



PERGAMON

Journal of Rural Studies 17 (2001) 309–322

JOURNAL OF  
RURAL STUDIES

www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud

# The Exclusive Brethren and an Australian rural community

Matthew Tonts\*

*Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 100 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup, WA 6027, Australia*

## Abstract

This paper examines the history, theology and geography of the Christian sect known as the Exclusive Brethren. This sect emerged as a result of discontent within the Church of England in Ireland during the 1820s and has gradually spread throughout much of the developed world. Central to the beliefs of the Exclusive Brethren is that they should separate from the perceived evils and corruption of the wider world. Traditionally, this involved a social and spiritual separation from those outside of the sect. More recently, however, reinterpretations of the scriptures and the emergence of a more permissive morality outside the movement have led members of the Exclusive Brethren in Australia to pursue a more physical separation. Members of the sect have attempted to achieve this spatial separation by settling in a few small, relatively remote communities in rural Australia. This emerging Brethren geography has led to significant economic and social changes in those rural communities in which sect members have settled. Drawing on the case of one such community in the Western Australian wheatbelt, the paper demonstrates that the Brethren have contributed to significant local economic activity and employment growth. At the same time, however, the sect is a source of social tension and controversy, largely as a result of their religious practices and beliefs. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Recent studies of rural society and culture have emphasised the need to examine aspects of ‘difference’, especially the experiences of minority groups and marginalised ‘others’ (Philo, 1992; Cloke and Little, 1997a). One of the outcomes has been a growing body of research that has re-examined the ways in which such groups occupy, experience and shape different kinds of rural spaces (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Woodward, 1996; Cloke and Little, 1997b). The concern of this paper is with the social and religious geography of the minority Christian sect known as the Exclusive Brethren. Over the past decade or so, an increasing number of Australian Exclusive Brethren have migrated out of large cities and settled in small country towns. The reasons for the gradual emergence of this distinctive Brethren geography are not all that different from those of other sects that concentrate in rural areas. As with groups such as the Old Order Amish and Hutterian Brethren in North America, the fundamentalist teachings of the Exclusive Brethren have encouraged members to ‘escape the worldly evils’ of

urban areas in favour of more isolated rural settings. This need to separate from evil is central to the beliefs of the Brethren and it not only shapes their geography, but also their social relations and economic behaviour. In a number of cases this has had significant ramifications for the small towns experiencing growing numbers of Exclusive Brethren. On the one hand, these towns tend to experience significant economic and population growth and on the other, they are often characterised by significant social tension and conflict. Part of the explanation seems to lie in the socio-cultural ‘difference’ between Brethren and non-Brethren residents. The Brethren do not conform with many of the established norms and values of Australian rural communities. While this is an issue that has received some attention in other parts of the world (see, for example, Janzen, 1990), there has been relatively little Australian research on the ways in which religious sects and minority groups interact with the existing residents of rural communities.

The central aim of this paper is to describe how the historical and theological characteristics of the Exclusive Brethren have shaped the sect’s social and economic geographies. The paper also considers how the changing theological and spatial characteristics of the sect are affecting social and economic relations within a small rural community. It begins with a short theoretical overview of the religious sect. Particular attention is given to

\* Present address: Department of Geography, University of Western Australia, Crawley WA 6009, Australia. Tel.: +61-8-93802697; fax: +61-8-93801054.

*E-mail address:* m.tonts@geog.uwa.edu.au (M. Tonts).

the ways in which certain sects attempt to physically and spiritually separate themselves from the wider secular world. It is argued that the social and economic geographies of these sects are largely a reflection of their interpretation of the scriptures. The paper then turns to the case of the Exclusive Brethren, providing an overview of the history, theology and geography of the sect. The remainder of the paper examines how the emergence of a 'Brethren geography' has affected the Western Australian community of Dalwallinu (see Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Conceptualising the religious sect

The concept of the religious sect has been the subject of considerable theoretical interrogation and refinement (see Wilson, 1970; Yinger, 1970; McGuire, 1992; Roberts, 1995). Much of this literature draws on the work of Troeltsch (1931), who attempted to distinguish between the 'church' and the 'sect'. He argued that the church can be regarded as a hierarchic and conservative institution that is able to compromise between spiritual and secular values. By contrast, the sect is usually egalitarian and radical, rejecting any secular compromise in the pursuit of personal holiness. There is, however, a certain conceptual rigidity in Troeltsch's dichotomy, since many religious movements have some characteristics of both church and sect (Roberts, 1995). This prompted Niebuhr (1957) to introduce the notion of the 'denomination', which was seen as a midway point between the church and the sect. In Niebuhr's formulation, denominations can be regarded as similar to churches in that they are able to accommodate the existing social order, but are usually restricted in their influence as a result of geographical, racial or class boundaries (Yinger, 1970). Examples of denominations include most major religious groups, such as Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Reform and Conservative Jews.

Niebuhr's contribution was also significant in that it emphasised the dynamic nature of religious movements. He argued that religious groups are not static entities, and that sects typically evolve as a protest movement within established denominations. The cause of this

protest is almost always of doctrinal or theological origin. Niebuhr also suggested that most denominations have evolved from sects, although not all sects experience this pattern of development. Some sects simply collapse, others are absorbed into more mainstream movements, and some maintain their radical protest and a strong commitment to ideology while avoiding the accommodation and modification that would turn them into a denomination (Johnstone, 1992). This later form of religious body is usually described as an 'established sect' (Wilson, 1970). Examples of established sects include the Quakers, the Hutterian Brethren and the Mennonites.

Once established, religious sects tend to manifest a number of similar characteristics. Foremost is their claim to hold a monopoly on the complete religious truth (Roberts, 1995). Thus, most sects are hostile towards the teachings of other religious bodies. Because of this, the sect will normally demand the total commitment and allegiance of its members, who are expected to live according to strict conventions. Those members who fail to meet certain moral and religious standards will face various forms of censure, which can include expulsion from the group. This course of action usually represents an attempt to re-establish religious purity within the movement. Achieving such purity also requires some form of separation from the perceived evils of the wider world. Central to this is the idea that salvation can only be found within the sect. The nature of separation can differ markedly between sects depending on the nature of their protest. For some sects this might include a simple ideological separation from mainstream views, while for others it requires a complete withdrawal from secular society. This latter response is usually referred to as 'introversionist' (Wilson, 1970).

These introversionist sects usually form a distinctive religious geography which aims to preserve and cultivate their own holiness. In most cases this has contributed to a distinctive spatial separation as the sect attempts to insulate itself from wider societal 'evils' by locating in rural areas. Examples of such sects include the Old Order Amish, the Hutterian Brethren, the Doukhobors and the Shakers (see Bennett, 1967; Janzen, 1990; Hostetler, 1993; Philo, 1997). This geographical separation from wider society is often accompanied by a symbolic cultural separation. In Amish communities, for example, conservative attitudes to dress, speech and material goods are ways of symbolising their withdrawal from secular society (Janzen, 1990). This is extended to their continued use of horse and buggy, rather than modern motor transport, and their decision not to use tractors on farms (Hostetler, 1993). Similar forms of symbolic separation are also evident in North American Hutterian communities. Not only do the Hutterites live in colonies that are physically separated from wider society, but they continue to use a pre-Reformation German dialect as the language of both communication and religious ceremony

<sup>1</sup> The primary data for this paper was collected during a number of visits to Dalwallinu between 1994 and 1999. The main source of information was five formal face-to-face interviews with local community leaders (one woman and three men), seven formal face-to-face interviews with former Brethren (all male), and 17 informal interviews with local business owners and managers (five women and 12 men). The interviews lasted between about 15 min and 3 h. Current members of the Brethren were unwilling to participate in formal interviews. The formal interview data were supported by participant observation, which provided important insights into community life and presented numerous opportunities for informal conversations with members of the sect. For a full description of the methods used in this research see Tonts (1998).



