



## ***Strategies used by the far right to counter accusations of racism***

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### **Abstract**

*This paper addresses the way in which the leader of the far-right British National Party (BNP), Nick Griffin, attempts to present the party as non-racist during hostile media appearances. The process of 'fascism recalibration', in which the party attempts to present itself in a more moderate way, which has been used to account for its electoral gain, is discussed. A discursive analytical approach is applied to one television and two radio programmes, all on the BBC, in which Nick Griffin was interviewed. The paper addresses the question: 'how is the BNP presented in a way that makes it appear reasonable and achieve 'fascism recalibration'? Analysis identified three strategies employed for this objective. These are: the party is presented as (1) acting as a moderating force, whereby a favourable distinction is made between the BNP and both other extremists and the BNP's own past; (2) acting in minority groups' best interests, where BNP policies are presented as being both supported by, and aimed to aid, minority groups; and (3) only opposing minority groups because of their own prejudices, a strategy used to justify Islamophobia based on the supposed intolerances of Islam. The implications and limitations of these strategies are discussed.*

**Key words:** British National Party; Racism denial; Far-right; Islamophobia; Discourse analysis

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thanks Dr. John Richardson for his comments during the review process.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

The British National Party is the most electorally successful far-right party in UK politics (Ford and Goodwin 2010). The growth in popularity (e.g. two European Members of Parliament gained in 2009 with almost 1 million votes) has been attributed to the modernization of the party (Wood and Finlay 2008; Ford and Goodwin 2010) involving a process of 'fascism recalibration' (Copsey 2007). This strategy of fascism recalibration involves a shift of focus away from issues of race to localised concerns regarding resource-allocation (Copsey 2004); arguments against immigration are then framed in terms of

limited resources rather than on grounds of race. Indeed, Billig (2001) argues that contemporary far-right parties employ a duplicitous strategy, wherein legitimacy is sought through public tokenism to moderation, yet privately the group presents a more extreme message (see also Copsey 2007; Edwards 2012). This shift to moderation (at least publicly) is driven by a societal taboo against prejudice (Billig 1988), such that electoral pragmatism necessitates re-positioning.

The embodiment of this modernization project is party leader Nick Griffin. Griffin, a middle-class Cambridge graduate, has rebranded the party and, in contrast to his predecessor, actively pursues electoral success (Copsey 2007). Griffin contradicts the caricature of inarticulate working class hooliganism associated with the Neo-Nazi/National Front antecedence of the party. Indeed, disclosure of BNP membership lists in 2008 revealed a more diverse (and middle class) supporter-base than stereotypes of the party would suggest (Woodbridge 2010; Rhodes 2011). Griffin attempts to avoid overt references to race/colour (Copsey 2007) and has endeavoured to replicate the strategy of another right-wing party, the United Kingdom Independence Party, wherein nationalism is promoted via more unobjectionable and phlegmatic concepts such as economic growth (Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou 2010).

The rise in electoral appeal (4%+ of the vote in the 2005 UK General Election; this figure, however, fell to 1.9% in 2010) suggests that Griffin has, to some extent, been successful in the repositioning and legitimization process. The focus on local issues is reflected in interviews with BNP voters, where local (mundane) issues, rather than race, were identified as the rationale for voting BNP (Rhodes 2009). Moreover, in directly addressing issues of immigration (through a focus on resources and fairness, rather than explicitly on race), Griffin has successfully outmanoeuvred the mainstream political parties who are perceived to have dealt with this issue ineffectively (Wood and Finlay 2008). This recent electoral success has led to an increase in high-profile media appearances for Griffin. The present study will build upon initial analysis of these interviews (Johnson and Goodman, in press) and further examine the 'fascism recalibrating' strategies used by Griffin in order to deflect accusations of racism.

## **1.2 Discursive Psychology and the Far Right**

Copsey's (2007) notion of 'fascism recalibration' needs to be understood as a discursive process, that is, something that the BNP and its leader need to achieve through the manner in which they present themselves. Therefore the discursive psychological approach is most appropriate for addressing attempted 'recalibration'. Discursive psychology focuses on what is accomplished in interaction, rather than attempting to make claims about the cognitions of the speaker (Edwards and Potter 1992). Consequently, the analysis focuses on how the leader of the BNP presents the party in order that it is received in a more positive light, rather than making claims about what Griffin (or BNP members) may or may not think.

