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# Neo-nationalism in the 2010s

## Religious aspects of the Nordic and Northern European extra-parliamentary far right

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The conflict between Christianity and Islam is a core issue for all varieties of European neo-nationalist and nativist<sup>1</sup> right-wing ideological organisation, from populist and far-right parties to extra-parliamentary groups and individuals. As a mundane political-social critique, this defensive and nationalistic form of anti-Islamism focuses on the downsides of mass immigration from Northern Africa and the Middle East, stressing the incompatibility of gross gender inequality, sexual intolerance and religiously motivated Islamist terrorism as well as the theocratic *sharia* system of laws with the secular European model of society (Vuorinen 2014: 188–94). Antisemitism makes an appearance in the guise of the old Nazi concept which portrays ‘World Jewry’ as a community of international financial exploiters, allegedly inspired in their misdeeds by their religion. However, this notion is being countered by a stronger, pro-semitic ideology, portraying the state of Israel as an ally in the struggle against Islam(ism). As ‘traditional’ European religions, Christianity and the different historical and local varieties of paganism serve as important points of positive identification.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 Referring to an ideology that restricts the right to citizenship of a particular country to individuals who either have been born there, genetically belong to the native stock, or have long established roots in the country.
- 2 Militant neo-Protestant, neo-Lutheran, or neo-Calvinist affiliations in Europe I have not yet come by, but would not dismiss offhand the possibility of their emergence.

*Over the blackened earth  
the old troops parade.*  
W. B. Yeats (1865–1939)

### Introduction: nationalisms and religions, past and present

From the sixteenth century onwards, the developing modern European states defined their politics in terms of, among other issues, religious preference and (in)tolerance. The emergence of Protestantism in Northern Europe was followed by the establishment of exclusively Protestant states – notably the then Swedish empire, whose early wars on Catholicism wreaked havoc mainly in the German lands. The hostilities between a declining Sweden and a growing Russian empire lasted longer, up until the early nineteenth century. Fought across the fault line between Orthodox and mainly Lutheran (in the case of Poland,

Traditional Catholicism, for obvious reasons, appeals to the neo-nationalists of for example Poland and France, while Anglicanism is part and parcel of the Ulster Unionist ideology. The former represent particular aspects of neo-nationalism, while the latter is a continuum of a longstanding nationalist ideology; their religious thinking, however, falls outside the category of neo-religionism proper.

also Catholic) cultural spheres, they gradually led to annexations of several non-Orthodox areas into the Russian state; the annexed areas were allowed to maintain their original faith within the multi-ethnic imperial context. The religious divergence, however, would soon intertwine with linguistic differences, capitalised upon – along with other cultural-political differences – by the emerging domestic nationalist elites, seeking independence, and in most cases gaining it, in the aftermath of WWI.

Imperialism and religion were thus intertwined with modern European state nationalism right from the start. The inter-war period brought its own distasteful flavour to the soup with the rise and eventual fall of several ultranationalist, fascist, more or less racist regimes. Particularly the memory of the Holocaust, the Nazi project of exterminating European Jewry – along with other elements of society it deemed ‘to be sub-human’ – has tainted the reputation of nationalisms and intra-religious disputes since the end of WWII. With the establishment of the binary Cold War system, the religious divide for a while went dormant, but has gained renewed momentum after the collapse of the Cold War in the 1990s.

Another prominent system of imperialist oppression that reached its peak in the nineteenth century was colonialism. A perceived religious – Christian – superiority, aided by a perceived racial superiority, provided the means for a ‘moral’ justification of several European overseas empires. The dismantling of the colonialist system, in the post-WWII years, accompanied by an atonement for the racist thinking it contained, has repercussions on the relations between peoples/nations and religions to this day.

\* \* \*

Ever since the turn of the millennium, the three ‘religions of the book’, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, have gained renewed visibility in an increasingly multicultural Europe, particularly in connection with a growing right-wing radicalism. Social scientists have come to agree about the important political role of religions across the spectrum of neo-nationalist ideologies – from garden-variety cultural conservative movements to right-wing parliamentary parties and beyond, to the extra-parliamentary far right inhabited by nativist to neo-fascist organisations and violent lone-wolf ideologues.

For obvious reasons, *Islam* – either as the ‘alien’ religion of immigrants from Northern Africa and the Middle East to Europe, or in the guise of radical Islamism, or as a perceived ‘foreign’ influence threatening the presumed cultural unity of the receiving countries – is recognised as the main exemplar of the religion-based enemy for all European neo-nationalists. Accordingly, it receives the lion’s share of publicity on religious hostilities, being mentioned by practically every author on the subject.<sup>3</sup> Particularly under the concept of *Islamophobia*, anti-Islamist attitudes are dismissed as misinformed, alarmist, and/or psychologically immature.<sup>4</sup> The openly leftist critique readily equates anti-Islam not only with Islamophobia, but with fascism and racism.<sup>5</sup>

3 See, for example, Akkerman *et al.* 2016a: 5, 2016b: 34–5; Banks and Gingrich 2006: 4–5, 10–11; Gullestad 2006: 76–9; Hervik 2006: 102–3; Larsson 2014; Minkenberg *et al.* 2014: 9, 12, 17; Mudde 2007: 6–7; Sunier and van Ginkel 2006: 110–21.

