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Antiracism and the current moment

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ABSTRACT

The most potent forms of racism within the West today arise from the international configuration of authoritarian populist and fascist politicians and the movements that support them. Their forms of racism have united distinct local events and contexts into a broader international synthesis about migration, crime, sexual violence, national abasement, civilizational decline and racial extinction. The Western far-right has developed racial projects that seek to radically transform Western societies along many social, political and cultural dimensions. Key themes within contemporary racism are drawn out in the article, including its civilizational and natalist forms, the significance of Europe and its alleged degradation, the centrality of gender for racist mobilisations and the complications provoked by ethnic diversity in the far-right. The formidable challenges for antiracism are elicited in the article, including limitations to "identitarian", "decolonial" and "communal" antiracism. The conclusion considers general directions that contemporary antiracism might take.

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Introduction

The most potent forms of racism in the West today arise from the international political constellation of authoritarian populist and fascist politicians and the movements they have incited and inspired. Most importantly for antiracist thinking, the Western far-right represents a range of interconnected racial projects that aim to comprehensively transform European and North American states and societies across many social, political, economic and cultural domains. Antiracism, therefore, faces the challenge of opposing both the large-scale political, economic and social ambitions of the far-right to reshape Western societies as well as its visceral, violent manifestations in the streets. Western racism is especially driven on an international scale by the second Donald Trump administration, exemplifying a transatlantic dimension that shapes racism across Europe and the United States. Since January 2025, the Trump administration has taken multiple allegedly unlawful and anti-democratic actions (Levine 2025; Luttig 2025). The ferocity of its anti-

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migrant, anti-minority sentiments and actions is expressive of many themes in ideal-type fascism (Eco 1995).

The ideological "family resemblance" among authoritarians extends from Trump to Viktor Orban, Giorgia Meloni, Marine Le Pen, Narendra Modi, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Herbert Kickl, among others (Traverso 2019). In several of these cases, it is challenging to analytically distinguish whether they represent right-wing authoritarian populism or fascism (Mondon and Winter 2020; Mudde 2019; Müller 2017). But little separates the rhetoric and platforms of many Western right-wing authoritarian populists from the beliefs and agendas of neo-Nazis and neo-Fascists. Ideas originating from neo-Nazism, white extinction and white genocide among them, circulate within the Trump presidency, within far-right political parties across Europe, and among authoritarian oligarchs (Kriner 2025; Tharoor 2023). Fourteen words used by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security echo the "14 words" creed of violent neo-Nazism, both starting with "We must secure … " (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2018).

Contemporary racism is uncannily able to fuse distinct local events and contexts into a broader international synthesis about migration, crime, sexual violence, national abasement, civilizational decline and racial extinction. Its thematic core includes "siege," "invasion" and the threats to white women and children across the West. The self-similar nature of racism across socially diverse countries and political environments illustrates how today's racism, while speaking to local contexts, has become unmoored from them. It has become an internationally robust discourse that is reproduced at multiple institutional and regional scales through far-right alliances, often aided by the power of social media. Racism, itself based on original "disinformation" about humankind, has been transformed into a method of international political communication that, through social media, evades institutional forms of democratic authority. International racist discourse regularly incites local, demotic racism that is often volatile and violent. It is not simply that today's racism is global in its reach and impact. It is intrinsically *about* international institutions and spaces, typically articulated within a broader civilizational ideology about the decline of Western societies arising from migrant "invasion" and "replacement."

These transformations exemplify the "fourth wave" of the far right, which is distinctive for moving mainstream politics in a far-right direction rather than moderating itself to become more palatable (Mudde 2019, 20). A distinction is regularly made between sections of the political right that remain committed to liberal democracy (even if "illiberally," as with Victor Orban) and those that reject it. This distinction is neither static nor clear-cut, and the boundaries between the "radical," "extreme," and "mainstream" right are often blurred (Minkenberg 2013; Mondon and Winter 2020). The term "far-right" therefore remains analytically useful (Pirro 2023), covering not only the "radical," "populist" and "extreme" right but significant sections of the political mainstream, and this is the way it is used in the article.

The international resurgence of racist governments, parties and movements reflects the weaknesses of antiracism, set against the demise of liberalism and the political left globally. It also demonstrates the failure of several decades of statutory policies across the European Union and within the United States, which are based on human or civil rights, equality, anti-discrimination, affirmative action, multicultural diversity or social cohesion. As a project led by liberal and left elites, and especially in its more recent identitarian forms, institutional antiracism has not been a success. In parallel, while antiracism

may be effective for local mobilizations, as seen in many towns and cities in the UK following the 2024 far-right-influenced riots in the wake of the Southport tragedy (see below), it faces formidable challenges in addressing the aims, international scales and novel configurations of racism. The compounded aspects of contemporary racism – its scale, demotic manifestations, underpinning alliances, and dynamic, volatile and unremitting nature – have diminished the effectiveness of antiracism. As importantly, contemporary Euro-American racism not only targets migrants but also whatever measures exist under the name of antiracism and multiculturalism, including corporate, identitarian and elite projects, and grassroots groups and social movements.

