Identitarian Populism: Young People and the Far Right in Times of Economic Crisis in Greece and the UK

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Abstract:
In the current European political climate, with political institutions in the process of configuring themselves to the new realities of the post financial crisis environment, the potential of populist groups to attract large numbers of followers is of renewed importance. In light of this, this paper looks at ‘majority identitarian populist’ parties in the UK and Greece: two countries with contrasting historical and politico-economic trajectories, both affected by the current economic crisis but to different degrees and dealing with this in different ways. Focusing on the core narratives of two ‘identitarian populist’ parties, the BNP in the UK and Golden Dawn in Greece, we show how populist actions promote exclusionary practices through the construction of ‘otherness’. These are commonly heralded as answers to the contemporary hardships encountered by citizens in their daily lives such as changes in the economy, work and social organisation, and range from profound hostility to immigration and multiculturalism in the UK to covert and overt violence against the ‘other’ in Greece. Finally we look at how attractive these identitarian populist groups are to young people and the paths of engagement for young people in these parties.
Introduction

In the current European political climate, with political institutions in the process of configuring themselves to the new realities of the post financial crisis environment, the potential of populist groups to attract large numbers of followers is of renewed importance. In light of this, this paper looks at ‘majority identitarian populist’ (Johnson et al., 2005) parties in the UK and Greece: two countries with contrasting historical and politico-economic trajectories, both affected by the current economic crisis but to different degrees and dealing with this in different ways. Focusing on the core narratives of two ‘identitarian populist’ parties, the BNP in the UK and Golden Dawn in Greece, we show how populist actions promote exclusionary practices through the construction of ‘otherness’.

These are commonly heralded as answers to the contemporary hardships encountered by citizens in their daily lives such as changes in the economy, work and social organisation, and range from profound hostility to immigration and multiculturalism in the UK to covert and overt violence against the ‘other’ in Greece. Finally we look at how attractive these identitarian populist groups are to young people and the paths of engagement for young people in these parties. In light of this, in this paper we examine:

Populisms and Identitarian Populism

In the last twenty years the ‘populist trend’ in Europe has been investigated by academics, while the term ‘populism’ itself has crossed the boundaries of academic debates into the political arena, and into everyday language. In-depth analyses of populism (e.g. Berz 1994) feature scholarship focusing on radical right parties (Kitschel, 2007), the new populist right (Laycock, 2005; Mudde 2004), far right parties (Taggart, 2004), the right-wing populism (Helms, 1997; Laclau 2005), radical right populism (Rydgren, 2003), or simply the populist parties (Fella and Ruzza 2009). The distinction extends the taxonomy to include neo-liberal populism and national-populism (Betz, 1994). Populism has been dismissed as being nothing more than a rhetorical style common to politicians, as described in Canovan’s (1981) concept of ‘Politician’s populism’. Some have described populism as a ‘thin ideology’, able to borrow ideas from a range of political perspectives (Stanley, 2008:95) or as lacking an ideological base. This has led to calls (Roxborough, 1984) for eliminating the concept given the difficulties in providing a clear-cut definition, because of its wide geographical and chronological extension and its multifaceted nature. Sartori (1970) speaks of conceptual stretching – namely, distorting the concept when it does not fit the case under examination and ‘adjusted’ it to denote too large an array of political tendencies. A consequence of these differences is that some scholars prefer to talk about ‘populisms’. Reflecting this uncertainty, the label populism has been applied to a massive array of parties, groups and narratives, from Russian Narodnicks to Italian comedians such as Bepe Grillo.

There are three key elements in populism. Firstly, populists claim to speak on behalf of a mass that can be defined as members of a national community that share a culture, a language, interests or the belief in the values of belonging to a group or culture. As such, the construction of the ‘people’ is rendered a genuine, homogeneous and democratic sovereign (Canovan, 1999), in other words an ideal totality (Laclau, 2005). Secondly, populists cast the people in opposition to an elite. Political elites and intellectuals are accused by populists of being undemocratic, incapable, unproductive and privileged, distant or alienated from the people or lacking in the plebescitarian quality of common sense (Mény and Surel, 2002). Finally, and as a result of the conception of the mass, populists identify some form of threatening ‘other’. Groups that are ‘othered’ are depicted as depriving the ‘sovereign’ people of their rights, values and prosperity, thus explaining why the elites and the mass are seemingly disconnected (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). Zaslove (2008:323) discusses how adept populist groups are at identifying ‘dangerous others’ that lie ‘outside the heartland’ and the lack of
ideological boundaries with populist parties on both the left and right. Zaslove (ibid) argues that parties of the right are more likely to point to ‘immigrants’, ‘environmentalists’, the ‘unemployed’ and ‘feminists’ as scapegoats. This list could include homosexuals, the disabled, asylum seekers and other minority groups.

