

Immigrants in the Transnational Far Right: Integration through Racisms and Negotiating White Supremacy in a Migratory Context

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Abstract:

Despite the historical and contemporary instances of immigrants and their descendants engaging with the far-right, whether through long-distance nationalism or country of residence politics, migration scholarship has surprisingly paid very little attention to this process. In this paper we argue that insufficient engagement with instances of the far-right attracting and mobilizing immigrants and ethnic minorities is a theoretical omission in both migration scholarship and scholarship of the far-right and is related to the reproduction of reified notions of “majority” and “minority,” normative assumptions about immigrants’ political activism as inevitably progressive, and methodological nationalism implicit in studying the far-right from a political science perspective. Through an analysis of a case study of Polish immigrants and their descendants in Britain, we demonstrate that these omissions can be bridged by paying more attention to relational processes of constructions of whiteness, the role of systemic racism, and the increasing transnationalization of the far-right. The cases we describe, captured through the notion of integration-through-racisms, are therefore a symptom of both increasing complexities of migration-driven diversity with threatened white privilege as the focus and dynamic changes in global far-right ideologies and strategies.

Keywords:

Far-right, immigrants, Poland, whiteness, racism

Introduction

The historical, social, and conceptual relationship between migration processes and the far right is not as clear-cut as is sometimes assumed. As an ideological framework revolving around nativism (Mudde 2019), xenophobia (Guia 2016), and racism (Newth 2024), the far right has constructed migration as both a symptom and a cause of social and political decay and a threat that must be resisted. Consequently, migration scholarship has tended to view the far right as a relatively undifferentiated political phenomenon representing a section of generic “natives” who mobilize against immigrants or as politicians who seek to gain support through inflaming anti-immigrant sentiments. Although links between levels of support for the far right and immigration policies are well proven (Howard 2010; Van Heerden et al. 2013), this approach nevertheless reifies the boundaries between immigrants and national politics, between the foreign-born population who are seen as largely passive and voiceless, and “natives” who enjoy political agency. As our article demonstrates this conceptual bias ignores diversity across and within immigrant groups, the varied transnational political fields where migrants operate, the changing nature of the far right, the dynamics of

diasporic long-distance nationalisms, and the role of systemic racism, both in countries of migrants' origin and in countries of destination.

Considering the limitations of the dominant approach to migrants' political participation, how should we theorize ethnic diversification within the far right, where immigrants and minorities become hostile to other immigrants or minorities and organize themselves politically, either in groups they themselves create or within established far-right organizations in the countries of residence—organizations that sometimes actively reach out to recruit them? What is the relationship between migration-driven diversity and shifting structures and modes of operation of far-right politics? We engage with these questions by exploring a case study of Polish migrants' involvement in far-right politics in the British context. Based on in-depth interviews with far-right activists and ethnographic engagement in various milieus, the article focuses both on the supply side—namely, Polish far-right organizations operating in Britain as well as British groups recruiting Polish migrants—and the demand side, that is to say, Polish migrants who engage with far-right politics in Britain, including Polish individuals convicted under British anti-terror legislation. We begin the article by reviewing the literature on migrant transnational activism and political integration highlighting some of the gaps that have led to neglect of migrants' engagement with the far-right. We argue that researchers' insufficient consideration of instances of the far right attracting and mobilizing minorities is related to the normatively-laden assumptions about migrants' political allegiances and a conceptual dichotomy opposing the “natives” to the “immigrants” which has become entrenched in migration scholarship. Our case study is broadly indicative of a wider range of realignments on the far right where selected minorities have increasingly been recruited as potential allies (Leidig 2019; Mulinari and Neergaard 2018; Svraka 2023), but also particularly evocative of the mechanisms accompanying such processes due to ideological and strategic synergies between British and Polish far-right actors in transnational political spaces. We identify the main themes recurring in the British far-right perceptions of Poland and Polish migrants and the transnational reproduction of Polish nationalist myths. This is followed by an analysis of the main developments in the transnational Polish-British far-right milieu, with emphasis placed on the key vehicles of radicalization, major actors, and interactions between them.

Findings from our interviews demonstrate that to fit in, integrate, and establish themselves at a desirable level in a hierarchy of belonging, social class, and leadership positions some Polish migrants engage in what Fox and Mogilnicka (2019) called “pathological integration” in countries of residence whose own structures of systemic racism reproduce white privilege, thus facilitating “whitening” of some groups of migrants in preference to others (Kalmar 2023; Narkowicz 2023). However, this process is far from straightforward as developments on the British far right impact how Poles respond and negotiate whiteness but also constructions of certain political myths. Our exploration of Polish migrants' participation in the far right in Britain demonstrates that what we broadly call integration-through-racisms, which sits on the interface between immigrants' and ethnic minorities' political agency and systemic racism in countries of residence, has become an important component of the shifting nature of the global far right, which constantly reconstructs and redefines its ideological components while

reproducing core themes around race, decline of the West, authority and politically justified violence.

Omission in Scholarship: Immigrants in the Far Right

The far right is an umbrella concept that comprises both radical and extreme right, where the former broadly accepts a majoritarian form of democracy from an illiberal, “ethnocratic” perspective, while the latter is more or less openly anti-democratic with Nazism as its farthest extreme. The far right is a useful term to bring the two together as it reflects the reality of ideological overlaps and strategic cooperation between different positions (Pirro 2023). What distinguishes far-right ideologies from other ideological families is a combination of nativism and authoritarianism (Pirro 2023, 105). Cas Mudde defines nativism as an ideology that “holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (‘the nation’) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state” (Mudde 2019, 27). While Mudde claims that nativism does not always have to imply racism (Mudde 2019, 19) we agree with George Newth (2024) that racism should be understood in broad terms and its expressions include prejudices grounded in “culture,” “religion,” or “civilization,” as is the case with the “clash-of-civilizations” thesis whose influence spans the entire right-wing spectrum (Huntington 1996). At the same time, while far-right ideologies “seek to preserve the superiority and dominance of some groups over others” (Miller-Idriss 2022, 8) the contours of the groups are porous and fluctuate with the “natives” category subject to constant reinterpretation.