The article focuses on contemporary racism and the challenges it poses for antiracist thinking. Few systematic academic attempts have been made to consider the meanings of antiracism (Bonnett 2000; Gilroy 2019; Solomos 2024). "Antiracism" often stands in for that which claims to function in opposition to racism. It is "best seen not as a fixed ideology but as a set of ethical and political values that seek to highlight the importance of a commitment to equality, dignity and common humanity" (Solomos 2024, 129). However, racism and antiracism are often based on enduring themes. Specific theoretical ideas inform antiracism, and the limitations of some of these in the face of contemporary racism are discussed. The central argument is that much antiracist thinking today is inadequate in challenging the *forms* and *variations* of contemporary racism, the international *scales* at which they operate, the manifest *themes* that constitute their popularity, their nature as political *communication*, and their ambitions to *transform* state and society in highly authoritarian directions.

The dominant forms of contemporary racism are not reducible to the many far-right mobilizations against migrants and asylum seekers. The latter are conductors for large-scale projects that seek a fundamental social, political and cultural transformation of Western societies under varieties of white nationalism. The latter spans numerous ethnonationalist, natalist and nativist projects of national recovery, racial rejuvenation and anti-migrant hostility. Many manifestations of racism – for example, incitement by "populist" politicians of racist vigilante violence – similarly need to be seen as larger techniques of authoritarian governance rather than simply political opportunism by ambitious figures.

The article first examines the limitations of some antiracist approaches. In particular, problems with "identitarian," "decolonial," and "communal" varieties of antiracism are highlighted. Key themes in contemporary racism are then drawn out in an extended discussion: its civilizational and natalist form, the significance of Europe and its alleged degradation, the centrality of gender for its mobilizations, and the complications provoked by ethnic diversity in the far-right. Through this discussion, challenges for antiracism are highlighted. The article uses illustrative events from the UK, the U.S. and from social media. These are related to broader transformations in racism and give us a vivid picture of the formidable theoretical and community-level challenges that antiracism faces today. The conclusion considers general directions for antiracism in meeting some of these challenges.

Varieties of antiracism

Racism and antiracism have varied historically, often in association with each other, but both typically contain underlying ideas, including ones that are usually in opposition.

The most significant opposition is between inherent, natural hierarchy and universal human equality. Equality is constitutive of much, though not all, antiracist thinking. Similarly, a commitment to equality may be based on rejecting the concept of race, its differentiation of humanity and its hierarchies. But race may also be preserved in some claims to antiracist equality. A universal orientation to equality also does not necessarily tell us what antiracism might look like in specific contexts.

Academic antiracism spans a wide range of approaches: liberal equality, critical race theory, second-generation decolonial theory, multicultural theory, identitarianism, intersectionality, "race and class" approaches and indigenous epistemology (Solomos 2024). Outside academia, antiracism constitutes an independent field of knowledge that may draw upon academic ideas but is the outcome of other social, political and economic processes. It includes mass movements based on equality, corporate EDI/DEI initiatives, black and ethnic minority identity politics, multicultural policy, even ethnonationalism and racial communalism. Antiracism contains "race-making" and "race-rejecting," secular and communal approaches. Affiliation with antiracism does not necessarily tell us which approach is being committed to under its name.

The fluid meanings of antiracism have significant ethical consequences (Bhatt 2024). While typically containing the claim that race is a social fiction rather than a biological reality, much identity-based antiracism naturalizes race as a fixed property of groups, a cultural, "spiritual" or organic quintessence that manifests as identity. In Critical Race Theory, "each race has its own origins and ever-evolving history," leading to unique "voices of color" (Delgado and Stefancic 2023, 10–11). Despite the rejection of biological ideas, the reification of racial identity is close to being about phenotype, reproducing the racial typologies that underpinned the very idea of race (Banton 2019). Thus, Critical Race Theory's main "racial faultline" is between homogeneous "whites" and all other unique and distinct groups.

Similarly, in many popular guides to antiracism that proliferated after the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020 and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter, race was frequently hypostatized as an indwelling property we all have (Andrews 2023; DiAngelo 2019). Racial identity was not only naturalized but also seen as harboring natural antagonism between groups. For example, in DiAngelo's elaboration of liberal "white fragility," not only does everyone have a racial identity, but that identity is the basis of affinity with their own kind and the cause of prejudice and discrimination towards others, prejudice becoming racism when backed by institutions (DiAngelo 2019, 56, 63). Prejudice and discrimination are characterized as the innate, ordinary behavior of all groups in a way that echoes the "new racism" of the 1980s (Barker 1981). Such "identitarian antiracism" brings alive the racial concepts that antiracism was intended to defeat. Relatedly, identitarian antiracism can construe antiracism as fundamentally equivalent to conflicts between innate groups.

In this vein, some decolonial approaches mobilize antiracism in languages that are barely different to those of the Western far-right.

> Our Native people and territories have been overrun by non-Natives, including Asians. Calling themselves 'local,' the children of Asian settlers greatly outnumber us. They claim Hawai'i as their own, denying indigenous history, their long collaboration in our continued dispossession, and the benefits therefrom. (Trask 2000, 2)

Though articulated in decolonial language, racism and antiracism are reversed here, illustrating how some antiracist ideas are proximate to the ethnonationalist racism they are seemingly opposing.

Decolonial theory can generate strong tendencies towards ethnonationalism, since it is often preoccupied with the distinct cultures, ways of knowing, and forms of knowledge that separate the West from those it colonized (Mignolo 2000). These ideas converge with those of far-right thinkers (Hull 2022). Conversely, the author of the "Great Replacement" idea has regularly praised Fanon and considers "decolonization" (through "remigration") as the primary goal facing Europe (Canlorbe 2020). Decolonial theory is frequently employed by far-right Hindutva writers and activists (Deepak 2021). Due to the identitarian logic of decolonial theory, opposing its "misuse" is not an intellectually straightforward exercise (Huju 2024).