Using this approach, Johnson and Goodman (in press) highlighted how Griffin uses two interconnected strategies in order to present the party as not racist, and to deal with accusations that it is racist. This is done by presenting

the BNP as respondent to anti-white racism, rather than as perpetrators of racism (see also van Dijk 1992). Griffin argues that the 'indigenous' majority of Britain (a term which functions to solicit imagery of an oppressed group, Edwards 2012) are victims of racism; a claim identified previously (Wood and Finlay 2008). However, Johnson and Goodman (in press) identify that Griffin does not blame perpetration of this anti-white racism on ethnic minorities but on an ill-defined elite (e.g. see also Rooyackers and Verkuyten 2012). This strategy avoids direct attacks on ethnic minorities, averting the societal taboo of prejudice (Billig 1988); although it has been suggested that this notion of elite conspiracy reflects the historical fascist concept of a Jewish conspiracy (see Copsey 2007; Johnson and Goodman, in press; Richardson 2011). Other recent discursive studies that have looked at the talk of the far-right in Europe (see Johnson and Goodman, in press, for discussion) have shown how there are attempts to remove the notion of 'race' from their argument, which points to further evidence for the notion of 'fascism recalibration'. For example, immigrants are presented as too culturally different from the host nation, rather than racially different (van der Valk 2003) to the extent that the host nations' culture is presented as under threat (Atton 2006).

Given current political events (particularly the context of the 'war on terror') and the religious background of many immigrants to Europe, it is perhaps unsurprising that much of this far-right talk refers to Islam. Rooyacker and Verkuyten (2012) show how Islam is presented as a major threat to the host country's way of life; a finding that is consistent with the research of Wood and Finlay (2008), which addressed the way the BNP responded to the 2005 terrorist attacks in London (indeed, Copsey 2007, identifies how the BNP have capitalised on national events such as the rise in anti-Islamic sentiment following the 2005 London bombings). In addition, Wood and Finlay demonstrated how the BNP presented Muslims as a uniform, rather than diverse, group; enabling generalised criticism of that group. Verkuyten (2011) shows how amongst the far right, a distinction is made between the religion (Islam) and its members (Muslims) in a way that allows the faith to be severely criticised without being seen to make direct (and potentially prejudicial) criticisms towards its members. The current research builds on this discursive research by addressing how the BNP and its leader, Nick Griffin, manages this process of 'fascism recalibration' by attempting to present the party as not racist, while being directly challenged to the contrary.

Johnson and Goodman (in press) have shown that Nick Griffin deems the BBC to be both part of an 'elite' that works against the interests of 'indigenous' British people and is hostile to the BNP. Consequently, appearances on the BBC are limited and particularly noteworthy precisely because of their rarity. These appearances therefore provide a unique opportunity to assess how Griffin performs in a mainstream political setting where there is interaction with speakers presenting opposing views. This dialogue is of particular interest as in order for the BNP to progress electorally they must appeal more to the mainstream. However, in order to reach the majority, the BNP must be included in the mainstream political dialogue via media appearances. Griffin's appearances on such programmes are met with hostility both from fellow politicians and journalists; this hostility centres on a general accusation of racism. In order to progress electorally, Griffin must successfully respond to

these accusations and, rather than framing his position in his own terms, must be reactive to such accusations. The BNP are therefore in the acute predicament that in order to progress they require mainstream acceptance but in order to obtain mainstream exposure the party must face the universal hostility of the media. The following analysis will explore how successfully Griffin can combat this hostility as such rhetorical ripostes are key to further BNP breakthroughs.

## **2. Methodological Procedure**

The data used in this study was gathered as part of a wider study into how the BNP was presented when it featured in three high profile BBC programmes. The following programmes were analysed: (1) BBC Radio Four's 'Today' programme<sup>i</sup> (8th June 2009), a 'heavyweight' current affairs programme the morning following the 2009 European parliamentary elections in which the BNP gained seats, (2) BBC One's 'Question Time'<sup>ii</sup> (22nd October 2009), a 'heavyweight' panel debate programme, for which Griffin's appearance was particularly controversial, especially as the BNP's white only membership rules were being contested in court (a rule subsequently over-turned), and (3) BBC Radio Five Live's Breakfast programme<sup>iii</sup> (19th April 2010), a radio phone-in during the lead up to the 2010 UK General Election. Together this amounted to approximately 100 minutes of data which was collected and transcribed verbatim by the first author<sup>iv</sup>. Both authors analysed the data according to the critical discursive psychological approach, which seeks to address both the 'action orientation' of talk (Edwards and Potter 1992) while also focussing on 'the social and political consequences of discursive patterning' (Wetherell 1998: 405). This means that talk is assessed in terms of what it accomplishes, with particular attention being given to the wider social implications of the talk. In this case such an approach means that the focus was on how Griffin makes arguments that address the ongoing criticism that the party is both extremist and racist so as to present himself and his party as reasonable and worth voting for. The analysis was undertaken by reading the transcribed data and identifying recurrent strategies (or ways of making arguments) that were used by Griffin to challenge the ongoing accusations of racism. Extracts were chosen that best illustrate the identified strategies (see Johnson and Goodman, in press, for additional analysis of the data).

