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# Is there a revival of French nationalism?

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## Introduction

In 2017, the candidate of the *Front National* reached the second round of the French presidential election. This is the second time this nationalist party has reached the second round of the presidential election in the history of the Fifth Republic. But in 2002 Jean-Marie Le Pen had only obtained 17.79% of the votes, while fifteen years later his daughter, Marine Le Pen, almost doubled her father's score, reaching 33.90% of the votes cast. Moreover, in the 2019 European elections, the *Rassemblement National*<sup>1</sup> obtained the highest number of votes of all French political formations<sup>2</sup> and can therefore boast of being "the leading party in France".

This is in a context where populist nationalism<sup>3</sup> is developing in many countries around the world. However, since the 1980s, nationalism seemed to many authors to be evaporating, in France as elsewhere. Eric Hobsbawm considered that it had "passed its zenith" (E. J. Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 244), Jurgen Habermas was preparing for a "post-national" era (Habermas, 1998) and Ulrich Beck anticipated a "global domestic policy" (Beck, 2003). Under these conditions, should we, like many observers or actors in French political life (Badie, 2016; Duhamel, 2018; Macron, 2018; Wilfert-Portal, 2016), speak of a "revival" of French nationalism today?

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<sup>1</sup> New name of the *Front National* since 1 June 2018.

<sup>2</sup> As it had already done in 2014, under its former name of *Front National*.

<sup>3</sup> Populist nationalism, or national-populism, is, according to Pierre-André Taguieff, "a call to the entire people - supposedly homogeneous (beyond class divisions) - which merges with the assembled nation, endowed with substantial unity and a permanent identity". (Taguieff, s. d.).

Such a formulation rests on three premises. In the first place, it presupposes that one knows clearly what one is talking about when one speaks of nationalism in general. Second, it assumes that French nationalism is a single phenomenon (otherwise one would speak of the revival of a particular type of French nationalism, or the revival of French nationalisms). Finally, the notion of "revival" implies that French nationalism had previously faded away. We propose to analyse each of these three premises in turn before answering the initial question.

## **1. Which nationalism?**

### ***1.1. Multiple approaches***

#### **1.1.1. From embarrassment to theoretical debates**

The issue of nationalism has long embarrassed social scientists. Neither Max Weber, Emile Durkheim nor Karl Marx provided a systematic theory of nationalism, recalls Montserrat Guibernau. (Guibernau, 1997, 1999, p. 7). Not only did these great scholars pay little attention to or underestimate the importance of nationalism, but they also tended to work within the contours of society and the nation-state, thus falling into the trap of "methodological nationalism," as analyzed by Anthony Smith (Smith, 1979, p. 191) and later by Wimmer and Glick Schiller (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). They resorted to a classification that led them to align themselves involuntarily with state prescriptions. (Beck, 1999, pp. 23-24).

Since then, this bias in the social sciences has been widely criticized (Beck, 1999; Chernilo, 2011; Guibernau, 1999; Mayall, 1990; Sassen, 2010; Smith, 1979; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). In addition - and most importantly - the issues of nation and nationalism were the subject of fundamental publications from the 1980s onwards (Breuilly, 1982; Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1983; Smith, 1986; Hroch, 1986; Hobsbawm, 1990, among the most well-known).

The major question for scholars of nationalism has been when nations and nationalism emerged, a question that Walker Connor and Umut Özkirimli consider "inconsequential". (Connor, 2004: 45; Özkirimli, 2010: 199-200). Nevertheless, following important scholarly debates between

'primordialists', 'modernists' and 'ethnosymbolists', the conclusion which emerged was that nation and nationalism were intimately linked to modernity, although there was no consensus on the precise nature of the relationship between them. (Keating, 1996, p. 2). The debate among experts is now less about *when* nationalism emerged than about *how* it develops and spreads. Can we nevertheless draw on the scholarly work we have just discussed to establish precisely what nationalism consists of?

### **1.1.2. Which definition?**

Among the major works just mentioned, Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* is at the forefront; and from the very first pages of his book, the author sets out the scholarly definition of nationalism that has become the most famous of all: "Nationalism is primarily a political principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent." (Gellner, 1989, p. 11).

The conciseness of Gellner's definition is its strength. Could it be also, to some degree, its weakness? By focusing exclusively on the search for sovereignty, it does not deal with the legitimization of established states. Moreover, by focusing on the character of nationalism as political principle, it neglects its emotional dimension.

Gellner's definition has, however, been deemed so relevant that it has been taken up by such renowned experts on nationalism as John Breuilly or Eric Hobsbawm. It is not, however, the subject of a broad consensus within the scientific community, comparable to Max Weber's definition of the state. Other scientific approaches clash with it, both among ethnosymbolists (Smith, 1993, p. 73) and new primordialists (Roshwald, 2006, p. 3), of course, but also within Ernest Gellner's own modernist "camp". Benedict Anderson, in particular, wishes to "change our approach to nationalism by conceiving of it, in an anthropological spirit, as a way of being in the world to which we are all subject, rather than simply someone else's political ideology" (Anderson 2005: 9). A few years later, Michael Billig wrote that the accepted view of nationalism is misleading. It is aimed exclusively at separatist or fascist movements, which he calls "hot" nationalism (Billig, 1995, 43-46) and leaves aside the "banal nationalism" of Western nation-states. However, "in a

world of nation-states, nationalism cannot be confined to the peripheries" (Billig 1995:5). For this reason, Billig "insists on stretching the term 'nationalism', so that it covers the ideological means by which nation-states are reproduced" (Billig, 1995:6).

To summarise: social scientists, after having long neglected the subject of nationalism, while being its playthings (through "methodological nationalism"), have devoted major works to it. The emergence of the nation has been the central topic of their theoretical debate. Finally, their definitions of nationalism range from a narrow focus (the political principle of sovereignty), to a very broad perspective (a way of being in the world to which we are all subject), going through a wide range of nuances. Added to this complexity is the fact that many different types of nationalisms have been identified.