Arguments that such uses of decoloniality are incorrect miss the point: major concepts in the antiracist canon have been inverted by the far right and often constitute the core of their ideological beliefs. This includes the concepts "indigenous," "colonialism," "decolonization," "genocide," "identity" and "culture," alongside their ideas of discrimination, oppression and injustice. Put in different terms, communal, ethnonationalist, and identitarian antiracism possess an underlying logic that renders their claims amenable to far-right capture and reversal through the very principles they assert: hypostasis, philosophical substantialism, the naturalization of group boundaries, and the assumption of innate antagonism. These principles establish racial conflicts as matters about effectively naturalized groups detached from political, institutional and historical determinations, ideas central to racism itself. Against these, the challenge for antiracism is to develop alternative approaches to "salvaging" planetary humanism (Gilroy 2019) that can contest effectively the wide ambitions of the far-right.

Dimensions of contemporary racism

Ideological diversity

A key challenge for antiracism is that the Western far right, seen as a broad, agile and transformative project, is ideologically variegated, containing affiliations from "classical liberalism" and reactionary libertarianism to fascism. These variations have consequences for the (sometimes contending) forms of racism produced, as well as for the antiracism that opposes them. Far-right actors have also diversified over the past decade, and this has led to unpredictable alliances between ideologically incommensurable groups, as well as hybrid ideologies that do not map into easily recognizable forms – "MAGA communism" led by an ethnic minority figurehead being one example (Al Din n.d.).

The form of state advocated varies immensely: the minimal "watchman" state of libertarians, the monarchy of neo-reactionaries, a corporately governed "techno-feudalism," illiberal democracy, an ethnonationalist fascist state, or the destruction of any state form (Bhatt 2021). In this context, the influence of neo-reaction and dark enlightenment ideas across the Trump administration is striking (Kofman 2025). The far-right advocates a powerful, national conservative nostalgia about a peaceful racial homogeneity that existed in the past, but this sits alongside accelerationist techno-elitism and technofascism (Chayka 2025). It is typically anti-"globalist" and opposes the European Union (EU)

and the United Nations; but it builds international far-right alliances, including ones based on European identity, and is often dependent on the EU that it seeks to undermine (Scheppele 2024; Vohra 2025).

The far-right typically advocates for strong law and order, but it often exemplifies illegality, routine rule-breaking, the undermining of independent judiciaries, and the suppression of legal accountability (Human Rights Watch 2025; Luttig 2025). It contains tendencies that make use of free speech absolutism against "wokeism," DEI or "Islam," but many of the same tendencies seek to repress legitimate speech critical of populist leaders, plutocrats or Israel (Mulhall 2023). Support for Israel, right-wing Zionism and Hindu nationalism, and vigorous opposition to Muslims, Arabs and Palestinians is routine, though not necessarily universal across the far-right – among some of the (typically neo-Nazi influenced) far-right, Hindus, Sikhs and Jews are equally part of the non-white migrant "invasion" they abhor.

The last point illustrates several fault lines within European far-right racism that are best illustrated by the minority groups that are targeted, though rarely in a neat and settled way: asylum seekers, poor unskilled versus wealthier skilled migrants, undocumented versus settled migrants, Muslim or Jewish people, or all non-white people. In the UK, the neo-Nazi Homeland Party, Britain First and Patriotic Alternative oppose all non-white migration and call for mass expulsions. Reform UK contains these tendencies, and ones that differentiate between Muslims and others, settled and recent migrants, and asylum seekers (Williams 2025). Alongside is a multitude of competitive actors on social media devoted to generating divisive, inflammatory, polarizing messages, including Rupert Lowe MP, formerly of Reform UK and now leading Restore Britain, Ben Habib, former Reform UK politician and now of Advance UK, and former academic Matt Goodwin. The shifting ideological divisions with the far right can result in forms of racism that are predictably structured or erratic, and manifest across different geographical and social contexts in volatile forms.

Civilization under siege

If the far-right is ideologically diverse, it nevertheless demonstrates consistent overarching themes relevant to its racism and these primarily concern civilization, natalism, and a driving fear of the occultation of whites by others. Thus, anxieties about "white extinction" and the impending collapse of Western civilization constitute key ideological underpinnings for European and North American far-right racism (Brubaker 2017; Stewart 2020).

The reconfiguration by the far right of Western nationalism in terms that can be simultaneously civilizational, ethnic, and racial generates a malleable intellectual space. The intense focus on migrants, Muslims, and multiculturalism (Mondon and Winter 2020) is virtually definitive, but it is typically linked to the threat each poses to Western civilization. (The same three targets appear in several non-Western far-right movements, including Hindutva.) The narrative of Western civilizational under siege connects migrant presence with the degradation of the nation's life, safety and destiny. Here, ideas of national belonging are not necessarily based on biology but are often informed by a neo-Spenglerian conception of national culture: organic, spiritual, and civilizational.