## **3. Results**

In this analysis we highlight a number of strategies that Griffin uses to present himself and his party as not racist. The three strategies that are identified are: 1) being a moderating force that reduces racism, 2) acting in minorities' best interests, and 3) opposing minority groups because they are prejudiced. Each strategy is now addressed in turn.

### **3.1 Being a Moderator**

In this first section we show how Griffin (N.G.), in response to debate chair David Dimbleby (D.D.), presents himself as being a moderating force that is actually working to counter racism both from the BNP's past and other organizations. This first extract, from Question Time, shows Griffin claiming to have moderated the BNP under his leadership.

(1) *Question Time*

1. D.D. Sorry which lie?
2. N.G. I'm talking about the one Adolf went a bit too far. I never said such
3. a thing. I am the most loathed man in Britain in the eyes of
4. Britain's Na Nazis. There are Nazis in Britain and they loathe me
5. because I have brought the British National Party from being,
6. frankly, an anti-Semitic and racist organization, to being the only
7. political party which er in the er clashes between Israel and Gaza
8. stood full square behind Israel's right to deal with Hamas terrorists.

In the extract, Griffin adopts a two-pronged approach to present himself as moderate and not racist. First, he contrasts himself with British Nazis who he claims hate him for moderating the party (which does acknowledge that the party has been racist). Second, he shows that he supports Israel which suggests that he is not anti-Semitic, which is one of the signifiers of being a Nazi (Billig 1978). The admittance of a racist past, signalled through the use of the honest tag (Edwards and Fasulo 2006) 'frankly' (6), acts as a concession which works to present Griffin as trustworthy while also presenting any racism associated with the party as purely historical. This allows Griffin to position himself as a reformer and moderator who has actually removed the racist elements from a once racist organization.

Griffin claims that his moderating influence on the BNP can account for why he is hated by British Nazis (3-4). While being hated is not normally something that a politician would use to gain popularity, here Griffin makes a show of this hatred to distance himself from the label of Nazi. In this context, being hated by a group that is socially condemned by society is positive, since the BNP is aligned more with the mainstream and perceived as less extreme. Specifically, Griffin is highlighting how racist groups hate him because he is not (or is insufficiently) racist. This functions to highlight how the BNP and British Nazis are ideologically distinct and presents the BNP as a reformed non-racist organization. As well as distancing himself from the 'racist' Nazis, Griffin also concedes the anti-Semitic past of the BNP. Griffin attempts to position himself and his party as not being anti-Semitic by making a show of the BNP's support for Israel. However, as is demonstrated later, this may indicate more about the BNP's negative stance towards Hamas, and Islam in general (signalled here through the use of 'terrorist'), than any positive stance towards Jews.

In the next extract, Griffin presents himself as a moderating force on the racist organization, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). His explanation is opposed by American author Bonnie Greer (B.G.).

(2) *Question Time*

1. N.G. I was... (*applause*) I was sharing... I shared a platform with David
2. Duke who was once a leader of a Ku Klux Klan: always a totally
3. non-violent one incidentally
4. (*raucous jeers/boos*)
5. B.G. Nick. Nick. Nick. Excuse me. Don't go and talk about the Ku Klux
6. Klan... No. No. No...
7. N.G. It's a vile organization...

8. B.G. No no no no no. I can tell you about David Duke but we don't have
9. time for that. Don't B S.
10. N.G. But... Further to David Duke, he detests where I stand – he regards
11. me as a sell-out. I've shared a platform arguing with him and when
12. you're trying to win people over to a more moderate position you
13. have to go somewhere to start with where they come from. That, for
14. instance, was the process whereby the Labour Party and others
15. ended up today with Sinn Fein in government.
16. D.D. So you were saying these things er not because you meant them but
17. because it was the way of winning him over. In other words, you
18. wanted to win over a racist to your view and you said we start by
19. being moderate.
20. N.G. Not to win over him, I'm trying to win over the youngsters he
21. otherwise leads astray. But can we reframe this whole question?
22. D.D. The point about this is why should anyone trust what you say? Why
23. should anybody think it's anything more than a facade?

Here Griffin is challenged over an extremist that he has shared a platform with. Griffin does accept that he has met members of the KKK. First he attempts to play down the image of the KKK by claiming that it was non-violent. This is noteworthy as it suggests that violent racists are problematic but that non-violent racists are, by contrast, acceptable (or at least less reprehensible). This comment is met by jeers from the audience and criticism from another panel member, which suggests that this is not an adequate response. Griffin then shifts to explicitly criticising the KKK (7). Indeed, partial-justification of the Klan varies with the latter argument that Griffin is attempting to protect vulnerable children from KKK ideology (20-21). As in the previous extract, Griffin suggests that the KKK member detests (10) him precisely because of his moderate position. As with the contrast with British Nazis (extract one), this functions to present Griffin and the BNP as not problematic when compared to a 'true' extremist group. Again, distance between the BNP and these 'true' extremists is constructed by suggesting that these extremists cannot abide Griffin's moderate stance, which works to present the BNP as acceptable and not extreme. In addition to this, Griffin presents himself as similar to the Labour party who reached out to other 'extremists'; this works to both position Griffin as a mature politician and may also work to criticise Labour for doing this. At this point Griffin is making the same argument as in the previous extract, i.e. extreme racist organizations dislike the BNP for being moderate, and therefore, the BNP must differ to these groups in not being an extreme racist organization.

