

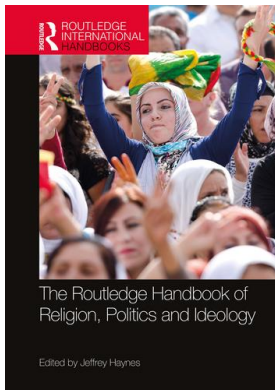
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THE RADICAL RIGHT IN EUROPE

Cultural shifts and religious nativism

Michael Minkenberg

Introduction

The return of religion into the political landscape in most liberal democracies and the “resacralization” of politics is accompanied by the return of antiliberal religion and its marriage to nativist ideas and the radical or populist right (Davie, 2010; Haynes, 2014; Hennig and Weiberg-Salzman, 2020; Marzouki *et al.*, 2016). Yet, in the academic debate about the radical right so far, religion is rarely introduced as an analytical category and only slowly entering the research agenda (for an overview, see Camus, 2011; Minkenberg, 2018a). This article discusses the relationship between religion and radical right ideologies and its role in radical right mobilization in the context of a profound cultural change in European societies since the 1980s. For this purpose, the article offers a concept of right-wing radicalism, which is centred on the idea of antiliberal ultranationalism and nativism and includes religion as a major determinant of out-group/in-group distinctions. It then takes a look at the changing context of the contemporary radical right and finally discusses the programmatic development and organizational profile of major radical right actors, as far as religion is concerned. It is argued that while religious beliefs may not be a core element of radical right ideologies, in an era of accelerated religious and cultural pluralization, religion functions as a proxy for xenophobia in its strategy and mobilization against the perceived threat of rapid sociocultural change and its putative carriers.

The radical right as antiliberal ultranationalism and its religious underpinnings

Most popular definitions of the radical (or populist or extreme) right do not include religion. Instead, ethnicity, racism and/or the opposition to immigration typically constitute the definitional cores (e.g., Betz, 1994; Carter, 2005; Ignazi, 2003; Norris, 2005). In a more elaborate and widely accepted definitional attempt, Cas Mudde lists nationalism as the key concept, which he then specifies by distinguishing the dimensions of internal homogenization, external exclusiveness, ethnic and/or state nationalism before qualifying it by additional key features such as nativism, xenophobia, authoritarianism and, in the most extreme version, an anti-democratic stand (Table 7.1 and Mudde, 2007: 16–24; also Minkenberg, 1998: 21–72).

Following earlier writings (Minkenberg, 2000, 2008), right-wing radicalism shall be defined against the backdrop of modernization theory with its emphasis on the fundamental processes

Table 7.1 The definitional ladder in Cas Mudde’s concept of the radical right

<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Key Additional Feature</i>
Extreme right	▲
Radical right	Anti-democracy
Nativism	Authoritarianism
Nationalism	Xenophobia

Source: adapted from Mudde (2007: 23).

of functional differentiation at the societal level and growing autonomy at the individual level. It is seen as the radical effort to undo or fight such social change and their carriers by radicalizing inclusionary and exclusionary criteria (Minkenberg, 1998: 29–47; also Carter, 2005: 14–20; Kitschelt, 2007: 1179). In other words, it is the overemphasis on, or radicalization of, images of social homogeneity which characterizes radical right-wing thinking.

Right-wing radicalism is a political ideology, the core element of which lies in the myth of a homogenous nation, a romantic and populist ultranationalism that is directed against the concept of liberal and pluralistic democracy and its underlying principles of individualism and universalism. In the logic of nativism, i.e., the defence of a “heartland” and its autochthonous population and culture, the nationalistic myth consists of the construction of an idea of nation and national belonging by stipulating criteria of exclusion which can be ethnically based, but also cultural, i.e., religious, aiming at the congruence between the state and the nation (Smith, 2001: 34). A summary of these exclusionary criteria is presented in Table 7.2.

Analytically, these criteria are distinct and have their own rationale. In the real world, however, they are often mixed together, and it is the task of the researcher to disentangle them and reveal the respective or prevailing rationale of right-wing thinking. The concept of “nativism”, as in Mudde’s and other definitions, overarches different versions of out-group/in-group distinctions based on fear of threats – imagined or real – to the native population’s identity and homogeneity (Mudde, 2007: 18–19). Like its “parental category” nationalism, nativism does not need an ethnocentric layer but can be religiously motivated, a trait it shares with fundamentalist movements that defend traditional religious beliefs and ways of life against threats such as liberalism or modernity. Nativism, like fundamentalism, then becomes a radical right ideology when their components of nationalism and xenophobia are complemented by authoritarian or illiberal features (idem, 24; see above). In this ideological mixture, the populist impulse of right-wing radicalism, i.e., the anti-establishment thrust and the identification of “the people” as the only source of political authority, is translated into a top-down relationship between the leader of the party (movement) and the masses (Griffin, 1991: 36; Minkenberg, 1998: 44).