## **1.2. Multiple types**

### **1.2.1. Dichotomies**

Many binary divisions have been elaborated about nationalism. The most widespread is that between patriotism and nationalism. It is present in everyday language: "Patriotism is love of one's own, nationalism is hatred of others" (Gary, 1945). It is also found in the rhetoric of politicians, including Emmanuel Macron, who announced in 2017 that he wished to become "the president of the patriots in the face of the threat of the nationalists." (Macron, 2017). Finally, it is accepted by some scholars (Jayet, 2013). Michael Billig, however, has shown the ethnocentric and rhetorical character of this distinction between "our patriotism" (good) and "their nationalism" (bad), supposedly very different but impossible to distinguish in practice (Billig, 1995: 55-59) and between which there is no break but rather continuity.

Another common dichotomy is the distinction between "civic" and "ethnic" nationalism (Greenfeld, 1992; Smith, 1993). The first type of nationalism, which stems from the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the Revolution of 1789, would base the nation on the will to live together. The second, on the other hand, would base the nation on a shared cultural heritage. However, Rogers Brubaker and Alain Dieckhoff have repeatedly emphasized the caricatural, reductive and

ethnocentric aspect of this dichotomy: there is no such thing as purely "civic" or purely "ethnic" nationalism, but rather a mix of many nuances (Brubaker, 1998, 1999; Dieckhoff, 1996; Dieckhoff & Jaffrelot, 2006, pp. 105-129).

Finally, a distinction is often made between the nationalism of "the subjugated peoples" and that of "the peoples who dominate them" (Girardet, 1996: 36-37). The former would be a nationalism of liberation, which aims at the creation of new sovereign states or the acquisition of specific rights for minorities (Kymlicka 2001), while the latter would be a nationalism of domination. This distinction, however, is only valid until the struggling peoples gain independence: indeed, post-colonial history shows how frequent the transition from one type of nationalism to the other is.

All these dichotomies help us to grasp reality, but they can only be used as standard ideals connected in a continuum, otherwise we risk being Manichean. However, more complex typologies have been developed. We shall cite three of them, among many others.

### **1.2.2. More complex typologies**

In *Nations and Nationalisms*, Ernest Gellner establishes a typology based on three factors: power (the distinction between those who hold power and those who do not); education (access, or lack thereof, to education or a viable modern higher culture); and common culture (the monocultural or bicultural character of the society). He deduced eight possible situations, five of which are non-nationalist. This leaves three forms of nationalism: the typical form of Habsburg nationalism, the form of nationalisms that advocated unification in Italy and Germany in the nineteenth century, and diaspora nationalism (Gellner, 1989: 156).

Miroslav Hroch famously constructed typology of national movements based on three historical moments: Phase A, where scholars study the cultural attributes of the national group, Phase B, which is a period of patriotic activism, and Phase C, where a mass movement is formed (Hroch, 1986:22-24). Depending on the timing of the appearance of these phases in relation to the industrial and bourgeois revolutions, he distinguished four types of nationalism: the "integrated

type," the "belated type," the "insurrectional type" and the "disintegrated type". (Hroch, 1986: 25-30).

Finally, Raoul Girardet established a typology based on six fundamental criteria:

1. The historical situation (he distinguishes between the nationalism of subjugated peoples and that of dominant peoples, on the one hand, and the historical conditions in which the nation-state and national consciousness were formed, on the other hand) ;
2. Economic evolution (the theme of "backwardness" can become a determining factor in the expression of nationalism);
3. Doctrinal and ideological motivation (of a liberal, authoritarian or socialist type);
4. The social attitude (anxiety nationalism or satisfaction nationalism);
5. The zone of civilization (African, Arab, Latin American types, etc.);
6. The religious attitude (certain nationalisms may be closely associated with a religious faith). (Girardet, 1996, pp. 36-42).

The extreme diversity of nationalism that emerges from the foregoing analyses could be discouraging. For example, according to Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism is too diverse to allow a single theory to explain it all" (Calhoun 1997:123). Without claiming to explain it, perhaps can we, nevertheless, attempt to describe it pragmatically?

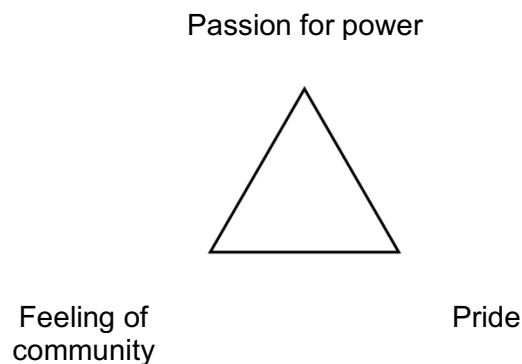
### **1.3. *Three-dimensional narcissism***

In place of the typologies we have just examined, which set types of nationalism against each other and give the impression that we are dealing with a multiplicity of distinct cases, we can substitute another approach, which, instead of dividing nationalism into distinct types, sees it as a single phenomenon with several dimensions.

#### **1.3.1. Three dimensions**

Max Weber, although he did not elaborate a vast theory of nationalism, nevertheless deals with nationality in a few pages of *Economy and Society*. First of all, he refers to the "feeling of community" (Weber, 2003: 142), i.e., the "feeling of having something in common

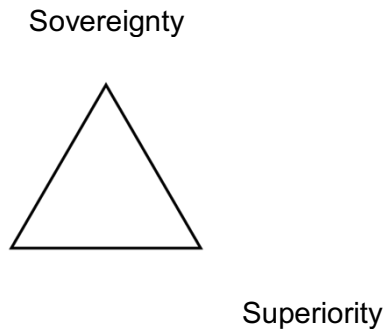
[*Gemeinsamkeitsgefühl*], referred to by the collective term of 'national' [feeling]" (Weber, 2003: 143). Secondly, he refers to the "proud consciousness" that some peoples have of their own character (Weber 2003: 143). Finally, he points out that "the concept of 'nation' constantly reminds us of the relationship with political 'power', i.e. sovereignty. "It is therefore obvious," he says, "if 'national' means something unitary, then it will also be a kind of specific passion [*pathos*]" (Weber, 2003: 144). We propose to synthesize his point using a very simple triangular scheme.



