

# National identity

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## France: National identity

Marc-Olivier Padis

National identity is not a purely descriptive notion; it also involves strong emotional commitment. It is variable according to time and place, highly charged with ambiguity and open to manipulation. Nevertheless, this expression, burdened as it is with history and memories, and easily transformed into a weapon, remains useful for exploring that feeling of political, historical and cultural belonging that the term 'citizenship' fails to satisfactorily describe. Vague as it is, the expression 'national identity' raises the eternal question whose existence it would be futile to deny, but to which there perhaps cannot be a unilateral, nor definitive, response.

On initial examination, 'national identity' refers to a legal situation: the nationality found on an identity card or passport. This is a minimal condition for a sense of political belonging, the secure bedrock the importance of which the experience of stateless persons or refugees has taught us. To be deprived of nationality is to be exposed to wandering, devoid of assistance or the minimal protection that a state provides (or should provide) for its citizens. It constitutes the primary effective framework for personal dignity, on condition, however, that it guarantees equality (the same rights for everyone, all rights for every individual) and the effectiveness of legal protection. This minimal legal foundation characterizes citizenship, understood in the sense of rights and responsibilities that come with belonging to a political group. However, the term 'citizenship' also evokes a form of political participation that goes beyond opportunities or obligations. It evokes a form of involvement in the life of the state, which includes good citizenship, selfless concern on behalf of the common good, which constitutes the accomplished form of the citizen's life in the tradition of 'civic humanism'.

This active form of participation in political life rationalizes the passionate aspects of political belonging by often presenting them as an ideal. It does not, however, describe in itself the totality of the sentiment of political belonging. A less intellectual, less refined, largely passive form of national identity remains the most common experience.

This subtler sentiment, sometimes less worthy, nevertheless remains the real cement of the '*af-fectio societatis*'. Moreover, no state disregards the importance of symbols, national pride, parochial patriotism, commemorations, collective celebrations and so on. Traditions, customs, habits and landscapes give a real form to national belonging within the daily structure of life.

It has often been noted that European citizenship has suffered from this lack of concrete incarnations. It is possible to defend 'constitutional patriotism' in terms of strong attachment and even personal engagement towards one's political community. But if such a formula makes sense within the realm of principles, it is far from having permeated the everyday life of Europeans.

It would be wrong to see in national pride only the simple expression of a sense of identity, which is of little importance from a formal legal viewpoint. The possibility of speaking one's own language, for example, or of knowing one's own history, are the conditions not only for belonging to a political whole, but also for developing a critical view which allows a distance to be created towards this belonging. Moreover, it is through seemingly fortuitous or futile elements that national belonging allows for the construction of a strong space of national solidarity: the level of redistribution accepted between citizens is directly correlated to the feeling of belonging and even of confidence that exists between citizens. The welfare state developed on a national basis, in response, moreover, to a world war which reminded us that the price of the spilled blood and collective sacrifices of war must find a permanent response once peace returned. The feeling of proximity appears, in point of fact, an inseparable part of the acceptance of the levels of deduction and redistribution that our welfare states have reached.

National belonging is therefore inseparable from an historical and cultural anchorage. But, if one recognizes that it would be vain to want to make of cultural identity an abstract idea, what place must we grant it? Must we enter into a debate on *Leitkultur* (majority culture or reference culture)? It would not be wrong to state that it is, without a doubt, easier to integrate into a society that proposes a strong

cultural corpus, visible and established, rather than into a society whose cultural codes remain implicit and discrete but secretly imply more than is obvious or stated. But if the risk of asserting a cultural identity is that of excluding those who, newcomers or not, do not share the majority culture, it is equally insidious to simplify and, finally, to impoverish this culture which has to serve as a reference. To try to establish what constitutes the cultural identity of a country is to risk reducing it to a caricature. Who can, indeed, decide the limits, the essential characteristics and the exclusions of this culture? Who can sort out what is central or marginal, essential or secondary? One would undoubtedly be content mostly with referring to a minimal school-level culture or to trendy references, even to political opportunities. The political definition of national identity, because it cannot be detached from pragmatic considerations, can only lead to manipulation of knowledge, to an oversimplification of the past, to a literally feeble (weakened) culture, whose power of seduction and inspiration would be annihilated. It would lead, ultimately, to the destruction of that which it is supposed to enhance.

The impossibility of establishing a cultural corpus must not, for all that, prevent us from speaking of belonging in cultural terms, nor make us confine ourselves cautiously to legal abstractions. Several paths can indeed be taken to overcome this apparent dilemma. The recognition, firstly, of shared conflicts. National histories more often consist of conflicts overcome rather than unilateral visions. To recognize that these conflicts are central to our heritage can help to deliver justice to the diversity of citizens' experiences. After that the recognition of the beneficial necessity of pluralism can follow. The latter must not be accepted as a lesser evil, a stopgap, a concession to tolerance, or even an inevitable scepticism, but as a positive contribution to our understanding of political life. Pluralism is desirable in itself as a discipline of the acknowledgement of the nation's internal diversity. This diversity is not only lived in the present: it is not an effect of contemporary relativism, that one could contrast with more ancient and homogeneous times where minds were unanimous and culture was shared. Diversity is a constituent of the very foundations which cannot be reduced to a single source without causing harm. Some of these foundations have

been forgotten, or obscured by history, or destroyed by confrontation with others. Others, almost abandoned, may instead still contain unfulfilled promises, unaccomplished histories, or 'warehouses' of meaning ripe for rediscovery.

