ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Epistemologies of ignorance in far right studies: the invisibilisation of racism and whiteness in times of populist hype

Aurelien Mondon[1]

Abstract
Research on the far right has been a booming field for decades now, with far-right parties generally being much more researched than their right, centre and left counterparts, even when they are marginal in terms of politics or electoral support. Yet, for a field that is notorious for its lively definitional debates and tendency to evolve and reinvent itself terminologically, it has appeared unwilling to engage with the concepts of race, racism and whiteness, or with its very positioning in political structures. Through a mixed-methods discursive approach, this article analyses the titles and abstracts of all articles published in peer-reviewed journal in the sub-field of far right studies between 2016 and 2021 ($n = 2543$) to highlight which terms and concepts are primed and which are obscured. This article highlights a tendency to prime euphemising terms and concepts such as 'populism' and avoid those which engage with systemic and structural forms of oppression such as racism and whiteness. This article thus aims to both map and make sense of the absence of whiteness and racism in the corpus by arguing that it is a symbol of the ongoing presence of colourblind approaches and a lack of reckoning with the scale and pervasion of systemic racism in contemporary societies.

Keywords Racism · Far right · Populism · Discourse · Whiteness

White methods are the practical tools used to manufacture empirical data and analysis to support the racial stratification of society. White methods are the various practices that have been used to produce 'racial knowledge' since the emergence of White supremacy in the fifteenth and sixteenth century and of the disciplines a few centuries later (Zuberi & Bonilla Silva 2008: 18).

In other words, the question is not whether someone's identity or social position influences how their work will be judged, but how (Bacevic 2021: 5).

✉ Aurelien Mondon
a.mondon@bath.ac.uk

1   University of Bath, Claverton Down, Bath BA2 7AY, UK

2016 appeared to mark a turning point in the mainstreaming of far-right politics in the West. Not that the process was not already well underway, but the victories of Donald Trump and Brexit demonstrated that a new stage had been reached, whereby outright far-right politics could not only infiltrate mainstream movements and parties such as the Republican and Conservative parties in the US and UK, respectively, but win key national contests. Since, we have witnessed mainstream actors and discourse turning sharply towards far-right politics as well as an emboldening of the far and extreme right, as demonstrated by the storming of the Capitol on the 6th of January 2021, or the victory of Fratelli d'Italia in 2022. Yet it is also in this context that the Black Lives Matter movement has resurged following the murder of George Floyd in 2020. While Trump increased his share of the vote dramatically in 2020, we also witnessed the spread of a more sophisticated understanding within some white communities of the role and scale of systemic racism in our societies. This awakening reverberated into academia and the American Political Studies Association (APSA 2020) published a strong statement to that effect in June 2020, 'condemning systemic racism' and acknowledging that their 'own programs, procedures, teaching, and scholarship may be shaped by or contribute to upholding, rather than dismantling, systems of oppression'.

'Far right studies', which I will define later, had not waited for the election of Trump or Brexit to become a booming field of research in times of 'populist hype'. Far-right parties are historically far more researched than their right, centre and left counterparts, even when they are marginal in terms of politics or electoral support. Yet, for a field that is notorious for its lively definitional debates and a general willingness to evolve and reinvent itself terminologically, it has generally been reticent to engage with the concepts of race and racism and has recently appeared slow to react to new developments and come to grips with its very positioning in political structures.[1] While the field embraced 'populism' in the 2000s, displacing and even discarding other terminologies for one which proved particularly problematic, even by its own proponents (see Cas Mudde's warning in 2007, amongst others), it has proven reluctant to engage with the concept of racism and the extensive literature on it in disciplines such as sociology.[2] As such, far right studies has failed to reckon with systemic forms of oppression core to far-right politics. More precisely, there has been a failure to recognise racism is not only a useful, necessary tool to explain our current political landscape, but one that takes many shapes and is present across the board, from the more extreme forms of politics to mainstream structures of power.

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[1] This is not unique and a similar trend is highlighted in fascism studies by Anastasia Kanjere (2022 forthcoming) who highlights the lack of engagement with Critical Race and settler colonial studies. As France Winddance Twine and Charles A. Gallagher (2012: 7) noted, this also matches earlier, wider developments, whereby 'throughout much of the twentieth-century mainstream, white social scientists did not focus on the institutions that created, reproduced and normalized white supremacy'.

[2] This is no doubt linked to the lack of 'serious intellectual interest' given to anti-racism as a field or object worthy of study (Harris 2020; Joseph-Salisbury & Connelly 2021) and links to what Jana Bacevic (2021) has described as 'epistemic injustice'. Unsurprisingly, the same has often been applied to feminist scholarship (see do Mar Pereira 2019).

