



**HAL**  
open science

# Religion and Nationalism in Contemporary Europe: Towards a Renewed Syncretism?

Pascal-Yan Sayegh

► **To cite this version:**

Pascal-Yan Sayegh. Religion and Nationalism in Contemporary Europe: Towards a Renewed Syncretism?. Nordic Political Science Association (NoPSA) - Workshop: Religion and nationalism: meeting points, conflicts and challenges, Aug 2011, Vaasa, Finland. halshs-00617615

**HAL Id: halshs-00617615**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00617615>**

Submitted on 29 Aug 2011

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Pascal Yan Sayegh, PhD  
Université de Lyon  
yansayegh@ymail.com

## NOPSA 2011

**Workshop:** Religion and nationalism: meeting points, conflicts and challenges

Working Paper

PLEASE DO NOT QUOTE WITHOUT PERMISSION

# Religion and Nationalism in Contemporary Europe: Towards a Renewed Syncretism?

**Abstract:** In the past decades, we have witnessed the global re-emergence of the political meaning of both nationalism and religion. This paper explores contemporary fragments of this trend across three European countries: Britain, France and Poland. The discursive occurrences brought into the analysis are taken from the state-centred political arenas as well as more diffused or marginal sociological elements. While the approach is primarily set in the perspective of nationalism studies, the final aim of the paper is to nourish the reflection on the negotiations of political and social significations which transpire through the occurrences presented in the analysis. To what extent are religious discourses inherent to the resurgence of nationalist discourses and social practices? Reversely, are nationalistic phenomena inherently religious in nature, hence favourable to combinations between religious and nationalist discursive elements? Are the contemporary forms presented in this paper tokens of a new (or renewed) syncretism of a would-be dominant reactionary grid of social significations?

## Introduction: Relations (Manner and Matter)

In *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm describes the three major innovations which were essential to the establishment of the French Third Republic in the following words:

“The first was the development of a secular equivalent of the church – primary education, imbued with revolutionary and republican principles and content, and conducted by the secular equivalent of priesthood – or perhaps, given their poverty, the friars – the *instituteurs*. [...] The second was the invention of public ceremonies. [...] The third was the mass production of public monuments.”<sup>1</sup>

The novelty here is the *agencement*, the assemblage of these parts into a different, new

---

<sup>1</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914”, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 263-307, pp.271-272.

cultural composition: the national state.<sup>2</sup> The three particular parts – an order, a set of ceremonies and monuments – have always been parts of the field of religion, but of politics as well. In the same pages, this leads Hobsbawm to define the national state as the “national church” and nationalism as a “new secular religion.”

Interrogating the relationship between religion and nationalism ultimately means interrogating the relationship between culture and politics, or rather what is – in the modernist mindset – considered as the separate fields of culture and politics. Interrogating this relationship is also the predicament in the study of nationalism. The importance of the political (civic, Western) aspect of nationalism and the cultural (ethnic, Eastern) can be hotly debated, but this tension is itself a representation of nationalism. The discourse of nationalism thus remains an ambivalent and nationalism operates as a rather inclusive ideology.<sup>3</sup> In short, nationalism already posits the relation between culture and politics as fundamental for its (re)production and its critique. As the opening quote from Hobsbawm suggests, there is an established and perhaps too obvious connection between religion and nationalism.<sup>4</sup> The quasi-religious discourse in Renan’s “What is nation?” (the notion of sacrifice e.g.) shows how nationalist myths are closely related to and perhaps of the same nature as religious myths.<sup>5</sup> The fact this relation is too obvious may be part of the reason why this issue is seldom addressed.<sup>6</sup>

This suggests we consider nationalism as a form of nation centred-religion, and in a mirrored perspective, to consider religion as a form of ideology. Within the equation of the relation between nationalism and religion, there operates a double relation, a cultural process: that which distinguishes (the sacred objects, the content, the signified) and that which assimilates

---

<sup>2</sup> The term *assemblage* is the accepted translation of the French word *agencement* (which relates to agency) in reference to Gilles Deleuze. The Deleuzian concept of *agencement* assigns novelty the progress of what composes these assemblages rather than simply to the relation between the composing parts. See e.g. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*.

<sup>4</sup> Other leading scholars in the field of nationalism have drawn connections between religion and nationalism. Benedict Anderson for instance places nationalism on the same level as the “great religiously imagined communities”, in *Imagined Communities*, Verso, 1983, p. 12. In a different tradition, the works of John Armstrong focus on the formation of ethnic and national ties within the religious framework of Christianity or Islam. See e.g. *Nations before Nationalism*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1982.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Renan, “Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?” Conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882”, e-text, Bibliothèque Municipale de Lisieux, 1997, <<http://www.bmlisieux.com/archives/nation01.htm>> [last accessed 25.03.2010]

<sup>6</sup> Going beyond the scope of this paper, the fact that such relation is so obvious should make us ask ourselves about how just our postulates are.

(the cult, the form/container, the signifier), how different matter is composed in the same manner. The cultural process which negotiates this equation is the space where the *agencement* takes place. The assemblage is the creation of reality, composing the correlations between form and content.

In political science, the term sacralisation of politics conveys only a facet of this perspective: historically, the modern sacralisation of politics has also meant a de-sacralisation of religion, both as a social container (e.g. less followers) and as political content (separation of church and state, reduced power of the clergy in education, etc.).<sup>7</sup> The sacralisation of politics and the processes associated with it, explains why many have considered nationalism as a secular religion. The secularisation of politics shows that the religious mode is correlated to the political mode of thinking. In the case of the relation between religion and nationalism, a more correct interpretation is that the nationalist mode – which is certainly more rational – is a rationalised version of the religious mode.<sup>8</sup>

In the nationalist imaginary, the legitimising and central piece is the nation. It can be represented by a state, speaking in the name of the nation, or by a revolutionary movement which hopes to establish a representative institution of the sort. As ideologies establish a hierarchy (rule of the sacred) of social representations, nationalism establishes a hierarchy where the sacred ruler – the high priest – is “the nation.” The nation (and its other forms, the country, the motherland, the fatherland, the *patrie*) is thus the narrative which legitimises the relations and division of power (be they that of liberal-democracies or totalitarian states). Religion, and in particular Christianity in Europe, for which the sacred ruler is God, has served as the legitimating narrative since its institution as the Church of Rome. The Christian institution of God has legitimised empires and crusades, and feudal, enlightened or absolute monarchies.

Taking all of these relations in consideration, how can we provide for a working definition of nationalism? A secular religion, which establishes a hierarchy between the concept of nation-state and human communities. And what of religion? A sacred ideology, which establishes a

---

<sup>7</sup> For a profound analysis of the sacralisation of politics in European modernity see: Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, Trans. George Stanton, Princeton University Press, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> If we consider all the major political ideologies of late modernity, they can all be considered rationalised divisions of pre-secular.

hierarchy between the concept of god(s) and human communities. It is on the basis of these working definitions, that we interrogate the relation between religion and nationalism in three different European contexts: Poland, France and Britain. Beyond what may seem as a playful formulation, putting the two working definitions in parallel suggests multidimensional and criss-crossing relations between religion and nationalism as modes of imagining communities. While epistemologically based on the study of nationalist political discourse, the following analysis aims at decrypting some of the dimensions of the relationship between religion and nationalism which appear in the contemporary negotiations of social meaning in Europe.

## 1. Demarcation

Poland is widely perceived as one the 'catholic nations' of Europe, alongside Ireland or Spain for instance. But the importance of religion in Poland needs to be relativised:

“The Catholic narrative of Polish history is far more than a recognition that Roman Catholicism was and is important in Poland: it is an ideologically loaded conceptual framework that gives specific meaning to the past and helps determine what is remembered and what is forgotten.”<sup>9</sup>

It suggests, as Geneviève Zubrzycki contends, that religion has played a primary role only for a certain form of Polish nationalism, and further, that it did not always play a role for Polish nationalism in general.<sup>10</sup> While the catholic community has been massively dominant in post-1945 Poland, the religious make-up of the populations in the Polish territories has always been diverse. The unrivalled social and political dominance of Christianity in the European modern world was commonplace until the institution of a generalised form of secularism in the twentieth century. The French *laïcité*, epitomised by the laws separating Church and state in 1905, is traditionally presented as the paradigmatic expression of secular institutionalisation. It is certainly epochal, but in the course of the twentieth century, constitutional and legal measures of a secular inspiration would be implemented across most liberal European states. In 1919, for instance, the newly established Republic of Poland

---

9 Brian Porter, “The Catholic Nation: Religion, Identity, and the Narratives of Polish History”, *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2001, pp. 289-299, p. 291.

10 Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 36.

legally recognised its numerous minorities, granting its large Jewish minority political equality.<sup>11</sup>

It would be a nationalist simplification to date the significance of Catholicism in the formation of the late modern Polish nation prior to the formulation of Polish nationalism.<sup>12</sup> Roots can certainly be found in Sarmaticism, and the messianism of Polish romantic nationalism has played a definitive role in the development of a Polish national culture permeated with religion. But the idea of a culturally exclusive (and thus religiously) homogenised Polish nation was first formulated by Roman Dmowski.<sup>13</sup> As a fairly accurate description of a social reality, it is a development of the second half the twentieth century whose causes have more to do with tragic policies and influences of foreign powers than with the designs of Polish reactionary nationalists of the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup>

Before the partitions, the Polish-Lithuanian Republic, due to its particular tolerance, had throughout centuries attracted the largest Jewish community in Europe.<sup>15</sup> In 1939, there were 3.35 million “Poles of the Jewish faith”<sup>16</sup> of a total population of about 35 million.<sup>17</sup> More than one third of the inhabitants of Warsaw were Jewish citizens. In 1945, an estimated one tenth of Polish Jews had survived the Holocaust, and many left for Palestine or the West. What this meant for the make-up of the post-war Polish society was the near disappearance of

---

11 In 1867 and 1869 respectively, Prussia and Austria had already granted the Jewish minorities on their partitions political recognition. Adam Dylewski, *Les Juifs polonais*, Uta Hrehorowicz [trans.], Bielsko Biała, Editions Pascal, 2004, pp. 14-15.

12 This by no means aims at reducing the role of Catholicism but rather to slightly re-frame it. It is obvious it has played a century-old role in Polish politics, not the least considering the fact that the Polish state was landlocked between the German protestant states in the west and Orthodox Russia in the east. On the role of the Church in the nineteenth century, see Norman Davies, *God's Playground, Volume II*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 152-157 and Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, pp. 34-76.

