



## Without Place, Is It Real?

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### Abstract

This article reviews Matthews' (2014) *Realist Criminology* as an opportunity to address larger shortcomings within critical criminology, which is the failure to develop an alternative theory of crime and place to the mainstream theories of social disorganisation and collective efficacy. It uses rural criminological work related to violence against women and substance use, production and trafficking to illustrate the importance of place for development of a realist criminology that can consider localised expressions of power and inequality, and the multiplicity of networks and roles by which people can simultaneously be involved in both conforming and deviant/criminal behaviours. The article also suggests that a critical theory of crime and place would be useful to the synthesis and re-interpretation of criminological literature that is either theory-less or lacks a critical perspective.

### Keywords

Collective efficacy; *gemeinschaft*; Left Realism; rural criminology; social disorganisation.

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## Introduction

... the local is the only universal. (US poet, William Carlos Williams)<sup>1</sup>

I begin with a simple claim: most critical criminologies ignore the reality of place, leaving place-based criminological scholarship hostage to the theoretical stumbles and methodological monotony of social disorganisation theory and the theory of collective efficacy (Donnermeyer 2015; Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014; Donnermeyer, Scott and Barclay 2013). This represents an amazing misstep given how much various strands of what usually falls under the umbrella of critical criminology is locality-focused by implication, but rarely by overt design. The tradition of keeping place in its 'place' – secondary, subsidiary, and not quite visible – continues with the newest attempt to revive and re-write an important strand of critical criminology, this time by Roger Matthews (2014) in his new book *Realist Criminology*.

As I read this book, which occasionally sparkles with interesting insights and is clearly written in a style which shows the author's passion for the subject matter, I was struck by how often I could find passages where place was assumed or mentioned blithely, but never fully recognised in a way that brings 'new' thinking (Taylor, Walton and Young 1973) to critical criminology and, in particular, to a realist criminology. In fact, I marked nearly three dozen places in the textual narrative and argumentations of *Realist Criminology* (Matthews 2014) where place is hidden behind a veil; it is there but we cannot quite see its face.<sup>2</sup> Finally, on pages 148 and 149 (only a few pages from the end of the final chapter), is Matthews' most explicit recognition of place where, noting the shift of criminology toward a concern with anti-social behaviours, he comments:

... a defining element of the new mechanisms that have been developed for controlling anti-social behaviour is the emergence of the neighbourhood as the site in which civility is to be enacted and regulated, resulting in an increasing role for communities to define, survey and report incidents. (Matthews 2014: 149)

Certainly, not all criminological considerations, critical or otherwise, require a place-based perspective. Yet, the role of place – community, neighbourhood, town, hamlet, city, village, crossroads, municipality, shire, township, borough, and so on – provides the crucial context in which issues associated with society-wide definitions of crime, social class and inequality, patriarchy and discrimination, law enforcement and punishment, justice and most other issues of interest to criminologists, play out in a 'real' world. That is what C Wright Mills (1959) wanted us to understand: the micro may be the 'only' macro, not because structural or societal-wide conditions are unimportant, but precisely because they are central to the lives of real people and the real places where these people live.

The purpose of this article is not to criticise Matthews' failed attempt to re-define the dimensions of a realist criminology. The book itself was mostly enjoyable to read, even though I kept whispering under my breath, continuously, in regard to the concept of place, 'you're so close, Roger, but you missed it again'. Instead, it is to take advantage of the shortcomings in Matthews' (2014) *Realist Criminology* to bring special consideration to what ought to be the pivotal role of a realist, critical theory of place within criminology and, conversely, of place in critical criminology.

I claim no insights of Einstein-ian dimensions about this subject, but I do acknowledge the role that place has played in my own academic background as a rural sociologist who then became interested in crime amongst rural peoples and communities. I eventually recognised the important role that critical criminology has to play in our understanding of crime in a world in which urbanisation and globalisation may be pervasive, but that is also a world in which over 45 per cent of its population experiences these macro forces outside the metropolis. By doing so, I

highlight important rural work where a left realist perspective is already incorporated but neglected by Matthews; namely, violence against women. A second area with sizeable and obvious rural dimensions where Matthews' critical lens failed to focus is the rural realities of drug use, production and trafficking. But first, I begin this essay with a brief discourse on criminological theories of place and my own epiphany about crime in the context of a rural locality.

