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ARTICLE

Far-right media on the internet: culture, discourse and power

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Abstract

This study examines the discourse of the British National Party's (BNP) website. It explores the site as a form of alternative media, focusing on how it involves members and supporters in its discursive construction of racism. It finds that the discourses and identities produced are played out through a radical reformation of the concepts of power, culture and oppression. Drawing on the post-colonial notion of the Other, the BNP seeks to present itself, its activities and its members as responses to racism and oppression that, it argues, are practised by the Other. While this discourse is constructed through the everyday experiences and attitudes of its members, the hierarchically-determined nature of the site prevents those members from sustained, active involvement in the construction of their own identities. For this reason, the study concludes, the BNP's site is far from the more open, non-hierarchical practices of 'progressive' alternative media.

Key words

alternative media • British National Party • colonialism • far-right • political extremism • racism

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The 1990s saw a dramatic movement of the European far-right towards the centre of national politics, through a series of attempts to establish

'respectable' electoral parties. Right-wing parties with policies based primarily on nationalism and immigration have continued to attract significant numbers of voters. In the European parliamentary elections held in June 2004, for example, Jean Marie Le Pen's Front National gained 10 percent of the vote in France (it had gained 15 percent of the vote in regional elections held a few months earlier). In the UK, the British National Party (BNP) increased its share of the vote to 5 percent (Schwarz, 2004). Such parties have sought to normalize a racial nationalism based on 'whiteness as an essentialized social identity which they say is under threat' (Back, 2002b), a strategy also followed by the BNP. We might think of these developments in mainstream political culture as the penetration into a dominant, Habermasian public sphere of debate and opinion-formation (assisted in no small way by the mass media's coverage of these popular right-wing parties) of hitherto marginalized political groups. Parallel to this normalization of right-wing discourse in the public sphere we find an increasing use of the internet by groups on the far-right, which are developing their own cyber-subcultures or alternative public spheres. It is these latter that this article wishes to explore here as types of alternative media.

Little attention has been paid to right-wing media as alternative media. In general, 'alternative' is employed to denote media practices that 'strengthen democratic culture' (Downing, 2001: 95); the desideratum of 'self-governing media is simply not imaginable' (2001: 94) for what Downing terms the 'repressive radical media' of the far-right. Couldry has argued that 'one of the central values of, say, neo-Nazi media is to *close off* certain others' abilities to speak of their experience, as part of constructing or sustaining a community *with closure*' (Couldry, 2002: unpaginated; emphasis in original). Participatory communication and radicalized professional practices of journalism are considered to lie at the heart of alternative media. Might such practices also be features of far-right radical media, and thus just as worthy of being considered as 'citizens' media' (Rodriguez, 2000)? In terms of graphic design and typography at least, racist skinhead music fanzines such as *Blood and Honour* drew explicitly from the same subcultural use of dominant codes that Hebdige (1979) found in the punk fanzine. More recently, in the far-right's use of the internet we find some intriguing, if not disturbing, modalities for transforming elements of dominant, 'normalized' discourses into racist media practices. Back has found that recently, the far-right media in the UK has assimilated the language of multiculturalist discourse through its adoption of terms such as 'equality,' 'fairness' and 'rights'. Significantly, he notes that the BNP's 'house publication' has been relaunched as *Identity*: 'their dominant motif is that whites are now the victims' (Back, 2002b). He has noted also the attempts on a White Power website to co-opt the writings of Adorno on the culture industry into the

canon of extreme racist literature: 'Adorno's work is *used* to criticize the involvement of cultural entrepreneurs and then organized into a conspiratorial anti-Semitic view' (Back, 2002a: 637, emphasis in original). Back explains these attempts at co-optation and assimilation as a consequence of a contemporary destabilization of political languages; 'increasingly, liquid ideologies are capable of assimilating elements that on the face of it seem incompatible' (Back, 2002b).

If Couldry and Downing are right in their assertions that the radical media of the far-right represents a community with closure, where the principles of authoritarian populism prevent any meaningful debate and work against any notion of democratic communication, insisting instead on hierarchical control, then we would expect to find more or less distinct divisions between producers and audiences. With them, we would expect also to find a relative absence of creativity, freedom and exploration of ideas and arguments, along with similarly curtailed forms and styles of presentation and structure.

