

# Agricultural Masculinities: Tradition and Change

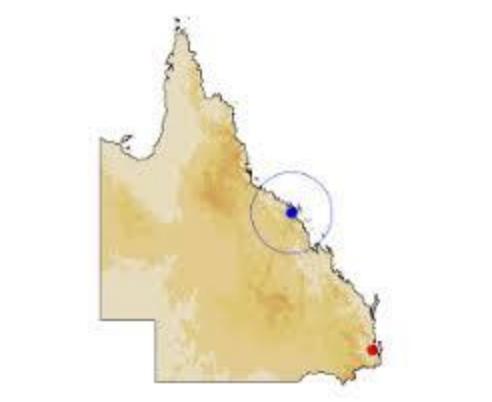
Barbara  
Pini



# Acknowledgement of Country



I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting and pay my respect to the Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



# My Story

- I grew up on a sugar cane farm in Proserpine in North Queensland.
- Race, class and the history of Australian cane farming.
- Between the years 1863 and 1904 an estimated 40,000 to 60,000 South Sea Islanders entered Queensland. Many were kidnapped. Coerced, deceived or persuaded.
- Italian migrants and the sugar industry –began late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, 1920s -1930s and post WW2
- My PhD examined gender relations in the Australian sugar industry – on farms and in agricultural organisations.

# Australian Agriculture and Settler Colonialism

The resounding no vote shows the great Australian silence lives on in the bush

*Gabrielle Chan*



There was a deafening silence about the Indigenous voice to parliament referendum in my regional NSW electorate, where 75% voted no

- Australian farming occurs on stolen land.
- This is the case in many countries.
- This has been ignored in the great majority of rural and farming scholarship and in many social movements related to farming (e.g. feminist, climate change, environmental and food security and food justice).

Pini, B., Rodriguez-Castro-, L. & Mayes, R. 2021. An agenda for Australian rural sociology. Troubling the white, middle-class farming woman. *Journal of Sociology*. 58 (2): [doi.org/10.1177/1440783321999830](https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783321999830)

Rodriguez-Castro, L. and Pini, B. 2022. The “White middle-class farming woman”: Instagram and settler colonialism in contemporary rural Australia. *Journal of Rural Studies*. 94: 83-90. [doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.05.024](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.05.024)

## Theorising Masculinities

### Tradition

- Agrarianism and masculinity
- Agricultural masculinities and the tractor
- Agricultural masculinities and heterosexuality
- Agricultural masculinities and the nation

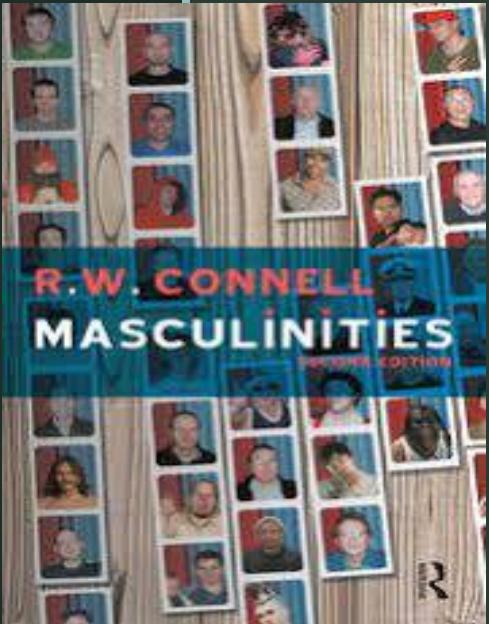
### Change?

- The farmer as businessman/entrepreneur/manager
- Agricultural masculinities and young farming men
- Agricultural masculinities, health and wellbeing
- Agricultural masculinities and fathering
- Agricultural masculinities and the environment

### Summary and Discussion



# Theorising Masculinities



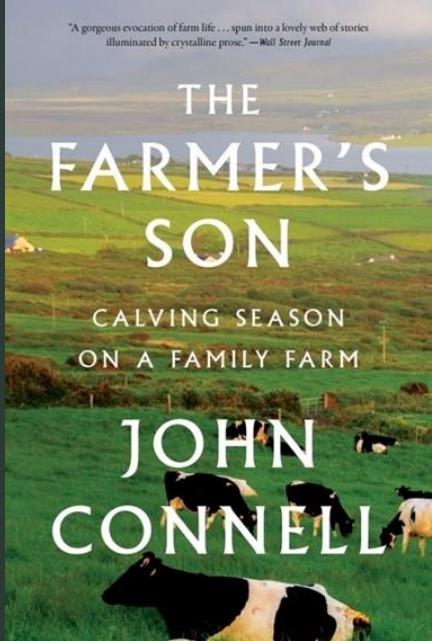
Until the 1990s studies of gender and agriculture were studies of women and agriculture.