Blind alleys of reference to cultural identity must not, therefore, lead to neutralizing convictions, for these convictions can nourish a positive and active commitment to citizenship and not merely a passive enjoyment of the rights that are attached to it. But convictions can only animate democratic life within a framework that includes the recognition of pluralism of opinions, the acknowledgement of the conflictual dimension of democratic life and the recognition of the unremittingly multiple foundations of our society.

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## Germany: National identity

Christoph Böhr

In the past decade the relationship of Germans to their nation and their nationality has noticeably relaxed. Nowadays, it is no longer difficult for a German to identify with his country and to think of himself as a German. One can even sometimes note a slight note of pride when someone says, 'I am German' or more often, 'my mother tongue is German'.

For the first time since the end of World War II the conditions have been created in which a German identity can be created anew. Nevertheless, even sixty years after the end of the World War II, Germans still find it difficult to deal with the concept of 'nation'. The term has been loaded ever since the derailment of the National Socialists. The way they distorted it still has an effect today. As a result, whoever uses the term still runs the risk of being ostracized. Someone thinking about 'nation' who considers this still to be an essential, or at least permissible political orientation, will prefer to hide his conviction rather than express it outright. Here lies the difficulty in describing the German national identity. It flourishes all too often in secret.

A further difficulty also comes into play: the concept of 'nation' contains within itself both the notion of inclusion, as well as of exclusion. It makes a statement that some people belong, while other others do not. It is therefore understandable that it comes to life particularly when distinctions are to be made: the nation then 'closes ranks', as a German idiom puts it. Precisely this phenomenon occurred in the 1980s and 1990s when a disproportionate number of foreigners chose to take refuge in Germany or to immigrate there. It was clear that nationalistic emotions came into play that were immediately denigrated as xenophobic or even racist. And of course once again memories of the racism of the National Socialists echoed loud and clear in the ensuing debate.

And so even today the concept of 'nation' remains traumatic in Germany and is discredited as being nationalistic, or even latently racist.

Therefore the term 'national interest' does not feature either in the vocabulary of the political debate in Germany. This can lead to unpleasant and misleading consequences: as when Peter Struck, a former German Secretary of Defence, defended the involvement of Germany in Afghanistan several years ago; he justified it by stating that Germany would also defend the Hindu Kush. What he meant, of course, was something entirely different: namely that Germany's national interests would also be defended in the Hindu Kush. The inhibition about speaking about national interest had, in this case, the fatal consequence of a moral hyperbole: in no way was the territorial defence of Germany at stake, but rather the national interest of Germany. This can occur, but each case must be weighed up individually – more as a political, than as a moral question.

Since the reunification of Germany the relationship of the Germans to their nation has become slightly more relaxed. It has become easier to talk about the nation since it is no longer a matter of two states divided by a wall. At the same time serious trauma still remains from the National Socialist era. One consequence that continues to have an effect today is that since 1945, Germans can only distinguish their sense of identity very weakly from the concept of nationhood: in the DDR it was ideology that was supposed to foster a sense of identity, while in West Germany it was a sense of belonging to the value system of the west.

This explains why even today the Germans' political search for identity is more a moral stance than a case of national cohesion. The concept of 'nation' has a more descriptive significance in Germany than as a guideline for developing a political concept. A sense of pride in being German is now expressed in a relaxed and unhesitating way at football championships. However, it plays only a subordinate role in the political culture of the country. This is both a problem and an opportunity.

One problem is that Germany, in its cooperation with other countries, always finds it difficult to understand its partners when they try to analyze Germany's aims on the basis of their own national interests, or vice versa: when other countries – led by their own national interests – try to enlist Ger-

man support to achieve their own goals. Hardly anyone understands, for example, why no one in Germany shows any interest in the fact that in a few years time Germany's energy requirements will be totally dependant on the goodwill (that is, the dictates of the market) of its suppliers. This is a serious problem for a leading industrialized country in the heart of Europe with enormous energy requirements. At the same time it is still more or less pointless in Germany – in the context of national interest – to argue for a sustainable, consistently high proportion of self-sufficiency in energy supplies. To put forward one's own (national) interests is considered improper in the political culture of Germany (and useless for winning votes).