4 Gardell 2010; Hannerz 2006: 281; Jokisalo 2016: 189–221; Jupskås 2016: 186; Mudde 2007: 69–75, 82–6; Sander 2014.

5 Leplat 2015: iii–iv; Kellner 2015: 19, 24; Löwy 2015: 29; Alm 2015: 99, 101–4; Commission antifasciste du NPA 2015: 113, 133,

The take on *Judaism* is more multifaceted; it gets mentioned much more rarely than Islam, and is discussed more briefly when mentioned. On the one hand, neo-nationalists are routinely suspected of antisemitism, either blatant or focussed on Nazi-style conspiracy theories. On the other hand, the pro-Israel attitudes of many neo-nationalists, based on the idea of a common fight against Islam in both Middle-Eastern and diaspora contexts, are also recognised by most authors, as well as their appreciation of the Jewish state as a paragon of a modern nativist state.<sup>6</sup> It has also been suggested that the neo-nationalists who position themselves as defenders of the Jews, particularly against the ‘new’ Islamist antisemitism, are merely striking a pose, so as to evade being associated with old-school Nazism (Akkerman 2016: 145; Heinisch and Hauser 2016: 76).

The points of positive religious identification of neo-nationalists get even fewer, and more vague, mentions. *Catholic conservatives* are often observed to be working hand-in-glove with neo-nationalists in countries where Catholicism traditionally dominates the religious scene, such as Italy (Stacul 2006: 167, 170), France (Gaillard-Startzmann 2006: 184, 191; Commission antifasciste du NPA 2015: 155–8), Belgium and Austria (Mudde 2007: 85; Seiser 2006: 209). Interestingly, Protestant Lutheranism appears to serve as the ‘national’ religion in Norway much in the same way as traditional Catholicism in the Central European countries (Gullestad 2006: 76–9). Meanwhile,

143–4; de Jong 2015: 269–75, 279–80, 289, 301; Svensson 2015: 319–20.

6 See, for example, Akkerman *et al.* 2016a: 8, 2016b: 34–5; Minkenberg *et al.* 2014: 10, 17–18; Mudde 2007: 6, 22, 79–84; Wiederer 2014: 37; Commission antifasciste du NPA 2015: 132; de Jong 2015: 478; Svensson 2015: 324.

the *pagan* aspect of the different varieties of neo-nationalism has been either ignored, dismissed as marginal, or even demonised (e.g. Gardell 2003; Minkenberg *et al.* 2014: 16; Wiederer 2014: 35–6).

What is missing in this rationalistic analysis is the recognition of the essentially romantic nature of the neo-nationalist and nativist movements,<sup>7</sup> reflecting heavily also on their take on religions. On the reverse side of an exclusivist hate ideology there is an ardent wish to love and to belong – to a cherished ethnic-cultural group, to a chain of generations, to an ancestral place – and to be recognised as a valued member of a local cultural community (Goodhart 2017).

### **Aim, focus, sources, approach**

My aim as such is not to refute the findings of the authors referenced above. Rather, I wish to provide a more multifaceted and detailed picture, adding some shades of grey to the prevailing black. Quite understandably, neo-nationalist ideologues embrace ‘native’ European religious traditions, from high church Catholic Christianity to local pagan cults and related folklore. Equally self-evidently, Islam(ism), particularly in relation to recent mass immigration from North-Africa and the Middle East, appears as their main religious (or pseudo-religious) antagonist, with a long history of mutual ideological and geopolitical enmity, lately enhanced by the alleged struggle for demographic prominence. As we will see, the apparent grand disagreement about Judaism and the state of Israel – either a powerful ally against Islamism or a participant in a joint global conspiracy against the Western Christian nations – eventually

7 This is not to say that they do not have also their own *rationale* based on anti-multiculturalist and nativist principles.

boils down to a trifle, at least when it comes to the ideologies of the extreme right.

Mapping the historical influences and parallels, political justifications and ideological consequences of each variety of religious politics among the far right, I hope to add also to the more general understanding of the ideological undercurrents of the early twenty-first century neo-nationalist scene, presenting them as the newest addition to a longer joint history of nationalism and religions.

To achieve what might be called a level-headed analysis of one of the most debated ideological phenomena of our time, I approach their programmatic texts as normal ideological constructs – by nature one-sided, selective, passionate, militant, and persuasive.

\* \* \*

The practical aim of this article is to provide an up-to-date survey on the role of different religions in the ideological thinking of recent radical extra-parliamentary right-wing groups and individuals, who in the 2010s have gained prominent media visibility, due either to violent acts of terrorism or *action directe* operations. In want of a more precise geographic term, I define my area of interest as Northern Europe with a Western twist – including the Nordics, Great Britain, Germany, Austria and France, but excluding, at least at this stage (on the basis of apparent differences of political tradition), the other Mediterranean states, Russia and the former ‘Eastern Europe’.

To manage an academically sound view that genuinely adds to our understanding about what is going on in the neo-nationalist scene, I will not focus on the volatile and transient, often grossly exaggerated, day-to-day expressions online. Instead, I analyse publicly available, permanent

programmatic texts, online and in print, presented as foundational by their authors and therefore likely to convey the most stable, serious and thought-through ideological aspects of each movement and individual writer. In the case of organised movements, the jointly processed and collectively approved nature of such texts adds to their ideological weight.

Both individual writers and collectives active on the neo-nationalist scene rely on online visibility for recruiting followers and distributing ideological propaganda. Contrary to individual, self-radicalised authors, who typically speak to private followers, collective movements openly recruit for new membership, with descriptions of past activities and plans for future ones. As a caveat, one must keep in mind that some of these texts may have been designed deliberately as a front, allowing their supporters to pose as relatively harmless in order to veil a more sinister intent. On the other hand, their contents are aggressive enough as they are, so they may well present the ideologies ‘as is’, with potential for further radicalisation as well as for calming down.