METHOD

Examining the discourse of far-right media

The present study will examine two aspects of the radical internet media of the far-right. First, it needs to analyse the texts themselves in order to reveal the extent to which they are constructed hegemonically, to assess the presence of 'liquid ideologies' that are mobile enough to borrow from a variety of discourses in order to present their arguments. The text therefore becomes central. Second, it must be capable of examining the social and cultural relationships that form and reform around the text, as a way of exploring the relationship between producers and audiences. This is to examine these texts as cultural objects in relation to the social institutions and actors (editors, writers, readers) that make meaning and transform the content of such objects through and into their daily experience, their hopes and fears – and 'culturally activate' them, to borrow Tony Bennett's (1983) useful concept. In their study of Pakeha ('white') racism in New Zealand, Wetherell and Potter argue for a 'double movement' of discourse analysis (1992: 86). Following Foucault (1980), they argue that discourse is constituted not only by existing social formations and historical accounts, but is itself constitutive of social groups, subject positions and identities. For the present study this approach has distinct advantages. First, it enables the analyst to explore how existing knowledge and structures (particularly, in the case of racist practices: socioeconomic determinants, the history of immigration, the colonial legacy, etc.) have constituted the power relations within racist discourse. Second, it encourages us to ask what new forms of identity or social action have been constituted? Third, it may explore how, for example, the social action produced by discourse might itself be

reformed by subsequent knowledge formations, such as the use of the discourse of multiculturalism in contemporary racist discourse (Back, 2002b).

In defining the activities and ideologies of far-right groups on the internet, Brophy et al. (1999) identify a range of ideological positions, among them racist, homophobic, fascist, right-wing, ultraconservative, social Darwinist and supremacist. They note both the historical linkages that many far-right groups make through their use of such ideologies (fascism and Nazism being the most salient) and the transformations that this terminology has undergone in recent years, as far-right groups aim for 'respectability' (emphasizing 'community' and 'identity' over more explicitly separatist and inflammatory terms). Back's observation that 'the language of hate is increasingly being articulated through invocations of love' (2002b: 1) suggests a detailed discursive examination of these practices. While Back does not attempt this, his emphasis on the BNP as one site for such practices suggests that the internet media produced by the BNP will be an appropriate subject for the present study.

CONTEXT: THE POLICIES OF THE BNP

Under its first leader and founder, John Tyndall, the BNP had been notorious for promoting forced repatriation and racial violence. In 1995, party activist Nick Griffin wrote in the extremist publication, *The Rune*, that the defence of 'rights for whites' could come only from 'well-directed boots and fists. When the crunch comes, power is the product of force and will, not of rational debate' (cited in 'Griffin Heads for Victory', 1999). Since becoming chairman of the party in 1999, Griffin has sought to distance himself from such rhetoric and to reposition the BNP as a party of 'racial nationalism and social justice', to build a 'responsible' movement that 'becomes the focus of the hopes not just of the neglected and oppressed white working class, but also of the frustrated and disorientated traditional middle class' (cited in 'Griffin Heads for Victory', 1999). Despite this shift in rhetoric (and some dilution of its earlier policies) towards a 'new nationalism', the BNP's policies remain founded on racism. Its primary policy is that of immigration, and from this all its other policies proceed:

On current demographic trends, we, the native British people, will be an ethnic minority in our own country within sixty years. To ensure that this does not happen, and that the British people retain their homeland and identity, we call for an immediate halt to all further immigration, the immediate deportation of criminal and illegal immigrants, and the introduction of a system of voluntary resettlement whereby those immigrants who are legally here will be afforded the opportunity to return to their lands of ethnic origin assisted by generous financial incentives both for individuals and for the countries in question. We will abolish the 'positive discrimination' schemes that have made white Britons second-class citizens. We will also clamp down on the flood of 'asylum seekers', all of whom are either bogus or can find refuge

much nearer their home countries. ('Immigration – Time to say NO!', <http://www.bnp.org.uk/policies.html#immigration>)

Its other policies – on Europe (the BNP seeks 'independence from the EU' [European Union]), on the economy and employment ('British workers first!'), and on education (the party is against 'politically incorrect indoctrination' and for 'knowledge of and pride in the history, cultures and heritage of the native peoples of Britain') – all assume a white racism based implicitly on a racially pure, historically-embedded notion of 'British' culture. Nevertheless, the party is emphatic that it is not racist, but only interested in the preservation of British culture:

Q: The politicians and the media call the BNP 'racist'? Is this true?