The same applies to other political fields. The debate on integration is another good example; we still do not tell foreigners in an unambiguous manner what we expect of them if they wish to take up permanent residence in Germany. Integration can only succeed if it is absolutely clear what the target of integration is. Without a definition of the goals, integration cannot be achieved. Nowadays, no one doubts any longer that mastering the German language is a prerequisite for every kind of successful integration. But it took many, many years for this consensus to be reached in Germany. But where nearly all the other goals of integration are concerned total disagreement reigns: which cultural beliefs is it reasonable for an immigrant to hold and to appropriate? What should we say to immigrants with a non-European upbringing and cultural background who have difficulty in accepting the prevailing view expressed in Article 1: 'The dignity of a human being is inviolable'? This statement is incompatible with a view of society defined by caste thinking, or one which assumes that men and women are supposed to enjoy different rights (and obligations). This is where it becomes obvious that integration can only succeed if a country that is willing to offer a migrant a new home has first of all made clear which of its own cultural and political convictions are indispensable and which should be contractually binding on third parties.

Nowadays Germans do not wish to impose themselves on anyone. The Nazi phrase that, 'The world can only recuperate if it adopts German attitudes and approaches', was both utterly stupid and utterly

arrogant and its consequences were appalling. Today Germans sometimes forget that it is essential for maintaining a friendly relationship that all participants not only know what they want but that they should also express this to their friends politely yet firmly.

And yet the rather weak sense of German national identity also presents an opportunity that should not be underestimated. Precisely because Germany hardly considers its own national interests, let alone asserts them, has the country which is located at the very heart of Europe been enabled like no other European country, to act as the honest broker in the search for a fair solution for all parties. Moreover, it is precisely for this role that Germany has been held in considerate esteem since the Treaties of Rome were signed.

Germany has no desire for hegemony and does not wish to play any particular role (which it does, nevertheless, because of its economic potential) and is therefore – more than others – interested that at the end of negotiations (for example between the countries of the European Union) a compromise, i.e. a consensus, is reached. And even then, Germany does not even feel the need that the achieved consensus should be seen as a result of its own efforts. Unlike almost any other European country, the Germans (and not only German politicians) are convinced of the necessity for European unification, incidentally also as a result of such men as Konrad Adenauer, Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt and Helmut Kohl, who acted as Germany's political teachers.

Precisely because the sense of German national identity is still so weakly developed, German politicians are able to search for a compromise without being chided back home. Never have Germans seriously criticized their government for having damaged German interests when international or European agreements have been reached. Germany's financial contribution was and is considerable. Yet this fact has never been made the focus of a populist political campaign. This has never been a handicap for the importance of Germany's role both in the world and in the development of European unification.

So in the end, an inevitable ambivalence remains: as national identity and the definition of Germany's national interests are hardly ever strongly defined, the country is sometimes seen by its friends as a burden and yet for the same reasons – and probably more often – it is seen as a blessing by its neighbours and partner.

What remains to be seen is how the younger generation, who have grown up in a globalized world with the Internet, Web 2.0 and YouTube, will develop a sense of national identity. It is hardly possible to predict an outcome. Yet it is to be supposed that both regional as well as national identities will maintain their importance in an age of globalization. This assumption not only applies to emerging markets, that have been overrun by globalization, but just as much to industrial and service societies such as Germany.

A multitude of voices in Germany have expressed the hope that in due course, the citizens of this country will find the path that leads back to a relaxed sense of national identity: that does not stand at every turn in the shadows of the memory of the National Socialist regime. As understandable as these voices are, it is equally important that Germany does not treat those years as a reason for self-pity, nor as a call for self-accusation and by no means as a reason to consider that a sense of self-awareness had been permanently forfeited. Just as important as the necessary recognition of responsibility for one's nation's history (especially in the context of a national identity) is the need to uphold the memory of a century of violence so that future generations can maintain a sense of the fragility of all democratic and cultural achievements of civilization as a distinctive historical experience and therefore as part of one's own – namely German, identity.

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## The Netherlands: National identity

Auke van der Berg

*'The nation is the continuing debate we have with each other in our own language'*, writes historian Ernest Kossman.

In a way, the Dutch government came to the same conclusion in a letter dated 20 August 2008: Language is the 'cement' of society. This letter is the government's reaction to the report 'Identification with the Netherlands' published by the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR, 2007). In turn, this report was a reaction to the continuing debate about national identity that has been going on for the past five years. A debate which had been absent from the public agenda in the preceding decades, for the simple reason that the cultural elite was quite pleased with the image that it, and the rest of the world, had of the Netherlands. Until five years ago, the silent majority lived up to its name and was thus not part of the debate.

The Netherlands is considered the California of Europe; we are so tolerant, we are the most liberal country of Europe, or make that the world. From marijuana to euthanasia, the Netherlands leads the way. Or is it time to start saying that the Netherlands used to lead the way?

After the assassinations of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh not much was left of the progressive image we once had, despite the differences in motivation and background behind the murders. What used to be called tolerance is now called indifference. What used to be considered liberal is now viewed as weakness. A harsh storm is raging over the polder.

