Countering Radical-Right Narratives

Learners Pack

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Contents

1. <u>Introduction</u>
a) About this Educational Pack

This resource has been designed to inspire KS5 students engaged in creative arts projects that counter radical-right narratives. It is hoped that over the course of the project students will come to terms with their own attitudes and prejudices as well as learn ways to counter prejudicial language and behaviour in everyday settings. It will also give you a chance to realise some of the consequences, risks and impacts that getting involved in radical-right politics can incur.

b) Aims of the Pack

The first aim of this educational pack is to help you understand what we mean by the Radical-Right, its history, beliefs, activities and drivers. The second aim of the pack is to help you explore your own attitudes and prejudices, see how they might overlap with these groups, and therefore overcome them. The third – and most important - aim of this educational pack is to give you an idea of different scenarios that could be used as part of your creative arts project. This will be referred to throughout the pack. However, looking at the 'What Possible Scenarios could be used for a Creative Arts Project?' section will give you a better idea of where your focus should lie.

c) Ground Rules: Establishing a Safe Space for Discussion

Before looking through the below material, it is important that you and your educator establish ground rules when exploring the themes, ideologies and online content associated with the radical-right. This is because discussions might provoke strong feelings, emotions or memories of previous experiences. Students should therefore work with teachers to establish a set of rules that will foster openness, positive dialogue and a safe space where feelings can be aired, but also to foster an environment where prejudicial views are not left unchallenged.

An example of such ground rules could be as follows:

- Take Responsibility;
- Be Open;
- Respect Others;
- Agree to Confidentiality;
- Disagree Constructively.

<u>N.B:</u> Whilst researching radical-right groups that might go into your final project, it is important to be aware of the risks associated with accessing extremist content online. Firstly, try to set yourself clear, identifiable rationales for accessing and reproducing extremist content. Moreover, keep your research to classroom time only. Finally, do not hesitate to discuss any content that you find challenging with your educator or a trusted adult.

2. <u>What is the Radical-Right?</u>
a) <u>What do we mean by the Radical-Right?</u>

The phrase 'Radical-Right' is a political term used to describe a particular form of extremism clustered around certain ideological features. The key parts of this extremist ideology we face in day-to-day situations include:

- Racism – the belief in the superiority or inferiority of specific people groups based on their skin colour, ethnicity, or religion.
- Ethnocentrism - the belief in the superiority of the social or cultural group.
- Xenophobia – a deep-rooted fear or hostility towards foreigners.
- Anti-Semitism – a deep-rooted hatred or hostility towards adherents to Judaism or people of Jewish background or heritage.
- Islamophobia - a deep-rooted fear of or hostility towards Muslims or Islam.

b) <u>What is the history of the UK Radical-Right?</u>

Information Sheet 2:

The Radical-Right and their policies do not appear out of thin air; rather they are reactions to events and trends in society, culture, politics and economy among many other things. The emergence of British fascism directly followed the First World War (1914-1918). The impact of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, where the victors, particularly France, placed sizeable demands for reparations on Germany contributed to the rise of Nazism in Germany. In Britain, the First World War led to a social crisis of sorts; the cross-class spirit of the trenches faded and the liberal patina of pre-War British governments was actively re-evaluated by citizens. The period between the First and Second World War in Britain (1918-1940) saw the rise of fascist figures in Britain, who attempted to capitalise on the various crises in Britain to their advantage, with a view to replicating Mussolini's 'March on Rome' in 1922, where his radical-right party had taken power. The main crises during the interwar period included the General Strike in 1925, and the domestic radical-right within Britain allied themselves with the Government and attempted to act as official Government 'stewards' to break strike action. The next crisis, which was global, was the Great Depression in 1929.

The Great Depression led to mass unemployment among many other economic difficulties, and radical-rioght proclaimed to hold the radical solutions needed by Britain. The crisis had a more profound effect on German society, and contributed to the rise in popularity and ultimate capture of power by Hitler and the Nazis in Germany. German re-armament and expansion in Austria and Czechoslovakia in the late 1930s would lead to increasing pressure on the British government to act, however their policy of appeasement led to stubborn resistance to stop Hitler's perhaps inevitable further expansion. Radical-Rightists were the arch-appeasers, but for different reasons than the Government. They resisted war with Germany due to both their own policies of isolation as well as their ideological affinity with National Socialism, not to mention the previous financial support Hitler had offered Mosley and the BUF. After Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, Britain was forced into war on the continent. The British government feared sedition from within and interned the vast majority of revolutionary Radical-Rightists under Defence Regulations 18(a) and 18(b), including Mosley and high-ranking BUF officials. WWII led to the collapse of interwar British fascism, however, immediately after the war, the same faces would re-emerge in a radically different world.

