# LUISS

# The never-ending tale of an existential threat. A text analysis of the securitization of French national identity (2007-2010)

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# Abstract

From Robespierre's guillotine to the 2004 ban on overtly excessive religious symbols, French national identity has historically been subjected to different measures ensuring the conservation of its "true" essence. The sources of its threats, however, have been detected within continuously diversified targets. In 2007, the creation of the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidarity Development under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy crystallized a new nexus between national identity and security. Policies were adopted to counter a pervasive situation of irregular immigration and scarce adaptation to French republican principles, mostly attributed to Muslim communities. Ultimately, they engendered a spiral of socio-political turmoil, debate, and confrontation, showing how framing national identity in security terms is a powerful measure, yet perilous. This research uses the securitization theory from Critical Security Studies (CSS) to perform a Correspondence Analysis (CA) to understand how the French press reacted to the creation of the Ministry. The analysis of a sample of 267 articles from five French national newspapers permits to identify four distinct approaches to the Ministry: de-securitization, securitization, anti-securitization, and ambiguous-descriptive. The resulting predominant trend opposing the Ministry validates the influence exerted by media on the process of securitization as defined by the CSS. Ultimately, the abolition of the Ministry in 2010 translates this theoretical validation into practical reality.

**Keywords**: French national identity, securitization theory, media studies, correspondence analysis, integration.

# List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| CA | Correspondence Analysis |
| CNHI | Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration |
| CSS | Critical Security Studies |
| EU | European Union |
| FN | Front National |
| IR | International Relations |
| LB | Libération |
| LC | La Croix |
| LF | Le Figaro |
| LM | Le Monde |
| LP | Le Parisien |
| MoDem | Mouvement Démocrate |
| PCF | French Communist Party |
| PS | French Socialist Party |
| RPR | Rassemblement pour la République |
| UDF | Union pour la démocratie française |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UMP | Union pour un mouvement populaire |
| US | United States |

# Introduction

During the 2022 French presidential campaign, politician Éric Zemmour centered his electoral agenda on the relationship between rising immigration and French national identity for purposes of survival and integrity (Cohen, 2021). More specifically, he demonized the rampant Islamization of French society caused by immigrants of African origin: a subtle process which was leading to the eradication of French republicanism by Quran religious precepts (Zemmour, 2022). These claims of identitarian protection must be inserted within the surge in domestic security measures following the 2015 Paris attacks, whereby a flawed bridge between Muslim communities and religious terrorism consolidated. However, the correlation between identity, migration, and security is not a recent phenomenon. It is the echo of a long-standing rhetoric rooted in French history, with politicians targeting continuously different enemies to national identity: they spanned from rural inhabitants, Catholic authorities, to individuals labelled as immigrants or foreigners, namely French returnees, colonies' natives and, ultimately, Muslim believers.

This dissertation contributes to the existent literature on French national identity by offering an original perspective. Indeed, while major studies have engaged in historical overviews and quantitative linguistic research (Hailon et al., 2012; Holubowicz, 2017; Noiriel, 2007; Martigny, 2009; Thomas, 2012), this study expands the lens of analysis to the discipline of Critical Security Studies (CSS). More specifically, it addresses French national identity as an object of security, whose nature, composition, and subsistence should be properly safeguarded. This statement has been the core of a transversal rhetoric, which has gathered antithetical forces in French political system since the French Revolution and has perpetuated throughout its history. However, the credibility of this argument has particularly gained momentum in 2007, when Nicolas Sarkozy won the presidential elections and institutionalized the security of national identity by creating the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidarity Development. He engaged in what the CSS have defined as a process of "securitization" (Emmers, 2016; Balzacq, 2005; Wæver, 1995): he proposed to French people concrete measures to defend their national identity from "uncivilised habits" sustained by individuals of immigrant origin, regardless of their real threatening nature. Although his election signalled the public acceptance of his move, the creation of the Ministry spurred a general atmosphere of antagonism, debate, and polarization within the public opinion, which was exploited by political parties and, notably, by media communication.