Fig. 1. The town of Dalwallinu and surrounding settlements.

(Hostetler and Huntington, 1967). The Hutterites (and the Amish) also view public schooling with extreme caution, since it can undermine the religious purity of its members by introducing children to 'worldly ways' (Hostetler and Huntington, 1971). In response to this, introversionist sects have often established their own education systems or negotiated with state educational authorities for special programmes (Olshan, 1981).

The introversionist sect's ideal of a separation from the wider world is, of course, tempered by economic exigencies. The need to generate cash income to purchase goods and services not readily available within the sect often results in an economic integration with the wider world. Furthermore, the difficulties facing agriculture in many parts of the world has forced sects with an agrarian orientation to diversify their economic base. In Amish and Hutterian Brethren communities this has resulted in an increasing reliance on cottage industries, such as woodworking, steel fabrication, and arts and crafts (Olshan, 1991). In rural Canada, the Doukhobor community has established jam factories, flour mills and cafes. These economic activities have the potential to generate considerable wider economic and social

benefits for rural communities through population growth, increases in local spending, the establishment of new businesses and expanding employment opportunities (Dahms, 1991).

This is not to say that the impacts of religious sects are always positive. The different lifestyle and culture adopted by sectarian religious groups has the potential to cause considerable conflict between sect and non-sect members. For example, introversionist sectarians are often disliked for their apparent secretiveness and aloofness (Wilson, 1970). Some sects are disliked because of activities such as public preaching, attempting to convert non-members, or simply because their teachings do not conform to societal norms. There is also a widespread public awareness of the physically and/or emotionally harmful, or illegal activities of some sects. The tragedies associated with groups such as the People's Temple, the Branch Davidians and Heaven's Gate have resulted in considerable public concern about the activities of religious sects, especially those with an introversionist disposition. One such introversionist sect is the Exclusive Brethren. Over the past three decades or so, this movement has received widespread attention from the popular

press in Britain, the United States, New Zealand and Australia, largely as a result of their strict religious beliefs and the associated impacts upon individuals and families (see Wilson, 1990).

### 3. Brethren history, theology and geography

The origins of the Exclusive Brethren can be traced to Dublin in 1825, when Dr. Edward Cronin and a small group of friends began to meet for informal worship outside the confines of the Church of England. The fellowship emerged as a result of serious doubts about the validity of Anglican orders and, indeed, about the warrant for any type of clerical class (Wilson, 1990). By 1827, the group had come under the increasing influence of John Nelson Darby, then a clergyman in the Church of England. Darby stressed the need to return to the teachings of the New Testament, which he felt had been distorted by the clergy and those who framed the creeds (Rowdon, 1967). In his 1828 publication *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*, Darby argued that separation from ecclesiastical error of any kind was a prerequisite for establishing Christian unity (Smith, 1986). For Darby and his small group of followers, this meant formally breaking from the corruption of the established denominations. Thus, early Brethren fellowships were characterised by a strict adherence to the biblical scriptures, the lack of an ordained ministry and the practice of distributing the Lord's Supper each Sunday.

The Dublin fellowship also came into contact with dissenting members of the mainstream churches in England and, by 1832, Brethren assemblies had been established in Bristol, Bournemouth, Exeter and Plymouth. Indeed, the Plymouth fellowship grew so rapidly (to around 1200 by 1845) that the movement became unofficially known as the Plymouth Brethren (Coad, 1968). The informal structure of the movement, and its rapid growth, soon led to differences on matters relating to religious doctrine (see Smith, 1986). Much of the debate centred on the issue of separation and, in particular, the question of the 'closed table'. Most members of the Brethren movement at this time held the view that a shared love for the Saviour is God's principle of Christian unity, hence they would have to admit any Christians to their table to break bread in fellowship, even if they belonged to other churches (Humphreys and Ward, 1988). Darby, however, insisted that existing church structures were corrupt and evil, and that true Christians should not break bread with the members of such organisations. These tensions culminated in a major separation during 1848, with followers of Darby forming the schismatic, introversionist sect known as the Exclusive (or Closed) Brethren. Those who favoured a less rigid position remained known as the Plymouth (or Open) Brethren.

Following the death of Darby in 1882, and under its subsequent leaders,<sup>2</sup> the governing principle of the Exclusive Brethren remained the biblical injunction outlined in II Timothy 2: 19–21, that believers should remain separate from evil (the Brethren also refer to II Corinthians 6: 14–18). This not only involves separating from secular society, but from individuals within the movement who are deemed to be uncommitted to God. This has tended to make the movement prone to schism, since Darby held that the assembly should always purge itself of unrighteousness and false doctrine. One of the most significant divisions within the Exclusive Brethren occurred in 1959. This schism occurred mainly as a result of the ongoing power struggle within the movement following the death of its longstanding leader, American James Taylor Snr, in 1953. The six years following Taylor's death saw numerous senior Brethren attempt to assert their leadership on the movement. Eventually Taylor's son, James Taylor Jr, came to prominence, largely as a result of his position on the so-called 'closed tables' doctrine (which led to the 1848 schism under Darby). Taylor argued that this doctrine had been interpreted too narrowly and that the idea of closed tables needed to be more than simply preventing non-members from participating in the Brethren's celebration of the Lord's Supper. Under Taylor's emerging leadership, the closed tables doctrine was extended to prevent the Exclusive Brethren from eating with non-Brethren. This brought enormous consequences for sect members. Previously, families with one spouse out of the fellowship had been permitted to exist without sanction. Following Taylor's decree, Exclusive Brethren were not allowed to eat with a spouse who was not a member of the sect. If a family could not bring the non-member into the fellowship, the entire family was excommunicated.

Having asserted his leadership, Taylor was widely regarded as a 'man of God', and he consolidated this position by proclaiming himself as the movement's 'elect vessel' on the basis of Acts 9: 15–16 and Isaiah 42: 1. This enabled Taylor to issue directives which were understood to be the will of God. One of Taylor's central concerns was to reassert the movement's separatist ethic, largely in response to the changing social conditions of the 1960s and the emergence of a more permissive morality outside of the movement (Wilson, 1990). In addition to moves such as banning television and radio, and discouraging

<sup>2</sup> While the Exclusive Brethren claim to have no formal leadership or clergy, the emergence of informal leaders has been an ongoing characteristic of the sect. Indeed, the absence of a formalised leadership structure frequently leads to delicate power struggles between leading Brethren. For example, the death of Darby in 1882 was followed by around six years of turmoil in which various people attempted to assert their leadership. The outcome was a number of divisions within the movement until F.E. Raven came to prominence and assumed the role of an informal 'community arbiter'.

participation in higher education, Taylor also reinforced strict dress codes. For women this meant wearing long hair, covered by a headscarf, together with conservative, unrevealing clothing. For men this involved wearing conservative dress and remaining clean shaven. While it is not expressed as such, these strict dress codes perform a similar function to those of the North American Amish, and represent a symbolic separation from the vanity of the secular world and help to reinforce the sense of 'boundary' around the sect.

