 Assimilation in this article is defined as ‘absorption into the community with ultimate total loss of identity as a race.’ Integration stated as ‘aborigines [sic] would be given the opportunity to fit themselves, to take their place in the economic, social and cultural life of the community on the basis of equality, yet retaining their racial individuality.’ See FC Fredericks, “Committee Seeks Integration of Aborigines,” The Northern Star (Lismore), August 6, 1958.
238 ——., June 30, 2003, 1.
drinkable water, the provision of a sanitation service and an electricity supply, and the chance to send their children to the public schools – *everything that the white community five miles away had.* Working to achieve these seemingly basic amenities, though, proved to be a life changing experience.

For the next two years, Tess approached government service departments and agencies responsible for Aboriginal people, asking questions and gathering information. *I set about as an individual, not representing any group, and I went to the police station, to the social services, and asked about what happens...I went to the hospital...I went to the school which was segregated.* After some time, she was also asked for help and to give advice on personal matters. Tess began to understand how difficult it was for the families living on the reserve to access services, approach departments for information or to achieve change. She saw that dealing with bureaucracy was challenging, frustrating, at times demoralising and how queries and requests by the community were obfuscated and ignored. She discovered that departments deferred their responsibility to the AWB and that their attitudes lacked what she considered to be Christian or humanitarian sensibilities.

After a long and emotional meeting with the social service officer arguing the case for a man’s pension, Tess remembers: *I came out of that office...and I walked along [Molesworth] Street to the bridge corner and as I was walking along, I just... it’s a feeling I won’t forget. As people walked towards me, I felt like shaking them and saying, “Do you know what’s happening?”...I was so angry, so frustrated, and I was crying. I forget how long I stood there on the corner, but I can distinctly remember thinking that if I was an Aborigine...I’d want to blot it all out. The frustration, that’s what*

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they were up against wherever they went. There was no way out for them and people don’t understand that.242

Consequently, working with and for Aboriginal communities led to two changes in Tess; firstly, a mutual respect grew between Tess and the families, not only because of her commitment to help but through gaining an understanding of and appreciation for their knowledge and culture. As she drove between reserves and missions, Tess would often travel with Mr James Morgan, who later held the “full-blood’ Aboriginal position on the Welfare Board from 1964-1968.243 Tess found him to have an intelligence and integrity she rarely encountered, and as they travelled, he would patiently answer her questions explaining Indigenous culture and lore, connections to land, ownership, and relationships between groups. Her sense of his knowledge confirms what Strehlow and other anthropologists have documented – that anyone conversing with those ‘trained in speech by means of the sacred myths and songs’ cannot fail to be aware that they are in the presence of men of education and culture.244

This presented a unique opportunity for Tess to understand an Indigenous worldview, integral to an Indigenous ‘way of being’ – something she realised was discouraged and disregarded by the bureaucracy driven by the assimilation policy, and for the most part unknown by non-Indigenous Australians. She found that, as [she] became more and more understanding of the situation, [she] recognised their identity as a people and that that was the core issue.245 I’d walk onto [---- mission]...there were three women on that reserve and they were so quiet and dignified... those women, they were key to the old culture...I don’t like using the word ‘power’ – but the

244 Berndt, The World of the First Australians: Aboriginal Traditional Life: Past and Present, 517.
power that [those] women had in their social structure...yet [white] people would just pass them by...and see three old women...they wouldn’t know the respect and the knowledge that those women had.246

Through reflecting on the situation for Aboriginal people and exercising agency on their behalf, though, a second and longer process of personal change began. This involved a level of reflective process which correlates with the key elements of action research – a qualitative research method which developed out of community activism.247 This is a fitting analogy, especially considering that one of Tess's mantras is that 'words are only words until they are put into action.'248

**Action research and the meta-reflective process**

*Regardless of what the array of issues reflects, it is impossible to [conduct] research without leaving one’s own familiar world and entering the world of others through open and honest dialogue.*

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-- Coghlan and Brannick249

It is valid to link Tess Brill’s experience of engaging with Aboriginal people and working with them to resolve their concerns, to the process of action research for several reasons. Firstly, action research has as its basic aim, the goal of contributing to ‘the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation’. A second acknowledged goal of action research, which also reflects Tess Brill’s efforts, is the development of peoples’ capacity to help themselves in dealing with key issues and tasks ‘in order to become more self-sufficient.’ Nita Cherry describes the process of action research as a continuous cycle of planning, action and review of the action...which is continually enriched by reflection, planning and the injection of ideas; at the same time, the action