*Figure 1 : Dimensions of nationality after Max Weber*

Forty years after the publication of *Economy and society*, sociologists Guy Michelat and Jean-Pierre H. Thomas conducted an empirical survey of French nationalist attitudes and behaviour. They drew an initial distinction between "affective nationalism," based on a feeling of belonging, and "ideological nationalism," which corresponds to a stage of rationalization and institutionalization (Michelat & Thomas, 1966, p. 11). They added a third dimension: the sense of superiority. "One will recognize that one's own nation is intrinsically superior to other nations; one will imbue it with a historical mission, one will want it to be a guide and an example." (Michelat & Thomas, 1966, p. 11). This survey thus empirically reveals three nationalist poles comparable to the three dimensions theoretically identified by Max Weber.





*Figure 2 : Dimensions of nationalism after Michelat and Thomas*

It is now time to summarize our findings in an attempt to go further.

### **1.3.2. Collective narcissism**

We have made three observations: on the one hand, scholarly definitions of nationalism range from a narrow conception (the search for sovereignty) to a very broad one (a way of being in the world to which we are all subject); on the other hand, the numerous typologies constructed by specialists give the impression of an infinite variety of different nationalisms; finally, we can distinguish, theoretically and empirically, three dimensions to the same nationalist phenomenon: affectivity, sovereignty and superiority. These seemingly contradictory approaches can be brought together into a whole.

In the first place, if nationalism is universally prevalent - if we are "all subject to it" (even "liberal Western academics [who] find it easier to recognize nationalism in 'others' than in themselves" (Billig, 1995, p. 15)) - it is logical that it has many facets, linked to the socio-historical contexts in which it develops. These facets - the variants that emerge from the specialists' typologies - can be seen less as distinct and separate realities than as ideal-types between which infinite nuances exist and can allow nationalist movements to move.

Secondly, the anthropological approach to nationalism can be understood as a form of love of society towards itself. Indeed, as Ernest Gellner writes: "In the nationalist age, societies worship themselves in a very open and impudent manner, in defiance of all modesty" (Gellner, 1989: 87). In the same way that, according to Émile Durkheim, religion is the cult of society by itself

(Durkheim, 1994, p. 496), nationalism could thus be considered a form of collective narcissism, presenting both the constructive aspect of narcissism and its possible excesses.

However, nationalism differs from other forms of collective narcissism by its strictly political dimension of claiming sovereignty. This is what gives it its specificity. Nevertheless, nationalism is not reduced to this claim to sovereignty. Two other dimensions accompany and complement it. Thus, instead of resorting to binary oppositions (patriotism versus nationalism, in particular), we suggest that nationalism be seen as a vast phenomenon of collective narcissism that combines - in variable and unstable proportions - the following three dimensions: *patriotism* ("sense of community" and affectivity), *sovereignism* (search for "congruence" between state and nation and "passion for power") and *supremacism* ("pride" and sense of "intrinsic superiority"). Perhaps an empirical study conducted in 3D (i.e., comparing the degree of intensity of the above three dimensions in various cases) would make it possible to establish a subtle scale of nuance of the forms of nationalism. Having said this, let us now examine what "French nationalism" consists of.

## **2. Which French nationalism?**

French nationalism is generally associated with the far right and Catholic clericalism<sup>4</sup> - not only in the press and media but also in the most knowledgeable scientific circles.

### ***2.1. Reactionary nationalism***

#### **2.1.1. "French-style" nationalism**

78% of the articles about French nationalism (in both English and French) identified by Google Scholar from 2017 to 2019 link it to the far right and uncompromising Catholicism. This linkage can be found among leading French political scientists such as Pierre Birnbaum.

According to the latter, "French-style nationalism [...] appears to be a protest against the universalist principles of the Republic, expressed essentially in the name of an intransigent

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<sup>4</sup> Clericalism is the doctrine of advocates of a strong influence of the Catholic clergy in the political field.

Catholicism". (Birnbaum, 1991, p. 58). Henceforth, adds P. Birnbaum, the National Front continues the tradition and "integrates itself [...] ideologically into a loose grouping which nowadays prolongs the movement of uncompromising Catholicism". (Birnbaum, 1991, p. 65-66).

Thus, "French-style" nationalism would present a great ideological coherence through time: reactionary, anti-universalist and "closely linked to Catholicism"<sup>5</sup>. The constancy of extreme right-wing Catholic nationalism in France over the decades is, of course, a historical reality that can hardly be disputed; is it, for all that, the sole filiation of the Le Pen family and the *Front/Rassemblement National*?

### **2.1.2. Complexity of the Le Pens' legacies**

In reality, the *Front/Rassemblement National* is a composite movement. Created in 1972 by *Ordre Nouveau*<sup>6</sup> in an attempt to bring together the far right during elections, the *Front National* (FN) managed to bring together in the 1970s and 1980s at least "three currents of the far right: activism [...]; right-wing anti-Gaullism [...]; and the solidarityist-fundamentalist tendency [...]" (Camus, 1996, p. 19). (Camus 1996: 19). In addition, it also attracted to itself "defectors from royalism [...]; Poujadists [...]" and some former militants of collaborationist parties [...]" (Camus 1996: 19, n. 1).

These different far right-wing nationalist circles are the product of distinct traditions with a common feeling of superiority of France and the French, which generally leads to racism or xenophobia. They share the same rejection of the Other, which, depending on the period, has targeted Jews, Freemasons or Communists and which nowadays focuses mainly on immigrants and Muslims. Finally, as opponents of universalism, often hostile to democracy, all these far right-wing circles want a strong State and are fighting against what they see as phenomena limiting

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<sup>5</sup> For Maurice Barrès, quoted by Pierre Birnbaum in support of his reasoning, "French nationality is closely linked to Catholicism". (Birnbaum, 1991, p. 63).