For some members of the Brethren the renewed vigour with which the principles of purity were asserted in the 1950s and 1960s was unacceptable, leading to frequent departures and schism. Overall, however, the movement accepted Taylor's directives, since these were seen as the will of God. Furthermore, the discipline facing any member who disobeyed the directives, espoused false doctrine or fell into immoral behaviour ensured that most Brethren attempted to live within the movement's new parameters. While transgressions by repentant members were (and still are) usually dealt with by the elders of the fellowship, unrepentant individuals are 'shut up', a term used to indicate that s/he is not admitted to the Brethren's meetings (see Field, 1996). If the individual fails to repent then they are 'withdrawn from' or 'put out'. If any member of a family is shut up or withdrawn from, then the remainder of the family risks similar censure unless they disassociate themselves from the unrepentant member. Any other members of the fellowship who associate with the unrepentant are also shut up or withdrawn from. While similar forms of excommunication have, at one time or another, been characteristic of other religious groups, the impact on members of the Exclusive Brethren are particularly severe given their near total disengagement from the wider world. As Wilson (1967, p. 79) points out:

Brethren have no friends and no near-acquaintances outside the movement, but within it intense mutual reliance and affection. To break away or to be expelled is a more profound thing than simply losing the right to participate in worship; it is intellectually the loss of a whole context of discourse, emotionally the destruction of every assurance, and socially the loss of everyone who is near and dear and whose existence has any meaning.

Thus, the enormous consequences of disfellowshipment for individuals, families and congregations is a strong deterrent for those who might otherwise fail to meet the standards demanded by the sect. To those in the movement, such discipline is an unfortunate but essential means of maintaining the fellowship's religious purity.

The death of Taylor in 1970 saw the leadership eventually assumed by James Symington, a North Dakota farmer. As the new 'elect vessel' Symington wielded con-

siderable influence, and declared that the Brethren should not own or use computers. However, the Brethren remained selective in their use of technology. For example, while computers, fax machines, radios and televisions are banned, modern mechanical technologies such as tractors, trucks, and metal and wood work equipment are accepted and widely adopted. Under Symington, however, participation in higher education was banned. It is also claimed that Symington developed the idea that the sect's leader should approve all significant decisions relating to household location and relocation (Wyman, 1998). This became increasingly significant after Symington's death in 1987, when Australian John Hales assumed the leadership of the movement. The emergence of Hales as the movement's leader has had significant implications for the social and economic geography of the Brethren in Australia. Under his leadership, a number of Brethren families have been encouraged to migrate from urban areas to selected Australian country towns.

The emergence of the Exclusive Brethren in Australia can be traced to a number of visits by John Nelson Darby and his followers during the 1830s and 1840s. While little is known about the early history of the sect in Australia, it is generally held that Darby's charismatic public preaching and missionary work led to the establishment of fellowships in Melbourne and Sydney (Humphreys and Ward, 1988). As elsewhere, the number of worshippers was affected by frequent schisms in the movement. Nevertheless, by the 1950s, the Brethren had a presence in every Australian state and capital city. Prior to the emergence of John Hales as the sect's leader in 1987, there is little evidence of a distinctive 'Brethren geography' in Australia. Since the late 1980s, however, it has become apparent that a growing number of Exclusive Brethren have migrated from large cities to more isolated rural communities. Interviews with a number of former Brethren indicate a clear shift in the sect's settlement pattern.

About 10 or 15 years ago, the largest fellowships were in Perth's Hills suburbs. I'd say there were probably 200 or so families down in Perth. You'd probably find that's now around 100, with the rest now living in the bush, mostly in Dally (Dalwallinu) and Cunderdin. There's also been a bit of a falling off in membership as people leave. (interviewee 2)

Without any doubt there are more Brethren living outside Perth now. The whole congregation seems to be moving away from the city. And this isn't just going on here. It's also in Sydney, with families moving to places like Katoomba. But it's really no different to lots of other religions. Look at religious communities in America. It's the same thing. (interviewee 3)

Yeah, people are packing up and going. They're shifting whole fellowships out of Perth. I gather it's not just something in WA, but is a concerted effort to get out of the cities. The funny thing is, Hales and his family have stayed in Sydney. Of course, lots of people are staying in the cities. I couldn't tell you exact numbers, but I'd say there are now more in the country than the city. (interviewee 6)

I also know that in Victoria, many families have left Melbourne and are now living in rural areas. I've heard it said that the plan is to gradually move all families out of the cities, which are being seen as evil. In meetings there are often readings from parts of the Bible that talk in some way about the righteous aspects of a simple rural life. (interviewee 7)

One former member, who once held a number of significant leadership positions within the sect, estimated that only 40% of Brethren families now live in cities, compared with around 70% 15 years ago. It is apparent that this shift has been concentrated in a number of select country towns, such as Cunderdin, Dalwallinu and Gnowangerup in the Western Australian wheatbelt. Interviews with former Brethren members reveal a number of possible reasons for the move out of cities and into certain country towns.

A few years after (John) Hales became leader, we were told to move from Perth to Dalwallinu. You see, because his word was seen as almost holy, we did this without much question. I think the main reason he wanted people to move was his feeling that we were being corrupted by things like TV and magazines and stuff. In the city it was much harder for the elders to keep an eye on what you did. So that was probably the main reason for sending us to the country. (interviewee 6)

I'm not really sure of why families are moving to Dalwallinu and Cunderdin. A lot of attention was given to the idea of being separate from evil. As you well know, that's one of the most important things. Leaving Perth was a way of being safe from the world. ... Dalwallinu and Cunderdin already had fellowships, and I think people were told to go to those towns to help make the fellowships stronger. (interviewee 11)

We moved because John Hales told us to, and that was that. What he said went. If we even thought about arguing we would be thrown out (of the sect). (interviewee 2)

I think it (the urban-rural migration) was because John Hales didn't trust the people (in the fellowship) in Perth. The same thing (outmigration) was happening in other places as well, especially Sydney. In the big cities people were always seen as being in danger of losing their way. Living in a country town away from

things was a way of keeping the congregation pure. (interviewee 7)

... another thing might have been to mix up the leadership in isolated places. By having new people join, you don't really know who to trust, so you always behave. Maybe that was it. (interviewee 3)

Keeping the fellowships pure was the key to it all. My feeling is that the elders wanted to set up Brethren communities. By being in the country you could have strong and close communities with a clear sense of purpose and belief. In a crude sort of a way you could think of it as trying to form close communities a bit like the Amish. Obviously people like the Amish and others like that are very different in their beliefs and rules, but you get the general idea. (interviewee 9)

Two main themes seemed evident from discussions about the reasons for the Brethren moving from the cities to a number of country towns. Firstly, and probably most importantly, it was seen as difficult for the Brethren to remain separate from worldly influences in metropolitan environments. As is the case with Amish and Hutterite communities of North America, rural environments offer the Exclusive Brethren relative seclusion from the wider world. Secondly, the relocation of families from urban to rural areas has the potential to strengthen small Brethren fellowships in country towns. In Western Australia, the towns experiencing an in-migration of Brethren have existing fellowships. There is no evidence of sect members moving to towns that do not already have established congregations. Not surprisingly, the movement of Brethren into these small country towns is having major demographic, economic and social impacts (Tonts, 1996). The remainder of this paper is devoted to an examination of these impacts in the small Western Australian rural community of Dalwallinu. In particular, it focuses on how the religious practices and lifestyles of the Brethren have reshaped the demographic, economic and social character of Dalwallinu.