This article studies this peculiar short-sightedness through an analysis of recent academic publications in the field. Through this, it aims to both map and make sense of the colourblind approaches core to the discipline, whereby racism is relegated as something 'frozen' in the past and defeated, or, if in the present, situated only in abnormal, exceptional and individualised or circumscribed politics (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Lentin 2020). First, a number of key caveats are made to understand the necessity to take a reflective approach to an area such as far right studies. I then provide an analysis of academic articles published in English between 2016 and 2021. This period spans the campaign, election and presidency of Donald Trump as well as the victory of the Brexit referendum, which was also marked by the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and a growing awareness in wider society of the role and scope of systemic forms of racism, in appearance at least.[3] The aim is to sketch what was primed in the titles and abstracts, and what was not (including what was potentially ignored, invisibilised, erased or downplayed). The discussion section then places the data within a well-developed, and yet almost altogether ignored literature in the field: colour-blindness, white logic and white methods.

Before moving on to the core argument in this article, it is essential to define what is meant here by 'far right studies', even though this must be heavily caveated. Indeed, far right studies is not a discipline in and of itself, nor is it a neat subfield that could be easily attached to a particular discipline. Scholars who study the far right come from many different disciplines, from political science to sociology, criminology, history, anthropology, communication and psychology. However, much of the development in the field has taken place in the wider discipline of politics and political science, with articles being predominantly published in this field (Web of Science 2022), but also as exemplified by the backgrounds of the scholars most cited in terms of terminology and definitions. While this article draws generalisations from the field as a whole, it is therefore essential to keep this diversity in mind. Crucially, it is also a field which has garnered incredible and in fact disproportionate attention over the years and led to a 'bandwagon effect' (Mondon and Winter 2020b): even when the far right was not particularly strong electorally, academic interest was higher there than in more traditional and powerful types of politics (Mudde 2007).

Politics, political science and epistemologies of ignorance

While we have witnessed some improvement in recent years, there remains a lack of diversity in the disciplines of politics, political science and international relations (see O'Neill 2023; Blatt 2018; Ginocchio et al 2022). Most recently, a report co-authored by the British International Studies Association and the Political

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[3] It must be noted here that only research published in English was collected and that there is a clear skew towards research published in the global North. As such, events such as the election of Donald Trump and Brexit played a particular part in setting the agenda, something which would benefit from further study.

Studies Association showed not only that the proportion of academic staff from ethnic minorities is lower in politics and international relations compared to related disciplines in the UK, but that the relative seniority of staff from ethnic minorities is also lower (Hanretty 2021). As such, politics, social sciences and academia more generally exist as what Victor Ray (2019) has termed 'racialized organisations'. Beyond reactive statements about whether discrimination exists in our midst, a real engagement would require us to 'begin with the assumption that discrimination, racial sorting, and an unequal distribution of resources are not anomalous but rather foundational organizational norms' (46). This is something international relations as a sub-discipline has proven more willing to undertake, despite the chequered origins of that discipline (Shilliam 2021). In recent years, a number of promising texts have been published to critically reflect on the whiteness and racism that has long been core to the discipline (Blatt 2018; Vitalis 2015; Sabaratnam 2020; Anievas et al 2015, and the special issues edited by Salter et al 2021 and Delatolla et al 2021).[4]

As Tukufu Zuberi highlights, the issue is not only that race and whiteness can be concealed under the pretence of objectivity in academic work, but that even when they are used this can be in a manner based on racist presumptions: 'social scientists are typically not prepared to answer the basic questions of 'how do you interpret the meaning of 'the effect of race?'' (Zuberi & Bonilla Silva 2008, p. 6; see also Zuberi 2001). This could not apply better to the field of far right studies where the refusal to use the term 'racism' is generally based on a lack of knowledge of the literature on race and racism, and a further refusal to engage with expert literature when it is pointed out that the concept would be more appropriate than notoriously slippery ones such as populism. Therefore, it is not just ignorance we are witnessing, but a clear case of epistemology of ignorance, as per Charles W. Mills' racial contract (1997, p. 18).[5]

Meera Sabaratnam (2020) pushes Mills' argument further arguing that we witness a combination of epistemologies of ignorance, immanence and innocence in subject positioning from academics:

> There is an important disjuncture between the everyday understanding of racism as the isolated behaviour of 'bad' or unreflexive individuals, and the scholarly understanding of it as a structural phenomenon that shapes societies and world politics in multiple dimensions. The often-limited training of IR scholars in understanding racism also means that they are likely to conceive it more in the former sense than the latter, and thus fail to see its workings. Moreover, the life experiences and ideological exposures of scholars racialised as White tend to normalise and render invisible Whiteness and White supremacy.

