

book review

**Interrogating Rurality in Settler-Societies**

**Place, Identity and Culture**

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David L. Brown and Kai A. Schaft

*Rural People and Communities in the Twenty-first Century: Resilience and Transformation*

Polity, Cambridge and Malden, 2011

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RRP US\$26.95 (pb)

Rob Garbutt

*The Locals: Identity, Place and Belonging in Australia and Beyond*

Peter Lang, Oxford, Bern, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Wien, 2011

ISBN 9783034301541

RRP US\$60.95 (pb)

—RURAL CULTURAL STUDIES

Research that questions predetermined beliefs about rural people and communities, and seeks to understand anew the dynamic cultures of rural places—which we

might characterise as ‘rural cultural studies’—is a burgeoning area of scholarship. Australia has been a fruitful site for its development. While using the moniker ‘rural cultural studies’, it is imperative to point out that this is in fact a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field of inquiry, drawing insights and outputs from, inter alia, cultural studies, human geography, history, anthropology, sociology, gender studies and media studies. The last few years in Australia have seen the publication of a growing number of authored books, edited collections and special journal issues (including an issue of this very journal, in 2010) on the concerns of rural cultural studies.<sup>1</sup>

The two books reviewed here contribute to this corpus of work; Garbutt’s *The Locals* more directly and Brown and Schaft’s *Rural People and Communities in the Twenty-first Century* arguably more laterally, but nevertheless with useful insights into the connections between rurality, place, identity and community. These two books have quite different origins, forms, aims, audiences and contexts, but are connected through their critical interrogation of ‘the rural’ and what rurality means in everyday life, particularly with regard to complex senses of place, identity and culture. Moreover, from a cultural geographical perspective, both make a distinct and allied contribution to scholarship in rural cultural studies by discussing the particular nuances of rural lives and communities in settler-societies: in Brown and Schaft’s case, the United States; in Garbutt’s, Australia. Together, they help us to understand the particular exigencies of ‘settler rurality’, including the impact on Indigenous peoples and cultures. In this review, I first discuss Brown and Schaft, which is arguably a broader treatise in terms of thematic content, and then turn to Garbutt’s powerfully reflective take on rurality and ‘localism’.

—SETTLER RURALITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Brown and Schaft’s *Rural People and Communities in the Twenty-first Century: Resilience and Transformation* is located in the discipline of sociology, and focuses specifically on the context of the United States, while also considering the implications of international connections for that country’s rural areas. It is primarily a textbook for university students and policymakers, but this certainly does not diminish its usefulness to researchers and other interested readers. Brown

and Schaft write well, with an excellent balance of theoretical discussion and empirical examples (albeit US-centric case studies). As a sociology text, *Rural People and Communities in the Twenty-first Century* concentrates on social structures, particularly questions of production and the economy, socioeconomic effects, class divisions, income differentials and rural poverty. Accordingly, the text interweaves cultural practices—or ‘ways of life’—with structural bases, with specific reference to rural regions in the United States. Within and through these sociological overtones, the linking of everyday rural life to structural imperatives should be of interest to cultural researchers. Brown and Shaft bring analytical attention to the cultural outcomes of social and economic structures, including both constraints on, and the restive dynamism of, rural ‘ways of life’. What this book does within its sociological remit, it generally does well.

The eleven chapters are divided into five sections. The first, ‘Thinking about rural places in a metropolitan society’, comprises two chapters which outline the context for understanding rural lives, livelihoods and communities in the twenty-first century. This context is at once political, social and conceptual: Brown and Schaft discuss ‘the rural’ in relation to ongoing urbanisation nationally (in the United States) and globally, provocatively asking, ‘If the world is so highly urbanized, why should we care about rural people and communities, particularly in metropolitan societies such as the United States?’ (3) The answer, established by the end of Chapter One, and developed throughout the book, is multi-layered. On the one hand, rural areas vitally contribute to national social and economic wellbeing, encompassing most of the land, water and mineral resources in developed countries, and underpinning food and energy security (this is as true of Australia as the United States). On the other hand, we should be concerned for the sake of rural populations, since ‘where one lives affects one’s life chances as well as one’s personal identity’. (13) This first section also surveys ways of defining ‘the rural’. While acknowledging that this is an inevitably relational imaginary and experience vis-à-vis ‘the urban’, Brown and Shaft move away from conceiving of ‘the rural’ as a residual category of ‘the urban’. They do this by layering demographic, locational, economic, institutional and socio-cultural dimensions to understand rurality—and by extension urban/rural relations—as multiple and ever-changing.