Far-right politics in migration research has been seen primarily as a force that uses migration to forge its political identity, and a key determinant of an increasingly hostile environment for migrants to the extent that far-right political parties are sometimes referred to as anti-immigration per se (Art 2011). Scholarship focusing on the political activism of immigrants and ethnic minorities thus takes it for granted that the far right is the enemy par excellence, the existential threat to immigrants’ well-being, and a major obstacle to their integration and homemaking process. Leaving aside “diasporic Islamism” (Rahnema 2007), the political activism of immigrants is usually positioned by default on a progressive spectrum as immigrants and minorities are assumed, by their very presence, to contradict the nativist agenda. This normative leaning is not surprising as it resonates with the historical record where immigrants encounter and resist systemic racism, hostile legal environment, and barriers to class mobility and welfare. In the British context, for instance, paradigmatic mobilization was the famous Battle of Cable Street, where Jewish anti-fascists, Irish workers, Somali seamen, and communists resisted Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists marching through London’s East End (Eade 2000). This event inspired antiracist struggles of the Bengalis in the 1970s (Alexander 2011, 208), and then violent clashes with the National Front in the 1970s and 1980s mobilizing the Punjabi community in the Southall area (Baumann 1996) as well as numerous other Black and South Asian communities across Britain (Dunlop 1993). Similar pivotal moments of immigrant mobilizations in other countries have been discussed in the subsequent scholarship. They include the French *Touche pas à mon pote* movement, which has been spearheaded by first and second-generation immigrants (Lapeyronnie 1987) or the *sans-papiers* movement (Siméant 1998). Recent mass demonstrations in Germany in 2023 in opposition to the Alternative

für Deutschland party and their proposed policies of mass deportations provide a more recent example (Le Monde 2024).

In line with the far right and immigrants being juxtaposed in research, as well as public perception, as intrinsically antagonistic entities, the question of political integration and participation of immigrants has been approached by scholars and policymakers through a normative prism (Favell 1998) as a path to migrants' social advancement (Alba and Foner 2015). In Europe, until recently a key preoccupation of scholars has been the political passivity and quiescence of immigrants, attributed to either their disenfranchisement as part of the guest-workers' immigration policies or to lower cultural and symbolic capital (Martiniello 2005). As an attempt to offset that, higher levels of integration have been linked not just to the social well-being of immigrants themselves but also to higher levels of social cohesion in the larger society (Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul 2008). Political participation by migrants has been discussed as an important dimension of the broader integration but, as Erdal notes, more work is needed to shed light on the impact of migrants' transnationalism on their politics (2020). This includes the ballot box as well as less institutionalized forms of political participation in social movements. Scholarship on various instances of immigrant solidarity is a further case in point illustrating the assumption about the inherently emancipatory nature of immigrants' activism (Martiniello and Lafleur 2009; Peró 2007). What is left underexplored are the limits of these progressive movements and solidarities, and the extent to which immigrants or their descendants turn against other minorities shifting their political identities towards the far-right.

In their work on Belgians of Moroccan dissent, Meeusen, Abts, and Meuleman (2019) delineated two perspectives on relations between immigrant groups. One position stresses solidarity due to shared experiences of discrimination and the loss of status relative to the home country and racism. Conversely, the other perspective originates in conflict theory and argues that competition for resources and status positions minoritizes against each other. While tensions between minorities have been recognized in scholarship—for example, Storm, Sobolewska, and Ford (2017) discussed ethnic prejudices held by British ethnic minorities against one another—insufficient attention has been paid to how this translates into political behavior, though a pertinent example is the case of some members of ethnic minorities voting, and sometimes campaigning, for the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union in the 2016 Brexit referendum (Begum 2023; Martin, Sobolewska, and Begum 2024). Research by Heath et al. (2013) points out that at the general level ethnic minorities in Britain tend to be ideologically more right-wing on social and economic issues than the white population. Highly relevant in this context is the rise of far-right celebrities whose ethnic background transgresses the traditional "white Christian" stereotype. Enrique Tarrio, the Afro-American Cuban leader of Proud Boys, sentenced to 22 years for his role in the January 6, 2021 attacks on the Capitol building in Washington DC, is a famous example. Others include Suella Braverman in Britain or Ron DeSantis in the United States acting in the capacity of what Saini, Bankole and Begum (2023, 70) call "elite ethnic minority political gatekeepers" playing a decisive role in the "reproduction of the racialized and class-based status quo" (Saini, Bankole, and Begum 2023, 60).

While the above contributions pay attention to potential and actual conflicts between ethnic minorities and migrant communities, literature on migrants' more direct transnational participation in far-right politics tends to focus mainly on historical case studies. Examples include Pretelli's discussion of Italian fascists in the United States and Britain who were politically active during the height of Italian fascism as part of Mussolini's diaspora engagement policy (Pretelli 2015), Berthona and Athaides's work concerning the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpart (NSDAP's division tasked with reaching out to German communities abroad, called *Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP* (Bertonha and Athaides 2023), or a range of studies concerned with how the Nazis escaping post-war reckoning influenced politics in countries where they settled, including Argentina, Brazil, Australia, Austria, and, especially, Chile, where they supported Pinochet's regime (Bertonha and Athaides 2023; Levenda 2019; Persian 2023; Ochsner and Roesel 2020). This literature falls within the framework of long-distance nationalism, as seen through the lens of political remittances and memory work of the diasporic communities, showing the far right's persistent political influence across borders—Rudling's (2020) work on Canadian Ukrainians is one example.

While valuable and influential, the concept of long-distance nationalism, as framed by Benedict Anderson (1998) assumes that mobilization is determined by and aimed at the home country, underplaying the role of internal diasporic politics, competition for resources, and prestige within immigrant communities (see the case of Polish diaspora Erdmans 2010; Garapich 2016). As we argue, analysis of far-right radicalization within minorities has to consider local hierarchies of racial privilege in the countries of residence, as negotiations of power and whiteness are entangled with class hierarchies and status that non-Anglo-Saxon groups strive towards. The abovementioned conceptualization of racial nativism in far-right discourses by Newth (2024) allows us to better capture immigrants' understanding of the political milieu they operate in. These circumstances are complex, as we will discuss, as in some cases in order to fit in at what is seen as a desirable social position, some migrants become involved in the reproduction of racial hierarchies in the United Kingdom, and here whiteness forms part of the racial framing of the world. We follow the focus on critical whiteness exemplified in the work of Hunter and Westhuizen on diverse constructions of whiteness which are "adapted in accordance with the vagaries of power as seen historically with the shifting positions of Jewish, Italian and Afrikaner whites" (Hunter and Van der Westhuizen 2021, 8). These "vagaries" of power mean that the current politics forces whiteness to "reveal itself," and to become more politically explicit as opposed to previous claims to invisibility—a facet of privilege par excellence (Hunter and Van der Westhuizen 2021). The empirical analysis we provide in this article shows how and why, this "revelation" happens in particular contexts of white immigrants' political activism in the United Kingdom. As Fox, Moroşanu, and Szilassy noted in their work on Eastern European migrants in Britain, whiteness "operates as a resource that East Europeans could invoke to improve their status in contingent social hierarchies" (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy 2015, 742). But while the literature on the "whitening" of immigrant groups is well-established (Brodkin 1998; Kalmar 2022, 2023; Roediger 2006) the scholarship concerning its effects on far-right politics is lagging behind. Racialized minorities, such as Latino or Caribbean migrants (Glick-Schiller et al. 2005), are usually seen as reacting to discrimination through political mobilization. The literature on cases falling on the

other side of the political spectrum is scarce. A valuable exception is Barbara Molas's work on Walter J. Bossy, a Ukrainian intellectual in Canada whose far-right ideas and activism were tuned towards claiming a space for white migrants falling outside the Canadian dual nation model—Anglo-Saxon and French—and positing them as superior to other, non-European and non-Christian incomers (Molas 2022).