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246 [---], May 18, 2003, 32.
produces experience which changes the way we think about things. Successful intervention (ones that work) and meaning (knowledge and learning) are created by the sustained interplay of activity and reflection.\textsuperscript{250}

Cherry further stipulates that the condition which someone who engages in action research needs is ‘to be capable of both action and reflection’ and ‘to operate in both the inner and outer world.’ She sees action research as encompassing a ‘meta-reflective process’ stating that in her coined ‘third position’ of engagement, ‘the action researcher stops, and not only thinks, but thinks about the way she is thinking: she starts questioning why she is doing what she is doing’ and this constitutes ‘double-loop learning.’ This phrase is understood as a review of ‘mental models’ and ‘accessing ...implicit theories’ and Cherry expands on this further by adding ‘emotional and intuitive processes and experience’.\textsuperscript{251} Even though Tess Brill was not consciously aware of the activity of action research, her reasoning, methods of researching issues, and her re-evaluation of her own society, are all examples of the condition of a meta-reflective process, and may be understood as elements of a process of decolonisation.

\textit{I said all along, I was not there as their spokesman [sic]...I wasn’t a welfare officer...I went to the Aboriginal people [and said] “I don’t understand [the problems] but if I can help”...so I always had to listen to them and go from their experience, that’s where I had to learn about the politics so...when they would say to me “Thank you for coming out Mrs Brill, thank you...” I would say, “No. Thank you for what you give to me”, because in the course of understanding them I had to learn about our own society...in a way that I’d never thought about it before.}\textsuperscript{253}

\textsuperscript{250} Cherry, Action Research : A Pathway to Action, Knowledge and Learning, 1.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{252} Tess Brill interview with Rob Garbutt, Hastings Point, June 16, 2003, 17.
\textsuperscript{253} Tess Brill interview with the author, Hastings Point. August 21, 2009, 16.
When asked by the interviewer whether her engagement affected her sense of Australian identity and citizenship, Tess replied,

*How [Aboriginal issues] affected me was...what I was learning...It changed my image of justice and equality. I really believed in that. I was very patriotic. I still am. But I was seeing a side that I didn’t know existed and the injustice in the laws. That’s what I learnt about, the Act itself...this special set of laws...the only way I can describe it – it’s like being in a prison without walls. You couldn’t see them, [the Aborigines] couldn’t see them. They were within the prison. [White people] couldn’t see it at all. All they could see was Aborigines and “It was their fault. All they had to do was live like us and everything would be fine.” So what I was learning about was the Assimilation Act.*

McCalman found that the generation contemporaneous to Tess Brill ‘were determined to make an end to war and injustice, so they were an idealistic generation.’ Nevertheless, Tess discovered the disjuncture between idealism and realism, finding that the religious ideals of her society could never be achieved as a lived reality.

*What I was learning and understanding [was] the reality of the society and it was a contradiction of my religious teaching, because what I was learning was ...[that] one was an ideal and very good principles involved but the reality was that you could never reach that ideal – the reality wouldn’t allow it – it would always be an ideal. It took a couple of years to work my way through that till I could finally throw off the expected justice in the present world...it wasn’t easy – it was an internal battle.*

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[through being involved was that] you have to do a lot of self-analysis [and]
I did a lot of self-analysis.257

Self analysis, an element of reflection, is regarded by Constantino as the antidote to bigotry and leads to greater awareness. He believes that continuous

self-analysis in relation to certain principles, rather than lead to introspection and pre-occupation with self...in fact, make [one] more acutely conscious of the larger problems. For the direction of [this] self-analysis would be toward making [oneself] a better advocate, a more efficient fighter for [one’s] principles.258

Through her interactions at Cubawee, Tess became aware of the situation for the children at the school. Teachers assigned to Aboriginal schools were often those at the end of their careers, passing time until their retirement and did not expect the children to progress past Grade Three level. Instead the focus was on craft activities such as basket weaving and agricultural pursuits such as gardening.259 The impression of Cubawee given by the inspector of schools in 1960 was that ‘[a]ny visit to this school is a perturbing, soul-searching experience’.260 When Tess realised the current teacher would be retiring at the end of 1960, she asked Vic if he would consider transferring there for the following year which he agreed to.261