Historically, the radicalized notion of national homogeneity resulted from the transformation of an emancipatory nationalism to an integral or official version (Alter, 1985; Anderson, 1983) and culminated in a romantic ultranationalist myth of belonging by the end of the 19th century; as such, it borders on or even inhabits chiliastic, i.e., quasi-religious, characteristics, especially when moral qualities of the nation and the notion of a national rebirth were added (Griffin, 1991: 32–33; also Minkenberg, 1998: 35–47). Some authors insist on including anti-system attitudes or opposition to democracy as an essential definitional criterion (Ignazi, 2003). But these

Table 7.2 In-group/out-group criteria in radical right-wing discourse (following W. Heitmeyer's concept of group-based enmity)

Criteria of Exclusion	Core Argument
Racism	Inferiority of the "other" on the grounds of biological difference ("natural" hierarchy)
Anti-Semitism	Special case of racism
Ethnocentrism	Superiority of own collectivity on the grounds of cultural and economic achievements (developmental differentiation)
Xenophobia	Defensive reaction against ethnic and cultural "others" (fight for resources, fear of "cultural mixing")
Religiocentrism (Fundamentalism)	Superiority of own collectivity on the grounds of a particular faith and exclusionary access to "truth"
Heterophobia	Intolerance to deviation from mainstream norms (unacceptability of morally "others", also within the own ethnicity)

Sources: Minkenberg (1998: 119); Heitmeyer (2005: 14–15); Zick *et al.*, (2011).

attributes are often under-specified since there is a significant difference between those who reject the entire democratic order and those who want less democracy but more state, or less state and more democracy (Carter, 2005: 42).

According to the definition used here, right-wing radicalism is not the antithesis to democracy *per se* (see Table 7.1). In other words, the radical right as defined here is not necessarily in favour of doing away with democracy but wants government by "the people" in terms of *ethnocracy* (Griffin, 1999: 308–315). Against this backdrop, the literature on the contemporary radical right largely considers the religious factor only when identifying religious minorities such as Jews or Muslims as targets of radical right thinking and activities or in electoral analyses where it is usually treated as one of many demographic variables (Arzheimer, 2008: 362; Norris, 2005: 183; but see Arzheimer and Carter, 2009; Immerzeel *et al.*, 2013). But in many countries, religion entered the respective idea of the nation or national identity (Soper and Fetzer, 2018: 3–13). Hence, the nationalistic myth can be characterized by the effort to construct an idea of nation and national belonging by radicalizing ethnic, but also religious and other cultural criteria of exclusion, to bring about a congruence between the state and the nation (Smith, 2001: 34), and to condense the idea of nation into an image of extreme collective homogeneity. In other words, the assumption that "the radical right's understanding of nationalism is ethnically driven" (Bar-On, 2018: 18) misses out on a significant dimension, i.e., religion and religious nativism, i.e., a religiously coded celebration and defence of the heartland.

While the literature on the contemporary radical right largely ignores the religious factor, except when identifying religious minorities as targets of the radical right, the nationalism scholarship abounds with references to religious characteristics. This applies beyond the obvious cases of Poland and Ireland (e.g., Zubrzycki, 2006). In fact, already, early research on national identity was closely linked to religion. German historian Friedrich Meinecke distinguished between the state nation and cultural nation, the latter being rooted in religion, the most important of the "cultural good" (Meinecke, 1908: 2–3) and his French counterpart Ernest Renan, though defining the nation as an "everyday plebiscite", added to this definition the requirement of a "soul", i.e., a spiritual dimension (Renan, 1947: 903).

Contemporary nationalism research continued to use these distinctions. An important strand of scholarship dissociates religion from nationalism, arguing, as did Benedict Anderson (1983),

that secularization and the modern national movements resulted in replacing religion with nationalism, which was then seen as a surrogate religion, or a “political religion” (Smith, 2001: 35). Others go one step further and distinguish various ingredients of nationalism, such as language, ethnicity, religion, kingship or the sense of belonging to a “historical nation” (Hobsbawm, 1990: 67, 73). While Hobsbawm dismisses religion as a necessary requirement for the emergence of nationalism (as he does with language, ethnicity and kingship), he discovers, like Smith, quasi-religious traits or the role of “holy icons” in it. Some historians see an even stronger connection and argue that religion lay at the roots of early modern European nation-building in that elites mobilized against religious others to strive for social cohesion and national identity (Marx, 2003; also Spohn, 2003a, 2003b). In a systematic account of the relationship, Rogers Brubaker (2012) argues that religion, far from being replaced by an allegedly secular nationalism, is more often than not intertwined with nationalism or can even constitute a distinct version of nationalism or a cause of its emergence. Likewise, the conceptual effort to link up religion with nationalism by J. Christopher Soper and Joel Fetzer distinguishes three models of nationalism (2018: 19), two of which contain religious core elements. The authors link up these three models, i.e., religious nationalism, secular nationalism and civil-religious nationalism, with particular institutional arrangements of church–state relations (establishment corresponds with religious nationalism, separation with the secular version), degrees of religious homogeneity (religious diversity corresponds with civil-religious nationalism and uniformity with the religious version) and other factors.