Let me be honest: being an exponent of the generation that turned politically correct thinking into a mantra for happiness, it is very tempting to start apologizing beforehand when writing about identity. Apologize for the fact that when you start discussing national identity it leads to 'exclusive' thinking. Because the thing that separates you from the rest – the rest doesn't have. Politically correct thinking was designed to accentuate the things that tie us

together, not the things that separate us.

The interesting thing about the above-mentioned letter from the Dutch government is that it comes to the conclusion that Dutch identity does not actually exist. Of course it points out several elements the government deems important for society, but striving for active citizenship, respect for law and democracy and freedom of speech and religion are not strictly Dutch. Even skating does not set us apart. And so language, the single unique quality, is offered as the cement for society.

'The continuing debate' is what makes Kossman's definition useful in the discussion about national identity, because it makes clear that it is not a static notion, incapable of change. The thing that ties us together is subject to change.

When we discuss morals and values, we have to understand that these are not static. The continuing debate anchors what we agree on and reports the things we do not agree on. Identity is not just what ties us together but is also defined by the way we handle that which we stumble over as a community. Because, as it turns out, we cannot change the course of the raging storm.

According to statistics, the population of Amsterdam is now made up of 177 different nationalities. It is safe to assume that not everyone in this city is using the same cement in their daily lives. Obviously, there is no disputing the fact that Dutch has to be the language to act as the cement in this country. But if we want to have this continuing debate, we will have to consider the consequences of not finishing building the Tower of Babel. The arrival of hundreds of thousands of lesser educated new citizens in the Netherlands has had specific consequences for the debate.

The status of a language is related to the social class(es) using it. Language as used by a lesser educated minority, with a consequently lower social status, frustrates the user. Common psychological effects include feelings of inferiority and exclusion. Sure, we are talking about the chicken and the egg: often the newcomer already feels excluded and unwelcome for other reasons. But language allows communication and care in the use of language is a

basic principle of communication.

My personal background as a member of a small and long-standing minority in the Netherlands shows that even without migration it is possible to encounter the psychological and social consequences of growing up in a minority language that is perceived and felt, as being inferior.

When I was four years old I began kindergarten. The lady next door, whose house I had visited daily during the previous years, became my teacher. On the first day of school she took me apart from the group and told me that during school hours, from that day on, I had to address her in Dutch. A language I could not speak. Frisian became a language I spoke at home, while Dutch became the language of further development.

During puberty all you want to do is blend in. Being part of a minority is something you try to hide as best as you can; you try to cover up the Frisian accent flavouring your Dutch. Afraid they will hear where you come from. The language of farmers and blue collar workers is no guarantee for a warm and indiscriminate welcome.

The continuing debate defines our nation. Language allows us to have that debate. And so care in the use of it is a must. Our identity is shaped by our words. Which words we choose to use is our individual right. National identity implies a consensus, also regarding language. But choosing one does not exclude the other. National identity is like language: diverse and uniform, multicoloured and monotone. Ever changing.

Today the wind blows from all corners in the Netherlands. And sometimes it storms. But the storm always dies down. If it is not today, then tomorrow.

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## Poland: National identity

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir

In this paper I intend to develop the following thesis: paradoxically, that the disappearance from the social landscape of that national minority which, for centuries, constituted the 'thorn in the flesh' of 'true Poles' has had the strongest impact on the definition of 'Polish nationality' in present-day Poland. The Polish author, Witold Gombrowicz, wrote that Jews provided Poland with access to all the most important problems of the world; however, as a result of the Holocaust, Poland has lost this perspective.

Professor Maria Janion believes that delusions of greatness and the feeling of having been wronged are closely connected. In Poland today both of these still find their expression in Polish Messianism, which provides a sort of compensation for feelings of inferiority and humiliation which are typical of post-colonial countries<sup>1</sup>. Loss of independence in the 18th century, living under foreign rule throughout the whole of the 19th century, followed by a short period of independence during the inter-war years in the 20th century, and the two subsequent occupations: the Soviet and the German, have created a feeling of intense inferiority vis-à-vis the West, 'which continued to develop its civilization while we remained backward. Besides, the West failed to help any of the Polish uprisings aimed at regaining independence, either in the 19th century, or in the 20th century, in the way the Poles would have expected. The basis for such Messianism (and not only of the Polish variety), that is one which proclaims 'its nation as the chosen one and destined to fulfil some special mission', is very similar<sup>2</sup>.