In this regard, this study explores the nexus between political securitization, national identity, and media. It tries to understand how French press has inserted within the securitization of national identity promoted by Sarkozy, namely which narratives and reactions it has conveyed in relation to the Ministry of National Identity. More specifically, it aims at answering the following research question: In the context of the establishment of the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidarity Development, which narratives have been employed by French press in relation to the securitization of French national identity as expressed in digital articles, and can any identifiable pattern of securitization or de-securitization be distinguished? To this end, this research would adopt a multidimensional approach. Insights from CSS, postcolonialism, linguistics, anthropology, and international relations theory (IR) would provide a solid foundation for undertaking a data analysis on press articles retrieved from 5 French national newspapers. The analysis would detect approximate tendencies of securitization and de-securitization within their narratives, and the presence of ambiguous cases. Moreover, it would discover the endorsement by newspapers of the different interpretations of French national identity mobilized during the unfolding of French history.

This dissertation is structured in three chapters, dealing with distinct dimensions of the research but incrementally complementing each other. The first chapter explores the ambiguous concept of national identity and its placement in French history. It provides an overview of the main definitions of French national identity mobilized by political actors since the French Revolution up to the beginning of the 2000s. Investigating this plurality of narratives against an ever-changing socio-political background permits us to catch the immutable traits of national identity, as well as the variance of its perceived enemies until Sarkozy's presidency. The second chapter provides the theoretical bases for the subsequent analysis. It investigates the contributions to the study of national identity by CSS. Particularly, the concepts of societal security and securitization are explained to apply them to the case study of the Ministry of National Identity, which is dissected in its constitutive elements. These historical and theoretical premises back the data analysis performed in the third chapter. Adopting a mixed methodology, encompassing the quantitative technique of Correspondence Analysis (CA) and qualitative interpretation of results, a corpus of articles from 5 French national newspapers is analysed through visual representations. Ultimately, findings are comprehensively discussed considering the theoretical background to assess newspapers' stances towards securitization.

# Chapter I

# A fluid concept: the historical evolution of French national identity and its politicization

**Introduction**

The concept of national identity has no easy life. Or perhaps this regards more those who seek to understand it. By quoting what British Prime Minister Churchill said about the USSR in 1939, it could be described as a "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" (as cited in Hamilton, 2022). Therefore, looking at the nature of French national identity and tracing its historical evolution shows significant obstacles, as its definition has undergone continuous battles of appropriation and debates over its ultimate nature. In this regard, this chapter does not aspire to grasp the intrinsic essence of French national identity. Rather, it analyzes how it historically unfolded through complex and variable political narratives which, however, have all converged towards one point: the consideration of national identity as a security issue. In the first part, the analytical category of national identity would be investigated, by looking at the different theories that have tried to explain its nature. The second part would illustrate the republican myth upon which the French Revolution has constituted national identity, considering its foundational importance and continuous instrumentalizations by political actors. The latter would be detected in the two-sided clash between the Right and Left during the Third Republic, and in the consequences brought by the process of decolonization, namely the end of colonial domination and the repercussions on the restructuring of the society. Conversely, a short-term moment of renewal would be attributed to the socio-political ferments of the 1970s-1980s, whereby the French Socialist Party (PS) would operate a shift of paradigm, opening to the narrative of multiculturalism. The last section would focus on the emergence of the xenophobic and nationalist phenomenon of Jean-Marie Le Pen, who would manifestly define immigrants as threats to national identity and instigate discussions over nationality and Muslim customs. These premises would ground the immigration policies adopted by Nicolas Sarkozy as Minister of Interior at the beginning of the 2000s: they would constitute the first seeds sown by the politician of a more ambitious project, which would culminate in the Ministry of National Identity.

The analysis provided in this chapter is molded on the historical periodization utilized by scholar Gérard Noiriel in *À quoi sert «l'identité nationale» ?* (2007), analyzing the Ministry

of National Identity. However, the framework of analysis is expanded to understand the ontological nature and transformations of French identity, applying perspectives from sociology, anthropology, and theories of IR.