### **Rural realities of crime and place**

As the noted rural scholar, Ralph Weisheit (2015: 3) observed, 'while most rural people live in urban areas, most places are rural'. Despite the vast, geographic sprawl of cities and suburbs around the world, the ever-encroaching tentacles of highways and electronic forms of communication across the globe, and the penetration of capitalist enterprises into the most remote places and isolated cultures on this planet, the world's geography remains sparsely populated. In a sense, cities can be viewed as islands in a sea of rurality.

Of course, sparsely populated is 'in the eye of the beholder'. The non-metropolitan (that is, rural) counties of the Midwestern US state of Ohio are densely packed with people when compared to the remote regions of inland Australia or the vast stretches of nearly unoccupied Amazonian rain forest. Yet, together they represent not only a wide variation in places considered rural but, by virtue of this diversity, they offer a rich laboratory for the application of critical criminology in all of its manifestations, including a realist approach.

Even though there are those in mainstream criminology who exhibit a laggard's mentality, still equating the city with significance and the rural with insignificance, a large share of the criminological community now thinks otherwise. One reason for this shift is rather ironic, because a major impetus for the growth of rural criminology over the past quarter century is the application of social disorganisation theory to the examination of statistical variations in official rates of crime in non-urban locales (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014).

The influence of social disorganisation theory on rural scholarship, especially in helping its emergence from a more scattered and marginal status during most of the twentieth century to what it is today, makes sense. Census data to measure so-called conditions of disorganisation and criminal justice records to create indices of crime are both fairly uniform across all the jurisdictions of the police and other criminal justice agencies of many countries, but particularly in those regions where most criminologists (including those with a critical orientation) seem to reside – in what I sometimes call the 'big four' of Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. This penetration of criminological statistical studies into the rural and remote regions of these countries carried the same baggage of methodological and theoretical shortcomings associated with the abstracted empiricism so vividly described and parodied by the late Jock Young (2011). Nonetheless, along with the convergence of other forms of non-urban scholarship, this trend helped bring a focus to rural criminology that largely did not exist before the 1990s.

In a countless array of studies, mostly using secondary datasets emanating from the criminal justice agencies of the 'big four', attempts were made to apply a theory to understanding rural crime rate variations that had emerged three quarters of a century ago in the city of Chicago (Lilly, Cullen and Ball 2015). The results were frequently inconsistent with urban-based studies (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014). Kaylen and Pridemore (2012) observed, after testing for themselves both the antecedent and systemic versions of social disorganisation theory to rural rates of violence and crime, that the theory has its obvious limitations.<sup>3</sup> The rural findings were frequently inconsistent with what the preponderance of the urban literature had found, no matter how the various factors were measured. Hence, its generalisability was limited, and perhaps this suggests deeper problems with its assumptions and causal logic, beyond problems

with measurement of key variables. Also, Wells and Weisheit (2012), in an analysis focused on US counties using the traditional independent and dependent variables employed by social disorganisation theory, discovered that, as the explained variance incrementally went down with size of place – that is, as the population of the unit of analysis declined in size – the theory was less effective in explaining the variance for official rates of crime.

Hence, in a way that Hegel (Russell 1945) would enjoy (and Jock Young as well), the abstracted empiricism which drives so much of mainstream criminology helped organise and coalesce the emergence of rural criminology, with the caveat that the rural findings now challenge the methodological base and conceptual assumptions of social disorganisation theory itself and, by extension, the latter-day version known as the theory of collective efficacy (Sampson 2012).

My own epiphany emerged from and was reinforced by the rural work of colleagues in Australia. Interviews with farmers indicated the extent to which they were stealing from each other. Victims were reluctant to ‘dob in’ their neighbor because of the difficulties it would cause the victim when living in a small, tight-knit community where everyone, quite literally, knows everyone else. Local police officers sometimes judged the significance of a crime reported by victims based on their relative marginality within the class structure of the local community (Barclay, Donnermeyer and Jobes 2004). There is nothing really new in these findings, except for the contrast in the way that the supposed *gemeinschaft* quality (Tönnies 1955) of these smaller places revealed a reality that was contrary to well-established stereotypes about the rural context. These were hardly the places that fit the image of ‘disorganised’ and, in fact, it was the very cohesion found at these localities that facilitated specific expressions of crime.