These three components illustrate the basic elements of populism but are still fluid enough to allow for the massive array of populisms seemingly on offer in the political marketplace. These essential building blocks can almost endlessly be ripped up and reconfigured to form new narratives with a range of groups filling the various roles of the mass, elite and other. This paper focuses on a particular interpretation of populism that we have termed majority identitarian populism. The majority identitarian populist narrative centres on the concept of identity as a tool for determining who belongs to the ‘mass’. This can be based on any number of characteristics such as religion, ethnicity or values. Majority identitarian populists claim to speak for what they see as the (current) majority group.\(^1\) The ‘other’ is usually a group considered not to belong to the mass, as defined by the organisation. The other in identitarian populist narratives differ in some key respect which can include ethnicity, but could also be based on citizenship status, language skills, religion or a mixture of different or unspecified criteria. Elites are often presented as either unable to prevent the threat presented by the ‘other’ and therefore as being incompetent or actively conspiring against the mass. Frequently this role is filled by political leaders seen as complicit in mass immigration or European integration or both (depending on the nature of the other). In some cases they may even be presented as engaged in conspiracy, colluding with the ‘other’ against the interests of the ‘mass’.

The final stipulation of majority identitarian populism is the need for the populist narrative to be central to the party. What Canovan (1981) terms ‘populist calls’ alone is not sufficient. To be considered as a majority identitarian populist party the organisation must not be operating in a wider social context. This definition, in practice, takes in many of the parties that have been described as radical or far-right, but it excludes mainstream political parties that may make populist calls.

\(^1\) This stipulation was included to differentiate minority populist groups which could conceivably include separatist groups and some religious extremists.
Methods
A series of semi-structured interviews have been carried out in both UK and Greece with members of *identitarian populist movements* conducted between May and September 2013. Interviewees included both youth members, intermediate activists and in some cases, senior figures and were analysed through a grounded theory approach.

The process of obtaining interviews in the Greek context was revealing about the nature of the organisations being contacted. In most cases initial contact was made through personal contacts of the researchers, as official path routes proved to be ineffective. This approach demonstrates that Greek politics are still heavily dominated by a network of inter-personal and, in a way, clientelistic relationships. Golden Dawn’s members were keen to provide information especially about their ideological background in an effort to disconnect it from pro-Nazism allegations. In some cases, interviewees were reluctant to engage with us, especially older members, whereas younger individuals with university education and in some instances studies in the UK were more open to participate in a UK university originated research.

In the UK, in most cases initial contact was made through email inviting subjects to an interview. The email was deliberately very open about the funding and scope of the project, and included a link to a project description hosted on the university website. In cases where no email address was available, contact was made over social networking sites. For example, contact was made with members of the Young BNP through their Facebook page. In some cases, interviewees were reluctant to engage with members of the academic community. One mid-level organiser from the BNP refused to be interviewed on the grounds of the National Union of Students (NUS) 'No Platform Policy' which prevents members of the BNP from speaking on NUS affiliated campuses. Other possible subjects were extremely reluctant to talk and exhibited strong concern for their personal privacy and a desire to maintain anonymity even from the researchers.

What makes qualitative research in this area so difficult is that academics are often perceived as being part of the elite and therefore incapable of being honest brokers and objectively and dispassionately communicating the words of research subjects without twisting them to their own ends.
Case studies

Greece

A shift in Greek politics occurred after the global economic crisis of 2008 and the collapse of the Greek economy in 2010. This was followed by a number of rescue packages by the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Matsaganis 2011, Georgiadou et al 2012) and by unprecedented harsh austerity measures which affected society as a whole and increased poverty (Marinakou 2012) to such an extent that some commentators go as far as to claim that Greece is now facing a humanitarian crisis (Politaki 2013). Moreover, the Greek immigration framework has created inequalities even among immigrants, and has created differentiated subjectivities easily mouldable by public authorities, and in this sense a ‘protean’ citizenship emerged for immigrants in Greece (O’Brien 2013).