Masculinities –socially constructed, something that is ‘done’. Not exclusively tied to male bodies but normatively associated with them.

Hegemonic Masculinity is:

- a socially constructed masculine ideal, held up as the most prestigious form of masculinity.
- defined chiefly in contrast to or as the opposite of femininity,
- used to organise men hierarchically.
- embedded in social institutions such as the state, education, and the family. Thus, male power is not simply held by individual men but is institutionalised in social structures and ideologies that support the gender order in favour of men in general.
- not necessarily good for individual men.
- Very few men actually occupy idealised hegemonic masculinity.
- Different definitions of hegemonic masculinity may co-exist.
- Definitions of hegemonic masculinity may change (Think “new” father and “new” man).

# The Farmer as a Masculine Identity



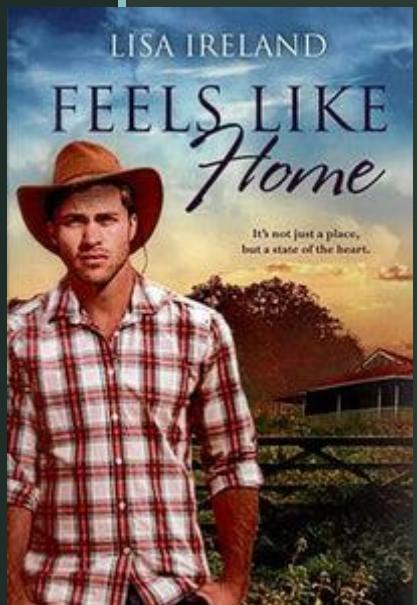
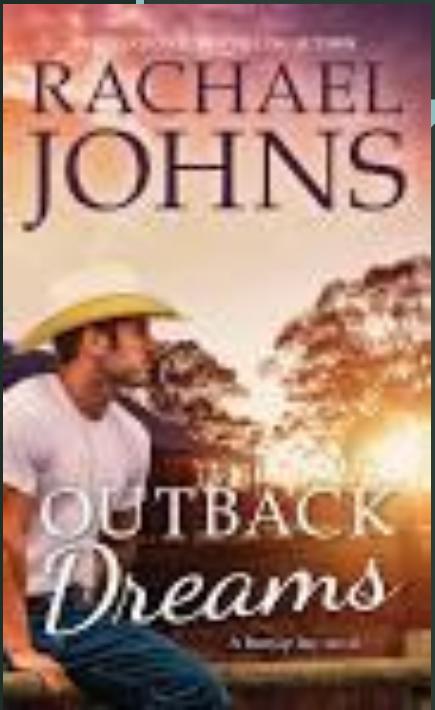
- Traditional agrarianism – farming as a ‘way of life’.
- Men are defined as ‘natural’ farmers. The farm seen as a masculine sphere and what women do on farms has been viewed as secondary.
- Tied to material practices e.g. patrilineal line of inheritance, access to knowledge about farming.
- Farming as masculine equated with physical labour, struggle, self-sacrifice. Farmers are stoic, resourceful, resilient, independent, hard-working.
- It is also an identity connected to moral worth. The farmer is viewed as communitarianism, family oriented, virtuous, an environmental steward.
- The ‘good farmer’ defined as masculine – the cluster of norms and expectations attached to the farming styles/system which are most highly esteemed (e.g. tidiness, productive).
  - Burton’s (2004) developed notion of ‘the good farmer’ without mentioning gender.

# The Farmer as a Masculine Identity – the Role of the Tractor

- Masculinity = natural expertise with technology.
- Brandth (1995) explored how the tractor as a symbol of agricultural masculinity was represented in Norwegian farming magazine 1984-1994. Emphasis on power and control of nature.
- Saugeres (2002: 143) used interviews to show how ‘male farmers use agricultural technology to reproduce and reinforce patriarchal ideologies which marginalise and exclude women from farming’.
- Pini (2005) how women who undertake tractor work negotiate their gendered identities.