Soon after, the rural realities of Australia were examined by Hogg and Carrington (2006) in their ground-breaking book, *Policing the Rural Crisis*, a title that rightly so derives from the now classic work by Hall et al. (1978). The authors of this earlier publication observed that ‘the presence of durable local networks of informal sanctioning and social control in some rural communities, in particular, raises the question, not only of the scale of rural “crime”, but of the extent to which such communities have been brought within the domain of pacification of the administrative state...’ (Hall et al. 1978: 77). Hence, even though Hogg and Carrington (2006) note the degree that rural rates match or exceed urban rates, based on formal police record-keeping, they speculate that the normative and social structures of small, rural communities may actually suppress the reporting of crime and, indeed, may facilitate some forms of offending that a positivist, statistical approach would never find.

Hogg and Carrington (2006) were among the first scholars to suggest what has become an emerging critique of mainstream criminology by a more critical rural criminology that in essence says: *there is no such thing as social disorganisation* (Donnermeyer 2015; Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2008, 2014). Instead, there is a reality that is indeed place-based, regardless of population size and density. It is this: all places include multiple forms of organisation which can simultaneously facilitate and/or constrain specific forms of offending, based on the multitudinous ways societies, especially the powerful therein, chose to define what is deviant and illegal and what is not (Donnermeyer 2015). Those without power often finds ways to resist hegemonic authority and culture, creating their own subcultural variants, whilst others shift in and out of mainstream and deviant networks, masking their participation in the latter when associating with others in the former. Hence, the organisation-disorganisation continuum of social disorganisation theory (Kubrin 2009) is a linear, functionalist way of thinking which has no validity in a realist criminology of place.

In actual fact, none of the rural scholars should take credit for this observation as a completely original idea, because urban scholars working from distinctive theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches throughout the twentieth century – including, among others, Gans (1962), Wacquant (1993, 2008), Whyte (1943) and Wilson (1987) – made this same essential

point. There is no such thing as social disorganisation but, indeed, there are forms of social organisation that do not represent the middle-class assumptions about normality found in the theories of social disorganisation and collective efficacy.

As social disorganisation theory turned away from its cultural deviance/subcultural roots under the influence of Kornhauser's (1978) revisionist meanderings, what remained re-acquired its popularity with mainstream criminology during the 1980s and 1990s. The parts that survived were the parts isomorphic to the arithmetic process. Hence, urban-focused social disorganisation theory raced headlong into the twenty-first century on the dizzying rapture of large databases, sophisticated statistical analyses, and the turning of a purposive 'blind-eye' to the biases inherent in official crime data (that is, the administrative state). At first, most rural scholars scurried to follow.

Obscured was the potentially critical nature of social disorganisation's original conceptual base because the founding fathers of the theory, however misleading this moniker may be, had a substantial view of the importance of subculture, immigration, neighbourhood segregation and ghettoisation, and poverty, as forces of social control (Shaw and McKay 1942). Like Matthews, however, they were close, but they did not take the subcultural perspective far enough. This is because they did not completely consider relationships of power and inequality in the context of how criminal behaviours are defined and how the contestation of definitions of unlawful behaviours at a larger, structural/societal level are major factors in the ghettoisation of crime and crime's enforcement in the working class and poor neighbourhoods of urban landscapes and rural countrysides alike. In other words, mainstream criminological theories of place and crime failed to fully reflect on how the 'local is the universal'.