My theory concerning Polish problems with identity, which, at present, are rapidly deepening, is presented in a recently published book *Legenda o krwi. Antropologia przesądu* (*Blood Legends. Anthropology of a prejudice*)<sup>3</sup>. My diagnosis may be sum-

marized briefly as follows: Poland has been going crazy since the disappearance of the Jews. After the Second World War the identity of the country, which for centuries was defined as *un pays marécageux, où habitent les Juifs*<sup>4</sup>, was thoroughly cleansed of its Jewish population. If there is a hierarchy of images of Poland, including pictures foreigners have of it, self-portraits and ideas, the most basic among them is the following: Poland was always that 'boggy country where Jews dwell'. At least for seven centuries Jews and Poles lived side-by-side, in friendship or squabbling, in neighbouring houses in a country which, after the Holocaust, saw the complete disappearance of one of these neighbours. The reaction of the Poles to the disappearance of one neighbour, namely the Jews, was, on the one hand, evident relief, but on the other, it has awoken a hidden, displaced anxiety, which, indeed, was caused by the Holocaust. It would seem that it was precisely the Holocaust and the resulting catastrophic 'homogenization' of a society used to diversity that have today become the moving force behind the 'list of Jews' currently circulating in Poland<sup>5</sup> and in the violent social antagonisms it hides. Disoriented Poles, unwilling to acknowledge that primary catastrophe, have produced those 'lists of Jews' denying the disappearance of the Jews, presenting it as a fraud, whereas the ethnic uniformity resulting from the *Shoah* is presented as a falsehood fabricated by the Jews to conceal their identity. This was exactly how people from the Sandomierz region viewed Polish post-war homogeneity, with hostility and suspicion:

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almost ten years of research work based on 100 narratives from different periods on host desecration, blood libel, and attacks on Christian holy pictures blamed on the Jews. Using the methods developed by Vladimir Propp (*Morphology of the Fairytale*) the author reveals the permanent structure of these tales. She then goes on to show the morphological similarity between them and contemporary beliefs in Jewish wickedness recorded in the course of ethnographic research work conducted in the region of Sandomierz (2005-2008). The final part of the book reports that part of her research which deals with provincial memory of the Holocaust in this region of Poland.

1 Sami sobie cudzy. Z Marią Janion rozmawia Katarzyna Bielas, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 19/9/2007.

2 Ibid.

3 WAB, Warsaw 2008 (further: LK). This book is a result of

4 'Poland is a boggy country where Jews dwell', after: Czesław Miłosz, *Oprawa*, from the volume *Druga przestrzeń* (2004)

5 I wrote about these lists and provided their photocopies on pages. 621-624 of my book *Blood Legends*.

[207W] 'Because before the war the Jew was different. He was a Jew. It was clear that he was a Jew. And today... it is difficult (...) Somebody is a Jew but he is hiding this, because he is... has some important job somewhere, and it's not clear who it is. Maybe he is from a Jewish family [pause]. Well, they went into the government (...). And is it known that the Jews went into the government? It's not known. Only later [indistinct] it becomes clear that they are Jews'.

[472W] 'After all in the government, in governments in Poland until today there are 70% - perhaps now Kaczynski will put things in order? - 70 or 80% are Jews. They are Jews'<sup>6</sup>.

If my hypothesis is correct, it would be a bitter historical irony that a country which, for centuries, based its identity on a denial of the significance of its Jewish population, lost its mental balance after their total disappearance. On the unconscious level the 'lists of Jews' constitute a desperate attempt to regain this equilibrium by restoring the diversity, by 'reconstituting' the twin who had disappeared from the Polish identity loop.

After what happened to the Jews before the nation's eyes Poland turned into a country with a broken spine. Likewise, what happened to the Jews after the war and was repeated in 1968, was far from decent, and therefore the notion of decency, which the Poles hold in high esteem, could not remain unscathed. In subsequent years it seemed that too much time had passed to revisit these events. However, we now know that experiences which we try to escape always overtake us, just as Roman Giertych, the ex-deputy Prime Minister and leader of the ultra-nationalist 'League of Polish Families', pre-empted the national discussion on the pre-war 'All Poland Youth' movement (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*), and just as the erection of the monument to the nationalist Dmowski in the centre of Warsaw in 2006 stole a march on the debate devoted to his heritage of hate. If there is any certain continuity in Poland it is that of various forms of antisemitism. In the most recent public discourse in Poland traditional 'fossil-

ized' antisemitic claims have resurfaced time and again. Thus the crowd which did not wish to accept the resignation of Bishop Stanislaw Wielgus before his induction as archbishop was shouting:

'Pharisees, go away, let us pray'.

'It's all the fault of the media, those Masonic Pharisees. They've sold the Bishop for a few pieces of silver'<sup>7</sup>.

'It was the Jewish-Communist conspiracy that took care of it (...). They got rid of him because they did not want a Polish bishop. They could not stomach the fact that the Church will be ruled by a Pole. They are already grooming a Jew'.

Popular Polish Catholicism makes use of coded language to express hate, of cartoon-like simplification. 'Sanhedrin' is that all-encompassing 'symbolic Jew', who, the day after Bishop's Wielgus' resignation was identified by the Deputy Prime Minister Roman Giertych with the KOR (Workers Defence Committee)<sup>8</sup>. In Warsaw street discourse 'Sanhedrin' and 'high-priest'<sup>9</sup> have become the 'villains'. Without reference to such an enemy the Polish nationalistic-Catholic society would either disintegrate<sup>10</sup> or become marginalized.