13 In distinction, at first, to the rather imperialist and multicultural nationalist project of the first president of the Second Republic, Józef Piłsudski, although both relied extensively on the ideal of the Polish *szlachta*. See Roman Dmowski, *Myśli nowoczesnego polaka* [Thoughts of a modern Pole], Wrocław, Nortom, 2008 [1933], p. 114; Bafoil, *La Pologne*, pp. 87-88.

14 In the 1930s, like in many other European states, the government of Poland took a radical authoritative turn. What the relative republican liberalism had established in the early years of the Republic, prompted by the League of Nations, was replaced by more overt nationalist policies and the treaty on minorities was abrogated. Dylewski, *Les Juifs polonais*, p. 15; Davies, *God's Playground, Volume II*, p. 192.

15 Davies, *God's Playground, Volume II*, p. 176.

16 The First Congress of the Founders of the Association of Poles of the Jewish Faith, Art. 1, quoted in Davies, *God's Playground, Volume II*, p. 190. For the figures, p. 194 and Dylewski, *Les Juifs polonais*, pp. 65-66.

17 Jerzy Lukaszewski, “La population de la Pologne pendant et après la seconde guerre mondiale”, *Revue de géographie de Lyon*, Vol. 38 no.3, 1963, pp. 225-254, p. 228.

what had been its largest minority and the marginalisation of its distinctive cultural features, such as the Yiddish language.<sup>18</sup>

The combination of the Nazi genocide and the expulsions of German nationals after the war left Polish society, for the first time in its history, in a state of relative homogeneity which would later be put to 'good use', so to say, by the national communist policies.<sup>19</sup> Yet, taking also into consideration the creation of the nation-state of Israel which further precipitated the emigration of Jews from Europe, we can observe how effective the transcultural dynamics of nationalism already was by the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> The Jews who remained in what had become since 1948 the People's Republic of Poland (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*, PRL) were predominantly secular. In spite of the Stalinist claim of having resolved the question of nationalities, the Soviet block in general was organised according to nationalist principles.<sup>21</sup> In Poland, the result of the 'Destalinisation' which followed Stalin's death in 1953 was national communism, a subtle compromise between symbolic independence and practical subordination to the Kremlin. One of the major political crises it faced was the crisis of 1968, which resolved itself in the clash between national and international affairs and resulted in an anti-Zionist policy across the Soviet block.<sup>22</sup> Davies explains the absurd tragedy of the aftermath of the 1968 crisis in Poland:

“As a result of the disturbances of March 1968, the great majority of Poland's surviving Jews were forced to emigrate. In the course of a few months, the country's Jewish community was reduced from c. 40,000 to a mere thousand. It was a shameful episode which could be presented abroad as a resurgence of Polish 'anti-semitism'. For if the initial wave of expellees contained a genuine core of ex-Stalinists and of former political criminals who had been purged from the Party with good reason, the purge soon turned into an undisguised attack on all persons of Jewish origin, irrespective of their conduct. Sadly or ironically, many of the victims were people who for one reason or another had voluntarily chosen to stay in Poland when most of their relatives and co-religionists had

---

18 By 1956, more than 95% of the 200,000 Jews who had remained in Poland after the war had emigrated. Dylewski, *Les Juifs polonais*, p. 18.

19 According to Zubrzycki, “The Second World War and important structural changes in its aftermath would generalize and ossify the Polak-katolik [Pole-as-catholic] stereotype.” *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, p. 60.

20 On Jewish nationalisms and the creation of the modern Jewish nation-state, see the ground breaking study by Shlomo Sand, *Comment le peuple juif fut inventé? De la Bible au sionisme*, Sivan Cohen-Wiesenfeld and Levana Frenk [trans.], Paris, Arthème Fayard/Flammarion, 2008.

21 Particularly the satellite states in central and eastern Europe.

22 E.g. the 1967, the victory of Israel in the Arab-Israeli War, better known as the Six-Day War became a symbol of political dissidence in Poland, and pro-Israeli sympathies became anti-Soviet expressions. Davies, *God's Playground, Volume II*, pp. 440-445.

left at the end of the war.”<sup>23</sup>

Davies concludes that contrary to the traditional purges which occurred in the Soviet Union, “no one was actually killed.” But scars were deep both for those who had to leave, those who chose to leave in face of such injustice and those who remained behind, whose non-Jewish origins simply made them “dissidents” leading some to interrogation and prison cells rather than abroad. The consequences for the anti-totalitarian movement in Poland were also dramatic:

“Mars 1968 a sonné le désastre moral et intellectuel de la génération qui avait cru pouvoir contribuer à rendre le monde meilleur et remettre en cause les fondements du totalitarisme en projetant une vision idéalisée du marxisme.”<sup>24</sup>

This also presents us with how deeply entrenched secular and left-wing ideologies were, at least in the educated classes of the time. Their failed attempt to engage a revision of the communist regime would eventually lead the democratic movement of the 1970s and 1980s to join forces with political movements under the wing of the Catholic Church of Poland.<sup>25</sup> The role of the Church in providing a haven for political dissidence across the political spectrum and the 1978 politically significant election of Karol Wojtyła as Pope of the Roman Catholic Church were additional socio-historical significations which prompted the becoming and (self-) perception of the Polish society as a catholic nation.<sup>26</sup> And yet, the situation was more complex, having formed into a chiasmus of the different forces and institutions which presents all the intricacies of the traditional conceptualisation of nationalism:

“There thus existed, under Communism, a double tension between ethnic and civic nationalism: that of the state's official civic discourse in contrast with its significant ethnic practices and/or effects, and that of the church's ethno-religious discourse in contrast with its civic practices, since it served as the umbrella institution of the opposition.”<sup>27</sup>

---

23 Davies, *God's Playground, Volume II*, p. 442-443.

24 “March 1968 resulted in the moral and intellectual disaster of a generation which believed it could contribute to changing the world for better and could challenge the foundations of totalitarianism by projecting an idealised vision of Marxism.” Cyril Bouyeure, *L'invention du politique: Une biographie d'Adam Michnik*, Lausanne, Les Editions Noir sur Blanc, 2007, p. 173.

25 See for instance Adam Michnik's essay *Kościół, lewica, dialog* [The Church and the Left], Paris, Institut Littéraire, 1977, which promoted the rapprochement between the secular anti-totalitarian left and the Catholic institution. This dialogue was certainly decisive in the formation and success of *Solidarność*.

26 On the relationship between the democratic dissidence and the Church see Bouyeure, *L'invention du politique*, pp. 173-195.

27 Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, p. 75.



In the decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Third Republic of Poland presented a rearrangement of the different parties which had joined forces under the unique formation which *Solidarność* (“solidarity”) was. In the constitutionally secular state and in the face of a society developing under the auspices of consumerist individualism, the position of the Church has been less influential.<sup>28</sup> Right to centre politicians have also often used the aura of the Church and of the catholic faith to attract voters.<sup>29</sup> But more than the Church, Catholicism weighs heavily on contemporary Polish society as part of the larger negotiation of social significations. It is rarely questioned, but the questions which Adam Michnik regularly asks in the pages of the social-democratic daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (“electoral gazette”) which he founded in 1989, are symptomatic of the predicament of Polish society:

“W jakiej Polsce chcemy żyć? W Polsce kalumnii, prowokacji i pogardy dla człowieka, w Polsce PiS, czy też w Polsce wspólnej, gdzie dla wszystkich jest miejsce, gdzie - mówiąc słowami poety – prawo zawsze prawo znaczy, a sprawiedliwość – sprawiedliwość?”<sup>30</sup>

Beyond the question of religion, the line of tension between the liberal and traditionalist imaginaries, which Michnik expresses here in his own political language, is certainly the deeper line of the struggle in the social negotiation of meaning. The popular reactions which followed the death of the right-wing traditionalist and populist president Lech Kaczyński in a plane crash in April 2010 express how this line of social struggle runs both deeply and in the open.<sup>31</sup> In the first days of the national week of mourning which followed the tragedy, a group of boy and girl scouts erected a cross in front of the presidential palace in Warsaw to commemorate the victims. By the time the week of mourning was over, the cross sparked a

---

28 In spite of the numerous attempts to maintain its political role. The undermining of its position has caused a certain number of mixed reactions for church officials. The most radical, although marginal, are certainly the anti-Semite, nationalistic and creationist ravings of Tadeusz Rydzyk, a controversial priest who founded the extremist *Radio Maryja* (radio Marie) in 1991. As a sign of the more general reactionary tendency of the turn of the century, he further extended his media group by founding the daily *Nasz Dziennik* (“our daily”) and the private television channel *Trwam* (I endure).

29 With relatively little effect, as in the case for Lech Wałęsa in the 1995 presidential elections, who despite his mythical personae, lost against the post-communist candidate, Aleksander Kwaśniewski.

30 “In which Poland do we want to live? In a Poland of slander, provocation and contempt for human individuals, in the Poland of PiS [“Law and Justice”, traditionalist right-wing party then in power], or in a common Poland, where there is a space for everyone, where – to speak like the poet – the law always means the law, and justice means justice?” Michnik, “Długi cień oszczerstwa” [the long shadow of slander], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19.10.2007. In 1989, in the first issues of the daily, he already formulated these questions in a nearly identical way, Bouyeure, *L'invention du politique*, p. 349. See also Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, p. 76.

31 In a tragical turn of history, Lech Kaczyński, alongside 88 Polish state officials, died in a plane crash at Smolensk in Russia on the 10 April 2010, on their way to commemorate the massacre of Katyń by the NKVD, the Soviet political police, in 1940.

wild controversy between members of the public.<sup>32</sup> A large group of supporters organised a round the clock vigil to ensure the cross would not be moved. The arguments in favour of maintaining the cross in its original location was a curious mixture of extreme catholic nationalism, anti-Semitism and anti Russian sentiment, cloaked in conspiracy theories. In interviews gathered at the time of the presidential elections held two months after the crash, one reads how “Poland is no more [...]. We had Lech [Kaczyński] as president – a real Pole and a catholic, and they took him and murdered him.” The plural pronoun referred to, depending on the versions of the conspiracy theories, either the Russians or the political opponents of Kaczyński who some even portrayed as “Jews in disguise”.<sup>33</sup> People in the street reacted in various ways to such displays of obscure defeatism, their reactions ranging from disbelief to rejection, which at times resolved into violence.