The possibility of a realist, critical version of place-based criminological theory was also lost, for the most part, during critical criminology's emergence (Schwendinger, Schwendinger and Lynch 2002; DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2012). There was not much about social disorganisation theory which was attractive, as the original Chicago School version was now obscured by the revisionist models beginning with Kornhauser (1978) and continuing with the work of Bursik (1999), Sampson (2012) and others who espoused one-dimensional interpretations of a community's social organisation through mostly statistical studies with large datasets. For the most part, numerous versions of critical criminology failed to incorporate a theory of place as the centralising viewpoint for their scholarly discourses. Either they failed to bring large-scale considerations of the relationship of inequality, power and discrimination to localised analyses of crime *vis-à-vis* a theory of place, or they delved into the cultural specifics of crime and deviance, forgetting that what happens within places reflects bigger societal realities. Pushed to the side were the ways the dynamics of place contextualise and symbolise the realities of macro- or society-wide structural conditions.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774), in his still-read poem *The Deserted Village*, laments the demise of a small place he calls Auburn,<sup>4</sup> the decline of which was caused when 'trade's unfeeling train usurp the land and dispossess the swain' (Goldsmith 2002). Hardly a criminologist or sociologist is Goldsmith, but one cannot doubt his ability to see great significance in the particular, which is the essence of both *The Sociological Imagination* (Mills 1955) and *The Criminological Imagination* (Young 2011), but not Matthews' (2014) *Realist Criminology*.

### **Violence against women**

Matthews (2014: 9-11) identifies five contributions made by feminist criminology, two of which are feminist challenges to mainstream criminological theory, and identification of the nature and extent to which women are the victims of violence. Yet, he curiously concludes that feminist criminology has lost 'much of its impetus' (Matthews 2014: 11) in recent years for the advancement of a realist criminology. He is particularly suspicious of what he describes as a

turn in feminist work to postmodernist perspectives that simply depend on 'situated knowledge' to the extent that the relativistic orientation of more recent feminist scholarship fails to inform a broader understanding of the structural conditions of society, women's victimisation, and the patriarchal nature of criminal justice policy responses in so many societies around the world.

Rather than viewing Matthews' (2014) dismissal of feminist criminology as the short-sighted mistake of a single author, it is more instructive to view his misinterpretation as another example of his failure specifically, and critical criminology's failure more generally, to develop an alternative to a mainstream criminology of place, hence missing a magnificent opportunity to do what the back cover of *Realist Criminology* mistakenly claims to do: set a 'new agenda'. He may be right (and he may not) about the overly narrow approach of much of postmodernist versions of feminist criminologies, but that does not mean they have no value. The point is that, without a firm grasp on the role of place, Matthews is fenced in on either side of a macro and micro view of crime and criminal justice, and thus is unable to connect one to the other because he has no conceptual way to engage in a scholarly discourse to do so, often misjudging the one as a better form of scholarship than the other. He is unaware that one way to connect the macro and the micro is place. Hence, he is unable to use his conception of a realist approach to interpret and synthesise the value of both past and current strands of feminist thought and research, be they post-modernist or not.

Again, it is rural work which helps show how the importance of place is necessary to make a realist criminology real. In 1992, Patricia Gagne published a ground-breaking piece of empirical rural work on violence against women in which she first cites and criticises the work of Strauss and Gelles (1986) for their contention that 'husband abuse' is more prevalent than violence against the wife. Juxtaposed in her work is a very familiar methodological divide between scholars who use survey research and those who prefer a more ethnographic and, by extension, subcultural approach. To quote Gagne (1992: 388): 'Feminists contend that violence is a form of social control perpetuated which promote and support men's use of physical force against women ... They have argued that the focus on violence outside its context obscures power relations within the family and society'. For Gagne (1992), that context is a small Appalachian community where violence was part of the patriarchal culture which objectified women and where the physical isolation of the place was transformed through patriarchy into 'persuasive control', social isolation of women, verbal threats, physical violence, and law enforcement and prosecutors who did little to help women as victims. She concludes (Gagne 1992: 413): 'I have shown how culture and the social structure provide a context in which the social control of women is achieved in a variety of ways, of which violence is only one'.

Perhaps Matthews (2014) would dismiss Gagne's (1992) work as diminutive or trivial, perhaps even as a harbinger of the criticisms he levels at postmodernist versions of feminist criminology. What Gagne (1992) shows, however, are two powerful messages for critical criminology specifically, and for all of criminology more generally. First, she smoothly links the specific to the general in a style that I believe C Wright Mills (1959) would admire. Second, even though it was not her intent, she demonstrates why rural criminological research has great potential to critique, revise and re-invent criminology, especially by creating a more critical criminology of place in which various localised expressions of inequality and power are considered centrally.