The post-war world was dominated by the Cold War (the stand-off between the two global superpowers; USA and the Soviet Union) which lasted from 1945 right up until the Berlin wall fell in 1989. The photographs of pile upon pile of skeletal corpses in Nazi-run concentration camps began to circulate and without doubt, radical-right thereafter became tainted with the Holocaust and the worst excesses of Nazism. Britain was now faced with a harsh reality; its infrastructure had been severely depleted by German bombing, it was financially indebted to the United States and the fall of its Empire, in the new bipolar world, was really only a matter of time. The main 'game changer' in terms of radical-right ideology was the influx of 'coloured' immigration from the Caribbean, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh who were invited by the Labour government to work on re-building Britain.

Radical-rightists capitalised on the ethnic tension that now existed, mostly in poor, urban communities, something which would be the mainstay of the post-war British Radical-Right right up until the present day. As nations under the control of British Imperial authorities gradually began to gain independence beginning with India in 1947 and ending in 1998 when Hong Kong became a Chinese territory, the decline of the British Empire would also be an important area of activism for British fascists who still believed in Britain's 'imperial mission' which was still based on 19th century ideas of white racial superiority. Another avenue for activism was Holocaust denial; the belief that 6 million Jews were not systematically murdered in Nazi concentration camps. The post-war Radical-Right was at its height in the 1970s during times of economic hardship and high inflation. This ascendancy, however, began to change at the time of Britain's first female Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, coming to power. Her more rightward stance on immigration policy and historical colonialism led to a collapse in the National Front vote, a process which was to be made irreversible by the Falklands War in 1982 and Thatcher's sweeping re-election in 1983.

Economic hardship, which featured heavily in the 1970s, continued to dominate in the decade to come, however. Political tensions also continued to boil between the Conservative Party and the Labour Movement, typified by the 1984 Miners' Strikes. The BNP, founded in 1982, struggled to find a place in the harsh political climate, and focused much of its attention on Holocaust denial and stirring up racial tension. Its mild successes in the 1990s are perhaps better explained in terms of grass roots politics; however they were set within a context of European Integration (highlighted by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty) and the economic turmoil experienced by John Major's government (demonstrated by Black Wednesday). 1997 was another landmark in British politics when Tony Blair became the first Labour Prime Minister to win an electoral majority since 1979. The Labour Government from 1997-2010 would be when the BNP and Radical-Right would be at its, electorally, most successful. Globalisation, increasing immigration, Islamist-inspired terrorism, European integration, the 2007 financial crisis as well as a growing alienation within working-class communities would all contribute to the success of the BNP. The EDL, which would emerge in 2009 would capitalise on much the same issues, but particularly the fear of Islamist-inspired terrorism.

Following the decline of the BNP (which effectively began after the 2010 general election) and EDL (following Yaxley-Lennon's resignation in October 2013), the Radical-Right, as of 2018, is fragmented into small organisations and numerically tiny. Whilst the electoral significance of the Radical-Right has all but disappeared for now, the threat of violence (and even terrorism) from Radical-Right groups and individuals has certainly not dissipated.

c) <u>What activities are the Radical-Right engaged in?</u>

The contemporary Radical-Right is associated with three areas of activity or activism:

1. Fighting Elections – though not as electorally popular of recent, one activity that the Radical-Right has been engaged in is fighting elections. Recent estimates suggest that they are at the fringes of politics – with the UK Radical-Right only fielding 108 candidates at the 2015 General Election. Such a form of activism is low-risk – with only minor scuffles and incidents reported as a result of these groups being involved in electoral contests.

2. 'Feet on the Street' – a more recent transition has been towards demonstrations, marches and protests. Key organisations on the UK Radical-Right (such as Britain First, the English Defence League, Northern 'Infidels' and National Action) typically use such activities to bolster their support bases and spread their message. Such a form of activism is medium to high risk – with arrests and violence a chief consequence that usually results from clashes with police and counter protestors.

3. Terrorism – the third and most dangerous form of activism associated with the Radical-Right is terrorism. Many such attacks are intercepted by police and counter-terrorism officials before they can be perpetrated (under the Governments PREVENT programme) but a sizeable number do slip though the net. Examples of this include: David Copeland, Pavlo Lapshyn and Thomas Mair. Such forms of activism are the highest risk of the three listed here and involve large fatalities – resulting in life sentences for the perpetrators, the victims' families and significant fatalities.

d) <u>What beliefs are associated with Radical-Right groups?</u>

The set of belief systems associated with the contemporary Radical-Right are the following:

1. Neo-Nazism - A form of fascist ideology based on the ideas of Adolf Hitler and other inter-war Nazis. Unlike the more populist Radical-Right, neo-Nazis advocate a more violent form of politics outside the normal democratic process. Contemporary groups that subscribe to this ideology include: the National Front, National Action, and the British Movement.

