

THE NEW COUNTRYSIDE?

Ethnicity, nation and exclusion
in contemporary rural Britain



Edited by Sarah Neal and Julian Agyeman

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For Brock, with love

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Foreword

John Solomos

The study of race and ethnicity has been transformed beyond recognition over the past three decades. We have seen the emergence of new conceptual and empirical research by new generations of scholars that has opened up new arenas for research and has given voice to new critical perspectives in a field that was dominated by a limited range of analytical paradigms. Yet what also remains clear is that there are still a number of major absences in the research literature. Among the most important of these absences we can include the study of race and ethnicity within rural settings and communities. This is an issue that has received regular attention in media coverage in recent years, but the academic discourses of race and ethnicity have remained silent and largely ignorant of this important social and political phenomenon.

Such an absence is to some extent the result of the origins of the study of race and ethnicity in societies such as our own. From its earliest stages as a sub-discipline, the sociology of race and ethnicity has been constructed through an urban frame of reference, and researchers and policy makers have shared the view that the focus of research should be on urban environments that have been shaped by the impact of race and ethnicity. In the period since the 1960s this is pretty much the direction in which the study of British race relations has gone, and this is evident in the main books in this field as well as in the journals.

This important new collection of original research on contemporary facets of ethnicity, nation and forms of exclusion in rural Britain is therefore to be welcomed both by scholars and by policy makers working in this broad field. In putting together this masterful edited collection Sarah Neal and Julian Agyeman have sought above all to raise questions and issues for further research and analysis. Apart from the editors' opening and closing overviews, the collection provides us with important contributions from leading scholars and researchers in this area of research. It includes chapters on such topical issues as the experiences of minority ethnic communities in rural environments, the position of Gypsy Travellers and New Age Travellers, the role of ideologies of race and place in a range of different environments and

the experiences of refugees in rural environments. The various chapters are the product of up-to-date research and have been carefully edited to produce a volume that allows for diverse views as well as emphasising a number of common themes throughout. This makes for a volume that moves easily from the specific experiences of Gypsy Traveller communities to wider debates about the construction of racialised spaces and identities. In doing so the book as a whole seeks to question both assumptions that race and ethnicity are not relevant issues in the countryside and assumptions that the countryside can be viewed as a monolithic and unchanging social and cultural environment.

Given the complex range of questions raised by all the contributors to this refreshing collection, it is somewhat invidious to focus on individual chapters as such. There are, however, a number of themes that run through the volume as a whole that need to be mentioned in the context of how we may move on from the current situation. First, and perhaps least controversially, there is the key refrain of the volume as a whole that we cannot ignore the impact of questions of race, racism and ethnicity in the rural landscapes of Britain. This is in some ways a simple point to make, but it is one that has been largely ignored by researchers in this field, with a few notable exceptions. What is important to note, however, is that the editors go beyond simply making this critical point and address in a serious and helpful way how researchers can move beyond the limits of existing research agendas.

Second, and perhaps most importantly in the context of current political debates, there is the important question of what it means to talk about living in a 'multicultural society' when little or no attention has been given to the realities of living with difference in the context of changing rural communities. Researchers in diverse arenas, such as education and social services, have highlighted the ways in which multicultural policies are seen as being relevant only in urban environments and as a result there are important lacunae in the implementation of policies at a national level. This is a concern that has been voiced recently by the Commission for Racial Equality, which has argued for the need to develop policy agendas around multiculturalism that are of relevance in largely rural environments. What this volume shows more clearly, however, are the consequences of a narrow vision of multiculturalism for specific communities.

Third, the various chapters in this volume point to the need for a better sociological understanding of the social makeup of rural communities and environments. The realities of what the editors call 'belonging and becoming' are complex and difficult to make sense of in any social situation, but they are surely right to argue that we need

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to develop a more nuanced and location-specific understanding of the meanings attached to race and ethnicity in rural environments. This implies both more research on these issues in the future, but perhaps more importantly the need for more dialogue about the parameters and focus of such research.

