



Solomos, John. "Contemporary Forms of Racist Movements and Mobilization in Britain." *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*. Ed. Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik and Brigitte Mral. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 121–134. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 25 Mar. 2016. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472544940.ch-008>>.

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Contemporary Forms of Racist Movements and Mobilization in Britain

John Solomos

During the first two decades of the twenty-first century we have seen important transformations in both the ideologies and organizational forms of racist, extreme right and populist movements and political parties. These transformations have been particularly important within both the political cultures and civil society in contemporary European societies. In the British context, the efforts by the British National Party (BNP) to rebrand itself as an ethno-nationalist movement have been a key feature of this period, even if their efforts have met with only limited success. The foundation of the English Defence League (EDL), in 2009, as a street-level direct-action movement aimed at countering forms of radical Muslim mobilization and a perceived threat to national identity as a result of immigration, represents another important innovation in far-right mobilizations over recent years. In Britain, as well as various other European societies, such movements and parties have sought to mobilize support by focusing on such issues as immigration and asylum, the role of radical political Islam and terrorism, economic crisis and social dislocation, and fears about the impact of greater religious and cultural diversity (Eatwell & Goodwin 2010). More specifically, they have been able to develop their political language in such a way as to articulate what they perceive as new discourses about race, culture and national identity that have formed the basis of their evolving political strategies and agendas (Eatwell & Mudde 2004, Eatwell & Goodwin 2010, Bleich 2011, Goodwin 2011a). They have also been able to seek to give voice to popular concerns within sections of white working-class communities about their seeming marginalization in the face of the growing role of racial and ethnic diversity (John & Margetts 2009, Cutts et al. 2010).

These broad developments have helped to reshape the role of the racist right as both a social and political force and have created the potential for these movements and parties to play an important role in influencing both public debates and policy interventions on issues such as immigration, multicultural policies and integration strategies. Over the same period, there has been intense debate within political institutions as well as in civil society about how best to develop strategies for responding to the growth of extreme right and racist movements and parties (Lentin 2004, Ford & Goodwin 2010).

Much of this debate has been framed by a concern to develop anti-racist initiatives that will provide an alternative to the political language of the extreme right, as well as potentially reducing, in the medium term, the basis of support for racist movements and parties.

In this environment it is important for researchers to try to understand the conditions that have led to the current situation and to make sense of the likely impact of these trends on political mobilizations by the extreme right in specific countries. The various chapters in this collection are tied together by a common concern to frame and analyse the changing role of right-wing racist populism across a range of national and regional contexts. The concerns of this chapter are linked to this common concern as well, but it will focus on two key issues in order to give more depth to our analysis. First are the changing forms of extreme right mobilizations in contemporary British society, including the evolving role of the BNP and the EDL. In looking at this issue we shall, in particular, seek to place the contemporary forms of mobilization and activism within a broader historical context. Second, we shall explore the challenges posed by new forms of racist and populist mobilizations for the development of anti-racist strategies. It will be argued that it is important to situate the contemporary role of the BNP and EDL in a wider historical context, reflecting the evolving and changing politics of immigration and race within British society over the past few decades (for a somewhat different account of this history see Richardson 2011, 2012). Issues such as immigration, race relations and cultural and religious diversity are at the heart of the political impact of organizations such as the BNP. At the same time, during the past decade, we have seen some significant changes in the ways in which racist movements have mobilized. In the British context, the mix of 9/11, urban unrest and 7/7 helped to push the extreme right to mobilize around issues of religion and cultural identity as well as immigration and race relations. This chapter will look at the role of these mobilizations in shaping the political and ideological formations of the extreme right. It will also explore the shifting forms of political mobilization among the extreme right as well as the responses of policy-makers and civil-society actors to their growing popularity.

Situating racist and extreme right-wing movements

Political and social movements espousing racist and populist extreme-right ideologies may have grown substantially in the past two decades, but we should not lose sight of the reality that they have a longer-term history. In the case of Britain, for example, they have been a feature of political debates about race and immigration from the 1960s and 1970s onwards (Billig 1978, Walker 1978, Fielding 1981, Husbands 1983). Indeed, since the 1970s, a number of extreme right-wing movements have sought to develop a broader political base, often using a mixture of neo-fascist ideas, anti-immigrant feelings and ethno-nationalist sentiment in their rhetoric and political language (Billig 1978, Thurlow 1998). Such movements have gone through cycles of growing support both nationally and in specific localities, and they have managed to gain a voice in public debates about race and immigration. They have on the whole remained at the margins of political institutions and have not succeeded in gaining a strong foothold

