



Perspectives on the geography of intolerance: Racist attitudes and experience of racism in Melbourne, Australia



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ABSTRACT

Given the challenge presented by worsening racial and religious relations in many western countries around the world, a closer look at the interplay between racist attitudes among potential perpetrators and experiences of racism among likely targets, focusing on out-group status, can better inform the dynamics of culturally diverse societies. Melbourne, Australia is ideal for such an analysis given its highly diverse population. Building on recent scholarship detailing a new approach to examining the attitude–experience relationship, we add an important spatial dimension by investigating how patterns of association vary spatially within specific localities over and above citywide effects. Findings indicate significant associations between racist attitudes and experience of discrimination at the citywide and, in distinct ways, at the local (Local Government Area) level. Such relationships are shaped by socio-demographic and ethnic diversity profiles, embodying attribution and degree of out-group status, in complex and nuanced ways.

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1. Introduction

In an age of globalisation and international migration, competing discourses associated with attitudes towards cultural diversity, the socio-cultural composition of neighbourhoods, and experience of racism characterise settler societies such as the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Forrest and Dunn, 2006a). Among central issues for intergroup relations in such increasingly multiracial, multicultural societies is the response of majority group members to ‘strangers in our midst’ (Miller, 2016), and its impact on minority ethnic group immigrants, at both national (Talaska et al., 2008, p. 263), and local levels (Bowyer, 2009). Two questions are suggested: how are any relationship between racist attitudes and experiences of racism constructed, and to what extent and in what ways are such relationships manifested generally and in place-specific (local) contexts?

In addressing the first major study question, it can be noted that, until recently, very few studies have focused on associations between majority attitudes and minority experience of racial discrimination (EoD). Most analysed either one or the other, perpetrator attitudes or target experience (e.g. Dovidio et al., 2002; Flynn,

2005; Hyers, 2007; Swim et al., 2003), although in two European studies, Pereira et al. (2010) found a positive relationship between prejudice and discriminatory behaviour, while Kauff and Wagner (2012) found such behaviour was negatively related to pro-diversity attitudes.

More is known about the spatiality of receiving society attitudes to recent immigrants, though again the analyses are largely two-dimensional, treating the broad spatial context of attitudes or experience (Robinson, 1987; Clayton, 2006; Bowyer, 2009; Hopkins et al., 2015). Forrest and Dunn (2006b, 2007) noted an ‘everywhere different’ aspect to racist attitudes in specific localities, where demographic profiles and differences in attitudes were associated with variations in out-group status (discussed below), or social distance, more or less affecting different ethnic groups. Two Canadian studies have also shown significant differences in the spatiality of racist experiences (Ray and Preston, 2009, 2013).

Habtegiorgis et al. (2014) have addressed the gap in the literature involving relationships between perpetrator attitudes and target experience of racism with a new approach (used in this paper) which analyses two embedded though not mutually exclusive samples. Our objective is, for the first time in an intra-urban context, to explore interactions between attitudes towards ethnic minority groups, minority group experience of racism, and their spatial context in Melbourne, one of Australia’s two largest immigrant receiving cities (Forrest et al., 2003).

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2. Attitude, experience and the spatiality of racism

In Australia, 27 per cent of the population were born overseas, compared with 20 per cent in Canada, 13 per cent in the USA and 24 per cent in New Zealand (OECD, 2014). In a society so strongly influenced by immigration, cultural diversity has, to some degree, been accepted as a normal aspect of people's lives, as part of everyday multiculturalism (Wise, 2005), representing Australians as open to diversity and willing to engage with others (Ho and Jakubowicz, 2013, pp. 4–5; Forrest and Dunn, 2010). Behind this characterisation, however, lies a contradiction, a society which, while increasingly multicultural in outlook (Stratton and Ang, 1994), is still struggling to disengage from over two centuries of Anglo privilege and cultural dominance (Forrest and Dunn, 2006a, pp. 167–168), where multiculturalism co-exists with racist attitudes among the majority and experience of racism among minority groups (Vasta and Castles, 1996, p. 5; Markus, 2014a; Moran, 2011). Nationally representative survey evidence indicates that about one in eight Australians are overtly racist (Dunn et al., 2004), while one in five regularly experience racism, rising to almost 1 in 3 among some immigrant groups (Markus, 2014b; for a discussion of the experience of racism in Australia, see Dunn et al., 2003).