In most of these writings, with the notable exception of Soper and Fetzer, the concepts of religion and secularism (as in religious or secular nationalism) remain sufficiently vague as to be malleable. Religion is treated as a particular institution, i.e., the Catholic Church, or a theology or denomination, or, in a wider sense, the appearance of a sacred dimension which interrelates with secularization in a zero-sum relationship (Bruce, 2002; Norris and Inglehart, 2011; and others). Hence, “religion” and its counterpart “secularity” or “secularization” need to be specified before bringing them together with the radical right. Generally, religion and secularization are multi-dimensional concepts, and the former entails at least the two dimensions of belief (in the supernatural) and their institutionalization. Thus Steve Bruce defines religion as “beliefs, actions, and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of judgement and action” (Bruce, 2003: 9f). Starting from this premise and following Max Weber (1920) and Roland Robertson (1987), the world’s large religions can be generally distinguished along two dimensions: on the one hand, religion requires some kind of institutionalization without necessarily being formally organized; on the other hand, religion can be characterized in terms of its basic orientation towards the world as it exists around it. The particular mix of a this-worldly orientation and a highly organized or formal structure, as in Christianity, transforms an organized religion into a potent political actor – and can result in severe tensions if the fundamental orientations differ from those of the polity in which it operates.

Moreover, as has been shown and argued in many studies, secularization does not necessarily mean the disappearance of religion. Instead, separate “moments of secularization” (Casanova, 1994: 19–39) must be clearly distinguished: secularization as “institutional differentiation”, in particular the separation of state and church, the emancipation of social and political forces from religious authority and the growing autonomy of churches in a liberal democracy; secularization as “decline”, i.e., the loosening ties of the individual to the values and institutions of religion (in Max Weber’s terminology “*Entzauberung*” or “disenchantment”) and secularization as “privatization”, i.e., the retreat of religion from the public sphere and its subsequent marginalization (also Taylor, 2007: 1–3; Fox, 2013). In this vein, religion can be married to the radical right as part of its agenda, as lending legitimacy for its mobilization and as a feature of its mobilization potential

among voters or the general public. All three regards lend the radical right the powerful resource of the re-enchantment or resacralization of politics even for those who are “religiously unmusical” (Weber, 1994: 65f, 69f).

Changing contexts: cultural shifts, pluralization and the new radical right

If the radical right is seen as fundamentally antiliberal, it shares this stand with almost all religious traditions in Europe at some point in time. Historically, the radical right’s ancestors are part and parcel of the Christian tradition, and only the modern age has differentiated religious beliefs so as to make most of Christianity compatible with liberalism and liberal democracy. But this process was far from uni-dimensional and linear. For example, in predominantly Catholic societies in Europe, nation-building by mostly liberal elites put Catholicism on the defensive, and often the question of loyalty was invoked. Here a conflictual relationship between the Church and liberalism prevailed, with little support of the Church for the emerging democratic orders and an unholy alliance between fascism and Catholicism in inter-war Europe (for details, Minkenberg, 2018a: 370–373; also Bruce, 2003: 110; and Warren, 1941). The Vatican’s accepting human rights, pluralism and democracy at its second council some 20 years after World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust (Casanova, 1994: 71; Anderson, 2009: 38–40) does not mean that all of Christianity had come to terms with democracy and tolerance, as is illustrated by the French integrists (the *Fraternité St. Pie X*) since the 1960s and antiliberal Catholics in Eastern Europe after 1989 as well as currents in Protestant fundamentalism from Scandinavia to the United States. These religious revolts against modernization and liberalization are a symptom of larger societal processes in the Western, later also Eastern European world.

While the Catholic Church entered a phase of opening towards the modern world in the 1960s, various Western democracies witnessed the mobilization of a right-wing “national opposition” that was directed at the political regime and centred on a crucial issue of democratization. In this sense, historian Wolfgang Wippermann rightly pointed out that “with the collapse of fascist regimes in Italy and Germany ... the era of fascism has ended – but not the history of fascism” (1983: 183, my translation). For example, in Italy, fascism continued into the new era in the form of an outright fascist party, the Italian Social Movement (MSI), which vehemently opposed the First Republic; in France, the end of the colonial empire, especially the loss of Algeria, fed a backwards-oriented radical right under Poujade and later under Tixier. In West Germany, the rise of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) was a reaction against the separation of the country and the Western integration of the Federal Republic, which signified the end of the authoritarian German nation-state. In all three countries, the new political situation was increasingly accepted by the public, thus in the 1970s, these movements – and their issues – lost support and faded away. Instead, new political actors on the radical right appeared by the end of the decade and proved more successful than the old radical right of fascist or racist provenance (Minkenberg, 1998, 2000).