In February, 1961 Max Praed, Senior Lecturer in Adult Education at the Lismore Regional Office of the University of New England, compiled notes on relevant press cuttings from The Northern Star to ‘clarify [his] own mind regarding the Cubawee question’262 – that being the re-location of the

258 Constantino, Neocolonial Identity and Counter Consciousness, 298.
259 Bertha Kapeen, Werlu Wana; Be Your Self (Lismore: UNE Northern Rivers Publishers, 1989), 15.
260 Fletcher, Clean, Clad and Courteous: A History of Aboriginal Education in New South Wales, 257.
residents of Cubawee onto a site which would provide clean water, electricity and sanitation. The significance of Praed’s assessment is his observation that while the issue had been approached from the religious, political and economic points of view within these articles, it had not been addressed from the standpoint of ‘practical humanity.’ This is an indictment of the society Tess Brill was countering and her unrecognised efforts in areas in addition to the issues of electricity, sanitation and water can be seen to represent ‘practical humanity.’

More importantly, as a result of her years of involvement with Aboriginal people as an individual, Tess could appreciate the situation at Cubawee from an ‘other’ side and this was a crucial difference between her and other white members of the Lismore Aboriginal Advancement League (LAAL) which she was instrumental in establishing in 1961.

The Lismore Aboriginal Advancement League

*NGOs are the engine rooms for getting things done...We should all be in NGOs. As free citizens we should all be trying to do what we can to stir the pot of injustice...NGOs can change the world. They can make a difference.*

–Justice Michael Kirby

As mentioned above, due to criticism of Australia’s racist policies, the formation of regional Aboriginal Associations was encouraged, and in 1960 the Casino Aboriginal Advancement League (CAAL) was established by a group of concerned citizens. Tess saw this as an opportunity to work as part of a group to help the people of Cubawee so she and Vic attended the

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263 Ibid., 8.
265 "Committee Formed for Aboriginal Advancement," *Richmond River Express* (Casino), August 17, 1960.
inaugural meeting taking some Cubawee residents. A motion was passed that the CAAL would work towards improving conditions for all the communities in the district, but after a few months, the CAAL reneged on its decision to represent Cubawee.266

They said “No. We’ll include Cabbage Tree, Box Ridge, Baryulgil, Kyogle, Casino, but Cubawee was definitely Lismore’s responsibility”...I reminded them of...the motion [which had been passed at the inaugural meeting]. So they said...“well, if you call a public meeting, form your own group and deal with Cubawee, then Lismore would be included in the [Constitution of Casino’s] Advancement League.” So, I came back and...approached all the ministries, all the clubs...and the [Lismore City] Council...I wanted a public meeting called to raise the question of Cubawee and the only people to reply was the Trades and Labour Council – and Vic was Secretary of the Trades and Labour Council – and the Teachers Federation – and he was also Secretary of the Teachers Federation...The Council replied that they...did not object to any Councillor attending a meeting...as a private individual, but not representing Council.267

Sixty people representing eighteen organisations, and several Cubawee residents, attended this meeting in Lismore which ratified the inauguration of the Lismore Aboriginal Advancement League. A small group of attendees were elected into a quorum responsible for researching and reporting back to the League on areas of education, employment, housing, sanitation, water and health.268 Many of those involved were teachers, businessmen,

266 Six letters were written to the AWB, the Director of Education and the local Chamber of Commerce in order to draw attention to conditions at Cubawee. See Casino Aboriginal Advancement League, "Letters (1960/61) Sourced in File B.W.1 at Richmond River Historical Society," (Molesworth Street, Lismore).
268 "New Group to Aid Aborigines - Natives at Public Meeting in Lismore," The Northern Star (Lismore), March 8, 1961.
engines, and Max Praed from the Department of Adult Education ... and, one of the first things they did was gather information.\textsuperscript{269}

Tess Brill was elected secretary and member responsible for reporting on health. The LAAL immediately started using the media to put pressure on local government departments and the AWB to organise a supply of clean water for the community.\textsuperscript{270} A scholarship account was started in order to support children to attend high school in Lismore,\textsuperscript{271} and plans were underway to close the Cubawee School so that children could attend primary schools in Lismore. On this issue, the AWB, aware that the existing bus service operating for white children was already ‘fully taxed’ responded by rejecting the request to meet the cost of transporting the thirty-five children to Lismore.\textsuperscript{272}