Much of our analysis centres on the concept of 'out-groups'. Both in- and out-groups result from social categorisation processes in which certain individuals become affiliated with the self, as in-group members, and others as outside the self, or out-group members (Shkurko, 2014). At the individual level, this process can occur symmetrically. For example, an Indigenous Australian includes other Indigenous people in their in-group but White people in their out-group; a White person may include other White people in their in-group and Indigenous people as an out-group. At the societal-level, however, such symmetry does not hold, with some ethnic/racial groups positioned as 'outsiders' within a national context while others are viewed as constitutive of the national imaginary and identity. Studies focusing on the threat hypothesis have shown that higher proportions of out-groups tend to increase the prevalence of 'negative racial attitudes' in multiracial settings (Bobo, 1988; Fossett and Kiecolt, 1989; Taylor, 1998). According to this literature, the underlying factor behind racial prejudice is the presence of out-groups, especially those regarded as most socially distant from the receiving society. It is these societal-level out-groups that are important targets of racist attitudes, with some of the most effective anti-racist interventions under-pinned by efforts to increase the permeability of group boundaries and create common superordinate groups of formerly oppositional in- and out-groups (e.g. Dovidio et al., 2009; Kunst et al., 2015; Tropp, 2015).

However, what constitutes a racist attitude for one person may be different for another, both across and among people of similar socio-demographic backgrounds (Forrest and Dunn, 2007). Bonnett (1996, p. 872) suggested a combined social and spatial perspective on racism, using a social constructivist approach aimed at identifying the main elements of and processes involved in category construction (see also Jackson and Penrose, 1993; Kobayashi, 2004, p. 239). The effect of a combined social and spatial approach is to conceptualise racist attitudes as social constructions within places (Schwarz, 2007), reflecting the importance of local socio-demographic and ethnic mix profiles acting to generate particular dispositions and experiences (see Havekes et al., 2014).

Two main types of racism have been suggested (Dunn et al., 2004, pp. 410–411). 'Old racism', represents an older form of socio-biological racism, highlighting racial inferiority. 'New (or cultural) racism' has to some extent supplanted the older form, and represents the 'insurmountability of cultural differences' (Markus, 2001), although the old and the new are interdependent (Hall,

2000, pp. 222–224; Pedersen et al., 2004). Differentiation under 'new racism' concerns ethnic groups seen as threats to social cohesion and national unity (i.e. the cultural values and integrity of the dominant Anglo receiving society – Jayasuriya, 2002, pp. 41–42). Denial of racism, sometimes called 'symbolic racism' (Sniderman and Tetlock, 1986) is represented here in two survey questions – Australia as a racist society and recognition of Anglo-privilege reflecting defence of the privileges of the dominant society (Pedersen and Walker, 1997; Forrest and Dunn, 2006a).

On the second major study question – do attitudes to ethnic minorities and experience of racism operate in local spatial contexts – while racism may be found everywhere, it is also 'everywhere different' (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000), depending on ethnic mix and the mix of socio-demographic characteristics present at the local level (Hopkins et al., 2015). Previous research involving contact and conflict theory (for a brief introduction see Valenty and Sylvia, 2004) has shown that larger proportions of ethnic minority groups in a neighbourhood can reduce intolerance (Schlueter and Scheepers, 2010). Forrest and Dunn (2007, 2011) have found that Australian-born residents living in neighbourhoods with larger numbers of European immigrants displayed low levels of racist attitudes. However, and consistent with racial threat (conflict) theory, residential proximity to a significant, socially distant out-group like those from the Middle East, or who are Muslims, can increase racist attitudes (Pettigrew et al., 2010), though not always (Hewstone and Schmid, 2014). These findings are consistent with those from an analysis of cross-sectional U.S. data, which found the educational level of an area impacted on whites' racial attitudes to produce 'a psychological response of out-group hostility generated by low status contexts' (Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000, p. 574).

3. Methodology and data

Habtegiorgis et al.'s (2014, p. 182) recently developed approach to relationships between racist attitudes and self-reported EoD using two embedded samples, proceeds in two main stages. The first measures racist attitudes towards specific target out-groups. The second measures the specific EoD reported by these target groups. The common element is out-group status: if racist attitudes relate to specific ethnic groups in a statistically significant way, and those groups are the targets of more EoD, then attitudes of perpetrators and experience of targets are statistically related.

The spatiality of these relationships can then be determined by examination of the ethnic or out-group population mix present in different parts of the city, and hence the basis for targeted anti-racism initiatives in specific areas as informed by the specific nature of the mix and the attitudes of local 'host' society residents (cf. Ferdinand et al., 2013). This was approached using entropy analysis, which groups areas (LGAs in Melbourne) on the basis of the similarity of the whole of their ethnic mix profiles (for a detailed discussion of this procedure, see Johnston and Semple, 1983; Forrest and Johnston, 1981).

Data on relationships between racist attitudes and self-reported EoD drew on the Australian 2001–08 *Challenging Racism Project* (2011) survey of Melbourne undertaken in 2006 ($n = 2607$). Questions were asked within three main topic headings: racist attitudes, identification of out-groups, and experience of discrimination (see Table 1 for details, with responses sought on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree through agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree to strongly disagree). Respondent socio-demographics closely approximated the 2006 census: males = 48.3% (survey) vs. 47.3% (census); for all ages except 25–34 (+2%), survey and census results differed by <1%. However,

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