



Cultural diversity, racialisation and the experience of racism in rural Australia: the South Australian case

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A B S T R A C T

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Rural spaces in settler nations like Australia are commonly perceived as 'white', with low numbers of 'non-white' ethnic minorities. Perhaps because of this, although ethnic diversity is a feature of some rural communities, there is a paucity of research into issues of cultural exclusion. This is surprising in view of recent federal government initiatives to encourage non-Anglo immigrants to settle in rural areas. How welcoming are the receiving communities? Set within a constructivist paradigm, racism is analysed here as a social construction within places, reflecting the local ethnic mix and socio-demographic profiles. From a telephone survey in 2007 and questions looking at 'old', 'new' and 'symbolic' racisms, this study finds that levels of tolerance and intolerance are everywhere different. Traditional associations between racism and higher education or increasing age are sometimes true, sometimes not; degree of contact is sometimes associated with acceptance, sometimes not. Particulars of the ethnic mix are especially important. Consistent with new racist attitudes, dispositions towards 'out-groups' varies between acceptance of immigrants from Britain and Europe and lesser acceptance of those from sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, or the Middle East (Muslims). However, while rural South Australians are less tolerant than people living in metropolitan Adelaide, low levels of experience of racist behaviour are found among ethnic minority group members than analysis of attitudes might have suggested.

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1. Introduction

Rurality has traditionally been seen as part of a cultural idyll embodying a natural counterpoint to the anomie, complexity and social heterogeneity associated with modern urbanism (Wirth, 1938; Bunce, 1994; Yarwood, 2005). Cloke (2004: 20–21), however, saw growing indications that this form of country *versus* urban imagining may be as much myth as idyll, that rural areas were not homogeneous, but very different, one area from another; and no longer free from social problems present in urban areas (see also Cloke, 2006; Neal, 2002). Rather rural areas were subject to an increasing blurring of boundaries between urban and rural (Wilson, 1992). Contemporary rural spaces could no longer be seen as single and homogeneous but as spaces of multiplicity (Mormont, 1990), often exhibiting ways of life scarcely different from those found in the modern city.

Rural areas have also been perceived as 'white' landscapes where cultural diversity and even ethnicity is rarely 'seen'

(Agyeman and Spooner, 1997: 197; Cresswell, 1996). This conflation of (Anglo) 'whiteness' and national identity in Britain has until recently been part of the symbolism of rurality (Cloke, 2004: 23). Cloke noted that 'explorations of racialised otherness in the countryside have been relatively few and far between', that (p. 28) the presence of 'non-white' ethnic minorities in rural areas was so unusual as to be 'out-of-place', urban, not rural. Yet he pointed (p. 29) to growing evidence of rural racism, ranging from the subtle to the 'downright criminal' (see also Agyeman and Spooner, 1997; de Lima, 2004). Such cultural constructions within rural areas can have deeply exclusionary effects. Similar conclusions have emerged from studies of racism in Western European countries (Blaschke and Torres, 2002). These included perceived threats posed by foreigners to the dominant Austrian culture (p. 44), of 'closed' rural communities in France characterised by a general rejection of everything coming from outside, in particular coming from the cities (p. 96), or the existence in rural Ireland of a strong rural mentality, but which did not necessarily translate into a rejection of minority groups (p. 165).

The Australian characterisation of the rural has had a strong Anglo emphasis. Recognition of the presence of Indigenous peoples and their contribution to non-urban Australian landscapes has

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increasingly been recognised, and distinguishes a settler nation like Australia from the English context. Nevertheless, Dufty (2009: 432) has noted that investigations of racism and cultural exclusion in rural Australia were 'few in number', and principally focused on the situation of Indigenous Australians (Carter and Hollinsworth, 2009; Hamilton, 1990; Langton, 1993). A recent edited volume on sustainability and change in rural Australia made no mention of population diversity, let alone racism (Cocklin and Dibden, 2005). Yet ethnic diversity has long been a feature of a number of Australia's rural communities (Burnley, 2001) increasingly so in recent years (Hugo, 2000). Recent exceptions to the paucity of research into racism in rural Australia include a special issue of the *Journal of Rural Studies* (Panelli et al., 2009); Missingham et al. (2006) discuss its demographic context and issues of social exclusion; while Forrest and Dunn (2006a) have examined the incidence of racist attitudes in Queensland and New South Wales.

Concern for the existence of racist attitudes is especially apposite in Australia's rural context in light of recent federal government immigration initiatives. Since 1996, federal government policy encouraged new immigrants to settle in rural areas to help reduce population pressures on the major cities and to assist in revitalising rural economies. This State-Specific Regional Migration (SSRM) scheme has been successful in diverting some immigrants to settle in rural and regional Australia through the introduction of a suite of SSRM-related visa categories governing where entrants under this scheme may settle for their first 3 years. South Australia has been one of the strongest lobbyists for, and users of, this scheme (Hugo, 2008). Hugo concluded (p. 143), however, that the whole issue of the ability of immigrant families to settle in and adjust to their new social and economic environments was of particular concern. Immigrant participants in a recent national survey of rural and regional Australia indicated general acceptance by receiving communities, but did not see themselves as being socially 'assimilated' nor participating as active members of local organisations and clubs (Collins and Krivokapic-Skoko, 2009).