As for migration from Poland to Britain, there is now an impressive body of scholarship on broad causes and implications of this phenomenon,¹ but the issue of how Polish migrants interact with the culturally diverse localities of their residence in Britain is, again, underexplored. Some scholars have pointed out that this relationship involves essentializing differences in skin color or religion, i.e., Christianity vs. Islam (Nowicka 2018; Nowicka and Krzyżowski 2017). Others have examined how Polish immigrants reproduce and negotiate their racial stereotypes in new settings arguing that this is the result of moving from a relatively homogenous context to a highly diverse one (Ryan 2010). More relational approaches include Garapich's (2016) argument that the mutual entanglement of ethnic and social class identity prompts some Polish migrants to de-emphasize their nationality and over-emphasize their "whiteness." Nowicka (2018) likewise showed that racism articulated by Polish migrants is embedded in a transnational dynamic context and adapted accordingly, while Fox and Mogilnicka (2019) explored the "pathological integration" that many immigrants engage in, and through which they negotiate their own racialized perceptions of diversity with what they hear and interpret from their British society at large. The question we ask here is how these dynamics translate into political participation on the far right. In other words, not every immigrant with racist views engages in far-right politics. But some do. Why and how?

Methodology

As Kathleen Blee notes, scholars have only recently begun to move away from the "externalist" approach to researching the far right to acknowledge the need for a closer, anthropological angle (Blee 2007, 120) although some older classic ethnographies set the tone for a more internalist approach, such as Raphael Ezekiel's exploration of the KuKluxKlan and American neo-Nazis (1995). More recent literature tackles thorny ethical issues of trust, empathy, legitimization, safety, reproduction of hate, and access (Ashe et al. 2021; Blee 2007; Pasięka 2019; Toscano 2019; Pilkington 2016). While adopting an anthropological perspective on the far right, we recognize that there are risks—political, ethical, reputational—inherent to it, but agree with Hilary Pilkington that "to prioritize our own ethical comfort constitutes not the enactment of an active political stance but, on the contrary, a form of political faintheartedness" (Pilkington 2019, 36).

This article is based on data generated through overt ethnographic immersion into several far-right milieus and subsequent 40 in-depth semi-structured or nonstructured interviews conducted between September 2023 and August 2024 with Polish immigrants, or Brits of Polish descent, who are or were active in far-right organizations.

¹ Website run by Anne White at University College London contains over 500 publications on various aspects of migration from Poland since EU enlargement in 2004 <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/people/anne-white/ssees/research/polish-migration>.

We interviewed far-right leaders and decision makers as well as rank and file members. The spectrum was broad, ranging from a formal political party, through diasporic organizations, and less formal networks, to the extreme, associated with Blood & Honor networks who openly sign up for neo-Nazism. The formal membership in far-right groups is difficult to determine due to the rhizomatic, fluid nature of some of the organizational forms (Griffin 2003) but all of the interviewees had significant periods of direct involvement in organizing political action such as demos, marches, and rituals around world war two (WW2) commemorative monuments, donated funds, were active on far-right social media, or engaged in racially and politically motivated violence. Three of our interviewees had spent considerable time in British prisons for racially motivated violence, one for preparing a terrorist act. We have also interviewed three leaders of British far-right organizations. As it happens in ethnography (Aunger 1995), formal qualitative interviews are not the only data source, sometimes they are not even the most valuable. Informal conversation before or after the interview, observation, negotiations of entry, and refusals to engage can also be revealing. For example, we approached the leader of the Britain First party, Paul Golding, and met him in person, informally chatting about Polish connections, but later on, he refused to engage. However, during that informal conversation, he conveyed a few points about his understanding of Poland and Polishness which have proven highly valuable pieces of data.

The interviews, which lasted between two and three hours, followed a broad narrative-biographical format aimed at mapping the respondents' biographies and paths of migration in relation to political activism. The questions focused on their ideological formation, political views on current affairs, and attitudes towards political and socio-cultural issues. As we were searching for Polish-British connections the interviews revolved around the development of mutual ties, receptions, and recruitment strategies probing the exchange of ideas and resources but also limits of cooperation, tensions, and limits of far-right transnational cooperation. It is difficult to generalize about the socio-economic profile of our respondents, and they are not a representative sample of Polish immigrants as such. For example, the picture is extremely unbalanced in terms of gender because the far right is a notoriously masculine space. While women are present in various organizations, our assessment is that they are harder to convince to be interviewed, therefore, in the sample we have just four women. The majority of our respondents are of working-class background, in particular individuals who are part of the neo-Nazi scene. They tend to be selfemployed in construction, as drivers, and delivery- and handy-men. There are a few activists in leadership positions that hold tertiary education. Interestingly, and importantly in the context of our findings, there are also several second- or even third generation Polish-British nationals. Interviews were conducted across the United Kingdom (London, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Cambridge, and Southport) but we also interviewed several returnees in Poland. The article also draws on the ethnic press, the British press, publications by anti-racist organizations, and extensive research into the online activities of activists.

In this article we combine the analysis of far-right ideologies and repertoires of action with the activists' narratives of what they gain from this. It is important to bear in mind that the tactics, strategies, and the "what" of activism also provide answers to the "why"

of activism. We explore the prefigurative (Boggs 1977/ 1978) aspects of far-right activism where “struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present” (Maeckelbergh 2011, 4). While prefigurative politics of left-wing movements has been given a lot of scholarly attention (for a critical review of this literature in relation to post-2008 progressive activism, see Soborski 2018 and 2019), prefigurative dimensions of far-right movements have been less thoroughly explored (exceptions include Futrell and Simi 2004). While focusing on the ideas and practices of far-right activists, our multifaceted approach also looks at the social and territorial milieus where they operate. In doing this we follow calls by Cynthia Miller-Idris to catch up with the fast-moving reality of far-right radicalization on the global stage. As she argues: “In addition to focusing on the why and how of far-right radicalization and growth [...] we should be asking where and when radicalization happens [...] What are the new spaces and places of contemporary far-right extremism?” (Miller-Idris 2022, 3).