Beyond the symbol of the tragedy, it also came to represent what many have termed a “street war” between its proponents and opponents.<sup>34</sup> The rows caused by the question of the cross were also fuelled by the way the issue was brought up on the political stage. On many occasions, it became a political weapon in the speeches of Jarosław Kaczyński – twin brother to the deceased president and candidate to his succession.<sup>35</sup> The attacks were primarily aimed against the other main presidential candidate, Bronisław Komorowski from the centre-right liberal party, Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO):

“Jeśli Bronisław Komorowski usunie krzyż spod Pałacu Prezydenckiego będzie jasne, kim jest, i po której jest stronie, w różnego rodzaju sporach dotyczących polskiej historii i polskich powiązań. Ten krzyż to symbol, można go będzie przenieść, jeśli stanie tam

---

32 As Zubrzycki's analysis shows (focusing on another controversial event of placing crosses at Auschwitz by ultranationalist catholics in 1998), the symbol of the cross had become in the times of PRL, alongside other signs, part of a nationalist iconography “borrowed from Romantic messianism. [...] together with other symbols, it created a language to express rebellion against the authorities.” *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, p. 69.

33 “Mieliśmy prezydenta Lecha - prawdziwego Polaka i katolika, to go wzięli i zamordowali. A jak po północy wygrał wybory jego dzielny brat Jarosław, drugi katolik i Polak, to je sfalszowali. Polski już nie ma”, Dominika Olszewska, “To już jest wojna pod krzyżem” [war has broke under the cross], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15.07.2010.

34 See previous footnote.

35 He also was the first prime minister under the presidency of his brother in a coalition government (2005-2007) with the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR, ultra-catholic) and Self-Defence (*Samoobrona*, left-wing populist). He is also the co-founder and president of the PiS party.

pomnik. Każdy, kto uważa inaczej dopuszcza się moralnego nadużycia.”<sup>36</sup>

Placing the question on the level of morality can be interpreted to be a populist touch. The reference to Polish history and its implied 'correct' interpretation signify the historical demarcations in the struggle for the imaginary institution of a literally civil society and secular institutions in the face of reactionary forces. It also confirms Brian Porter's analyses quoted at the beginning of this section, on the relationship between Catholicism and Polish nationalism as “an ideologically loaded conceptual framework” which determines a particular vision of Polishness.

Eventually, after many discursive tribulations, the social negotiations around the cross commemorating the victims of the presidential plane crash was resolved by moving it from the presidential palace to the nearby church of Saint Anne in November 2010.

## 2. Assimilation

The question of religion in contemporary state discourse across the globe has become dominant enough to be described as a return of religion. In France as well as in Britain, it is partly coated with 'Islamophobia' or 'Arabophobia'.<sup>37</sup> This has become explicit since the terrorist attacks of 2001 in New York and the bombings of 2004 and 2005 in Madrid and London respectively. But the discursive trend has been steadily growing since the previous decades in most European societies.<sup>38</sup> In islamophobic discourses in post-colonial centres such as France and Britain (we also refer to the Netherlands and Spain), the role of religion replaces the traditional role played by anti-Semitism.<sup>39</sup> These countries, contrary to Poland, are immigration countries and the question of immigration has concurrently become part of the dominant political and social issues in the post-Cold war world.

---

36 “If Bronisław Komorowski removes the cross from under the Presidential palace, it will be clear who he [really] is, and on which side he is on, on a number of contested issues related to Polish history and Polish ties. This cross is a symbol, it will be possible to place it somewhere else, if a monument stand in its place. Anyone who thinks otherwise commits a moral abuse.” Jarosław Kaczyński, TVN24 (news channel), 16.07.2010.

37 As Balibar notes, there is a “systematic confusion of 'Arabness' and 'Islamicism'.” “Is there a 'Neo-Racism'?” p. 24 For a study which presents how the Muslim minority, contrary to the dominant discourse, is culturally well integrated in French society, see Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France*, Washington, Brookings Institution Press, 2006.

38 E.g. Thomas Deltombe, *L'islam imaginaire. La construction médiatique de l'islamophobie en France, 1975 - 2005*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005.

39 Balibar, “Is there a 'Neo-Racism'?” p. 24. This nevertheless does not mean the disappearance of anti-Semitism, but only its reduction or its reframing as a less dominant discursive formation.

The strict secularism of the French state (*laïcité*) has been institutionalised since 1905, and although regularly debated,<sup>40</sup> it prevents in theory any form of ostentatious display of religion, especially from state officials. French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, who has been the herald of the theme of 'national identity' since the presidential campaign of 2007, has also become the first president to have breached the rule of secularism expected from someone in his position.<sup>41</sup> The relationship Sarkozy establishes between religion and culture contributes to the generally culturalist promotion of national identity. Before his election as President, when he was a state minister and president of the major right-wing party, the Union for a Popular Movement (*Union pour un mouvement populaire*, UMP), Sarkozy published a book entitled *Le République, les religions, l'espérance* (The Republic, religions, hope/expectations), in which he expresses with little inhibition, his ideological take on these topics. Conversely, this formal ideology constitutes the basis for his culturalist promotion of the French national identity:

“Je note que les juifs non pratiquants sont souvent présents dans les synagogues pour Kippour, que les musulmans non pratiquants considèrent que l’islam fait également partie de leur identité. Pourquoi ? Parce que nombre d’entre eux se sentent juifs ou musulmans dans le regard de l’autre. Le reniement ou l’indifférence à l’endroit d’un engagement religieux revient presque à se désolidariser d’une communauté de naissance, comme si on abandonnait un héritage, une facette de sa vie”<sup>42</sup>

This passage reads of the particularistic or 'ethnicist' underpinnings of Sarkozy's vision of culture. The concept of “community of birth” echoes the essentialist concepts of the ultra-traditionalists on the far right of the political spectrum, although it is certainly also, if not

---

40 One of the major debates since the 1990s has been the controversy about the wearing of the hijab in public institutions, such as schools. The “anti-scarf” discourses in the debate were often representative of the confusion of Islamicism with Arabness Balibar mentions. For a critical inquiry, see: Pierre Tevanian, *Le voile médiatique. Un faux débat: “l’affaire du foulard islamique”*, Raisons d’agir, 2005.

41 The signing of the cross by the President on several occasions during official visits in 2007 and 2010 at the Vatican, created a controversy without actual consequences. On the latest presidential visit and reactions by French politicians, see “La visite de Sarkozy au Vatican et ses signes de croix font des vagues”, AFP, LePoint.fr, 10.10.2010.

42 “I notice that non-practising Jews often attend synagogues for [Yom] Kippur, that non-practising Muslims consider Islam to be part of their identity. Why? Because most of them feel Jewish or Muslim in other people's opinion. The denial or indifference towards a religious commitment nearly amounts to dissociating oneself from a community of birth, as if one abandoned a heritage, a facet of one's life.” Nicolas Sarkozy, *La République, les religions, l'espérance*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2004, p. 21. For a critical overview of the book, see Richard Monvoisin, “Le Sarkozy sans peine. Vol. 1 : la république, les religions, l'espérance”, [http://vigilance-laique.over-blog.com/ext/http://infokiosques.net/imprimer\\_sans2.php3?id\\_article=295](http://vigilance-laique.over-blog.com/ext/http://infokiosques.net/imprimer_sans2.php3?id_article=295), [last accessed 30.07.2010].

more directly, inspired by American neo-conservatism.<sup>43</sup> This ideological expression of ethnic communitarianism sheds a new light on the displays of religiosity by Sarkozy during his presidency. His faith – however true – becomes utilised as a set of signs expressing a 'feeling' towards the religious community which is stronger than the political function. These signs are also without doubt, in the political play for issue ownership, part of a political spectacle directed to voters for whom the Christian religion is of political value. The passage further suggests that the French Republic and its members is/**are** essentially of the Christian cultural stock, which the remainder of the book confirms, and that in return, the Jewish and Muslim communities are not part of this primordial essence.

Sarkozy's further utilisation of cultural themes was made even more explicit during the presidential campaign of 2007. In the campaign programme, entitled *Mon Projet: Ensemble tout devient possible* (My project: together, everything is possible), the double standards of Sarkozy regarding secularism are hidden behind appropriate formulas: “la laïcité, l'égalité entre la femme et l'homme et la liberté de conscience sont des principes avec lesquels je ne transigerai jamais.”<sup>44</sup> Putting all of these formal elements in relation with Sarkozy's systematic stigmatisation of Muslims “who bleed sheep in their bathtub” (in reference to an obsolete practice during the traditional religious holiday Eid al-Adha), it becomes plain to whom the strictness of Republican standards apply.<sup>45</sup>

The last point of Sarkozy's programme was entitled “Fiers d'être français” (Proud to be French, in the plural) in which Sarkozy, after having presented his plan to control immigration, states:

“C'est finalement sans doute le pire de nos renoncements que d'avoir cessé d'être fier d'être français. Notre fierté repose d'abord sur l'identité de notre nation. Nous incarnons l'idéal national, parce que justement notre pays est constitué d'une multitude de peuples, de régions, de traditions et de cultures locales, depuis la métropole jusqu'à l'Outre-mer, enrichie par les vagues successives d'immigration, fédérée autour d'une ambition et d'une

---

43 On the culturalist turn in far-right nationalist discourse in France, see Ruth Amossy, “The National Front against the 'Off-the-peg thinking' of anti-racist groups, or: an examination of the proper use of accepted ideas in the new xenophobic debates”, Teresa Walas [ed.], *Stereotypes and Nations*, Cracow, International Cultural Centre, 1995, pp. 303-315. On neoconservatism and religion, see Mark Gerson: *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars*, London, Madison Books, 1996, esp. pp. 284-292.

44 “*laïcité*, equality between man and woman, and freedom of conscience are principles I shall uphold always.” Nicolas Sarkozy, “Mon projet: Ensemble tout devient possible”, p. 15, <http://www.sarkozy.fr/lafrance/> [retrieved 24.11.2007]

45 Declared in the early stages of the presidential campaign, during a talk show on the main private TV channel in France. Sarkozy, *J'ai une question à vous poser*, TV talk show, TF1, 05.02.2007.

foi commune: être un grand pays, uni par les droits de l'homme et nos valeurs républicaines. Si je suis élu, je ne cesserai d'affirmer la fierté d'être français."<sup>46</sup>

The worn out reference to the richness of immigration certainly sounds once more appropriate, although partly dictated by common sense and partly by political correctness. It could even have sounded earnest had not Sarkozy deprived it of its meaning so often, as is even the case on the same page of his campaign programme. The suggestive religious vocabulary adds to the potential significations of Sarkozy's political statement, cloaked in dreams of grandeur which echo the long gone imperial glory and an attempt to reformulate the 'civilising mission' of the West.<sup>47</sup>

Despite all the eloquence, Sarkozy's policy was already established in the eyes of the public as intransigent and pro-active. In the years preceding the 2007 presidential election, Sarkozy made a name for himself as a man of action as Interior minister during President Jacques Chirac's second term (2002-2007).<sup>48</sup> His policy had plain overtones of law and order and imposed a results-oriented culture (*culture du résultat*) on the police forces.<sup>49</sup>

---

46 "Finally, our worst denial has without doubt been us ceasing to be proud of being French. Our pride rests primarily on the identity of our nation. We are the incarnation of the national ideal, precisely because our country is constituted of a multitude of peoples, of regions and local traditions and cultures, from the *Métropole* to the oversea territories, enriched by successive waves of immigration, federated around common ambition and faith: to be a great country, united by human rights and our republican values. If I am elected, I will not cease to affirm the pride of being French." Sarkozy, "Mon projet", p. 15.