In this socio-economic context, a number of newly formed or smaller identitarian populist political groups of the far-right emerged on the Greek political scene; some (the Independent Greeks and the Golden Dawn) gained political representation in the Greek Parliament after the May and June 2012 national elections.

The results of the 2012 national elections may have been largely determined by the degree of public anger at the EU-IMF rescue package for Greece and the desire to deliver a shock protest vote against the two main established parties, the conservative New Democracy and the socialist PASOK. Nevertheless, immigration also featured prominently in most party programmes and public discourses as a fundamental security concern. Golden Dawn was the most spectacular beneficiary of the securitization of the immigration debate, rising from 0.29% in 2009 to almost 7% in 2012 and winning respectively 21 and 18 parliamentary seats in the May and June 2012 elections.

The electoral system in Greece is ‘reinforced proportionality’, according to which a party must secure at least 3% of the vote to be represented in parliament, and the party that wins the plurality of votes cast is awarded an extra 50 seats. Before the 2012 national elections, Golden Dawn never managed to be represented in the Greek Parliament due to this threshold.

The social process behind the ‘magic’ rise of the Golden Dawn is based on the general unreliability of the political system and the democratic institutions and the systematic breakdown of important institutions by the political elites. According to the European Social Survey, Greek citizens in 2002 were asked how highly they would rank their trust in parliament and politicians on a scale of 0 to 10 (10 the highest score); 61% and 80%, respectively, gave responses from 0 to 5. In 2010, 92% and 96%, respectively, ranked their trust from 0 to 5, which is among the lowest trust in political institutions ever since. In this context, the young have lost trust in politicians and political institutions. And this belief may fuel violence as their response. Following the killing of 15-year-old...

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2 See in this respect data from Eurostat: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion

3 Voting is compulsory legally but with constitutional reform of 2001 there is no more penal prosecution see http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Vouli-ton-Ellinon/To-Politevma/Ekloges/

4 See: http://www.opendemocracy.net/yannis-theocharis/reinstating-trust-in-greek-psyche
Alexis Grigoropoulos by a police officer on 6 December 2008, school and university students have risen up in an unprecedented outpouring of rage. Spontaneous demonstrations, mostly organised by email and SMS, have shaken towns and cities across the country.

A further factor explaining the rise of the Golden Dawn has been the lack of another powerful conservative political pole to compensate for a shift to the extreme right (Marvakis et al, 2013:5). New Democracy and LAOS, which used to be the major representatives of the Right in Greece, were accused by many of their supporters for collaborating with the EU and IMF against the interests of Greek people. The phenomenon of the Golden Dawn interests academics of the far-right in Greece and new literature is being published discussing its rise in the Greek political system (Xenakis 2012, Doxiadis & Matsaganis 2012, Georgiadou and Rori 2012; Zouboulakis 2013; Ellinas 2013; Koronaiou & Sakellariou 2013).

Golden Dawn campaigned in both 2012 national elections based on concerns for unemployment, austerity and the economy, as well as virulent anti-immigration rhetoric. In May 2012, action squads organised by Golden Dawn, terrorised for days immigrants detained in special facilities in the outskirts of Patras, which is the third largest city in Greece. Recent opinion polls5 show that support for Golden Dawn jumped from 6.9% to 11.5% after the last parliamentary elections, a percentage which ranks Golden Dawn as the third political party in electoral support behind New Democracy and SYRIZA (the Coalition of the Radical Left).

The Golden Dawn has been developing a social programme, including the delivery of free food among the most unfavoured strata of ethnic Greeks. Under the slogan ‘Return Greek people’s money to the people’, they have organized open food donations in central squares all over Greece. Another area of activism in which Golden Dawn engages is that it allegedly offers protection for victims of crime, especially when immigrant crime is involved. One of the actions Golden Dawn took after the 2012 elections was to create a blood bank. Announcements and slogans such as ‘Donate blood – Save a Greek soul’ were widely circulated, and it was clearly stated in the text accompanying this announcement that the blood is ‘only for Greeks’.

The Golden Dawn can be characterized as a majority identitarian populist party that places the ‘identity’ of the majority, defined as ethnic Greeks, at its centre. As a Golden Dawn activist told us:

‘Greek is only the person born by two Greek parents’.

And another one said:

‘I am against inter-racial marriage because it goes against the purity of our race’.