In this case, this is why, even when the words 'race', 'racism' or 'white supremacy' are used, they can remain part of the white methods arsenal as they posit race and racism as issues circumscribed to the illiberal racist articulation and to freakish,

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[4] It is worth stressing early that, in this article, as in most serious research on the matter, whiteness is understood as a social construction.

[5] On this, see also the edited book by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (2007).

exceptional individual actions and happenstance belonging to some outer realm, rather than part and parcel of a systemic mode of oppression, what Lentin has called 'frozen racism' (Lentin 2020; see also Mondon and Winter 2020a on liberal and illiberal articulations of racism).

The drive towards scientification within social sciences has made many academics reticent to accept that 'human knowledge is uncertain and imperfect, and it is not clear how statistical models contribute to understanding how and what produces a particular social outcome [as] theories not statistical methods guide how we interpret social data' (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008, pp 8–9). Zuberi's plea about acknowledging one's positionality rather than claiming impossible objectivity is an obvious one and yet often overlooked:

> By recognizing that the researcher is as important as what they study we enhance our ability to contribute to an understanding of society. We are not Martians from another time or place, thus we cannot study society as outsiders. We are part of the world and study society from the inside (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008, p. 12).

There are some potentially less negative reasons for the field of far right studies being predominantly male and white, such as the harm caused by the issues researched themselves and the need for self-care. In the field, harm can come from a number of places, from the direct and indirect mental trauma or re-traumatising caused by reading, watching or hearing discourses aimed at removing one's own humanity, to physical threats and harm through field work, or the potentially nefarious repercussions of dissemination. This is obviously not reason enough to keep those at the sharp end from studying far-right politics. In fact, many scholars of the far right are from communities traditionally targeted and many more are blocked from entering by systemic barriers. Rather, this is to understand why some would choose to avoid it, particularly when the field itself does not always seem to offer a real understanding of the politics at stake, let alone solidarity or protection (see Vaughan 2021; Vaughan et al 2023).

Furthermore, if this is found to be a good or understandable reason why the field remains predominantly white, then it should lead to an extra effort from researchers to engage with their positionality and account for systemic forms of oppression as core to their research field and ethics. Yet, as the sample below demonstrates, whiteness in particular does not appear as an object worthy of study, even in the margins. As Mills (1997, p. 94) pointedly noted, 'intellectuals write about what interests them, what they find important, and—especially if the writer is prolific—silence constitutes good prima facie evidence that the subject was not of particular interest'. This silence is particularly loud considering the advances achieved in related fields in this respect. As France Winddance Twine and Charles A. Gallagher (2012, p. 3) noted in their collection on the 'third wave of whiteness studies', this 'is now examined in virtually every branch of social sciences', and 'given the mobilization of far-right movements throughout Europe and the United States this line of research is a needed examination of how whiteness and nationalism are used to portray racial minorities as perpetual foreigners, potential terrorists or permanent cultural

outsiders'. With this in mind, and given how abundant scholars researching the far right are, what does it mean that whiteness is virtually absent in far right studies?

As Meera Sabaratnam (2020) highlights:

> Whiteness in IR theory does not reside in authors' skin colour, conscious intentions or places of origin but rather the ways in which a set of epistemological tropes, locations, assumptions, and commitments naturalise racialised accounts of world politics – that is, ones based on hierarchies of the human. In brief, Whiteness is not an 'identity' so much as a 'standpoint' rooted in structural power.

In line with Sabaratnam's efforts to challenge the white hegemony in International Relations, this article aims to add to this nascent (and long overdue) rise in consciousness regarding the whiteness core to our academic discipline so that we can consider ways to address it.

Framing far right studies

Data collection and analyses are limited to the titles and abstracts of all academic articles written in English in relevant disciplines published between 2016 and 2021 that contained either far right, extreme right, radical right, populist right or right-wing populis*.[6] In total, a sample of 2543 articles was collected through the Web of Science database.[7] This article focuses on titles and abstracts to understand the framing of research in the field; that is, to highlight what is considered worthy of inclusion in the most public-facing elements of our research. This is particularly relevant as priming and framing (McCombs 2014) in titles and abstracts have become increasingly important in contemporary academia as dissemination and citations are widely considered core to 'performance' in this neoliberal setting. It is worth noting that there has been some more critical research published in journals (see Beaman 2018; Seikkula 2019; Sengul 2021),[8] but also in edited collections or monographs (see for example Ashe et al 2021). Yet these remain rare and a cursory analysis of indexes of recent key books in the field highlights that discussions of racism are generally limited to illiberal articulations, while whiteness is more often than not absent (both phenomena will be discussed in the following sections).