Part 2 examines 'Rural communities, institutions, and environments', with one chapter for each of these domains. Chapter Three covers 'rural communities' and provides an exceptionally lucid discussion of competing theories of rural social change, including concepts of 'social networks', 'social capital' and 'social exclusion', and the boundaries, borders and stratification of 'community power'. Brown and Shaft clearly explain the similarities and differences between the approaches, where they diverge, intersect and/or complement. This chapter is an excellent resource for researchers as well as students. Chapter Four, on 'rural institutions', turns to governance in a federal structure, encompassing school and health systems alongside local government, and broaching questions of decentralisation and privatisation. While the focus is the United States, the discussion is relevant to Australia's and Canada's federal systems, too. Chapter Five, on 'rural environments', is one of the most interesting—and certainly one of most timely—discussions in the volume. Here, Brown and Schaft explore the diverse roles of natural resources in rural development and underdevelopment, historically and today, covering: farming; amenity and tourism; resource extraction and mining booms; traditional (such as coal and timber) and green (such as wind and biofuels) energy extraction; and the problems raised by these competing demands, including narrow economic bases, casual labour markets, pollution and NIMBY/BANANA politics.<sup>2</sup>

Part 3, on 'Rural populations', is narrow but informative. Chapter Six covers 'youth, ageing and the life course'. Youth out-migration and population ageing are significant issues for the social, cultural and economic sustainability of rural areas across the world, not just in the United States, so this discussion will resonate widely with research and policy needs. However, I found Chapter Seven, on 'racial and ethnic minorities in rural areas', more interesting. While rural areas in developed countries are often imagined as monolithically 'white', Brown and Shaft illuminate the diverse ethnic and racial geographies of the rural US. This includes focused discussion of African American, American Indian and Latino populations in, and experiences of, rural areas. This begins to draw in the insights and interests of scholarship in critical race, postcolonial and migration studies. Brown and Schaft explore the diverse and dynamic relationships racial and ethnic (so-called) 'minorities' have to rural imaginaries and spaces in the United States. This is a chapter that begins to come to grips with the specific dimensions of rurality in

settler-societies, embedded in the postcolonial politics of dispossession and diaspora, which throws up a range of challenges for 'white settler rurality' and claims of belonging.

Part 4 considers 'Rural economy and socioeconomic wellbeing'. Chapter Eight examines industrial, occupational and labour force restructuring in the rural United States, including shifts in local-global linkages and deregulation, and the impact on the lives of rural people, such as under-employment, informal economies and commuting patterns. Chapter Nine is similar, but focuses on farm restructuring and the effects on farming families. Chapter Ten is an excellent and important take on rural poverty, which critiques and marries structural and cultural (individual/behavioural) explanations. Here, Brown and Schaft present qualitative data, alongside quantitative measures and statistics, to show poverty is not just about income, but access and insecurity; poverty is social and cultural, not just economic. Part 5 concludes the volume, and includes an informative discussion of the rural digital divide of interest to cultural and media researchers.

This is a comprehensive book on rural lives and livelihoods in the US, but there are some gaps. There is a notable lack of depth on gender and sexuality in rural areas; these are growing topics in rural cultural studies.<sup>3</sup> 'Homosexuality' is included once, in a list about 'racial' cleansing under Nazism on page 123, while discussion of gender is restricted to women (there is no mention of masculinities) and is then further limited to socioeconomic issues like labour force participation (155-6), poverty differentials (194-5) and the dual burden of farmers' wives who increasingly work off-farm to sustain 'farm income' while still doing domestic work. (179) Other examples of 'gendering' and 'sexing' the rural are missing: feminist and lesbian separatism and women's lands; marriage, farming families and reproduction; 'country girls' and morality; masculine 'pioneer' imaginaries; gender and agricultural management; and lesbian and gay rural experiences.<sup>4</sup> Some deeper consideration of gender and sexuality would further enrich Brown and Schaft's otherwise informative discussion of rural people and communities in the contemporary United States.