Another health initiative has been the formation in December 2012 of ‘Medicines Avec Frontiers’, in opposition to the international organization ‘Medicines Sans Frontiers’. In their inaugural announcement they stated that the service is only for Greeks and called on Greek doctors to participate. They also state that ‘almost 3 million illegal immigrants are treated by the Greek hospitals for free and this is the basic reason why the health system is in this mess’ (Koronaiou & Sakellariou 2013:334).

As far as unemployment is concerned, Golden Dawn’s anti-immigrant rhetoric is summarized in their repeatedly used slogan ‘every foreign worker is a Greek unemployed’. Members of Golden Dawn have reportedly been involved in numerous incidents of hate speech and crime based on victims’

5 See: http://news247.gr/eidiseis/dimoskopiseis
national, ethnic, religious, and sexual identities and are profoundly opposed to immigration; a prominent Golden Dawn activist told us when asked about Golden Dawn’s immigration policy:

‘First .. we shut down our borders ... second .. all those who are currently inside the country with no documents, no papers will be sent back’

When he was asked where they would go, he replied:

‘Let them go wherever!’

A document posted on the Golden Dawn site - Political Positions - stated that all illegal immigrants will be arrested and be sent to special detention centres pending repatriation, where ‘the conditions will not resemble a 5-star hotel’. In addition, all of the Golden Dawn interviewees were against the creation of a mosque in Athens and they expressed concerns regarding the increase of Muslim immigrants in the country. Furthermore, one Golden Dawn member characterized the Roma population in Greece as:

‘...Bulgarian/Turkish-gypsies who have nothing to do with the Roma in Europe, and should be kicked out of the country, since they are here just to work as professional beggars’.

All Golden Dawn interviewees expressed concerns about Zionism and many openly denied the holocaust, arguing that the figure of the death toll of the Jewish population by Nazis during WWII has been largely fabricated. The Party’s spokesman in a public speech in the Greek Parliament in June 2013 admitted openly that Golden Dawn members deny the holocaust.

Today’s youth in Greece is possibly the first generation since the Second World War that will be worse off than their parents. Youth unemployment is exceptionally high with European figures reporting a youth unemployment rate greater than 50%; according to data released by the Greek Statistical Authority, unemployment rates in the age groups between 15-24 and 25-34 years were in May 2013, 64.9% and 37.7%, and the overall unemployment rate for all age groups amounted to 27.6%. According to the President of the Afghan community in Athens, Golden Dawn recruits young people from a very young age and they participate as minors in action squads that attack immigrants in specific neighbourhoods in Athens such as Agios Panteleimonas and Plateia Atikis. Younger activists are thought more likely to receive lenient treatment from the police.

Moreover, Golden Dawn has formed a non-profit organization, which they named OAED (in Greek) after the acronym of the official state organization for the unemployed which literally means ‘Manpower Employment Organisation’, but in the case of the Golden Dawn organization the acronym means ‘Group for the Unemployed Hard-Hit Greeks’ (Koronaiou & Sakellariou 2013:335). The purpose for this organization, which illegally operates according to the Greek Ministry of Labour, is, in collaboration with local Golden Dawn offices, to find jobs only to Greeks.

Golden Dawn has, also, a growing presence among students in public schools around the country. Its official website recently hosted pictures of neatly-dressed 6 to ten-year-olds, accompanied by parents, at a ‘national awakening’ session held at a Golden Dawn branch office outside Athens. The session included a discussion on ‘the Olympian gods, the ancient Greek pantheon and the Christian

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6 http://www.xryshaygh.com/assets/files/politikes-theses.pdf, p. 18
7 See: http://news247.gr/eidiseis/politiki/kasidiarhs_arnhthhke_to_olokautwma_mesa_sth_voylh.2284457.html
8 See http://www.sigmalive.com/inbusiness/news/greek/59564
9 See http://www.neolaia.gr/2012/09/28/xrysh-aygh-grafeio-ergasias-ellines/#.UXnRhUpiOTw
faith. It is quite active through the internet where it mainly promotes issues related to the party’s social programme. There are also websites supportive of the Golden Dawn devoted to nationalist ideals. Finally, Golden Dawn operates a number of blogs. A heavily visited blog is the party’s New-York based blog ‘Xaameriki’ (http://xaameriki.wordpress.com/). Via those it mobilises young people. Younger activists are thought more likely to receive lenient treatment from the police. In the Greek context youth participates in identitarian populist parties such as the Golden Dawn in order to feel a sense of belonging, security and protection against a collapsing world. Especially Golden Dawn with its military-like organisation of the youth provides a sort of structure and stability in a disintegrating and deconstructed society. When asked about youth participation, a Golden Dawn interviewee responded:

‘Certainly there is an increase .. certainly it is growing every day .. . in major cities of Greece .. Athens .. Thessaloniki .... the percentage of the youth participation in Golden Dawn is far ahead of the other parties ..... far ahead ... it means that .... desperate young person.. seeing that there is no hope ... turns to nationalism .. thinking that this closed system ... might spare him the problems of ... uh .. monopolies and globalization.....’