Antisemitism is an old and 'cold' topic, which means that it is both deeply rooted and less and less directly accessible. For the past half a century, explicit anti-Jewish content has found expression in the Polish language only very infrequently.

<sup>6</sup> Full text of interviews from Sandomierz region conducted in 2005-2006 in: J.Tokarska-Bakir, LK.

<sup>7</sup> K.Kowalska, *Przed katedrą i domem biskupów*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8/1/2007; further quotations are from the same source.

<sup>8</sup> [note signed „es”] KOR caused Bishop Wielgus's affair, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11/01/2007: 'The Holy Father took his decision influenced by these attacks', said Giertych. According to those who today attacked Bishop Wielgus it was not the Catholic Church that saved us from Communism but KOR, founded by Msrs Macierewicz, Michnik, Kuron and others. In addition the Church has to be 'blackened', stating that it is the source for Secret Service agents! The case of Archbishop Wielgus is an attempt by KOR milieu to steal the straggle against Communism!

<sup>9</sup> M. Rybiński about Adam Michnik in a text called *Koniec Polski i Kiszczaka, i Michnika*, *Dziennik* 10/01/2007.

<sup>10</sup> '...without reference to the Jews, who threaten society, this society would have disintegrated', S. Žižek, *Wzniośły obiekt ideologii*, translated by J.Bator i P.Dybel, Wrocław 2001, s. 209.

In Poland, desecration of Jewish cemeteries is much less frequent than, for example, in France. Similarly, the scale of racist violence is not comparable<sup>11</sup>. What exists in Poland today is rather 'a structural antisemitism', manifesting itself through allusions and ambiguous signals, 'infected' words and actions, like those written on banners commenting on the failed induction of Bishop Wielgus, making use of the symbolic 'excess' hidden in the language. Slogans of the 'All-Polish Youth' movement (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*), revived by Roman Giertych, exemplify such 'double' messages and this whole movement may, in a way, constitute such an ambiguous message. A similar strategy has been adopted by the 'League of Polish Families', led until recently by Giertych<sup>12</sup>. The banner carried during its October 2006 demonstration in Warsaw: 'Woodworms to the tropics', is a clear allusion to the pre-war National Democrats slogan 'Jews to Madagascar'<sup>13</sup> or to the one dating from March 1968 'Zionists to Siam'. The authors of a banner: 'Eskimos! When are you going to apologize to us?' probably referred to those Jews who failed to ask the Poles for forgiveness<sup>14</sup>.

The stronghold of Polish antisemitic codes is not only the infamous 'Radio Maryja'. In present-day Poland these ideas also serve as the most effective source of election catchphrases, endowed with great potential to arouse, but they are hardly explicit. It seems that the words in these catchphrases arrange themselves to the sound of a

military trumpet, in accordance with the folk idiom of ahistoricism, where only nouns are significant while verbs hardly matter. In order to work, these ideas need not be reproduced verbatim. If they appear as syllogisms (such as, for example: 'Judas is a traitor', 'Judas is a Jew', 'Jews are traitors') it is enough to quote one of the elements and people acquainted with the code recognize it straightaway. The signal may be contained in innocent words, for example: 'Nation' or 'Poland', provided there is a link with the word: 'enemies'. For example: in spring 2001, just before the first official anniversary commemoration of the Jedwabne massacres, Jarosław Kaczyński, who, at that time, was a candidate for the post of Law and Justice party leader, referred in one of his speeches to current events. 'They are trying to slander us', he said, 'to make us Hitler's partners; the enemies of Poland are behind this'<sup>15</sup>. He was rewarded with an ovation.

An American historian, Thomas Bender, believes that history as a discipline is strongly linked to the concept of nation as the carrier of historical narration. Therefore the way history is taught can shape an exclusive model of citizenship<sup>16</sup>. Why has the most important Polish politician failed to take this into consideration in the multinational province of Podlasie, near Jedwabne, while postulating *Ein Volk*? 'We will win', he stated, 'because Poland needs this victory. Poland needs it so that one Polish nation and not different nations should live in this state, in the Republic of Poland, so that the Republic is one whole and all its lands have the same laws; so that all the Poles have the same right to dignity'<sup>17</sup>.

'Patriotism must become universal. Yes, this is our aim', said the same politician some days later and these words already sounded like a threat, in particular, when among those to be forcefully 'enclosed' by this patriotism, before Armenians, Lithuanians Byelorussians and Germans, Jews

11 See Alain Finkelkraut, quoted in: 'Forum' 14-20/3/2005, p. 23; see also R. Sołtyk, *Skończenie z antysemityzmem*, 'Gazeta Wyborcza', 20/2/2004.

12 Songs sang in summer camps run by the League of Polish Families: (music from a popular tune 'Those were beautiful days') 'Those were beautiful days, when the Jew went to the gas [chambers]'; (music from a popular tune 'How nice it is to conquer the mountains'); 'How nice it is in winter to rinse a Jewish mug in an ice-hole, to wipe one's shoes with his beard and to sing loudly the League of Polish Families'; cited from: 'Młodzież Wszechpolska – wybrane fakty z ostatnich dwóch lat', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 1/12/2006.

