

Institute of Australian Geographers Conference July 2002

EVERYWHERE DIFFERENT: A GEOGRAPHY OF RACISM IN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT The nature and frequency of racism varies over time and across space: it is not a static phenomenon. Yet the geographies of racism remain poorly understood. This paper outlines research into the geography of intolerant attitudes in Australia. The handful of theories that attempt to explain the geographical variation of racism were applied. These range from the thinking of the early urbanists, such as Simmel and Wirth, through neo-Marxist explanations, the Chicago School, and more recently Social Construction approaches. An attitudinal telephone survey of residents throughout the states of Queensland and NSW generated a completed sample of 5000. An area stratified sample at the level of statistical local areas enabled regional variation to be examined. The constructs of racism that were tested included: tolerance of cultural difference, perceptions on the extent of racism, tolerance of specific groups, ideology of nation, perceptions of Anglo-Celt cultural privilege, and racialism, including separatism and hierarchy. Findings suggest a substantive degree of racism in Australia. Racist attitudes were expressed in each region in highly specific ways and did not conform to an often-assumed rural-urban divide. Anti-Asian attitudes, for example, were strong in some rural centres but were also strong in the outer urban districts in the state capital Sydney. Anti-Muslim attitudes, on the other hand, apply generally across social groups and geographic areas. Social Construction theory is put forward as a spatially sensitive theory for understanding and responding to the geographies of racism. The research points to the need for the development of anti-racism initiatives that are responsive to the local nature of racism.

BACKGROUND

A number of authors have now noted that the nature and frequency of racism varies over time and across space: it is not a static phenomenon (Berry & Kalin, 1995:309,315-9; Cope *et al.* 1991, p. 27; Kalin & Berry, 1995; Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; Vasta & Castles 1996, pp. 5,14,20). Yet the geographies of racism remain poorly understood (Kobayashi & Peake 2000, p. 400). This paper outlines research into the geography of intolerant attitudes in Australia. One of our principal aims is to finesse the theory for understanding the geographic variation of racism, with particular emphasis upon advancing a social construction approach.

METHOD

An attitudinal telephone survey of residents throughout the states of Queensland and NSW generated a completed sample of 5056. The sample was area stratified at the level of statistical local areas to enable regional variation to be examined. We have some preliminary findings, having received the raw only a few weeks or so ago, and my intention today is to present some of the preliminary findings.

SAMPLE ISSUES

Size: 5056

Distribution: NSW 63.6% QLD 36.4%
Capital cities (2577), regional cities (607), rural (1872).
From across 401 post-codes (every second)
Respondents from all residential SLAs (with the exception of some in Brisbane)

Timing: October – December 2001

Composition: Speak a language other than English 14.2%
Born in Australia 76.5%
Women 58.7%
Indigenous Australians 1.9%

Let us turn first, and briefly, to the available theory.

INDICATORS

Our survey questions were adapted from rigorous work carried out in North America and in Europe. Typically, these attitudinal questions gauge respondents' tolerance (or discomfort) with specific (out) cultural groups, as well as their opinions on the desirability of cultural diversity.

Traditional indicators: out-groups
(Old racism) tolerance of diversity

However, new question formats were introduced to operationalise those issues arising within contemporary theories of racism. These included questions on perceptions of white (Anglo-Celtic) cultural privilege, ideologies of nation, beliefs in racialism, racial separatism (differentiation) and racial hierarchy (inferiorisation).

Newer constructs: White (Anglo-Celtic) privilege & normalcy
(New racism) ideologies of nation
racialism; separatism; hierarchy

THE EXTENT OF RACISM

1. Out-groups

We asked two sets of questions that delivered data on who might be the current out-groups of Australian society.

Firstly, we asked respondents whether they believed that there were any cultural or ethnic groups that did NOT fit into Australian society? Respondents could then name three such groups if they liked.

"Muslims (& people from the Middle East) don't fit in"

By far the most common groups mentioned were Muslims and people from the Middle East. At least 635 respondents said Muslims, and 641 said people from the Middle East. Quite a lot of cultures and groups from Asia were also mentioned by respondents (746 mentions in all). Fifty-eight people even said that Indigenous Australians did not fit into Australian society.

To measure the degree of intolerance of specific out-groups we asked respondents for the extent of their concern, or none, they would have if a close relative were to marry a member of specific groups.