\* \* \*

My primary focus is on ideologies that have already inspired grave and/or recurring aggressive action by relatively young authors/perpetrators who publish in English to reach an international audience. To trace such contents, I analyse

- 1) the online manifesto *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, published by Norwegian Anders Behring Breivik (b. 1979) immediately before embarking on his killing spree in 22 July 2011, with a death toll of 77;

- 2) the pamphlets and online materials published by the *Génération Identitaire* / *Identitäre Bewegung* / *Generation Identity* youth movement, originating in France and active also in Austria and Germany since early 2010s, engaging in direct action campaigns against Muslim immigration and landmarks of Islam; and
- 3) the online programme, *Our Path*, by the Nordic Resistance Movement aka *NordFront*, with its home base in the Nordic countries, operating online in local languages but also in English, whose riot-prone public appearances are designed to maximise negative visibility in the media.

As such individuals, movements and incidents, so far, thankfully, are rare, as well as for the sake of broader scope and context, I include a secondary layer of ideological texts, by authors belonging to older age groups that have contributed to the development of the ideology. My choice of source materials may thus be termed *cumulative*; however, I try my best not to be eclectic. The ‘founding fathers’ include the French veteran philosopher Alain de Benoist (b. 1943), his late countryman Dominique Venner (1935–2013) and the British ethno-nationalist Arthur Kemp (b. 1962).

Utilising a recent comparison opportunity, I analyse the manifesto *The Great Replacement*, by a Westerner anti-Islamist of European descent, namely the Australian Brenton Tarrant (b. 1991), who in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 15 March 2019 attacked worshippers in two local mosques, killing 50. The author professed a dependence on Breivik’s ideology, as well as a strong identification with his own ‘white’ European ethnic origin (Tarrant 2019). The religious contents of the 2011 manifesto,

by the original wannabe Knight Templar, Breivik, are discussed in relation to his recent copycat/acolyte.

\* \* \*

To understand an ongoing neo-nationalist ideological process, I utilise the approach known as *methodological empathy*, developed by the two central authorities on the study of historical fascisms, George L. Mosse and Roger Griffin, and conceptualised by the latter (Griffin 2008: xiv, xxiv, 21, 99, 2012: 18, 144, 206–11 and 2018: 27, 34–40, 47, 50). Simply put, the approach consists of taking an ideological message seriously and at face value, for the sake of study, regardless of how aggressive or distasteful its contents may be, analysing it in its political, economic, geographical and temporal context to find out why it is supported, by whom, and to what end.

In relation to the 2010s Northern European extra-parliamentary radical right, a list of focal questions that need to be tentatively asked, even though many of them cannot yet be definitely or completely answered, include the following.

Who are the leaders of the extreme right, and what is the essential societal change or new conflict they react to? How do they see the present situation? What are their hopes and fears?<sup>8</sup> What do they want to remove, stop, change, strengthen, or bring about? What kind of meaning do they invest in the cultural, religious, communal, social, legal and administrative traditions, history,

8 I find Angela Merkel’s much-quoted phrase ‘Must not give in to fear’ very problematic. As a strong primal emotion, fear cannot be managed at will, nor dismissed only by being told to do so (see Bourke 2005). As witnessed by the recent climate scare, fear, like hope, is a powerful incentive for political action.

geography and the natural features of their local and national environment? In whose interest and on whose mandate do they see themselves as acting, and by what means? Is the division into moderate parliamentary and extreme extra-parliamentary factions going to die down with the establishment of regular parliamentary groups with moderated versions of the shared ideology? Or, will the extreme factions develop into outlets for romantic desperados, with even more extremist, and potentially violent, antisocial aspirations?

### World religions according to neo-nationalism

#### Anti-Islamism

For Northern European and Nordic neo-nationalists, opposing Islam is mainly based on *mundane* matters, with the focus on cultural, political, societal and legal issues. Muslims are targeted for problems related to mass immigration, from terrorist incidents to burdening social security systems at the expense of the native European poor. The main points of interest are the hypothetical cultural and demographic threats, related to the birth-rates of Muslim families, of a gradual Islamisation of European culture and a replacement of her ethnic stock. The animosity towards Islam *as a religion* appears as a corollary of what the neo-nationalists see as an attempted colonisation of Europe. Nevertheless, the authors take the trouble of acquainting themselves with those aspects of Islamic dogma that may regulate the contacts between Muslims and non-Muslims, pointing out passages of the Koran that can be interpreted as justifications for exploiting and deceiving Christians as infidels.

A critique of Islam occupies the best part of the first two books of the over-1500-page-long manifesto<sup>9</sup> by Anders Behring

Breivik, titled *2083: A European Declaration of Independence* and released on the internet only hours before he set out on his killing spree. Breivik (2011: chs. 1.1–1.30) describes Islam as being incompatible with the fundamental Western social and political values, including secular democracy, a secular judicial system, the rule of law, freedom of speech, the work ethic, religious and sexual tolerance, and gender equality. As the exact opposite of Western ideals, he associates Islam with theocratic political rule, cruel punishments, and Sharia courts. Compulsory veils and other covering garments for women as well as the precedence given to men in the Islamic family law are presented as tokens of gross gender inequality. Contrary to the explanation of it as a moderate spiritual struggle, Breivik construes *jihad* or Holy War literally, as the incitement to continuous violent hostility towards non-Muslims. Yet, as an indication of the basically non-religious, political nature of his antagonism, he stresses that all Muslims, and indeed anyone who accepts the Western societal values and wish to partake in the European-style communal life are welcome to do so.<sup>10</sup>

As character evidence of the assumed Islamist conspiracy, Breivik lists historical practices used to manifest the inferior status of Christians and Jews in the Muslim-dominated societies of the past – from

available at <publicintelligence.net>. As there are in circulation also other editions, with identical content but slight variation in the layout, I refer mainly to chapters instead of page numbers.