This renewal of the radical right must be seen in the context of far-reaching social and cultural change in Western societies. These processes have been identified by numerous authors as “post-industrialism”, “value change”, “late capitalism”, “the third modernity” and so on. Most prominent are the contributions of Ulrich Beck (1986), who talks about “the other modernity” and Ronald Inglehart (1990, 1997), who relates his research of “post-material value change” to the concepts of a “culture shift” and “post-modernity”. Based on a number of similarities in these approaches and to avoid the pitfalls of “post-ism” (Rüsen, 2016), the summary term “late modernity” is preferred to “post-modernity”. This phase of late

modernity is characterized by an increasingly reflexive process of modernization and a new, self-critical posture towards modernity and cultural orientations, a sharpened sense of crisis, the primacy of the “life world” and the central role of education, language and communication. The process can be read as a new phase of individualization and pluralization, following conventional definitions of modernization, and as the de-emphasis of authority, both religious and rational-legal in the Weberian sense.

In addition, the religio-cultural landscape of Western democracies is undergoing a significant change. Contrary to classical secularization theories, religion, even in the Western world, is a power that does not want to vanish and that assumes a new significance in an ever more complex and diverse world (Butler *et al.*, 2011). In Europe, more than anywhere else, many signs have pointed at a receding social relevance of organized religion since the 1960s (Davie, 2000; Norris and Inglehart, 2011); yet, this development was accompanied by a heightened religious and cultural pluralization of Western societies. Major facets of this pluralization process include the immigration and growth of non-Christian minorities, in particular, Muslims; the immigration of Christians with a rather different denominational background, for example, Eastern European Orthodoxy or African versions of Christianity; the growth of the religiously unaffiliated or atheists; and finally the European integration process itself, which triggers new and heated discussions about the proper relationship between religion and the state (Haynes, 2014: 63–85).

As a result of these processes, in most countries, the unaffiliated are today the second-largest group when looking at measures of religious affiliation and Muslims the second- or third-largest among those with an affiliation (PEW Research Center, 2016; also Table 1 in Minkenberg, 2018b). Countries where Islam was second (data from around 2010) have traditionally been very homogeneous in denominational terms, such as Austria, Belgium, France, Italy and Spain among the Catholic majority countries, and Denmark, Norway and Sweden among the Protestant majority countries. In addition, from around 1980 until around 2000, religious diversity has increased in all Western European democracies, except for Sweden (*ibid.*).

These processes of pluralization and the growing presence of (non-Christian) immigrants and their descendants challenge the established institutional and political arrangements in the religio-political field. They also provoke religious and political counter-reactions, which to a large degree are driven by nativist, antiliberal and radical right actors and react to the challenges to what they perceive as the religio-political “normalcy” (Minkenberg, 2018b). In that, the new radical right can assume a substitute role for weakened institutions and actors in the religious sphere or open the gates for new holy or unholy alliances between the radical right and illiberal religion/religious nativism (Hennig and Weiberg-Salzmann, 2020). More specifically, radical right parties may flourish more in secular than in religious societies in particular if their incorporation of religion into their agenda provides them with a mark of distinction in the competition with other parties. The summary overview in Table 7.3 indicates some relationship, with the bulk of modestly or weakly secularized countries having a weak presence of those parties; however, the inverse is not true regarding countries with advanced secularization. When considering the presence of Islam and the dose of religion in these parties’ ideologies (see also next section), the link becomes stronger: regardless of the secularization of the country, the parties which added Islamophobia to their traditional ethnocentrism are more successful and they have established themselves especially in countries with a strong presence of Islam (see Table 7.6).

In other words, the current radical right is strong where it couples its ultranationalist or racist message with Islamophobia, especially in countries with a long tradition of Christian mono-confessionalism. Widespread Islamophobia and the rejection of multiculturalism in large parts

Table 7.3 Secularization and the radical right (RR) in Western Europe (post-2000)

	<i>Weak RR Presence</i>	<i>Strong RR Presence</i>
<i>Weak or modest secularization</i>	Ireland	Austria ^a
	Germany	Belgium ^a
	Great Britain	Italy ^a
	Netherlands	Switzerland
	Portugal	
	Spain ^a	
<i>Advanced secularization</i>	Sweden ^a	Denmark ^a
	Finland	France ^a
		Norway ^a

Sources: Norris and Inglehart (2011: 84–91); Minkenberg (2018b, Table 6).

Note: Strong RR presence: countries with a radical right party which has received at least 4% in every national parliamentary election since 1990.

Note: Secularization is measured by low church-going rates (advanced = less than 20% going to church at least once a month; average for World Values Survey data from 1981 to 1998).

Note: ^aCountries, in which Islam was the second-largest religious community in 2010.