A great deal of the development of rural criminology can be said to be associated with research on violence against women. This may seem contradictory given the credit extended earlier in this essay to social disorganisation theory, despite its fatal flaws. Consider, for example, work on domestic violence in the rural context of another Appalachian community by a close cousin of Gagne (1992), Neil Websdale (1995, 1998), even though his conclusions were not in complete agreement with her results. His intent was to 'give voice' to rural women based on an

ethnographic case study approach that discovered that, despite draconian forms of social control over abused women, they nonetheless found ways to engage in ‘... many acts of resistance and developed strategies to avoid being vulnerable to victimisation’. These acts included everything from considering possible types of revenge to planning ways of leaving when their male partners were too busy or gone for extended periods, such as on hunting trips, drinking at bars, and doing drugs.

DeKeseredy and Schwartz’ (2009) monograph, *Dangerous Exits*, is a more consciously left realist approach to the study of violence against women in the rural context, and one that more explicitly seeks to link empirical research with theory-building. I was not surprised that Matthews (2014) was either not aware of their work or simply ignored it. In the case of *Dangerous Exits* (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2009), a male-peer support model of sexual and physical violence against women who are attempting to separate from their husbands/male partners is presented to readers. Like the earlier work by Barclay, Donnermeyer and Jobes (2004), DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2012) play off of the hackneyed vision of the rural as comparatively free of crime by emphasising the extent to which the *gemeinschaft* or close-knit qualities of social networks and the normative strictures of smaller-sized places exhibit characteristics that contribute to offending, rather than to constraining it. Indeed, although merely a figurative expression with limited value for a realist theory of place except to bring out a quality long suppressed by the weight of mainstream criminological theories of place – much like earlier sociological theorists, including Tönnies, used ideal typologies to make explicit certain features of societies (McKinney 1966) – there is a ‘dark side’ to *gemeinschaft*.

Beyond these qualitatively inclined studies from the rural Appalachian regions of the US are a plethora of studies in the non-urban places of many other countries. Wendt’s (2009) and Carrington and associates’ work in Australia (Carrington and Scott 2008; Carrington et al. 2013), Jewkes et al.’s (2006) studies in South Africa, and research by a variety of authors on violence against women in rural India (Bhattacharyya, Bedi and Chhachhi 2011; Krishnan 2005; Srinivasan and Bedi 2007) are representative of this rich diversity of site-specific research, whether it is self-consciously feminist in orientation or not. However, what amazes me is how little of Matthews’ (2014) book recognises the ways in which so much of this scholarship would not exist without the inspiration of feminist criminology. For example, the journal, *Violence Against Women*, publishes 15 issues each year, which alone debunks Matthews’ (2014) claim of lost impetus.

John Donne (1572-1631), best known for his poem *No Man Is An Islande*, also composed a set of romantic lyrics titled *The Good-Morrow*. With due apologies to Mr Donne, I use a line from his magnificent prosody to reflect on Matthews’ judgment that feminist criminology has ‘lost much of its impetus in recent years’. The first line of the third stanza begins: ‘My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears’ (Allison et al. 1983). Perhaps the reality is that, by ignoring the sociological features of place and its ability to aid critical criminologists in finding commonality amongst a diversity of ethnographic and post-modernist case studies, whether from Appalachia or India, the impetus to find scholarly vitality in twenty-first century feminist criminology is completely lost on Matthews. The impetus is there more than ever before, if only he knew where and how to look for it.

### **Drugs and rural realities**

My favourite pages in *Realist Criminology* are in the second half of Chapter 5: ‘From Cultural Criminology to Cultural Realism’. It is there where I believe Matthews creates useful synergies out of insights from a rich literature that the current gatekeepers of mainstream criminological theories of place have forgotten: namely, the subcultural dimensions of localities and the multiplicities of collective efficacies and forms of social organisation that exist within a place,

and all at the same time. Even here, however, his insights are far short of building a new agenda for a realist criminology because he fails to recognise the theoretical importance of place.