2. Counter-Jihadism – This a term typically used to refer to an international movement or political current that is fundamentally opposed to any public expressions of Islam, such as Mosques, Muslim dress and Muslim Cultural

Centres. Contemporary groups that subscribe to this ideology include: Britain First, the English Defence League and Liberty GB.

3. Racial Nationalism – This term is typically used to refer to groups that believe in ideas around racial purity of the nation and that only the racial 'in-group' should be counted as the 'people'. Contemporary groups that subscribe to this ideology include: the British National Party, the British Democratic Party and the Racial Volunteer Force.

3. Where does support for the Radical-Right come from?

a) What different explanations are there of Radical-Right support?

The most common explanation put forward for Radical-Right support is to suggest that such groups become more popular during a time of economic or political crisis. In fact, however, the picture for why people support Radical-Right parties is much more complex than this. We can therefore put forward three key theories or explanations why people support the Radical-Right:

1. 'People Getting Left Behind' – this explanation suggests that individuals who support Radical-Right parties have been 'left behind' by modern developments, such as globalisation, education and the information economy. Unable to keep up, they become disenchanted with their individual life chances, the direction of societal developments and the political system in general.

2. 'Different Races Competing for Scarce Resources' – this explanation suggests that individuals support Radical-Right parties as a 'defensive' response to mass migration. This explanation suggests that voters vote for Radical-Right parties in order to further their own economic self-interest.

3. 'A Radical-Right Vote is a Protest Vote' – this explanation suggests that individuals support Radical-Right parties not because of immigrants but because of dissatisfaction with politics in general. Those who vote for a Radical-Right party do so therefore not because they believe in the party they're voting for, but due to their dissatisfaction with politics as it is.

b) What 'push' and 'pull' factors drive Radical-Right activism?

Voting for a Radical-Right party is very different from getting involved in seeking political office or joining a Radical-Right street protest movement. The easiest way to explain why someone becomes involved in a Radical-Right organisation can be reduced to push factors on the one hand (i.e. factors outside a certain individual's control that drive them into becoming active) and pull factors on the other (i.e. personal factors that might have to do with the person's family or psychology).

Push factors include: 'social, political and economic grievances; a sense of injustice and discrimination; personal crisis and traged[y]; frustration; alienation; searching for

answers to the meaning of life; an identity crisis; social exclusion; alienation; marginalisation; disappointment with democratic processes; polarisation, etc.'[1]

Pull factors could include: 'a personal quest, a sense of belonging to a cause, ideology or social network; power and control; a sense of loyalty and commitment; a sense of excitement and adventure; a romanticised view of [a specific] ideology and cause; [as well as the] the possibility of heroism, personal redemption, etc.'[2]

c) How misconceptions can lead to prejudice?

Misconceptions about different people groups are often spread by our lack of contact or interaction with them. People often have a pure view of those who are different to them without looking beyond the stereotype and to the person underneath. This can often foster negative feelings of hatred and hostility towards what we might consider a social outgroup and when acted upon (either through our actions or verbally) can have devastating effects – both on victims and the lives of aggressors.

Social Psychologist, Gordon Allport, wrote nearly sixty years ago about the factors in each person's upbringing that foster this in-group/out-group prejudice.[3] In order to overcome such bias, he suggested that increased contact with those of different racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds is an important factor in reducing levels of fear, anxiety and hostility. It also helps to build relationships with those who are of a different religious or ethnic background than us.

In order to address prejudice, Allport set about spelling out the basis for meaningful interaction between different social groups. These are as follows:

1. Equal status between participating groups;

2. Sharing of common goals when these groups come together;

3. Proper co-operation between groups when they do come together;

4. Such activities need to be backed by authorities, the law and customs of the land in which it is taking place.[4]

4. Who Get Involved in the Radical-Right?
a) What people groups get involved in Radical-Right activities?

Unfortunately, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' explanation for why people get involved in Radical-Right groups. What leads individuals into activism is usually highly specific