13 *Żydzi na Madagaskar – felieton o hasle z manifestacji LPR*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 08/10/2006.

14 I would like to thank Mr Tomasz Ptóciennik for this interpretation: if the Poles have to ask the Jews for an apology then the Poles should be forgiven by the Eskimos; as is well known in both cases there is no reason to ask for an apology.

15 Quotation from: A. Bikont, *Pięć lat po Jedwabnem*, 'Gazeta Wyborcza', 4-5/3/2006.

16 *Czy Ameryka jest wyjątkowa? Z Thomasem Benderem rozmawia Artur Domostawski*, 'Gazeta Wyborcza', 22-23/9/2007.

17 Speech by Jarosław Kaczyński, The Prime Minister of the Polish Republic at the time, 'Gazeta Wyborcza', 16/09/2007, za PAP.

were mentioned, while the community which so nicely invited them to join it was defined here as 'the community of loyalty'<sup>18</sup>. The following statement made by the leader of the Polish Parliament, Ludwik Dorn, fulfilled an identical function of the bogeyman:

'I regard external attempts to convince the Poles that they are particularly infected by this illness [antisemitism] as an anti-Polish campaign, and the claims of the internal campaign that the Poles must make a special reckoning of their guilt because of alleged extraordinary antisemitism, I believe, is simply harmful'<sup>19</sup>.

Thus we get to the crux of the matter, the so-called policy of history which is dominant in today's Poland. Only this policy, were it to be conducted based on historical truth, on the one hand, and with a sensitive conscience on the other, could safeguard Poland's protection against historical exclusions. Unfortunately, this endeavour has been compromised in Poland from the very beginning. The most poignant expression of the new historical policy adopted in Poland is a legal measure which is still in force, contained in Paragraph 142 of the Criminal Code, which envisages a term of up to three years of imprisonment for 'public slander of the Polish nation as a participant, organiser or someone in any way responsible for Communist or Nazi crimes'<sup>20</sup>. After formulating this definition of the field of discussion about the past, the authors of this historical policy expend all their energy on locking history away in museums: in the Museum of Polish History and in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews respectively, sparing no effort to ensure that anyone would mistake one for the other.

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18 *Kaczyński: Patriotyzm musi stać się powszechny. Konwencja programowa PiS w Warszawie*, 'Gazeta Wyborcza' 30/10/2007.

19 *Dorn: Dementuję, jakoby kiedykolwiek miał serce*, 'Dziennik', 21/7/2007.

20 Passed by the Polish Parliament in October 2006 while amending the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance. It came into force on 15 March together with the amendment as a whole.

## United Kingdom: National identity

*No nationalism please, we're British*

Catherine Fieschi

Landing in the UK fifteen years ago from Canada, a place dominated by a variety of citizenship and national identity debates, I breathed a sigh of relief at the fact that no one here was sitting around counting identities on a pin-head. To my foreign eyes there was no debate because Britain seemed self-defining – with unspoken codes, unspoken consonants, unspoken covenants and an unspoken but wilful commitment to living together in what seemed like awkward grace, if not always harmony. For me, the combination of my felt foreignness and the ease, indeed the benevolent amusement, with which others met me, were proof of the UK's self-assurance. Britishness was so alive and well, that there was no need for the word.

Beneath the general attitude, I was to discover, lay a distinct combination. Pragmatism, on the one hand – with its corresponding suspicion of enshrined codes, abstract ideologies and other concoctions that were all deemed too continental (and effete) or too American (and grandiloquent) for the no-nonsense Brits. In the face of Europe in particular, the conspicuous absence of nationalism and the light touch patriotism of the monarchy seemed like a bulwark against the excesses of continental nationalism that led to the disasters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And on the other hand, a version of liberalism that placed both individuals and communities, rather than nationhood, at its heart.

The multiculturalism adopted in the UK (from the 1990s onwards) was therefore a way of reconciling that pragmatism about living together in practice rather than in theory, with the UK's striking faith in communities, neighbourhood initiatives, cooperatives (the vibrant civil society that had always been counted upon to provide the societal glue required to live together in a land of unwritten rules). Multiculturalism as it was practised in the UK was therefore never enshrined as a doctrine, let alone the national ideology that it is in Canada, for example, but rather as a set of principles that encour-

aged the celebration of diversity, dialogue between cultures and a measure of minority protection that built on the various versions of the Race Relations Act (1965, 1968, 1976, 2000) and the British Nationality Act of 1948 (and 1981). Above all it was deemed loose enough to do nothing that would rigidify a predominantly *ad hoc* system of accommodation to difference.