Matthews (2014: 107) cites the left realist concept of the square of crime, to which cultural criminology brings '... meaning, energy and emotion, thereby turning this formal structure into a lived reality'. I agree, but add that the formal structure is also useful as a heuristic for the organisation of dispersed and unorganised literatures on substantive issues. In *Rural Criminology* (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014), the square of crime is used to bring conceptual clarity to such diverse issues as communities and crime, agricultural crime and substance use, to build up a more critical interpretation of literature that is either explicitly non-critical in its theoretical orientation or is essentially theory-less.

I also nod my head in affirmation when Matthew observes: 'We generalise in part because we aim to learn lessons from studying different situations, and generalisations are often accomplished through the process of comparison' (2014: 109). Even though he ignores his own advice on studies of the same type within the variants of feminist criminology, Matthews (2014) certainly recognises value in the ethnographic work of Phillippe Bourgois (2000) on homeless drug users, to which he devotes a number of pages.

Matthews (2014) uses the work of Bourgois (2000, 2003) to counter conservative images of street life in big cities. So, too, there is a kind of street life in every rural village, town and hamlet in the world, not only related to crime against women but also for drug use, production and trafficking. National level surveys, such as the Monitoring the Future (Johnston et al. 2015) and the National Household Survey of Drug Abuse (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services 2014) long ago showed the equivalence in self-reported rates of illicit substance use in the US rural and urban populations. Further, a special rural edition of *Substance Use and Misuse* (Edwards and Donnermeyer 2002), with contributing authors from Australia to Nigeria to Costa Rica, affirm the significance of this topic for the study of rural crime.

Two recent publications, in particular, show the extent to which this issue is embedded in the social structure and cultural systems of rural communities. The first is a monograph by Garriott (2011) on the impact of methamphetamines in a rural area of the US state of West Virginia. His intent is to analyse not only the physical, psychological and sociological impacts of meth use in a rural locality, but the way its emergence has transformed the area. Mills' (1959) smile would certainly broaden with a passage from Garriott's (2011: 163) concluding chapter: 'The fact that responding to the methamphetamine problem could mobilise such a broad swath of the local community underscores the power that the concern with narcotics has in American political life'.

Throughout the book, Garriott (2011) portrays a community not in terms of the disorganizational effects of meth's introduction, but as a community whose organisation shifts and changes in response to its adoption and diffusion. This thesis essentially refutes the theory of social disorganisation even as it establishes the relationship of social capital and networks – the essential building blocks of the born-again version of social disorganisation theory called the theory of collective efficacy (Sampson 2012) – to the effects of methamphetamines directly on those addicted, their families, local criminal justice agencies, and on the culture of the community itself. In a large sense, Garriott's (2011) analysis is a rural-based community-level version of a subcultural approach to constructing a realist criminology so positively touted by Matthews when he refers to Bourgois' (2000, 2003) work in Chapter 5.

Also consider the research of Stallwitz (2014) on the integration of heroin users and the 'heroin scene' in the Shetland Islands. Like Garriott (2011), her research also delved into the ways that localised social structures and cultures in rural localities changed in response to the diffusion of an illicit drug via the workers, mostly from the urban south of Great Britain, who came to labour



at the shipping terminals for North Sea oil. Stallwitz (2014: 171) invents the concept of 'community-mindedness' as an alternative to Sampson's (2012) collective efficacy because it is a combination of 'spirit' or 'attitude', together with the social capacity of a locality: '... the development of community-mindedness depends on the realisation and adherence to diverse pro-social values and behavioural rules but also clearly defined sanctions ...'.

This community-mindedness formed the basis on which the new arrivals and their heroin addictions were governed locally through a strong normative system. The addicts were employed, they were not on the street causing disturbances, and were not engaged in predatory crimes (such as burglary and robbery). So long as their addictions did not disrupt the civic life of the community, these individuals co-existed side-by-side with a centuries-old culture of heavy alcohol use and the central role of pubs in the social life of the Shetland Islands. The stigma of being a known heroin user was reduced and tolerance of heroin users and heroin use was high. This form of social and cultural transition documented through what is essentially an ethnographic study of a newly emergent subculture in the Shetland Islands shows both the resilience of a community and the ways rural communities often respond to outside sources of change.