10 Among his sources of inspiration Breivik lists Bat Ye'or (2006), Robert Spencer (2005) and the Norwegian online anti-multiculturalist pen-named Fjordman, as well as other online and printed sources, including statistics, case descriptions and opinion pieces. On Breivik's manifesto in general, see Vuorinen 2014 and 2016.

slave markets, selling infidel women taken as spoils of war, to the *jizya* tax collected from Christians and Jews, their restricted right to worship, and a particular dress code – claiming that Muslim immigration into Europe is a new form of religious taxation, justified by the supposed superiority of Islam. In addition, he mentions the allegedly Koran-inspired *al-Taqqiya*, or right to deceive non-Muslims without punishment in order to save one's life, as a further justification for financially exploiting the non-Muslims. Furthermore, the supposed right/duty to kill particularly Jews, but also Christians, when sighted, is presented as a justification for both the Islamist terror in Europe and the oppression of Christian and other religious minorities in the Middle East (Breivik 2011: chs. 1.1–1.30).

Brenton Tarrant, the New Zealand shooter, saluted 'Commander Breivik' in his manifesto *The Great Replacement*<sup>11</sup> not only as a source of inspiration, but as a trailblazer and fellow combatant. Tarrant fully shares Breivik's ideal of fighting Islamism and Muslim immigration, to protect the Christian faith, Western nations and European ethnic stock from what he sees as an ongoing white genocide by Muslims (Tarrant 2019: 2–3 and *passim*). Like Breivik, Tarrant also included links to various internet pages with contents that support his views.

In his manifesto, Tarrant (2019: 11–13, 20–1) presents himself as a modern Crusader, re-enacting the original religious-military conflict between Christianity and newly-established Islam in the distant past. In a more current tone, he justifies

11 Published online immediately before the attack, like Breivik's. 'Replacement' refers to the perceived threat of ethnic Europeans being replaced by immigrating non-Europeans, with big families and mainly of Islamic faith.

his attack on the particular mosques with political and security reasons, referring to their alleged prior online history of jihad-style extremism. Along ethno-nationalist lines, he pronounces that Muslims should remain in their own homelands, not invade 'our lands' where their high fertility rates cause distress to the native populations. He also refers to converts from Christianity to Islam as 'traitors'.

The Nordic Resistance Movement is an anti-immigrationist, Pan-Nordic nativist group, which proudly displays its rather showy Nazi sympathies on its webpages. Its online programmatic publication, *Our Path: New Politics for a New Time* (2016: 9–14, 18–19 and *passim*) directly mentions neither Islam nor Christianity, being content to condemn 'parasitic' mass immigration from outside the Nordics as 'new colonialism', while preparing to defend the rights of the Nordic races with arms. However, when describing a post-collapse future society reorganised according to traditional principles – with women active as mothers and homemakers, men as providers and defenders – they draw a distinction between the Nordic and the apparently Islamic way of treating womenfolk:

Our views on women are not inspired by any *desert religion* but are derived directly from the natural and egalitarian vision of our Nordic ancestors (*Our Path* 2016: 38; *my italics*).

In a similar vein, the Generation Identity movement (generation referring roughly to those born in the 1980s and 1990s) declare their respective homelands, as well as Europe in general, to be off-limits for all, including Muslim, immigrants. Taking as a starting point exclusive nativist and ethno-nationalist principles, they introduce an inverted, positive version of the restricting

principle. The globally applicable *ethno-pluralist* ideal allows nations and cultures to prosper, each in its own way and, most importantly, in its own space, in an atmosphere of mutual respect, separate but equal, thus genuinely preserving cultural diversity and ensuring peaceful conditions for all (Generation Identity 2013: 7–12; Willinger 2013: 41–4, 71–7, 82–3; Willinger 2014: 19, 21, 38–40).

The original French Identitarian ‘fighting community’ proudly counts itself as having begun the October 2012 demonstration at the construction site of the Grand Mosque in Poitiers – a location of great symbolic importance as the battle site where Charles Martel defeated a Muslim army in 732. Equating religious and political Islam, the movement declares a modern French Reconquest, modelled in the vein of the original Reconquista which reclaimed Spain from Muslim rule by means of Catholic forces in the eighth to fifteenth centuries (Generation Identity 2013: 7, 12–13, 18–9, 28–9, 37).

A hundred youths, men and women from all over France, have just entered the future Grand Mosque and occupied the roof. Across the front façade, facing the minaret, we have unfurled a banner with a clear message. ‘Immigration, mosque construction, REFERENDUM’. By this, its first major act, Generation Identity intends to place itself in the front line of the fight for our identity.

It will soon be 1,300 years since Charles Martel stopped the Arabs at Poitiers following a heroic battle which saved our country from Muslim invasion. It happened on 25 October 732. Today, we have reached 2012 and the choice is still the same: live free or die.

Mosques are not mere places of worship but cultural centres, places for strengthening the community, embassies of Islam and bases for conquest. Your claim that constructing mosques will stop praying in the streets is utter nonsense. Those street prayers are political instruments which serve to impose further mosques on us! (Generation Identity 2013: 18, 25)

The religiously motivated anti-Islamism, expressed by references to the Crusades, is complemented by a mundane critique of the current multiculturalist society, in desperate nationalistic tones that at times verge on racism, at others borrow the Nazi *Blut-und-Boden* vocabulary.

We are the generation of ethnic fracture, of the total failure of integration, the generation of forced cross-breeding. ... We have stopped believing that Abdul is our brother, the planet our village, and humanity our family. We have discovered that we have roots and ancestors – and thus a future. Our only inheritance is our blood, our soil and our identity. We are the heirs of destiny. (Generation Identity 2013: 9–10)

A nation can recover from an economic crisis or a war, but not from the replacement of its population. Without the French, France will no longer exist. (Generation Identity 2013: 19)

In his two booklets, titled *Generation Identity: A Declaration of War against the ‘68ers* (2013), and *A Europe of Nations* (2014), Markus Willinger blames the 1968 generation of importing foreigners, mainly of Muslim origin, in order to

create a multicultural society for what the young generation sees as frivolous reasons – to add ‘diversity’ and ‘colourful’ cultural attractions, in the process happily shattering what they despised as ‘boring’ European traditions – all the while expecting the newcomers to immediately modernise and adapt to their liberal European ways. To curb the unfortunate experiment, the Identitarians, acting as the young indigenous Europeans – ‘the rightful heirs’ – now claim back the continent. However, they also claim to be willing to maintain peaceful political relations with the Arab world, provided that the cultural spheres are kept separate in the future (Willinger 2013: 17, 38, 95–9, 102–3 and 2014: 38–40, 59–60, 88–90).