## 1.1 Diving into the enigma: dissecting the concept of national identity

There is no doubt that the concept of nation discloses an intricate nature: debates over its ultimate definition, qualifying attributes, and criteria for membership still permeate academic and political scenes, as they did in the past. As a case in point, has the existence of intra-state minority communities, such as the Kurds, or secessionist movements, such as the Catalan one, definitively torn the attachment of one nation to one state? What is the logic of ontological precedence between nation and state, admitting its existence? These complexities regard also the sense of belonging to a national entity, namely national identity. Is it possible to disentangle the single components of this identitarian feeling? Are they understood in terms of common culture or socio-political action? Moreover, does it undergo a certain evolution over time, or is it fixed in a static reference? Providing a univocal response to such questions is rendered even more critical by multiple considerations. First, national identity is a multidisciplinary subject of analysis, encompassing sociology, international relations, security studies, philosophy, and psychology, which complicate the achievement of a unified framework of interpretation (Kastoryano & Escafré-Dublet, 2017, p. 83). Secondly, it displays an intrinsic ambiguity of meaning and usage, risking to "mean nothing at all" (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 1); a downside which is worsened by the politicization of the term. Ultimately, its characterization and content rest on individual perception, which deeply varies according to changes in social settings, relations, and structures occurring in political communities (Kastoryano & Escafré-Dublet, 2017, p. 82). Nevertheless, multiple analyses by scholars show shared themes, which contribute to untangling national identity into three characteristics: the role of history, the relational nature, and the power of representation.[1]

First, a broad academic consensus traces the origin of national identity as an analytical category to the end of the 18th century, when the fading of Enlightenment paved the way for the dawn of Romantic sensibility. The revolutionary ferments taking place in the US (1776) and France (1789) culminated in the establishment of nation-states and the affirmation of modern constitutionalism, giving political evidence to the theory of social contract, the

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[1] The expression "power of representation" is borrowed from the postcolonial theory, as described by Chowdry, G., & Nair, S. (2002, pp. 15-17).

principles of popular sovereignty and separation of powers (Grimm, 2012, p. 102). This institutional makeover was sustained by new ideological tenets, which discarded the universalist aggregation advocated by Enlightened thinkers and prioritized the uniqueness and non-rationality of single realities. Among these, the concept of nation stood out, signaling the primacy of the "principle of individuality [and] the particular" over the "generalizing and universalizing tendencies" of the previous centuries (Chabod, 2019, p. 17). The nation was believed to be embedded within a global heterogeneous system, whereby each nation was characterized by its specific identity, which grounded the idealistic homogeneity of its internal parts and distinguished it from other nations.

In this context, two main approaches explaining the origin and nature of national identity can be distinguished. They have been conventionally ascribed to the French and German traditions of the 18th century, differing for their conception of history in the formation of nation. On the one hand, a "naturalistic" theorization has been attributed to the works of the Prussian philosopher Herder and his compatriot Fichte: they described the nation as a flourishing reservoir of innate characteristics, such as language, culture, and past experiences (Cabanel, 1997). These eternal marks, whether properly secured, were believed to form the identity of the nation and ensure its survival against possible decay. To this end, the state was expected to continuously "favor what [lied] in a nation and awaken what [was] sleeping in it", adhering to its natural rules and detaching from degenerative foreign models (Chabod, 2019, p. 49). Thus, the German idea of nation consists in an ancestral belonging, resting on the share of features of culture, ethnicity, and language that precede the formation of the state (Schön, 2024, pp. 30-31). Its predominantly exclusivist character tends to establish rigid boundaries for barring what resides outside of it. This conceptualization shows two distinct features: first, an anthropomorphic approach assimilates the nation to the human being, in terms of quasi-genetic conformation and progress from birth to decline. Secondly, it displays a deterministic understanding of history, comparable to the one advanced by Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (1837/2001): the nation constitutes the highest stage of a historical pre-determined path with teleological rationality. Nevertheless, this mode of thinking has been criticized by scholars such as Étienne Balibar, who has argued that nations do not emerge from "a line of necessary evolution, but [from] a series of conjunctural relations" which are attributed *post hoc* to "the pre-history of the nation form" (1990, p. 340). In this sense, nations would be the accidental result of cumulative actions and changes that are not rationally pre-defined. Among these, the state centralization of legal regulations and use of force, and the conciliation between the powers of the church and the monarchy are considered critical junctures (Balibar, 1990, p. 339).

