

Review

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Rob Garbutt. *The Locals: Identity, Place and Belonging in Australia and Beyond*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2011

The Locals is a timely book that examines the increasingly important territory of the identity of Australia as a country with a colonial past, and as a country that is at a point in history in which debates over Indigenous sovereignty and asylum seekers are ever-increasingly the focus of political and media debates. In *The Locals*, Garbutt examines in detail what it means to be 'local', and importantly, who is identified as 'local' and who is not. As such, Garbutt examines core issues of what it means to be seen as 'belonging' in Australia, including what that means for Indigenous Australians. In his examination, Garbutt includes a range of perspectives on the word local, including the history of the word itself, an examination of the way the word is used both internationally and in Australia, and an analysis of how the 'local' appears in the mainstream news media. Garbutt then explicitly addresses the racial implications of the word local in terms of how it serves to naturalise 'locals' (in the case of Australia – white Australians). In addressing the concept of 'local' from across these differing view-points, Garbutt takes the reader on a journey regarding their own understandings of being 'local' and intertwines this with his own experiences of attachment to a place that were unsettled by the experience of recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and the fact that his 'local-ness' was dependent upon the dispossession of Indigenous Australians.

In the first chapter of the text, Gargutt introduces the reader to the topic through a subjective description of his feelings of belonging to the place around which he centres his examination of 'local'; Lisbon, on the far north coast of New South Wales in Australia. This chapter serves to orient the reader immediately to the subjective aspects of being local, and, importantly, allows Garbutt to acknowledge his location in Australia as a white male, and therefore as writing from a subjective view-point rather than an strictly 'authoritative one'. This chapter is important since the rest of the book, whilst acknowledging the positioning of Indigenous Australians within debates over who is 'local', only infrequently engages with Indigenous view-points about what the word local may mean for them and their relationships with the land. Despite this, however Garbutt acknowledges the role of the book as problematizing and rendering explicit white or settler understandings of 'local', without attempting to speak on behalf of Indigenous Australians. Indeed, rather than speaking on behalf of Indigenous Australians, Garbutt engages with a variety of Indigenous scholarship critiquing white

claims to belonging, and in doing so, ensures that such claims are unsettled by Indigenous Australians discussions of their experiences of dispossession at the hands of white Australians.

The next two chapters of the book consider definitions of 'local', including a history and etymology of the word itself and an examination of some international literature in the area. These chapters serve to highlight the complexity of the term, and to identify ways in which the word 'local' is frequently used in conflicting ways – to occasionally denote dominance and ownership over the land, and to occasionally be used pejoratively as an indication of those upon whom dominant groups gaze. Interestingly, these chapters also include an examination of the differences between 'local' and 'national' as sites of ownership of the nation-state, an important discussion in light of recent focuses on the meaning and place of nationalism (Billig; O'Doherty & Augoustinos).

Chapter 4 of the book turns to an analysis of newspaper representations of 'local', and in doing so begins to highlight some of the dominant ways in which the word is used within Australian discourse. Of particular interest is Garbutt's argument that within these texts 'local' becomes an effective rhetorical device to appeal to a typically conservative 'authenticity'. Through claiming the right to speak for a place on the basis of being local, those arguing for the *status quo* are able to stake a claim in a place whilst defending against wider cultural change. Importantly (and perhaps relatedly), Garbutt also discusses the fact that in his analysis, the word 'local' (as an adjective) is rarely or never applied to Indigenous Australians – that is, there is never a 'local Aborigine' within the news media he considered. In fact, he argues, as Katrina Schlunke does, that Indigenous Australians are seen as "too local to be local" (Schlunke 43), by their very presence unsettling conceptualisations of white Australians as truly local.

Following from this chapter, Chapters 5 and 6 turn to a focus on the word 'local' as reserved for white Australians, and thus address an important aspect of the broader issue of being 'local' – that of being seen to belong in, or claim a sense of ownership of, an Australia that is conceptualised as a white country. Here, Garbutt again discusses his own experiences of whiteness and being white in Lismore, arguing that within this space, whiteness – though unmarked – was actively constructed as the norm through a continual engagement with practices seen as coherent with 'whiteness'. Here Garbutt briefly engages with the extensive literature on whiteness theory, although does not propose a definition of whiteness *per se*. Garbutt then extends this analysis to a broader discussion of the process of indigenisation of settlers, examining a number of different colonial examples. In particular, Garbutt discusses the concept of autochthony, arguing that this process of claiming a legitimate relationship to the land has a growing significance in the present day. In Australia, such claims to 'being sprung from the land' are fundamentally based on the dispossession of Indigenous Australians, and as such Garbutt argues that autochthony for settler (white) Australians is therefore based on the premise of forgetting both Indigenous Australians and the original settler status of white Australians. In a brief discussion of the Cronulla riots of 2005, Garbutt also examines the concept of white autochthony in relation to white and non-white Australians. Whilst not explicated further, this discussion of autochthony and its relationship to whiteness in Australia also provides a useful standpoint through which to examine the claims to

'local' made by white Australians that are not similarly extended to non-white, non-Indigenous Australians.

Finally, and with a caveat in relation to the relationship of Indigenous Australians to Australia, Garbutt examines what he terms an "ethics of location" – in which locals examine the movement which has brought them to the place they now claim belonging to, and which they engage with other forms of being local. In this final chapter, Garbutt argues that being local is a complex process, and one which requires an ongoing examination of the relationship of oneself with both the area in question and with a broader community of people. Such an argument is particularly pertinent in light of debates in Australia over Australia's role in settling asylum seekers (often those for whom there is no 'local', or for whom their 'local' is no longer safe), and in global responsibilities for those in developing countries. Garbutt's unsettling of the meaning of local therefore enables us to think about the local as a way of connecting with other people ethically and responsibly.

Works Cited

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