Several limitations must be acknowledged here. Some more in-depth qualitative analysis of the content of the articles would certainly bring additional findings, but this is beyond the scope of this article. Furthermore, the fact that a term is mentioned in the title or abstract does not automatically mean that it is discussed appropriately

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[6] Far right was used in 1607 articles, radical right in 918, right-wing populis* in 903, extreme right in 528 and populist right in 105. Data collection was undertaken on the 24th of September 2021.

[7] The sample is limited to articles with titles and/or abstracts in English, but there are no geographical limitations. Disciplines were not restricted but the corpus was 'cleaned' to remove articles which were irrelevant.

[8] This is a non-exhaustive list selected from the corpus and does not do justice to the many scholars working on these issues, but who may not have appeared in this particular search.

or even at all. It should also be noted that some terms can have different meanings to different academics and contexts: for example, 'white' can be used to discuss whiteness and racism, but it can also be used to describe demographics in an apparently apolitical manner. Similarly, certain terms can be used to make a normative point or criticise such normative points (e.g. 'left behind'). It should also be made clear that it is possible to research the far right without discussing, centring or mentioning some of the issues highlighted below. Therefore, the aim here is not to point the finger for omitting certain terms. It is to reflect upon what is considered worthy of priming in the field *as a whole* and, in the process, what may be obscured or invisibilised. Therefore, this article is not about policing far right studies, but about countering the fatalism that far right studies must be colourblind because it has always been so. The current widespread active ignorance and avoidance of both whiteness and racism in far right studies would be equivalent to the vast body of research on gender leaving no space for discussion of sexism, misogyny or patriarchy.

The methodology employed in this article is based on the mixed methods approach developed by Katy Brown (2019, 2021, 2022; Brown and Mondon 2020) which brings together insights and practice from Discourse Theory (DT), Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and Corpus Linguistics (CL). This mix provides a holistic picture combining the more generalising and theoretical insights allowed by DT and the more quantitative elements provided by CL, both tied together with CDS. To guide my analysis, a number of key terms were tested. These were selected through combined inductive and deductive approaches, first with terms core to this project, and then through the terms which were particularly prevalent in the sample.

This first level of CL analysis (Tables 1 and 2) reveals a number of interesting results, which can only be made sense of when coupled with the more insightful tools provided by CDS and DT. Somewhat unexpected is the prevalence of *far right* (which appears in 1215 articles or 47.8%) considering it is probably one of the least well-defined terms in the field, particularly when compared to extreme and radical right or fascism and even populism (see Mondon and Winter 2020a; Mudde 2020; Shroufi 2023 for attempts at defining the far right). This is not to say that there is a definitional consensus on any of these terms, but each builds on extensive academic traditions and literature, something that is yet to become clear with far right. This could be explained partly by the increasing prevalence in far right studies of electoral and opinion data analysis and the little interest paid to context, concepts and history in such research, and therefore, a certain ease in selecting terms which are not only mainstream but also fuzzy enough to avoid engaging in typological and terminological debates. This is supported by the fact that *party/parties* are also particularly prominent in the corpus, denoting the importance of electoral studies in the field, which can at times be at the expense of other forms of politics and therefore exaggerate certain phenomena (such as the rise of far-right parties rather than abstention) or obscure others (such as the mainstreaming of ideas despite poor electoral results) (see amongst others Brown et al. 2021; Krzyżanowski 2020; Wodak 2020; Winter 2019).

The second most prevalent term is *populis** which appears in 1190 articles or 46.8%. This is hardly surprising considering the populist hype (Glynos and Mondon 2016), and reinforces the impression that this term is also chosen for its mainstream

Table 1 Key terms and their occurrence in the full corpus per number of articles

Term	Number of articles with term in chapter or abstract ($n = 2543$)	Percentage
far right	1215	47.8
populis*	1190	46.8
party/parties	1152	45.3
radical right	824	32.4
right-wing populis*	816	32.1
democra*	488	19.2
immigra*	447	17.6
election*	435	17.1
extreme right	390	15.3
nationalis*	360	14.2
rac*	285	11.2
liberal*	268	10.5
Islam* or Muslim*	238	9.4
violen*	184	7.2
racis*	175	6.9
authoritarian*	157	6.2
ethnic*	142	5.6
white*	135	5.3
working class or working -class or worker*	130	5.1
populist right	110	4.3
exclusion*	110	4.3
terroris*	97	3.8
xenophobi*	91	3.6
nativis*	83	3.3
anti-semit* or antisemit*	52	2
sovereign*	49	1.9
supremac*	48	1.9
illiberal*	44	1.7
Race* and racis*	31	1.2
nativis* and rac*	15	0.6
Whiteness	13	0.5
nativis* and racis*	10	0.4
colourblind* or colorblind* or colour-blind* or color-blind*	3	0.1