<sup>6</sup> *Ordre Nouveau*: French extreme right-wing nationalist movement with neo-fascist tendencies. Created in 1969, it was dissolved by the French government in 1973.

France's sovereignty. Beyond these important points of convergence, however, their diversity is considerable.

Given the complexity of its membership, the changing social and political context and the choices made by its leaders to increase its audience, the *Front National* has undergone various ideological shifts over the decades. And it was from a strategic perspective that its leaders emphasized the Christian dimension of French identity when Catholic fundamentalism underwent a revival in the late 1970s and in the 1980s: "the FN tried to make the most of this opportunity to broaden its base" (Camus, 1996, p. 32). In reality, however, only a fraction of the *Front/Rassemblement National* is a continuation of the intransigent Catholic right of the early twentieth century. It is this movement, therefore, that fits into the *Front/Rassemblement National* cluster rather than the other way around. The assimilation of the *Front/Rassemblement National* to the tradition of the uncompromising Catholic right is therefore an oversimplification. But wouldn't the assimilation of French nationalism to the far right also be in itself a simplification?

## **2.2. Republican nationalism**

Almost all French political tendencies today reject the word "nationalism," referring only to the *Rassemblement National*<sup>7</sup> (or, in another register, to independence movements). This is particularly the case of the left. However, the concepts of nation and nationalism do not originate, at the outset, from the far right, or even from the right.

### **2.2.1. The French Revolution**

It was the revolutionaries of 1789 who were the first to give a central place to the nation, conceived in a dual dimension: "almost ethnic" (the French nation) and political (a new regime, based on the majority of the social body) (Nicolet, 1995, pp. 16-17). The nation, which "exists above all [and] is at the beginning of everything" (Sieyès, 2009), is the foundation of sovereignty. (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, 1789, art. 3). As for the word "nationalism," it

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<sup>7</sup> The latter, however, does not openly claim to be nationalist. Its leaders prefer to present themselves as "patriots" or "nationals".

was to stigmatize the immorality of "Jacobin patriotism" that it was first used in French in 1798 (Girardet, 1996, p. 11). It was thus the French Revolution that was the founding moment of "French nationalism" (Girardet, 1996, p. 11)<sup>8</sup>. The revolutionaries transferred the sovereignty of the person of the king to the nation, discovering in the process that the latter was in reality only an abstraction that did not *de facto* exist<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, Mirabeau described the France of 1789 as "an unconstituted aggregate of disunited peoples". (Mirabeau & Méjan, 1792, p. 269).

This French nation that did not yet exist, the revolutionaries decided to build it. To do so, they developed "conscious programs of nation-building and patriotic instruction" (Bell, 2001, p. 7). In particular, they sought to annihilate all forms of regional diversity, whether legal, historical, or linguistic. (Thiesse, 2001, p. 70-71). They fought both their enemies from inside (to forge a new Man) and from outside (to protect the sanctuary of the Revolution). But, unlike the reactionary nationalism we mentioned earlier, French revolutionary patriotism is a 'universalist' (Furet, 1990, p. 186) and messianic nationalism: the 'Great Nation' sees itself as the beacon that illuminates the world and will save humanity by bringing civilization to it. (Nora, 1997).

Thus, "French-style" nationalism is not only reactionary: it is twofold. And its republican variant is moreover the oldest since it appeared as early as the Revolution. We will now examine the development this republican nationalist current has undergone subsequently.

### **2.2.2. Posterity**

It was the Third Republic (1870-1940) that accomplished the missions that the revolutionaries wanted to carry out. To do this, it implemented "a true nationalist pedagogy: history, geography, morality and civic instruction, the lessons of things, everything [was] to contribute to

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<sup>8</sup> Even if, after several centuries of monarchical centralization, this founding moment was "the culmination of a process that had begun a century earlier"... (Bell, 2001, p 7).

<sup>9</sup> Hence "the great nationalist paradox: political leaders making wholly unprecedented demands on behalf of 'the nation' and justifying their actions by reference to its sovereignty, but simultaneously acknowledging that the nation did not yet exist". (Bell, 2001, p. 14).

tempering the national soul" (Winock, 2004). Indeed, Hitler himself cited the nationalist pedagogy of the Third Republic as an example in *Mein Kampf*<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, at the end of a process based not only on the action of the school but also on military service and the development of roads and railways, it succeeded in achieving the cultural homogenization that revolutionaries were calling for in order to build the French nation (E. Weber, 1976). Moreover, the colonial enterprise of the Third Republic enabled France to spread 'the benefits of civilization' throughout the world, as proudly emphasized in French primary school history textbooks (Lavissee, 1942, pp. 318-321).

Republican nationalism persisted - with ups and downs - over time, winning over the communists at Stalin's behest. "It was between 1934 and 1936 that the communists rediscovered *La Marseillaise* and the tricolour flag. [...] The nationalism of the Communist Party [...] was very well suited to the popular part of the left-wing electorate." (Martinet, 1994, pp. 20-21). In the 1960s, under the authority of General de Gaulle, republican nationalism thrived (Winock, 2004, p. 34). Nevertheless, this French republican nationalist current soon regressed, as if it were "obsolete" (Winock, 2004, p. 34). Firstly, under the effect of the anti-colonial emancipation struggles, which questioned its imperialist nature. Secondly, because the very concept of "nation" was rejected by the rebellious youth of May 1968 (Martigny, 2016, pp. 35-36). Some twenty years later, however, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, which represented the end of the tangible alternative to capitalism, dragged down binary political logics (communism versus capitalism); from then on, French republican nationalism experienced a powerful revival, which has still not waned. (Confavreux & Turchi, 2015, p. 2). Is this republican nationalism, however, totally different from reactionary nationalism?

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<sup>10</sup> "A young Frenchman is not trained to see the reality of things objectively: his education shows him, with the subjective view that one can imagine, all that is of some importance for the greatness of his country, in matters of politics and civilization. Such education must always be confined to very important general concepts. And they must be engraved in the hearts and memories of the people by constant repetition." (Hitler, 1926, p. 74).