Rob Garbutt's *The Locals: Identity, Place and Belonging in Australia and Beyond* is a very different book, and arguably even more concerned with understanding the particular cultural constructions of rurality in settler-societies. *The Locals* is part of Peter Lang's Cultural Identities Studies Series, and was developed from Garbutt's PhD project. It is, accordingly, a scholarly monograph addressing a specific thesis, and does not seek to provide, as Brown and Schaft attempt to, a comprehensive treatment of rural economy, society and culture. Rather than breadth of coverage, Garbutt aims for depth of insight: the objective of *The Locals* is to address the question: 'What concepts and ideas inform the processes Australian settlers have undertaken to install themselves as "local" or "original", thereby displacing Aborigines?'(2) Garbutt interrogates processes of 'becoming local', or 'being local', with particular conceptual and empirical reference to rural and regional Australia, and specifically to Lismore and the north coast region of New South Wales. *The Locals* is thus connected to *Rural People and Communities in the Twenty-first Century* through a parallel, but more geographically and culturally focused, consideration of how rurality, place and identity are interwoven in settler-societies.

Picking up the question offered above, Garbutt's focus is on white settler processes of localism and belonging vis-à-vis Indigenous populations who were spatially dispossessed and discursively excluded from their own claims to 'being local'. Through exploring the possible answers to his question, Garbutt proposes the idea of 'white "autochthony" as enabling that transformation from the roles of invader, colonist and settler to the role of "being a local"'. (205) 'White autochthony', or 'settler indigenisation', is a discourse permeating settler-societies (the United States as well as Australia) that elides the historical reality of Anglo-Celtic population as immigrants, and allows them to see themselves as 'born of the Australian soil', (202) or local born-and-bred. It could be seen as a discursive 'sleight-of-mind' whereby 'the forebears of the locals are remembered as settlers not as migrants', (207) thus enabling present generations to conceive of themselves as 'locals'. In the process, Indigenous peoples are 'cleared' from the spatial imaginary of the land—from terra localis (199)—and placed in an ambiguous position regarding the politics of local identity: they are 'too local to be local', (92)<sup>5</sup> and characterised by terms like 'local Aborigine'. In articulating this argument, Garbutt demonstrates

the multi-scalar purchase of 'local' discourse and identity politics, which imbricates belonging to a specific rural region in northern New South Wales and belonging to the Australian nation. Local processes work across, and draw together, multiple scales of constructed, but nonetheless powerful, belonging.

*The Locals* is exquisitely written; its seven chapters (plus an introduction) demonstrate the author's scrupulous self-reflection, conceptual vigour and breadth, and methodological diversity and depth. Regular readers of *Cultural Studies Review* will already be familiar with Garbutt's work: a 'modified and condensed version' of Chapter One, 'Within and Beyond the Clearing', was published in a 2010 issue of the journal. Together with the introduction, this chapter provides the context. 'The Clearing' works at multiple levels, tying local events and places in northern New South Wales with theoretical possibilities; it combines local history—clearing the land and Indigenous population—with a conceptual space for illumination and encounter: Heidegger's *Lichtung*, or lighted clearing. With the space prepared, Chapter Two, 'Local Geographic', examines 'the local' as a linguistic and geographical concept, including a discussion of the scale politics that make 'local' an expansive and flexible device. While chapters one and two examine 'the local' as a site, Chapter Three, 'The Locals: A Critical Review of Literature', surveys scholarship about 'local identity'.

Chapter Four, 'The Local Word', begins the detailed empirical work on 'being a local' in northern NSW, initiating a critical language study of the use of the word 'local' in written texts in the region, with a particular focus on Lismore's local daily newspaper, the *Northern Star*, between 2003 and 2005 (while also utilising other sources). Garbutt discusses various interpretations of expressions of localism—including propinquity, country mindedness, property and kinship—and adds his own twist by considering 'race as a factor in localism', with specific attention to Aborigines. (147) This study is continued in chapters five and six, which explain 'how this local language functions and is organised'. (107) Chapter Five, 'Becoming local: white on white', analyses how whiteness is marked as local, and marks local places, in northern New South Wales, while enrolling Aborigines as objects of fear and subjects to be disciplined. Chapter Six provides a detailed discussion of 'White autochthony'—as I iterated above—as a frame for explaining 'settler localism' in northern New South Wales and Australia more generally.