reach and generally fuzzy definitional character (see Collovald 2004; Hunger and Paxton 2021). However, what is interesting here is that compared to far right, it would take a real effort to ignore the typological and terminological debates surrounding the term that a basic literature review would raise. Considering that the sample is based on titles and abstracts, one would think that the terms used in these settings would require a sound academic knowledge and careful choice so as not to

Table 2 Key terms and their occurrence in the full corpus

Term	Total occurrences	Percent of corpus ($n = 508,250$)
party/parties	4051	0.797049
populis*	3885	0.764388
far right	2027	0.398819
radical right	1512	0.297491
right-wing populis*	1178	0.231776
immigra*	1163	0.228824
democra*	950	0.186916
election*	815	0.160354
Islam* or Muslim*	753	0.148155
rac*	749	0.147368
nationalis*	731	0.143827
extreme right	516	0.101525
liberal*	461	0.090703
violen*	405	0.079685
racis*	393	0.077324
white*	356	0.070044
terroris*	342	0.06729
ethnic*	303	0.059616
authoritarian*	281	0.055288
working class or working -class or worker*	210	0.041318
exclusion*	150	0.029513
nativis*	142	0.027939
xenophobi*	135	0.026562
populist right	134	0.026365
anti-semit* or antisemit*	113	0.022233
sovereign*	88	0.017314
supremac*	83	0.016331
illiberal*	63	0.012395
Whiteness	28	0.005509
colourblind* or colorblind* or colour-blind* or color-blind*	12	0.002361

confuse readers or mislead them. Yet if one considers the issues surrounding populism as a concept and its varied uses and misuses, it is somewhat concerning to see it appear so often unqualified and as a key definer.

Concerns over the use of populism in far right studies are hardly new. Back in 2004, Annie Collovald (2004) noted that the term, increasingly used to describe the Front National, was not only 'blurrier, but also less stigmatising than the ones it is meant to replace, such as fascism or extreme right'. Interestingly, it was also a term that Jean-Marie Le Pen himself had been trying to impose for years

to avoid the stigmatisation attached to other, better suited descriptors. Yet such warnings went unheeded and instead we have witnessed what has been described as a 'populist hype', whereby a 'dominant 'hyped' response to the populist conjuncture by politicians and the media has served to pre-empt the contestation of some troubling norms animating the regimes of 'really existing' liberal democracy and to contest other norms which many consider worthy of defence' (Glynos and Mondon 2016). The concept of populist hype has since been refined, in particular in the work of Bice Maiguashca (2019) who argues that populism as a logic often serves a process of abstraction and deradicalisation of radical politics. In this case, it is fascinating to see that the term is not only prominent in the number of occurrences within the whole corpus, but that it is used in almost half of the articles' titles and/or abstracts.

Obviously, the issue is not so much about populism as a concept or it being used in far right studies, but how and how much it is used and the impact this has on what is primed and what is ignored, what is highlighted and what is obscured. On the one hand, the use of populism, instead of racism for example, diverts attention away from these politics finding their roots in exclusionary ideas, but also links so-called populist politics to 'the people' *qua demos*. This not only gives them a veneer of democratic support, which they generally lack, but also places the blame for the rise of such politics squarely on 'the people', as if politics was simply a matter of bottom-up pressure rather than top-down mediation and agenda setting (see Brown et al 2021; Mondon 2022).

Populist hype has served to divert attention away from the more extreme politics of the far right, and from racism in particular. This is confirmed in the corpus, as terms that either point to the more extreme nature of these parties, movements and ideologies or to their racism in particular are far less prominent: *extreme right*, a key descriptor in the 1990s and early 2000s, appears in 390 articles (15.3%), *violence* in only 184 (7.2%), *authoritarian** in 157 (6.2%), *nativis** in 83 (3.3%) and *supremac** in 48 (1.9%). One could argue that authoritarianism and nativism could be implied by radical right if this term is based on Cas Mudde's definition of the populist radical right (2007), but it would then fail to explain why populism is so much more prevalent than radical right, despite Mudde's warning that radical right is the key descriptor. This may partly be explained by the bandwagon effect in far right studies which has led to many academics flocking to the field in search of citations, without always doing due diligence to the wider literature (Mondon and Winter 2020b).