either in national political institutions or in local government. At various points since the 1970s, however, racist populist mobilizations have succeeded in giving a high profile to the extreme right as a social and political force. During the 1970s and early 1980s, this was the case with the National Front (NF), which gained a degree of support in some areas and became a focus for public concern about the influence of racial populism. Subsequently, much of the attention shifted to the BNP, which has been the most prominent movement with a national as well as a local presence. For both of these movements, questions about immigration and race, the rights of the white majority in Britain and the threats posed by increasing cultural diversity have constituted a core element of their political language.

During the past two decades in particular, an important element in the rhetoric and the practice of such mobilizations has shifted to questions such as religious diversity, the impact of immigration on white working-class communities and on the threats posed by radical political Islam. In the late 1990s and 2000s, much of the rhetoric of the BNP shifted towards mobilizations focused on popular fears and concerns within the white majority communities, both nationally and locally. This approach became most clear in the political strategies developed by the BNP under the leadership of Nick Griffin since 1999 (Copsey 2008, Copsey & Macklin 2011, Goodwin 2011b). The BNP can, in some ways, be seen as a movement that espouses ideas with a familial similarity to the earlier racist movements, such as the NF, but it is also the case that they have been adept at representing themselves as racial populists whose concern is to protect the rights of the white British majority in this evolving and changing social and political environment (Rhodes 2006, Wemyss 2006). Perhaps the highpoint of this strategy was the election, in the June 2009 European Elections, of two BNP members to the European Parliament, namely Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons, with 943,000 votes cast for the party nationally. In the aftermath of this relative success there was intense public debate as well as media-led discussion about both the reasons for the support that the BNP attracted and how best to develop both national and local strategies to counter their ideas and influence (Hartley-Brewer 2009, Rhodes 2009, Ford 2010).

From the NF to the BNP

The rise of the NF during the 1970s as a more or less credible political force was intimately linked to the politicization of immigration and race relations. Indeed there was serious concern during the late 1970s and early 1980s that the NF might become an established entity on the formal political scene. The history and political impact of the NF have been paid considerable attention by academics. There have been a number of studies of its rise and decline, and of the social context of the support received by it and other neo-fascist and racist political groups (Fielding 1981, Thurlow 1998). In addition, a number of studies have explored the role of racialized ideologies and the prospect of the future mobilization of racist beliefs and ideologies by political parties and movements. These studies, written mostly between the 1970s and the early 1990s, focused on the impact of the NF on both local and national political life.

The NF was founded in 1967 as a united organization of groups with neo-fascist and anti-immigration views. One of the primary motivations for its formation was the perception among extreme-right activists that immigration and race-related issues were being relatively neglected by the mainstream political parties. This was seen as providing an opportunity for a party openly committed to the defence of racial purity and to a clear anti-immigration stance to capture support from both of the main political parties. As a union of the right-wing BNP and the League of Empire Loyalists, the NF inherited the ideological baggage of anti-Semitism and resistance to Britain's post-war decolonization, two prominent themes among far right-wing political groups in the 1960s and 1970s. In its political rhetoric, it made clear its links to the politics of anti-Semitism and its commitment to a nationalist ideology based on racial purity (Thurlow 1975, 1976).

Research, on the social basis of support for the NF and other racist political groups, revealed two important features. First, some research argued that it was important to look at social and economic factors in order to understand the attraction of sections of the white working class to the politics of the NF. Scholars such as Phizacklea and Miles, for example, explored the changing dynamics of working class support for the NF in specific parts of the country (Miles & Phizacklea 1979, Phizacklea & Miles 1980). Drawing on research conducted in London, they argued that one of the most important factors in the growth of support for racist political groups was the economic and social restructuring of many inner-city working-class areas (Phizacklea & Miles 1980). Based on a study of NF support in localities such as the East End area of London, Husbands argued that it was particularly important to look at the influence of such issues as the presence of black communities, changes in the national and local politics of race and the restructuring of local political economies in order to understand the level and solidity of NF support in some areas and its relative weakness in others (Husbands 1983). Hence these studies emphasized the need to locate the support for racism in a wider social, economic and geographical context. A similar theme was taken up by Cashmore in his detailed analysis of the social basis of racism in Birmingham and its environs during the 1980s (Cashmore 1987).