Chapter Seven, 'Towards an ethics of location', draws the threads together and moves them forward. Rather than concluding, this chapter pushes beyond the book's initial aims to question the validity of local claims—or rather to contest the exclusivity of such claims, made as they are in a context of dispossession, but which also ignore the more-than-local connections, relationships and places that necessarily construct 'local places'. This last argument draws on key conceptualisations in human geography (from Doreen Massey, for instance) about place as the particular but unstable intersection of a proliferation more-than-local flows of people, ideas, materials and relations. Places are not only constructed and mutable, but are fundamentally extra-local, always connected beyond their own imagined borders, and fabricated out of flows that come from 'beyond'. The white discourse of 'settler', rather than 'migrant', elides their origin elsewhere and occludes the relationality of places. Garbutt tentatively calls for an 'ethics of location ... directed towards a post-settler understanding of this place. That is, a place where being an Anglo-Celtic settler Australian is disarticulated from current unities such as native-born or being local.' (217)

*The Locals* is a challenging analysis of rurality and race relations in a settler-society. Given its specific and meticulous interrogation of 'white localism', it is difficult to suggest any missing pieces. Future work could address intersections of 'white localism' and 'settler rurality' with other axes of subjectivity, such as gender and sexuality, which are fundamental to constructions of Australian identity and to rural particularities. Garbutt acknowledges these cross-cutting categories, placing them 'beyond the scope of this analysis'. (147) A range of literature in cultural studies, human geography, rural studies and other disciplines has demonstrated that experiences of 'place', 'belonging' and 'home' (key terms in *The Locals*) are vitally informed by gender and sexuality (and class, age, and so on).<sup>6</sup> This would be a rich vein for further analysis.

Despite their different aims, audiences, approaches and geographical contexts, together Brown and Schaft's *Rural People and Communities in the Twenty-first Century* and Garbutt's *The Locals* begin to provide a composite picture of 'settler rurality'. The authors convey the diversity of 'the rural' in contemporary Western societies. They articulate how 'settler rurality' is connected to and informed by 'rural ideals' in Britain and Europe, but how it also diverges from the 'continental rural



idyll'. Post-colonial, diasporic and migrant imprints are key to this difference, and point towards the particular interweaving of rurality, place, identity and community in settler-societies.

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Lia Bryant and Barbara Pini, *Gender and Rurality*, Routledge, New York and London, 2011; David Carter, Kate Darian-Smith and Andrew Gorman-Murray (eds), 'Rural Cultural Studies', *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 45, 2008, pp. 27-96; John Connell and Phill McManus, *Rural Revival? Place Marketing, Tree Change and Regional Migration in Australia*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2011; Catherine Driscoll, *The Australian Country Girl*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2012; Chris Gibson (ed), *Creativity in Peripheral Places: Redefining the Creative Industries*, Routledge, New York and London, 2011; Chris Gibson and John Connell (eds), *Festival Places: Revitalising Rural Australia*, Channel View Publications, Bristol, Buffalo and Toronto, 2011; Ray Goodlass (ed), 'Arts and Culture in Rural, Regional and Remote Australia', *Rural Society*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2003, pp. 221-344; Andrew Gorman-Murray (ed), 'Country', *M/C Journal: A Journal of Media and Culture*, vol. 11, no. 5, online at <http://journal.media-culture.org.au>; Stuart Lockie and Lisa Bourke (eds), *Rurality Bites: the Social and Environmental Transformation of Rural Australia*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 2001; Emily Potter, Andrew Gorman-Murray and Clifton Evers (eds), 'Rural Cultural Studies: Research, Practice, Ethics', *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2010, pp. 3-176; plus regular articles in the journal *Rural Society* that could be categorised as rural cultural studies.

<sup>2</sup> Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) and Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anyone (BANANA).

<sup>3</sup> For example: Bryant and Pini; Hugh Campbell, Michael Mayerfield Bell and Margaret Finney (eds), *Country Boys: Masculinity and Rural Life*, Pennsylvania UP, University Park, 2006; Andrew Gorman-Murray, Barbara Pini and Lia Bryant (eds), *Sexuality, Rurality, and Geography*, Lexington, Lanham, 2012 (forthcoming); Mary Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*, NYUP, New York and London, 2009; Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*, NYUP, New York and London, 2010; Jo Little, *Gender and Rural Geography*, Pearson, Harlow, 2002; Richard Phillips,

Dianne Watt and David Shuttleton (eds), *De-Centring Sexualities: Politics and Representations beyond the Metropolis*, Routledge, London, 2000; Barbara Pini, *Masculinities and Management in Agricultural Organizations Worldwide*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> For research in these areas, see Sine Anahita, 'Nestled into Niches: Prefigurative Communities on Lesbian Land', *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 56, no. 6, 2009, 719–37; Bryant and Pini; Driscoll; Campbell, Bell and Finney; Pini; Gray; Herring.

<sup>5</sup> Citing Katrina Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, Curtin University Books, Fremantle, 2005, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> See note 3 for some examples.