The author openly mocks the multiculturalist generation for their apparent condescending attempt to enlighten and educate Muslim immigrants, in order to make them into modern Westerners. Instead,

Muslims opposed your fanatical and heedless ideology with an equally fanatical religion, the political Islam. ... Today millions of Muslims live in Europe and laugh at your ideology with contempt. You still hope to be able to win them over. You call this integration. Yet it’s time to recognise one thing: the proud Muslims of the East will never accept your beliefs and theories. ... For some time now, the most radical of the Muslims, also known as Salafists, have been on an aggressive counteroffensive. They are proselytising in the heart of Europe. Among the uprooted and disoriented Europeans, there are a few who apparently find Islam an anchor in the storm. ... The presence of millions of Muslims in Europe represents a continuing threat to the continent. Not

because the Muslims are the embodiment of pure evil, but because your multicultural society does not work. (Willinger 2013: 63–6)

Towards the end of the above argumentation, there is, however, a passage that stands out for its expression of basic religious tolerance.

We condemn neither Muslims nor Islam. Here we are a thousand times more tolerant than you ever were. We neither hate nor demonise. We don’t claim to have found the absolute truth but recognise the unique and legitimate truths of each and every culture. (Willinger 2013: 66)

Later on, Muslim immigrants are nevertheless dismissed in no uncertain tones, patronising them while offering safe passage home, as well as support in developing their communities of origin. Associating Muslims with tents may have several implications, from actual Calais-style tent camps of hopeful migrants, or a pejorative association with poor housing conditions in general, to a more archaic image, referring to an imagined nomadic Arab culture or even to the tents used by the Muslim armies during the Crusade period (see below).

Muslims and Africans! Take down your tents and leave this continent. Entire regions of the world already belong to you. We’ll gladly help you make your homelands better places, help you to build and shape them. Even more so than European help, Africa and the global East need you and your strength. (Willinger 2013: 88)

The racially oriented British ethno-nationalist Arthur Kemp (2012 and 2013: 36–41 and *passim*) lists Muslims among the many equally unwelcome extra-European immigrant groups. As his main focus is on Europeans as indigenous peoples – as carriers of a plethora of valuable local and national cultures, threatened by demographic pressure – he has little interest in religions as such. Meanwhile, the French philosopher-soldier Dominique Venner (2015: 3, 18–25, 56, 63–80, 130–1) claims to recognise an essential difference between Christianity and Islam: while the one is a religion, the other is also a community, a law and a civilisation. Like Breivik, Venner also points out the traditionally inferior position of Muslim women and the violent conquests made in the name of Islam. As he sees it, the weakness of post-WWII Europe has indeed developed into a Spenglerian moment, allowing ‘tired old Europe’ to be colonised by vigorous Islamic migrants.

#### **Judaism: antisemitism and pro-Israel attitudes**

When it comes to Jews, Judaism and the state of Israel, opinions are divided among the neo-nationalists. The starkest hostility is expressed by the Nordic Resistance Movement. Their take is not ethnic-racist as such, nor is it very religion-oriented either, but is based on a ‘World Jewry’ type of concept, formulated into a Nazi-style economic and cultural critique.

The short second chapter of *Our Path* (16–17) focusses on the issue of a supposed ‘global Zionist elite’, allegedly acting in the interest of the state of Israel and of what is termed (positive) Jewish racism. Zionists are presented as a parasitic class of international capitalists, a hidden power that controls not only the global monetary infrastructure, but also all major military resources and media houses. As ‘God’s chosen people’, Zionists allegedly consider

themselves as having a divine right to rule the world. They are said to work towards multiculturalism, mass immigration and liberalism with the aim of dividing and conquering all other bases of political power besides themselves, at the same time destabilising and eventually dissolving all other national cultures and traditional social norms. Echoing older conspiracy theories about Jews, the Nordic Resistance Movement claims that once in power it will prohibit such ‘malicious and secret societies engaging in subversive operations’.

However, a person’s ‘Jewishness’, in the ideological sense, ultimately depends on their choices and actions, not on an ethno-religious essence:

Even non-Jews include themselves in the global Zionist elite, motivated by their own religion or egoism. It should be noted that not all Jews are Zionists and that there are Jews who stand against the Zionist endeavour for power. (*Our Path* 2016: 7, 16–7)

The rest of the neo-nationalist authors have a more positive take on Judaism. The long-standing conflict between Islam and Judaism in the Middle East gives incentive to Breivik’s (2011: 186, 202, 206–8, 337, 1373 and *passim*) appreciation of the state of Israel, and the Jewish diaspora, as natural allies in the fight against Islamism. He also expresses admiration towards Judaism both as a religion and as a cultural tradition. Tarrant’s (2019: 14, 18) is a straightforward ethno-nationalist attitude towards Judaism: as long as they live in Israel, it is ‘ok’ with him. Kemp (2013: 52–63) admires the Zionist project as ‘the only practical and surviving ethnostate in the world’, while recognising the crucial role of widespread antisemitism in its creation.

The most neutral reaction to the

current conflict of Islam and Judaism in the Middle East comes from the Identitarians. Willinger expresses sympathy for both sides of the dispute over the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, recognising the special significance of the ancient religious site.