But it is important not to lose sight of the part played by broader transformations in politics and ideology in the mobilization of this support. It is interesting to remember, for example, that during the 1970s and early 1980s both the Conservative Party and the Labour Party lost voters to the NF. Throughout the 1970s, the NF's membership and level of electoral support ebbed and flowed with the tide of political debate on, and public controversy over, racial questions. Its membership rose from 14,000 to 20,000 between 1972 and 1974, at the height of the arrival of the Ugandan Asians. In 1973 it achieved a vote of 16.2 per cent in the West Bromwich by-election, and it also achieved respectable results in local elections in 1976 and the London local elections in 1977. This level of support was not maintained, however, and fell dramatically during the 1980s, particularly as the Conservative Party adopted a hard-line stance on immigration and the 'swamping' of British culture as a result of immigration (Thurlow 1998, Copsey 2008).

From its foundation, the issue of black immigration occupied a central place in the NF's political rhetoric and propaganda. Despite periodic attempts by its leadership to

broaden the movement's appeal and political platform, immigration and race remained the two most salient issues among its members and sympathizers during the 1970s. It was the ability of the party to play on this issue at both local and national level that enabled it to mobilize electoral support and attract members. The political discourses of the NF, as well as those of subsequent neo-fascist political groupings, resonated with references to racial purity, cultural superiority or difference and defence of 'the nation'. Indeed, according to the NF, the main threats to Britain were immigration and racial mixing. The alien, the stranger and the 'subhuman' were common themes, and the anti-Semitism embedded in the pages of the main neo-fascist journals tied them closely to Nazi ideology. What was also at play in the ever-changing politics of the extreme right was an attempt to create a mass nationalist movement that would attract popular support on a scale never before witnessed in Britain.

After the election of the first Thatcher government in 1979, there was a decline in the electoral success of the NF, and during the 1980s it splintered into various factions. This has been interpreted from a number of perspectives as indicating the marginalization of the racist message the NF was propounding, as the outcome of the absorption of some of the NF's ideas by mainstream political parties and as the result of factional strife and conflict within the racist groups themselves. It is also important to note that this was a period of important anti-racist mobilization in the political and culture spheres. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the activities of the NF also became the focus of anti-racist political actions orchestrated by the Anti-Nazi League and Rock against Racism, which helped to counter the NF's claim to be a defender of the national interest and to spread awareness of the political dangers that its growth as a major political force presented (Gilroy 1987).

Evolving forms of racial populism

During most of the 1980s and 1990s, the BNP noticeably failed to have any significant impact on electoral politics. Although it became the most successful organization to emerge from the collapse of the NF, the BNP struggled for some time to escape the links it shared with earlier racist movements and ideologies. Its founder, John Tyndall, was linked to the neo-Nazi political groupings of the 1960s and 1970s. In his personal monthly journal, *Spearhead*, he espoused a mixture of anti-immigration politics, anti-Semitism and ethno-national politics. Initially, the BNP did not have the degree of national attention garnered by the NF in the 1970s, but it did have some success in particular localities. In 1993, for example, BNP member Derek Beackon briefly held the Millwall ward in the London borough of Tower Hamlets. After his surprise victory in the by-election, Beackon commented 'I put my own people first - by that I mean white people' (*Independent on Sunday*, 19 September 1993). Beackon's success was short-lived and the BNP did not gain the foothold in local politics it had hoped for. It continued to be active in some localities throughout the 1990s, but it too suffered from factionalism and splits. Part of its political agenda during the 1990s was its adoption of a nationalist rhetoric. In its newspaper, the *British Nationalist*, there was constant emphasis on the need for the party to fight for the interests of the white majority in British society,

and a call for the adoption of the Union Jack by its members as a symbol of their political stance. By the late 1990s the BNP was also showing an interest in developing an electoral strategy to gain influence in both national and local politics.

This was perhaps reflective of a broader shift by sections of the extreme right towards a more overt nationalist political stance, and particularly by one of the rising young leaders of the organization, Nick Griffin, who had been active in the NF and was a member of one of the 'third position' factions that had emerged from the split in the early 1980s. In the mid-1990s, he became active in the BNP and was involved in the editing of *Spearhead* and another journal called *Rune*. He gained a sufficient power base to challenge Tyndall for leadership of the BNP and became its leader in 1999. Although Griffin retained some of the NF's political rhetoric on race and immigration, he sought to reinvent the party in order to give it a broader electoral appeal. In one sense his vision of the BNP involved its evolution along the path of racial populism similar to Le Pen's Front National.