Table 7.4 Religious diversity and pluralization trends (1980–2000) and strength of radical right parties in West European democracies

	<i>Weak Pluralization</i> ($d < 0.10$)	<i>Moderate Pluralization</i> ($d = 0.10-0.20$)	<i>Strong Pluralization</i> ($d > 0.20$)
<i>Low level diversity</i> (< 0.20)	Ireland	Belgium ^{a,b}	France ^{a,b}
	Portugal	Denmark ^{a,b}	Italy ^{a,b}
	(Sweden ^a : $d = \text{negative}$)	Norway ^{a,b}	Austria ^{a,b}
		Finland	Spain ^a
<i>Moderate diversity</i> ($0.20-0.50$)			
<i>High level diversity</i> (> 0.50)	Switzerland ^b	Germany	
		Great Britain	
		Netherlands	

Sources: Minkenberg (2018b, Table 1 and Table 6).

Note: The base of categorization is the diversity value of 1980 (0: completely homogeneous, 1.00: completely diverse).

Note: $d =$ difference of diversity value between 1980 and 2000

Note: ^aCountries in which Islam is the second-largest religious community.

Note: ^bCountries with a strong radical right-wing or xenophobic party in the country's party system (at least 4% in every national parliamentary election since 1990). The two periods are not synchronized because such processes do not translate into political changes immediately.

of Western European publics (Minkenberg, 2008, 2013; Zick *et al.*, 2011) provide an opening for the radical right to look more “mainstream” and less extremist, in contrast to earlier racist discourses such as anti-Semitism or biological racism. Table 7.4 shows that the link becomes even more evident when considering the pace of change in religious diversity (as presented in Table 1 of Minkenberg, 2018b).

The distribution of countries in Table 7.4 reveals a very clear pattern. One group of countries exhibits low levels of diversity around 1980 and a low degree of pluralization (Ireland, Portugal). Here, the monopoly of Catholicism by and large persists, and no relevant radical right party has emerged. The situation changes in the next group, with low levels of diversity but a medium degree of pluralization from 1980 to 2000 (Belgium and the Nordic countries, except Sweden). These countries also start with a denominationally homogenous society, and in all of them but Finland, Islam now occupies the second place among the large religious communities. It is here, again with the exception of Finland, that a new or renewed radical right party has become a permanent fixture in the party systems since the 1990s. In the third group (upper right cell), this scenario grows most obvious, with little diversity as a starting point and strong pluralization. Again, in these countries, which are all predominantly Catholic, Islam takes second place, and, except for Spain, the new radical right has established itself firmly in the party system well before the current debate on “populism”. The remainder of the countries fall in the category of already elevated levels of diversity. They constitute the heartland of the Protestant Reformation, with an early institutionalization of religious diversity. Here, Switzerland stands out with its strong radical right party, which had consolidated before the later waves of immigration.

In contrast to Western Europe, post-Communist Eastern Europe is not characterized by processes of large-scale immigration and religious pluralization. Instead, it is ethnic minorities that feed the radical right “backlash”, and there is only a weak link between (overall rather modest) ethnic pluralization and radical right electoral success (Mudde, 2007: 214; Minkenberg, 2017: 112–114). Moreover, in denominational terms, most countries in the East are even less diverse than in ethnic terms. With 12% of the population being of Turkish descent, Bulgaria is the only country in the East with a significant Muslim minority, but this is not due to immigration but the Wilsonian order in Eastern Europe after World War I. Consequently, as Table 7.5 reveals, there exists only a weak relationship between the degree of religious diversity and the success of the radical right.

Table 7.5 Religious homogeneity and the radical right success in Eastern Europe (1990–2015)

<i>Religious homogeneity (2010)</i>	<i>Radical Right Success (2000–2015)</i>	
	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Medium–low</i>	Czech Republic Estonia	Bulgaria ^a Hungary Latvia Slovakia
<i>High</i>	Lithuania Romania ^a	Poland

Sources: Minkenberg (2017: 113), Census nearest 2010, PEW Research Center 2020.

Note: Religious homogeneity high: majority religion (Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy) is more than 80%.

Note: Religious homogeneity medium–low: large share of unaffiliated (>30%), large share of non-majority religion (>20%).

Note: Radical right success is measured by a radical right party obtaining at least 5% of the vote in at least three national parliamentary elections between 1995 until 2015. This takes into account a period of regime settlement from 1990 to 1995, which is excluded from consideration, and the generally high level of electoral volatility/low level of party attachment in the entire region.

Note: ^aCountries in which Orthodoxy is the majority religion.

The Changing frames of the radical right: the return of religion as religious nativism