Frank Roberts continued to represent the Cubawee community, favouring integration rather than assimilation, while still advocating the group’s desire to stay on the land as a community. After so many years of hardship, though, some residents with younger children wished to move into the town as individual families, choosing to leave close kinship connections in the hope of improved conditions for their children.\textsuperscript{273}

They had no water supply...a small stream wound along the edge of the reserve...I would say it was a sixty foot drop to the water...it was a steep

\textsuperscript{270} “Cubawee Reserve: Water Used by Aborigines Polluted,” \textit{The Northern Star} (Lismore) 1961. Sourced from Tess Brill personal papers.
\textsuperscript{271} “Apex Club Scholarship for Cubawee Child," \textit{The Northern Star} (Lismore), May 4, 1961; "Relief Sought for Conditions at Cubawee," \textit{The Northern Star} (Lismore), April, 1961. Sourced from Tess Brill Personal Papers.
\textsuperscript{273} In a letter appealing directly to the AWB, one resident wrote, ‘I need a home “badly”. As you know yourself the living conditions at Cubawee and the water we drink, and this home I live in is not big enough and cold weather is coming and when it rains it gets so muddy and I am so fed up with the place, and it is no place to bring up children as there is no future for them here.’ See Gahan, “Live Like Us: An Examination of the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board’s Assimilation Discourse and Some Aspects of Policy Implementation at Cabbage Tree Island Station and Cubawee Reserve, 1939-1969”, 260.
slope with winding paths worn into it to get down...farmers upstream were known to dispose of cow carcasses in the creek...adding to the pollution...the creek water also served [for] washing clothes...I used to look at great lines of washing and I’d think of the women weaving their way down to the water’s edge, washing in that muddy water, carting it all up and hanging it out...and everyone saying “They’re lazy and dirty”. They did the utmost under the circumstances and life was pretty hard. There was no way Gundurimba Shire or Lismore City Council would change the situation for the people. It was full stop. [The LAAL] came up against a brick wall...endless letters were written backwards and forwards, interviews and meetings got nowhere.  

After some months, when it became apparent that she had the trust of and connections with the residents of Cubawee, Tess found that her position became that of ‘mediator’ between the residents and the President of the League, D. Harrison, who regarded the League’s goal to be the removal of the ‘blot’ of Cubawee and was only interested in working to achieve this end. Another frustration for Tess within the machinations of the LAAL was the refusal of members, led by the President, to take Cubawee’s issues beyond the local area. There was no support for motions put by Tess to affiliate the LAAL with larger national groups in a bid to gain more backing which could apply greater pressure on the AWB to make improvements.

*FCAATSI* had come into existence ...and they [wanted] any groups to affiliate with them. Well it was the same [parochial] thinking. “Well, no...we really don’t want to” It was a mistrust I suppose [of the National Group] and so they fought against this. Every time there was a suggestion ...“No, they didn’t want to”, “We’re doing our thing”... “We don’t want

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276 Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders
anyone else”. This meant that the LAAL was constantly met with the same rebuffs and could not move beyond the impasse in which the LCC deferred to the stance that as Cubawee was outside the city boundaries, it was not their problem; the AWB’s position was that LCC would not sell it land for the group to live together within city boundaries; the Gundurimba Shire Council was sympathetic but did not have the infrastructure to supply electricity, water or a sanitation service; and both the Shire and LCC Health Departments would refer health issues back to the AWB.

As the LCC was not prepared to provide land for the Cubawee community within the city’s boundaries, the AWB slowly began buying home sites, erecting single houses in Goonellabah, Alstonville, Evans Head and South Lismore, and ‘by degrees families were being located off the reserve.’ These houses were ‘pepperpotted’, an arrangement whereby the Aboriginal house would be surrounded on all sides by white residents, guaranteeing no other Aboriginal neighbours. This isolation from their own community while being ignored by white neighbours meant those assimilated experienced a peculiar loneliness of urban segregation, a situation which many residents of Cubawee wished to avoid.