47 To further make the imperialist reference in Sarkozy's discourse explicit, one can refer to Sarkozy's speech at Dakar University on 29.07.2007 which sparked a controversy across the African continent as well as in Europe. In a mixture of shameless defence of the European colonial heritage in Africa and a paternalistic imprecations on Africa's essence and path to the future, he declared among other things: "Le drame de l'Afrique, c'est que l'homme africain n'est pas assez entré dans l'histoire." (The drama of Africa is that the African man has not entered history enough). The theme of the civilising mission (or civilisatory mission) had more generally been resurging in political discourse since the mid 1990s. See Dino Costantini, Juliette Ferdinand [eds.], *Mission civilisatrice: le rôle de l'histoire coloniale dans la construction de l'identité politique française*, Paris, Editions la Découverte, 2008, p. 290.

48 Sarkozy had been Interior Minister on two occasions, a first period (2002-2004) in the government of Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, and later, in the government of Dominique de Villepin (2005-2007). In the fall of 2005, the French "crisis of the housing estates" (*crise des banlieues*), which resulted in the declaring of a state of emergency, was set in the rising climate of securitisation, and in turn, fuelled the further evolution of state policies in this direction. See Mehdi Bhelhaj Kacem, *La psychose française. Les banlieues: le ban de la République*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 2006; William J. Horobin, "Figuring the *banlieues*: contemporary political discourse in France", MA thesis, Modern Languages and Critical Theory, University of Nottingham, 2007.

49 For a critical assessment of Sarkozy's first term as Interior minister, see Laurent Mucchielli, "Le « nouveau management de la sécurité » à l'épreuve : délinquance et activité policière sous le ministère Sarkozy (2002-2007)", *Champ pénal / Penal field, nouvelle revue internationale de criminologie*, Vol. 5, 2008, <<http://champpenal.revues.org/3663>> [accessed 22.10.2008]

This tour of the formal expressions of Sarkozy's ideology amounts to a series of ambivalent discursive practices. These formulations often bring socio-cultural risk motives in relation to immigration to the front.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, as we can already observe in the passage from the campaign programme, Sarkozy repeatedly aligns his approach to the tradition of French civic nationalist discourse formulated by Renan, stressing the will behind the national project. Shortly before the official start of the presidential campaign, he was already declaring on national television: “La France est une volonté, ce n'est pas un hasard.” (France is an act of will, it is not an accident).<sup>51</sup>

The general ambivalence or permeations of Sarkozy's discourse on culture, national identity and immigration tends to be confusing. Regardless of the political objectives, the effect is the promotion of a 'totalising' (in the sense of all-encompassing) and yet traditionalist national imaginary. In comparison to the reaction of the major candidate of the social-democratic opposition (*Parti Socialiste, PS*), Ségolène Royal, whose focus on the question of national identity were the symbols of the Republic and the theme of diversity,<sup>52</sup> the rallying power of Sarkozy's discourse appears as having been much more effective in electoral terms.<sup>53</sup> Sarkozy's wide ranging symbolic references, to traditions across the political spectrum effected on relegating most of the other political issues to a secondary plan.

On 8 March 2007, on public television, Sarkozy announced his project for creating a “ministry for national identity and immigration”.<sup>54</sup> Two days after the official start of Sarkozy's term as president, on 18 May 2007, the then officially named “Ministry for Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidary Development” (*Ministère de*

---

50 See Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London, Sage, 1992; Petersson, *Stories About Strangers*.

51 Sarkozy, *A vous de juger*, political talk show (live), France 2, 30.11.2006, [www.ina.fr](http://www.ina.fr) [accessed 06.02.2008].

52 See “Ségolène Royal 'veut réhabiliter le patriotisme du coeur’”, *La Croix*, 25.03.2007.

53 This should be in part, but not exclusively, linked to the relevance of political issue ownership, which would suggest that issues such as immigration or national identity taken up by right-wing candidates are more believable. It should also be noted that Sarkozy was the first to raise these issues long before the presidential campaign started. This certainly played in his favour on several levels. Ségolène Royal's intervention on these issues appeared as an overdue attempt to counter the right-wing candidate on what were clearly “his” grounds. On issue ownership see: Patrick Egan, “Issue Ownership and Representation”, Working Paper, Institute of Governmental Studies, University of Berkeley, 2006, <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/54b3d7zh>> [accessed 04.09.2009].

54 Ludovic Blecher, “Sarkozy veut un ministère de l'immigration et de l'identité nationale”, *Libération*, 09.03.2007.

*l'Immigration, de l'Intégration, de l'Identité nationale et du Développement solidaire* ) was created. Its first minister, Brice Hortefeux, a longstanding friend and political ally of Sarkozy, would reproduce the promotion of national identity and the stigmatisation of post-colonial immigration.

If we compare Sarkozy's numerous rationales on the need for the control of immigration with the passages from speeches by Hortefeux after the creation of the Ministry for Immigration and National Identity (the short formula used in the media to refer to the ministry in question), we observe a similar reference to French citizens whose origins are the post-colonial immigration of the 1960s onwards to justify the institution and related policies. For instance, the following quote is an explanation by Sarkozy on the need for tighter immigration control shortly before the presidential campaign:

“Dans les banlieues, nous payons le prix d’une politique de l’immigration qui n’a été ni choisie, ni voulue, ni revendiquée, ni organisée ; mais l’accumulation dans certains quartiers de fils et petit fils d’étrangers à qui on n’a donné ni formation, ni éducation, ni emploi a conduit à de véritables poudrières. J’en tire la conclusion qu’il faut maîtriser l’immigration, qu’on ne peut pas accepter tout le monde pour donner la chance de l’intégration à ceux qui ne l’ont pas.”<sup>55</sup>

What is surprising is the relation created between what appear as economic problems which are actual problems and the discourse on the failure of the previous immigration and integration policies, which were in part the prerogatives of the Interior minister twice held by Sarkozy at the time of this declaration.<sup>56</sup> The following extract from the press conference given by Brice Hortefeux on the 8 November 2007 takes it a step further:

“D’abord, osons regarder la vérité en face : le système français d’intégration a échoué. J’en veux pour preuve la concentration beaucoup trop forte de la population d’origine étrangère sur seulement trois régions sur vingt-deux : 60% des étrangers habitent en Ile-de-France, en Rhône-Alpes ou en Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, parfois dans de véritables ghettos urbains. J’en veux aussi pour preuve le taux de chômage moyen des étrangers,

---

55 “ In the “banlieues”, we are paying the price of an immigration policy that was neither chosen, nor wanted, nor claimed or organized; but the accumulation in certain neighbourhoods of sons and grandsons of foreigners who never had any formation, any education, any job has created real powder magazines. I conclude that one has to control immigration.” *A vous de juger*, France 2, 30.11.2006.

56 The laws regarding immigration had already been tightened in 2004 by the Interior Minister at the time, Dominique de Villepin. The new codex came into force in 2005 (Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile). In 2003 and 2006, Sarkozy who was then Interior Minister, proposed additional laws which further restricted the rights of immigrants (Loi no. 2003-119 du 26 Novembre 2003 relative à la maîtrise de l'immigration, du séjour des étrangers et de la nationalité; Loi no. 2006-911 du 24 juillet 2006 relative à l'immigration et à l'intégration) which has been in effect since July 2006, nearly half a year before the quoted declarations on the need for tighter immigration control.



supérieur à 20 %, soit plus du double de la moyenne nationale. Dans certaines banlieues, ce taux atteint les 40%. Il faut donc dire la vérité aux Français : notre système d'intégration n'est plus un modèle. Et pour réussir l'intégration, il faut d'abord maîtriser l'immigration."<sup>57</sup>

Most of the figures Hortefeux mentions could not be verified by the present author.<sup>58</sup> In addition, their rounded-up numbers suggest an effort to obtain an authoritative effect. Leaving the petty rhetorical devices aside, we observe in both passages just mentioned an ambiguous and confusing discourse regarding “foreigners” and French citizens of foreign origin (*issus de l'immigration* is the usual French phrase) who inhabit the *banlieues*. The terms used in Sarkozy's declaration swing from “banlieues”, “sons and grandsons of immigrants” (a turn of phrase which actually refers to French citizens of foreign origin) and “immigration”. Hortefeux more plainly associates the “ghettos” with immigration, further directing the signification of who the French people he is addressing are: all of those who do not identify themselves with the association between immigration and the *banlieues*.

These discourses symbolically disintegrate the parts of the French population which can be both recognised as being *issus de l'immigration* and in the *banlieues*. In spite of all the talk of the economic problems faced by the working class in general which inhabits the housing estates, this disintegration from the core of what is signified as Frenchness further marginalises French citizens of foreign origins who already are on the symbolic and social-economic fringes of the French society. Beyond electoral politics and particular policies, these observations confirm the established trends of the appropriation by mainstream politicians of xenophobic and nationalist discourses leading to the promotion of exclusionary discursive practices, with symbolic as well as actual consequences. Balibar already noted:

---

57 “First of all, let us be honest: the French integration system has failed. The proof is the much to high concentration of population of foreign origin in only three regions out of 22: 60% of foreigners live in Ile-de-France, Rhône-Alpes or in PACA, sometimes in real urban ghettos. Another proof is the average unemployment rate of foreigners, above 20%, which is more than twice the national average. In certain “banlieues”, this rate reaches to 40%. We have to say the truth to the French people: our integration system is not a model anymore. And to successfully integrate, one has first to control immigration.” Brice Hortefeux, Press Conference, 08.11.2007, <[http://www.premierministre.gouv.fr/iminidco/salle\\_presse\\_832/discours\\_tribunes\\_835/discours\\_brice\\_hortefeux\\_presse\\_57958.html](http://www.premierministre.gouv.fr/iminidco/salle_presse_832/discours_tribunes_835/discours_brice_hortefeux_presse_57958.html)> [accessed 25.06.2008, URL obsolete]

58 Most accessible statistics do not present similar methodological terms. The closest we could find was an estimate that one third of immigrants were beneficiaries of social housing, which presents differences with the suburban housing estates since 2000, all municipalities of at least 50,000 inhabitants are legally bound to allocate 20% of available habitations for social housing purposes. On statistics from 1996 see Julien Boëldieu and Suzanne Thave, “Le logement des immigrés en 1996”, *Insee Première*, no. 730, 2000.