As part of its new electoral strategy, the BNP sought to gain a higher profile for its candidates in both national and local elections. This became evident in the 1997 general election and was taken further during the 2001, 2005 and, most recently, 2010 general elections. The urban unrest in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford featured prominently in the BNP's electoral strategy for the 2001 general election and it stood for 33 seats, gaining an average of 3.9 per cent of the votes. Its most successful result was Nick Griffin's 16.4 per cent in Oldham West and Royton. The BNP also did relatively well in Burnley, Bradford and in parts of the West Midlands and East London. Encouraged by this performance, the BNP adopted a similarly aggressive electoral strategy in the 2005 and 2010 general elections. It met with mixed results on the ground though this strategy highlighted the potential of the BNP's approach in particular localities.

This relative success encouraged the BNP to move further towards presenting itself as essentially a white nationalist party. Through the late 1990s and 2000s, it refashioned itself as a party focused on issues such as radical Islam, asylum-seekers and gaining rights for whites on a range of social and economic issues, including housing, crime and the environment. The 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London encouraged the BNP to give a higher profile to its attacks on Islam, framed around its idea that the West needed to be defended against the enemies within as well as without. More importantly, it refashioned itself through this period around ideas of national identity and white nationalism.

The past and the present

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learnt from the experiences of the past two decades or so is that racist mobilizations are constantly evolving and changing, as demonstrated by the emergence of new forms of racist politics, violent attacks on ethnic minority people and a rapid expansion in the use of cultural symbols by racist and neo-fascist movements. This has been the subject of considerable journalistic attention and research over the past few years, with wide-ranging discussions in the press and among researchers and policy-makers on the origins of these new racist activities

and their impact on specific environments. A good case in point is the strategy that the BNP has adopted over the past decade of developing local and community-based forms of political mobilization. The mobilization of support for the BNP on a local basis has taken a number of forms, including attempts to play on fears about the impact of immigration, the role of Islam in British society as well as more localized concerns about housing and access to public services (Rhodes 2011, Bloch et al. forthcoming). In areas such as Burnley, Dagenham and Luton, the exploitation of anti-Muslim attitudes has been an important theme in its local propaganda.

Perhaps the most important theme in contemporary political discourses on race in Britain, even after successive attempts to institutionalize anti-discrimination policies, is the portrayal of the whole of black and ethnic minority communities, or particular groups of them, as a threat to the unity and order of British society. One way in which this tendency is expressed is in attempts to attribute the persistence of racial inequality not to racism but to the presence of black minorities and the problems that result from their presence. This is by no means unique to the post-1945 period or to Britain. Edelman (1971), writing about the United States, shows how, in situations of conflict and protest, one of the ways in which dominant groups or political institutions defend themselves is to rationalize the events as the product of outsiders whose social and moral values are removed from those of society as a whole. For example, referring to the race riots of the 1960s, he argues that the dominant élite attempted to reduce the political impact of the events by portraying them as the work of enemies of American society and its values.

In Britain, in the 1990s and 2000s, the new right portrayed black and ethnic minority communities not as an enemy from without but as an enemy within: as endangering the cultural and political values of the nation. Meanwhile, the media depicted them as a threat to the way of life of the white population and as being difficult to integrate into mainstream British society. More recently, Muslims have been portrayed as a kind of fifth column, particularly at times of global tension, and other racialized groups, such as refugees and asylum-seekers, have been said to pose a threat to cultural and religious unity.

An integral part of the BNP's political strategy since the 1990s can be seen in its adoption of a political rhetoric that draws on a self-image of the party as one of the silent white minority communities, particularly those in areas that have been transformed by immigration and religious and cultural diversity. It has sought, in particular, to play on fears about the loss of voice and rights for the white majority communities. It is interesting that the BNP has sought to play on white working fears about immigration and race by using slogans such as 'People Like You' on billboards in the period leading to the 2009 European elections.