It is to be hoped that *The new countryside?* will act as a timely reminder to all those of us working on questions of race and ethnicity that we have to broaden our fields of vision beyond the urban and be more attentive to what is happening in rural environments. It is a fascinating book that evokes an amazing range of social, political, cultural and everyday issues about the role of race and ethnicity in rural environments. My main hope is that the challenge it makes to dominant research agendas in this field will be taken up in a positive manner and that the communities and issues to which it seeks to give voice become part of the evolving research and policy agendas in this field. The chapters that follow should be an important, if overdue, push in this direction.

John Solomos
City University, London

Acknowledgements

An edited collection always represents a piece of work in which many people have been involved. This collection is no exception and there are a number of people that we, as editors, would want to extend our thanks to. We have been extremely fortunate in being able to attract (or coerce!) the contributors who make up this volume. We want to thank each of them for their commitment to the project and for producing innovative, exciting and challenging material. We would also like to thank those that enabled the project along the way – the Leverhulme Trust, the ESRC and other funding bodies; the respondents and organisations in the various research projects who provided the authors with time and rich and important information; the Open and Tufts Universities; John Solomos for always being generous and for writing the Foreword; Ingrid Pollard for letting us use her beautiful and important pictures; and our patient and ever helpful editorial team – Dawn Rushen, Laura Greaves, Julia Mortimer, Emily Watt and Dave Worth – at The Policy Press. We want to extend our thanks to those friends and colleagues who not only supported and encouraged us but at the same time pushed us along on the intellectual journey and did not tire of discussing the issues and themes – Sarah Bradshaw, John Clarke, Karen Duke, Lynn Hancock, Gail Lewis, Eugene McLaughlin, Janet Newman, Steve Pile, John Solomos, Carol Vincent, Sue Walters and Joanne Winning. Needless to say they are in no way responsible for any weaknesses or limitations within the collection.

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Musterd (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2003); *Understanding the decision making of asylum seekers*, with Jeremy Segrott (London: Home Office, 2002), and *Migration and public policy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1999).

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Introduction

Sarah Neal and Julian Agyeman

Beginnings

In Kazuo Ishiguro's wonderful *The remains of the day*, a 1950s-set novel about class, love and social change, the central character, Stevens, an ageing butler to a country house, embarks on tour of England's West Country. Stopping outside Salisbury Stevens is advised by a local man to climb a hill for the view. Rather crossly (the hill is steep) he does so and encounters 'the most marvellous view over miles of surrounding countryside ... field after field rolling off into the far distance. The land rose and fell gently and the fields were bordered by hedges and trees ... To my right, almost on the horizon, I thought I could see the square tower of a church' (Ishiguro, 1989, p 26). Later that night in his hotel room in Salisbury it is this view that Stevens recalls:

the English landscape at its finest – such as I saw this morning – possesses a quality that the landscapes of other nations, however more superficially dramatic, inevitably fail to possess. It is I believe, a quality that will mark out the English landscape to any objective observer as the most deeply satisfying in the world, and this is probably best summed up by the term greatness. (Ishiguro, 1989, p 28)

We begin by quoting from Ishiguro because he describes, through Stevens, the sensuous appeal of the English countryside and its core place in an imagining of not only nation but the superiority of a nation. What is apparent in the figure of Stevens is Rodaway's (1994, p 5) distinction between sense and senses. Stevens' gaze from the hill across the pastoral English landscape incorporates a process of making sense, 'sense as meaning' (seen in his connection between the view and the 'greatness' of England) *and* a process in which the senses, particularly sight, shape his emotional experience of 'feeling' the view (its 'pleasures', 'fineness', 'marvellousness'). This is an important and perhaps overlooked point in discussions of the race–ethnicity–rural relation. The rural landscape itself gets a little lost in research and