#### **4. The demographic and economic turnaround in Dalwallinu**

Dalwallinu is a small agricultural service town located 250 km northeast of Perth in the Western Australian wheatbelt (see Fig. 1). It is also the headquarters of the Shire of Dalwallinu, a local government area which covers around 7500 km<sup>2</sup> and incorporates the settlements of Buntine, Kalannie, Pithara and Wubin. In reality, these settlements consist of little more than a grain silo and railway siding, a handful of businesses, a small school, a meeting hall, some basic sporting facilities and a few houses. The well being of the Shire's settlements has traditionally been linked to the productivity of the wheat

and sheep sectors. In recent years, though, depressed commodity prices, rising levels of farm debt, and a dramatic reduction in the level of governmental support for agriculture have contributed to decreasing levels of farm profitability. These problems are common to much of rural Australia and have contributed to a dramatic reduction in farm numbers across the nation (see Smailes, 1997; Taylor, 1996; Lawrence, 1995). In Dalwallinu, the total number of farms fell from 290 in 1966 to 160 in 1996. This, together with increasing levels of farm mechanisation and the subsequent shedding of hired farm labour, has resulted in a reduction in the number of people participating in the agricultural sector of the labour force. Between the 1966 and 1996 Censuses, the number of people working in agriculture fell from 547 to 393. As a direct result of this decline, and the associated outmigration, the number of people living in the rural component of the Shire (i.e. outside of the Dalwallinu townsite) fell from 1829 in 1966 to 1002 in 1996. These trends are typical of the population decline affecting Australia's broadacre farming regions (see Productivity Commission, 1999).

Until recently, the changes affecting farming had a direct impact on the economic and demographic viability of the Shire's settlements. In the townsite of Dalwallinu, the loss of trade associated with falling farm incomes and the declining agricultural population contributed to a contraction of local economic activity and the closure of a number of local businesses (Tonts, 1996). The outcome was a longstanding process of outmigration and population decline. Following a peak of 724 in 1971, the town's population fell to 571 in 1986, a decrease of 21.1%. The smaller settlements of Buntine, Kalannie, Pithara and Wubin experienced even more dramatic economic and demographic decline (see Jones, 1993). By the late 1980s, however, this situation was beginning to change, largely as a result of the arrival of increasing numbers of Exclusive Brethren.

The Exclusive Brethren are believed to have first arrived in the Shire of Dalwallinu as farmers during the 1930s. Local conversions and the in-migration of sect members saw the total number of Exclusive Brethren living in the Shire reach around 60 by the early 1970s. Most of these sect members lived in the town of Dalwal-

linu and in the small settlement of Kalannie. Brethren households and businesses were (and still are) integrated into these settlements and exhibit no distinctive micro-socio-spatial characteristics. The total number of Brethren in the Shire of Dalwallinu remained relatively small until the late 1980s, when John Hales emerged as the sect's leader, or 'elect vessel'. Hales' suggestion to a number of Brethren families that they should leave the worldly ways and permissive moralities of the Perth metropolitan area and resettle in Dalwallinu had a direct impact on the Shire's population. Between the 1986 and 1991 Censuses, the total number of Exclusive Brethren living in the Shire of Dalwallinu increased from 73 to 98 (see Table 1). While this was a relatively small increase, the concentrated nature of the resettlement saw the population of the town of Dalwallinu increase from 571 to 597, bringing to an end nearly two decades of demographic decline (Tonts, 1996). Given the extremely small size of the town, this increase represents a significant population turnaround. However, at a broader Shire level, the influx of Exclusive Brethren was not enough to outweigh the loss of other residents, particularly those engaged in the troubled agricultural sector. Indeed, the number of people living in the rural component of the Shire fell from 1141 in 1986 to 982 in 1991.

The 1991–96 intercensal period witnessed an even more dramatic increase in the number of Exclusive Brethren in the Shire. During this period, the relocation of sect members from Perth saw the population of Brethren rise from 98 to 182, an increase of 84% (Table 1). In the town of Dalwallinu, the total population increased by 100, from 597 to 697. The population living outside the Dalwallinu townsite also increased, if only marginally, rising from 982 to 1002. This ended nearly three decades of population decline. The growth in both the town of Dalwallinu, and the rural balance of the Shire, occurred at a time when the majority of other towns in the broadacre farming areas of Western Australia were experiencing a steady pattern of economic and demographic decline (Haberkorn et al., 1999; Tonts and Jones, 1997; McKenzie, 1994).

The recent population turnaround in the Shire of Dalwallinu has been accompanied by a strong economic revival. In part, this is reflected in the changing structure

Table 1  
Population change in the Shire of Dalwallinu<sup>a</sup>

	1986	1991	1996	Percent change, 1986–91	Percent change, 1991–96
Dalwallinu townsite	571	597	697	4.6	16.8
Rural balance	1141	982	1002	– 13.9	2.0
Total	1712	1579	1699	– 7.8	7.6
Total Brethren	73	98	182	34.2	85.7

<sup>a</sup>Source: ABS (1997).

Table 2  
Labour force change in the Shire of Dalwallinu<sup>a</sup>

	1986	1991	1996	Percent change, 1986–91	Percent change, 1991–96
Agriculture and mining	491	391	398	– 20.4	1.8
Manufacturing	12	19	44	58.3	131.6
Utilities	5	4	0	– 20.0	– 100.0
Construction	9	11	23	22.2	109.1
Wholesale and retail	130	112	111	– 13.8	– 0.9
Transport and communication	37	36	22	– 2.7	– 38.9
Financial and property services	16	14	18	– 12.5	28.6
Public administration	32	28	27	– 12.5	– 3.6
Education	22	46	57	109.1	23.9
Health and community services	31	26	41	– 16.1	57.7
Personal and other services	27	35	25	29.6	– 28.6
Other/not stated	1	3	9	200.0	200.0
Total	813	725	775	– 10.8	6.9

<sup>a</sup>Source: ABS (1997).

of the Shire's labour force (see Table 2). Between 1986 and 1991, the Shire's overall labour force continued to decline, largely as a result of the difficulties facing the agricultural sector. During this period, employment in agriculture fell from 491 to 391, a decrease of more than 20%. The in-migration of the Brethren into Dalwallinu has had little impact on agriculture, since the majority are not farmers or farm workers. Indeed, one former Brethren member estimated that only about 20% of local Brethren operated or worked on farms. In addition to the decline in agriculture, and as in most other wheatbelt towns, falls were also experienced in retailing, transport and communications and public administration. By contrast, small increases were recorded in the manufacturing, education and personal and other services sectors. The 1991–96 intercensal period saw an end to the overall pattern of decline, with the Shire's labour force increasing from 725 to 775, a rise of 6.9%. This represents a distinct contrast with the previous pattern of decline, and with the labour force contraction affecting other wheatbelt shires. The growth of Dalwallinu's labour force was largely the result of increasing employment in manufacturing, education, construction, finance and property services, and health and community services (Table 2). Importantly, this growth was coupled with stability in the agricultural and retailing sectors.