A: No. 'Racism' is when you 'hate' another ethnic group. We don't 'hate' black people, we don't 'hate' Asians, we don't oppose any ethnic group for what God made them, they have a right to their own identity as much as we do, all we want to do is to preserve the ethnic and cultural identity of the British people. (<http://www.bnp.org.uk/faq.html>)

Our interest is less in these policies and in the BNP's limited success in a number of local council elections in the UK, and more in how these explicitly racist policies (which is what they are, despite the party's denials) are being presented on the BNP's site and how the party actively constructs its cultural identity.

CONSTRUCTING CULTURAL HISTORY

The introduction to the 'Heritage and Culture' section of the site emphasizes the BNP's political end as 'the long term survival of our people and our nations in this island group in the North Atlantic which happens to be our homeland' (www.bnp.org.uk/culture/poetry/2003_apr.htm). The plea is not for the alienation, repatriation or (as in much supremacist discourse) the destruction of immigrant populations and communities, nor even for the defence of whites against an immigration 'onslaught'. It is both much simpler and much more invidious than either of these. The section seeks to isolate the defining characteristics of British culture, the better to 'preserve all the positive aspects of our culture' (www.bnp.org.uk/culture/poetry/2003_apr.htm). This culture is emphatically pan-British, emphasizing Celtic and Anglo-Saxon influences. It draws on both the mythic and the literary-canonical for its explanatory power – an explanatory power, however, that is left unstated, as if already understood. The works of Shakespeare (voted '5th Greatest Briton' by BNP members in a 2003 poll) are prominent here, available online (with a link to MIT's Shakespeare site) as a corrective to the 'onslaught of "politically correct" reworkings' of his plays). Each month a poem by a British writer is presented in this section, along with a brief critical appraisal of its significance. Poets are chosen from

across the British Isles and are generally in the canon: G.K. Chesterton, Sir Walter Scott, W.B. Yeats. A poem from Scott's novel *Ivanhoe* is made to represent both the ancient roots of Britain and the present necessity to fight against Britain's 'disappearance' into the EU. The reasons for choosing Auden's 'Night Mail' are less clear, unless it is to stand for the security that might come from nostalgia, as might the emphatically non-canonical choice of 'Albert and the Lion'. Similarly, the anonymous folk lyric 'John Barleycorn' celebrates a timeless past through its depiction of brewing ('a very key aspect of British society'). The selection points to a past of innocent pride – even Scott's martial poem is set in myth – there is no engagement here with an actual history of power. The culture portrayed is benign and worthy of preservation; similarly, by implication 'our' British present is benign and in need of defence, for it is under cultural attack. The discursive space established by these choices (it is unclear who is making the choices but, given the hierarchical nature of the party – a feature that it shares with mainstream British political parties – we can assume that the choices are approved by Nick Griffin) is one occupied at once by racial purity (we shall find no works here by authors whose origins or influences are admitted to lie outside the British Isles) and by a (limited) inclusiveness that brings together the English, Irish, Welsh and Scots (and subgroups such as the Cornish) as a coherent nation whose cultural history needs to be maintained against the 'politically correct' incursions of the Other. The Other, it is suggested, might not only be the 'immigrant'; it might easily be other 'British' people – most obviously 'liberals' and 'the Left'. The Other is constructed as the threat of multiculturalism, against which the BNP's representation of its cultural heritage presents itself paradoxically as a monoculture that draws on a variety of cultural histories.

The BNP's site constructs white identity as Othered (that is, as repressed and in need of defence), yet perceives that identity as under threat by cultures which themselves are subject to Othering. Stuart Hall's work on cultural identity offers a dialectical approach to understanding this apparently contradictory and specious mechanism of cultural defence. In his critical essay on Caribbean cinema and cultural identity, Hall (1990) identifies three 'presences' through which we can consider Caribbean cultural identity: *présence Africaine*, *présence Européenne* and *présence Américaine*. It is the first two that are most useful to the present argument. *Présence Africaine*, he argues, represents that 'imagined community' (citing Benedict Anderson) to which the Caribbean people can never return. 'Africa' becomes the '*origin* of our identities, unchanged by four hundred years of displacement' (Hall, 1990: 231, emphasis in original). Similarly, the Britain constructed through the BNP's 'culture and heritage' resources, with its melange of Shakespeare, Yeats, King Arthur and Odin, is imaginary. The point is that we constitute ourselves through representation and, as the forms and means available to

that representation develop as a consequence of other ‘presences’, so does our identity change, positioned as it is historically. Cultural identity is not simply about a shared culture, it is also about how these presences – and our interactions with them – produce difference, and with that difference a cultural identity that is ‘subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power’ (1990: 225). *Présence Européenne* represents the play of power in the cultural history of the Other, a presence that is ‘endlessly speaking – and endlessly speaking *us*’ (1990: 232, emphasis in original). Here the subject is positioned within the frames of representation that derive from the experience of colonialism. Thus the historical colonizers – the oppressors – construct themselves as the Other, as both repressed (*présence Africaine*) and silenced (*présence Européenne*).