The civilizational politics of the Western far right are intimately tied to a declinist narrative that is strikingly like the global racial theories that emerged during the early

twentieth century. Within these, decreasing white birth rates, non-white immigration and racial "mixing" were associated with racial degeneration, national collapse and civilizational decay (Spiro 2009). In today's far-right, these declinist ideas emerge in many ways. Non-white migration and comparatively low Western birth rates signal civilizational collapse. For Elon Musk, declining birth rates are the "biggest threat to civilization" (Elon Musk [@elonmusk] 2022). Similarly, he said that the problem with the "Great Replacement Theory" is that it fails to address how low birth rates were contributing to Europe's "collapse" (Elon Musk [@elonmusk] 2024b). Musk's interventions chime with the pronatalist obsessions of much of the Western far-right for whom low birth rates in Europe are causing whiteness to fall into shadow.

Contemporary racism expresses a natal relation to the nation's past and a mournful nostalgia for kin-based communal life "before the invasion." Nationalism, in this register, "is not a value system you can adopt. It's a multi generation legacy that is inherited by birth alone" (The Englishman Outside of Time [@Anglo_R_Green] 2025). In this universe, civic nationalism is unthinkable. If national belonging is understood in natalist terms, national sovereignty is defined primarily by hard borders against non-white migrants and increasing calls for involuntary mass expulsions, framed as "remigration."

In this national-civilizational register, threats from migrants are inevitably articulated in overwrought, apocalyptic, martial terms. As Musk put it after the 2024 far-right instigated anti-migrant riots in the UK, "Civil war is inevitable" (Elon Musk [@elonmusk] 2024c). Contemporary racism, whether formally ideological or demotic, is typically catastrophizing, thus generating an affective field of fear and anxiety for its mobilizing power. The apocalyptic racial dystopia claimed to exist is expressed in a manner that aims to make it – and large-scale civil conflict – real (Harris 2025). The vision of impending civil disorder and societal collapse also echoes a persistent far-right theme of "race war."

If Western societies are being "invaded," then all related political discourse becomes martial. During a demonstration in Cork in June 2025, a speaker from the far-right National Party opposed legitimate non-white migrants and asylum seekers using these words:

> [Ireland] belongs to the Irish people! It always has and it always will, so long as we are ready to stand up and defend it. So, for those out there who would spit on the sacrifice of our ancestors, who have betrayed our legacy, let them hear us now. This is our land! This is our home! This is our future, our hopes, our dreams, our ancestors, our legacy! This is our island and it always will be from now until the end of time, so long as the wind blows over our fields and the rivers flow from our mountaintops, so long as there's a single blade of fucking grass left on this island, and a single Irish man only willing to stand up and defend it. (The National Party 2025)

Here, past and present, living and dead, and the treachery of politicians fuse into a war narrative. The words "sacrifice" and "legacy" carry much cultural weight. "Topophilia" as a characteristic of nationalism emerges in raw verse about landscapes (Tuan 1990). Civic nationalism is only desired by elites who force it upon an unhappy populace. What replaces it lies somewhere between a thick cultural natalism in which tradition and values are inherited legacies, and ethnonationalism of the racial, biological kind.

Both Ireland and Northern Ireland have seen far-right-driven anti-migrant mobilization. This led to serious violence in Dublin during 2023, informed by nativist nationalism, and also loyalist-driven violence in and around Belfast in 2025 during which violent crowds in Ballymena burned down several migrant homes following claims of sexual assaults on

two girls by teenagers allegedly from Romania (Sabri and Cochrane 2025). The idea of Irish nationalists protesting immigration, and Northern Ireland loyalists objecting to "replacement" might seem jarring. But, despite the differing sectarian grounds, they share identical antimigrant themes and common forms of vigilante violence against migrants and their homes.

Vigilantism is often interpreted as the assumption of "sovereignty" resulting from mistrust or perceived absence of state authority (Gardenier 2022, 31). It is now a routine form of racist expression across many European countries. As a mode of political governance, it is accompanied by politicians and political parties that knowingly incite vigilante violence but remain unaccountable for it. In turn, local vigilante events are synthesized into internationally resonant ideas of the authentic people losing their natural patience and rising up. Vigilantism is a feature of authoritarian governance in which political parties, politicians, or the state, on one side, and violent vigilante groups and militias, on the other, mutually instrumentalize each other but often remain formally unrelated (Jaffrelot 2021, 211–216). Many aspects of vigilantism as a mode of governance, including the vengeful "vigilante state," have accompanied the rise of Donald Trump (Hurst 2019).

The many deaths of Europe

Central to the civilizational discourse of the Western far-right is its imagination of Europe, one that takes different forms across the Atlantic. A novel factor among the far right in the United States is a concerted obsession with European societies and demography. Europe is regarded as the source of Western civilization that contributed to the formation of the United States; it is the foundation for the white, Christian racial-cultural identification that the far-right values. Nevertheless, Europe is also seen as the source of much that is destroying the wellspring of that civilization: mass non-white immigration, tolerance of Islam, "globalism," liberalism, and multiculturalism. For much of the U.S. far-right, contemporary Europe symbolizes the abasement of Western civilization; for the European far-right, Europe is living under siege.

The imagination of contemporary Europe among the far-right in the United States is often hellish. The degradation that has seemingly fallen upon Europe is used as a warning to the United States. As Trump put it in justifying a twelve-country travel ban in May 2025: "We will not let what happened in Europe happen to America" (Howie 2025). Trump adviser Stephen Miller, though speaking about Biden's migration policies in 2024, said, "If you import the Third World, you become the Third World" (Media Matters 2024), generating a meme that is widespread among the Western far-right and frequently used on social media alongside images of migrant communities in Paris, London, Florence, Brussels and elsewhere – the degeneration of the major cities of Europe signifying civilizational chaos. The suffering of whites, as articulated on far-right social media, results from the mere visibility of migrants or Muslims on a beach, in streets, leisure parks or the countryside, with London represented as especially terrifying. If the association of migrants with heightened fecundity, filth, disease, crime, sexual violence, and urban and national degeneration are old themes in Western racism (Gilroy 2007; Hall et al. 1978; Lawrence 1982), they are resurgent today in manifold ways.