### So what went wrong?

Given these rather loose arrangements, it is worth asking what concatenation of events accounts for what seems like a reversal of public and government attitudes on this issue. Why has the debate on national identity become so much more prevalent? One obvious answer is the London bombings of July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005. Whilst 9/11 and 7/7 are often uttered in the same breath (and bear obvious similarities), the 7/7 events have been depicted as a wake-up call for the UK – beyond foreign policy matters, the London bombings (and their aftermath) are seen by some as symptomatic of the UK's policies of minority management and integration. A perception, in fact, of mismanagement – or at the very least, *lack* of management – of community relations. The importance of these events is not to be underestimated. However, it is worth keeping in mind that long before the 7/7 bombings, long before 9/11, the riots in Bradford in 2001 and Birmingham in 2005 and the quiet rise of the far right in certain communities pointed to a growing malaise. A malaise of such proportions that Trevor Phillips, then Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, did not hesitate to accuse multiculturalism of allowing the UK to 'sleepwalk into segregation' – and this before the London bombings. Finally, it is worth mentioning something that foreigners generally choose to ignore when thinking of the UK, and that is that national identity in Britain needs to be premised on three nations – England, Scotland and Wales; four if one adds Northern Ireland. After the Labour government's devolution programme (which saw Scotland and Wales acquire more law-making powers from 1998), the re-emergence of questions concerning what, if anything, holds Britain together might be more understandable. As a Scot himself, Gordon Brown made much (even as Chancellor of the Exchequer) of the Britishness agenda from 2004, and from then on the discussion of a national

identity became subsumed under the Britishness debate. Thus since 2004, but more obviously since 2005, the political landscape in the UK has been dominated by the twin worries of Britishness on the one hand and the role of multiculturalism on the other.

### The Britishness band-aid

Given the UK's multiple constitutive nations, Britishness was the only possible interpretation of a national identity – and it was initially perceived as a loose enough concept (in other words, capable of accommodating diversity) to co-exist with an allegiance to multiculturalism. But pushed as it was by officialdom, the conceit succumbed to its own vagueness when its adversaries demanded that it be defined. Asking 'What makes Britain British?' promptly pointed to the dangers of pinning down something as rich and fluid as a cultural and political tradition – particularly in a place that has taken pride in avoiding such smoky debates. With survey after survey indicating a decline in the proportion of people who consider themselves British (down from 52% in 1997 to 44% in 2007, according to the British Social Attitudes Survey), some saw an alarming decline in the primary allegiance to the nation-state and attendant institutions. One influential thesis that has fuelled much of the government's subsequent policy-making on the topic is from David Goodhart (editor of the monthly *Prospect* magazine of the broad liberal left). In a series of articles in the *Guardian* newspaper in February 2004 and then, subsequently, in a 2005 Demos pamphlet entitled *Progressive Nationalism*, Goodhart refers to the loss of solidarity engendered by what he refers to as the 'discomfort of strangers'. The thesis is a simple one – by valuing difference over shared values, we risk undermining the solidarity upon which our welfare states are built and thereby destroying one of the left's major achievements. An exhortation for the left to dip its toe into a debate that it has traditionally shunned and found distasteful, the thesis has gained currency on the liberal left and in policy circles (see references to it in speeches by Liam Byrne as Minister for Immigration). The received wisdom now seems to read as follows: we cannot leave matters of national identity exclusively to the right. If we are to remain fair and progressive we must address the trade offs of a diverse society

rather than hide behind notions of diversity and multiculturalism. Fuelled by such debates, the Labour government has attempted to address these issues – 2008 saw a reform and simplification of the citizenship law, as well as new (and restrictive) immigration rules.

Much of the debate in the UK has been cast as a trade off between the costs and the benefits of openness – economic benefits as potentially undermining solidarity; recognition of cultural diversity as curtailing the possibility of shared liberal values. In an open, fiercely liberal economy, it is difficult to make a case for a more closed, less *laissez-faire* cultural and political solution to diversity. And while the debate seems to peg proponents of multiculturalism (who argue that we've not had *enough, real* multiculturalism) against fierce Britishness defenders, most people are somewhere in the middle – aware of the trade offs, but resolutely against an assimilationist set of policies, or even a rigid integrationism. For most Brits, multiculturalism and diversity are an unmistakable, if difficult part of what it means to be truly British. Tolerance – a word that sends chills up the spine of many ethnic Brits – nevertheless defines what it is to be British: a live and let live attitude to others that, far from signifying ignorance or disinterest, is in fact a benevolent attitude towards other people's quirks, eccentricities and, above all, choices. The framework within which these differences are lived is being examined and many voices are rightly calling for a renewal of our commitment to the liberal values that traditionally make this sort of tolerance and living together possible. The well-researched and much agonized over tension between liberalism and the communitarism that is often at the heart of multiculturalism is nowhere near resolved. But the conversation around shared values and the commitment to a very British liberalism has begun, in ways that suggest that Britain is more European than it used to be in its insecurities, but that any *res publica* would have to take liberalism to heart if it were to appeal to the British public.

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