Clearly, Garriott (2011) and Stallwitz (2014) are describing two rural localities in a very large world but, because they spent their scholarly energies on the investigation of crime within the context of place, they were able to achieve the same thing, which was to generalise, not in the sense of statistical representativeness but in terms of theory development and the link of micro- and macro-level social forces. If realist criminology is the ability to put both a human and a humane face on the context of crime and deviance, then Garriott (2011) and Stallwitz (2014) represent how rural criminological research can help set the new agenda Matthews (2014) so deeply craves.

Even though he nearly idolises Bourgois' research, Matthews seems to regard most other ethnographic, case study and post-modernist work as if they are undesirables living in a ghetto of some sort, and that is where they ought to stay, segregated off from what a realist criminology ought to be. Bourgois (2000, 2003) is the exception, the rare bird, and one of the few 'good' cultural realists. So, let's allow him in and keep most of that post-modernist scurvy out! Instead, what Matthews (2014) ought to do is work from a theory of place to re-interpret and integrate locality-based research into a realist criminology, regardless of the perceived theoretical and empirical imperfections this body of work may display. Hence, a realist criminology also needs to take a realistic approach to the scholarship of others, rather than one of exclusion, parochialism and scholarly snobbery. There is much in all the criminological literatures, even the a-theoretical and abstracted empiricist kind that Young (2011) so cleverly criticised, which can be re-interpreted through a critical lens, if there was a better theoretical sense of place.

'Anyone lived in a pretty how town' is the opening line to a poem of the same name by EE Cummings (1894-1962). Cummings' (1959) unique phraseologies sometimes baffle me until I give up and toss his work to a side-table of 'to-be-read-when-I-actually-do-retire' literature. But I have always viewed this line as symbolic of the oft-hidden diversity of places, both large and small. Ideals create a blandness that the remainder of Cummings' poem so cleverly, sarcastically and incisively describes and, by doing so, recognises that below the surface is the real version of these places. Analogously, it is the rural scholarship on both violence against women and drug use that so vividly describes the multiple realities which Matthews (2014) fails to see, except for the occasional work of scholars like Bourgois (2002).

## Conclusions

The concept of place goes back to the very origins of criminology and continues to inform criminological scholarship today: as it should! Unfortunately, it remains a concept rooted in a functionalist mode that ignores what are arguably the two underlying or latent social forces that unite all of critical criminology: inequality and power. Even Matthews' (2014: 149) most explicit use of place near the end of his monograph adopts a view that is, at its core, functionalist rather than critical. Neighbourhood is seen merely as a place where governance has been pushed down by state policy to control anti-social behaviours. It is a passive recipient of social structure and change, rather than an active agent of context and of subcultural emergences.

As a rural sociologist who first drifted into criminology and then into the open arms of critical criminology, I have always been baffled by the unproductive nit-picking and concept splitting I hear at criminology meetings and read in the critical criminological literature. It reminds me of exactly the criticism that was so frequently and correctly levelled at the work of Talcott Parsons a generation ago, and now seems to be a trait displayed by too many of the bright scholars I see around me who claim to have a critical orientation. Several years ago, when asked to write a chapter about rural crime and critical criminology, I attempted to create a single sentence statement of critical criminology's rich diversity:

... all approaches to critical criminology argue for a structural explanation (yes, even the postmodernist varieties) of crime, that is, crime is rooted in economic, social, political inequalities and social class, racism, hate, and other forms of segmented social organisation, reinforced and rationalised by culturally derived relativistic definitions of conforming, deviant, and criminal actions, which separate, segregate, and otherwise cause governments at all levels and people everywhere to differentially and discriminately enforce laws and punish offenders. (Donnermeyer 2012: 289)

My purpose in reviewing Matthews' (2014) monograph was to make the assertion that a realist approach is not possible without a clear theoretical orientation that recognises the centrality of place. Hence, the title: 'without place, is it real?'