The expansion of the labour force is the result of direct and indirect employment opportunities created by the Exclusive Brethren. Much of this employment is associated with a number of new business enterprises established by sect members. In the townsite of Dalwallinu these include a number of retail outlets, a steel fabrication firm, a manufacturing plant for agricultural implements and a firm producing water storage tanks. It is important to note that the nature of these enterprises reflects the Brethren's belief that its members should not participate

in higher education. Accordingly, operating these businesses do not require any tertiary education. In addition, the rejection of many new technologies, including computers, has meant that Brethren enterprises tend to be relatively labour intensive. This has created considerable local employment opportunities. While the Exclusive Brethren give priority to employing other sect members, any additional employment is available to non-Brethren members of the local community. This provides local residents with important employment opportunities at a time when the labour market might otherwise be shrinking, and has the capacity to reduce outmigration and depopulation. Furthermore, some Brethren-owned firms have employed a number of young non-Brethren members of the community and provided them with valuable training in fields such as carpentry and welding. These job opportunities are helping to retain young people in Dalwallinu, and reducing the need for them to migrate to metropolitan areas and regional centres in search of employment and education.

The growing population of Exclusive Brethren has also created significant indirect employment within the Shire of Dalwallinu. While sect members tend to patronise their own businesses, where no alternative exists the Brethren support local firms and services. For local businesses such as grocery shops, clothing retailers and service stations this increase in trade has helped to boost turnover and stabilise employment. Indeed, the results of the two most recent retailing censuses have indicated that, in 1989 constant dollars, the average turnover per establishment increased from \$537,355 in 1985–86 to \$644,053 in 1991–92 (ABS, 1988, 1994). This is in sharp contrast to the contraction of retail spending that occurred in many other parts of rural Australia (see, for example, Smailes, 1996). The Brethren also support a number of local professional services, particularly those which demand university level training or the use of

those technologies that the sect's leadership have deemed inappropriate. For example, the need for Brethren business owners to employ accountants appears to have contributed to an increase in the number of people working in the local financial and business services sector (Table 2).

The influx of Exclusive Brethren into the Shire of Dalwallinu has also contributed to a consolidation of basic public services. Until recently, Dalwallinu was in a position familiar to many Australian rural communities where population decline and severe cutbacks in government funding are threatening the continued provision of services such as schools, hospitals and police stations (Tonts and Jones, 1997). In Dalwallinu, however, the growing population has increased demand for these services and justified their continued provision. In the education sector, for example, the number of enrolments in the Shire's four schools increased from 317 in 1986 to 415 in 1996 (Ministry of Education, unpublished data). Prior to this, enrolments in Dalwallinu's schools had been steadily falling. The growth in student numbers is largely attributable to the in-migration of Exclusive Brethren and their tendency to have large families (the Brethren do not allow the use of contraceptives). The rise in student numbers has resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of people employed in the education sector. This rose from 22 in 1986 to 57 in 1996 (Table 2). Similar increases have also been experienced in the health sector. As a result of ongoing population decline during much of the 1980s, the community's hospital, located in the townsite of Dalwallinu, faced a rationalisation of funding, staff numbers and beds. These pressures subsided as increasing numbers of Exclusive Brethren settled in the Shire. The Brethren have no opposition to modern health technologies and form a major clientele of the local hospital and health services. Indeed, the number of staff employed in the health sector has increased steadily in recent years (see Table 2).

The increases in local employment associated with the Brethren have triggered what Sorensen (1993) describes as a virtuous cycle of growth. As new public sector (and other) employees migrate to Dalwallinu to service the growing population, they themselves create further employment by increasing the demand for local goods and services. The outcome is further in-migration and population and economic growth. These newer residents are also likely to make an important contribution to the socio-cultural sustainability of Dalwallinu by strengthening local social networks, by participating in local clubs and organisations, and by injecting new ideas and lifestyles into the local community.

These indirect benefits are supplemented by the impact of the Exclusive Brethren on local government services. As with other residents in the Shire, members of the sect are required to pay local government taxes and charges which are then used to provide basic infrastructure, such

as road construction and maintenance and rubbish removal. This revenue is also used to provide community infrastructure, such as sporting facilities, meeting halls, and parks and gardens. However, members of the Exclusive Brethren rarely, if ever, use any of these community facilities. The main reason for this is that the Brethren refuse to participate in activities considered to be worldly, such as sport, and because their introversionist teachings prevent them from associating with non-Brethren except where absolutely necessary. Given the size of the Brethren population in Dalwallinu, it is probably not surprising to find that non-Brethren residents are generally aware of the significant contribution that the sect makes to local government revenue, and how this effectively cross-subsidises the provision of many community facilities.

## 5. Local social relations and the Brethren

Despite the direct and indirect economic, demographic and social benefits associated with the growing concentration of Exclusive Brethren in the Shire of Dalwallinu, they have become a source of social tension within the local community. This is generally linked, in one way or another, to the Brethren's insistence that they separate from the perceived evils of the wider world. At the centre of this social tension is the Brethren's practice of withdrawing from members who fail to meet the sect's strict religious and moral standards. The 'putting out' of wayward individuals has caused the break-up of a number of Brethren households, since any member who fails to disassociate themselves with the errant brother (or sister) also risks being put out of fellowship. This has had a devastating impact on some Brethren families. One recent example includes a married couple and four of their young children who left the fellowship and were unable to have any contact with their four older daughters, aged between 16 and 20, who decided to remain with the sect. The emotional impact of this separation has been made even more difficult by the small town setting, where chance meetings and visual contact between family members are often unavoidable and can cause considerable distress. This was emphasised by comments made by a number of former Brethren:

One of the hardest things about leaving the group was losing contact with close friends and relatives. This is even harder when you see them nearly every day in the street. Dally (Dalwallinu) is such a small place that this happens all the time. There are even people who can't speak to their own children or parents. Most of my family don't even acknowledge my presence when I walk down the street. (interviewee 2)

... one family is in such a mess that two little kids who left the sect can't talk to their cousins and lifelong friends in the sect, even at school. It's terribly hard for

the adults, let alone the kids, they really don't understand what is going on. (interviewee 1)

My brother and his family refuse to speak to me. They even cross the road if they see me coming. (interviewee 3)

Recent interventions by the Western Australian media have ensured that divisions within Brethren families are now a source of general public concern. The majority of reports were based on the accounts of former Brethren members who had, at some time or other, been separated from members of their family. One of the first major stories to appear was during 1997 in the *Sunday Times*, Western Australia's weekly tabloid newspaper (see Kelly, 1997). Under the title 'Brotherly Shove', a full page article recounted the emotional trauma facing those Brethren who had been put out of fellowship and had subsequently lost contact with family members who had remained in the sect. The examples used in the article help to illustrate the enormous consequences of excommunication. In the first of these cases, an entire Brethren family was put out of fellowship for questioning the sect's growing list of extra-Biblical edicts. This meant that they lost any meaningful contact with extended family and friends who remained in the sect. The story also pointed to the enormous difficulties associated with the transition to life outside the sect. As one family member pointed out:

Your beliefs focus around the point that the Brethren is all there is in the world that is worth anything. They (the Brethren) are of the belief that outside the circle of saints, you may as well be dead. That is why people are so emotionally distressed when they come out. You are outside of everything you know (quoted in Kelly, 1997).