Another reason why the young are attracted to the Golden Dawn may be the party’s social action programme, which may create a sense of ‘meaning’ in their lives making them feeling useful in a society with high youth unemployment. All our interviewees felt quite strongly about their party’s social action programme and they were keen to promote it as the ‘only alternative to the failure of the Greek welfare state’. A Golden Dawn member said in relation to this:

‘With the various social actions, and the gatherings we organise, like the ones where children are learning about Greek history and ideology .. so this is how our ideology is cultivated. Beyond that, someone who has lost his job .. has been mugged 17 times by foreigners ... they have raped .. uh ... his wife .. uh .. or his mother ... uh .. and is a victim of too many unlawful acts committed by all these scums...it is possible to come to us .. slowly they see and they are fully nurtured by our ideology ... all those votes and even more so were not from members of the Golden Dawn [party] .. they are from sympathizers who are potential political soldiers of the People’s Association .. through our various social actions which, as you see, are continuing and .. uh .. unstoppable .’

UK

Despite the financial crisis the UK offers a relatively stable and prosperous backdrop for populist politics and the mobilisation of young people. Following the 2010 UK general election, the UK is led by a coalition of the centre-right Conservative and centre Liberal Democrat parties. Such a coalition is unusual in the UK due to the use of single member plurality voting. In opposition sits the Labour party which is struggling to recover from an unpopular premiership by Gordon Brown. Current

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10 See http://www.economist.com/blogs/charlemagne/2013/03/greek-politics
11 See http://ethnikismos.net/
polling information suggests that the Labour Party is currently in the ascendancy, sitting around 8% above the Conservatives with the Liberal Democrats on 11%.12

Following the financial crisis, the dominant theme in UK politics is the government's austerity drive characterised by large scale cuts across many government departments as part of what David Cameron described in 2009 following significant contractions in GDP as the 'Age of Austerity'.13 Grimshaw and Rubery (2011:115) have described the impact of coalition approach towards the welfare state as being negative for young people in the UK: tripling the level of university fees, revoking the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)14, extending the age at which young people were considered to still be dependents and therefore unable to qualify for independent housing benefits (raised from 25 to 35).

Young people (<25) have suffered disproportionately compared to older workers during the financial crisis as displayed by the youth unemployment rate (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011:264). In 2012, of those able to work, 21% of those under the age of 25 were unemployed, compared to 5.7% of those aged between 25 and 74.15 For comparison, the figure for under 25s in 2000 was 12.2%. The UK youth unemployment figure compares favourably with the European average, 23% unemployment amongst under 25s. The unemployment rate covers only those available and actively seeking work, and so the true impact of the recession may be larger. The idea of a lost generation has also been encapsulated in the figures for those 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' the so called NEETS. The Office for National Statistics currently estimates that 1.09 million people between the ages of 16 and 24 fall into this category (ONS, 2013).

It becomes clear then that whilst young people in the UK are far from the worst off in Europe, they are facing challenges. Despite this, there is little sign that young people are organised politically, and most research suggests that they do not engage in formal collective action through electoral politics. Recent figures, collected by the Hansard Society (2013:21) show similarly low levels of political participation by 18-24 year olds, with only 12% of those questioned reporting that they were likely to vote, down from 22% the previous year. This is against an overall figure of 41% of citizens reporting that they were certain to vote in the event of a general election (ibid:18). However, there is evidence that less formal and more individualistic participation in the UK is relatively common, especially amongst young people, such as petitions and boycotts. This trend is consistent with wider social change as society goes through a process of individualisation that has made it difficult, for younger people especially, to connect with formal, organised political parties (Pattie et al, 2004:87; Henn et al: 2002).