In the deserts of the holy land, the ancient traditions of two peoples collide, and they both fight for their highest values, the holy sites of their national, cultural, and religious identities. ... The conflict is neither of an economic nor a political nature; it is entirely cultural. This struggle isn't about money or resources, but symbols and holy places. (Willinger 2013: 91–2)

Recounting the long history of cruelties on both sides, Willinger (2014: 88–90) doubts there is any possibility of ever resolving the conflict. Seeing that outside meddling mainly aggravates the situation, he declines any unconditional crusade-style support for Israel. Utilising the situation to demagogically argue for his own ideas, he points out the folly of expecting any two religions – in this case, Christianity and Islam – to live in peace with each other in a shared space, for example, in Europe.

If anything can be learned from the conflict in the Middle East, it's that having two entirely different peoples in one territory is an atrocity and a crime. (Willinger 2014: 89)

### Neo-pagans of Roman and Nordic varieties

The main neo-pagan trends within neo-nationalism relate to ancient Roman and Nordic-German cultures – the former added with Central-European local colour, the latter tinged, at least in the eyes of outsiders, with Nazi antecedents.

Venner, in more ways than one, was the Roman among the neo-nationalist authors. His military-masculine ethos is inspired by a mixture of the glorious history of the Roman legions, the medieval knighthood and the heroes of classical Greek narratives from Homer onwards, with the addition of the modern bravery of Claus von Stauffenberg and others, who attempted to murder Adolf Hitler in 1943. His decision to take his own life was carried out as a Roman-style public suicide. Venner shot himself in 21 May 2013, in Nôtre Dame Paris, apparently in protest against multiculturalism, feminism, the legalisation of gay marriage, and the inability of the French government to curb Muslim immigration, thus allegedly bringing down European civilisation. The Central-European streak of Venner's paganism manifests itself in powerful imagery of sacred forests, nature animated with spirits, and ritual sacrifice, related to the hunter-warrior identity of male brotherhoods. Being no egalitarian when it comes to gender roles, Venner nevertheless stressed the importance of the mystical sexual union of male and female, particularly as described by the classical pagan authors (Venner 2015: 17, 26–54, 81–91; Gottfried 2015).

Venner's countryman Alan de Benoist (2004) is remarkably sober in comparison. For him, Greek and Roman paganism as well as traditional Catholicism are the core ingredients of European cultural and religious heritage, invaluable as a spiritual resort in the imminent crisis of individualistic modernity.

Compared to the founding fathers discussed above, the history-conscious and emotional paganism of the Identitarians is softer and somewhat less erudite, often manifesting itself as a quasi-religious love of the natural and cultural landscapes of the Fatherland.

As a collective, Generation Identity (2013: 37) is content to mention the ancient pagan cultures of Athens and Rome, as well as of the Celts, as important sources of current European identity, expressing respect for and identifying with the prehistoric pagan ancestry as original Europeans. In his foreword to Willinger's first book, French Identitarian Philippe Vardon (b. 1980) evokes images of romantic, pastoral nationalism mixed with modern symbols of state power, adds the chain of generations, and wraps the lot up in a powerful, if also potentially alarming, rhetoric of Us vs. Them – the latter identifiable as multiculturalist EU elites, liberal modernists and immigrants.

They have defiled our flags, erased our frontiers, twisted the very names of things. With them, the homeland is no longer the land of one's fathers! It runs into a nebulous idea, an abstraction, a construct. For us it represents the most concrete things of all: our words and songs, our forests and mountains, our bell-towers and castles, our relatives' graves and our babies' cradles. We carry our flag within us and trace the frontiers ourselves: this is our identity! The agents of systems of killing peoples – to quote Guillaume Faye's formidable formula – would like to break the chain of our heritage: we're here to fix its links. (Vardon 2013: 8)

In his second book Willinger emulates Vardon's romantic despair when contemplating the allegedly threatened ancestral landscapes, mixing it with paranoid 'camp mentality'.

It is a struggle for Europe itself, for Europe's cities, streets and homes, for our meadows, mountains, and lakes.

It's a struggle for our homeland, and we are losing. (Willinger 2014: 19)

In a more sober tone, Willinger (2014: 75–7) recognises the importance of Roman and Germanic pagan heritage for the current European cultural identity – spread during the period of migration and mixed with the local beliefs, thus forging continent-wide common traditions. According to Willinger, they still persist, even though Christianity has always sought to hush up the existence of preceding religions. He even declares that old-style traditional Christianity is no longer a living influence. Rather, Europeans are what he terms 'pagan Christians', lax in worship and tolerant of other gods, not proselytising. To regain genuine spirituality and revitalise their culture, Europeans should embrace both pagan and Christian heritage, especially by reviving the Greek and Roman, as well as Germanic festivals.

The Nordic variety of neo-paganism borrows from Scandinavian sources. While Breivik (2011: 742, 901, 1400) contents himself with referring to his Viking ancestry as inspiration and source of pride, Nordic Resistance Movement proudly flies a flag adorned with the Scandinavian *Tiwaz* rune, signifying Tyr, Odin's son, and associated with war.<sup>12</sup> The movement's overall ideological take capitalises on the heritage of the Nordic cultural sphere, such as the promotion of indigenous peoples (including minorities), languages and pagan folklore, spiritually accentuated environmentalism and respecting their Nordic ancestry (*Our Path* 2016: 12–5, 18, 29–31).

Tarrant (2019: 13, 37, 40–2, 72) generally recommends that the peoples remain true to their native faiths. Ending his

12 For details, see Wikipedia entries on 'Tyr' and 'Tiwaz'.

manifesto with a 'Goodbye, god bless and I will see you in Valhalla', he mixes the flippant with the solemn, and Christian with pagan. However, his environmentalism, veneration of ancestors while looking towards future generations, as well as the idea of a 'Roman' death of a heroic soldier are well in harmony with the different aspects of neo-pagan ideology.