Conversely, the French model of nation displays an opposite conception of history. Its original elaboration is owed to the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who transferred the analysis of national identity from the hereditary dimension to the political one. According to Rousseau, nation is made by contract: its foundations are determined by a voluntaristic act of people (*volonté générale*), crystallized into a body politic endowed with one shared authority and will (as cited in Dunn, 2002, p. 164). On the one hand, this concept discloses a precise normative objective: it reifies the *volonté générale* into a supra-individual entity, dictating the path to reach the common good (G. Pecora, personal communication, April 14, 2021). On the other hand, the nation appears not as the continuation of what has been historically determined, but a contingent and intentional act of beginning. Therefore, it constitutes a sacred political project which is realized in a single time point (Chabod, 2019, p. 61). In this way, the French idea of nation displays an inclusivist scope, whereby belonging to it is not precluded by criteria of descent, but is conditional on adhering to a common political will from which the state originates and is sustained. This will takes the form of social and everyday habits to be internalized by national individuals, such as language proficiency, inter-individual support, and ethics of loyalty and commitment (Lorcerie, 1994, p. 256).

Thus, the different understanding of history underlying these two conceptions can be summarized as follows: the German nation exists because it could not be otherwise, while the French nation exists because it has been intentionally agreed. This dualism in nation theorizing has received broad consensus, as it has been historically validated on two different sides. As shown by Cabanel (1997), it has been exemplified by the Franco-Prussian rivalry of the late 19th century. Moreover, it has manifested into the different citizenship regimes accorded by the two states on the basis of their demographic conditions. However, adhering to such dualism risks causing a certain sterility of analysis, due to the following limits. First, it neglects the plurality of perspectives internal to both the German and French conceptions of nation. Moreover, it tends to dismiss their mutual fertilization, which, instead, has taken place within their political contexts. As a case in point, the emphasis on difference and anti-egalitarianism advanced by the German thought has been pivotal to the political strategy of Jean-Marie Le Pen's *Front National* (FN) and the ideology of the *Nouvelle Droite* in France in the 1970s-1980s (Genga, 2015, pp. 113-114).

The drawbacks of this binary opposition can be evaded by using a different theoretical model. It can be named as a "social-constructivist approach", echoing the theory adopted in the field of IR in the late 20th century. Emerging after World War II, this school of thought defined the nation as a "sociocultural construction sustained by discursive practices, invented

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traditions, and collective imagination" (Schön, 2024, p. 32). Accordingly, the nation represents an artificial construct, endowed with symbolic power and able to achieve collective identification of individuals by highlighting shared material and abstract references, be they ethnicity or socio-political values (Koukoutsaki-Monnier, 2015, p. 68). This perspective has been endorsed by the Irish scholar Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (2016), who has qualified nations in a two-fold sense. First, the nation is conceived as a sovereign political entity, originating from free consent rather than imposition. However, its sovereignty is limited by the existence of other nations, whereby one nation ends where the other begins (p. 7).[2] Thus, nations are imagined to be placed in a world characterized by the absence of a superior nation that encompasses all individuals. While this state allows them to retain their sovereignty in terms of their specific traditions and symbols, at the same time it condemns them to a perpetual "security dilemma".[3] In this condition, nations must guarantee the survival of their identity against foreign threats that might destroy it or contaminate its purity, such as immigrants, diaspora communities, imperialistic enterprises, and soft power. They must continuously defend, protect, and promote their national identity, ensuring that everyone continues to recognize "the external frontiers of the state" as "a projection and a protection of an internal collective personality" (Balibar, 1990, p. 348).