Table 1: Concern regarding out-marriage of a relative, to specific groups

Level of concern*	Muslim %	Aboriginal %	Asian %	Jewish %	Italian %	Christian %	British %
Not at all	46.0	70.5	71.8	74.9	87.3	90.7	91.8
Slightly	16.1	13.8	13.0	12.0	7.2	4.6	4.6
Somewhat	12.3	7.7	7.9	6.5	3.3	2.3	1.9

Very	9.7	3.5	3.3	3.0	0.9	0.8	0.7
Extremely	14.7	3.9	3.2	2.5	0.8	1.2	0.7
Don't know	1.2	0.7	0.8	1.0	0.5	0.4	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Question wording: In your opinion how concerned would you feel if one of your close relatives were to marry a person of ...

Clearly, there is a lot of concern regarding Muslim Australians. Interestingly, while women were generally more relaxed about out-marriage to all groups, they were more concerned about out-marriage to a Muslim than were men. This suggests that Muslims suffer quite dramatically from the stereotypes of Islamic misogyny / sexism. The results clearly indicate an expanding Islamaphobia, no doubt linked to recent geopolitical events, media representations of Muslims, and an accumulating heritage of western antipathy to Islam.

Clearly, Aboriginal, Asian- and Jewish Australians remain as significant out-groups, if not to the extent of Muslims. Anti-Aboriginal and Anti-Jewish sentiment appear to have a relentless longevity in Australia.

2. Normalcy and privilege

We examined the extent to which respondents recognised there to be a problem of racism, and the extent to which they recognised that there was a White (Anglo-Celtic) cultural privilege in Australia.

‘New racisms’

Table 3: Recognition of racial prejudice and Anglo-Celtic privilege in Australia

	There is racial prejudice in Australia?* %	British Australians enjoy a privileged position?** %
Strongly disagree	1.6	9.8
Disagree	6.9	32.8
Neither disagree or agree	7.7	16.0
Agree	52.9	31.2
Strongly agree	30.2	7.7
Don't know / Not sure	0.6	2.5
Total	100.0	100.0

*Question wording: There is racial prejudice in Australia?

**Question wording: Australians from a British background enjoy a privileged position in our society?

83.1% of respondents recognised that there was problem with racism in Australia, leaving about 8.5% in denial. However, the denial of Anglo-Celtic privilege was much higher at 42.6%.

Older people and men were more likely than younger respondents and women, to deny racism and privilege. Only 4.8% of indigenous respondents denied there was racism, and a third denied there was Anglo privilege. And only 35.7% of respondents who could speak a Language Other than English denied there was privilege.

So, while there is a great recognition of racism, the recognition of 'winners' is much lesser. And while that recognition is stronger among indigenous Australians and those of a non-Anglo-Celtic background, the extent of variation is not as marked as one would have imagined.

3. Belief in 'race', racial hierarchy, and racial separatism

‘Old racisms’.

Table 4: Racialism, racial separatism, and racial hierarchy

	Belief in 'races'* %	Sexual separation** %	Racial equality*** %
Strongly disagree	5.6	31.4	3.1
Disagree	9.5	44.1	8.6
Neither disagree / agree	6.2	10.6	4.8
Agree	48.8	10.5	44.6
Strongly agree	28.8	2.8	38.5
Don't know / Not sure	1.1	0.7	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Question wording: Humankind is made up of separate races?

**Question wording: It is NOT a good idea for people of different races to marry one another?

***Question wording: All races of people ARE equal?

About 78% of respondents believe that human kind can be sorted by natural categories called 'races'. Clearly, the belief in natural categories is quite prevalent.

Just over 13% of respondents are separatists, specifically in the sphere of marriage.

And 11.7% felt that there was a racial hierarchy of some form.

4. Self-identification as a racist

Respondents were asked if they themselves were prejudiced against other cultures. This was an indicator of the respondents' preparedness to self-identify as racist.

Table 5: Self-identification as a racist

	I am prejudiced* %
Strongly disagree	39.3
Disagree	40.9
Neither disagree / agree	7.5
Agree	9.4
Strongly agree	2.6
Don't know / Not sure	0.3
Total	100.0

*Question wording: You are prejudiced against other cultures?

About 12% of respondents self diagnosed their own racism. This hard core body of racists, are likely those that believe in racial hierarchy and separatism. This relation is yet to be statistically tested. But, clearly there is a hard core of Australian racists, extrapolating from our results, we are talking about just over one-in-ten Australians.

