

***Rural Racism*, Neil Chakraborti and Jon Garland (eds) (2004),
Willan Publishing, Culmcott House, Cullompton, Devon, United
Kingdom**

This edited volume explores the prejudice against immigrants and people of colour who reside in rural England. Scholars and practitioners from the social sciences and services describe two contravening qualities of the bucolic English countryside. The first is an assumed tradition of stoic tolerance and cheer. The second is the presence of prejudice against outsiders, particularly ethnic and racial minorities. The chapters complement each other to help examine and understand the phenomenon. The discovery that prejudice exists in contemporary rural England appears to come as a surprise to the authors though rejection of outsiders is historically commonplace in rural communities.

The exploration and discovery of racism in rural England are recent. The data examined in this volume are derived from a few relatively limited research projects. All authors agree that some prejudice against racial and ethnic minorities is present. Several passionately contend that such prejudice is a grave problem that merits the dedication of political, educational and social service resources.

This is the first volume that summarises and articulates a wide range of findings around the topic. The diversity of opinions and observations among the authors is perhaps the greatest strength of the book. Chapter One by P Cloke emphasises the heterogeneous dystopic and dynamic character of rural areas in England. Chapter Two by P de Lima specifies how particular sub groups are particularly vulnerable and affected by prejudice and discrimination. The absence of local support networks creates a hardship; women who cannot drive are especially isolated. Some areas, such as Suffolk, have considerably more prejudice than others, such as West Norfolk. In Chapter Three D Malcolm describes how minorities typically were excluded or withdrew. Minorities were reluctant to either describe offensive incidents as prejudice or to report incidents to the police.

Chapter Four by V Robinson and H Gardner is especially insightful. Drawing upon data from rural Wales and literature from international sources, the authors stress the need for specifying and differentiating the relationship between being a member of a minority and residing in rural areas. Their research found that racism is far less common in Wales, and in fact is often directed against the English, rather than minorities of colour or ethnicity. Although racism existed, many immigrants reported that they felt positive about their experiences and preferred to reside in rural Wales than where they had previously lived.

Chapter Five by P Iganski and J Levin contextualizes rural racism in England by considering the experiences of other nations from an interactional perspective. They develop their analyses of 'cultures of hate' by examining social interaction and values systems of prejudiced conservative rural groups in the United States and Britain. Chapter Six by J Garland and N Chakraborti introduces 'othering' as a process in which rural people want and reward conformity to local behaviors and values.

The final three chapters describe what has been done or what their authors think should be done to combat rural racism. Chapter Seven by S Jalota summarises the organisational structure of a model initiative for local service provision. Chapter Eight by K Broadhurst and A Wright offers polemic that higher education has failed on race and racism issues. They provide a generic list of educational considerations that might be effective against

racism in rural areas. R Pugh in Chapter Nine circumspectly ties together the complex and fragmented materials presented in the preceding chapters. He cautions that while rural areas tend toward conservatism, they ... 'are by no means illiberal places or places that are resistant to new comers' (p 177). He stresses that any responses need to be contextualized into the unique characteristics of the local community.

There also are conceptual and methodological weaknesses to the text. The research on the topic in England amounts to a small number of studies, which for the most part have been conducted with the intent of substantiating that prejudice against racial and ethnic minorities exists in locations which have attracted some notoriety. There generally were no attempts to measure levels of prejudice among other (non-minority) persons. This is a crucial shortcoming since locals may well be prejudiced against all kinds of others, including many locals. Generalising that there is a large and frequent problem when the data seem to indicate that with some exceptions the incidents are comparatively few and not exclusively racist, crosses the boundary between social science and advocacy. It is possible that a relatively small percentage of the local population is prejudiced and responsible for a high percentage of racist incidents. It is also possible that some reverse prejudice occurs. In either case, the data do not demonstrate the presence of a racist society.

Moreover, what is being discussed as racist may conceptually be a distinctly different process. Being close minded because of local mores is not the same as being racist. Racism is directional against identifiable groups. Xenophobia is being opposed to everyone else. Xenophobia is an ancient social science concept that may describe most processes discussed throughout the text more effectively than does racism. Since it is a nearly universal process in isolated areas and places experiencing strain, it should hardly come as a surprise that prejudice exists in rural England just as it does in rural Africa, Asia, Australia, the Americas and certainly the Balkans.

Garland and Chakraborti quote (p 128–129) a woman of mixed racial heritage as an example of discrimination:

There's a chap who lives just down the road from me, he was saying 'It's all right love, we don't see you as one of them. You're one of us.' I don't want to be one of them, thank you very much. I'm me thank you.

However, the statement does not express rancor against the category. It also articulates what is acceptable by a local person. Her insistence on being herself ignores his statement of value. What may be implied is that rural English communities are no longer unique comparatively homogenous social systems in bucolic settings. Along with a residual of locals, they are heavily composed of commuter and transient populations from mixed class, racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds. The phenomena described in this book seem rather restrained and tolerant in comparison to recent riots in nearby English industrial cities. On this somber note older social scientists may recall the popular *Merry Minuet* composed in 1958 by Sheldon Harnick:

They're rioting in Africa
 They're starving in Spain
 There's hurricanes in Florida
 And Texas needs rain
 the Whole world is festering with unhappy souls
 The French hate the Germans, the Germans hate the Poles
 Italians hate Yugoslavs, South Africans hate the Dutch
 And I don't like Anybody very much. — Sheldon Harnick

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