“the assimilation demanded of [...] a 'Black' in Britain or a '*Beur*' [slang for Arab] in France [...] before they can become 'integrated' into the society in which they already live (and which will always be suspected of being superficial, imperfect or simulated) is presented as progress, as an emancipation, a conceding of rights.”<sup>59</sup>

Balibar further explains how in recent racist discourses express “all the ambiguity of the notion of culture”, referring to the universalistic or 'open' and particularistic or 'closed' acceptations of the term. As far as nationalist discourses are concerned, they are also based on an inherent ambivalent play between the nation as a political entity and the nation as a cultural entity. Breuille analyses how the nation is portrayed:

“at one moment as a cultural community and at another as a political community whilst insisting that in an ideal state the national community will not be 'split' into cultural and political spheres. The nationalist can exploit this perpetual ambiguity. National independence can be portrayed as the freedom of the citizens who make up the (political) nation or as the freedom of the collectivity which makes up the (cultural) nation.”<sup>60</sup>

Although the discursive elements presented in the previous pages, in the cases of both Poland and France, are far from being comprehensive and representative of the full range of political discourses, their relationality points towards a constant and fairly efficient discursive play between the various ambiguities of both xenophobic and nationalist discursive formations as well in between these formations. These formal significations point, in their promotion in mainstream political speeches, to an imaginary association between cultural exclusion and national belonging which may induce their further institution or reproduction as socially recognised significations.

### **3. Linearity**

Before articulating the case of mainstream political discourses in Britain on the issue of national identity, we need to overview the themes articulated for the Polish and French cases. Regarding the question of religion and secularism, Britain presents a different development from the two republican state formations of France and Poland. As a constitutional monarchy, the main difference is evidently the survival of the monarchy whose role has progressively become more symbolical or formal than strictly speaking political. The head of state has also remained the head of the Church ever since it was established in the sixteenth century as one of the first steps of the Reformation. The diminishing role of the monarch has certainly

---

59 Balibar, “Is there a 'Neo-Racism'?”, p. 25.

60 Breuille, *Nationalism and the State*, p. 348.

allowed this official relationship between state and church to continue. It has nonetheless not hindered the development of secularism in political institutions of the state which partly reflects the social evolution of the British population.

Anthony Blair, who served as Prime minister during two consecutive terms between 1997 and 2007 is knowingly a devout catholic but was expected to refrain from blatant displays and promotion of his faith. A year after leaving the office of Prime minister and the world of British national politics, he founded the Tony Blair Faith Foundation which “aims to promote respect and understanding about the world's major religions and show how faith is a powerful force for good in the modern world.”<sup>61</sup> Regardless of Blair's personal convictions, such a foundation would have been unimaginable were he still serving as the British Prime minister:

“Indeed, after spending much of his decade in Downing Street fighting shy of discussing his deep Christian convictions for fear of alienating Britain's largely secular society, he is now free of such constraints”<sup>62</sup>

Gordon Brown, Blair's successor as Prime minister, appears as less pious than his predecessor despite a number of general references to religion in his political speeches.<sup>63</sup> Where Brown distinguishes himself more consistently from Blair is on his overt promotion of a national British identity which he already heralded as Chancellor of the Exchequer under Blair's government.<sup>64</sup> While Brown's speeches are generally more poised and less spectacular than those of Sarkozy or Hortefeux, we observe the same discursive practice. In both cases,

---

61 *The Tony Blair Faith Foundation* website, <<http://www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/pages/about-us>>, [accessed 20.01.2010]

62 Tom Baldwin, “Tony Blair's Faith Foundation to sell religion as force for good”, *The Times*, 30.05.2008. There is one declaration of faith Blair made during his term which is worth taking note of. Although there is no direct reference to Christianity, Blair replied on an ITV1 talk show in 2006 that he prayed to God to help him decide to go to war in Iraq. These declarations were met with criticism, which nevertheless were of little consequence. What is significant is how it establishes, in similar vein as with Sarkozy, a connection with American neo-conservative politicians, and more particularly with George W. Bush with whom Blair went to war. On the declarations and reactions see “Blair 'prayed to God' over Iraq”, BBC News website, 03.03.2006, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/4772142.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4772142.stm)> [accessed 20.01.2010].

63 See e.g. James Chapman, “Brown DOES do God as he calls for new world order in sermon at St Paul's”, *The Daily Mail*, 01.04.2009, <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1166182/Brown-DOES-God-calls-new-world-order-sermon-St-Pauls.html>> [accessed 22.01.2010]

64 Gordon Brown was Chancellor of the Exchequer in Anthony Blair's governments from 1997 until 2007, before becoming leader of the Labour Party (24.06.2007) and as a consequence Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland since 27.06.2007. For an insight into Anthony Blair's position on the question of “Britishness” and the differences with Gordon Brown's, see e.g. Keith Dixon, “Blair, Brown and Britishness: the end of an old song?” conference paper, 2007, <<http://www.raisonsdagir.org/kd7.pdf>> [retrieved 17.02.2008].

immigration and national identity, sometimes termed citizenship in the British examples, the politicians state the lack of national identity and the failures of their respective models of integration.

To the “denial of the pride of being French” stated by Sarkozy, Brown declares that Britishness should not “leave a hole” and that action should be taken in this respect.<sup>65</sup> As far as it could be traced in his political speeches, Brown repeatedly declared the need for the United Kingdom to rediscover its Britishness. Delivering the British Council annual lecture on 7 July 2004, Brown spoke of a “belief” that urged him to continuously try to instil new life into Britishness:

“I believe that just about every central question about our national future [...] can only be fully answered if we are clear about what we value about being British and what gives us purpose and direction as a country. [...] And I want to suggest that our success as Great Britain [...] depends upon us rediscovering from our history the shared values that bind us together and on us becoming more explicit about what we stand for as a nation.”<sup>66</sup>

The clarification of the values of Britishness implies it is not clear, which further confirms the problematic lack of a national identity in Brown's formal ideology. Similar statements were made by Sarkozy, like for instance in his campaign video clip on national identity:

“If no one explains what France is to newcomers, to people who want to become French, how can we integrate them? The French integration model has failed because we have forgotten to talk about France. I do not want to forget [talking] about France, because France is at the core of my project.”<sup>67</sup>

We observe here another element which is crucial in opening up the imaginary space for promoting new senses to be instituted within this space for national identity. In the passage taken from Hortefeux's press conference, we read “We have to say the truth to the French

---

65 Britishness is precisely defined as national identity: “[...] a Britishness which welcomes differences, but which is not so loose, so nebulous that it is simply defined as the toleration of difference and leaves a hole where national identity should be.” Gordon Brown, “The future of Britishness”, speech at the Fabian society, 14.01.2006, <<http://www.fabian-society.org.uk/>> [accessed 10.01.2008].

66 Brown “Speech at the British Council annual lecture, July 7 2004”, <[www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2004/jul/08/uk.labour1](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2004/jul/08/uk.labour1)> [accessed 10.04.2008] In 2007, Jack Straw, then Leader of the House of Commons, would reproduce the same discourse as Brown in the political campaign for promoting the government's citizenship policies: ““We have to be clearer about what it means to be British, what it means to be part of this British nation of nations and, crucially, to be resolute in making the point that what comes with that is a set of values. Yes, there is room for multiple and different identities, but those have to be accepted alongside an agreement that none of these identities can take precedence over the core democratic values of freedom, fairness, tolerance and plurality that define what it means to be British.” *The Times*, 26.01.2007.

67 Sarkozy, “National Identity” Campaign video, 2006. For a full transcript in French, see Annex 8.

people: our integration system is not a model anymore. And to successfully integrate, one has first to control immigration.” In Brown's approach to the question, immigration and British citizens of foreign origins are less the primary focus it is in the speeches of French politicians. More precisely, they are not the only problems which Britishness is faced with. Brown in fact attempts, as is often the case for mainstream British politicians, to have more consensual approach to immigration in general as a positive element for the economy but he is also more attentive to the diversity of Britishness.<sup>68</sup> When Sarkozy dramatically talks of the “failure of the French integration system”, Brown more diplomatically casts a doubt on how effective “the balance between integration and multiculturalism” is, or in a later formulation: “[w]hat was wrong about multiculturalism was not the recognition of diversity but that it over-emphasised separateness at the cost of unity.”<sup>69</sup> Moving partly away from questions of integration, the forces that undermine the Union are to be found in the competing regional nationalisms of the ‘nation of nations’:

“Perhaps in the past we could get by with a Britishness that was assumed without being explicitly stated. But when our country is being challenged in Scotland, Wales and now England by secessionists, it is right to be explicit about what we, the British people, share in common and the patriotic vision for our country’s future.”<sup>70</sup>

At first glance, Brown's promotion of nationalism appears explicitly civic albeit clouded in a very traditional rhetoric.<sup>71</sup> Looking at the elements with which Brown proposes to fill in the space opened by the lack of national identity, they appear indeed as very traditional. Brown, certainly influenced by his higher education in history, heavily relies on key political events in what is presented as the “golden thread” of British history which, as Brown states, have

---

68 Part of the reason for such a promotion of “diversity through unity” is certainly to be found in the terrorist bombings of 2005. The citizenship curriculum promoted by Alan Johnson, the Education Secretary in 2007, who initiated a curriculum review entitled *Identity and Diversity: Living Together in the UK*, (Keith Ajegbo, Dina Kiwan, Seema Sharma, Nottingham, DfES Publication, 2007) is representative of the policies aimed at countering home-bred terrorism. Announcing compulsory lessons in British history, including “Black and Asian history”, the review reads as a textbook example of civic nationalist discourse.

69 Respectively, Brown, “The future of Britishness” and “We need a United Kindgom”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 13.01.2007.

70 Brown, “We need a United Kindgom”.

71 In Brown, “The future of Britishness”, for example: “[our] shared civic values which are not only the ties that bind us, but also give us a patriotic purpose as a nation and sense of direction and destiny.”