arguments about the extent and experiences of racism and marginalisation and exclusion. The loveliness of the rural sweeps of Britain tends to vanish in critiques of its constructedness and its potency as a signifier of a very particular version of national belonging and culture. Of course, in part it is the loveliness of rural landscapes, the ways in which they are seen and made sense of that underpin discourses and practices of inclusion and exclusion. Relph (1976, p 122) argues that 'landscape is not merely an aesthetic background to life, rather it is a setting that both expresses and conditions cultural attitudes and activities ... landscapes are therefore always imbued with meanings that come from how and why we know them'. This observation is particularly pertinent to rural landscapes that are able to act as persuasive settings for ideas of what the nation 'is'. This is echoed in Cosgrove's suggestion that 'landscape is a social and cultural product, a way of seeing projected onto the land' (1984, p 269). A 'way of seeing' Englishness in particular has been to project it onto a rural landscape although, as Connolly, de Lima, and Robinson and Gardner (this volume) all show, this projection is not confined to England but extends to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The powerfulness of a dominant way of seeing can be reflected in hiddenness and invisibility, subordination and marginalisation, absences and problematic/dangerous presences. As Kinsman (1993, p 2) notes, 'if a group is excluded from the [rural] landscape, then it is excluded to a large degree from the nation'.

This introduction seeks to explore this exclusionary way of seeing nation through notions of the rural and examines the outcomes of this and the nature of the challenges to it. We argue that this way of seeing is inherently unstable and is constantly open to contestation and change. This is increasingly so in a contemporary context in which perceptions of expanding geopolitical borders (for example, the European Union) and globalisation processes (transnational movements of people, goods, services, capital) have unsettled and destabilised the 'national spaces' within, and boundaries of, nation-states (Clarke, 2005, p 81). The anxieties that these unsettlements produce – what Clarke defines as 'internalised globalisation' (2005, p 80) – can mean that particular spaces become (re)valorised as essences of nation. At the same time these spaces are themselves part of the unsettlement and re-formation processes. Such spaces are subject to diverse claiming processes by those identified as included *and* those identified as excluded.

The first part of the introduction looks at the connections between rural spaces, identity and nation formation. The second part scrutinises

the discourses and practices of exclusion. The final section of the introduction outlines the organisation of this book and introduces the concerns of the chapters within it.

Ways of seeing: rural spaces, whiteness¹ and senses of nation

We have cited Stevens' view out across the hills of Wiltshire and his reflection on the greatness of England as a fictional example of the sensuousness of landscape and its meaning. Stevens' gaze works as an example of how a particular space is seen and understood and experienced as *the* nation. That there is an alchemic process by which the countryside is converted into the essence of the country is not a new argument and has been made cogently by a number of commentators. Raymond Williams begins *The country and the city* by noting the power of the term 'country' and reminding how 'in English the "country" is both a nation and a part of a "land"; the country can be the whole society or its rural area' (1979, p 9). Splitting country/side with the oblique stresses the duality that Williams identifies, the way in which countryside can simultaneously flag and stand in for nation, even a highly urbanised nation. For us, what is of pertinence is the alchemic process itself; countryside becoming country/side. In what ways and why does Stevens' gaze from the hill not simply see other hills but rather 'see' England?

Sarah was reminded of this passage from *The remains of the day* during a particular encounter in a recent research project. This project involved a series of focus group interviews with members of local Women's Institutes and Young Farmers' Clubs in three areas of rural England². In one Young Farmers' Club interview in Northumberland the group discuss their attachments to Northumberland and the pleasures of a return to it after being away. Chris explains this seeing/feeling/belonging to the country/side moment: 'If you stand again and look at the view that we've got and you see the trees and the moors and the land, the free land, you think that's it you're in England.' For us, understanding the alchemic process of the country/side has taken us to the work of social theorists and cultural geographers such as Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Edward Soja (1996). While it is not our intention to review this body of work we want to suggest that the arguments put forward by them on the ways in which spaces and social relations each shape and embed the other – that is, they are mutually constitutive – is one that is highly appropriate to the analysis of the relationship between rural spaces, constructions of nation and racialisation. As space