Poland and the Nationalist Myths that Keep Giving

Poland’s relatively homogenous ethnoreligious make-up, history, dominant ideological outlook, and legal arrangements, notably concerning abortion, have made it appealing to the transnational far right, somewhat of a model country, attractive in combination with fast economic growth, low unemployment, and overall sense of developmental success that it has enjoyed over the last two decades. Social media accounts of global far-right trendsetters feature “images from Poland,” such as pictures and videos of the subway in Warsaw posted on Jack Dawkins’ (account of Craig Fowler) Telegram account with an added note: “Clean, orderly, and pleasant. Natives without multiculturalism have respect for their surroundings,”² or of pushbacks on the Polish border publicized by, for example, Mark Collett, the British founder of the white nationalist organization Patriotic Alternative,³ or of Polish football players refusing to kneel in support of the Black Lives Matter movement at the start of their World Cup qualifier match with England on which an American far-right correspondent Jack Posobiec commented, “The Polish aren’t slave to black people and globohomo, it’s as simple as that. Well done, guys!”⁴ This perception is reinforced at an annual event in Warsaw on the 11th of November, which since 2015 has served as an important transnational hub, ideological apparatus, and ritual space for the reproduction of white supremacist symbols bringing together nationalist far-right Polish groups and activists from Europe and America (Witkowski, Woroncow, and Puchała 2023).

This far-right messaging on social media is implicitly anchored in the narratives and symbolism of Polish nationalism. The latter may also receive more explicit articulations from highly influential voices. An evocative example comes from no one less than the former American President, Donald Trump, who chose Warsaw for his main European speech in which, aside from raging against Islam and political correctness, he proclaimed:

We can have the largest economies and the most lethal weapons anywhere on Earth, but if we do not have strong families and strong values, then we will be

² <https://t.me/s/JackDawkins/12919>

³ <https://gab.com/MarkCollett/posts/109800374607305312>

⁴ (@JackPosobiec)/X (twitter.com). March 31, 2021.

weak and we will not survive. If anyone forgets the critical importance of these things, let them come to one country that never has. Let them come to Poland [...] So, together, let us all fight like the Poles—for family, for freedom, for country, and for God.⁵

Equally nationalistic militarism is articulated by other populist leaders such as former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson,⁶ or United Kingdom Independence Party (UKiP)'s, then Brexit Party's and now Reform UK's leader Nigel Farage.⁷ Similar narratives have been circulated by far-right British groups, Britain First or the English Defence League. One leading figure of the British far right told us of his fond memories from a visit to Warsaw:

Luckily for the Poles and a lot of Eastern Europe, you haven't undergone the same transformations that we have...Yet! [...] We was in Warsaw for the Independence March [...] wherever we went, there was Polish flags. It was 95% Pole or European on the face of it. And we said, if we lived here, there'd be no need for us. You know, Warsaw is still Polish. Imagine that! You know, how controversial: Warsaw is still Polish, but London can't be British still, you know. So... we was in love with Warsaw and, and that's your capital city. But I fear in 10 years time [...] it's going to look like Paris or Berlin or London. (Luke 2024)

Another British leader painted a similar picture of Poland and described Poles as a people who have a natural inclination for nationalism:

White British people have a lot in common with Polish people and the Polish people I've met and come into contact with, even the ones who aren't political do all seem to be very traditional. They seem to be very proud of their heritage, and they seem [...] to have a lot of qualities that you would describe as nationalistic. (Chad, 2024)

This discourse characterizes also the dominant narrative of Polish diasporic nationalism. Historically, Polish nationalism has always had a strong diasporic emphasis on emigration culture, stressing its military component, and the higher status of “political,” as opposed to mere “economic,” emigration (Garapich 2016; Erdmans 1992, 2010). The political myths of Polish nationalism—where political myth is understood as “an ideologically marked narrative, which purports to give a true account of a set of past, present, or predicted political events, which is accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group” (Flood 2002, 44)—have allowed some Polish migrants to present themselves as political refugees driven by non-material, idealistic values fighting for Western civilization, freedom, Christianity, etc. In the long history of Polish emigration, this trope is important, positioning political refugees, a tiny minority of people who left Poland over the generations, on a higher moral ground than the vast majority of economic migrants. This social construction of emigration as a “moral issue” (Erdmans 1992) through which a community of values is established, delineates key

⁵ <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/articles/top-three-moments-from-president-trumpsspeech-in-poland/>

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/PolishEmbassyUK/videos/pm-boris-johnson/1105583432969633/>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pJ6RGG9uxU>

ideas about obligations to the collective and, as Garapich (2016) pointed out, setting up norms of political reproduction of power relations in diasporic structures. Reproduction of diaspora in that sense happens through further nationalist radicalization.

Poland's Far-Right Scene and Its Offshoots in Britain

As in other formerly socialist states, the post-1989 far-right scene in Poland is complex, with a plethora of organizations taking a wide variety of alignments on ideological and strategic questions (Mcmanus et al. 2003; Kajta 2020; Pankowski 2010). These include a broad spectrum of religious views ranging from pre-Vatican II integrist Catholicism of Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski or National Rebirth of Poland (NOP) to a rejection of Christianity by groups like Zadruga in favor of neopagan beliefs (Filip 2009). Another particularly consequential cleavage separates supporters of a strong and proactive state, including in its role as a welfare provider—for example, within Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny or National Radical Camp (ONR)—from advocates of the “free market,” extending to a combination of nationalism with right-wing libertarianism represented by Konfederacja (Confederation, see below). However, regardless of their political differences, all of these positions assume a moral imperative that the nation needs to be defended against external enemies, leftist ideologies, and “globalist” forces. All of the above have set up their presence in Britain in the aftermath of large migration movements from Poland after 2004.