“woven together [...] “our central beliefs [which] are a commitment to – liberty for all, responsibility by all and fairness to all.”<sup>72</sup>

On the key political events, Brown continues:

““[...] there is [...] a golden thread which runs through British history – that runs from that long ago day in Runnymede in 1215; on to the Bill of Rights in 1689 where Britain became the first country to successfully assert the power of Parliament over the King; to not just one, but four great Reform Acts in less than a hundred years – of the individual standing firm against tyranny and then – an even more generous, expansive view of liberty – the idea of government accountable to the people, evolving into the exciting idea of empowering citizens to control their own lives. [...] Of course the appeal to fairness runs through British history, from early opposition to the first poll tax in 1318 to the second; fairness the theme from the civil war debates [...] to the 1940s when Orwell talked of a Britain known to the world for its ‘decency’.”<sup>73</sup>

All of these events refer to obviously significant events. But the British history exposed by Brown remains traditionally nationalistic on two grounds. First, they are all extracted from their historical contexts. The linearity thus created not only removes the transcultural density behind the events, but more importantly sets relevant British history primarily as the history of England. So when Brown talks anachronistically about Britain in 1689, it is either a surprising mistake coming from a historian or a purposeful twist. Secondly and consistently this time, Brown makes no references to the struggles against English hegemony on the British Isles, or any mention of the actual reasons behind the diversity of contemporary British society.<sup>74</sup> The historical linearity excludes thus all the formation of the British Empire and its unifying “tyranny” at home as well as overseas while naturally, never questioning the traditional symbol of unity of the Church of England and the British state, the monarchy.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Brown, “The future of Britishness”. Most passages quoted from “The future of Britishness” appear in nearly the exact same form in Brown's “Speech at the British Council annual lecture, July 7 2004”.

<sup>73</sup> Brown, “The future of Britishness”.

<sup>74</sup> The only mention to the diverse origins of members of the British society in “The future of Britishness” was: “we have always been a country of different nations and thus of plural identities – a Welshman can be Welsh and British, just as a Cornishman or woman is Cornish, English and British – and may be Muslim, Pakistani or Afro-Caribbean, Cornish, English and British.”

<sup>75</sup> Perhaps the focus on the division is a less controversial way than to point at the dividing power of religion; perhaps it is also the sign of Brown's belief in the rationality of the political system and its separation from Church, i.e. from religious questions as well.

#### 4. Integration

It has been previously suggested that the exclusionary significations promoted in discourses on national identity by mainstream political figures is supported by their appropriation of far-right rhetoric. In Poland, the coalition governments of 2006-2007 of Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz and Jarosław Kaczyński, involving extreme parties (such as the ultra-catholic LPR) and the mainstream PiS, may appear as a short term glitch. But this glitch is certainly representative of political and symbolic associations between mainstream and extreme formations. Roman Giertych, co-founder of the LPR in 2001, served as minister for national education in both governments. The series of controversies sparked from the outset of his nominations reached beyond the scale of national politics.<sup>76</sup> These did not prevent Jarosław Kaczyński from maintaining Giertych as minister of national education. The fact that Giertych was assigned to this particular ministry is meaningful in itself.

In France, as was the case in many European countries, playing on people's fear of immigration and general insecurity was originally the prerogative of the far-right and became major political themes in the electoral breakthroughs of the Front National (FN) in the 1980s.<sup>77</sup> By the time of Sarkozy became Interior minister, Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder and president of the FN, had become an established political figure.<sup>78</sup> Sarkozy would make explicit references to the traditional positions held by the FN, borrowing on several occasions during and after the presidential campaign, formulas which were customary in the speeches of the FN leader. On several occasions, when asked to respond to criticisms suggesting that he was directly referring to the programme of the FN (particularly concerning catchphrases similar to “love or leave France”), Sarkozy systematically answered: “If Le Pen says the sun

---

<sup>76</sup> On Giertych's open homophobia after having sacked Mirosław Sielatycki, then director of the Central Agency for the Formation of Teachers (Centralny Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli) for having suggested in a book that schools should contact gay organisation to promote open-mindedness, and the reaction of the Council of Europe, see e.g. “Rada Europy przeciw decyzji Giertycha” (The Council of Europe condemns Giertych's decision), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 14.06.2006. The Ambassador of Israel also reacted in declaring he would refrain from getting in touch with the minister of national education, PAP (Polish Press Agency), 09.07.2006. On the national stage, as early as in May, an open letter to the Prime minister was set up demanding the removal of Giertych from office, see <<http://www.bezgiertycha.rp4.pl/>> [accessed 04.09.2009].

<sup>77</sup> Catherine Fieschi, *Fascism, Populism and the French Republic: In the Shadow of Democracy*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004, see pp. 11-12.

<sup>78</sup> In the presidential elections of 2002, Le Pen reached the second round, losing against Jacques Chirac with 17,79 percent of the vote in what was the greatest success of the far-right in presidential elections. The FN's vote count was above the average in other national elections as well.

is yellow, I am not going to argue that it is blue.”<sup>79</sup> Yet Sarkozy also manages to maintain ambivalence, usually with less tendentious explanations on the dangers of the far-right, managing even to suggest his populist appropriations as responsible or even necessary answers to the rise of the far-right:

“[we] are the [democracy] where the extreme right is the strongest and where temptations of racism have in recent years been the most severe and the most dramatic. Maybe this should be reflected upon...”<sup>80</sup>

Brown and his government seem to have come to the same conclusion as Sarkozy and more generally French mainstream politicians: that in order to counter the relatively successful extremist political formations, one needs to appropriate their rhetoric. But this means fighting them on their grounds. This is representative of a general shift to the right which has steadily been taking place since the 1980s, the traditional right-wing formations giving credence to far-right ideologies, and the centre-left formations giving credence to centre-right ideologies as left-wing formations generally appear out of inspiration.<sup>81</sup>

The 'fronts' Brown faced, compared to the case of Sarkozy, were more numerous and each, one might say, was holding different grounds. On the one hand, the memory of the July 2005 bombings in London, which he portrays in connection to the question of integration,<sup>82</sup> forms the front of the question of immigration and Islam. On the other hand, the successful electoral campaigns of separatist political parties and their significant gains in the form of devolved parliaments – particularly in Scotland where a referendum on independence after the 2011 elections is on the agenda of the leading party in the Scottish parliament, the SNP – demonstrate that the issue of the break-up of Britain more topical than ever. While Brown is himself a Scotsman, what he calls the “secessionist forces” are portrayed as one major justification for the promotion of a British national identity:

“Perhaps in the past we could get by with a Britishness that was assumed without being explicitly stated. But when our country is being challenged in Scotland, Wales and now

---

<sup>79</sup> Sarkozy, TF1, 28.04.2006; TF1, 05.02.2007. An example of Sarkozy’s “love it or leave it” slogans date from the 22.04. 2006, during a UMP meeting in Paris: “If there are people who feel embarrassed of being in France, they shouldn’t feel embarrassed about leaving it”. These relate to a famous motto of the FN “France, love it or leave it” (“La France, aimez-la ou quittez-la”) also used by another far-right party (*Mouvement pour la France*), “France, you love it or leave it” (“La France, tu l’aimes ou tu la quittes”).

<sup>80</sup> Sarkozy, TF1, 28.04.2006.

<sup>81</sup> Environmentalist formations do not seem to be very comfortable with the traditional left-wing continuum, although most of them would be regarded as centre-left. For an enlightening alternative representation of political typology replacing the simplistic left-wing right-wing continuum, see *The Political Compass*: <<http://www.politicalcompass.org/>> [last accessed 05.11.20011]

<sup>82</sup> Brown, “The future of Britishness”; “We need a United Kingdom”.



England by secessionists, it is right to be explicit about what we, the British people, share in common and the patriotic vision for our country's future."<sup>83</sup>

Having defined the primary opponents of the Union, Brown is faced with yet another problem: the British National Party's (BNP) traditional ownership of the issue of British national identity. In a similar discursive strategy to Sarkozy's, although with a less extreme rhetoric, Brown refers to the BNP in order to assert that patriotism is not a value that should be left for the extremists to thrive on, but needs to be "[taken] back from the BNP"<sup>84</sup>, confirming the initial positioning mentioned before, that national identity has not been asserted enough by mainstream political actors:

"[...] let us remember that when people on the centre-left recoiled from national symbols, the BNP tried to steal the Union Jack. Instead of the BNP using it as a symbol of racial division, the flag should be a symbol of unity, part of a modern expression of patriotism. So we should respond to the BNP by saying the union flag is a flag for Britain, not for the BNP; all the United Kingdom should honour it, not ignore it; we should assert that the union flag is, by definition, a flag of tolerance and inclusion."<sup>85</sup>

In light of Billig's analysis of banal nationalism, it becomes obvious that all the positioning by right or left wing majority parties in favour of a renewed promotion of national identity, even when it appears justified by a the lack of social cohesion, means the further banalisation of traditional nationalism, often accompanied by a religious discourse (e.g. the good and evil in neo-conservatism and its relation to fundamentalist religious organisations). While civil society is certainly put to the test in immigration countries, the global movement of peoples has always been part of human history.<sup>86</sup> In this regard, the traditional paradigm of nationalism which has been organising states and peoples across the globe for the past centuries can hardly be considered successful. Diversity, be it religious or cultural (or sub-cultural) may also seem to put a strain on the cohesion of a given society. Once again, when inspecting the cultural diversity of Europe before the age of nationalism and globalisation, we observe that the number of languages spoken throughout Europe was far greater than the

---

83 Brown, "We need a United Kingdom".

84 Brown, "We need a United Kingdom".

85 Brown, "The future of Britishness".

86 Reasons, range and frequency have varied. Apart from enforced migration, such as slavery or the post-World War 2 expulsions, a certain number of constants remain. Economic reasons have been and remain the dominant global factor for migration. For the UK, in 2007, 44% of immigration was work-related, 37% in 2008. *Migration Statistics 2008, Annual Report*, Office for National Statistics, OPSI/Crown, 2009, p. 22. Depending on the state's policy, other factors can appear as primary. In France, immigration in relation to family appears as the dominant incentive, while work-related migrants and asylum seekers are significantly less numerous, "Immigration and the 2007 French Presidential Elections", *Immigration Backgrounder*, no. 3, The Migration Policy Institute, 2007, p. 2.

number of actual states or even of regional institutions. Contemporary diversity may prove as surprising.<sup>87</sup> The failure in developing multilingualism as the norm, or rather the impossibility of imagining multilingualism – even in between high culture languages – has been the mark of the dominating nationalist (monotheistic?) framework developed in Europe. This framework imposed a single language beyond to be used as cultural language and not simply as working language (or *lingua franca*). In relation to the parliamentary debate about the status of regional languages in France, Jean-Marie Rouart, member of the French Academy (*L'Académie Française*),<sup>88</sup> presents us with the plainest expression of such nationalistic ideology. Without even considering the possibility or fact of multilingualism, he perceives the use of regional languages, as a threat to the *essential* superiority of the national language:

“Les langues régionales, malgré leur charme, leur spécificité et leur importance pour le patrimoine français, ne doivent pas supplanter la langue française. En outre, le terme « langues » pour les idiomes de région me paraît abusif. Il s’agit plutôt de patois, de dialectes. Preuve en est qu’elles n’ont jamais produit de grandes œuvres littéraires, contrairement à la langue française. [...] La France est un pays universel, international. Revenir aux dialectes locaux est une absurdité.”<sup>89</sup>

We can wonder why the universalism represented by France, as Rouart claims, should be opposed to and fearful of such 'despicable' languages, of which the speakers have no means to establish as national languages *per se* – even if some radicals are perhaps hoping to do so, and

---

87 In 1999, a report to the Ministry of National Education, Research and Technology and to the Ministry of Culture and Communication established that in accordance with the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages (1992), the current number of languages spoken on the French territory (including the overseas dominions) is 74 (26 in metropolitan France). Bernard Cerquiglini, “Les langues de France. Rapport au Ministre de l'Éducation Nationale, de la Recherche et de la Technologie, et à la Ministre de la Culture et de la Communication”, 1999, <[http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/dglf/lang-reg/rapport\\_cerquiglini/langues-france.html#ancre156623](http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/dglf/lang-reg/rapport_cerquiglini/langues-france.html#ancre156623)> [accessed 30.09.2010]

88 The aim of the *Académie* is the improvement and standardisation of the French language. Created in 1635, it was suppressed during the French Revolution. Napoleon I restored the institution in 1803 which remains as a token of French linguistic imperialism up to this date.

89 “Regional languages, in spite of their charm, specificity and importance for the French national heritage, should not supplant the French language. In addition, it seems to me that the use of the term of “languages” for regional idioms is excessive. They are rather *patois*, dialects. The proof is that they (sic) have never produced great literary works, contrary to the French language. [...] France is a universal, international country. To return to local dialects is absurd.” Jean-Marie Rouart, interview, *France Soir*, 08.05.2008 <<http://www.francesoir.fr/actualite/societe/langue-guerre-des-patois-26187.html>> [accessed 10.01.2011].

are very unlikely to succeed.<sup>90</sup> The reasons why speakers of regional languages or dialects have not produced a literature worthy of praise is precisely because of the existence of a *lingua franca* (such as Latin) before the age of nationalism, or of the particularistic high cultures which were inherent in the formation of nation-states. The dominant preceding lingua franca was provided by the Church of Rome, itself building on the gains of the Roman Empire.

Consequently, it is maybe necessary to turn our perspective upside down and wonder about the extent to which our nationalism makes us consider migration or diversity (including diversity of religion) as presenting socio-cultural risks before considering the actual problems that arise when people rather than states are faced with both phenomena. It follows that a sense of risk is rather to be found in the culturalist and traditionalist promotions of national identities at a period when economic questions should certainly be put to the fore and alternative means of imagining political and cultural belonging should be explored.

## 5. Crystallisation

As an epiphenomenon of the general reactionary mood which has steadily become dominant in European politics, and presenting us with some of the consequences of enlivening traditionalist nationalist political discourse, the case of the English Defence League (EDL) stands out as an alarming synthesis of the reactionary significations in the contemporary European imaginary. It is the first of a series of Islamophobic organisations based on football hooligan subculture and related to already present Islamophobic organisations, such as the SIOE (Stop the Islamisation of Europe) whose slogan reads: “Racism is the lowest form of human stupidity, but Islamophobia is the height of common sense.”<sup>91</sup>

---

90 Perhaps the case of Ireland could be enlightening in this respect. Although we are not in the presence of a regional language, it proves the point even more so. Irish Gaelic, despite being the first official language and the pro-active policies in favour of establishing it as the main national language since 1922, has remained a secondary language. According to the Central Statistics Office of Ireland, just short of 42% of the population speak Irish (<<http://beyond2020.cso.ie/Census/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=75610>>, accessed 10.01.2011]. According to the report *The Irish Language and the Irish People*, four fifths of the population support a form of bilingualism. Micheál Mac Gréil, *The Irish Language and the Irish People: Report on the Attitudes towards, Competence in and Use of the Irish Language in the Republic of Ireland in 2007-08*, National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2009, p. 7, <<http://www.pobail.ie/en/PressReleases/2009/April/file,9801,en.pdf>> [accessed 10.01.2011]

91 SIOE website, <<http://sioe.wordpress.com/>> [last accessed 20.01.2011]. Most websites of these organisations need to be accessed with a login. For the current inquiry, the present author did not find it necessary to access further information than is provided without website membership. Another website, <<http://www.euro-reconquista.com/>> lists a number of these clone organisations in its links. We can mention the *Ligue de Defense Française* (French Defence League), Scottish Defence League or the Dutch Defence League. The SIOE for its part has a number of national sites, as well as in Poland, and an American counterpart, the SIOA.

The EDL claims it originated as a reaction to the violent protest by radical Islamist group Al-Muhajirun (“The Emigrants” in Arabic) against returning British troops from the Afghan war in March 2009.<sup>92</sup> They present us with yet another facet of the discursive evolution of nationalist and xenophobic discourses since the 1980s towards their acceptability. Just as the banalisation of national significations entailed the appropriation of extreme nationalist discourses, the banalisation of nationalist significations entails the appropriation of mainstream discursive practices.<sup>93</sup> In the mission statement of the EDL which is openly accessible on their official website, one reads:

“The English Defence League (EDL) is a *human rights organisation* that was founded in the wake of the shocking actions of a small group of Muslim extremists who, at a homecoming parade in Luton, openly mocked the sacrifices of our service personnel without any fear of censure. Although these actions were certainly those of a minority, we believe that they reflect other forms of religiously-inspired intolerance and barbarity that are thriving amongst certain sections of the Muslim population in Britain: including, but not limited to, the denigration and oppression of women, the molestation of young children, the committing of so-called honour killings, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and continued support for those responsible for terrorist atrocities.” [emphasis added]<sup>94</sup>

We can observe here the acceptable discourse which cloaks the otherwise xenophobic and violent demonstrations of the EDL.<sup>95</sup> What we observe is that there are similarities between the array of topics which this “human rights organisation” covers and the themes Sarkozy mentions in his campaign clip on national identity and campaign programme, such the rights of women. But here, instead of the more general values we find in Sarkozy's discourse (equality between men and women), or such as the ones used by Brown (liberty, fairness and equality for all), all the themes are addressed with terms which directly denote violence, and indirectly call for it.

---

92 Before becoming a national organisation, the name of the group was “The United Peoples of Luton” referring to the city where the Islamist protest took place.

93 In fact, the latter appropriation pre-dates that of mainstream political discourse. See Amossy, “The National Front against the ‘Off-the-peg thinking’ of Anti-racist Groups”.

94 “Mission Statement”, EDL official website, <<http://englishdefenceleague.org/content.php?136>> [accessed 08.01.2011]

95 See e.g. Robert Booth and Sam Jones, “‘Defence league’ recruiting football fans to march against Islamic extremism”, *The Guardian*, 11.08.2009.

It is maybe surprising also to read that an anti-Islamic organisation seems concerned with such themes as molestation, homophobia or anti-Semitism.<sup>96</sup> But they all contribute to enhance their acceptability. In the process which originated in turning the theme of discrimination on its head, we observe in this particular instance how far-right discourse has evolved to encompass groups whose struggle against discrimination is commonly established. The new leader of the FN, Marine Le Pen, seemed to follow the same route in her first speech as party president. Similarly to the EDL and related organisations, she claims to be defending the rights of women, gays and Jews against the rampant Islamisation of France and Europe by Muslims who, although it is not formally stated, appear as misogynous, homophobic and anti-Semitic.<sup>97</sup> Without going against the traditional core values of the FN, we can observe how, in a declaration where she categorically expresses her opposition to gay marriage, she turns the struggle against homophobia to her advantage:

“Je pense que les associations soi-disant représentatives ne sont pas représentatives (des homosexuels) et l'immense majorité des homosexuels réclament non pas le droit à la différence mais le droit à l'indifférence”<sup>98</sup>

Looking back at the mission statement of the EDL, we observe another feature which is characteristic of contemporary far-right political formations, namely their uncritical defence of what is assumed as their natural national identity and contemporary political institutions. This assumption constitutes the main 'acceptable' justification against their crusade against Islam:

“[Islam] runs counter to all that we hold dear within our British liberal democracy, and it must be prepared to change, to conform to secular, liberal ideals and laws, and to contribute to social harmony, rather than causing divisions.”

The statement continues:

---

96 The “the molestation of children” may be misinterpreted. It probably refers to the condemnable practice of excision, associated nowadays with Islam. It is unlikely the EDL is concerned with any other possible meaning behind the expression “the molestation of children”. According to Anne Chemin who investigated the situation in France, “Les excisions sont désormais rarement pratiquées sur le sol français, les filles étant excisées lors de séjours temporaires dans le pays d'origine de la famille ou suite à des reconduites”, “50 000 femmes mutilées sexuellement vivent en France” (Nowadays, excisions are rarely practised, *Le Monde*, 25.10.2007. We can assume that the situation is similar in other countries which host Muslim communities. Both national legislations and international bodies such as the World Health Organisation, have enforced strict policies against this practice. In France, perpetrators risk up to 20 years of imprisonment.

97 See Nolwenn Le Blevenec, “La Marine's touch : dix façons de renouveler le danger FN”, *Rue89*, 16.01.2011, <<http://www.rue89.com/2011/01/16/la-marines-touch-dix-facons-de-renouveler-le-danger-fn-185992>> [accessed 16.01.2011].

98 I think that the so-called representative organisations are not representatives (of homosexuals) and the large majority of homosexuals do not call for the right to difference but the right to indifference. “Mariage gay: Le Pen "totalement contre””, AFP, 28.01.2011. <<http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2011/01/28/97001-20110128FILWWW00371-mariage-gay-marine-le-pen-totalement-contre.php>> [accessed 28.01.2011].