Interviews held with former Brethren also suggested a serious sense of social and emotional loss.

My family felt like it had lost everything. We knew nothing outside the church and were always told that the rest of the world was evil. Imagine confronting that. It was like moving to another country. I guess it's a culture shock thing. (interviewee 3)

It (being 'put out') was a very confusing time. I never really knew if I would be accepted back, and I didn't know if I wanted to go back. But I also didn't know if I could face the big wide world. In the end I just had to adjust. (interviewee 7)

It was pretty hard losing all your lifelong friends and close relatives. It sometimes feels like there's been a death in the family. I don't think we will ever really get over it. I still can't talk to any of my family 'cause they're all still tied up with this bloody cult. (interviewee 6)

As far as the Brethren are concerned you're not even alive. That can be hard to take. What this does to people is horrendous and I could take you to talk with lots of families who are in a terrible state. But at the same time you realise that they take the decision to put someone out very very seriously. When you're thrown out you have absolutely no-one to turn to or trust. It's pretty serious stuff because we'd lost everything we knew and all of you were sinners and we'd had it drummed in to us not to have anything to do with outsiders. It was just complete isolation. (interviewee 2)

These comments bear a strong resemblance to Wilson's (1967) argument, quoted earlier in this paper, that to be excommunicated from the Brethren is more profound than simply losing the right to worship, it is the loss of an entire way of life.

The articles in the *Sunday Times* in 1997 were followed by a similar series of stories in the State's only daily newspaper, *The West Australian*, during 1998. The initial front page article, entitled 'Christian Sect Splits Families', gave an overview of two households which had been divided by the Brethren's practice of withdrawing from errant members (see Watts, 1998a). In a similar vein to the *Sunday Times* story, *The West Australian* focussed on the emotional trauma associated with losing contact with family members. Both articles made considerable use of interviews with those who were 'put out' from the sect. The newspaper also contained a story on the behavioural codes by which the Brethren attempt to adhere. The following day, *The West Australian* provided six further stories relating to the activities of the Exclusive Brethren. Four of these related to the issue of internal divisions within families, while another suggested that local non-Brethren residents should boycott Brethren businesses (see Watts, 1998b). Only one of the articles attempted to defend the presence of the Brethren in Dalwallinu (Mendez, 1998). It drew on an interview with the Shire Council's chief executive officer, who pointed out that the sect make an important contribution to the local economy. The article also stated that the Exclusive Brethren were law abiding and that the local police had received no complaints concerning the sect.

The generally negative light in which the popular press portrayed the Brethren was not always reflected in local community attitudes. During my first visit to Dalwallinu in 1994, before the local media had 'discovered' the sect, there was a widespread belief that the growing population of Brethren, and their business activities, had provided an economic boost for the Shire. For example, interviews in 1994 with three local non-Brethren business people highlighted the positive local economic and social impacts.

You look at all the other towns in the wheatbelt. Most are losing people, businesses and services. The Brethren have helped to stem the tide. Also, look down at

Cunderdin and Gnowangerup and the businesses the Brethren have set up. They've turned things around. Where the Brethren go you'll find prosperous towns. (interviewee 4)

I'm not sure what others think, but I reckon they've been good. They might have strange ways, but they spend their money locally, support our businesses, except the pub and places like that, and generally do the right thing. We're definitely better off having them than not. (interviewee 5)

They tend to support their own, but they still put a lot of money through other (non-Brethren) places. Also, they don't seem to mind giving outsiders a job. If they spend some money, and they stop people leaving because of the lack of work, then it can only be a good thing. Remember, they also pay rates, which means that the shire can do things like keep the oval green during summer or spend money on other services. (interviewee 8)

These views tended to reflect those of other residents, with most agreeing that Brethren newcomers were a welcome addition to the Shire. Nevertheless, there was some animosity towards the sect. Some residents were aware of the divisions that had occurred within certain local families, and the impact of this on those who had been put out of fellowship. Particular concern was expressed where parents had left the sect, but children had remained within the movement. Some residents also complained that the Brethren did not participate in community life and remained distant and aloof. For example, some local residents commented:

I do worry about them, especially the families. There have been some terrible bust-ups, and that affects the whole town. Kids in schools are often stuck in the middle of the blues (disputes) between them. Sometimes half the family gets thrown out of the cult and the other half stay in. That can't be healthy. I know they've been great for the community in some ways, but I am a bit worried. (interviewee 10)

They're a bit full of themselves, and they think the rest of us as a bunch of heathens. Still, most of the time they keep to themselves. I think they've also been pretty good for local business (interviewee 13).

I suppose they might create a few jobs, but they don't do much else for the community. Never join in in anything. Most people would disagree with me, but I'm not sure we want any more of them. I probably shouldn't say that, and maybe I'm a bit prejudice, but we might end up a minority in our own town (interviewee 14).

While these cautious views tended to represent a minority in 1994, visits to the town between 1996 and 1999

revealed a changing perception of the Brethren. Although informal discussions with residents suggested a continuing support for the sect's economic activities, a number of other concerns have become increasingly prominent. The most significant was the Brethren's threat to remove children from local schools. The dispute emerged as a result of differences between the Western Australian Ministry of Education and the Exclusive Brethren over the use of modern technologies in the school curriculum. In response to the increasing use of television and computers in schools, which the Brethren reject as worldly, the sect threatened to withdraw their children from local schools and teach them at home. Some of the following interview excerpts reveal the concern about the potential impact of the Brethren withdrawing children from schools:

I can understand that their beliefs are important to them, but taking their kids out could force the school to close. If that happens they'll have to sit on a bus for 45 minutes to get to school. The government is already marching about trying to close country schools. This could be just the excuse they need. They (the Brethren) should think about how their actions could affect the rest of us and, I guess, themselves in the long run. Once it's (the school) gone, it's gone for good (interviewee 15)

It's just selfish really. This town has always made them (the Brethren) welcome and backed their businesses. And now this is how they carry on. Don't get me wrong, I think they have done a great thing for the town by settling here, but it's a two way street and they should be showing some loyalty. (interviewee 18)

... they seem to feel that their children's education will be better without computers and TV. It's living in the Dark Ages really. You can't deny technology. Without learning these things their kids will end up behind in lots of ways. There must be a bit of room for compromise. (interviewee 14)

If this is how they (the Brethren) feel, then let them have separate classrooms. The Breth kids already eat and play on their own, and there's enough of them, so they might as well teach them separately. Taking the kids out of the school is a real worry. What'll it do for the rest of the kids. Does it mean teachers will leave, or that we'll get fewer resources. I'm worried about what this might mean in the longer term. (interviewee 19)

As the interviews suggested, the loss of Brethren students would have had severe implications for local schools, some of which were already under threat of rationalisation as a result of government cost cutting in rural education (see Tonts and Jones, 1997). The issue received considerable attention in the local electronic and print media, and was resolved when the Ministry of Education agreed to continue to take into account the

religious beliefs of the Brethren, particularly their insistence that Sect children not be exposed to technologies such as computers and television. The Brethren's concerns about public sector education are similar to those expressed by a number of other introversionist sects. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the desire to separate from the wider world has led North American Hutterite and Amish communities to withdraw their children from some schools or agitate for separate classes within the public school system (Olshan, 1981). This has often been a source of social tension within American rural communities.