From all these groups, NOP has integrated the most into the British far right. They established connections in the 1990s through their access to the Third Position (Witkowski 2019) with the National Front, the British National Party, and most recently National Action which in 2016 was proscribed as a terrorist organization. As one female NOP activist told us:

It wasn't like nationalists from different countries hated each other. Because that's what it might seem like, right? That nationalism focuses on “my country,” right “me”? But no, it absolutely wasn't like that [...] We learned from each other by talking, meeting, and discussing things. We talked about what needs to be changed here, what needs to be changed there. How did we solve this, how did we solve that? We talked about each other's heroes. (Meg 2024)

NOP activism in Britain involves so-called White Rescue actions which consist of providing help to white homeless individuals⁸ creating the opportunity to integrate through their shared “whiteness” in the name of national socialism, hence also integrating with National Action through their racist outlook: *Focusing on white people, we also had help from English right-wing groups. We often did these actions together. Members of National Action sometimes joined us. So, at that time, we simply organized a joint collection* (Meg 2024). It is crucial to emphasize that White Rescue emerged as a result of the activists' migrating to the United Kingdom, it had no precedence in NOP's repertoire in Poland, it was invented specifically to connect with other British white supremacists. As one activist summarized: *This was about pure racism. Not about*

⁸ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/neo-nazi-soup-kitchen-glasgow-whitesonly-national-action-a7318331.html>

some immigrants [Poles] doing this or that, but white people doing something together (fieldwork notes). As we see, this activist contests the “immigrant” label by evoking race, a very good example of whiteness “revealing itself” in political action. A unique quality that distinguished the NOP on the United Kingdom far-right scene was its close-knit internal relationships. Members engaged in non-political activities together, such as celebrating birthdays, visiting museums, and organizing Sunday barbecues. This sense of camaraderie was a significant attraction for a British activist and a member of the National Front, who saw it as a learning opportunity for British organizations. As he told us, *The group set, actually, the precedent about how other groups should organize themselves in terms of everyone gets along. Everyone. There’s no internal drama, no internal conflict between them* (Allan 2024).

While praised by British counterparts for their discipline and commitment, NOP activists claim that British politics is not their primary concern. According to them, their struggle is for white supremacy and what they perceive as “Western culture,” and they emphasize that they fight for Poland. This, sometimes, puts them in a delicate position, as when being together with a group of English neo-Nazis who chose to perform the Nazi salute in public. They refused to perform the Nazi salute, unlike the Brits but did not find it offensive in the case of their British counterparts: *I have never given the Nazi salute, but if they [the British] want to do it, let them. I don’t care whether they are neo-Nazis or not. We are fighting for Poland* (Andrew 2024).

At the same time, the NOP has some strict recruitment rules and is content with its relatively small numbers (circa 10–20), and refrains from formal contact with other Polish nationalist groups, as they emphasize their elitist approach and the prime goal of activism in Britain which is getting media attention:

[I]t cannot be denied that we had publicity. So, one could possibly consider it some kind of success. [...] You know, the media also eagerly picks up on such topics, right? [...] Hope Not Hate was quick to turn us into some Nazis, extremists or something like that. [...] it doesn’t matter what they say, what matters is that they are talking, right? (Adam, 2023)

All of the above shows that the activists of NOP in the United Kingdom had a strong sense of uniqueness, international media attention, and a feeling of thrill and adrenaline rush being in close contact with British groups whose proclivity to violence was something their colleagues in the NOP in Poland clearly lacked. Integrating through this reproduction of white supremacy had therefore strong elements of social mobility and a sense of prestige.

Ideologically close to the NOP—in terms of its radically nationalistic outlook and roots in Polish pre-war fascism—the ONR on the other hand refrains from contacts with the British far right, concentrating its efforts on commemorative works around Polish veterans’ graves, including locations associated with Polish nationalists and fascists who following WW2 went into exile and died in Britain.⁹ Once relatively numerous

⁹ <https://www.onr.com.pl/2023/06/13/brygada-zagranica-38-rocznica-smierci-jana-jodzewicza/>

(around 30), the group seems in decline now. Among Polish political parties having their outposts in the United Kingdom, the far-right Konfederacja is the most visible and engaging in fund-raising and electoral campaigns to garner support from Polish voters living in Britain exemplifying what Jakobson et al. (2023) called “homeland populism.” As a result, Polish far-right parties tend to receive a higher share of the vote amongst Polish voters in the United Kingdom than what they get in Poland.¹⁰ Konfederacja is a coalition of nationalists, catholic integrists, and libertarians brought together through their opposition to the European Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the LGBTQ+ movement, Islam, immigration, and Ukraine (sometimes with implicit pro-Russian sentiments), and with emphasis on low taxes, small government, and free-market ideology with some respondents describing themselves as anarcho-capitalists. Following the 2023 elections the coalition dissolved in Poland but its activists in Britain are still highly active—mainly on social media, but also organizing events for the Polish community. Their activities are firmly geared towards Polish politics though one of the leaders also stood as a candidate for UKIP, a far-right British party. Narratives of the party activists whom we have interviewed often point to their critical stance on British diversity and the number of immigrants in the country (by this, they mean non-white, most often Muslim, immigrants). They vocally support the English Defence League’s Tommy Robinson and some took part in the “Free Tommy” protests in London in 2018. But overall, members of this party have a very skeptical view of British politics. One of our respondents, who in the past financially supported Britain First campaigns, but now re-migrated back to Poland due to a court order after being sentenced for inciting racial hatred, sees the United Kingdom as a lost land:

Well, I wish the best for the United Kingdom, hoping that something will change. However, I don’t believe that anything will actually change. Honestly, the proposals of Priti Patel or Suella Braverman might seem strong from a British perspective, but it’s laughable. [...]. If someone proposes some restrictions in a country where thousands of illegal immigrants are arriving, what restrictions are we even talking about? The whole problem is already inside. It’s like trying to bail water from a sinking ship. First of all. Secondly, did they propose simply expelling those who arrive? Or completely preventing them from arriving? No, they didn’t. So what’s the point? What radical measures? A radical measure would be shooting at those boats, not... not some legal solutions. [...] [W]hat they should do is sink those smuggling boats, and that’s it. Show that they are at war, and that’s the end of it. (Kamil, 2024)

This narrative goes beyond integration-through-racisms towards justifying violent measures. The discourse here reflects the current developments on the Polish-Belorussian border, increasingly violent incidents there on which the Polish far-right aims to capitalize calling for more drastic and violent measures, including organizing vigilantes groups.¹¹ In this instance therefore we clearly see the case of political remittances and further radicalization through return migration.