In light of the above-mentioned processes of cultural shifts and modernization, various new organizations on the far right appeared from the late 1970s on, which tried to influence elections and the policy-making process. In the 30 years between 1965 and 1995, 19 right-wing radical parties were formed in Western Europe, with more than half of them gaining an average of at least 4% in national or European elections in the 1980s and 1990s (Kitschelt, 1995: 52). Besides these electoral organizations, there are new groups of the radical right that try to influence public debate and the minds of people rather than voting behaviour. These groups – think tanks, intellectual circles, political entrepreneurs – are summarized as the New Right in the literature. In Europe, the most prominent groups are the French *Nouvelle Droite* groups *Club de l'Horloge* and especially GRECE, led by philosopher Alain de Benoist, the German *Neue Rechte*, the Italian *Nouva Destra* and other country chapters, also in Eastern Europe. The New Right is inspired by the Weimar Conservative Revolution, in particular Carl Schmitt's antiliberal "Political Theology" (Bar-On, 2013; Schmitt, 2010; Sedgwick, 2019). The ideas of these groups are disseminated largely in magazines such as the French *Éléments* or the German *Junge Freiheit* or *Criticón*. This New Right builds a bridge, or hinge, between established and traditional conservatism and the organizations of the new radical right. It is characterized by its effort to create a counter-discourse to the "ideas of 1968". The German New Right historian Rainer Zitelmann, for example, advocated overcoming the German "double trauma of 1933 and 1968" (*Der Spiegel*, 11/1994: 224). The New Right more or less successfully appropriates strategies and issues of its political opponents, especially the New Left and new social movements. This process of "issue framing" aims at establishing a cultural war, a *Kulturkampf von rechts*, or a *Gramscisme de droite*, with the goal of filling terms of public debate with a right-wing meaning of a homogeneous nation, a strong state and discrimination of all things "foreign".

In Europe, the most important ideological renewal took place with the New Right's formulation of the concept of "ethnopluralism", which demarcates New Right thinking from old-fashioned ideas of biological racism and white superiority. In direct appropriation of the left's concept of the right to be different ("*droit à la différence*"), the New Right emphasizes the incompatibility of cultures and ethnicities and advocates the right of the Europeans to be different and to resist cultural mixing. As French sociologist Pierre-André Taguieff (1994) shows, this concept, despite its claim of pluralism, still smacks of racism, or "mixophobie". Ethnopluralism only appears to be pluralist and liberal; its essence is a politically enforced segregation of cultures and ethnicities per geographical criteria, a global apartheid. Thus, ethnopluralism is the New Right's countermodel to concepts of multiculturalism, a modernized strategy against immigration and integration (Camus, 2011; Minkenberg, 1998: 141–166).

At the level of the political parties' discourse in Western Europe, this concept boils down to a defensive nationalism. None of the parties mentioned advocates a return to pre-democratic, dictatorial political orders; all stress their support for republican principles and the liberal-democratic constitution (a difference to inter-war fascism in Italy, Austria or Germany). They don't want to abolish democracy but to redefine it in terms of ethnocracy (Minkenberg, 2000; Mudde, 2007): "*Les Français d'abord!*", "*Deutschland den Deutschen*" (also "America First") are their slogans. In line with the New Right's countermodel to multiculturalism, this is a modernized strategy against immigration and integration and also used as a religious defence against multiculturalism and Islam – albeit the *Nouvelle Droite* around Alain de Benoist originally attacked Christianity as an alien religion just like Islam, in their embrace of a pre-Christian European identity (see Camus, 2011). However, other New Right think tanks in France, such as the *Club de l'Horloge*,

appropriated Catholicism as part and parcel of French and European identity (Minkenberg, 1998: 153f).

Further along the line, smaller far-right groups and movements without electoral ambitions and a more particular agenda emerged, heavily relying on religious narratives and mobilizing against Islam in an increasingly aggressive fashion, such as Aarhus against the Mosque in Denmark, the (successful) mobilization in the Swiss referendum on the banning of minarets in Mosques, and more recently the Dresden-based PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident) movement and the Europe-wide anti-Islam Identitarian movement (Minkenberg, 2008: 48–50; Vorländer *et al.*, 2018; Zúquete, 2018). From the *Nouvelle Droite* to PEGIDA and the Identitarians, the ethnopluralist argument centres its agenda on religious grounds and connects the ideology of nativist nationalism with a religious logic, thereby turning religion into an ultranationalist “master frame”, which meant to provide a direct link between these groups and the political mainstream, thereby bypassing all parties and partisan discourse. Yet, in Western Europe, it was the parties of the new radical right, which most successfully appropriated this frame in their electoral politics.

The recent shifts of radical right parties towards emphasizing a religious divide by attacking Islam and claiming the role of defenders of the Christian or Judeo-Christian heritage in the respective countries, or Europe in general (Immerzeel *et al.*, 2013: 946), does not need to be interpreted merely as a strategic ploy to gain political advantages (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009: 989). For one, a number of these groups and parties had already long-time links to ultra-conservative or orthodox currents of Christianity. For example, Le Pen’s Front National (FN) cultivated an alliance with the antiliberal Lefebvrists/integrists, some of whom held prominent posts in the party (see above, and Camus, 2011; Minkenberg, 1998). Bruno Mégret, the number two in the party until the split in 1999, made the case that France was a Catholic country and should embrace the history of her Catholicism as she should embrace her pre-revolutionary past (1996). The FN’s recent shift towards Islamophobia was not the result of the change in leadership; it appeared already before Marine Le Pen took over in 2012. Yet, under her leadership of the FN, renamed 2018 into *Rassemblement National* (RN), Islamophobia was coupled with a new emphasis on the secular-republican traditions of France, which the party sees under attack by Islam and its allies in the French establishment. In this context, Catholicism in the FN/RN assumes the role of a “cultural Christianity” or religious nativism, compatible with principles of French *laïcité*, rather than an expression of religious faith (Hennig and Weinberg-Salzmann, 2020; Roy 2016).