Outside of the formal political parties in the UK, all of whom have youth wings, there are a range of political organisations, many of them conforming to the identitarian populist framework established above, that may attempt to mobilise supporters; these include the British National Party (BNP), a nationalist political party that has long been perceived as the face of ‘far-right’ politics in the UK. The

12 See UK Polling Report for a frequently updated aggregate levels of support for the three main parties: http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/


14 The EMA was a small payment made to those between the ages of 16-18 and in education.

15 European unemployment data is available from Eurostat: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home
BNP won two seats in the 2009 European elections close to a million votes, a nine-fold increase on their previous total making them the most successful ‘Extreme Right Party’ in the UK (Ford & Goodwin, 2010:4). The 2009 European election however marked the electoral highpoint for the BNP, and was the result of concerted effort by the party since 1999 to present itself as an electable force in UK politics. In both the 2010 general election and the regular council elections since the BNP has suffered a reversal of fortunes. It retains its two MEPs (although one MEP resigned from the party in 2012), it is still without representation at the national level, and only two remaining local councillors. The electoral ups and downs of the BNP have been accompanied by a constantly evolving ideological position. From 1999 onwards, and under the leadership of Nick Griffin, the BNP has sought to undergo a process of modernisation designed to break the connection to fascism exhibited by crude racism and anti-Semitism, and replace it with a softer and more socially acceptable programme (Eatwell, 2004; Atton, 2006; Mammone, 2009; Rhodes, 2009; Goodwin, 2010). Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou (2010) argue that post 1999 the BNPs manifestos reveal a shift in their understanding of the nation and nationalism. Whilst race forms a significant basis for the BNP’s nationalism, this is increasingly alongside narratives that emphasise civic values such as rule of law, citizenship and political rights (ibid:588).

From the viewpoint of the identitarian populist template, the BNP’s discourse clearly matches the three elements described: protection of the mass, identification of a threatening ‘other’ and anti-elitism. Beginning with how the BNP understands and represents itself, its members and the majority of the British public (i.e. the mass), the 2010 BNP election manifesto was clear that ethnicity remains a component of the BNP’s understanding of British identity and that the party had a focus on protecting the rights of the ‘indigenous’ British (BNP 2010:12). The ambiguities of this approach can be seen in the following extract from the manifesto:

‘The BNP recognises the right of legally settled and law-abiding minorities to remain in the UK and enjoy the full protection of the law, on the understanding that the indigenous population of Britain has the right to remain the majority population of our nation.’ (ibid:16)

In this context indigenous is synonymous with ‘white’, however, this is far from the kind of exclusionary language associated with ethnic nationalism. The evolving position on who constitutes the mass within the UK is partly confirmed through interviews with activists. One middle-aged, female BNP activist maintained the focus on natural divisions between peoples: she said:

‘We’re all put in our countries for a reason.’

Further questions however revealed a more complex understanding of identity. The same activist, whilst maintaining the importance of ethnic distinctions in constructing citizenship, invoked the concept of civic citizenship based on the shifting narratives described in the analysis of Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou (2010). Quite what civic citizenship amounts to and the status of civic citizens in relation to the ‘indigenous’ British is not made clear:

‘Well they can’t be British English can they? How can a black man or a Pakistani –he’s a Pakistani – how can he be English? He can’t – he should never deny his heritage anyway but they can be civic citizens.’

In a separate interview a middle-aged, male, BNP activist, when asked if British identity included a cultural as well as a racial component responded:

‘The way we live our lives, the English live their lives. Yeah, I think it’s unique.’
He went on to suggest that minorities that were prepared to assimilate (Westernise), only then they could be considered to be citizens:

‘Well, they fit in, wherever they want to fit in. If they want be Westernised, that’s fine. But there’s not a lot to say about that.’

Representing the mass in this way, even if not entirely based on an ethnic interpretation of British identity, inevitably results in the establishment of an in-group and an out-group; those who are not part of the mass the BNP claims to represent. The BNP 2010 manifesto presents a wider range of targets for this type of othering behaviour, namely immigrants, Europe, Muslims and those convicted of a crime. Speaking with activists however they chose to dwell on two central concerns, Immigration and European integration. Opposition to both these trends seems to stem from the nationalist stance of the BNP with both immigration and closer European integration felt to be a threat to national identity. In discussing immigration, interviewees did not specifically attack immigrants themselves and often instead presented themselves as sympathetic but rejecting immigration primarily on resource grounds. The following example from a YBNP activist strongly emphasise what they see as the economic case for halting immigration:

‘You can’t sustain an unprecedented amount of people coming and staying, for the most part, because we’re an island, we’re very small and it is an issue and it needs to be resolved. Because we’re over-populated as it is.’