In this next extract Griffin presents himself as a moderator once more, this time in relation to the BNP's shifting position towards homosexuality.

### *(3) Question Time*

1. D.D. Isn't that rather in line with your view that people find homosexuals
2. creatures repulsive? As you said about er homosexuals.
3. N.G. I've said that a lot of people find er the sight of two grown men
4. kissing in public really creepy. I understand homosexuals don't
5. understand that but that's how a lot of us feel. A lot of Christians
6. feel that way. Muslims, all sorts of people. I don't know why it's just

7. the way it is. And we have... we have come...
8. Aud [jeering] rubbish, you're a disgrace
9. N.G. again I took a party ten... I took a party ten years ago which said
10. that homosexuality should be outlawed – people should be driven
11. underground and persecuted. The British National Party position
12. now is that what people do in the privacy of their own homes is
13. absolutely up to them and the state has no right to interfere. But
14. nor do militant homosexuals, not all of them, but militant ones do
15. not have the right to try and preach homosexuality to school
16. children.
17. Aud: [jeering]
18. N.G That is perverse

This extract begins with Griffin being challenged over his opposition to homosexuality, following a scandal in which a newspaper columnist made some controversial comments about homosexuality<sup>v</sup>. While Griffin maintains his opposition to homosexuality, he again positions himself as a moderating force within his party, having improved the position from outlawing to accepting homosexuality.

Prejudice towards homosexuals is oriented to as less problematic than opposing accusations of racism since Griffin does less to distance himself from a homophobic position than from a racist one. This can be evidenced by his account for why so many other people oppose it. What Griffin states as accepting homosexuality is only a partial acceptance; he maintains that he considers seeing men kissing as 'really creepy' (4), is critical of a special category of 'militant homosexuals' (14), presents the teaching of homosexuality in schools as 'perverse' (18), and states that homosexuality should remain private. However, the response of some audience members suggests that this position is not acceptable. In explaining his opposition to homosexuality, Griffin draws on support from Muslims as well as Christians, which is interesting considering his opposition to Islam (which is based on Islam's supposed intolerance, a point which is addressed in the final section). Highlighting agreement with Islam serves to mitigate accusation of Islamophobia. Griffin's footing (Goffman 1981) in this extract is speaking on behalf of most people ('a lot of people' 3 and 'how a lot of us feel' 5) which function to present him as mainstream and inclusive, rather than controversial and divisive.

It has now been demonstrated that Griffin presents himself as a moderating force with regards to (1) the BNP's historical racism and anti-Semitism, (2) other, more extreme, far right organizations, and (3) the BNP's historical homophobia. In the following section it is shown how Griffin positions his and his party's policies as in the interests of ethnic minorities.

### **3.2 Acting in Minorities' Interests**

In this first extract, from Question Time, it can be seen that Griffin presents his immigration policies as being supported by ethnic minorities.

#### *(4) Question Time*

1. N.G. Yes, thank you. Erm yeah, our immigration policy is, I think,

2. supported by eight four per cent of the British people at present
3. who, according to a very recent opinion poll er said they're worried
4. about immigration
5. [six lines omitted]
6. N.G. And this included two thirds of members of settled ethnic
7. minorities in this country also saying immigration is out of control -
8. it's time to shut the door.

This extract begins with Griffin answering a question about the BNP's immigration policy, consisting of a strong opposition to further immigration and repatriation of existing immigrants<sup>vi</sup>, which is arguably one of their more controversial policies. Griffin begins by using statistics to show widespread opposition towards immigration (a strategy identified by Goodman 2008), amongst the 'British people' (2), which implies support for the BNP's tough immigration policies. Griffin then goes on to highlight the popular opposition to immigration amongst 'settled ethnic minorities' (6-7). By speaking on behalf of the majority of people (including those traditionally not associated with support for the BNP) Griffin is able to do two things. First, the policy is presented as having broad and popular support (both from 'British' and 'ethnic minority' members). Second, by claiming that ethnic minorities support BNP policies, Griffin can inoculate the party against claims of prejudice. This is achieved by implying that if minority members support the measures they cannot, therefore, be racist. Furthermore, Griffin suggests that the BNP policies are actually designed to protect the interests of a group that could otherwise be considered a target of racism, i.e. the BNP are protecting, rather than persecuting, British ethnic minorities.