The growing importance of Islam in the political language of the BNP is another central feature of the way it has sought to place itself in the position of defending the cultural and religious values of British society. The issue of Islam has been highlighted even further by the EDL in street-level mobilizations in various localities up and down the country from 2009 onwards. The EDL has focused on two key issues since its foundation in 2009. First, the role of 'Muslim extremism' nationally and in specific cities and towns has been perhaps their key concern (Allen 2011). They have

also mobilized on issues such as immigration, multiculturalism, lack of jobs, crime and the financial crisis. Underlying these mobilizations has been a concern over the question of national identity and the threats posed by increasing cultural and religious diversity. Interestingly enough, research carried out by Demos among supporters and sympathizers of the EDL during 2011 highlighted immigration and fear of Islamic extremism as strong concerns, followed by issues such as crime, unemployment and multiculturalism (Bartlett et al. 2011, Bartlett & Littler 2011). The combination of these concerns is perhaps not surprising in itself, since historical research on right-wing ideologies has highlighted the way that they adapt to changing social and economic environments (Mosse 1981, 1985). But the growing importance of fears about Islamic extremism also highlights the contingent nature of issues as a tool for mobilization.

Countering or accommodating racism?

We can now turn to the question of how best to respond to the actions of movements such as the BNP and the EDL. This has been a recurrent theme in political debates and controversies in Britain for some time (Kyriakides 2008; Lentin 2008). During the New Labour administrations from 1997 to 2010, there were recurrent attempts to respond to the mobilizations of the extreme right by combining initiatives aimed at enhancing community cohesion in specific localities with a tough stance on immigration and asylum. Successive Labour politicians argued that there was a need to balance opposition to the BNP with recognition of 'real fears' about immigration and race relations in the wider society. Norman Tebbit, a right-wing Tory politician, commented acerbically that 'Mr Blunkett is more outspoken on race than I ever was and we should be grateful to him' (*Mail on Sunday*, 10 February 2002).

Certainly, a core element of New Labour policies at the beginning of the twenty-first century involved attempts to assuage popular concerns about issues such as housing, employment and terrorism. This was often justified in terms of the claim that the 'real fears' of sections of the white working class about immigration and increasing religious and cultural diversity needed to be addressed. This kind of approach was based on the assumption that the best way to manage fears about such issues as immigration and political Islam was to develop a strategy of engaging in dialogue with those sections of white working-class communities that were attracted to racial populist ideologies. This also involved attempts to distance governmental policies from a strong commitment to multiculturalism in favour of policies that aimed to emphasize the need for minorities to integrate with majority norms and values. The bombings in London on 7 July 2005 emphasized the tenuous nature of policy agendas in this area, and led to a wide-ranging public debate about the limits of multicultural policies in producing community cohesion. Indeed, some commentators argued that there was a need to question the very idea of multiculturalism and to emphasize the need for greater social cohesion alongside diversity. It was in this context that the Commission on Integration and Cohesion was set up, with the remit of looking at how best to develop policies that would strengthen integration and cohesion (Keith 2008, Bloch et al. forthcoming). In their final report, *Our Shared Future*, they made a total of 57 recommendations

across a range of areas for refining and extending the cohesion and integration agenda. The report argued that it was more important to focus on people's perceptions of and feelings for their localities and stressed that it should be interdependency, mutuality and social separation rather than residential separation that should be the focus of attention.

The potential threat of terrorism from violent groups within political Islam accentuated the growing emphasis in policy terms on integration and social cohesion. This has become a recurring theme in the period since 2001, and has influenced both political and media discourses. In the aftermath of the 7/7 terrorist attacks on London, Tony Blair reflected this theme when he argued that 'radical Muslims must integrate' or endanger the possibilities for social cohesion (Blair 2006). In the context of the 2010 General Election in the United Kingdom, the *Daily Telegraph* reflected an even stronger version of this strand of analysis when it argued that 'Immigration is not an insoluble problem, assimilation, not multiculturalism, is the best way' (*Daily Telegraph*, 10 June 2009). Such arguments reflected the growing fears that there was increasingly a potential for communities to live what some commentators called 'parallel lives' rather than to interact and develop new ways of living together.

A clear example of the influence of this shift can be found in the policies and agendas developed by the coalition government of David Cameron since 2010. In his most forthright intervention on this question, Cameron defines multiculturalism largely in a positive manner:

Multiculturalism, the notion that this country would be enriched by allowing each community to maintain and develop its own culture, lifestyle and value system, was founded on tolerance and fair play. (*The Times*, 7 February 2011)

While defining himself as being in favour of this notion of multiculturalism he does not see it as succeeding in practice:

It has sadly, failed. Instead of new stream enriching the lifeblood of this country, all too often separate cultures have remained separate. Communities have become ghettos, mental and physical. (*The Times*, 7 February 2011)

In opposition to this failing multiculturalism, Cameron argues that 'we need less of the passive tolerance and much more active, muscular liberalism'. By implication, the way forward lies in strategies that emphasize common values and interests, what holds people together rather than keeps them apart.