URBAN / RURAL VARIATION

A straightforward urban/rural division in the extent of racism has yet to be convincingly demonstrated in any recent research (see Davis & Stimson, 1998; Dunn & McDonald, 2001:34-6; Forrest et al., 2001). Although some Australian researchers have generated data which may suggest that anti-Indigenous sentiment is stronger in rural Australia than in cities (Dunn & McDonald, 2001:34-5; Pedersen et al., 2000:110,114).

Denial of racism and Anglo-Celtic cultural privilege varied very little by urban and rural, with a slightly higher denial of racism in the regional and capital cities.

Racialism, etc

Table 8: Racialism, racial separatism, and racial hierarchy, by urban / rural

	Belief in 'races'* %	Sexual separation** %	Racial equality*** %
Urban	77.2	12.5	11.2
Regional	76.6	15.3	12.8
Rural	78.6	13.7	11.9
All	77.6	13.3	11.7

*Question wording: Humankind is made up of separate races?

**Question wording: It is NOT a good idea for people of different races to marry one another?

***Question wording: All races of people ARE equal?

Variation in belief of natural racial categories did not vary much between capital cities, regional cities and rural areas. However, belief of racial hierarchies and particularly separation did reveal some urban / rural variation, with regional cities showing the stronger support.

Self identify

Table 9: Self-identification as a racist, by urban / rural

	I am prejudiced* %
Urban	13.2
Regional	9.9
Rural	10.8
All	12.0

*Question wording: You are prejudiced against other cultures?

There was a stronger self-identification as racist in the capital cities than elsewhere.

As we found in an earlier pilot project (Dunn & McDonald, 2001:34-6) there is little substantive evidence of a straightforward urban / rural differentiation regarding racist attitudes.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS

There is little substantive evidence of a straightforward urban/rural differentiation of racist attitudes. This finding corresponds with the conclusions of recent geographical research in Australia that has questioned the simplistic notion of a 'city – bush dichotomy' which is often

prevalent in media and political discussions (Stimson, 2001; Davis and Stimson, 1998; Dunn and McDonald, 2001; McManus and Pritchard, 2000)

Many rural areas are less racist than parts of the metropolitan centers. Some of the most 'racist regions' are located within Sydney and Brisbane, especially in more working class districts. Finally, there is considerable variation among rural regions, as well as across the major cities.

- In Sydney, higher levels of racism occur in the west, southwest and south of the city; rather less in the north and east, and in between in the Blacktown/Baulkham Hills area.
- In Brisbane, higher levels occur in the working class areas of the south and east, in Logan City and in Redlands and in some areas to the north, but not in the central area, Brisbane City, the north (Pine Rivers) or west (Ipswich) – home to One Nation but also well known for its excellent civic initiatives.
- In rural and regional NSW, racism is higher in the south, including the Riverina, but low on the Far North Coast (Tweed-Richmond), the Illawarra and the southeast, and in central to northern coastal regions.
- In QLD, racism is high in southern and southeastern parts of the state, but low in the Cape York – Cairns region.

All this relates to the summary statement derived from the sum of scores on the range of identifiers tested for. When we look at the detail, however, at individual questions, the picture changes. We find that racism generally and in its various forms is not only everywhere different, but also different in specific ways.

- While Anti-Muslim sentiment is generally strong, and anti-Asian sentiment varies markedly. This is an important change from the time of the 1998 election, when the focus, through One Nation, was more on anti-Asian sentiment.
- Anti-cultural difference sentiment varies very much more across Sydney than it does across Brisbane.
- Anti-Indigenous sentiment is strong in a few areas – in northern NSW and central to southern QLD, but otherwise is fairly uniformly set at 30% or so of respondents.
- Anti-Asian sentiment is a more uniform 25% or so across rural and regional NSW, but more variable in QLD, and strongest in the Maryborough – Gladstone region and in the central-west of the state.

THEORY

Social constructivism

The unique histories and relations of each 'place' could be expected to produce specific sets of inter-communal relations (Massey, 1992:12). This complexity and local specificity point to the utility of a social constructivist theory of racism. According to this theory ethnicity is a socially constructed category rather than a natural order (see Jackson & Penrose, 1993:3; Kobayashi &

Peake, 1994; Vasta & Castles, 1996:22). Ethnic groups are constructed in different ways; ways that are dependent upon place and the unique layers of identity of that place. Jackson and Penrose stated that "place contextualises the construction of 'race', generating geographically specific ideologies of racism" (Jackson and Penrose 1993: 203). Place is important in the construction of ethnicity and thus is important in the construction of racism. The specific forces that determine ethnicity in any location will also underpin racism.