### **2.3. What relationship between the two kinds of French nationalism?**

#### **2.3.1. No watertight boundary**

So far, we have focused on the contrast between two types of French nationalism. Reactionary nationalism, on the one hand (which Pierre Birnbaum refers to as "French-style nationalism"). It is characterized by a feeling of superiority of France and the French, rejection of the Other, racism and xenophobia; it is hostile to universalism and, often, democracy; it wants a strong state and fights anything that seems to limit French sovereignty. Michel Winock calls it "closed nationalism". (Winock, 2004, p. 7).

Republican nationalism, on the other hand (which Pierre Birnbaum does not mention), far from being hostile to other nations, sees itself as universalist and messianic; it wants to save humanity by freeing peoples from their yoke and bringing them the benefits of civilization. Michel Winock calls it "open nationalism" (Winock, 2004, p. 7). We will not retain the dichotomy established by Michel Winock because it implicitly leads to the idea that there is an absolute break between the two types of nationalism when there is no "watertight boundary" between these two movements (Winock, 2004, p. 13) but, on the contrary, convergences.

#### **2.3.2. Convergences**

The feeling of superiority is not the exclusive preserve of reactionary nationalism. According to Alain Desrayaud, in fact, the patriotism of the Revolution was characterized by a "strongly pronounced feeling of superiority" (Desrayaud, 2010, p. 85). He cites, in particular, Henri de Carion-Nisas, who defined French patriotism as "that feeling, even exaggerated, of superiority that this revolution inspired in us" (Desrayaud, 2010, p. 37), as well as the legislators of 1801, who described France as "the most pleasant and attractive country in the world" (Desrayaud, 2010, p. 37)<sup>11</sup>...

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<sup>11</sup> Roederer's report on 'droit d'aubaine' (taxing of foreigners inheritance), Council of State, meeting of 24 Thermidor year IX (Fenet, 1827, p. 76, t. VII), quoted by (Desrayaud, 2010, p. 41).

Xenophobia, on the other hand, should be alien to French republican nationalism, since it seems so far removed from its foundations. It is not, however, absent from it. As soon as revolutionary wars began, "the nation identified with the universal, the nation humankind, found, as a result of the war, an 'external enemy' and redefined itself in the face of it. The French revolutionaries reconnected with the distrust of the "foreigner"" (Citron, 2008, p. 170). Thus, "the cosmopolitanism so often associated with eighteenth-century French culture abruptly disappeared from books and periodicals, to be replaced by snarling hostility to France's enemies" (Bell, 2001, p. 82).

Despite their similar propensity for feelings of superiority or xenophobia, these two nationalisms develop opposing approaches to otherness. For republican nationalism, heir to the Enlightenment, the Other (exterior<sup>12</sup> or interior<sup>13</sup>) is philosophically similar and therefore potentially assimilable by the Republic. For reactionary nationalism, on the other hand, the Other is fundamentally different and is therefore an object of mistrust. Two nuances should, however, be added to this binary opposition. First, in its colonial enterprise, the Republic sometimes acted in contradiction of its universalist principles and refused assimilation to the "natives" it colonizes. "In the far-off lands of Africa, Asia and Oceania, where the Other seems to become a reputedly 'savage' or 'barbaric' Other, the 'Declaration of human rights' cannot be applied, writes Ferry<sup>14</sup>" (Le Cour Grandmaison, 2009, p. 127). Second, whether one speaks of colonization or assimilation, one is always dealing with domination. Colonization means a brutal deprivation of rights. Assimilation, on the other hand, confers citizenship to the assimilated, but is accompanied by an intentional public policy of removing their specificities, which can be analysed in terms of ethnocide. (Jaulin, 1974; Clastres, 1974).

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<sup>12</sup> The foreigner.

<sup>13</sup> The "provincial," who often ignores French and seems "foreign to civilization".

<sup>14</sup> Jules Ferry (1832-1893) was a French statesman, considered one of the founding fathers of the Republic. Minister of Public Instruction, he instituted "the secular, free and compulsory public school". Several times President of the Council, he led an active colonial policy, justified by dubious arguments.



Beyond, however, the partial convergences that we have just mentioned, let us examine the possibility of a true syncretism between these two types of French nationalism.

### **2.3.3. Syncretism**

In France, nationality and citizenship are considered synonymous because the state is considered "mononational" (Thiesse, 2010, p. 24). Sophie Duchesne has highlighted the existence of two models of "citizenship French-style": citizenship by *inheritance*, based on ties that "appear natural, prescribed, so that the individual is defined in part by them" and citizenship by *scruples*, where these ties "are conceived as artificial, fortuitous, and the individual defines himself in part against them" (Duchesne, 1997, p. 310). Moreover, within citizenship by *inheritance*, she distinguishes between "nationals", who claim as their inheritance "eternal France, descendant of Gaul and which was for a long time the 'eldest daughter' of the Church" (Duchesne, 1997, p. 168), and "republicans", who claim "France as it emerged from the Revolution, the French Republic" (Duchesne, 1997, p. 169).

While everything seems to oppose the "nationals" to the "republicans," the author shows that there is, in fact, a "common core" to these two "sub-models," both of which "come to postulate the national nature of man" (Duchesne, 1997, p. 173). Moreover, the two fundamentally irreconcilable overall models of citizenship by *inheritance* (holistic) and citizenship by *scruples* (individualistic) are themselves, in the minds of the interviewees, artificially reconciled. (Duchesne, 1997, p. 311). Does not this syncretic momentum indicate an aspiration to unity, characteristic of nationalism?

Having noted the complexity of French nationalism - made up of two ideal-typical tendencies linked by convergences, compromises and even syncretic aspirations - perhaps is it time now to consider the appropriateness of the idea of "revival" to refer to the present situation.

### 3. What "revival"?

To speak of a "revival" of French nationalism implies that it would have previously faded away, as said in the introduction. It is now time to examine this point.