In early September 1961, Tess visited Lismore Base Hospital and was given statistics about the admissions, re-admissions, causes of illness and deaths of children at Cubawee on strict conditions that the information would not be made public. Before making her health report at the subsequent LAAL meeting, Tess stressed this condition of strict confidentiality to all members who gave assurances, guaranteeing this confidentiality. The

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278 Bass, Education in Lismore: A Century and a Quarter of Progress, 124.
280 ‘Uncle Aub’ Roberts and his wife, Carrie, went to live in the house at Evans Head. A year after Cubawee had been closed there was a get together and Tess, realising that ‘Mrs Aub’ wouldn’t be able to get up to it, went to Evans Head and picked her up. Tess remembers when I drove her home I said to her, “Well, have you had a good day?” and she said “Mrs Brill, it was wonderful just to talk to another black face.” Tess Brill interview with the author, Hastings Point. 28 September, 2008.
President, left the meeting early, saying he had other matters to attend to. The following day, when the Publicity Officer was handing in the meeting report to the press, he learned that the President had already handed in a report the previous evening which included the confidential information, betraying his agreement. Tess had travelled to Brisbane that day and was unaware of the distress the report had caused, was unable to defend her reputation or offer an apology to those damaged by the publicity. Harrison evaded his responsibility in the matter, and any attempt by Tess to repair the damage failed. Tess realised the President was untrustworthy yet continued to work with the team in order to represent the wishes and views of the Cubawee community.

As a result of the press coverage which the leaked information triggered, in early 1962, the Chief Secretary of the AWB, Mr Kelly, announced that £32,000 would be allocated for housing subject to land being made available outside the city limits on Wyrallah Road. The LCC had bought an area of land at Wyrallah Road from the Gundurimba Shire for a new sewage treatment works, and so the AWB approached LCC offering to purchase two acres of the site for the resettlement of Cubawee.

The announcement of this decision caused widespread opposition by local residents culminating in a large public meeting being held to oppose this plan. *The hall was overflowing and extreme racial views were openly expressed. In the course of the uproar, one man emotionally stated, “I will have to give up my job to stay home to protect my wife and children.”* 281

After protests by the residents of Wyrallah Road and the LCC’s decision not to sell the land, the situation was still unresolved. 282 Cubawee residents were also against the proposed site. 283

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Heather Goodall recognises that ‘entrenched resistance to residential desegregation was so powerful that the Welfare Board, in one situation after another, failed to penetrate rural residential segregation.’ Thus, the AWB became the legitimator of that segregation, consistently resolving disputes by yielding to town opposition. ‘Rural whites found that the Welfare Board could be relied upon to keep Aborigines out of town.’

At a tense and crowded meeting of the LAAL, held at the Gundurimba Shire Council rooms, one of the Cubawee men stood to voice his opinion on the Wyrallah Road site. The President, who had supported the site all along and had rescinded his support in light of the white opposition, disregarded the speaker saying, “Sit down, we know what’s good for you!” Understandably, the meeting ended in turmoil and a special meeting of the LAAL was later held at the Cubawee School.

It was at this meeting that a motion to contact national bodies and agencies about the contaminated water was put by Tess which was overwhelmingly supported by the Cubawee residents. The decision was then made to contact numerous national organisations and their affiliations acting in the interests of Aborigines by letter, which not only explained the untenable water supply at Cubawee, but urged these organisations to contact the State Health Minister and the AWB by a certain date, demanding they take action. Tess remembers, we had been asking the Health Minister and the Board’s representatives to visit Cubawee for two years. After they were inundated with the responses from the letters we had sent, they arrived on the next train from Sydney. They were looking for faults in the list of the conditions. I knew I had to get every detail of every point correct so that there could be no denial or accusation of misrepresentation.

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286 Ibid.
The Minister for Health demanded that the AWB take immediate action to remedy the situation at Cubawee. This led to the AWB issuing an ultimatum to LCC: “Submit a suitable site or the Board itself will resume an area.” The resumption of land was an option the AWB had the power to do all along. This ultimatum forced a negotiated agreement between the LCC and Gundurimba Council. At a site, situated on a boundary line separating their respective areas, six houses were to be constructed in Gundurimba shire with water, electricity and sewerage services to be supplied by LCC. This AWB-LCC final decision on a town site meant that Cubawee residents had to decide their future.

Roberts (Senior) opposed any town move, continuing his long struggle with the AWB for an area of higher land situated behind Cubawee, currently controlled by the PPB. He proposed the exchange of Cubawee for 30 acres of this land. Local farmers objected stating that if the higher ground was given away, there would be nowhere for cattle in flood time. The PPB also opposed the idea as it had ‘installed hundreds of pounds worth of fencing, piping and troughs on the hillside land [which] would have to be removed if an exchange were approved.’