Another facet of contemporary political discourses is represented by the conflation between the actions of groups like the BNP and EDL and radical Muslim groups in fostering a climate of fear in multicultural communities. This is a strong theme in the interventions made by David Cameron since he became the leader of the coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in the aftermath of the 2010 general election. He has sought to highlight his opposition to what he sees as the 'extremism' of radical right-wing groups as well as radical Muslim groupings by arguing for a stronger sense of what it means to be British in these changing times.

Arguing against what he sees as the excesses of multiculturalism he has positioned himself in favour of a 'muscular liberalism' that would help to prioritize a sense of national identity (Cameron 2011).

This approach is not only articulated by the Conservatives. Although perhaps in a more nuanced manner, the Labour Party has also argued for the need to enhance community cohesion by directing attention to common British values. In the aftermath of the 7/7 attacks Tony Blair warned that:

When it comes to our essential values – belief in democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, equal treatment for all, respect for this country and its shared heritage – then that is where we come together, it is what we hold in common. It is what gives us the right to call ourselves British. At that point no distinctive culture or religion supersedes our duty to be part of an integrated United Kingdom. (Blair 2006)

In the context of the relative success of the BNP in local politics, David Miliband has also articulated a similar line of analysis. Referring to the situation in places such as Bradford, Luton, Barking and Dagenham, Miliband has highlighted the potential for the mobilizations of the extreme right and radical Islam to fuel a politics of hatred:

Groups like the BNP, the English Defence League and Islam4UK are only ever likely to appeal to a small minority: their violent rhetoric, aggression and warped politics provide the source of their downfall. But we should not understate their impact locally in creating a climate of division, fear and hatred. (Miliband 2011)

Although Miliband is also clear that the BNP and the EDL are a substantive threat to community cohesion, his inclusion of a radical Islamic group is also symptomatic of efforts to balance attacks on the politics of the extreme right with efforts to address fears and concerns within white working-class communities. From this standpoint, the role of policies should be to oppose all extremist ideologies and not just those of the populist right.

In pursuing strategies such as these, both New Labour and the coalition government have touched on a concern that is likely to remain an important issue in debates about how best to develop policies that can undermine the appeal of racist and populist movements. But they also highlight the potential dangers of accommodating rather than countering the political language used by such movements. The attempts by the EDL to mobilize locally on issues such as Muslim radicalism, immigration and unemployment are also reflective of the range of issues that have become the focus of extreme right mobilization in recent years (Bartlett & Littler 2011).

Conclusion

We have argued in this chapter that the core reasons why racist and ethno-nationalist populist movements and parties are an important part of the contemporary political scene, as well as of civil society in many countries in contemporary Europe, and can

be linked to the current waves of fear and public debate about immigration, cultural diversity and national identity, Muslim minorities and political Islam. We have also suggested that a rounded analysis of contemporary forms of racist politics and racial populism needs to (i) take account of contemporary trends within a broader historical context, and (ii) explore the ways in which racial populism has evolved in response to changing patterns of migration and racialized politics. Given current trends, it is likely that extreme right and racial populist movements will remain an important political issue in British society for some time to come. This is not to say that specific movements and organizations will remain unchallenged. A good case in point is the failure of the BNP to sustain the gains it made during 2009 and in the May 2010 general election. It suffered losses in a number of local contexts, including in Barking and Dagenham in East London, the parliamentary constituency in which Nick Griffin stood. In the aftermath of his weak performance and the defeat of the BNP's six local councillors in Barking and Dagenham, some commentators argued that this highlighted the importance of developing locally based strategies to tackle the influence of the BNP and the EDL (Taylor & Muir 2010).

An important challenge that we face in the contemporary environment is the question of how we can develop a better understanding of the ways in which racist and populist movements are developing and taking on new issues and concerns in order to underpin their ideologies. Contemporary racist and populist movements are in many ways ideologically linked to earlier movements and mobilizations, particularly when we look at issues such as immigration and opposition to racial and ethnic diversity. But it is also important to analyse the emergence of discourses that have allowed them to take on new issues and reinvent themselves through political discourses about radical Islam and multiculturalism. It is through this process of reinvention that such movements are likely to gain more influence in the future and it is important therefore that we are able to analyse the discourses of racist and populist movements in all their complexity. It is therefore of some importance that the complexities of contemporary racist ideologies and forms of mobilization are understood.

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