#### 3.1. *The manufacturing of Nationalism*

##### 3.1.1. **At the pinnacle of the state**

A first way to assess the manufacturing of nationalism in France is to study the way it is expressed at the highest level of the state. Lonneke Van Noije and Ellen Hijmans have done this in an article on the Christmas speeches of the presidents of the Fifth Republic from 1958 to 2000 (Van Noije & Hijmans, 2005). The authors coded as "nationalist" those expressions that conformed to Anthony Smith's definition<sup>15</sup>, that is, those that referred to ideals of autonomy, unity or national identity. Among the references to national identity, however, they retained only those in which the French nation was represented as "invincible and superior to elements from the outside world," those in which "negative others [who were] more or less [...] the incarnation of evil," and those which incited the French to "immediate or future (mental) mobilization". (Van Noije & Hijmans, 2005: 32).

The authors point out three structures of meaning in the discursive constructions of French presidents. The first frame, the "bond of safety," is predominant: presidents refer to "themselves as a father, and the French as their children, as part of one extended family." (Van Noije & Hijmans, 2005, p. 52). The second frame, that of "the great French values," as proof of "French moral superiority, penetrating the blood of the French" makes spiritual parents of all French. It is presented "as simply being there from birth, invariable and eternal." (Van Noije & Hijmans, 2005, p. 52). Finally, the framework of the "significant other" appears with each president, even if its

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<sup>15</sup> "An ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation". (Smith, 1993, p. 73).

meaning varies according to each of them: it is either a threat or a competitor to be beaten. (Van Noije & Hijmans, 2005, p. 51).

There is nothing in the work of Van Noije and Hijmans to indicate that French nationalism might have disappeared, at one time or another, from the discourse of the presidents. On the contrary, the authors show that "every individual president strikes a nationalist chord" (Van Noije & Hijmans, 2005: 41). As for the speeches made after their research, which are available on the Élysée website ("Élysée", n. d.), their content in no way contradicts the conclusions of the study. On the contrary, the nationalist theme was reinforced following the 2007 campaign, when the nation was the subject of a "fierce debate" between the main candidates. (Martigny, 2009). At the highest level of the State, therefore, it would be inappropriate to speak of a "revival" of nationalism: on the contrary, it has constantly permeated the speeches of the presidents of the Fifth Republic. Let us now examine the transmission of national values through school socialization.

### **3.1.2. At school**

On 26 July 2019, a law made it compulsory for every classroom in France to display the tricolour flag, the European flag and the lyrics of the chorus of the French anthem. Is this a return of the flagging of the French nation within educational establishments? If there is a "return" of the nation to schools, however, it does not date from 2019. The law of 8 July 2013 had already made it compulsory to affix the motto of the Republic, the tricolour flag and the European flag on the facades of public educational establishments. Moreover, this law followed on from a law of 23 April 2005, which had made it compulsory to "learn the national anthem and its history" in primary school. The latter law was preceded by another one, of 23 February 2005, one of the paragraphs of which (which has since been repealed) stipulated that school curricula should recognize the "positive role" of French colonization...

Does the French public authorities' renewed concern for the transmission of national values in schools date back to 2005? This is not the case: "the desire in France in 2005 to teach

the nation is the result of a long history," says Gérard-François Dumont, former rector<sup>16</sup> of a French educational district. It is symbolized by the expression "*éducation nationale*," which today makes France "a singular case in Europe." (Dumont, 2005, p. 5).

The concern to inculcate the nation at school has been constant in France, apart from a fifteen-year slackening following decolonization and the events of May 1968. The teaching of the nation's history in schools was reinvigorated in the early 1980s. "A large place is given to national history" in primary school, with only "openings" to the world (Dumont, 2005, p. 403); as for the teaching of the history of the regions (former annexed provinces), it is forgotten. "It is a question," explains Gérard-François Dumont, "of restoring certain values taught under the Third Republic and considered to be a powerful bond of identity." (Dumont, 2005, p. 11). If, therefore, we were to speak of a "return" of the French nation at school, it would not be to the 2010s decade that we would have to date it, but rather to the early 1980s. A study carried out by the sociologist Géraldine Bozec in 2014 details the steps involved. First, in the 1980s, the nation was "rediscovered". It was at this time that a left-wing minister<sup>17</sup> organized an "explicit and fiery valorization of 'French patriotism'". Following that, in the years 1990-2002, the importance of the schools' national mission continued to be affirmed, but with less emphasis than before: the nation became a "vector of internal cohesion", particularly in the face of Islam, which has been a problem since 1989. From 2002 onwards, the school experienced a "boom in references to the nation". Finally, from 2007 to 2010, "the turning point of 'national identity'" took place, when the theme of learning at school about 'respect' for the nation and its symbols was reinforced. (Bozec, 2014).

However, is school perhaps not the only channel through which national feeling is forged in young consciences, or even the most powerful one?

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<sup>16</sup> The rector is an "official of authority" appointed by the President of the Republic to implement and control French education policy within an administrative district called the "academy," under the direct control of the Minister of National Education.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Pierre Chevènement, Minister of National Education from 1984 to 1986.

### 3.1.3. "*Dans nos foyers*" (in our homes)<sup>18</sup>

Katharine Throssell shows that, from the age of eight, children in France and England already have a sense of belonging to a nation and are, moreover, able to explain what that belonging is based on. This is, she says, "the most fundamental finding of this research". (Throssell, 2012, p. 342).

In both cases, national belonging is essentialized and reflects "something fundamental about the individual linked to their origin and the source of their being". (Throssell, 2012, p. 344). This explains why children spontaneously declare their love for their country and even say they are ready to fight for it! For the child, the nation must be protected because, in his or her eyes, it is the equivalent of his or her emotionally charged "home" (Throssell, 2012, p. 346). For Katharine Throssell, it is the transmission (whether intentional or not) by parents of their representation of the world during primary socialization that is at the foundation of everything.