A social construction approach should be particularly useful for disentangling the geographies of racism.

Our research has also examined issues that have arisen within contemporary theories of racism. These include discussion about the everydayness of racism, privilege, the ideologies of nation, and racialism.

Privilege and normalcy

Researchers have commented on what they have called the normalcy of racism (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000, pp. 394-6). It has been argued there is a privilege of Whiteness, and that it is associated with a way of life and perspective from which racism is unseen or is considered an exceptional aberration (Kobayashi & Peake 2000, pp. 393-7). We decided to examine the extent to which respondents recognised there to be a problem of racism, and the extent to which they recognised that there was a White (Anglo-Celtic) cultural privilege in Australia.

These arguments also infer the utility of a social construction approach for racism research. A foundational premise of social constructivism is the problematising of that which is seen as non-problematic, a project of de-naturalising (Jackson & Penrose, 1993:203; Kobayashi & Peake, 1994:230). Examining normalcy and privilege advances such a problematising aim.

Ideology of nation: spatial managers and the spatially managed

A number of researchers of racism have pointed to the ideology of nationhood as important to understanding racism (Hage 1998:27-55; Goodall et al. 1994:16,188). Racism is likely to be linked to dominant ideas about what the nation is, where it is, and who is popularly considered to be a citizen: what is an Australian? (Rizvi, 1996:174). Ghassan Hage (1998) has persuasively suggested the utility of the binary concepts of spatial managers and the spatially managed. The spatial managers are those who feel empowered to express an opinion about the country, and about who belongs, and who should be allowed into the national space. The spatially managed are those who have opinions expressed about them, where they should be put, what they're doing, where they should be sent back to, etc.

Contemporary racism in Australia, and intolerance of specific cultural groups, is likely linked to historic constructions of Australian national identity. Asian-Australians, Muslims, and Indigenous people have long been key Others to the Australian national imaginary (Hamilton, 1990; Rajkowski, 1987; Rizvi, 1996:176-7).

Again, social constructivism is useful here, as we are talking fundamentally about the way in which constructions of national identity might inform everyday racisms.

Racialism, nature and racism

It has been argued that belief in natural categories of humankind called 'races', is a core ideology on which racism draws. Without the notion of separate and distinct 'races', racial discrimination would have little force. Following this theoretical advice we made racialism a core component of our geographies of racism survey (Anderson 1998, pp. 125-7; Bonnett 1996; Kobayashi & Peake 2000, p. 393; Miles 1989).

CONCLUSIONS

Further work: the experience of racism

Collection of data on the experience of discrimination is the most innovative approach to developing indicators on the extent of racism. This approach has been developed and applied by a research team based at the University of Michigan, USA (The University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, 2001 and the Eurobarometer). This form of indicator on the extent of racism has not yet been systematically applied in the Australian circumstance. We tested a handful of such questions. They indicate that about 16% of respondents have experienced racism within their workplace, and the reports for other institutional spheres were even lesser. The rates of racism experienced by Indigenous Australians were much higher (Workplace 29%). We also asked respondents to tell us about everyday forms of racism, suffered in restaurants at sport, in the streets etc. The frequencies of these racisms were higher than for the institutional forms. Most noteworthy were the generally higher levels of racism experienced in the form of dis-respectful treatment, lack of trust and name-calling.

Policy relevance: anti-racism initiatives

While racism is quite prevalent in Australian society its manifestation is everywhere different. Also, international research has indicated the importance of locally developed and locally owned anti-racism initiatives (Pedersen et al., 2000:116; Vasta & Castles 1996: 15-6). Kobayashi (1994:78) advocated the need to confront the discourses of racism "on the very sites where they are produced and nourished". Our research interest is premised, therefore, on the conviction that locally sensitive anti-racism initiatives are required to engage everyday racisms within Australian society.

Local organisations that develop anti-racism initiatives (such as local government, lands councils, and grass roots organisations) depend largely upon anecdotal evidence on the nature and extent of local racisms. Our current project is overtly aimed at generating decision making support tools for central and local government agencies, as well as community groups, to aid their development of anti-racism strategies. The database that we envisage would be comprised of data that are statistically significant at the local level (SLA). Our intention is to prepare a web-site where such data would be freely available.