This constructivist idea of national identity allows us to identify its other components. They can be detected in the model developed by Koukoutsaki-Monnier (2015), which describes the mechanism of subsistence and transformation of national identity. The first characteristic consists in the relational nature: the ontological existence of national identity depends on and could not stand without the existence of the "Other" (p. 72). This term refers to those elements that are perceived as alien to one's national identity and that contribute to differentiating them all. On the one hand, the identification of the "Other" highlights the peculiarities of single identities and accentuates their opposition. On the other hand, their antagonism is intensified by the coexistence with sub-national identities, which emerge from the process of internal diversification of societies (Noiriel, 2007, p. 27). Such identities are defined in professional,

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[2] This expression echoes the Kantian conception of pursuit of happiness, as expressed in Waltz (1962, p. 332): "everyone may seek his happiness in the way that seems good to him as long as he does not infringe on the freedom of others to pursue a similar purpose, when such freedom may coexist with the freedom of every other man according to a possible and general law."

[3] The expression "security dilemma" has been utilized by the IR neorealist scholar Waltz, who in *Theory of International Politics* (1979), has described the system of international relations as characterized by an anarchical structure, meaning the absence of a centralized superior authority (p. 88), which commits states to continuously secure their material survival against external threats, via resource enrichment or alliance formation (p. 118). Transferred to nations as such, this concept refers to the threats feared by nations to their own "identitarian" security, meaning the contamination of the authenticity and disruption of their identity by other nations.

gender, ideological, or religious terms, and are translated into a hierarchical ladder at the individual level. The last characteristic consists in the power of representation, through which the construction and perpetuation of national identity are accomplished. This power is exercised by public officials' discourses, social facilities (educational system, religious institutions), individual behaviors, traditional (press) and modern communication systems (social media), which reinforce modulations of national identity with different degrees of attractiveness to the community (Koukoutsaki-Monnier, 2015, pp. 70-71). For instance, diverging representations are discernible in the polarization between left-wing and right-wing political parties, even if these differences have changed and overlapped throughout time. Ultimately, this interpretation of nation exhibits a different understanding of the role of history: previous events, rooted traits or traditions are functional to public actors to continuously construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct narratives of national identity, regardless of their factual significance.

Overall, this social-constructivist approach allows us to interpret in a clearer way the complexities inherent in the concept of national identity. According to these academic contributions, it can be defined as a fictional unity representing a sense of national belonging, which finds its phenomenological manifestations in historical experiences (political foundation) and traits (ethnicity), depending on what is claimed by the dominant political rhetoric (Choquet, 2015). Nevertheless, these representations would never succeed in explaining exhaustively the essence of national identity. Moreover, this approach shows that the construction of national identity is a dynamic process, in which practices of actors from different domains intersect with each other, hinging on tangible elements of belonging and targeting alleged enemies. Ultimately, the distinction between a French and a German definition of nation vanishes: they can be grouped into a coherent unity, where their artificial nature constitutes their common denominator. This helps explain why these definitions have at times diverged from one another, before again converging and resonating together. It is under the framework exposed so far, namely the fictional dualism of German and French ideas of nation, the relational nature, and the power of representation, that French national identity would be interpreted throughout its historical evolution, in order to make sense of the mobilizations and adjustments made periodically in the public scene. The symbolic act of its creation, the French Revolution, would constitute the point of departure of this analysis.

**1.2 The French Revolution: the origins of the republican myth**

The historical significance of the French Revolution has been attributed to plural dimensions, encompassing the Marxist affirmation of new capitalist socio-economic structures and the triumph of democratic values within an impersonal bureaucratic state (Skocpol, 1979, p. 175). This section would contribute to the array of these interpretations, by highlighting the influence played by the Revolution in setting the foundations for a modern idea of French national identity, doomed to become a leitmotif of political imaginary.