The selection of cultural resources presented on the site tells us little about how we are meant to understand or deploy them. Some, such as the poster of Odin riding Sleipnir offered for sale by the Excalibur ‘heritage store’, appear as symbols of racial pride. However, there is little evidence outside white racist practices of a strong cultural identification with Norse mythology; its signification can be little more than a token for some unexpressed ‘heritage’. While Shakespeare has much more widespread cultural currency in the UK than Norse mythology, his works too appear shorn of their meaning – again, he appears to stand in for a timeless, abstracted notion of ‘Britain’, left undefined. This timelessness of signification recalls Hall’s *présence Africaine* as an imaginary space: ‘the original “Africa” is no longer there. It . . . has been transformed’ (1990: 231). The cultural–historical constructions of the BNP work in a similar fashion.

This ensuing ‘powerlessness’ is not, to use Hall’s phrase, the historical outcome of ‘the old, the imperialising, the hegemonising, form of “ethnicity”’ (1990: 235). The cultural discourse of the BNP suggests a choice: it has chosen to place power in the hands of the Other; this is not a structured, historical condition. Of course, there is no actual transfer of power here. The objects of the BNP’s racism are hardly empowered by this ‘act’ – it is a purely rhetorical act that seeks to represent the BNP itself as repressed. However, what underlies and ‘justifies’ this desire for constructing the Other as the dominant cultural force in British society? For, just as the BNP’s discourse of cultural heritage seeks to normalize a ‘positive’ racism through a set of cultural–historical symbols that are (obscurely) intended to fully explain and establish white British identity, so the ‘new nationalism’ of the BNP entails a normalization of the individuals who constitute it and who therefore must be similarly constructed as Othered by the Other. It is to the discourse surrounding these individuals to which we now turn. In particular, we shall examine the extent to which the BNP’s promotion of white cultural identity has usurped the ‘old racism’ and how social and

cultural relations are presented by and through the rank-and-file members of the BNP through their letters and personal profiles on the website.

WHO IS THE BNP? RACISM AND THE EVERYDAY

As part of its Resources section the site features 'Meet the Real BNP', which profiles four 'ordinary people just like you' who have joined the BNP to 'stand-up [sic] and do something positive to change this country for the better'. Beneath a photograph, each member has contributed a couple of sentences summarizing their reasons for joining the party. Below each text is a longer paragraph written by (we can assume) a BNP press officer or other party official, arguing the reasons for joining the party. Although brief, the contributions by the four 'ordinary' members emphasize unspecific statements of problems ('the changes in this country which are threatening our way of life'; 'I want to help make Britain great again'), the maintenance of value systems ('traditional and Christian') and the hope for a 'British future for my children'. Explicitly racist views only appear once, in a declaration by 'Mr. Nick Cass' that his concern for the future of his 'two small children' proceeds from 'a country which gives preferential treatment to ethnic minorities and asylum seekers'. This view is reinforced by an editorial commentary that asserts 'that life is hell for young white mothers in todays [sic] inner cities. They have to face the risk of assault, racial abuse, see the graffiti, the litter, the vandalism'. It is understood that the sole cause of these social problems stems from 'immigrant' communities. Once more, the repressed Other is cast as the oppressor: the normative notion that racism is generally that suffered by ethnic minority groups is turned on its head; 'racial abuse' is suffered by whites, in part through their exposure to anti-'white' racist graffiti. Even those who drop litter are non-whites, exhibiting oppressive behaviour. There is a reflexive discourse at work here that renders white racism as an everyday, non-extreme practice (these are mothers and fathers worried about their children, not skinhead gangs or Ku Klux Klan members). Racism is presented as a reasonable reaction to the imputed racism of the Other. The only explicit mentions of racialized actions are attributed to non-whites. It is 'asylum seekers' who inflict 'racial abuse'; the implicit racism of the BNP is born out of suffering and repression, not hatred. This 'strong current of victimology in far-right discourse' (Ware and Back, 2002: 50) is played out in the everyday lives of the BNP members depicted here – and what could be more everyday than a 'retired vet', a 'businessman' and a 'customer services adviser and mother' (we have only a name for the fourth)?