[1] Ranstrop, M. (04/01/2016) 'The Root Causes of Violent Extremism'. RAN Issue Paper. Hyperlink: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf
[2] Ibid.
[3] Allport, G.W. (1954) *The Nature of Prejudice.* Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
[4] Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2005). 'Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis: Its history and influence'. In: J. F. Dovidio, P. Click, & L. A. Rudman (eds.) *On the nature of prejudice: Fifty years after Allport.* Maiden, MA: Blackwell. PP. 262-277.

and might depend on their upbringing, social background and belief system. There are however overarching factors which are common to all Radical-Right activists:

1. Age – traditionally, activists from the Radical-Right tend to be older individuals with more fixed ideological views. There are however exceptions to this: a study of the Radical-Right group, the English Defence League, found that 74% of activists were under the age of 35.[5]

2. Gender – activists from Radical-Right groups tend to be male. In the same study previously mentioned, 73% of activists were men. This might have to do with the often violent and aggressive agenda that these groups subscribe to.

3. Ethnicity – activists from Radical-Right groups tend to be unsurprisingly white. There are examples of activists (especially in the Counter-Jihad groups listed above) who are from Sikh, Hindu or even Muslim backgrounds. This is however exceptional.

4. Education – people that support Radical-Right groups tend to be from low educational backgrounds – usually with few 16+ qualifications.

5. Employment Status – Radical-Right activists again usually hail from lower social and economic groups. Unskilled or unemployed people tend to be attracted.

b) <u>What happens in a person's life to draw them into this kind of activism?</u>

As mentioned above, there are many push and pull factors that draw people into joining Radical-Right groups. We can think of a number of vulnerabilities that might help contextualise such factors, for example:

- A lack of a strong, stable and safe home environment (e.g. a history of foster care, domestic abuse or family breakdown);
- Traumatic child or adulthood experiences (e.g. experiences of domestic violence, multiple bereavement, or sexual abuse);
- Weak social ties (e.g. social isolation through a lack of friends, family or other meaningful relationships preceding or resulting from activism);
- A history of mental ill-health, drug addiction, imprisonment or chronic unemployment.

A case in point here was the conviction of a 22-year old young man, Nicky Reilly, in January 2009 (Edwards et al 23rd May 2008).[6] He was jailed for a minimum of 18 years after launching a failed nail bomb attack on a restaurant in Devon in May 2008 (*BBC*

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[5] Pilkington, H. (2016) *Loud and Proud: Passion and Politics in the English Defence League.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

[6] Edwards, R., Savill, R., and Allen, N. (23rd May 2008) 'Exeter explosion: Suspect 'brainwashed' by Muslim extremists.' *The Daily Telegraph.* Date Accessed: 14/03/2017. Hyperlink: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/2014358/Exeter-bomb-Nicky-Reilly-white-Muslim-convert-is-named-as-suspect-in-Giraffe-restaurant-explosion.html.

News 30th January 2009).[7] Suffering from a history of mental ill-health and self-harm, Reilly had been radicalised using the internet and encouraged by men based in Pakistan to commit the attack (ibid).[8] Here we can see a fairly extreme example how a vulnerability (e.g. mental ill-health) can be utilised by a 'person of influence' (here a person online) in order to resolve a particular grievance (e.g. Western Foreign Policy in the Middle East).

a) <u>What role do parents play?</u>

There is a small (but not overwhelming) set of evidence to suggests that family histories of Radical-Right voting and activism lead to further involvement by more junior members of a household (Nayak 1999; Simi and Futrell 2010).[9] In the studies mentioned above on EDL activism, Busher (2015: 42) notes that three of the activists he met started by going to EDL events with their parents while Pilkington (2016: 78) suggests that six of the activists she interviewed either had parents playing senior roles in the EDL or had a history of family members voting for or being a member of another prominent Radical-Right organisation (such as the British National Party or National Front). Relatedly, friendships and other social ties play a stronger influence in Radical-Right activism; it seems the social circles in which people move in are what play a vital role in people hearing about and accessing a group as well as being important in terms of binding a group together.

It is not hard to see why the role of family or friends can be important in an individual's political activity. As one political scientist puts it (Evans 2004: 45-46), 'as an individual grows up, they receive a set of values and beliefs or interests which enable them to function within their social group and in society more generally...For the most part, the influences later in life build upon the foundations laid in the formative years...' [10] This suggests that the influence of family or 'person of influence' is important – even if there is little evidence to suggest that it is a widespread phenomenon amongst the Radical-Right.