Aware that the school would soon be closed and with no bus transport to town schools, the residents realised there was no future for them at Cubawee. Nevertheless, they rejected the policy of enforced assimilation, ‘pepperpotting’, as they feared moving into a hostile white environment, wanting instead to move together as a community.

The LAAL held a special meeting at the Cubawee School, to discuss the Aboriginal peoples’ decision. After weeks of often divisive and emotional discussion about cutting ties from the place that was home, and which had

given them recognition of their independent identity as an Aboriginal community, the enormity of that decision can only be imagined. When the time came to vote, it took great courage for those who raised their hands, which in effect, signalled their support for the motion to close Cubawee and move as a community to Gundurimba. The motion was passed with a majority decision.

Those who had not already left Cubawee to live in the white community were relocated to the new houses at Gundurimba in 1964. While these were a substantial improvement to the houses at Cubawee, when the AWB pushed through the closure and completely revoked the reserve, a sense of loss of connection to land and identity was left among people who had been struggling for so long to stay on their land.²⁸⁸

Even though the families moved into the new houses at Gundurimba, Tess expected the LAAL to continue offering support to the former residents. The President though, stated that the committee had been formed to eradicate the ‘blot’ of Cubawee and as that had been achieved, the committee was no longer needed and would disband. Tess refused to stop working with Aboriginal people, attending meetings on reserves, representing and resolving issues, at their request.

After years of campaigning by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists, advocating for Aboriginal causes, the NSW Government was forced to hold a Select Committee Inquiry into the AWB in 1966 which condemned the Board, largely because it had not been assimilationist enough. The Inquiry signalled the end of the AWB with its functions transferred to departments such as the Housing Commission and Child

²⁸⁸ Goodall, Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972., 318.
Welfare Department, and the rhetoric of ‘integration’ was adopted signalling that political activism had made an impact.²⁸⁹

When asked about her activism, Tess replied, *Well, once you’re aware, it’s hard...hard to shut off...and the situation changes...you’d have to work totally differently if you were involved today and that’s the good part about it, the Aborigines themselves...they were always doing things themselves, but they were up against that Board and I like to think that I was part of that movement that did away with the Board.*²⁹⁰

What has been written above serves as a précis of Tess Brill’s years of working with Aboriginal people. To detail every situation in which she fought for the rights of Aboriginal people, every meeting she attended, instances where she tried to explain an Indigenous worldview to a white audience or the many issues she was involved in is not possible within this space. Instead I will present a particular story, in her own words, which I believe epitomises Tess Brill’s tenacity, her principles and her strength of character.

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An Exemplary Act

In order to test the strength of the current one has to first enter the water and attempt to swim against it – I discovered I was a strong swimmer!

Tess Brill ²⁹¹

The Aboriginal people phoned me one evening...Terribly upset...one of the young men...He’d been working all day...arrived home...about 20 minutes later the Police came and arrested him for stealing and took him away. This is at Woodenbong. There’d been a robbery at the local club...and whiskey and beer...was missing. This had happened a couple of days before the phone call...When the family wanted to know where they’d taken him to, the Police wouldn’t tell them. They thought he was in Casino...until another Aborigine who was in Casino Gaol had returned to Woodenbong and...[said] that the young man had been beaten up...he described how he’d heard what had gone on and he believed he’d been taken down to Grafton Gaol. Now Grafton was to be feared...it was terrible. This is what they’d heard and he was not guilty and they didn’t know what had happened to him. So I got the phone call “Would I come across?” So, “OK” I went across.

They had little hope on their own if they were dealing with authority. I learnt, and I think they learnt too, if you had the support of a white person it was a different issue. So what I used to do was get them to explain it all...find out consecutively what had happened...when I was sure that I’d got all the information, they’d say “Well, what can we do about it?” and I’d tell them what they could do. And the first thing they’d say is “Well, will you come with us?” - “OK.” So that’s what we did.

²⁹¹ Tess Brill personal correspondence to the author, April 21, 2009.
But, I used to do my own thing as well. I went around to the local solicitor in Casino, a very religious man, and a supporter of the CAAL. I put the case to him and asked, “Would you make some enquiries?” And his reply was, like most of them, “I’ve got to live in this town. I won’t touch it.” Even though he was so involved with [Aborigines], when it came to an issue, he couldn’t do it...He said “It would be more than my reputation, my business.”