¹⁰ In the 2023 parliamentary elections Konfederacja received 7.16 percent of the vote overall but 10.46 percent of the votes cast in the United Kingdom (<https://wybory.gov.pl/sejmsenat2023/en/sejm/wynik/pl>)

¹¹ www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=883301290509620&set=pb.100064892702663.-2207520000

Polish Far-Right Groups Established in Britain

Polish immigrants in Britain also set up their own organizations—organizations without any pre-existing branches in Poland. These vary in scale, activity, membership, and audience but predominantly focus on historical commemorative events, which puts them into direct contact with older diasporic networks of WW2 veterans and their descendants thus providing access to leadership positions, or prestige while also being relatable to broader British public reproducing the mythology of Polish defenders and fighters. There is/was a plethora of such organizations, including Husaria Manchester, Ogniwo, Polska Niepodległa, Zjednoczona Emigracja, Komitet Obrony Polski, W Jedności Siła, and Patriae Fidelis. Some were short-lived, social-media initiatives, others had more formal structures, membership, and programs. Their activities include various forms of promotion of Polish culture and history, celebrations of anniversaries of historical events, especially around WW2, with a distinct nationalist angle visible for example in the prominent role assigned to the so-called Cursed Soldiers, the cult of whom is a hallmark of Polish nationalist circles (Jaskulowski and Majewski 2023, 2024) including football-based networks (Nosal, Kossakowski, and Woźniak 2021). One of the consequences of this cult is an aggressive campaign against Zygmunt Bauman, who between 1944 and 1947 was a member of Polish military intelligence in the newly formed Polish Peoples Republic. One infamous incident involved an interruption of his lecture at the University of Wrocław in 2013 by members of NOP. Less known is the fact that a conference at the University of Manchester in 2014 with Bauman's keynote has been also interrupted by a group of Polish nationalists, linked to violent football hooligans group.¹²

In 2017, 11 of these organizations—but, notably, not the NOP—signed a formal agreement to cooperate, with broad goals related to “fighting for Poland” and coordination of activities, especially around commemorative events. Once most prominent and numerous among them, Patriae Fidelis demonstrates an interesting case of a nationalist, far-right organization that became too large, with radical elements and class tensions eroding it from within. Patriae Fidelis was set up by a group of second or third-generation middle-class, British Poles, who after 2004 were increasingly confronted with the arrival of new Polish migrants which brought up class and cultural differences. As one of the activists, a middle-class Polish Brit educated in one of the top high schools in London, remarked: I didn't know such Poles existed.... Patriae Fidelis was established as the Polish Youth Association with the aim of organizing young Poles around lobbying and protests, for example against perceived defamation related to the contested role of Poland in the Holocaust, and against discrimination. At the same time, Patriae Fidelis engaged in commemorating nationalist events, which connected it with the older Polish diaspora. The relatively inclusive nationalist nature of the organization, however, has also opened it to penetration by more radical groups. A significant offshoot of Patriae Fidelis included extreme right elements, football ultras within W Jedności Siła group, and Blood & Honour networks; one Patriae Fidelis member was also very close to National Action. Following the disclosure of these extreme right links by anti-fascist organizations, but also some incidents of violence

between anti-fascists and members or sympathizers of *Patriae Fidelis*, several leaders resigned, and to this day try to disassociate themselves from this episode and overall the organization declined in numbers. Although personal ambitions did play their part, our research points to deep class-related tensions that emerged when trying to bring middle-class Poles, football ultras, and second-generation Polish Brits under one nationalist umbrella. It seems nationalism proved too inclusive to work in this case.

British Far Right Engaging with Polish Migrants

The key point of our argument is that the activities of Polish far-right organizations in Britain do not happen in a void, but fall on fertile ground. While the British far-right has been studied extensively (Fielding 2016; Macklin 2020; Mondon and Winter 2020) with recent research focusing on new organizational and ideational configurations (Busher 2016), including the transnational dimension of far-right ideologies (Hermansson et al. 2020; Soborski 2013, 107–139), the participation in far-right groups by members of non-British background or cooperation with immigrant groups has not been explored at all. However, their presence has been noted by antiradicalization NGOs such as Hope Not Hate (Lowles and Collins 2018):

A feature of the British far-right scene over recent years has been the rising numbers of Polish extremists active in it. From the political party National Rebirth of Poland (NOP) to right-wing Polish hooligans fighting on our streets, there are few British far-right groups that do not have any links to their Polish extremists... (Lowles and Collins 2018)

This is certainly true. But how did it play out? And why did people join at all? From our assessment of organizational links and interviews with far-right activists it is clear that the whole spectrum of the British far right is peppered with Polish connections—from officially existing parties or social movements, like the BNP (in its past¹³), UKIP, Reform, Britain First, English Defence League, Democratic Football Lads Alliance to neo-Nazi organizations such as National Action,¹⁴ Blood and Honour or Combat 18. UKIP, for example, had Polish candidates standing in local elections in Wales¹⁵ and England, and Reform UK likewise has candidates standing in the 2024 parliamentary elections who emphasize their Polish roots.¹⁶ The EDL's leader, Tommy Robinson recruited Polish skinheads and neo-Nazis as his security (from the Polish section of the DFLA¹⁷) as well as having political connections in Poland. His film from the annual Independence March in Warsaw was watched by over half a million people.¹⁸ At the event, Robinson

¹³ Links between BNP and Polish far right, most notably NOP, through its Third Position ideas date back to 90s: <https://www.nop.org.pl/2013/10/02/nop-na-zjezdzicie-bnp/>

¹⁴ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/neo-nazi-soup-kitchen-glasgow-whites-only-national-action-a7318331.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/UKIPWales/photos/a.356338581125701/3888964967863027/?type=3>

¹⁶ <https://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/11203895.polish-council-candidate-przemek-skwirczynski-ukip-is-the-natural-choice-of-eastern-europeans/>

; Hertford and Stortford Constituency—John Burmicz Reform UK (reformparty.uk); Brent East Constituency—Zbigniew Kowalczyk Reform UK (reformparty.uk)

¹⁷ Revealed: DFLA Polish Group Provide “Security” for Yellow Vester James Goddard as He Attended Magistrates Court (tellmamauk.org)

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDL6d6rz11Q>

tweeted, “I have had an amazing time with Polish patriots marching against Islam. Polish pride is something else.”¹⁹ According to our data, he was invited and hosted in Warsaw by a third-generation Polish Brit, owner of a PR firm. In Poland he established strong links with the then-Polish governing party’s (PiS) politicians such as Dariusz Matecki, and Dominik Tarczyński. Robinson’s entry into the Polish political imagination resulted in a widespread campaign in his support while he was in prison,²⁰ backed by many Polish mainstream journalists and politicians.²¹ The campaign was framed as support for Robinson’s fight against Islam but also against the corrupt and unfair judiciary. This is important as the Polish government at the time fought a political-legal battle with the European Union around judiciary reform which amounted to democratic backsliding (Bernhard 2021) hence Robinson’s struggle was of a double political benefit—he was presented as fighting the “lefties liberals” who protect Islamists as well as fighting the corrupt judiciary. But in the UK Tommy’s popularity among Poles seems to have declined. While his previous rallies and marches were attended by Polish supporters who frequently carried Polish flags, and there used to be an EDL Polish Division,²² and we met many members and supporters, at a rally in June 2024 there were none, and during another rally on July 27, 2024, we encountered one Polish demonstrator with a Polish flag. As one of his Polish ex-supporters, remarked: *Tommy then said yes, Poles, come we will be together; but once he doesn’t need us then it’s like in Yalta, just fuck off, I will go to other [minorities]* (fieldwork notes, informal conversation with a respondent).