Finally, and of more direct relevance to this article, *rac** appears in 285 articles (11.2%), *racis** in 175 (6.9%), *white** in 135 (5.3%) and *whiteness* in 13 (0.5%). This could be problematised further through the use of certain terms derived from the rac* stem being used uncritically, without reflecting on race as a social construct, but rather using it as a descriptor, as previously mentioned. Similarly, racis* could be used to discuss only the most egregious, illiberal forms of racism at the expense of the more mundane, liberal and systemic ones (Mondon and Winter 2020a). Most strikingly, the 13 occurrences of whiteness denote not only a lack of reflection on a key norm guiding the field in a systemically white environment, but also the politics which are studied. What seems clear here is that concepts that tend to euphemise the nature of far-right politics are particularly prominent in the sample (populis*,

Table 3 Key terms and their occurrence in the white* corpus per number of articles

Term	Number of articles with term in chapter or abstract (n = 141)	Percentage
white*	141	100
far right	80	56.74
rac*	66	46.81
populis*	52	36.88
supremac*	43	30.50
nationalis*	38	26.95
racis*	34	24.11
Race* and racis*	34	24.11
right-wing populis*	33	23.40
violen*	28	19.86
party/parties	26	18.44
immigra*	24	17.02
liberal*	22	15.60
democra*	20	14.18
extreme right	20	14.18
working class or working -class or worker*	19	13.48
election*	19	13.48
Islam* or Muslim*	17	12.06
radical right	15	10.64
whiteness	14	9.93
ethnic*	12	8.51
authoritarian*	10	7.09
exclusion*	10	7.09
xenophobi*	9	6.38
anti-semit* or antisemit*	6	6.38
terroris*	7	4.96
populist right	7	4.96
nativis*	3	2.13
colourblind* or colorblind* or colour-blind* or color-blind*	2	1.42
illiberal*	1	0.71
nativis* and rac*	1	0.71
sovereign*	0	0

right-wing populis* or immigra*). Those, such as racis*, which are more stigmatising for these politics, but which also potentially point to wider systemic forms of oppression core to white supremacy, are rarely used.

This pattern of euphemisation is almost the exact opposite in our narrowed sample. To understand further the role of both whiteness and colour-blindness in far right studies, a sub-corpus was created based on the articles which mentioned white* in their abstract or title (Tables 3 and 4). The aim here is not to naturalise whiteness

Table 4 Key terms and their occurrence in the white* corpus

Term	Total occurrences	Percent of corpus ($n = 24{,}730$)
white*	321	1.298019
rac*	201	0.812778
far right	154	0.622725
populis*	108	0.436717
racis*	84	0.339668
supremac*	71	0.287101
party/parties	68	0.274970
nationalis*	62	0.250708
Islam* or Muslim*	57	0.230489
immigra*	51	0.206227
right-wing populis*	50	0.202184
violen*	46	0.186009
working class or working -class or worker*	44	0.177922
election*	34	0.137485
extreme right	30	0.121310
liberal*	29	0.117266
Whiteness	28	0.113223
democra*	23	0.093004
terroris*	23	0.093004
ethnic*	22	0.088961
authoritarian*	20	0.080873
radical right	17	0.068742
xenophobi*	16	0.064699
anti-semit* or antisemit*	16	0.064699
exclusion*	11	0.044480
populist right	8	0.032349
colourblind* or colorblind* or colour-blind* or color-blind*	5	0.020218
nativis*	4	0.016175
illiberal*	1	0.004044

as a concept, but to highlight the lack of engagement with or even acknowledgement of it in the field compared to other terms which tend to euphemise systemic modes of oppression or exceptionalise far-right politics. As Mills (1997, p. 127) noted, 'whiteness is not a color at all, but a set of power relations'; it is a social, political and historical construct. Once a cleaning process was performed, there remained 321 occurrences of white* in 129 articles.[9] Through this a clear correlation between the use of white* and the focus on racism appear.

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[9] In the clean white* corpus, occurrences such as 'White House', 'white paper' or last names such as White or Whiteley were removed. Whitewash* was also removed when it was not used to refer to whiteness.

It is particularly interesting to note that white* is the most used when the entire corpus is taken into account, pointing to the fact that its use is generally a conscious decision to centre it as a key term to shape the study. Furthermore, terms generally associated with the racist and extreme nature of far-right politics tend to be more prominent in the white* corpus with rac* appearing 2nd in the full white* corpus (compared to 10th in the full corpus), racis* 5th (compared to 15th) and supremac* 6th (compared to 26th). Potentially euphemistic terms such as populis* (4th vs 2nd), right-wing populis* (11th vs 5th), immigra* (10th vs 6th), ethnic* (20th vs 18th) or nativis* (27th vs 22nd) were used less in comparison. The particularly low use of nativis* is interesting here as it could imply that the term is generally not thought of as adding any level of precision when other terms such as racis* are used.