When pressed for detail, specific forms of immigration were considered more acceptable than others. For example, when asked about overseas students coming to the UK, one YBNP activist stressed that he did not consider this to be part of wider immigration patterns:

‘That’s on a different level altogether isn’t it? If people come here for education, it’s separate.’

Whilst it was clear that immigration was perceived to be a central political problem for the BNP, as the quote below from another YBNP activist illustrates, the focus of criticism is on political leaders as opposed to immigrants:

‘But I think where the main problem lies is, not the people that come here, but the issue would be that we allow this to happen. For them to come here and it doesn’t help them in any way, it’s much more than what we would help them in another way. I think there’s all kinds of solutions to that sort of immigration.’

The anti-elitist element in BNP literature is one of the strongest components in the BNP’s manifesto. In a section entitled counter Jihad, the manifesto argues that mainstream political parties have been responsible for encouraging mass immigration which they argue will lead to ‘most of Europe colonised by Islam within a few decades’ (BNP, 2010:5). Other activists expressed a profound disconnection from mainstream politics, accusing political figures of being arrogant, shallow and in one case traitorous:

‘Teddy [Edward Heath] took us into the EU illegally – he was a traitor as a bastard because he did commit treason against this country without a shadow of a doubt.’

Having established their brand of politics, we now go on to explore how the BNP has sought to engage with young people. Evidence to date suggests that BNP activists are predominantly drawn

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16 Interviewees also expressed opinions on a variety of other social issues including homosexuality; these will be reported in another paper.
from older cohorts rather than the young, a trend that Goodwin puts down to the coming of age of many older groups during the Powellism of the 1960s and 70s in the UK, and therefore as identifying to a greater extent with the ‘exclusionary’ BNP (Goodwin, 2010:42). In contrast, online the BNP is active on Facebook and analysis of the groups Facebook page has shown a majority of those who have joined the BNP Facebook group are under 25, 62% of the sample of 82,700 (Bartlett et al, 2011:34). The BNP also maintains a specific youth wing that is active on Facebook – Young BNP – which is currently maintains an active Facebook page (955 ‘likes’). BNP campaign material stresses the importance of the YBNP as part of the wider BNP party structure, arguing that:

_The success of our youth wing, the YBNP, is one of the most important objectives of the Party. After all, it is for the rights and freedoms of our own children and grandchildren that we are fighting, and we have to recruit new, young activists or the party would gradually die out!’_ (BNP Activists Handbook, undated:40)

However, given the low levels of youth involvement in politics in the UK and the seemingly shrinking levels of support for the BNP (see above), increasing membership of YBNP seems likely to be challenging. This was recognised by the YBNP members interviewed who put the size of the YBNP in their region at 100-200. There was also a clear recognition that formal YBNP membership was often secondary for looser and more informal relationships with the party. Increasingly, it was reported, the YBNP had supporters rather than members, however this was seen to be common to all political parties:

‘Supporting, active yeah, but you’re problem is, there are a lot more supporters than there are active people. It’s always a big problem with all politics, I would say.’

They also felt that many young people who could be attracted to the BNP were put off by the stigma attached to the party:

‘Yeah, even then there’s a lot more activists than you get made aware of, simply because of other external factors, such as the stigma that comes with the BNP and they don’t wish to be seen in pictures and such.’

None of the interviewees were able to give details about any recruitment drives targeted at young people specifically, and given the apparent size of the YBNP and in spite of claims made in the activist handbook (BNP, undated) it seems that YBNP remains a small-scale group. Both the YBNP members interviewed fit the profile, suggested by Goodwin (2010), of self-starters. On encountering a BNP street-stall at the time of the last general election (2010) both claim to have done further research into political parties and compared their policy positions including researching material online:

‘We joined the Youth BNP when we met them at a stall. They had a stall held in [place name], which was the British National Party in general. And they’re there often, and they give out leaflets and such, and we took, I took one of the leaflets and I was interested by what I read, and I looked into it further and decided it was right for me’.

Surprisingly however, members of the YBNP saw themselves as being exceptional amongst their peers for their interest in politics and were critical of those not politically engaged:

‘I think people should realise its significance, especially youth, of politics. If you’re not paying attention to a governing body that controls every aspect of your life, until you die, then you’re just socially inept. And I find it stupid that people go, ‘I don’t pay attention to politics.’
Conclusions

Data collected from activists in both the Golden Dawn and the BNP has revealed a surprising amount of diversity in the parties’ understanding of who they represent, and in their attitudes and praxis towards the other and their appeal to young people.