# Agricultural Masculinity and Heterosexuality



- Agricultural masculinities tied to heterosexuality –
  - Notions of ‘the family farm’.
  - Close to nature/natural and heterosexuality
  - Feminising of land/nature ‘penetrating and fertilising the land’ (Saugrres 2002: 380).
- My reading of Australian rural romance novels (Think “chick-lit” but set in the outback).
  - She was fascinated by his work-toughened hands, spinning the steering wheel or deftly shifting gears, so different from the smooth, manicured hands of city men (Johns 2013: 23).
  - She’d never seen this look in Giles’ eyes, not once in the two years they’d been going out. It wasn’t disguised, or hidden beyond some cool façade, it was raw desire, need and...Lust (Lane 2013: 109).
  - Farmers were so close to the land, with most breeding cattle for a living and also riding the bulls for sport. It gave them a raw, untamed aura that a laptop and a suit just didn’t give urban man (Ireland 2013: 35).

# The Masculine Farmer as Representative of the Nation

- The farmer is seen as “the real Australian”. Exemplifies what it means ‘to be a man’ in Australia (and U.S). What about Germany?
- Bosma and Peeren’s (2022: 13) study of the Dutch farmers’ protests – authenticity of ‘the farmer’. Preserving farmer = preserving nation. People remain attached to these ideas ‘despite their lack of grounding in reality’.
- Why does this matter?
  - Exclusionary and hard to challenge – part of ‘everyday’ common sense.
  - Shapes policy and politics at local, state and national levels.



# Changing Agricultural Masculinities – The Businessman, Entrepreneur, Manager



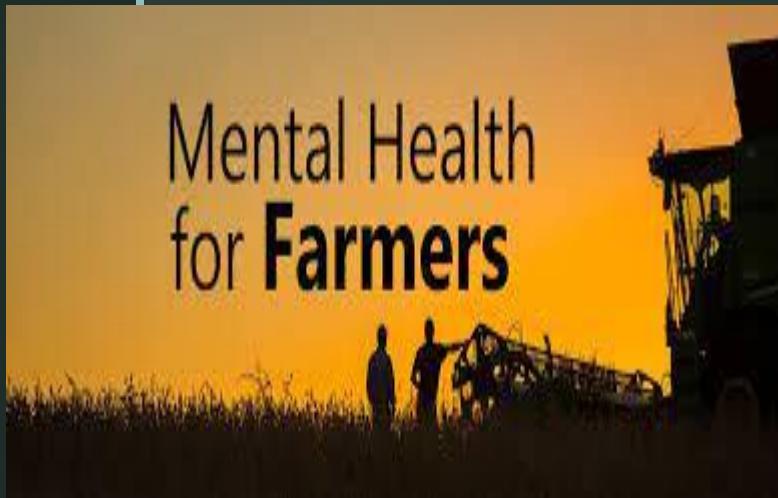
- Brandth's (1995) study – noted change in technology on farms – from tractor to computer. Emergence of a 'business like' and 'professional' masculinity.
- Brandth,& Haugen (2000) From lumberjack to business manager
- Bell et al (2015) agribusiness transforming agricultural masculinities from rugged individualism to businessman.
- 'Success as a farmer and as a man is more dependent upon rational decision making than hard physical labor' (Nusbaumer 2011: 103).
- Masculinity associated with continued reliance on chemical inputs, Improved and advanced technology adoption, expert knowledge acquisition (Bell et al 2015; Carter and Lopez 2020).

# Agricultural Masculinities – Young Farming Men

- Studies of young agricultural masculinities in the context of rural restructuring.
  - How has the socio-economic transformation of rural areas impacted young farming masculinities, and more broadly, the ‘gender order’?
- Ni Laoire’s (2001; 2005) young men farming in Ireland.
  - ‘Staying behind’ is synonymous with failure and exclusion.
  - ‘As farming undergoes radical change, rural masculinities, as traditionally defined, are under threat...marginal farmers and the isolated, may be most affected by challenges to hegemonic masculinities’ (232).
- Kaberis and Koutsouris (2013: 88) How do young Greek farming men understand women’s exodus?
  - ‘They can thus be considered the prisoners and victims of their own habitus (including dominant masculinity), i.e. the internalised set of general dispositions that unreflexively generates the way to be, the way to think, and way to interact.