Britain First’s leaders Paul Golding and Jayda Fransen have also nurtured friendly relations with Poland’s far right. On two occasions in 2017, they attempted to bring to Britain a Polish nationalist former priest Jacek Międlar but he was denied entry by the authorities (Lowles and Collins 2018). Golding and Fransen also appeared at a demonstration in Wrocław in support of Międlar. In terms of direct engagement with the Polish minority in Britain, Fransen recorded a YouTube video calling on Polish immigrants to join the ranks of the party.²³ Poles are portrayed as natural allies and followers of nationalist politics. As one of the leaders of Britain First told us:

I think patriotism and nationalism is something that is in the DNA still of many Eastern Europeans, whether they’re Polish or Lithuanian or Romanian. One thing we noticed is when we do our banner actions over bridges [...] you can always guarantee that when you see a number plate with PL on it, he’s going to beep you and thumbs up. Yeah! And that’s with, that’s with a sea of Union Jacks because it’s in his DNA. He loves patriotism. He doesn’t care whether that patriotism comes in the form of a red, white and blue flag or just a red and white flag. (Luke 2024)

¹⁹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/tommy-robinson-poland-edl-right-rallyanti-semitism-islam-signs-holocaust-attendance-a8053356.html>

²⁰ Tommy Robinson’s Big Adventure—Pin Prick (wordpress.com)

²¹ Wiceprezes SDP W. Gadowski: Już zajmujemy się sprawą Tommy’ego Robinsona (tysol.pl)

²² www.facebook.com/EnglishDefenceLeaguePolishDivision

²³ <https://youtu.be/8gKhZ9JxwiA>

The ways Poles react and relate to the attempt by Brits to recruit them shows the dynamic nature of integration through racism. We interviewed a long-standing Polish member of Britain First whose path of far-right radicalization epitomizes this process. Politically inactive in Poland, his move to Britain and witnessing London's 7/7 bombing, combined with the consumption of online anti-Muslim material and speeches by Międlar, led to him joining Britain First. He quickly became a recognizable figure in the organization and is seen in many photos with the leaders. From his narrative it is clear that he sees activism as a manifestation of his social mobility upwards from a working-class immigrant in a low-status job to an actor in politically significant—in his eyes—events. In a process of positioning himself in a hierarchy of whiteness, his racist prejudices have been vindicated and legitimized by his British acquaintances and fellow activists who may perceive him as an immigrant, but one who is white and with politically beneficial symbolism around him. He also seems to embrace this tokenization strategy employed by the Britain First as it was beneficial to him and his symbolic status: *Well, as the Polish champion [in martial arts], it's clear that I meant something to them...* Official membership enabled him to climb the social hierarchy; no longer viewed as a low-skilled Polish immigrant, he was now perceived as a white Christian who had what it takes to defend the United Kingdom against Islam. From our interviews with other activists, however, it seems that the close relationship has waned and many have voiced their skepticism and cynicism towards Britain First's reach-outs to Poles. One commented: *[t]hey want to fight Islam with Polish hands* (fieldwork notes), while others see Golding as essentially an English anti-Polish xenophobe, just using Poles for his own purposes, or simply as financially driven political entrepreneur.

The case of Gabriel, a Polish far-right activist who was convicted under terrorism charges is significant in this context, illustrating how integration-through-racisms works. He was a former member of Britain First and an EDL sympathizer but was mainly active online. He became radicalized through meeting an English EDL supporter who introduced him to anti-Islamic propaganda and online hate groups. The respondent's connection with the Polish far-right was negligible, he mainly consumed English-language material. His narrative reveals how this material resonated with his sense of being unfairly treated by non-whites and Muslims who—he thought—had no right to live in Britain. He thus reproduced British far-right tropes; there were very few Polish nationalist themes in his thinking. He told us about far-right British influencers who had radicalized him online:

There were people who just posted things like "Muslim attacked woman in London". That it is no longer safe to walk around London, that women are discriminated against. And at that moment an even greater sense of injustice began to awaken in me, that I should somehow fight against it, do something about it, that...that I should simply defend these women, defend these people, that it is unfair [...] I only took one position, that of a white, right-wing man who fights only for white, right-wing things, but I didn't even look at the perspective at all those people who are on the other side. And... and then it was just my petty thinking that it seemed to me that these people were bad people and we had to fight them. (Gabriel 2024)

After serving his sentence, he was deported to Poland and was then contacted by members of Polish far-right parties. As he remarked: *In their eyes, I am a martyr who fought for the white race and against Islam, and whom the evil leftist [UK] government punished.* In this instance, his deportation presented an opportunity for the Polish far right to reconstruct the myth of the Polish martyr, by associating themselves with an internationally recognizable individual. But his radicalization happened outside any Polish networks. Asked about who radicalizes whom, he answered: The English radicalize Poles, mainly because we are guests and we are not as familiar with the British culture when we arrive there. But Poles then radicalize Poles and it works like a virus, it simply spreads.