Firstly it explains why the children are aware of and attached to the nation at an early age; secondly why they associate this attachment with themselves and their sense of self (or their origin); thirdly why this affective relationship remains both mysterious and indubitable for many individuals; and fourthly why the notion of 'homeliness' and ontological security, with its foundations in childhood socialisation, security, emotion and identity building is so important for understanding nationalism. (Throssell, 2012, p. 349).

The secret of the power of nationalism lies therefore in its precocity. Later, in adulthood, "the worldview that is thus acquired is generally difficult to shake." (Throssell, 2012, p. 340).

Given its complexity, there are many channels for the spread of nationalism. To date, there is no comprehensive study of banal nationalism in France that would show how the French are constantly exposed to a flagging that reminds them on a daily basis that they are French, particularly the deictics employed by the press and media. For example, "we" for the French, "here" for France, "*the* nation" for the French nation, etc. (Billig, 1995, pp. 105-119). Nor are there any major studies on the "everyday nationalism" of the French population. In the absence of such

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<sup>18</sup> "*Quoi ! des cohortes étrangères feraient la loi dans nos foyers?*" "What! foreign cohorts would rule in our homes?" Excerpt from *La Marseillaise*, the French national anthem.

systematic observations, we have mentioned here three channels of diffusion of French nationalism: speeches by presidents of the Republic, school socialization and primary family socialization. In the first two cases, we found that there was no "revival" in the dissemination of nationalist representations. As for family socialization, there is no indication, in the only survey we have at our disposal, that we are seeing any form of revival. Consequently, there is no evidence to suggest that a "revival" of the manufacturing of nationalism is under way. What, on the other hand, about the ways in which nationalism is expressed in society?

### **3.2. Modes of expression**

#### **3.2.1. Pride**

In their 1962 survey on French nationalism, Guy Michelat and Jean-Pierre H. Thomas had asked their sample group members if they were proud to be French; however, they do not provide the response rate for this question in their book<sup>19</sup>. They merely state that it is "a fairly widely shared elementary form of nationalism" in France (Michelat & Thomas, 1966: 59-61).

Since 1978, on the other hand, there have been many quantified results about pride in being French, based on three series of surveys of representative samples of the French population. Do they reveal a "revival" of French nationalism? The first series of surveys<sup>20</sup>, carried out as part of post-electoral surveys, shows that "in 1988 as in 1978, pride in being French is a very widespread feeling. It concerns 80 to 90 per cent of the sample, depending on the way the question is formulated" (Mayer, 1996, p. 154). The second series of surveys<sup>21</sup>, conducted as part of European Values Surveys conducted from 1981 onwards, shows a steady increase in the feeling of pride in being French, which rose from 82 per cent to 90 per cent between 1981 and 2008 (Belot, 2009, p. 37). Finally, the third series of surveys<sup>22</sup>, conducted by the Ifop Institute from

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<sup>19</sup> A result that, in any case, would only have been indicative given that the sample was simply composed of two hundred and twenty-three students from three Institutes of Political Studies.

<sup>20</sup> Surveys carried out after the 1978 legislative elections and the 1988 and 1995 presidential elections (N = 4,516, 4,032 and 4,097). The question of pride was not asked in 1995.

<sup>21</sup> European Values Survey conducted in 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2008 (N = 1,200, 1,000, 1,821 and 3,071).

<sup>22</sup> Surveys conducted by Ifop polling institute in 2009, 2010, 2016 and 2017 (N = 1,001, 1,001, 1,000 and 1,000).

2009 to 2017, indicates a declining trend in pride, even though the proportion of people who say they are proud to be French is still very high. ("Ifop", s. d.).

The major lesson from these surveys is that pride in being French is, on a constant basis, very widely shared: from 1978 to 2017, more than three-quarters of those surveyed said they were "proud to be French". There is no progress from a date that would mark the "revival" of nationalism. On the other hand, there are some impressive outbursts of pride in certain exceptional circumstances. The football World Cups of 1998 and 2018, in particular, when the tricolour flag was everywhere, including painted on many, many faces. The attacks of 2015, too, where "national communion" resulted in a spike in pride (Todd, 2015). Overall, then, we do not see a "revival" of French nationalism, measured by national pride, but rather its constancy at a high level.

### **3.2.2. Protection**

Several studies have highlighted identity insecurity in France. (Bouvet, 2012; Guilluy, 2019; Mergier & Fourquet, 2011; Rouban, 2014; Taguieff, 2015). It can be explained by the collapse of the great ideologies that 'enchanted the world' (Gauchet, 1985), allowed people to grasp reality by giving it meaning and provided models for action. The Catholic religion has lost its structuring power (Fourquet, 2019, pp. 21-36) even if some reminiscences of it remain in places, which Hervé le Bras and Emmanuel Todd term "zombie Catholicism". (Todd & Le Bras, 2013, p. 70-72). The Berlin Wall brought a whole world down and, in France, communism is well and truly dead. (Todd & Le Bras, 2013, pp. 66-72). This upheaval of traditional landmarks is a source of anxiety. (Todd, 2015, p. 35). How, in such a context of ideological void and lack of religious or political landmarks, are the transformations of the contemporary world perceived by the population?

Globalization, which most French people discovered at the end of the 1980s, is generally perceived as a threat. (Opinionway, 2018). The European Union does not appear to be a bulwark but rather an object of mistrust. (European Commission, 2019). Finally, economic elites are shirking their responsibilities: they interact less and less with the rest of the population, their "sense

of solidarity, but also of responsibility towards society as a whole [...] is waning" and they are resorting more and more massively to tax evasion abroad. (Beck, 1999, pp. 1-8; Fourquet, 2019, pp. 93-119). Under these circumstances, French society now appears to be divided into two classes.