The U.S. far right's orientation towards Europe leads to alliances with Viktor Orbán, Giorgia Meloni, Marine Le Pen, and Nigel Farage, and disdain towards the European

Union and other European leaders. However, the fixation on Europe also betrays envy, as Europe is also revered as an archive of philosophical, cultural, and monumental treasures that gave birth to the United States. An unusually ideological Substack post by the U.S. State Department in May 2025 (U.S. Department of State 2025) explained why the Trump administration had "sounded the alarm" in Europe. It outlined the "unique bond" between the United States and Europe forged by "above all, a shared Western civilizational heritage." However, Europe, it claimed, had disowned its "spiritual and cultural roots," the promise of Europe lying in "tatters": "What endures instead is an aggressive campaign against Western civilization itself. Across Europe, governments have weaponized political institutions against their own citizens and against our shared heritage" (U.S. Department of State 2025). It is in these ways that the racial politics of civilization manifest.

Previously, European far-right intellectuals usually considered the U.S. responsible for "globalism" and the cultural destruction of Europe (e.g. De Benoist and Carpentier 2003). However, the U.S. State Department now castigates Europe for suppressing far-right European politicians and those critical of mass migration. Of course, interference by the Trump administration or Elon Musk in the racial politics of European countries can backfire (More in Common 2025). Nevertheless, of importance for antiracism is how transatlantic interventions and the traffic of racial-civilizational ideas across Europe and the United States influence the shapes of local racism.

Degradation and nostalgia

The degradation of Europe is linked causally by the far-right to multiculturalism. Perhaps each major aspect of what might have been valued in 1990s Britain as a positive, diverse, multicultural society is now inverted into a damning indictment. Consequently, among substantial populations across Europe, antiracists have comprehensively lost their arguments about the benefits of migration and multiculturalism.

> The usual propaganda is no longer effective and only antagonizes. We all know that Diversity Is NOT Our Strength. Diversity Did NOT Build Britain. Immigration Is NOT A Net Benefit. Multiculturalism Is NOT A Success. (Buckley 2024, 43)

Far-right narratives about the failures of multiculturalism range on a continuum from "commonsense" ideas to full ideological world-view: unrecognizable streets, cities, or countries, feeling like strangers in "our" country, "we didn't ask for mass immigration," "we were never consulted," multiculturalism is "state-sanctioned replacement," hate speech is "what you're not allowed to say while being replaced."

The "commonsense" relates to claims about the degradation in the quality of everyday urban life, particularly in the capital cities of Europe. Like some supreme scapegoat, migrants (not austerity policies) are held responsible for the deterioration of public services, the unavailability of public housing, traffic congestion, pollution, litter and much more. Typical far-right social media depictions show high streets or iconic places with migrants in them, presented as evidence of replacement or referred to, in mocking terms, as "cultural enrichers." These ideas are often linked to the sacrifices of British soldiers during the two world wars: "This [multicultural society], unfortunately, is exactly what they died for. A tragic, pointless war in which we lost everything" (Zoomer

[@ZoomerHistorian] 2025). Enfolded quietly in this lament is a neo-Nazi idea that the Second World War was unnecessary, fratricidal, and engineered by Jews (Yockey 2011, 526).

Far-right discourse contrasts the degradation it imagines with a nostalgia that it assembles from old images and film. A deep ideological relation is established between contemporary "migrant invasion" and a nostalgia for a peaceful past, nostalgia here being fully equivalent with bereavement. Narratives about white powerlessness and victimhood accompany this loss (Maly, Dalmage, and Michaels 2013). Yet, this "technostalgia" can only exist in remediated form (Lizardi 2015) and evokes a past that exists on social media renditions of reels from the 1940s to the 1970s of monoracial European neighborhoods.

It has been argued that white nationalist rhetoric contains the *doxa* of authenticity, home, and restoration, the latter imagined as orderly and peaceful (Mayne 2019, 84). The "restoration" for long-suffering people suppressed by migrants, "Islam," "woke" liberals and political elites begins with defiant reawakening. A video widely circulated on social media from early December 2023, seemingly recorded at the Million Mask March in London in November, shows a man talking to protestors, saying, "Don't touch me, Abdul. Go back to your home." After being touched by a protestor, he lashes out, a moment that is decelerated in some versions of the video to represent a critical transition (Robby Tominson [@RobbyTominson] 2023). This was referred to across far-right social media as the "reawakening of the wrath of the Saxon," based on a distortion of a Rudyard Kipling poem about the First World War, "The Beginnings." Kipling writes about the English that hate is not in their temperament, they are icily patient and not easily moved, hate comes "late" to them. But once it has arisen, it will not "swiftly abate" (Kipling 1917, 442).

The topoi of commonsense

Many who express such views would object to being seen as far-right and instead are expressing "what they see every day." However, much of what they see may be mediated – social media, as opposed to personal experience, known to increase negative orientations towards migrants (Van Assche et al. 2023). Underlying commonsense views are *topoi* formulas, which are linked to accepted opinions (*endoxa*), and these represent some of the deeper communicative structures of far-right discourse (Wodak 2021, 74–76). Because *topoi* need not be fallacious but can evade or obscure facts and issues in ways that are misleading or incorrect, they can be effective and difficult to challenge by antiracists (Wodak 2021, 75).