Likewise, despite the anti-clerical tradition in Austria, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), just like the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) and the Italian *Lega Nord* (now only Lega), have increasingly attacked Islam as incompatible not only with their countries’ democratic order but also their Christian identity (Marzouki *et al.*, 2016: 13–60). The British National Party (BNP) has discovered Islam as the country’s enemy, as has the Danish People’s Party (DF) (Goodwin, 2011: 177–178; Widfeldt, 2015: 146–149, 171). In Denmark, Protestant fundamentalists – just like Catholic integrists in France – sided with the major party of the radical right (Minkenberg, 2008: 48–50), and in the Netherlands, the *List Pim Fortuyn* in 2002 and Geert Wilders’ Party of Freedom (PVV) were almost completely centred on a strongly Islamophobic platform from their beginning (Art, 2011: 179–187).

Finally, the German radical right, old and new, followed and enhanced this trend. While the “*Republikaner*” in the early 1990s still focused more on xenophobia than Islam, the more extreme and, if anything, pagan National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) has found religion a promising programmatic point and echoes its British counterparts in embracing anti-Semitism as well as Islamophobia. More recently, the new Alternative for Germany (AfD), first organized

as a fiercely anti-EU and anti-Euro party in 2013, has moved further to the right and increasingly mobilized against immigrants, refugees and Islam. Like PEGIDA and the Identitarians, the AfD discovered the Christian heritage of Germany as a political resource in its ultranationalist fight against immigrants and the establishment, and its various sub-organizations include a Protestant-pietist group, the Christians in the AfD, similar to the Lefebvristis in the French FN and the Protestant fundamentalists in the Danish DF (Zick and Küpper, 2015).

This overview of the West European radical right illustrates the voyage of the concept of ethnopluralism from the intellectual New Right of the 1970s into the party platforms of nearly all contemporary radical right parties in the West: religion today serves as a master frame to mobilize support and appear more mainstream. Where mainstreaming is not the goal like in the BNP until the late 1990s, radical right groups remain outright racist and/or put more emphasis on anti-Semitism than on Islamophobia, with the obvious results of finding political allies in anti-Semitic circles in the Muslim world (Camus, 2011: 272–274; Goodwin, 2011: 172–173; also Carter, 2005: 35–41).

In Eastern Europe, the relationship between the radical right and religion does not signal a return of religious ultranationalism. It has never been gone, except for a 40-year long hiatus in the Communist era when both religion and nationalism were suppressed by the Soviet hegemon. In this region, the radical right has stood for a merger of religion and ultranationalist platforms since it reappeared in the 1990s. The most notable case is Poland, where the radical right tries to out-Catholicize the Catholic establishment and political mainstream. Here, the inter-war ideas of the anti-democratic and antiliberal Roman Dmowski find new resonance with listeners of Radio Maryja, street marches organized by the All-Polish Youth and parties such as the now-defunct League of Polish Families, the ruins of which have been absorbed by the governing Law and Justice party (PiS). This party, in cooperation with parts of the Catholic clergy, has also embarked on an antiliberal moral crusade against all real or perceived threats to the Polish nation and the Catholic way of life (Hennig and Weinberg-Salzmann, 2020; Pytlas, 2016). In Hungary, the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP), as well as *Fidesz*, took over Catholic voters in the late 1990s when the Hungarian Christian Democratic party declined in the wake of internal rivalries (Minkenberg, 2017: 86). Today, the Movement for a Better Hungary (*Jobbik*) has, until recently, echoed the Polish radical right by emphasizing that Hungarian national identity and Christianity are an “inseparable concept” (Pirro, 2015: 71–73; also Ádám and Bozóki, 2016). The Slovak National Party (SNS) stands for a particularly strong fusion of national identity and Catholicism, which in the first phase of national independence in World War II bordered on clerical fascism; these traditions were carried on by the SNS in the 2000s, which under the leadership of Jan Slota tried to rehabilitate the fascist priest Tišo (Pirro, 2015: 89–91; Václavík, 2015). Its successor at the extreme right-wing end of the party spectrum, the *Kotleba* party, has also adopted Catholicism in its ultranationalist platform and vehemently mobilizes against Muslims and LGBT rights. An anti-Muslim thrust informs the radical right in Bulgaria, where Ataka was formed as an anti-Turkish party (Avramov, 2015: 300f). In Romania, on the other hand, radical right parties such as the Party for a Greater Romania (PRM) have declined since 2000, but increasingly, the Orthodox Church of Romania (ROC) has taken over the role of an antiliberal safeguard of the Orthodox identity of the country (Andreescu, 2015). Only in the Baltics does cultural Christianity or religious nationalism remain largely absent from the radical right’s agenda. Here, ethno-cultural nationalism and anti-immigration rhetoric dominate, as exemplified by the most successful party in the region, the partly governing National Alliance in Latvia (Minkenberg, 2017: 80).