The "open winners" are pro-European and see the positive sides of globalisation. The "closed losers" reject globalization and Europe (Reynié, 2005), turn to defensive nationalism and demand more economic, social, security and identity protection from the state (Fourquet, 2019, pp. 271-281). This is how the *Gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) movement can be interpreted, rather than, as has sometimes been suggested, as a surge of the far right (Collectif, 2018; Geisser, 2019; Noiriél, 2019; Sebbah, Souillard, Thiong-Kay, & Smyrnaiois, 2018). This nationalism is not new in that it continues the tradition of republican nationalism. On the other hand, its originality lies in its purely defensive dimension (Taguieff, 2015, pp. 41-43).

There is, however, another form of nationalism that is currently on the rise, which is a cause for concern.

### **3.2.3. Perversion**

Since October 3, 1989, a large proportion of the French population has expressed unease about Islam. On that date, a school principal had decided to exclude three girls from his school because they refused to remove their headscarves during class. (Lorcerie, 1994). His decision was the subject of heated discussions throughout French society (Gaspard & Khosrokhavar, 1995, p. 11). Since then, a law was passed in 2004 that prohibits, in public schools, collèges and lycées, "the wearing of signs or outfits by which pupils ostensibly manifest a religious affiliation".

However, it was in January 2015 that the malaise concerning Islam reached its peak, after the attacks in which the editors of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* were murdered, along with policemen and customers of a Jewish shop. France then experienced a "fit of hysteria," in which the media "communicated in celebration of the admirable character of the French people.



[...] *Charlie Hebdo* and his cartoons of Mohammed were shrouded in sanctuary." (Todd, 2015, p. 11).

Concern about Islam, or even Islamophobia, takes over from an older, related evil (Cf. CNCDH, 2019, p. 125): a rejection of immigration that can go as far as Arabophobia. (Todd, 2015, p. 156). It is a scapegoat phenomenon, which occurs when categories of the population feel threatened with social downfall. (Wieviorka, 1992, p. 35, 1993, pp. 59-62, 1998, pp. 41-42). This variant of nationalism is akin to racism. Is it, however, really racism in the classical sense? According to Emmanuel Todd, it is rather a "perversion of universalism":

The universalist *a priori* of the central French system certainly allows for the development of fine theories [...]. But it can also lead, in the intermediate phases, to extremely violent tensions. Let us work out to their end the logical consequences of the egalitarian *a priori*: "If men are the same everywhere, and if the foreigners who arrive on our soil behave in a really different way, it is because they are not men." (Todd, 2015, p. 155).

The "perversion of universalism" is not new. Already present in the Enlightenment - where Voltaire, in particular, established a hierarchy between men, 'negroes', monkeys and oysters (Voltaire, 1734, p. 210) -, then during the French Revolution (Cf. Wahnich, 2010), it allowed great democrats and republicans to justify colonization in the name of French superiority, in extremely violent terms. According to Victor Hugo, for example, colonization represented "the civilization that treads on barbarity" (Hugo, 1841, p. 52). It allows, added Ernest Renan, "the regeneration of inferior races or bastardized races by superior races" (Renan, 1871, p. 390). For, said Jules Ferry, "there is a right for the superior races, because there is a duty for them. They have a duty to civilize the inferior races". (Ferry, 1885, p. 103). "Internal colonialism" (Lafont 1967:140-142; Weber 1983:689-704), which was supposed to bring civilization to the "savages" and "barbarians" who populated the provinces, was justified in very similar terms. (Le Coadic, 1998, pp. 113-118).

This "perversion of universalism" today provokes bitterness among some young French citizens whose families often come from countries that have been colonized by France. They abhor anything that evokes French nationalism. At school, they cannot accept the values of

"national" education without feeling that they are betraying their parents (Sicot, 2007, p. 13) and sometimes they go as far as a "global and explicit refusal of the knowledge taught" (Alamartine, 2003, p. 102). In the stadiums, they sometimes hiss at the French anthem. (Roos, 2008). Finally, in the suburbs where they live, they tend to reject French state because they consider it racist and humiliating. (Mucchielli & Aït-Omar, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

We have examined the three premises of the claim that there is at present a "revival of French nationalism". The first conclusion is that the very concept of "nationalism" is singularly complex. After referring to Gellner's famous definition, we preferred to use an anthropological approach according to which nationalism is a collective narcissism combining three dimensions (inspired by Weber, 1921 and Michelat & Thomas, 1966): the sense of belonging, the search for sovereignty and the idea of superiority. These dimensions are intertwined and their combination in varying proportions gives rise to a wide range of nuances.

Secondly, we have shown that the expression "French nationalism" is a convenient simplification, which makes it possible to group together several apparently opposing ideological currents which, in reality, do not have a watertight boundary between them and which, moreover, are the subject of an aspiration to syncretism.

Finally, we have approached the notion of "revival" from two angles. The "manufacturing" of nationalism by institutions and the family, on the one hand, has appeared as a constant process. In this respect, therefore, the term "revival" is inappropriate. As for the ways in which nationalism is expressed, we have made three observations. First, pride in being French has always been maintained at a very high level, so to speak of "revival" about it would be inappropriate. The dominant orientation of French nationalism, secondly, appears today to be mainly defensive rather than messianic, which is a new characteristic, peculiar to the contemporary era. Finally, the

"perversion of universalism" is not a new feature, but has been gaining in strength over the past thirty years or so and now arouses rejection among sections of the youth population.

In conclusion, since the public authorities and the family constantly produce nationalism, the expression "revival of French nationalism" is inappropriate; on the other hand, its social expression is currently undergoing a reinvigoration and defensive mutation.

Further analysis would require meticulous work on both banal nationalism (manufactured by the State to reproduce itself) and everyday nationalism (implemented by the population); for the "hot" nationalism of the far right, which tends to attract all the attention, cannot be disconnected from the whole French nationalist continuum. However, to date, we are a long way from that. Michael Billig's work received a frosty reception in France (Birnbaum, 2010; Duchesne, 2019, p. 5) and it took almost twenty-five years before it was translated into French (Billig, Duchesne, Hamidi, & Hamidi, 2019). Finally, there is only one major investigation on the French (and English) case(s), the results of which were published in English by an Australian (Throssell, 2012). Much therefore remains to be done.

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