Our final example comes from the most extreme end of the far-right spectrum, the neo-Nazi transnational skinhead network, Blood and Honour which is linked with the Rock Against Communism scene (Dyck 2016). We have interviewed several members of the network and all confirmed that Poles made up a significant group during some underground neo-Nazi concerts in the United Kingdom (one said that around 80 out of circa 300 attendees, were Polish). They were also called for support as security, or during anticipated violent clashes, such as the one in Liverpool in February 2016 during an anti-immigration protest that ended up in a violent brawl with several people arrested and sentenced for causing public disorder.²⁴ Our interviews with participants during that violent incident revealed a network more diverse and complex than what the media reported—as merely an invitation from a British organization North West Infidels to Polish football fan groups including Football Hooligans and W Jedności Siła to join their forces. As a matter of fact, this was a transnational political ecosystem, with members of National Action but also Polish neo-Nazis from Combat 18 or Polish neo-pagans from Zadruga. Thus, although Polish Hooligans were directly invited by British leaders, they joined an already diverse network that included other Polish neo-Nazi activists that they had not necessarily known of before. In this case we see a clear process of integration through violent racism, as the event in Liverpool was a staged, violent encounter where Poles were clearly brought to provide support, numbers, and ideological fuel. To some extent this was exploited by the British far right, then in decline, but from our respondents' perspective, this was also about “climbing up” the ladder of far-right activism in Britain, which for them was also a major part of their social mobility. As this participant in many other violent racist rallies frames it:

We stood there [in front of The Cenotaph, 2020 riots post-BLM demos] just so that those from Black Lives Matter wouldn't come and damage it, right? [...]. But listen, [...] people who run 'bojówki' [violent ultras squads] in the worst clubs: Millwall, West Ham... They were brought to me, “Hey! This is Theo, the Pole.” [...] Yeah. They just heard Theo Pole, you know? Thug, right? Best. Best dude. (Theo 2024)

Discussion and Conclusion: Between Long-Distance Nationalism and Short-Distance Racism

²⁴ <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/far-right-polish-hooligans-recruited-13962683>

As demonstrated, nationalism, racism, and other far-right themes articulated by immigrants are not transplanted, mechanistically remitted issues, but rather are being negotiated relationally, tested, and—in favorable circumstances—enacted to new audiences. This integration through racism shifts scholarly attention to whiteness in the relational process of immigrants settling in their countries of residence. The complex picture described above demonstrates in stark terms the far-right ideological framework that immigrants actively seek and find accommodating structures to reproduce their ideology but also create their own networks of support within new contexts. They may also develop far-right views and means of action after migrating. These ideas may be more mainstream, tapping into standard conservative nationalism, in particular when under the control of diasporic organizations that reproduce them institutionally, or they may take more extreme forms. In both cases, migrants demonstrate adaptation to the fertile environment of the receiving society.

Polish history, especially symbolic references to WW2, forms a vital component of many organizations' narratives and political mythology. It evokes the notion of a Polish warrior, defender of white, Christian, heteronormative Europe which is allegedly under threat from new and old enemies (e.g., LGBTQ+, European Union, NATO, Jews, Islam, immigration). This is not only a menu of ideological themes that correspond to immediate political leanings but also a response to a demand from sections of British politics and this renders these political symbols and myths relevant and politically impactful. Polish nationalist mythology offers British politics a particularly rich and meaningful repertoire of tropes that can be evoked to reactivate nostalgia for Britain's imperial past, and the bygone era of an ordered, hierarchical, and ultimately white Britain. Employed keenly by the British right, these ideas are inherent to what Francesca Melhuish calls anti-immigrant "Powelite nostalgia" based on "the long-standing and widely shared emotional desire to restore white English colonial authority over 'foreign' Others" (Melhuish 2023, 2). In that sense, Polish organizations and individuals are not just celebrating Polish history, they also make politically meaningful claims to a particular vision of Britain and Britishness in its white and Christian incarnation, and with a masculine, military symbolism around it.

But, as we have seen, for Polish migrants this also provides an agentic avenue for negotiation of their sense of inferior class status and stereotype of lower class, manual worker, servicing the economy. In fact, the appeal of Polish far-right extremists among their British counterparts stems from a fusion of the mythology of a fighter and violent hooligan with that of a hard-working craftsman, mainly in construction. In that far-right, but also more mainstream, conservative Powelite nostalgia, the British conflate the "builder" with the fighter/defender. It is not surprising that some British far-right activists reach out to Polish individuals, groups, and organizations for support or association and are keen to capitalize on symbols and mythologies around Polish militarism, nationalist struggles, and their supposedly anti-left, traditional, Christian outlook. As Paul Golding of Britain First said in a conversation with one of us before he declined any further interviews: *Poles are fighters, they know how to defend themselves, not like the English, who never rebelled* (fieldwork notes). Poles thus provide a model, which the English struggle to reach; at the same time, they can also provide additional support, security, and participants in what are sometimes poorly attended events of the British far right.

The processes discussed are intertwined with shades of whiteness and complexities of power in increasingly diverse societies. Paul Gilroy noted in a different context, that this is how whiteness is reproduced, as immigrants try to

[S]eek salvation by trying to embrace and inflate the ebbing privileges of whiteness. That racialized identification is presumably the best way to prove they are not really immigrants at all but somehow already belong to the homespace in ways that black and brown people against whom they have to compete in the labor market will never be recognized as doing. (Gilroy 200, 111)

It is here that we identify the space of integration-through-racisms which employs diverse, multilayered discursive tools to claim white supremacy. This deals with both the ambiguous positionality of Eastern Europeans in Western Europe in terms of social class (Lewicki 2023; Kalmar 2022) and systemic racism which opens up spaces for inclusion and exclusion for white immigrants. In that sense, we argue that what actually drives Polish immigrants into far-right activism is not just long-distance nationalism, however important it is, but rather short-distance racism aimed at gaining local prestige and status in an ambiguous world of constantly negotiated whiteness.

In that space, there seems to be a significant demand for this from the host, the British society. The conceptual problem we identified in existing scholarship—the reification of majority-vs-minority opposition—stems from a static and monochromatic approach to social diversity, where far-right, anti-immigrant groups are seen as constantly fighting an imagined “immigrant” who implicitly denotes a person of color, likely non-Christian. This monochromatic approach may unintentionally contribute to the reproduction of epistemic white privilege raising the question of how, where, and in what way a “minority” becomes a “majority.” In essence, the conceptual gaps and omissions point to the need for a more nuanced, relational approach whereby the consequences of far-right politics are considered in terms of political agency bringing minority and majority groups into one transnational social field of political contestation accounting for volatility within far-right movements as well as growing migration-driven complexity. Our case study provides telling examples of this complexity.

This paper identified the need for explorations of the interfaces between the political agency of immigrants in their countries of residence including the “demand” and “supply” side of local politics and long-distance nationalism in a particular, nonobvious far-right political milieu. The case of Polish immigrants active in far-right politics in Britain demonstrates how contemporary transnational far-right evolves in response to changing social realities, this evolution involving engagement with, recruitment, and radicalization of immigrants. As far-right ideas and tactics are fast adapting to new environments and modes of communication in global conditions (Miller-Idriss 2022) it is inevitable that immigrants’ engagement with far-right politics will become an important dimension of this evolution, and we will no longer be able to assume that the far right and immigrants are opposing entities.

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