To sum up, relevant actors of the radical right in European democracies can be distinguished according to the extent to which they disseminate a religious agenda, either in terms

Table 7.6 The radical right and its religious agenda in Europe, west and east (since 1990s)

	<i>Party</i>	<i>Movement</i>
<i>No explicit religious reference/ agenda from the beginning on</i>	NPD, <i>Republikaner</i> (DE)	<i>Freiheitliche Arbeiterpartei</i> (DE)
	<i>Movimento Sociale Italiano</i> (IT)	<i>Dansk Front</i> (DK)
	British National Party (GB)	<i>FANE</i> (FR)
	National Alliance ^a (LV)	NOF, ONR, PWN-PSN (PL)
	PRM (RO)	<i>Magyar Gárda</i> , <i>MÖM</i> (HU)
		<i>NSS</i> , <i>SNJ</i> (SK)
		<i>Vatra Romaneasca</i> (RO)
<i>Explicit religious reference/ agenda as an addition to ethnocentrist platform</i>	AfD (DE)	
	<i>Vlaams Blok/Belang</i> ^a (BE)	
	<i>Front/Rassemblement National</i> ^b (FR)	
	DF ^a (DK)	
	<i>Lega Nord</i> ^b (IT)	
	FPÖ ^a (AT)	
	SVP ^a (CH)	
<i>Explicit religious reference/ agenda as the core of platform from the beginning on</i>	<i>List Pim Fortuyn</i> ^a , Pvv ^a (NL)	Identitarian Movement (various)
	LPR ^a , PiS ^a (PL)	PEGIDA (DE)
	SNS ^a Kotleba (SK)	<i>Comités-Chrétienté-Solidarité</i> (FR)
	MIÉP, KDNP, Jobbik ^a (HU)	New Era (DK)
	<i>Fidesz</i> ^a (HU, after 2015)	Arhus against the Mosque (DK)
	<i>Ataka</i> ^a (BG)	Radio Maryja, All-Polish Youth (PL)
		[<i>ROC</i> (RO)]

Sources: Country chapters in Bertelsmann Stiftung (2009), updated; Minkenberg (2013, 2017).

Note: ^aParties with sustained electoral relevance (see Tables 7.4 and 7.5).

of affirming a religious identity of the nation they claim to defend or attacking “others” on religious grounds. This reasoning leads to three types: a non-religious radical right, a fundamentally religious radical right and a radical right which added religion to its repertoire during its existence, as shown in Table 7.6.

Regardless of these differences, all variants have in common a strong quest for internal homogeneity of the nation through the primary “we-group” – a rejection of difference and pluralization – and a populist anti-establishment political style (Minkenberg, 1998: 21–72, 237–309, 2000; also Kitschelt, 2007: 1179f). The relevant parties in selected countries, as presented in Table 7.6, are also marked with regard to their electoral success, and the overview in the table suggests a link between the programmatic focus and the electoral success as far as radical right parties in Western Europe are concerned: the mixture of “ethnocentrism” and “Islamophobia” seems to be the new winning formula. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, deeply religious ultranationalism predominates, except for the Baltic region.

Conclusions

In liberal democracies, religion and the radical right interact at various levels on which religion acquires a political quality, from beliefs and doctrine (ideology) to the organizational and institutional interaction to legitimation and mobilization (Fox, 2013: 56–108). Against this backdrop, “the return of religion” adds a new element to the interaction because it occurs in an age of secularization and affects even those political actors who were long interpreted as offering a substitute

for religion: an extreme “faith” in the nation, a quasi-religious identity providing a sense of political home for those who felt lost in an increasingly complex world. But the article proposes that this return of religion to the European radical right agenda since the 1990s stems mainly from outside pressures and societal dynamics, in particular, an accelerated religious pluralization, rather than from the beliefs of the activists or the tradition of the respective parties. Hence it should be seen as a strategic adjustment, not the core identity of the radical right, which remains its anti-plural ultranationalism. In other words: the changing agenda of the radical right does not signal the return of the traditional religious nationalism, which presupposes a religious population.

However, because of the enduring success of dyeing the radical right agenda with religion, above all Islamophobia in the West, religion may become a core component of the radical right ideology by being appropriated as “religious nativism”. This means a justification of the defence of the fatherland with religious rhetoric, thereby approaching the more conventional models of religious nationalism in Eastern Europe (south of the Baltics and southeast of the Czech Republic) and in the United States, especially in the Midwest and the South (Minkenberg, 1998). In sum, religion and the radical right will not undo their marriage of convenience even in a secular age. But with the exception of Poland and similar cases, the dose of religion in the radical right’s ultranationalism is a religion for non-believers rather than the religiously devout.

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