In the next extract, from a radio discussion programme, Griffin is defending the BNP against accusations of racism from a caller to the programme (C1) by again drawing upon support from minorities.

*(5) Radio 5*

1. C1. Yeah, because er my view is I don't think the BNP are honest with
2. themselves let alone er the British public. Er, you are a racist party,
3. it's as simple as that and I don't know why you do not come out er
4. and actually admit this to yourselves let alone anyone else.
5. N.G. Well because we're we're not racist Ian. I was knocking on doors in
6. Barking yesterday and talking to particularly West Indian families.
7. They've been here thirty, forty years and they were now saying just
8. the same as the the white Brits down there – that we're our kids are
9. at the back of the queue for council housing behind Somalis and
10. Albanians who have only just arrived. It's not fair. So there are
11. plenty of West Indians agreeing with our message that Britain's
12. full. They're not racist nor are we.
13. C1. Well, huh, I think it would be a cold day in hell before I would agree
14. with that one.

This extract begins with a caller making a direct accusation of racism aimed at the BNP. Griffin responds to this accusation by directly and explicitly denying the accusation (5). The use of the accuser's name directly following the denial works to present Griffin as sincere. The direct denial is followed by a personal



account (that is difficult to disagree with) of receiving support from ethnic minorities. Unlike the previous extract where Griffin refers to a statistic about 'settled ethnic minorities' here Griffin names a specific ethnic minority group ('West Indian' (6)). West Indians are presented as suffering the same immigration-induced problems as 'white Brits'. Griffin uses this to create some 'discursive deracialisation' (Augoustinos and Every 2007) whereby he suggests that the BNP's and the West Indian's opposition to immigration is purely about resources (such as 'council housing' (9) and because Britain is 'full' (11)). Griffin is explicit again about not being racist (12); this time using the West Indian people's opposition to immigration as the rationale for this. In doing so, Griffin is suggesting that his position cannot be racist since West Indian families were in agreement. The implication is, therefore, that other ethnicities cannot be racist. In championing the rights of West Indian families, Griffin is demonstrating himself to be working in the interests of minorities and not uniquely seeking to assist the 'whites'. The caller does not accept this and again accuses the BNP of being racist.

In this next extract, Griffin responds to the concerns of a caller to the programme (C5) by arguing against affirmative action (positive discrimination) on the grounds of it being bad for the minorities who it applies to.

*(6) Radio 5*

1. C5: Erm I'm just worried about my kids and the future, when
2. they go for jobs erm they'll be bottom of the list because of so called
3. erm affirmative action. I'd like to know if Nick Griffin would er like
4. to ban that affirmative action.
5. N.G. We'd stop affirmative action because it's unfair on the people, the
6. native majority who are being discriminated against. It's also
7. demeaning to ethnic minorities because when you get someone
8. from an ethnic minority whose made their way in the world and got
9. on and they've got a nice car or whatever because they work hard
10. and they're really capable, people look at them and say he only got
11. the job because he's black and that's just as unfair on them as
12. people who get put to the back of the queue because of affirmative
13. action

This extract begins with a caller to the programme criticising affirmative action, on the ground of it threatening the chances of her children, and asking Griffin if he would oppose it. It is initially noteworthy that the presenter does not question the existence of affirmative action. Whilst UK law prohibits the discrimination of an individual on the grounds of race, there exists no quota system in employment law for the allocation of jobs. Failure to challenge this proposition allows Griffin to achieve rhetorical advantage in response to unsubstantiated fears. This lack of opposition by the presenter serves to further validate the supposed existence of affirmative action. Griffin replies by stating that he would stop affirmative action (5) and then goes on to offer his explanation as to why it should be stopped. Here a 'native majority' (6) is contrasted with ethnic minorities (7); a distinction inconsistent with Griffin's defence of the accusation of racism in the previous extract where ethnic minorities were categorised with the native majority. Griffin first claims that

affirmative action is unfair towards the native majority and, instead, draws upon a meritocratic argument. Drawing on meritocracy to oppose affirmative action has been identified in arguments against schemes to promote Maori rights in New Zealand (Wetherell and Potter 1992) and Aboriginal rights in Australia (Augoustinos, Tuffin, and Every 2005). However, after addressing the unfairness this causes for ‘natives’, Griffin goes on to argue that affirmative action is equally unfair for the minorities who, he claims, will not be able to receive credit for their efforts and ability when they do succeed. Again, this account suggests that the BNP’s policy will be in the interests of the minority groups and Griffin consequently is protected from appearing to be racist. Griffin therefore positions himself, and his party, as campaigning for fairness, and for the interests of minority groups, rather than as opposing schemes that are designed to undo any harm caused by (racial) inequality.

In the final extract in this section, Griffin can be seen justifying his anti-immigration policies on the grounds of it being in the interests of the countries from where immigrants originate.