# Agricultural Masculinities – Health and Wellbeing



- Failure to meet ideals of agricultural masculinity (either more agrarian/traditional or business/entrepreneurial mode) can be damaging to men's identity and mental health.
- The 'distressing reality of patriarchal family farming' (Price and Evans 2001: 1).
- Bryant and Garnham (2015) - The fallen hero: masculinity, shame and farmer suicide in Australia
- Hammersey et al. (2022) contemporary regulation of farming practices gives rise to tensions associated with a perceived loss of masculine autonomy and mastery, as well as ripple effects on mental health.

# Agricultural Masculinities and Fathering



- ‘Farming culture is losing its influence’ in how agricultural men describe fathering. They are adopting notions of the ‘involved’ father and ‘intensive’ fathering (Brandth 2019).
- Fluidity and hybridisation of masculinity in agricultural men’s fathering discourses with emphasis on care and tenderness but gendered boundaries still in place.
- ‘A dismantling of rural hegemonic masculinity still seems to be a distance away’ (Brandth 2018: 223).
- Allan et al (2021) – farming men wanting to be ‘better’ fathers than their own fathers. Embracing a caring masculinity while not letting go of traditional masculinity (e.g. economic provider).

# Agricultural Masculinities and the Environment



Sustainable agriculture seen as having potential to challenge hegemonic agricultural masculinities.

Stronger tendency of young women farmers towards environmentally friendly farming activities (Unay-Gailhard and Bojneč 2021).

Women have had a higher visibility in organic farming compared to industrial/productivist agriculture but organic farming viewed as ‘pretend farming’ (Silvasti 2003: 146). Similarly, Peter et al (2000) report sustainable or alternative agriculture viewed as ‘other’ or ‘feminine’ (and therefore lessr) by mainstream agricultural actors.

Barlett and Conger’s (2004) new type of masculine success on farms is an *emergent ecological vision*.



## Changing Agricultural Masculinities?

Evidence that traditional gender relations continue on organic farming – but note research is dated.

- ‘Most organic farms exhibited a fairly conventional gendered division of labor and power’ (Hall and Mogyorody 2007: 295).
- Sumner and Llewelyn (2005: 135) ‘This neglect leaves organic agriculture vulnerable to reproducing many of the problems it was intended to solve’
- Maceachern (2008) traditional gendered division of labour but some equity in farm decision-making. gender inequality not addressed on organic farms.
- Wilbur (2014) traditional gender roles adopted by ‘back-to-the landers’ in Italy.
- Leslie (2017) sustainable agriculture embedded in heterosexism.

## summary

- Masculine mythologies of farming are not just evident at the level of the individual but at the nation..
- There are many reasons for wanting to challenge and change hegemonic agricultural masculinities.
- Some points of positive change in agricultural masculinities (e.g. fathers wanting to spend more time with their children and engage in care) but significant gender inequalities remain.
- Further, agricultural masculinities tied to industrial farming continue to be highly valued.

# Potential Questions for Discussion



- Did you grow up on a farm? How was masculinity practised on the farm? What was your response? Have you noticed changes in how masculinity is performed on the farm in your lifetime? If not why are agricultural masculinities so resistant to change?
- If you had to imagine the ‘typical’ German farmer how would you describe them? Why? What differences are there amongst German farmers in terms of class, race and other social locations? How might these differences give shape to masculinity?
- Consider ways in which ideas about agricultural masculinities have been communicated in Germany. Think of films, literature, songs, advertisements, social media, political campaigns. Have you identified changes in representations of agricultural masculinities in these examples?
- To what extent is farming tied up with German national identity and masculinity? What protest and/or political movements have German farmers been involved with recently? To what extent has gender been a part of these protests/movements?
- How has farming changed in Germany and how might this affect masculinities in agriculture? To what extent has German/EU agricultural policy been framed by an idea of the farmer as masculine and/or traditional definitions of masculinity?
- What would agricultural masculinity look like for a more equitable and ecologically sustainable food system and world?