Again, history, culture and 'heritage' are brought to the fore, particularly in the BNP's own editorializing in this section. However, here the mythic is presented through actual historical events: 'One thousand years [during which Britain] stood proud against the foreign invader.' The battle of

Trafalgar is invoked, as are the two world wars. The cultural history and identity thus invoked are to be defended against the 'threat' to 'our heritage and the birthright of our children'. If a triumphalist, imperialist history is the cultural bedrock of the BNP's racism, its social imperative for the future rests on a racist construction of white children and young people. Here we see enacted, as Deleuze and Guattari (1988) understand it, a 'fascism [that] is manifest in the micro-organization of everyday life' (Ware and Back, 2002: 96). The headline banner on the BNP site advertising its 'Camp Excalibur' appeals to a mythical history that is joined with the everyday: an 'annual activity-packed getaway' for BNP families. Activities include 'paintballing, five-a-side football, archery, water-sports, a saturday night social and a full English breakfast'.

LETTERS OF LOCAL RACISM

Thus the racists of the BNP are constituted by a discourse that represents them as victims of racism and as oppressed by those who previously had been the victims of the party's racism (and as if they are no longer subject to that racism). Members and supporters of the BNP are encouraged to see themselves as fighting to regain a colonial past that has been (or is in imminent danger of being) erased by a new colonizing force. So far we have considered examples of constituting discourse. If we consider this discourse as producing a 'new' subject position for white racists, what are the consequences? Do these racists then go on to employ a discourse that proceeds from this subject position? The fragments we have examined already from rank-and-file members are too brief to answer these questions with confidence although, as we have seen, they do contain within them the seeds of this 'new' discourse. However, the letters section (www.bnp.org.uk/letters/current.htm) of the site does offer a richer base from which to examine the movement from constituted to constitutive.

There is much similarity between the official discourse of the BNP and that of its members' letters, the majority of which are anonymous or which have been anonymized (the exceptions being letters from BNP local councillors). Once again, editorial commentary has been added, which reinforces the official discourse. An 'alarming report from Cardiff' comments on the 'success' of protests against converting a disused hospital into a centre for asylum-seekers, but notes that 'the latest plan' for the hospital is to convert it into a 'residential college for Islamic studies'. The author's reaction brings together what are now familiar features of racist discourse: the local community will be 'over-run' by '1000 students studying Islam', 'a recipe for youth boredom, which so often leads to crime, as well as a potential hotbed of racial tension'. The assumptions that the students of the proposed college will not be 'British' and that they will be responsible for destructive, racist practices against the local, 'white' community, 'many of whom are elderly',

concord with the perverse discourse of Othering that we have encountered previously. The threat to tradition is signified, rather subtly, by the writer's observation that this college will be founded on a 'listed hospital building'. In its editorial response, the BNP makes the author's argument explicitly confrontational: 'it is down to the work of the local [white, racist] community to stop such destruction of their local living and working space'. Thus a proposal to develop an educational institution for the study of a world religion is rendered as an act of racist destruction, more evidence of colonization by the colonized. Elsewhere, in response to a brief note complaining about the absence of a BNP councillor from the website of Kirklees local council is transformed editorially into an example of the ideological work of the supporters of multiculturalism. Once again, it is the BNP who are the victims; they (the other members of the local council) 'treat BNP members like dirt' through their 'warped ideologically correct ideology' which 'condemns the indigenous population to the status of second-class citizens in its own homeland'.

THE BNP IN CYBERSPACE

So far we have examined the discourses on the BNP site without attending to their 'technosocial' aspects. The analysis easily might have been of reports, manifestos and contributions in a printed document. How does the BNP position itself in cyberspace, what use does it make of the technologies of the internet and the world wide web, and how does this use have an impact on its discursive resources? The BNP makes use of the expected technologies of website construction and presentation, such as internal hyperlinks, Portable Document Format (PDF) downloads, online shopping, email links, mailing list, RealPlayer audio and video extracts from public and commercial broadcast media. While it presents email links through which members and supporters might contact head office and their local branch officers, there is little evidence of a reticulated site through which its members may communicate with one another.