“If people migrate to this country then they should be expected to respect *our culture, its laws, and its traditions*, and not expect their own cultures to be promoted by agencies of the state. The *best of their cultures will be absorbed naturally* and we will all be united by the enhanced culture that results. The onus should always be on *foreign cultures to adapt and integrate*. If said cultures promote anti-democratic ideas and refuse to accept *the authority of our nation’s laws*, then the host nation should not be bowing to these ideas in the name of ‘cultural sensitivity’. Law enforcement personnel must be able to enforce the rule of law thoroughly without prejudice or fear. Everyone, after all, is supposed to be equal in the eyes of the law.” [emphasis added]

It is obvious here what ideological underpinnings are expressed. It is ironic, that in the names of human rights, and claiming to fight the “Jihad”, the EDL and affiliated organisations respond by their own crusade. The imagery of the crusades is paramount across the websites of these organisations. In addition to the traditional nationalist football related paraphernalia, the national flags in the form of shields which recall those bore by the medieval crusaders can be found on nearly every single website of any of the national “defence leagues”. The finale sentence of the EDL's mission statement sounds indeed as disheartening call to arms: “The time for tolerating intolerance has come to an end: it is time for the whole world to unite against a truly Global Jihad.”

The 'holiness' of the medieval crusades has been replaced with one of the foundations of modern societies, namely the rule of law; but the 'infidels' have remained the same. It is significant that in this respect, all these organisations, the defence leagues as well as the SIOE, officially support the state of Israel, which may also first come as a surprise. And yet, through their crusade imagery, one can easily assume how Israel stands for the outpost of the West, replacing the Middle Eastern Christian kingdoms and defending Jerusalem from the “Mohammedans”. But these are mere assumptions, which even if were proven true, would make the discourses of organisations such as EDL and akin conspirational ideologues of 'Eurabia', even less admissible.<sup>99</sup>

In relation to Brown's predicament, we observe that the English nationalist front appears in fact much more radical than the “secessionist forces” of Wales and Scotland for whom the

---

99 The term Eurabia is a politically laden neologism coined by Bat Ye'or (pseudonym of Giselle Littman, meaning “daughter of the Nile” in Hebrew) which defines a Europe that has capitulated in the face of Islam. It was made popular with her book, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Madison, 2005. Since 1983, she has been elaborating her ideology around the notion of *dhimma* which historically refers to non-Muslim people living under Sharia law. She applies this condition to the European societies in a paranoid contribution to the more widely popular idea of the clash of civilisation. It is significant that the expression, before it was adapted by Samuel Huntington in “The Clash of Civilisations?” (*Foreign Affairs*, 1993), was originally coined by Bernard Lewis in essay “The Roots of Muslim Rage”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990. Already in 1976, Lewis had formulated what would form the basis of the dominant discourse on the incompatibility of Islam and the West: “The Return of Islam”, *Commentary Magazine*, January 1976.

contemporary means of negotiating their nationalist significations have been channelled into the political process known as devolution which can be dated back to the struggles for home rule in Ireland.<sup>100</sup> In this process the traditional separatist and nationalist political groups, such as the SNP in Scotland and Plaid Cymru in Wales and their supporters, have little in common with the far-right crusaders of the EDL or even the BNP for that matter. As Vernon Bogdanor notes:

“Many of the supporters of the nationalist parties indeed have sought not separation, but the humanization of the state through a reduction in the scale of government.”<sup>101</sup>

The political programmes of these nationalist parties also reflect such mainstream preoccupations, as they “are now more left wing, in political rhetoric but also now in government practice, than their Labour adversaries.”<sup>102</sup> It is questionable whether Brown's traditionalist promotion of a British national identity has a direct influence on the ideology of organisations such as the EDL, and the actual extent to which such a promotion is indeed counterproductive is hard to assess. The nebulae of identity politics which contributes to promoting traditional significations and the centrality of England, may indeed render discourses such as the EDL's more acceptable.

It is significant also that the EDL, contrary to traditional far-right parties, is adamant about clarifying its position as anti-Nazi.<sup>103</sup> In October 2009, it called a press conference in a derelict warehouse in Luton to stage the burning of a Nazi flag. As BBC journalist Paraic O'Brien reports:

“The windows of the warehouse had been boarded up. Fifteen men in balaclavas unfurled a swastika flag and proceeded to try to set it alight for the cameras. The message - look we are not Nazis.”<sup>104</sup>

This sort of positioning is certainly different from the usually less spectacular and more ambiguous positioning of far-right political parties and organisation vis à vis national-

---

100 Vernon Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 2.

101 Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom*, p. 297.

102 Keith Dixon, “Blair, Brown and Britishness: the end of an old song?”.

103 The EDL has a “Jewish division” and in early January 2011 staged a common demonstration in Toronto with the Canadian branch of the extremist Jewish Defence League. On the Jewish division see Julian Kossoff, “The English Defence League, the Jewish division and the useful idiots”, *Telegraph.co.uk*, 19.01.2010, <<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/juliankossoff/100059179/the-english-defence-league-the-jewish-division-and-the-useful-idiots/>> [accessed 27.01.2011]

104 Paraic O'Brien “Under the skin of English Defence League”, *BBC Newsnight*, 12.10.2009, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/8303786.stm>> [accessed 22.02.2009]

socialism.<sup>105</sup> But in the generalised process of the banalisation of far-right ideologies – and in the case of the EDL, its support for the state of Israel and cooperation with Jewish extremists –, these new procedures appear as part of a rhetoric of the new reactionary imaginary. The grid of significations it points to is that the opposition to national-socialism is no longer a safeguard for extremist ideologies, which is a dramatic evolution in the contemporary imaginary. One could argue that it is related to the evolution of the memory of the horrors of the Nazi regime, which is slowly passing from living memory to memory-history.

The synthesis which transpires through the EDL's statements is closely related to the larger political movement of conservative reaction which is called in France the movement of the *Identitaires* (the term is a noun derived from the adjective *identitaire* meaning “relevant to, of identity”). The neologism could simply be a reframing of nationalism, meaning nationalism at an age when identity has become a much more fashionable (and thus accepted) term.<sup>106</sup> The *Identitaire* (or *Bloc Identitaire*) is a synthesis of neo-nazi ideology and pan-European federalist nationalism based on tightly knit biological and cultural features of a utopian (or rather dystopian) European civilisation. This ideology is thus the relay of other reactionary and conspiracy theories such as the clash of civilisation and American neo-conservatism. Stéphane François qualifies their political doctrine as ethnopolitics.<sup>107</sup> What is particularly interesting is the opposition of these extreme nationalists towards the historical nation-states. Rather than promoting the established institutions, the *Identitaires* promote a European and Christian empire which serves the survival of the regional cultures of the white race. It thus appear as a synthesis between a Holy European Empire and conservative regional nationalisms. While still remaining a marginal movement, the *Identitaires*, similarly to the EDL, have in recent years increased their presence in the media. If a conservative revolution is under way, the *Identitaires* will certainly play a defining role due to their inclusive reframing of nationalist ideology.

## **Conclusion: Interest and Reason**

The failed attempt at institutionalising Brown's promotion of national identity confirms the traditionalist approach which aims at emulating the national institutions such as the one found

---

<sup>105</sup> Usually under the form of historical revisionism or even denial of the Holocaust.

<sup>106</sup> In the United States, the “nativism” movement may be considered a contextual equivalent.

<sup>107</sup> Stéphane François, “Réflexions sur le mouvement identitaire”, *Fragments sur les Temps Présents*, 2009, <<http://tempsresents.wordpress.com/2009/03/05/stephane-francois-mouvement-identitaire-22/>> [accessed 25.07.2011]



in France or Poland (and in fact across the globe). On 5 October 2007, in the early stages of Brown's premiership, the government launched a review on citizenship in Britain. The report, *Citizenship: Our Common Bond* was eventually presented to Brown by Lord Goldsmith in March 2008.<sup>108</sup> It is particularly significant as it contains proposals for "enhancing the bond of citizenship" – a national day for instance – which for most were previously mentioned by Brown when promoting the "rediscovering" of British identity.<sup>109</sup>

Beyond the formal and contextual differences, what is observable in terms of the promotion of nationalism in contemporary political discourses in the three cases is that the discursive practices related to nationalism lead to the same conclusions. They are all based on hegemonic discursive processes which involve the opening of spaces for the projected institutionalisation of social significations. The combination or play on the ambivalences inherent to the discursive formation of nationalism creates significant senses which are often supported by social or political institutions. In all cases, regardless of the combination of themes, the promoted senses hint at exclusionary social significations.

In more details, what we have observed is that in the case the Polish traditionalist discourses, the focus on the catholic faith as essential to Polishness excludes an imaginary that could interpret the history of the Polish peoples which would include their long-standing social-historical complexity, notably regarding the historical religious minorities. This exclusionary focus suggests a linear and narrow reading of history as it appears in Brown's account of British history, even if his focus is of a more political nature. The centrality of England in Brown's promotion suggests a generally uncritical appraisal of the role of the Empire in the construction of contemporary British society (without mentioning its global effects). This recentralising on the high culture of the state is finally clear in the opposition between the idealised and homogenised French identity and stigmatised immigration populations, which in speeches of the politicians in power in France, even tend to exclude actual French citizens as being part of a 'Frenchness' defined through their exclusion.

By considering nationalist discourses from the centre (representatives of the state) to the periphery (representative of the most radical fringes of nationalist ideology), the sacralisation of politics is accompanied by a reframed instrumentalisation of teleological significations. For

---

108 Lord Q.C. Goldsmith, *Citizenship: Our Common Bond*, 2008, p. 88, <<http://www.justice.gov.uk/reviews/citizenship.htm>> [accessed 03.04.2008].

109 Brown, "The future of Britishness"; "We need a United Kingdom"; "We must defend the Union", *The Daily Telegraph*, 25.03.2008. Faced with increasing unpopularity, the policies were not instituted nor appear to have been taken up by the following coalition government since 2010.

example, in the reactionary cosmology, immigration is to Islamism what socialism was to communism. Both these ideological logics leave out of their equation what has recently been sadly portrayed in Norway: the risks these ideologies (or their violent/revolutionary reactionary corruptions) posit to the societies which they define as their own.<sup>110</sup>

The contemporary reactionary shifts in the European imaginary reactivate the debate between faith and reason, between religion and science. “Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men” may be a myth, but it functions in the same way as the religious myths: it “sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures.” Replacing the term “nation” with “religion” and Gellner’s statement remains a truism.

If the framework of modern politics, the hierarchy of relations of power, is indeed based on the premises of religion, the first questions to pop up are: are political frameworks necessarily derived (that is rationalised) from the religious forms, if yes, is there a form of politics which does not address questions of religion, *including its own mythology/cosmology*? This last point is the most important. If the answer to the first question is no, on what basis can such a form of politics be composed? Ultimately, couldn’t these two questions lead to a same mode?

---

<sup>110</sup> This logic has been expressed very recently in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Norway by two prominent members of the FN which again shows how this logic is corrupting judgement.