moves increasingly to the centre of social science analysis (Morgan, 2000), it becomes evident that a concern with the rural is a concern with the social production and interpretation of a particular form of space and spatial practice. While much of Lefebvre's work and that of those influenced by him has tended to focus on the urban and metropolitan environment (Soja, 1996; Pile, 1996), there is a very evident applicability of the core tenets of these arguments to rural spaces. What we want to take from this Lefebvreian work is the concept that spaces are socially produced and 'made'; that this production and making of space incorporates gendered, raced, ethnicised, sexualised, classed social power and political relationships; that spaces are never inert and immobile but are constantly subject to social and economic change and processes of reproduction and reinvention and that within those processes contestations, claims and counter claims will be key drivers and shapers. How do we map this onto rurality? What the contributors to this volume and other scholars have been able to show is that the countryside is not a blank or neutral space. It is politically charged space and one that has been adept at signifying nation. While English rural spaces may be repositories of nation *par excellence*, as Connolly, de Lima and Robinson and Gardner (this volume) show, rural space exists at the heart of other narratives of nation. However, the particular place that the rural takes up in the English narrative of nation is significant. It reflects the country-house base of the traditionalist political system of England and, perhaps above all, it appears to speak of a system of social order (Scruton, 2000; Neal, 2002). The production of the orderly English rural space requires a certain imagining that vigorously attempts to delineate between those groups who are included – the rural presences – and those that are excluded – the rural absences. It is the accounts and analysis of these processes that concern all of the contributors in this volume.

Rural spaces, trialectics of space and ethnicity

Lefebvre argued that space could be understood as operating through three fields or moments – perceived space, conceived space and lived space – *simultaneously*. These are not discrete, bounded spaces but domains that melt, and spill over, into each other. Lefebvre stressed the social production of all the three spaces. The cultural geographer, Edward Soja, has detailed this triad and developed a trialectics of space – firstspace, secondspace and thirdspace – based on the Lefebvre's delineations. Perceived space, firstspace, also referred to by Lefebvre as spatial practice, is the domain in which the reality of space and its

material form is apparent. It is, according to Soja, 'directly sensible and open, within limits, to accurate measurement and description' (1996, p 66). Conceived space, secondspace, also described as representations of space, is the domain in which the meanings or ways of imagining space are identified and discursively set 'via control over knowledge, signs and codes' (1996, p 67). Lived space, thirdspace, also described as spaces of representation is Lefebvre's 'disrupter' of the real-imagined binary. It is the moment and location of 'thirdings', of insertions, of the choice of another. Lived space incorporates both the real and the imagined and unsettles these. Soja (1996, p 2) defines thirdspace as, 'a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings'. The combination of real and imagined and the (emotional, intellectual, physical) experience of space render 'lived space [thirdspace] as a strategic location from which to encompass, understand and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously ... [it is] the space of perils and possibilities, the space of radical openness, the space of social struggle' (Soja, 1996, p 68).

In thinking the countryside into Soja's trialectics of spatiality it is possible to understand the countryside in firstspace or perceived space terms. It has a materiality and 'realness' that is, while evolving and shifting, nevertheless concrete and mappable (Soja, 1996, p 75). The particular, dominant imaginings of the countryside or ways of 'knowing' the countryside 'fit' with the conceived or secondspace domain. This is where our inclusion of the oblique in country/side can be fully appreciated. It relates to the populist and political constructions of the rural as problem-free, aesthetically and socially idyllic, culturally homogeneous zones signifying essentialist and familiar notions of nation – what Michael Billig has referred to as the very 'unimaginative imagining' of nation (1995, p 102). This secondspace meaning of the rural is, of course, metonymic and obscures, excludes and marginalises those that do not reinforce and reproduce a specifically imagined version of rural spaces. The secondspace is the moment in which meanings of space are institutionalised and compounded by the activities and discourses of the powerful and various actors and agencies within political and policy arenas within countryside areas. The findings of the early research into racism in the countryside (for example Jay, 1992; Derbyshire, 1994) are illustrative of this. Both studies found resistance on the part of actors and agencies active in the South-West of England and in Norfolk to conceive of the category race as having any relevancy to the countryside. Ironically, the assertion of the whiteness of rural spaces provided the basis from which respondents