(7) *Radio 5*

1. N.G. So, we’d have perfectly friendly relationships with other counties,
2. we wouldn’t go invading them, and we wouldn’t be looking for their
3. advice on how to run our country. With the third world as the
4. relationship there you can look for instance at the at the states of
5. southern Africa, where we’re told that we have to have mass
6. immigration because otherwise our national health service will
7. collapse, and the Malawi’s health service has collapsed because
8. we’ve stolen so many of their doctors and nurses. There’s not
9. enough people there to keep young kids alive when they get
10. diarrhoea. And I think that’s wrong – and there’s plenty of deals
11. that can be done between a nationalist country in the west like
12. Britain and the third world countries, whereby we help them with
13. technology and skill train people of theirs going back to their
14. countries to help them and we take on the responsibility of paying
15. our own doctors and nurses decent wages

Here Griffin builds a case against immigration on the grounds of it being harmful to the countries from where immigrants originate. This case is built up with the use of an example of Malawi where, Griffin claims, their health service is failing because of immigration from Malawi to the UK. By making a display of concern for the people of Malawi and their health care system, Griffin is able to deflect the inference that he is opposing immigration from Malawi because of any prejudice towards Malawians (or foreigners in general). In doing so, Griffin presents the British in a negative light by suggesting that ‘we’ (8) have ‘stolen’ (8) ‘their’ (8) health workers, something that is explicitly presented as ‘wrong’ (10). Rather than referring to race, Griffin presents this policy as being designed precisely to help the development of poorer countries. Nevertheless, the implication that immigration damages wages is made through a claim on line 15 which suggests that native health workers are not paid properly as a result of immigrants being in the UK; this does hint at repatriation as a method of improving wages for British people. Throughout this extract, Griffin presents

opposition to immigration as in the mutual benefits of all countries involved; consequently, Griffin is able to present opposition to immigration as about fairness rather than about race.

In the next section it is shown how Griffin does, in some cases, acknowledge opposing Islam; however, this opposition is argued not to be underpinned by personal prejudice but instead driven by an opposition to the prejudicial ideology of the religion.

### **3.3 Justifying Prejudice towards Muslims by claiming that Muslims are Prejudicial**

In this first extract we see Griffin questioned over his criticism of Islam (the question is posed by audience member T.A. and clarified by Dimpleby), which Griffin defends through the presentation of Islam as problematic.

#### *(8) Question Time*

1. T.A. Why is Islam a wicked and vicious faith?
2. D.D. This is a quotation that er you made, twice I think, about er Islam.
3. It was wicked and vicious, you confirmed it the other day. You start
4. off, why is it a wicked and vicious faith?
5. N.G. Because it treats women as second class citizens. Because it says
6. that a woman victim of rape should be stoned to death for adultery.
7. And because it orders its followers to be harsh with those of the
8. unbelievers who live near to them. And it ordains as a religious duty
9. the murder of Jews as well as other non-Muslims. That's in the
10. Quran, there's no point shaking your head. There are good points
11. about Islam er for instance, it opposes usury it wouldn't have let the
12. banks run riot in the way that the Labour Party and the Tory Party
13. have done. There are good points but it doesn't fit in with the
14. fundamental ca values of British society, free speech, democracy,
15. and equal rights for women.
16. Aud [Applause]

This extract begins with a question from the audience which asks Griffin to explain a quote he had previously made about Islam. The chair of the discussion then elaborates on the initial question by presenting the comments as Griffin's own words (2) and invites Griffin to account for this. Griffin replies to this not by denying that he has made contentious comments about Islam (where he has denied racism, for example in extract five) but by elaborating on why he opposes Islam. The reasons he gives for this opposition all refer to the way in which Islam is, supposedly, prejudicial towards women (5-6), non Islamic neighbours (8), and Jews (9; although, interestingly, there are no references to the accusations of homophobia that Griffin was aligning with in extract three). It is noteworthy that Griffin singles out Jews as victims of Islamic prejudice because (as was seen in extract one) Jews are viewed as the 'traditional' target group of Nazis (Billig 1978), an ideology that Griffin goes to rhetorical lengths to distance from the BNP.

Griffin orients to criticism of this point (10) and then attempts to support his point by presenting it as factually accurate. Rather than risk appearing to be unfair or to be making ungrounded criticisms of Islam, Griffin attempts to present himself as

someone knowledgeable about Islam; this is achieved through his reference to the Quran (9) and to his concession that there are elements of Islam that are positive (10-13). Griffin then goes on to claim that Islam is incompatible with British values, presented in a three part list, the last of which is equality for women. This means that Griffin is drawing on the supposed prejudice towards women within Islam to justify his prejudice towards the faith.

In this next extract we see Griffin again, following accusations of Islamophobia from a caller (C8), presenting Islam as a prejudicial faith in justifying his prejudiced position towards it.