Both groups fit the template of majority identitarian populism as identified in the theoretical section. Despite this, there was considerable variation within how they constructed their specific brands of populism. For the Golden Dawn, the mass was constituted firmly by ‘ethnic’ Greeks born of two Greek parents. Manifesto material from the BNP reveals a similar ethnic component although with non precise emphasis on both parents’ origins being British, promising to defend the ‘indigenous’ British. However, face-to-face interviews with BNP and YBNP members, unlike those of the Golden Dawn, reveals a mind-set potentially less extreme than the reputation of the party suggests. Unlike the Golden Dawn, electoral necessity has seemingly led to the BNP attempting to ameliorate some of its most exclusionary tendencies as shown by the willingness to extend civic citizenship to those born outside of the UK. Undoubtedly this should not be considered citizenship on equal terms with the ‘indigenous’ population.

In constructing the other, Golden Dawn interviewees were overt in the criticism of migrants, and ethnic minorities such as the Roma. In contrast the BNP interviewees, exhibited little direct hostility towards immigrants and British minorities. Every BNP interviewee was careful to stress their inclusive credentials and to counter accusations of racism and unlike the Golden Dawn, none of the interviewees was directly critical of immigrants themselves. In part this is likely down to acute sensitivity and awareness of previous portrayals of the party in the media and academia. In other words, everyone was likely on their best behaviour. The fiercest criticism from the BNP interviewees was reserved not for the other, but for the elite. Mainstream political parties, characteristically referred to as the ‘old gang’ in BNP literature are described as being arrogant and out of touch with the majority of the public (BNP, 2010:18). On the other hand, the Golden Dawn, having won a substantial number of seats in the Greek parliament, gauged their criticism towards the EU and IMF and comparatively slightly less to the state apparatus.

In relation to the recruitment of young people, both the Golden Dawn and the BNP demonstrated an awareness of the importance of young people to the future of their parties. Whilst the Golden Dawn was clearly optimistic about its ability to recruit new and youthful members, the BNP was decidedly less so. This may be partly explained by the vastly different social situations. Whereas the UK has come through the economic crisis comparatively well, the financial pressures and rapidly degenerating social circumstances of the Greek case may well be acting as a recruiting Sargent for the Golden Dawn. There is also some evidence that Greek society may be predisposed towards nationalist and exclusionary narratives. For example, a survey conducted by the National Centre for Social Research at the end of the 1990s illuminates in a better way how the young people understood then the meaning of Nation: largely as a homogeneous organic and cultural group (Stratoudaki 2005). More than 80%, the adolescent students inter alia agree in that the preservation of Greek traditions and habits again conditions of globalization and open borders, common biological, ‘racial’ origin of the Greeks. The same survey found that one in four students placed in the first place the traditional nationalist values of ‘pride for the homeland ‘and’ religious faith.’

According to Halikiopoulou and Vassilopoulou the economic crisis may be exacerbating deeper
tendencies towards extremism present in Greek society perpetuated by a highly centralised education system\textsuperscript{17}.

Both the Golden Dawn and the BNP are legitimate political parties with a clear focus on contesting elections. For this reason it is difficult to brand either extremist in the sense that they are outside the boundaries of liberal democratic systems. However, both parties clearly adopt discourses that serve to establish out- and in-groups, and seek to exclude those that do not fit within the specific mass the party claims to represent. Nevertheless, interviews with activists reveal a marked difference in the extent of othering behaviour in the two organisations. Whilst Golden Dawn activists focused their criticism on migrants themselves, the BNP activists reserved their strongest attacks for political elites. The different foci may go some way to explaining the seemingly different levels associated with each organisation. Whilst there are a number of accounts linking the Golden Dawn to organised political violence directed at migrants, there is seemingly less evidence linking the BNP explicitly to organised political violence.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} See: \url{http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europppblog/2013/01/29/greece-golden-dawn-education/}

\textsuperscript{18} There is some limited evidence that the BNP has a particular culture of violence expressed in internal party narratives. It is not possible to expand on this research however to claim that the BNP itself participates in or endorses violent acts. See a Hope Not Hate report written by Goodwin and Evans available here: \url{http://www.channel4.com/media/c4-news/images/voting-to-violence%20(7).pdf}
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BNP (undated) Activists and Organisers Handbook.