So we were on our own...I explained to the family “Well look, I can ask for you but you’re the mother, you’re the aunts” And explained that “It’s OK for you to ask this question. It’s quite within your right to ask this question.”- “So, you’ll be there Mrs Brill?” - “Yes I’ll be there, but you’ve got to ask, it’s your son, you can ask. You’re not doing anything wrong.” - “OK.” So they went in [to Casino Police Station] and they asked and there’d be...a dismissal...“Can’t tell you,”...“No information,”...And then I’d ask the question. “No...[the Casino police] didn’t know where he was either.”

I’d heard on the radio about the Law Reform Society...They try to change unjust laws. I made phone calls. There was a Mr St John...Sinjin it’s pronounced. I went down to Sydney to see him at his office in Macquarie Street. I was shown into his office up in Macquarie Street, he listened to the story and then with a polite smile said, “I think you have the wrong Mr St John...it’s my brother you need to speak to.”- So I found the right Mr St John’s office...of course these weren’t ordinary solicitors...I was in the league of ‘silks’...He listened to it all and he said, “I’ll make enquiries...and I’ll contact you.” - “What do I do in the meantime?” He said, “You talk to the Aboriginal people and get as many facts as you can.” I heard from him later to say, “Yes, they had decided to take on the case and they would [represent him].” The Police were on the defensive...so they had a top ‘silk’ too.

The family received word that their son was in Casino Gaol and would be released. We waited in the car for him...[at] Casino Police Station and when he came out, he had a swollen eye, he’d lost a tooth and he had a swollen
jaw...So, on my recommendation, they had photographs taken as evidence... Anyhow the outcome was a court case in Casino Court House... And I had to appear in the witness box...

Before we went into the courtroom the barrister asked, “Do you still want to go in? It’s not too late for you to pull out if you don’t want to give evidence?” and I said, “Well, I don’t want to give evidence...but if it means to bring a bit of justice that’s needed I’m prepared to.” He said, “Do you realise what you’re doing? You’re getting involved with police here.” And I said, “I know that. The only thing I worry about is my family... but this is peace time, we live in a democracy and if I’m not prepared to take a stand when it’s needed, there’s no point. You know, when or how will things change?”

Anyhow the police got two men... who gave evidence against the young man. I spoke the truth as I knew it... but according to the Aboriginal people, those two men were well-known local drinkers... they were well dressed and presentable for the day to give evidence and their evidence was believed.

After the case was over, we stood outside the courthouse and the barrister said, that if I was agreeable, he’d recommend I be made an Honorary Member of the Law Reform Society. I said, “I don’t think I did that much.” I wasn’t in it for any personal aggrandisement. We lost the case anyhow. A few months [later] the Aboriginal people showed me a little notice in the paper... “See this Mrs Brill, they’re the two men who gave evidence”... they were up on drink charges and it verified what they said - [that the police] just got these two men as witnesses. So it shows you what goes on... they’re just the things that happened.”

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Long after recovering from my illness...I attended a meeting [organised by Pastor Frank Roberts Junior]...the hall was packed and I remember thinking “This is wonderful” because my first experiences...with the Aboriginal people, whenever a meeting or function was held, all the white people occupied the front seats and the Aboriginal people were a small group at the back. And here was a hall full of Aboriginal people with a handful of white people at the back and I thought, “How times have changed!”

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Terms such as *anti-colonial acts* and *decolonisation* did not exist in the 1950s. It must be acknowledged that Tess Brill would never articulate her experiences in the theoretical language of postcolonialism. She judged assimilation to be inherently unjust and it was the recognition of a system which promoted the creation of 'lesser beings' which stimulated Tess Brill to reflect on her society, to reject its premise of equality through assimilation and her subsequent years of activism which may be understood to be the result of a mind engaged in an ongoing process of decolonisation. It is this process which connects her story to the postcolonial landscape of today as she is exemplary of someone who worked to decolonise spaces.