(9) Radio 5

1. C8 None of them are gonna vote for you er your party because you're anti-
2. Muslim. You don't like Muslim people. You don't like Asian people.
3. Yeah?
4. N.G. It's not a matter of not liking Muslim people. I regard, I look at Islam
5. realistically. I've read the Quran and what I see there isn't fundamentally
6. a religious book, it's a manual for conquering other people's countries and
7. wherever Islam has gone it has what's been called by historians 'Bloody
8. Borders'. It rubs up against other cultures. You can't have Islam and
9. democracy. You can't have Islam and women's rights.

This extract begins with Griffin being challenged by a caller for being anti-Muslim, a position which is explicitly presented as based on race (through the reference to 'Asian people' 2). It is noteworthy that in his defence, Griffin distinguishes hating Muslim people from opposition to the faith in general; this is designed to present Griffin as not prejudiced towards certain people, but towards an ideology (Verkuyten 2011). Specifically, Griffin is arguing that his prejudice towards Islam is premised on an intolerance of prejudice. As with the previous extract, Griffin attempts to present himself as knowledgeable about Islam through his declaration of having read the Quran (5) and both understanding its message (5-6) and other experts' interpretation of it ('historians', 7). Griffin makes the contentious (and offensive) claim that the Quran is a guide to imperialism rather than a religious text. As well as presenting Islam as imperialistic and anti-democratic, Griffin again presents Islam as opposed to women's rights. This is brought about through the clear contrasting of Islam with the values of democracy and women's right ('you can't have Islam and...' 8-9). It is the prejudicial nature of Islam (in addition to its incompatibility with other British values) that is used to justify Griffin's prejudice towards Islam.

It has therefore been shown in this section that Griffin presents Islam as prejudicial and that it is this prejudice that is used to justify his and his party's prejudicial stance towards Islam.

#### **4. Discussion**

In this analysis we have shown how Griffin, in response to media hostility, employs three separate strategies in order to present the BNP as a modern non-racist organization; indeed, Griffin seeks to argue that the BNP directly functions to combat racism. First, Griffin presents himself as a moderating force within the far-right and highlights how he is disliked by the extreme right because of his modernising agenda. This argument has been identified

by Billig (1988) and van Dijk (1993) who showed that by highlighting a 'true' (and more extreme) racist viewpoint, speakers are able to present themselves as not racist. By drawing a contrast with extremists like the KKK, Griffin attempts to position the BNP as not only moderate, but also acting to help those who may be persuaded to join extremist groups such as British Nazis and the KKK. However, as is evident in the extract, this is a potentially problematic strategy because Griffin can be seen to be held to account for being associated with these extremists, so that even when he attempts to present the BNP as a moderating force, this association is enough to present the BNP as particularly problematic.

A second part of this strategy is the contrasting of the old 'problematic' party and the new 'reasonable' one. This is perhaps to be expected given the project of 'fascism recalibration' and the aim of showing how the BNP is a reasonable and moderate party. The admission that the party used to be anti-Semitic, racist, and homophobic is a bold and potentially damaging move, but by making a show of this concession Griffin presents himself as honest and by being aware of the past flaws presents himself as a modernising and moderate leader. Notwithstanding this claim to moderation, Griffin is overt in his criticism of homosexuality.

The next strategy identified shows Griffin arguing that policies of the BNP (e.g. abolishment of positive discrimination and repatriation of non-whites) are actually intended to help minority groups (e.g. protect self-esteem and improve Malawian health provision). By framing these policies in terms of helping ethnic minorities (rather than helping the 'indigenous' British to the detriment of ethnic minorities), Griffin is able to do two things. First, he is positioning himself as someone who seeks to assist these groups. Since Griffin is claiming to be not forming these policies based upon a dislike of ethnic minorities, the BNP cannot be accused of racism. Second, by speaking on behalf of minority groups (such as West Indians), Griffin can present himself as aligned with, rather than speaking out against, minority groups; this enables him to appear not just to be non-racist (as it deracialises policies, Augoustinos and Every 2007) but to actually be representing non-white groups.

The third strategy sees Griffin outline his opposition to Islam on the grounds that Islam is fundamentally prejudicial. Griffin's intolerance to intolerance can be summarised thusly: he is opposed to prejudice to such an extent that he will be prejudicial to a group that practices prejudice. Griffin is, therefore, positioning the party as champions for equality, juxtaposing the perception of the party as one which seeks to benefit specific groups in society. This is not the first circular argument that has been shown to be used by those arguing against immigration, as (non BNP) opponents of asylum and immigration have been shown to suggest that the policies of the BNP should be adopted to prevent the BNP from gaining power (Goodman 2008). Interestingly, this opposition is adroitly directed towards an ideology rather than individuals or racial groups: Griffin consistently focuses on 'Islam' rather than 'Muslims' (an approach highlighted by Verkuyten 2011). This depersonalises the negativity as Griffin is criticising an abstract construct (Islam) rather than a racial/religious group (Muslims), thereby averting accusations of racism.