In the case of Dalwallinu, though, it is the issue of family separation which has been at the centre of recent social conflict between Brethren and non-Brethren. The extensive media coverage of family break-ups during 1997 and 1998 appears to have been accompanied by a general hardening of attitudes towards the sect. Local residents had become increasingly concerned about families being divided because of religious beliefs. While most did not act on this concern, a small number of locals were promoting a boycott of Brethren businesses as a form of protest against the sect. More obviously, it was apparent that residents were becoming increasingly aware of the sect's strict behavioural codes, often questioning their biblical validity. In a number of interviews conducted during 1999, local residents described the Brethren in negative terms.

In my view, they're causing a lot of problems. Our town seems to be in the paper every second day and we have a real image problem. Every time I go to Perth and people find out where I'm from they quiz me about the bloody Brethren. We've become known as the town where the Brethren live, and not as a community in our own right. (interviewee 21)

What's going on with their (the Brethren's) families is a disgrace. Something really needs to be done about it. It's not right that families are being split up and all the trouble tied up with it. All the time we are hearing about this one or that one that has split up, with half the family staying in and the other half coming out. And whenever this happens it takes its toll on the community. Even those of us that are not in it (the sect), we worry about the kids involved, the psychological side of things. It affects more than just the Breth. (interviewee 20)

... we really are a divided community. The Shire thinks they're (the Brethren) great, the cops refuse to get involved in family problems, and anyone who does business with them is not likely to object to them. Then there's those of us who can see what's happening. More and more we're taking sides in all of this. Look at what might have happened to the school. Look at all the negative publicity. The trouble is, people who drive

through town see all this economic development. They don't see what's below the surface. (interviewee 23)

... so you've heard about our local cult then. (interviewee 25)

Some former Brethren members also questioned the basis of the sect's teachings.

A lot of what is taught is based on Hales's or Symington's writings. It doesn't come directly from the Bible. But if you're in the sect you can't question any of it. The leaders are in their position because they are regarded as authorities on the Bible and, in some ways, divine. The Brethren often describe people like Hales as the vessel elect. (interviewee 6)

... the rules they lay down are often just the beliefs of the elders or, mostly, the leader. The best example was James Taylor in the 1960s. Until then, the Exclusives were pretty normal, but then they took on all these new laws that had not much at all to do with what was in the Bible, but more just what Taylor thought. There is lots of competition between senior Brethren on the interpretation of scriptures. This leads to all of the new rules, which are usually just part of the one-up-manship that the elders use to exert their authority. (interviewee 2)

A lot of what they teach has nothing to do with the Bible. It is all about brainwashing members ... (interviewee 11)

Despite these negative views, the Brethren were still widely recognised as an important contributor to the local economy and, in some respects, as a saviour of the town.

There have been problems, without a doubt, but remember that they are free to practice their religion and, as far as I'm aware, they always obey the law. One of the problems they face is that they are under constant scrutiny in Dally. In Perth they wouldn't get this type of attention. What we all need to remember is that without them many of us might not have jobs or be living here. (interviewee 27)

As business people they are outstanding. We used to be a little agricultural service town. Now we export water tanks, farm equipment and all sorts of things. They've been the reason the town has diversified. That'll keep the place alive. Most country towns are finding it pretty tough, but we're doing ok. (interviewee 29)

You've got to remember, there are break-ups in all families. It's not just a Brethren problem. The consequences are high whoever you are. The problem is that they're (the Brethren) different in a country town. Country towns aren't very good at coping with the unusual. (interviewee 28)

In many respects, this last comment highlights one of the critical aspects of the Brethren in Dalwallinu — the question of difference. As Sibley (1999) has pointed out, familiarity, predictability and sameness are important for many people. This is a common theme in much of the literature on social relations in Australian country towns (Wild, 1978; Dempsey, 1990; Gray, 1991). It is evident that the notion of difference is a defining feature of Brethren/non-Brethren social relations in Dalwallinu. This is emphasised by local residents' beliefs about the Brethren contribution to the local economy, their feelings about the sect's religious beliefs and their thoughts about the outcomes of these. The Brethren are constantly constructed as different from the non-Brethren population. The Brethren themselves also contribute to the sense of difference, through their exclusionary religious practices and symbols of separateness. While there has always been a sense of difference between non-Brethren and Brethren residents, it is evident that this has increased over recent years. The publicity surrounding the divisions among Brethren families, the sect's strict behavioural codes and the dispute with the State government over education have clearly played an important role in exacerbating this sense of difference. Restoring a more harmonious relationship within Dalwallinu seems likely to depend on local residents, the media and the state embracing cultural difference, rather than constructing it as a threat (see Sibley, 1995, 1999).

## 6. Conclusion

The main objective of this paper was to demonstrate how the history and theology of the Exclusive Brethren have shaped their social, economic and spatial relations. As with other introversionist sects, in seeking to remain separate from the evils of the secular world, the Australian Brethren have constructed distinctive economic and social geographies. These geographies are a direct reflection of the Brethren's theological ideal of remaining separate from the secular world. In common with other introversionist sects, this has led to an increasing concentration in remoter rural areas where they are in a better position to maintain their 'exclusivity'. However, unlike sects such as the Amish and the Hutterian Brethren, the Exclusive Brethren do not have a long history of settling in rural areas as a means of achieving separation from the wider world. This has been a more recent development, largely as a result of changing leadership, a reinterpretation of the scriptures and, subsequently, an increasing commitment to isolationism.

By insulating themselves from a wider (predominantly urban) world, the Brethren have come into relatively close contact with the residents of those communities which they have 'colonised'. In essence, they have produced an 'other space' within a more conventional agri-

cultural and small town landscape (Foucault, 1986; Philo, 1997). The outcome has been a growing recognition of social, cultural and economic difference within Dalwallinu. Among local non-Brethren there is a widespread recognition that the Brethren have created significant local economic and employment benefits, and have contributed to the reversal of two decades of population decline. At the same time, their religious practices, particularly that of withdrawing from wayward members, have brought them into conflict with former sect members, local residents and parts of the wider Western Australian population. These 'outsider' concerns about the religious practices and psychological and social impacts of the Exclusive Brethren are not altogether that different from the concerns expressed about other introversionist sects, notably the Mennonite, Hutterite and Doukhobor communities in North America (Janzen, 1990). While these concerns have undoubtedly been fuelled by tragedies associated with some other sects, the real explanation is likely to lie in the socio-theological differences between the Brethren and the established social norms of Australian (and especially rural) society.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Roy Jones, Alan Black, John Duff, Ann-Claire Larsen and two anonymous referees for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. The usual disclaimers apply.