There is, for example, no forum for the interactive exchange of views, no chatroom or discussion board. There is the 'Policy Forum' (www.bnp.org.uk/policy/policy_forum.htm), which offers a limited opportunity for members to present sustained arguments about the policy issues that they believe the BNP should address. However, the BNP is careful to point out that 'all articles contained in this section [and there are only seven there at the time of writing] are not official policy and are solely the work and thoughts of the individual authors concerned'. While the Policy Forum section appears to broaden the political interests of the BNP and to position it as much more than a single-issue party, its fundamental policy of a racism that is to be mobilized throughout society and its institutions is never far from these contributions. Despite the

‘environmentally-friendly’ proposals for transport reform, which include the promotion of cleaner fuels and car-sharing (now part of every political party’s environmental policy in the UK), the BNP’s solution rests not on such reformist measures but on immigration control:

We regard the road congestion crisis as not the fault of ‘selfish’ British car owners, but as yet one more symptom of the chronic over-population of our country – a situation caused to a large extent by the effective surrender of our borders, and several decades of virtually uncontrolled immigration to our shores. (www.bnp.org.uk/policy/motorists_transport.htm)

The presence of such explicitly ‘party line’ documents in what is presented as an ‘unofficial’ space for discussion confirms the notion of right-wing media as ‘constructing or sustaining a community with closure’ (Couldry, 2002: unpaginated). In the present case, this may be understood as the functioning of a political party website, where the voices that do get to be heard are closely controlled by the party’s hierarchy. Yet it appears odd that a party that places such an apparent premium on the voices of an ‘oppressed’ culture speaks so much on their behalf. One convincing explanation is the reported unpopularity of the BNP leadership amongst its local activists. Many consider Griffin’s disavowal of the party’s espousal of racial violence under its previous leadership as a betrayal of their cause. In 2003 two prominent Scottish members ‘resigned in disgust over the party’s adoption of candidates with Black relatives’ (‘Tyndall’s Last Stand’, 2003).

The BNP also adopts the language of progressive internet media, claiming that its Resources section is ‘to cater for “cyber-activism”’. However, what it proposes is very different from the cyberactivism found within progressive social movements. The activism promoted by the BNP is centralized and party-based. It does not encourage its members to use the internet as a tool for protest, to make direct contact with its opponents (whether construed as the ‘politically correct’ ideologues of New Labour, or the Othered ethnic minorities against which the BNP sees itself as struggling). By contrast with the reticulated and independent grass roots activism of, for example, the anti-capitalist movement, its notion of cyberactivism is quite attenuated. It amounts to providing PDF leaflets ‘which people at home can download’ in order to distribute by the traditional means of doorstep circulation: ‘put on some comfortable shoes and get out into your neighbourhood!’ (www.bnp.org.uk/resources.html). However, its Campaign offers leaflets in PDF form (for its ‘Campaign against Crime’). Its ‘Campaign to Stop BBC Bias’, resembles a more engaged form of cyberactivism. Among its materials it offers a proforma which members are encouraged to complete and submit to the BNP, detailing the ‘bias’ they have witnessed on BBC radio and television programmes. In this case, ‘bias’ means primarily bias against the BNP, as well as ‘examples of anti-white racism’ and ‘examples of distortion

of the historical facts regarding Empire, British history and our nation's finest heroes' (www.bnp.org.uk/campaigns/bbc_bias_feedback.htm). The 'Campaign for Freedom of Internet Access' explicitly encourages members to take action in their public libraries by attempting to access the BNP's site. Should access be blocked, they are encouraged to complain directly as well as complete a proforma for the BNP's campaign. The BBC and the internet campaigns demonstrate in their protest activities the familiar discourse of marginalization, where a majority population is constructed as a minority, oppressed not only by a numerical ('immigrant') minority but by a state apparatus (public broadcasting, libraries) that 'should' be supporting it.