Nevertheless, this argument constructs Islam (and arguably British Muslims) in a particularly negative light, making this a prejudicial discourse. A notable variation in Griffin's talk is his alignment with Islam when he is arguing against homosexuality (where there is agreement on opposition to a minority group). This contrasts with his critique of Islam, which is justified on the basis of Islam's opposition to other groups. This clearly demonstrates how discourse varies 'according to the purpose of the talk' (Potter and Wetherell 1987) and shows a major inconsistency in Griffin's line of argument.

This analysis contributes to the literature on the discourse of the far right in a number of key areas. In particular it has shown how the leader of the most electorally successful far-right British party engages and interacts in what can be described as mainstream political debate. However, despite being invited to participate in these mainstream media discussions, it can be seen that the BNP, and specifically Griffin, is by no means treated as a mainstream political figure; indeed these appearances are noteworthy for the high levels of criticism that Griffin encountered. This analysis demonstrates that, despite some electoral success, the BNP is not treated as mainstream and instead its presence allows for the established political parties to unite in criticising it. In this way the BNP function as the problematic 'extreme' that established parties can present themselves as moderate in comparison to when justifying their own positions, in much the same way as Griffin uses the KKK and British Nazis to legitimate BNP policies. For example, by criticising the BNP the established political parties are able to present their anti-immigration policies as unproblematic (or only problematic for being too lax).

The analysis contributes to understanding how the far-right positions itself in relation to minority groups such as Jews and ethnic minorities (see Allen 2011 on the way in which the English Defence League has embraced Jewish, Sikh and Gay and Lesbian members) by embracing them in a way that suggests a tolerant and non-racial approach, while also proposing repatriation of immigrants and strongly criticising Islam, the second largest religion in the UK. With regard to Griffin's talk about Islam, this analysis has shown the use of a circular argument being used to justify opposition to the religion. This circular argument draws on the supposed (and arguably unfair) representation of the religion as intolerant as justification for intolerance towards it. Identifying the circularity in this argument may help opponents of the far right to highlight the flaws in the position of the far right. This analysis therefore contributes further to the literature on the far-right by demonstrating how the prevailing, mainstream arguments such as those which present Islam as problematic (Allen 2010) or those which present homosexual relations as inferior to heterosexual ones (as indeed the chair of the Question Time episode featured in this analysis points out, the Conservative spokeswoman for community cohesion, a panellist on the programme, has "written about the promotion of homosexuality undermining family life") are utilised by the far-right. This demonstrates a degree of inter-relation between far-right discourse and mainstream arguments such that mainstream dialogue becomes more extreme in order to appease those sympathetic to the far right, a strategy identified by Goodman (2008) in which opponents of asylum immigration present their harsh policies as a way of preventing support for the BNP. In addition to this strategy, this analysis has

demonstrated how the far-right uses the more extreme elements of mainstream politics in order to legitimise and build their arguments. As a consequence, far-right discourse cannot be viewed as entirely separate from (problematic) mainstream political talk.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has explored how Nick Griffin has responded to mainstream media hostility and attempted to present the BNP as moderate. We have identified a number of strategies used by Griffin in an attempt to position the BNP in a positive and moderate light while promoting particularly worrying policies, such as an end to immigration, repatriating non-whites, prevention of teaching about homosexuality in schools, and the representation of Islam as evil. Some of the relative success of the BNP may be attributed to this attempt at 'fascism recalibration'; indeed, Copey (2007) argues that this strategy has led to greater normalization/legitimacy in the eyes of many voters. However, despite this moderate presentation, extremist policies persist. Moreover, in order for the party to progress electorally, Griffin must reactively counter the accusations of racism from journalists and other contributors on mainstream political outlets. The current analysis has identified a number of limitations to his responses and shown that the BNP remains a long way from being an accepted mainstream political party.

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<sup>i</sup> The full interview is available here: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_8088000/8088793.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8088000/8088793.stm)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/boonft24>. The programme can be found on youtube.

<sup>iii</sup> The full interview is available here (beginning at 5 minutes 12 seconds into the file) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/boos1tr>

<sup>iv</sup> Transcription has been conducted at a basis word for word level in line with the analysis; however links have been given to the full interviews for those who would like to scrutinise the data in more detail.

<sup>v</sup> The comments can be read here <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1220756/A-strange-lonely-troubling-death-.html> with commentary on the controversy here <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/feb/18/jan-moir-stephen-gately>

<sup>vi</sup> The BNP manifesto can be accessed here <http://communications.bnp.org.uk/ge2010manifesto.pdf>