Consider a right-wing social media post that states: "You're not allowed to ask: Where did my culture go? Why are cities unrecognizable? Why is the truth now 'dangerous'? Because you're not supposed to notice" (Caroline Farrow [@CF_Farrow] 2025). While superficially expressing conspiracy-laden discontent, its rhetorical structure draws on several potent *topoi,* including white culture and identity as a unified and disappearing essence (singularization) that is under attack (threat), while implying that people are being unfairly silenced for saying this (burden) (Wodak 2021, 75–76).

Similarly, the post deploys familiar discursive strategies, including provocative questions that imply concealed truths (the curiosity gap), communicating its meanings indirectly and thereby suggesting more is occurring than stated (implicature), asking

questions while making assertions (pragmatic insincerity) and insinuation (Muirhead and Rosenblum 2020; Scott 2021). The post embeds a complete worldview within superficially honest, anxious queries: there is an elite project to obliterate white cultures, replace white people, and disguise the truth that this is taking place.

Critically, the post works as a kind of illocutionary "reframing," eliciting others to reinterpret their experiences as the deliberate suppression of their culture and concerns. In this way, the post induces their avowal of the conspiratorial presuppositions underlying the claims. The example illustrates how contemporary racism works as a complex, structured mode of political communication whose discursive architecture is at least as significant as its content, which, in this example, would be difficult to pin down as racist because of a pre-existing awareness of what would likely be considered racist. This represents a significant problem for antiracism – even excavating the presuppositions above and demonstrating their multiple logical fallacies is a significant task.

In addition to its discursive structure, the impact of social media platforms on antiracism is multifaceted and far-reaching. The promotion of disinformation and untruths is more distinctive to right-wing populism compared to liberal and left-wing political discourse (Törnberg and Chueri 2025). It includes disseminating visceral distrust of objective news, politics, law, policing, and medicine, institutions seen as favoring minorities, "two-tiered," repressive towards the native population, or controlled by "globalist" or "woke" forces.

Beyond content, social media collapses institutional and geographical boundaries, instituting new forms of political authority that bypass legitimate forms of political authority and democratic accountability. Through it, global and local events are entwined in ways that intensify the transnational circulation of racist ideas. In particular, the combination of social media populism and authoritarian oligarchy is a novel dynamic, demonstrated by Donald Trump's support for white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups in 2020 (Frenkel and Karni 2020). It is illustrated differently in Elon Musk's many messages of support for perhaps the U.K.'s foremost far-right activist, Tommy Robinson (e.g. Elon Musk [@elonmusk] 2024a). Additionally, while disinformation from decentralized social media platforms, such as Telegram and WhatsApp, can cause serious violence, what is equally significant is the rapid mobilization that occurs when a large social media account amplifies a local post that previously had little interest (CAJ / Rabble Cooperative 2025; ISD & CASM Technology 2024). Thus, major far-right accounts posting about the Southport events (see below) substantially changed the import and scale of the antimigrant violence.

Gender and demotic racism

Far-right demotic discourse is frequently based on alleged migrant and Muslim predatory sexual violence against white women and children, itself a civilizational theme. The safety of white European women and children represents a potent gendered symbol and a central feature of contemporary racism. It was key to the widespread violence against migrants and asylum seekers across the UK during 2024 following claims that a young man, Axel Rudakubana, who killed three young girls while engaged in an especially brutal mass stabbing of children attending a yoga dance class in Southport, UK (Goose 2025), was an asylum seeker and a Muslim. The violence which followed the murders was unprecedented, this pattern of pogrom-like racist violence targeting hostels, hotels and homes not seen in the UK since, perhaps, the 1950s, though now becoming

regular. However, it resembled patterns of vigilante attacks on migrants, asylum seekers and their hostels that have been increasing across continental Europe over the last decade.

The theme of sexual violence against young white women and girls is central to the international popularity of Tommy Robinson and his mobilizations around Pakistani Muslim "grooming gangs." The town of Rotherham in northern England saw the horrific, massive and organized sexual abuse and exploitation of about 1500 girls over several decades starting from the 1990s, with information about the abuse reported locally before 2003 and then nationally several times from 2010, most comprehensively in 2014. Around eighty per cent of the abusers were men from Pakistani backgrounds. Most girls abused were white and working class, with many of them from complex backgrounds of family abuse, poverty, and drug use (Heal 2003; Jay 2014).

While the far-right exploited the abuse using a potent racial politics of gender, the antiracist response to the Rotherham events was dominated by challenging the narrative of "Muslim grooming gangs" and the racist stereotyping of South Asian men. In August 2015, the town saw a brutal racist murder of an elderly man, Muhsin Ahmed. There had been over a dozen far right and neo-Nazi mobilizations in Rotherham related to the sexual abuse in the months preceding the murder. (Hussain 2018).

Notwithstanding the serious threat of far-right violence affecting the town, the dominant antiracist responses failed to address the horrific abuse suffered by girls in Rotherham and many other towns. When women (from many backgrounds) highlighted sexual violence by the abusers, they were often criticized for perpetuating racism. Ethically, much of the antiracist response effectively took the same position as the police services: the raped and abused working-class girls were ignored (Jay 2014). Similarly, the antiracist argument that most perpetrators of "grooming" and child sexual abuse are white had little impact on the affective logic that informed far-right mobilizations and was often seen as condoning the abuse, points around which the far-right could mobilize easily.