The use of stronger, more stigmatising (albeit also potentially more precise) terms in the white* corpus does not necessarily mean that the approach in these articles is reflective and automatically deals with systemic racism. In fact, many of these articles focus on the more illiberal articulations of racism, which can at times serve, consciously or not, to conceal the more liberal ones, which are not only more mundane but core to current political structures of oppression (see Mondon and Winter 2020a). Yet they denote an engagement with concepts often thought of as core to these politics and yet one that is surprisingly rare in the field. Particularly striking, out of 141 articles mentioning *white**, only seven (16 occurrences) were published in dedicated political science and international relations journals, with another three (three occurrences) published in journals straddling different disciplines but judged closest to politics and international relations (*Citizenship Studies*, *Third World Quarterly* and *Terrorism and Political Violence*) – although as was discussed above, international relations has recently proven far more willing to engage with these issues. Out of these seven articles, one mentions 'white identity', 'white majority' and 'white working-class voters' in uncritical positive terms, and none mention 'whiteness'. This is hardly surprising as the term appeared in only 13 articles in the whole sample, with 15 out of the 29 occurrences found in only two articles' titles and abstracts. When the term appeared, it was generally clear in the context that it was taken in a critical manner and aimed to highlight more systemic patterns of racial, systemic oppression.

White methods, methodological whiteness and far right studies

Building on the theories discussed in the first section and the data outlined in the second, the absence as presence of race and racism as systemic and structural forces is particularly illuminating in far right studies. Indeed, many scholars of the far right would be very aware of racism as a key object of their research and yet refrain from using the term and concept, preferring instead euphemising substitutes. This is despite the fact that racism as a concept has been far better developed theoretically and conceptually than others such as nativism for example (see Newth 2021). This does not mean that there is a universal agreement on how racism should be defined or used as a concept, or that it is not a contested term in both terminology and practice. But neither is populism, for example, which, despite being a highly contested

term, is often used carelessly, without any due diligence to the terminological or conceptual debates, or even providing a definition (see Hunger and Paxton 2021). This then begs the question: why do far right studies scholars feel comfortable using populism or nativism in their research, often without paying much attention to their definition and despite them being contested terms, while they refuse to use racism?

This could point to what Bonilla-Silva (2006) has called the 'sincere fictions' people create to avoid thinking about racism as something systemic that they benefit from and perpetuate.[10] Systemic and structural forms of racism are denied and whitewashed through a number of mechanisms such as cultural racism, naturalisation, abstract liberalism and the minimisation of racism (Bonilla-Silva 2006). To give but a few examples of how colourblind racism is deployed in the field of far right studies, cultural racism can be witnessed in the naturalisation of racist procedures and politics against 'Islamist terrorism', regardless of the impact on racialised communities. Naturalisation can be witnessed in the way the 'left-behind' and 'white working class' are reified as categories despite little evidence supporting this racialising approach, or that working-class white people prioritise their racial identity over others such as class (see Bhambra 2017; Mondon and Winter 2018). Abstract liberalism plays a key role in the field whereby academics cannot possibly perpetuate racist structures since they position themselves against the far right. It is assumed instead that they stand on the side of liberal knowledge and science, widely and uncritically accepted as a bulwark against racism and the far right in and of itself, and regardless of any historical understanding of the role played by liberalism in the perpetuation of racism (see Losurdo 2006; Mondon and Winter 2020a). Finally, the minimisation of racism can be witnessed through its euphemisation: is it really racism or is it something else (e.g. nativism, nationalism, xenophobia, cultural grievances, populism)? As explored by Mandisi Majavu (2021) in the South African context, 'colour-blind ideologies […] become a way to avoid talking about racial justice'.