Building up a place-based realist and critical criminology must begin with two straightforward assumptions that mainstream versions of social disorganisation theory and the theory of collective efficacy largely ignore, as does Matthews. First, place represents a micro-expression or microcosm of all of the inequalities found in the larger society. I agree with the rural sociologist, Ruth Liepins (2000: 30), who views the community as a place with 'temporally and locationally specific terrains of power and discourse'. This simple nine-word phrase recognises both structural inequalities and the ways that both the powerful and the marginal express the context of their locations within a specific physical and social space and, by extension, within the larger structural complexities of society. Liepins (2000) is not a criminologist and it is perhaps for this reason that she was able to think about the sociology of community unhampered by the assumptions that have become so firmly embedded in mainstream criminological theories of the same.

The second assumption necessary to create a realist and critical concept of place and crime has already been mentioned. It is this: within a specific locality, as seen in Liepins' (2000) nine words of wisdom, are multiple forms of collective efficacy, buttressed by overlapping networks or forms of social capital. Hence, one expression of collective efficacy may simultaneously constrain some types of crime whilst it encourages other types of crime. Examples ranging from agricultural victimisation to women as the victims of violence to drug production, trafficking and use, all facilitated by the small, tight-knit nature of rural communities, illustrates this dynamic. That is the value of rural criminology as its distinctive theoretical contribution to

mainstream criminology and critical criminology as well (Donnermeyer, Scott and Barclay 2013).

A corollary to the second assumption is that, conceptually, individual actors can now be seen more clearly as having opportunities to participate simultaneously in multiple forms of collective efficacy *vis-à-vis* multiple networks/social capital. Hence, the contextual reality about how and why some people commit crime, as well as the actions of victims (from attempts at prevention to forms of resistance in relationship to forms of hegemonic power) can be more explicitly recognised.

Robert Frost (1874-1963) composed an oft-cited poem about coming to a place along a by-way where a seemingly trite decision gains lifelong importance. It is titled *The Road Not Taken*. The poem concludes: 'Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference'. Perhaps if Matthews (2014) had devoted his monograph to informing the reader more about what a realist criminology is, and less about what it is not, he would have recognised the centrality of place. He would have taken the road 'less traveled by', and what a difference it would have made!

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<sup>1</sup> Williams (1893-1963) was quoting philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), but expressing thoughts about the embeddedness of human experience in the nexus of everyday life (Conarroe 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Here are two examples of missing an opportunity to consider fully the role of place in realist criminology from Matthews' (2014) book. The first is on page 33: 'The problem of crime is not reducible to acts but is a process of action and reaction involving specific social groups and the interaction between them, their relative social and geographical proximity and the type of threat they generate'. Proximity indeed, but where is the recognition of place as a contextualisation of these diverse social groups, interactions and reactions. The second is on page 97, where he dismissively criticises cultural criminology: 'Thus, although cultural criminologists provide detailed and often colourful depictions of aspects of popular culture, they often fail to locate them within the wider cultural contexts from which they have emerged, or to identify the detailed workings of the institutions of social control'. If Matthews (2014) had used a place-based approach to revive realist criminology, he could instead turn this weakness into an opportunity to add value to the work of cultural criminology through synthesis, not dismissal and exclusion.

<sup>3</sup> The structural antecedent version of social disorganisation theory mostly uses census and other secondary forms of aggregated population indicators as proxies for cohesion, or lack thereof, of a community. The systemic version of social disorganisation theory attempts to measure more directly the cohesion of a place, such as by measures of ties and interactions between neighbours and neighbourhood-based networks. These factors are seen as mediating the relationships between the antecedent variables and social control, which in turn, affects offending (Bursik 1989; Kubrin 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Auburn is the principal city of Lee County, Alabama, US. It was named for the village in Oliver Goldsmith's poem. Located there is the former Alabama Polytechnic University, which officially changed its name to Auburn University in 1960. Auburn University displays the same dynamics of power and inequality that mark all places throughout their histories, and that link the local to the macro. For example, the university did not admit African-American students until 1963, over 100 years after its founding in 1856.

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