An associated area of apophenia-driven disinformation is the comparison of prosecutions and sentences of migrant men involved in sexual or other crimes with those of whites arrested in far-right-led riots or for inciting hatred. In this way, the far right usurps languages of injustice, inequity and discrimination. Similarly, a typical narrative compares seemingly lenient sentences for crimes handed down to non-whites with allegedly harsh sentences for whites for exercising lawful free speech.

The events in Rotherham and many other towns could have been the basis for a different kind of ethical antiracism and genuine antiracist solidarity with the girls and the white working-class communities of a town in which many women and their families remain devastated by the events, with many women still seeking justice. The paucity of such solidarity – a consequence of identitarian antiracism – meant that the events in Rotherham became lightning rods for the far-right in the UK and internationally. They will inevitably be exploited by the far-right for many years to come.

Relatedly, the knitting together of disparate events of sexual violence across Europe by the far-right has generated a potent narrative of the global threat to European women and children. This narrative has taken institutional form (Garraud et al. 2024), constitutes part of the political agenda of several far-right political parties across Europe, fuels numerous vigilante groups, and is the basis of several far-right women's campaigns, one of

which stated boldly: "The biggest issue facing women today is the threat of mass immigration" (Women's Safety Initiative [@WomenSafety_UK] 2025).

Far-right narratives seamlessly link the Rotherham events with the January 2016 sexual assaults by migrant men on women in Cologne, Hamburg, Stuttgart and other towns, and other assaults, real and alleged, in Paris, Austria, Sweden and elsewhere, They also illustrate the two-way traffic between local, demotic racism and internationally coordinated ideological narratives that aim to depict every migrant as a threat to every white woman and child. In previous decades, the ideological association of migrants with crime, sexual violence and national decline were successfully challenged by antiracists. The renewed popularity of these ideas among significant sections of the population is immune to antiracism. The relative lack of attention to gender and class, as with the Rotherham events, also indicates the broader failures of antiracism.

The "multiracial far-right"

Alongside the ideological diversity described earlier, there has been a "racial" diversification: virtually all major Western far-right groups and events in recent years have had a significant presence of non-white figures. Consequently, a critical challenge for contemporary antiracism is the consolidation of an international "multiracial far right" (HoSang 2024) of a kind that antiracists from the 1970s to the early 2000s did not have to face in a significant way.

Reform UK's chair is currently Zia Yusuf, a businessperson, a Muslim of Sri Lankan origin, an ally of Nigel Farage, and the biggest donor to the most electorally successful far-right party in the UK for several decades (though Reform UK has strongly contested the "far-right" label.) He has been subjected to attacks from different groups of Reform UK supporters, some objecting to his religion, others that he is a "foreigner" (he was born in Scotland), others that he is not white (for example, Laurence Fox [@LozzaFox] 2025). Relatedly, Ben Habib of Advance UK favors mass deportations of "illegal" migrants who he calls "criminals" (GBNews 2025), demonstrating the movement in idiolect from "undocumented" to "illegal" to "criminal."

Under the 2025 Trump administration, Vivek Ramaswamy was tasked, alongside Elon Musk, with creating a Department of Government Efficiency. Ramaswamy, an Indian American businessperson and former Republican presidential candidate, represents an authoritarian politics that is "anti-woke" and driven by conspiracy thinking about climate change, COVID-19, 9/11, and the "Great Replacement" (Corasaniti 2023). His political views have the shape of those of the far-right, including white supremacists. Ramaswamy is recognizably a far-right diaspora figure from a "racialized" minority who joins individuals like the former Conservative Home Secretary and Attorney General Suella Braverman, who said that wealthy liberal elites with luxury beliefs were causing mass immigration that was making British culture disappear (Sparrow 2023). If there is little that differentiates Braverman's politics from that of Britain's white nationalist far-right, it signals how proximity to power "de-racializes" like-minded authoritarians.

Within the far-right's heterogeneous ideological universe, there is significant space for non-white far-right forces to align with white nativist projects. Thus, following unprecedented, large-scale violence in Leicester in September 2022 between Hindus and Muslims, Tommy Robinson said that he would bring hundreds of his supporters to

Leicester to defend Hindus (OpIndia 2022). In an extended interview to an Indian television audience in 2024, Robinson related his "rape jihad" idea to the "love jihad" ideology of the Hindu far-right (News18 [@CNNnews18] 2024). Hindutva support for Donald Trump provides another example: activists from the U.S. branch of the violent, Hindu nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad were present during the storming of the Capitol Hill building in January 2021 (Ladegaam 2021).

The violence in Leicester during 2022 was itself a major challenge for antiracists. It involved an extended period over several months of often violent communal polarization between largely Gujarati South Asians. Leicester's history of community-rooted antiracist, antifascist organizing was occulted by a conflict in which Hindutva-affiliated groups and political Islamist activists mobilized polarizing communal narratives against other South Asians. In this situation, antiracist organizing faced considerable opposition from far-right Hindutva organizations. Similarly, South Asian community mobilization against the white nationalist far-right has been weakened because of the activities of Hindutva groups, some of which have created alliances with the far-right. Communalism and religious authoritarianism are, therefore, further challenges for antiracism.