This points to what George Lipsitz (2006: vii) has termed 'a possessive investment in whiteness', stressing that while 'this whiteness is, of course, a delusion, a scientific and cultural fiction [it is] however, a social fact, an identity created and continued with all-too-real consequences for the distribution of wealth, prestige and opportunity'. Failing to recognise this investment in whiteness can only lead to a failure to recognise the benefits drawn from perpetuating myths about racism only really existing in its illiberal articulations. Consequently, research on the far right which fails to account for the evolution of racism or for the fuzzy and porous borders between the extreme and mainstream serves to reinforce myths about a post-racial society and therefore hegemony (see Lentin 2020 and Goldberg 2016). As Roland Barthes (2009, p. 168) noted, 'myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal'. Through a process of ex-nomination, whiteness becomes an unquestioned, invisible norm despite being

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[10] It is somewhat akin to what Peggy McIntosh (1988) referred to in her definition of privilege and how 'Whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege'.

core to the power structures currently in place, even though they are also central to far-right politics. As such, academia, and far right studies, reinforce this hegemonic status by lending credibility to the normality of whiteness through its absence in the discussion of (far-right) politics. Without centring hegemonic norms such as whiteness and racism and instead invisibilising them, far right studies exceptionalises the more extreme far right and racism and places them outside *our* good norm. As such, it reinforces the idea that the most extreme far-right politics and racism are an aberration rather than tightly linked to the history and present of liberal democracies. This is not to say that liberal democracies must necessarily have whiteness and racism at their core, but simply that they have thus far, and that more often than not, liberalism has not acted as a bulwark but as an enabler, or at best a passive onlooker (see Losurdo 2006).

Conclusion: a (re)turn to self-critique and self-reflection as core to academic practice

Before turning to our conclusion, it could be argued that not all far-right politics are white or positioned within the global North, and that we should move the field beyond a Eurocentric approach that focuses predominantly on Europe and the US. While it is true that movements, parties and politics across the globe are espousing increasingly reactionary politics, there is a risk to adopting a colourblind approach to far right studies in an effort to decolonise the field. Whiteness remains a cornerstone in such politics historically and continues to operate as a key mechanic in the division of power and oppression. As such it should not be let off the hook, as this would in fact whitewash current colonial practices and legacies. As Mills (1997, p. 1) highlighted: 'White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today'.

Based on this assumption, and focusing on articles published in peer-reviewed journals, often considered rightly or wrongly as the cutting-edge of research, this article follows the simple and obvious belief and plea voiced by Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008, p. 5): 'social science is at its best when it is self-critical and relentlessly self-correcting'. Therefore, this article has revealed the presence of whiteness and systemic racism in far right studies through its absence. An analysis of publications within this field which focuses directly on the movements most closely associated with such politics and identity demonstrates that these are generally invisibilised and euphemised through the use of less appropriate and well-defined terms such as populism. As already stated, the aim is not to police far right studies, nor is it to argue that some terms should be used over others or in any particular form or order.

The aim is to highlight a phenomenon which has not only been discussed for a very long time in academia, but has also become particularly prominent and somewhat mainstream in recent years: systemic racism continues to shape political structures and that racism can take more mundane and indeed liberal articulations which are core to structural oppression. This does mean that far right studies should not cover the more illiberal forms of the politics these parties and movements deploy and represent, but that these should be studied with an

understanding of and engagement with wider political structures and power relationships. As Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi (2008, p. 7) highlighted,

> The real issue is the way a society responds to an individual's racial identification. The question has more to do with society itself, not the innate makeup of individuals. Racial identity is about shared social status, not shared individual characteristics. Race is not about an individual's skin color. Race is about an individual's relationship to other people within the society. While racial identification may be internalized and appear to be the result of self-designation, it is, in fact, a result of the merging of self-imposed choices within an externally imposed context. When we forget or make slight of this point, social science becomes the justification for racial stratification.

In spaces and fields such as far right studies which remain predominantly white for both hegemonic and more understandable reasons, it is essential for researchers to engage with their positionality and the norms that can invisibilise certain forms of oppression (Sengul 2023). This does not mean that whiteness should be centred, but that it should be acknowledged as a hegemonic construction which underpins not just far-right politics but the broader study of the far right. The issue is thus not that scholars researching the far right, in political science in particular, do not agree on the exact way to use or define the concepts of whiteness or racism, or that they feel that other terms may be more appropriate, but that they simply refuse to engage with them, even in an effort to explain why they are or are not useful or preferable. For Mills (1997, p. 1), 'it reflects the fact that standard textbooks and courses have for the most part been written and designed by whites, who take their racial privilege so much for granted that they do not even see it as *political*, as a form of domination'. That this has remained a norm in far right studies is particularly damning at a time when authoritarian far-right movements are on the rise, but also as movements such as Black Lives Matter and urgent action in the fight against climate change (see Malm et al. 2021) demand serious reflection upon systemic racist practices. There is therefore a pressing need for academics in the field, and gatekeepers in particular, to reflect on these issues, turn to a more open acceptance of mistakes and shortcomings, challenge epistemic injustice (Bacevic 2021), learn from and repair them and take seriously our pursuit of knowledge, even, and especially, when said knowledge challenges our worldviews and norms.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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