This study aims to contribute to filling the gap in the literature on the racialisation of ethnic minority groups in rural South Australia. It reports on diversity, tolerance and experiences of racism among the overseas born from both English speaking (ESB) and non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). Using data from a 2007 survey, part of a wider study of racism in Australia (Dunn et al. 2011), a social constructivist approach was used to investigate the socio-spatial nature of attitudes towards 'out-groups' or cultural 'strangers' (Noble, 2005). A constructivist approach encourages the identification of aspects of category construction, of spatial identity or culture, as well as what constitutes racism itself (Jackson and Penrose, 1993). What are people's attitudes to immigrants, especially those who have come to a place where settlers from a given country stand out as culturally different? Is there evidence of an 'everywhere-different' incidence of racist attitudes in rural South Australia found by Forrest and Dunn (2006b) in eastern Australia? If so, are such attitudes a reflection of the actual presence of culturally different immigrant groups, or are they part of an older rural way of life traditionally seen to stress social homogeneity and intolerance of 'strangers'? What is the experience of racism by members of ethnic minority groups in rural contexts, and how does this relate to the degree and composition of inter-cultural mixing?

2. A welcoming community?

A welcoming community is among a small number of basic requirements for the successful integration of immigrants into any new society (Teixeira and Lei, 2009; see also Clutterbuck and Novick, 2003; Collins and Krivokapic-Skoko, 2009; Flint, 2007).

This is especially important because 'the dominance of whiteness and the pervasiveness of the pastoral idyll [and] the small size and scattered nature of rural minority communities ... are crucial factors which mark racism in rural areas' (Neal, 2002: 457). Conner and Heilpern (1991) have noted that first generation NESB immigrants often moved into rural areas because of job availability but remained because of a growing sense of belonging, in spite of experiencing some hostility from members of the dominantly Anglo-Australian community.

Missingham et al. (2006: 136) found that the situations noted by Conner and Heilpern (1991) resulted in economic considerations (concentration into lower paid jobs) and racist attitudes having to be offset by the creation of family and social networks based on shared cultures. Babacan (1998) stressed the importance of cultural issues and marginalisation, among other factors, as vitally important in shaping the settlement decisions of NESB immigrants to locate and remain in rural areas. There are, however, two parties to any welcoming society: the newcomers and the receivers. From the perspective of the receiving society, how a community is constructed, their social and economic backgrounds, and the nature of the ethnic mix present among immigrant newcomers, affects just how welcoming, how tolerant or otherwise, it can be.

The discourses of racism are complex. At their most simple, geographers and other social scientists commonly differentiate among three forms, 'old' and 'new' (Sniderman et al., 1991; Bonilla-Silva and Forman, 2000), which Hall (2000: 222–224) argues remain strongly interdependent; and also what are often called 'symbolic' racisms (Sniderman and Tetlock, 1986). Old racism embraces a socio-biologically based form of intolerance, emphasising the exclusion of racialised groups, with an emphasis on inequality (Jayasuriya, 2002: 40). 'New' or 'cultural' racism is a more subtle conceptualisation, focussing on the perceived incompatibility and 'insurmountability of cultural differences' (Markus, 2001; Sniderman et al., 1991), expressed principally in terms of national identity, nation building and who does or does not 'belong'. Symbolic racism is about perceptions of personal prejudice and levels of prejudice in society generally.

To an important extent, 'new' racist attitudes are associated with a form of national ethnocentrism where 'Australianness' is closely linked to Anglo (or Anglo-Celtic) culture (Johnson, 2002). This, in the Australian context, is the equivalent of 'whiteness' where immigration from Britain and Ireland absolutely dominated the intake of settlers for more than 150 years until the late 1940s. Australian racism involves the manipulation of power to mark Angloness (Britishness) as a location of social privilege (Forrest and Dunn, 2006b). Rural racialisation in the Australian context, as in the United Kingdom, involves 'the dominance of whiteness [Anglo privilege] and the pervasiveness of the pastoral idyll, the small size and scattered nature of rural minority ethnic communities' (Neal, 2002: 457).

Attitude analysis in western settings has long tracked an association between tolerance and higher levels of education (Nunn et al., 1978; Smith 1981). More recently, Dunn et al. (2004) found that 'old racism' and prejudice against other cultures was negatively associated with level of education. But they found no significant correlation between education and the 'new racisms'. Age is the other main basis for attitude differentiation. Dunn et al. (2004: 424) found a strong relationship between increasing age and assimilationist or anti-diversity views. Forrest and Dunn (2007) conceptualised this age relationship as acculturation to immigration among three age categories in the Australian context: those aged 65 and older, acculturated in the pre-World War 2 period of the dominantly British origin of immigrants and a White Australia policy; those aged 35–64, brought up during the post-World War 2 period and the dominantly European origin of immigrants; and

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