The manifestations of the multiracial far-right are much wider than figures like Ramaswamy or alliances between Hindutva groups and anti-Muslim figures. Leaders of many U.S. far-right groups have come from Latino, Indian (Hindu), or African American communities. Trump's "stop the steal" campaign that led to the storming of the Capitol Building in January 2021 was led by Ali Alexander, an African American. Enrique Tarrio, an Afro-Cuban, heads the violent white supremacist Proud Boys organization. A key figure in the American far-right Turning Point organization is Candace Owens. The "American Descendants of Slavery" (ADOS) and "Freedmen" groups generate potent racism against African and Caribbean migrants, this representing a right-wing African American variant of the "replacement theory." There are significant numbers of black Republicans who have shifted away from historic black conservatism and towards Trump's authoritarianism. While some of these formations are small and not reflected in electoral support among African Americans for Trump, that support did increase between the 2016 and 2024 elections, though it was not as significant as the substantial support for Trump among Latino, Asian American, Indian American and other minority groups (Bender et al. 2024). Serious attention to the "multiracial far right" and its varieties of communalism is therefore a key task for contemporary antiracism.

Conclusion

The current moment in the West is defined by the institutional entrenchment of the far right and the normalization of its transformative visions. This political reordering is independent of electoral cycles: it is international in its structure and embedded in Western political institutions, civil societies, and much of the media. Its ideological core is comprised of a racial-civilizational discourse of siege that fuses natalist, gendered, and nostalgic imaginaries with dystopian fears about crime, violence, social disintegration and apocalyptic threats to Western societies from migrants. Through the racism it marshals, the contemporary far-right represents authoritarian projects that seek major social, cultural and political transformation across the West. Ideological and multiracial variations across the far-right are unsettled and dynamic but contain ample space for novel alliances

and unexpected configurations of racism. Rapid local mobilization is commonplace, and violent vigilantism, often incited by often wealthy political and social media figures, is becoming a normal mode of far-right expression, echoing a significant feature of authoritarian governance.

These transformations have occurred in the context of an ongoing Russian attack on Ukraine, the genocidal assaults on the population of Gaza (Pieris 2024), and the highly authoritarian repression of pro-Palestinian protestors by the Trump administration (Singh 2025). The regular protests in Western countries against Israel's actions are themselves the focus of far-right grievances and have been integrated into its ideological framework about injustice, "two-tier" policing and the deterioration of Western societies.

Racism is a complex international mode of political communication that appeals to broad contexts and populations in the West. It has synthesized a wide variety of unrelated local events and contexts within a grand international discourse. Antiracist politics, therefore, faces the challenge of operating on an international terrain with approaches that can navigate both transnational and densely local situations.

While antiracism and antifascism are historically different projects, they are intertwined today. If confronting the international far-right constitutes the most important task for contemporary antiracism, many older antiracist frameworks have been significantly weakened or no longer persuade. Some antiracist approaches, academic or otherwise, reproduce the epistemic ground that underpins contemporary racism. Antiracism has rarely engaged with far-right, communal, religious absolutist forces from within minority communities, but they constitute significant obstacles in community-based antiracist organizing.

Similarly, communal antiracism, relevant only to a particular ethnic, national, or religious group, needs to be critically interrogated as a ground for antiracism. Defending minority groups whose human rights are under attack is a given for antiracism, but this cannot be equivalent to endorsing identities. This requires a reorientation in which anti-communalism and attention to the "multiracial far right" are integrated within antiracism. Issues of class, communalism and the "multiracial far-right" have little relevance for identitarian antiracism since it is preoccupied with valorizing the identities of the largely middle-class sections of the minorities it considers to be morally excellent. Similarly, many of the concerns of identitarian antiracism, such as microaggressions, white fragility, "privilege politics" and identity narcissism are serious deflections from the formidable challenges confronting antiracism today.

An important direction is engaging directly and honestly with traumatic events, such as in Rotherham and elsewhere, acknowledging and engaging the emotional weight of the events and their continuing reverberations within working-class communities. This also entails integrating non-identitarian approaches to gender and sexual politics, the latter being constitutive dimensions of far-right racism. Attention to political vigilantism as a mode of authoritarian right action requires deeper engagement, including its utility as a form of political governance for the far-right. Confronting disinformation and the discursive architectures that sustain the far-right present distinct challenges in developing effective modes of communication, new communicative practices, and alternative media.

Engaging with the appeal of the far right in many populations requires listening to them as well as speaking with them and undertaking much more than articulating an

oppositional stance (Solomos 2024, 96). While local manifestations of racism cannot be dislocated from social and economic conditions in which they thrive, reliance on realist discourses about welfare, housing, levels of crime and the benefits of migration, though critical, are widely perceived as evasive. Long-term approaches capable of engaging working- and middle-class people who have been drawn to the far right are essential, especially in the context of austerity, public sector funding cuts, and increasing inequality. Multiple deprivation, often severe depending on the geographical region, affects many white communities, especially in larger cities in the north of England, the Midlands and Scotland, in former industrial or mining areas and in several coastal towns. Deprivation includes attainment at school and entry to higher education, especially for white working-class boys. While comparative percentages will show some ethnic minority groups as facing greater deprivation, this can disguise major differences in absolute numbers because of the numerical size of the white population. Socio-economic context, including a re-politicization of social class and socioeconomic deprivation across all communities, is critical to a renewal of meaningful antiracism that can move beyond solely oppositional work.

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