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4: Decolonising Spaces

...the justification of the neighbour’s pain is certainly the source of all immorality
Emmanuel Levinas

The gap of Indigenous disadvantage ‘diminishes all of Australia, not only the...communities in which it is most apparent.’\textsuperscript{295} Yet, as Boyd Hunter’s study concludes, ‘it is not sufficient to measure the various aspects of disadvantage...we need to understand the pathways into [it] and the evolution of more sustainable positive outcomes.’\textsuperscript{296}

While historical pathways have been considered within this thesis, the gap of disadvantage has been regarded instead as a metaphorical gap of disconnect in order to extend the debates concerning postcolonial conditions, Indigenous-settler relations and decolonisation, and making a contribution to the evolution of more positive outcomes.

There is a history of policies which have been directed at Indigenous Australians: segregation, protection, assimilation, integration, reconciliation and the latest, intervention. This thesis suggests it is time for a meaningful directive for non-Indigenous Australians: decolonisation – interpreted as a process of reflexivity. Considering decolonisation a necessary development, Deborah Bird Rose observes that

\textit{The process of decolonising modern settler societies is a new phenomenon; we have no models from the past to guide us. It is equally a dialogical project; we cannot theorise in advance just how it will happen and still be}

\textsuperscript{294} Cited in Rose, \textit{Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation}, 7.
\textsuperscript{295} Ken Henry cited in Dillon and Westbury, \textit{Beyond Humbug: Transforming Government Engagement with Indigenous Australia}, 175.
committed to openness. We have to work it out step by step dialogically with and among each other. If it happens at all, it will unfold in real time, and will be shaped by the Indigenous, ‘old’ settler, and recent migrant peoples who share the here and the now of our homelands.²⁹⁷

This thesis has therefore argued that decolonisation necessarily involves a willingness to engage more openly and honestly with our national, regional and personal histories, creating a space from which it is possible to recognise ongoing and embedded structural imbalances which persist in what may certainly be regarded as a postcolonial site. Consequently, it has interwoven the national history of occupation of this land and the project of assimilation, aspects of the regional history of Lismore on the Far North Coast of NSW, and its connections to the personal history of pro-Aboriginal rights activist Tess Brill.

By exploring the colonial history of Australia and the inherent attitudes which conditioned the status of the colony which was established, I have shown how a societal structural imbalance was created through a disconnect between ways of knowing. Through examining the policy of assimilation, its paradoxes and its corollary, the ideology of assimilationism, I have explained how a system of thinking, which perpetuates the structural imbalances in our society, maintains the ongoing ‘gaps’ between Australians today.

By reflecting on the life of Tess Brill, I have come to understand a way of thinking about these imbalances and found that by re-viewing the local encounters between whites and Aborigines in the 1950s, there is value in looking at our society from an ‘other’ perspective. Moreover, regarding Tess Brill’s activism as anti-colonial, offers the possibility of change. Thus, ‘The Exemplary Life of Tess Brill’s Activism’, while seemingly ambiguous, supports the contention that her activism does in fact have a ‘life’. Not only

does her activism, based on an open and honest dialogue with Indigenous people represent ‘practical humanity’, but her history serves as a model for engaging in self-reflexivity and has the potential to move people to think about their world. Her activism cannot be replicated. Anti-colonial acts can, though, and by necessity should, take many and varied forms. Thus, it becomes an individual project for all non-Indigenous Australians to consider how to engage in a process of decolonisation, accepting that this is not an achievable state, rather an ongoing and valuable process of negotiating cultural change.

In Beyond White Guilt Sarah Maddison, recognising that it is up to the individual, not the government to create change, refers to this process as an ‘adaptive challenge’ imploring Australians to read books on Australian history, to find out about our past, entreating us to take an unflinching look at ourselves.298 This aligns with Constantino’s thinking that

> the development of an adequate form of historical consciousness, in place of the mystifying false consciousness, is vital to any radical critique of the prevailing structures of domination...the quest for self-identity is, therefore, inseparably also a radical revision of colonial-inspired historiography and the reorientation of historical consciousness towards asserting the interests of the dominated people.”299

Therefore this thesis serves as a point from which to explore the various social, political and conscious conditions under which the possibility for change can take place and frameworks in which decolonisation may be applied. Engaging with this project has meant exploring historical Australian spaces through my own decolonising lens of reflexivity and I have learnt

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299 Constantino, Neocolonial Identity and Counter Consciousness, 4.
many things about the white Australian culture which I am historically, genealogically and morally connected to. I have also come to see that what is written in the mountain of Tibrogargan still holds a message for us today: that if we look to the sea, turn our backs on the people and the land, then we too are lost and nowhere.
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