### Christianity and neo-Catholicism

Many supporters of the current 2010s European radical right movements embrace traditional Christianity. Along with nationalism, the Christian religion functions as the logical antithesis of both their perceived main adversaries; that is to say, the recent mass immigration and the secular/atheist post-1968 spirit of the liberal Left, particularly in its present guise as the promoter of individualist, multi-gender, multiculturalist, multi-religion ideals of society. In the Northern and Central European countries, religiously more mixed in regard to Christian denominations, extra-parliamentary right-wing movements tend to produce thinkers who, without always being anti-modernist or pro-Catholic as such, nevertheless share the romantic and intensely emotional religious traditionalism of their Nordic fellow ideologues (Vuorinen 2014: 188–9 and 2016: 145–51).

In mainly Catholic countries, Catholicism is part and parcel of the received Christian heritage. For de Benoist (2004; de Benoist and Champetier 2012) and Venner (2015) as well as the Identitarians, Catholicism appears as a normal, uncomplicated European practice, albeit threatened by both home-grown secular modernism and immigration from non-Christian countries.

The French Identitarians recognise the Christian roots of European culture and society; they also express compassion

towards Middle East Christians, persecuted by Muslims. As became apparent from their statement, released at the building site of the Poitiers mosque in 2012, quoted above, they also strongly associate themselves with the Christian Crusaders who defended European lands against Muslim invaders and settlers (Generation Identity 2013: 37–40).

Willinger's take is more complex. Associating the present Church with primitive fanaticism, intolerance and general backwardness, he refuses both High-Church and atheist options, looking instead for a church that would genuinely support a community of modern Christians.

Religious [Christian] fanaticism in all of its forms is incomprehensible to us, and often seems primitive and stupid. Yet deeply religious people and cultures fascinate us, for we know they have something we lack: a deep, inner feeling that they are sheltered and protected. A lucid certainty in matters of right and wrong.

We can only imagine how it might feel not to be plagued by constant self-doubt. We will never feel that way ourselves, for religion has become unthinkable. We can't obey dogmas, and so we feel ourselves at once superior and inferior to the fanatics, ...

Yet even nothingness itself makes no sense to us. How are atheists supposed to know that there is no God? In this sense we believe in an indefinite higher power that may or may not exist. (Willinger 2013: 21–2)

In mainly Protestant countries the attitude towards Catholicism varies from disinterest and hostility to an ardent wish

to return to the original Mother Church. For converts, Catholicism often appears as undiluted Christianity, with a long history of earthly and spiritual power, grand ceremonies and a full palette of sacraments, many of which have been stripped from the Protestant versions of Christian ritual. Combining the ornamental with the mystical, neo-Catholicism often manifests as romantic, intensely emotional and personal, sometimes admixed with anti-modern and anti-liberal traits. Combined with neo-masculinity, neo-Catholicism produces the romantic ideal of the medieval Christian Knight, embodying a selfless commitment to defending the Faith and the Crown, as well as protecting the defenceless and the poor. On a personal and emotional level, an imagined knighthood provides both an ideal community, a sense of history and destiny, trans-generational continuity as a member of an ancient institution, a moral tradition, and an ethic code of self-discipline, self-respect, loyalty and sacrifice.<sup>13</sup>

In the case of both Breivik and Tarrant, modern knighthood involves a commitment to one's race and the Western nations. They see their personal quests as part of a great battle between Christianity and Islam, a re-enactment of the Crusades (Breivik 2011: 1:11–14, 1:20–2, 3:11–20, 3:62–70, 3:72, 3:153 and *passim*; Tarrant 2019: 4–5). Both also include the element of martyrdom, or voluntary self-sacrifice. Breivik (2011: 858, 867, 913, 947, 1328–9) manifestly expected to be killed in action, while Tarrant (2019: 12–3, 55) expressed doubts about his survival, urging his fellow Christians and Westerners to follow his example, joining the grand crusade to die

13 See Fukuyama (2018: 18–22) on the history and philosophy of the warrior-defender identity.

a hero's death. A third case in point is the public suicide, committed by another self-publicised knight, Venner, who did not take others with him when shooting himself in the Paris Notre Dame on 21 May 2013.

Breivik claims membership of a modern order of Knights Templar, allegedly recently revived in Great Britain, to combat Islam in present-day Europe. His manifesto includes a detailed treatise on the history, ideology, symbols and battle gear of the original Templars, complete with a sample of his own modern-day designs based on them. He recounts the histories of two great battles in which Christian Europeans defeated Muslim armies, praising Charles Martel, the hero of the battle of Tours (Poitiers), as a great strategist and leader of men. The cryptic digit 2083 in the title of his manifesto refers to the incoming 400th anniversary of the second battle at the gates of Vienna in 1683, where the Catholic Christian leaders of the Holy Roman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth jointly defeated the Ottoman Turks for the second time. His motto, *De laude novae militiae* ('In praise of the new militia') – is a quotation of St Bernhard of Clairvaux, the patron saint of the original Templars, celebrating the victorious Templars as the liberators of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem; the text is quoted mainly for the description of ideal knighthood it includes (Breivik 2011: 3:11–20, 3:72). When it comes to his personal 'Justiciar Knight Commander' Templar avatar, it is anybody's guess whether he originally meant it as an abstract romantic pose, appropriated it as a usable, readymade identity, or contemplated it as an archetypal personification of a moral philosophy.