## References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 1988. Retail Industry: Small Area Statistics, Western Australia, 1985–86. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 1994. Retailing in Western Australia, 1991–92. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 1997. Census of Population and Housing Time Series Data, 1986–1996. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Bell, D., Valentine, G., 1995. Queer country: rural and lesbian gay lives. *Journal of Rural Studies* 11, 123–133.
- Bennett, J.W., 1967. *Hutterian Brethren: The Agricultural Economy and Social Organisation of a Communal People*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Cloke, P., Little, J., 1997a. Introduction: other countrysides?. In: Cloke, P., Little, J. (Eds.), *Contested Countryside Cultures: Otherness, Marginalisation and Rurality*. Routledge, London, pp. 1–18.
- Cloke, P., Little, J. (Eds.), 1997b. *Contested Countryside Cultures: Otherness, Marginalisation and Rurality*. Routledge, London.
- Coad, F.R., 1968. *A History of the Brethren Movement*. Paternoster Press, Exeter.
- Dahms, F., 1991. St Jacobs, Ontario: from declining village to thriving tourist community. *Ontario Geography* 36, 1–13.
- Dempsey, K., 1990. *Smalltown: A Study of Social Inequality, Cohesion and Belonging*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Field, M., 1996. *Shut Up Sarah*. Highland Books, London.
- Foucault, M., 1986. Of other spaces. *Diacritics* 1, 22–27.

- Gray, I., 1991. *Politics in Place: Social Power Relations in an Australian Country Town*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Haberkorn, G., Hugo, G., Fisher, M., Aylward, R., 1999. *Country Matters: Social Atlas of Rural and Regional Australia*. Bureau of Rural Sciences, Canberra.
- Hostetler, J.A., 1993. *Amish Society*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
- Hostetler, J.A., Huntington, G.E., 1967. *The Hutterites in North America*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.
- Hostetler, J.A., Huntington, G.E., 1971. *Children in Amish Society*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.
- Humphreys, R., Ward, R., 1988. *Religious Bodies in Australia*, 2nd Edition.. The Book Printer, Melbourne.
- Janzen, W., 1990. *Limits on Liberty: The Experiences of Mennonite, Hutterite and Doukhobor Communities in Canada*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto.
- Johnstone, R.L., 1992. *Religion in Society: A Sociology of Religion*, 4th Edition. Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.
- Jones, R., 1993. Country town survival: some Anglo-Australian comparisons. In: Wilson, M.R. (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Prairie Division, Canadian Association of Geographers*. Department of Geography, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, pp. 1–19.
- Kelly, J., 1997. *Brotherly Shove*. The Sunday Times 15th June, 7.
- Lawrence, G., 1995. *Futures for Rural Australia: From Agricultural Productivism to Community Sustainability*. Rural Social and Economic Research Centre, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton.
- McGuire, M.B., 1992. *Religion: The Social Context*. Wadsworth, Belmont.
- McKenzie, F., 1994. Population decline in non-metropolitan Australia: impacts and policy implications. *Urban Policy and Research* 12, 253–263.
- Mendez, T., 1998. Police, Shire steer clear of intervention. *The West Australian* 6th June, 7.
- Niebuhr, H.R., 1957. *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. World Publishing, New York.
- Olshan, M.A., 1981. Modernity, folk society and the Old Order Amish. *Rural Sociology* 46, 297–309.
- Olshan, M.A., 1991. The opening of Amish society: cottage industry as Trojan horse. *Human Organization* 50, 378–384.
- Philo, C., 1992. Neglected rural geographies: a review. *Journal of Rural Studies* 9, 193–207.
- Philo, C., 1997. Of other rurals?. In: Cloke, P., Little, J. (Eds.), *Contested Countryside Cultures: Otherness, Marginalisation and Rurality*. Routledge, London, pp. 19–50.
- Productivity Commission, 1999. *Impact of Competition Policy Reforms on Rural and Regional Australia*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Roberts, K.A., 1995. *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, 3rd Edition. Wadsworth, Belmont.
- Rowdon, H.H., 1967. *The Origins of the Brethren, 1825–1850*. Pickering and Inglis, London.
- Sibley, D., 1995. *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West*. Routledge, London.
- Sibley, D., 1999. Creating geographies of difference. In: Massey, D., Allen, J., Sarre, P. (Eds.), *Human Geography Today*. Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 115–128.
- Smailes, P.J., 1996. Accessibility changes in South Australia and the country town network. In: Lawrence, G., Lyons, K., Momtaz, S. (Eds.), *Social Change in Rural Australia*. Rural Social and Economic Research Centre, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, pp. 119–138.
- Smailes, P.J., 1997. Socio-economic change and rural morale in South Australia 1982–1993. *Journal of Rural Studies* 13, 19–42.
- Smith, N.D., 1986. *Roots, Renewal and the Brethren*. Paternoster Press, Exeter.
- Sorensen, A., 1993. The future of the country town: strategies for local economic development. In: Sorensen, A., Epps, R. (Eds.), *Prospects and Policies for Rural Australia*. Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, pp. 201–240.
- Taylor, M., 1996. Agriculture in recession: the regional performance of Australian broadacre livestock farming. *New Zealand Geographer* 52, 46–55.
- Tonts, M., 1996. Economic restructuring and small town adjustment: evidence from the Western Australian central wheatbelt. *Rural Society* 6, 24–33.
- Tonts, M., 1998. *Rural restructuring, policy change and uneven development in the central wheatbelt of Western Australia*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Curtin University of Technology, Perth.
- Tonts, M., Jones, R., 1997. From state paternalism to neo-liberalism in Australian rural policy: perspectives from the Western Australian wheatbelt. *Space and Polity* 1, 171–190.
- Troeltsch, E., 1931. *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*. Allen and Unwin, New York.
- Watts, K., 1998a. Christian sect splits families. *The West Australian* 5th June, 1.
- Watts, K., 1998b. Boycott sect business: critic. *The West Australian* 6th June, 6.
- Wild, R.A., 1978. *Bradstow: A Study of Status, Class and Power in a Small Australian Town*, Revised Edition. Angus and Robertson, Sydney.
- Wilson, B.R., 1967. The Exclusive Brethren: a case study in the evolution of sectarian ideology. In: Wilson, B.R. (Ed.), *Patterns of Sectarianism*. Heinemann, London.
- Wilson, B.R., 1970. *Religious Sects: A Sociological Study*. Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London.
- Wilson, B.R., 1990. *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism: Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Woodward, R., 1996. 'Deprivation' and 'the rural': an investigation into contradictory discourses. *Journal of Rural Studies* 12, 55–68.
- Wyman, R., 1998. James H. Symington, <http://www.cloudnet.com/~dwyman/jhs.html>.
- Yinger, 1970. *The Scientific Study of Religion*. Routledge, London.