A case in point here was the conviction of County Durham teenager, Nicky Davison, in May 2010 for helping his Dad administer the website of UK-based extreme right para-military group, the Aryan Strike Force. Submitting his defence at his trial, 19-year-old Davison suggested that he had joined the group to please his racist father (BBC 30th April 2010).[11] The consequences of the teenager not standing up to his Dad were

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[7] *BBC News* (30th January 2009) 'Nail-bomber given life sentence.' Date Accessed: 14/03/2017. Hyperlink: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7859887.stm.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Nayak, A. (1999) '"Pale Warriors": skinhead culture and the embodiment of white masculinities' In: A. Brah, M.J. Hickman and M. Mac an Ghaill (eds.) *Thinking Identities: Ethnicity, Racism and Culture.* Basingstoke: Palgrave. PP.141-162.
Simi, P. and Futrell, R. (2010) *American Swastika: Inside the White Power Movement's Hidden Spaces of Hate.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

[10] Evans, J.A.J. (2004) *Voters and Voting: An Introduction*. London: Sage Publications.

[11] *BBC News* (30th April 2010) 'County Durham teenager convicted of terror plot'. Hyperlink: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/wear/8653722.stm. Date Accessed: 10/03/17.

however stark – destroying the army career that he had hoped for since childhood (Wainwright 14th May 2010).[12]

c) <u>What are the risks of getting involved?</u>

While getting involved in extremist organisation might look 'cool' or 'edgy', there are many negative risks, impacts and consequences associated with such a form of activism. These include:

- Potential Imprisonment associated with being involved in demonstrations, rallies and protests;
- Loss of employment as a result of association with a Radical-Right organisation;
- Expulsion from education again as a result of association with a Radical-Right organisation;
- And, rejection by friends, families and colleagues.

An example from Hilary Pilkington's (2016: 84-85) study of the first example above is the story of Jack who was sentenced for violent disorder at an EDL demonstration. Despite Jack not being directly involved in fighting counter-demonstrators, his simple presence amidst the crowd of people perpetrating the offence was enough for him to be sentenced to three years in prison. In the UK, you can be convicted of violent disorder simply if it is proven that more than three people are involved in a particular incident – with your actions inciting others to violence. Therefore an incident that just started as an innocent piece of 'banter' between EDL demonstrators and counter-demonstrators became incriminating – highlighting how just being present at one of these rallies can result in a criminal conviction.

5. <u>What Possible Scenarios could be used for a Creative Arts Project?</u>
a) <u>What are the aims of such a Creative Arts Project?</u>

Scenarios for a Creative Arts Project that is focused on countering the Radical-Right are potentially limitless but here are a selection of examples to get the groups started:

- A project tracking an individual's journey into a Radical-Right street protest movement – their process of entry, radicalisation, and exit;
- A project tracking a teenager's journey of saying 'no' to an overbearing parent, friend or 'person of influence' who might be encouraging to join one of these groups;
- A project looking at the impact of activities by Radical-Right groups on victims within the Muslim, Jewish or non-white population;
- A project exploring the emotions and feelings associated with extremism, and how they can be challenged;
- A project challenging one of the ideas associated with the Radical-Right (e.g. racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and xenophobia);

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[12] Wainwright, M. (14th May 2010) 'Neo-Nazi Ian Davison jailed for 10 years for making chemical weapon.' *The Guardian.* Hyperlink: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/may/14/neo-nazi-ian-davison-jailed-chemical-weapon. Date Accessed: 10/03/17.

- A project exploring the personal impact of being active within a Radical-Right group.

b) <u>What formats might be appropriate for conveying such scenarios?</u>

As you already know, Creative Arts Projects come in many forms, as well as different shapes and sizes. Depending on resources available, you may wish to convey their given scenario in one of the below mediums:

- A curated set of paintings conveying a story or a set of meanings behind a particular set of 'Radical-Right' words and their societal effects;
- A filmed audio-visual piece involving members of your group as actors – acting out different scenarios and using a narrator to deliver a core message to the audience;
- A live piece of theatre – again acting out different scenarios and using crowd participation to create an interactive experience;
- A piece of music that captures the emotional and personal aspects of radicalisation and de-radicalisation;
- A curated set of pictures conveying the costs, consequences and risks associated with Radical-Right activism;
- A piece of interpretive dance set to music that tell a story of a teenager rejecting a person of influences insistence that they join a Radical-Right group.

c) <u>What tools can our groups use to develop our ideas?</u>

Creative Arts Projects can be fun, fulfilling and impactful but can be quite challenging. In order to help you and your team, it be helpful to try out the following techniques:

- Regular mind-mapping sessions with project members, peers and educators;
- Creating a plan of action that is regularly reviewed and monitored by an educator;
- Chances to rehearse and receive feedback by educators and peers;
- Chances to explore and read relevant material about the topic that might open up new avenues.

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