Like Breivik, Tarrant expressed symbolic allegiance to the historical defence of Europe against Islamic invaders by inscribing the names of Charles Martel and other

Crusaders on the weapons he used (see for example *The Guardian* 15.3.2019). He, too, claims to have contacted reborn Templars, to ask for their blessing in support of the attack. In addition, he salutes Breivik, thanking him 'for receiving his blessing for my mission after contacting his brother Knights'. As further, historical inspiration he mentions Pope Urban, who in 1095 called Christians to the First Crusade, to take the Holy City of Jerusalem back from Seljuk Turks, as well as the victory of the Battle of Vienna in 1683 (Tarrant 2019: 17, 25, 29, 41–2).

### **Conclusion: a clash of civilisations, and what comes after?**

This article deals with aggressive political ideologies that preach against multiculturalist ideology, favouring instead the nativist or ethno-nationalistic principle; that is to say, for each nation their own country, or, for each culture its own geographical space. Their most prominent feature, as opposed to other, more moderate neo-nationalist schools of thought, is that they openly oppose the presence of newcomer religious-cultural-ethnic minorities, chiefly Muslims, on European soil, toying with designs of forced eviction or even destruction of recent immigrant groups. Many of them also flirt with notorious historical precursors with impressive death tolls, from the Crusaders to the Nazis.

Seen from the outside, their expressed ways of thinking easily fall into the category of hate speech, with intolerant, anti-Islamist and racist undertones. Seen from the inside, they equally acknowledge many objects of collective love, including Christian heritage and pagan folklore, the homeland, local and national traditions, and the family, to be fought for and protected. Cultural traditions cannot be secured by owning them, but must be cherished collectively to keep

them alive. Apparently, those who love traditions have the most to lose in times of rapid change, while others embrace the change and expect to fare better because of it. As neo-nationalists see it, the difference between conservative traditionalists and progressive modernists is a major schism of our time.

The current extreme-right neo-nationalist thinking represents the renewal, re-enactment and /or revival of several old schools of thought. The programme thus embodies an impressive array of what might be termed *neo-tendencies* – from neo-nationalist and neo-conservative to neo-romantic, neo-collective and neo-masculine. Neo-spiritual and neo-religious notions combine well with the general neo-traditionalist frame.

Both religious and nationalistic tendencies connect to the idea of an *emotional community*, as they both produce a feeling of being a part of something bigger than oneself. Instead of the modernist ideal of human beings as separate, independent, free individuals, neo-nationalists emphasize belonging and togetherness. National and religious communities as well as established religious-cultural traditions, collectively shared, not only join people together temporarily, but offer a sense of continuity beyond the individual life span (Staub 1989: 15–6, 21–2, 32, 39–42, 53–5, 99, 105; Waller 2007: 146–61, 172; Griffin 2012: 18, 144).

In an age of singleness and childlessness, a perceived/imagined continuity from ancestry to future generations may provide emotional stability for those who have neither siblings, spouse nor offspring. The contemporary togetherness with like-minded coevals and the vertical cross-generation continuity combine, grounding an individual both into a present-day collective and a cross-period continuum.

Close togetherness, in turn, creates both in-group affiliation and enmity towards others. In the current situation, the religious divide provides a powerful ideological engine for both identity-building and for drawing boundaries between in-groups and out-groups.

Another neo-traditionalist, anti-modernist streak of neo-nationalist thinking is its expressed wish to reinstate the positive role of men in society: as spouses, fathers, providers and defenders. Combined with religion, the neo-masculine ideal produces the image of the Christian Knight – eminently applicable in a perceived context of European nations being once again in danger of succumbing to the expansion of Islam, enabled by globalist, liberal EU elites. Heated nationalist conflicts easily give rise to political violence, with operatives motivated by an idea of potential self-sacrifice for one's national community – the latest case being the New IRA, defending a united Ireland against the establishment of a so-called hard border between EU Irish Republic and post-Brexit Britain.

The neo-masculine streak, introduced by the founding fathers of neo-nationalism, de Benoist and Venner, is particularly strong among its youngest generation. The youth-movement aspect, though far removed from the usual Youth Studies curricula, is nevertheless essential for assessing the future and potential significance of the phenomenon. Combined with patrimony issues, the struggle for a right of inheritance has the makings of an epic conflict over the symbolic ownership of Europe.

Some obvious worst-case scenarios related to the current developments have already come into being. An historical re-enactment of an ancient conflict that gave rise to the original Crusades seems to be in progress. Instances of actual violence include the deeds of the two self-styled

Templar terrorists, plus the lesser mayhem caused by the Identitarians and the Nordic Resistance Movement, on the one hand, and the deeds by the now nearly defeated Middle-Eastern Caliphate, founded by pan-nationalistic, neo-Islamist ISIS, notorious also for terror attacks, on the other. It is also worth noting that the exact same militant ethos, combined with romantic ultra-masculine warrior hero imagery, were typical for the broadly mediated propaganda by the opposing side of modern anti-Islamism, namely the ISIS, at its peak.

In a potential best-case scenario, the aggressive ideology formation, even as practised by the above individuals and groupings, may eventually function as a political safety valve, keeping most individuals from resorting to actual violence while venting an otherwise suppressed grievance. The exclusivist and aggressive expressions typical of the radical neo-nationalists and nativists can be perceived as symptoms of a new type of social friction, with a strong potential of bringing on a societal conflict that ends in violence. However, the situation may also calm down, for example with the emergence and gradual establishment of *moderate* neo-conservative parliamentary parties within the European political scene, able and willing to negotiate an eventual peaceful solution.

Taken at face value, the positive, in-group related emotional aspects of neo-nationalist programmatic texts appear to be intensely romantic. Theirs is not the modern aspect of 'romance' as something bright, cute and harmless, painted in light pink shades, but its opposite appeal – the darker shades of passion (in both senses of intense love and equally intense suffering) and perceived destiny consciousness. To dismiss this as something naïve, feeble or ridiculous is to ignore the main appeal and strength of radical neo-nationalism. ■

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