Ware and Back (2002: 98) have argued that 'the rhetoric of whiteness becomes the means to combine profoundly local grammars of racial exclusion within a translocal and international reach, which is made viable through digital technology'. How, then, does the BNP's localized discourse of racial exclusion combine with other racial discourses through the technologies and social networks that characterize cyberspace? Beyond its own pages, how does the BNP connect with other groups and organizations, what is the nature of those groups and connections? The external links on the BNP's website fall into two broad categories: affiliated and support groups (mostly in the UK), and a comprehensive set of links to other, 'white nationalist' parties. The latter include all the major European nationalist parties, such as the Austrian Freedom Party, France's Front National, the Danish People's Party and the Italian Northern League. While we do not know how these 'local grammars of racial exclusion' are relevant to or employed by the rank-and-file (how many of the party's members, for example, would be able to understand the various languages of these sites?), it is reasonable to assume that such links at least symbolically demonstrate the international reach of the new nationalist movement and function as offering solidarity to what is a minority political party. The UK-based groups affiliated to, or supportive of, the BNP function as special interest groups, offering services to specific sectors of the British nationalist movement. The relationship between these groups and the BNP is unclear in some cases (for example, the Association of British Ex-Servicemen). The discourse of others, however, is in line with the twin discourses of Othered and Othering that we have encountered previously, such as the 'white victims' support group' Families Against Immigrant Racism. There is little evidence here of any significant social networks in the cyberspace of British nationalism, even less of any global reach or reticulation. A number of the associations and groups listed have only Post Office box addresses (which is a feature of many extremist organizations across the political spectrum) and very few have websites.

Despite the general absence of interactivity or of a discussion space for rank-and-file activists, we do find one space where an attenuated form for

such communication has taken place. This is on the site of the BNP's Directory of White British Businesses (www.whitedirectory.tk). The link takes the viewer not to the promised 'fledgling project to encourage Britons to use local small businesses in their area', but to a discussion page which begins with a handful of enquiries about the absence of the directory. The posts then broaden to include messages of support for the party, criticism of its leadership and justifications (apparently borne of personal experience) for being opposed to immigration. The occasional interpolation by the list owner (we assume a BNP official) chides posters to 'keep on topic' – although in the absence of the business database itself, it is difficult to see what the topic would be. This is the only space available through the BNP in which its members (and others) may post their unmediated opinions and communicate with one another. The fortuitous absence of a resource has resulted in an opportunistic move by BNP members. The frustration of the list owner at this is palpable; returning to the discussion list only two days after first viewing it, we find the link broken, the page unavailable. In a double irony the rank-and-file members have colonized a space in which to establish their own discourse, using the resources of the powerful (the party) through which to express themselves. That party has responded by dispossessing those members of that space, placing it off-limits, effectively erasing it. Perhaps this is a suitable point to close this analysis, with the discourse of colonizer and colonized played out within the structure of the BNP itself, rendering its cyberspace closed and constricted.

CONCLUSION

We began this study through a consideration of far-right media as a species of alternative media. We sought to provide empirical materials with which to examine Couldry's assertion that far-right media, unlike more 'progressive' alternative media, sought to construct a 'community with closure' in which an explicit ideological framework not only prevented counter-discourses from arising in those media, but curtailed a multi-voiced discourse from developing even among sympathizers and supporters through its hierarchical control of symbolic resources. Following Downing, Couldry asserted that the opportunity for media audiences to become media producers or, at least, active discussants through those media, would be absent from far-right media. While the work of Ware and Back contradicts this assertion to some extent, the findings of the present study confirm Couldry's position. The BNP's website maintains a hegemony of ideas, of how 'new nationalism' is to be understood discursively. The authoritarian populism of the BNP is presented through populist symbols (a mythic past, a repressed present and a secure future for the innocent) and draws on the everyday experiences, identities and social processes of its members' lived experiences. Yet it does so on their behalf, giving those individuals little

opportunity to present themselves on the website. As Couldry predicts, there is little evidence here of that ‘democratized creativity’ we find in other alternative media formations, little space for the sharing or exploration of ideas and arguments.

Yet the study has done more than merely confirm an assertion. What it has shown is the extent to which an ideology founded on racism, hate, separatism and exclusion might reform itself by making use of the very discourses to which historically it has been opposed, and which we will find in progressive alternative media. The deployment of post-colonial notions such as the Other, of the discourse of a struggle to maintain and develop a cultural identity in an oppressive present, of the hope for a future free from fear: all these are powerful features of the discourse of multiculturalism. However, for the BNP they are deployed in order to critique – indeed to reject – their original site of production. The BNP is anti-multicultural, anti-equality and anti-freedom, yet its discourse uses the tropes of multiculturalism, equality and freedom to maintain an ideological space where racism and repression may appear natural and commonsensical. Its authoritarian populism ensures that this view, within the space of the BNP’s website at least, will remain uncontested.

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