The French Revolution is always cited for its nature of epochal turning point. It ushered in a new democratic institutional system and sensibility, albeit in its embryo, and produced long-lasting effects on the 19th century European continent, fueling revolutionary movements of liberal and democratic nature. Its heterogeneous phases of political restructuring were matched by a consistent alteration of class relations. These two dimensions intersected in degrading the central power of the absolute monarchy of Louis XVI, which was shaken by a two-sided attack: external competing nations, such as the rampant imperialism of the United Kingdom (UK), and internal struggles with the aristocratic class, based on the exploitation of labor and the dysfunctional overlap of aristocratical and royal administrative offices (Skocpol, 1979, pp. 47-67). These factors disseminated the germs of popular upheaval, which exacerbated after the unsuccessful reforms proposed by the royal apparatus for the enduring financial crisis. In this context, a first sense of national belonging manifested in the protagonism of the bourgeois class and its guidance of peasants' grievances, demanding the end of the feudal system in their *cahiers de doléances* and fairer criteria of political representation (Hastings, 2023, p. 25). While these features were symbolized by the storming of the Bastille on the 14th of July 1789, the fall of the post-revolutionary constitutional monarchy and its replacement with the I Republic in 1792 signaled that the identitarian threshold had been crossed. The conception of French identity of the *Ancien Régime*, whereby individuals were drawn together by their descent from Gauls and passively subjected to monarchical absolutism, was replaced by a modern one (Safran, 1991, p. 220). According to this narrative, individuals discovered their political agency. They seized their national affiliation by agreeing to establish the bases and functioning of a democratic republican state.

This revolutionary idea of national identity grouped people into a coherent whole, which was not based on common cultural derivation but on a political act of foundation, involvement, and sharing of rights and duties (Choquet, 2015). Individuals started to distinguish their legal status through the categories of Frenchman and foreigner, detaching from

the former distinction based on social order (Brubaker, 1989, p. 32). However, this new conception was not devoid of internal nuances, as shown by the different interpretations of French intellectuals of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. A paradigmatical example is found in *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (1882, as cited in Giglioli, 2018) by philosopher Ernest Renan. Exalting the primacy of France in having established a modern nation-state, Renan defined French nation as "an everyday plebiscite" (Giglioli, 2018, p. 262). With this term he referred to a spiritual entity composed of individual wills, which realized common aspirations dismissing linguistic or religious differences in halting national unification (Giglioli, 2018, p. 263). This interpretation found resonance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century analysis endorsed by anthropologist Louis Dumont. According to him, French individuals identify their self in their citizenship, endorsing the republican values derived from political action, rather than in shared linguistic and ethnic traits (Dumont, 1990, p. 177). Instead, a focus on both cultural-naturalistic and political dimensions of national identity was proposed by the two-fold analysis of historian Jules Michelet. As exposed by Aramini (2017), the intellectual ascribes French national identity to a unified natural entity resulting from the historical process of fusion of races. Nevertheless, its existence is revealed to the conscience of individuals only by the political act of *volonté générale*. In this regard, the naturalistic identity acquires substance only when affirmed by the act of institution of the political body. Quoting the philosopher Descartes, this concept can be summarized with the expression: *volo ergo sum*.

These divergent interpretations have not prevented the delineation of a commonly accepted image of French revolutionary identity. This consists in a universal republican myth to identify with, a temple of historical memory and future progress, sustained by the columns of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, and *laïcité*. This quartet of principles has been explained by Laborde (2001) in its consequentiality: first, this conception recognizes the universal equality (*égalité)* of all individuals due to their inner liberty (*liberté)*, which is understood as self-determination free from external constraints and guided by free will (p. 718). This condition favors the creation of solidarity behaviors between individuals (*fraternité)* who, recognizing their mutual liberty and equality and overcoming their private differentiations, collaborate to reach collective utility (p. 719). Moreover, the realization of French national identity depends inextricably on the dissociation between public and private spheres, exemplified by the principle of *laïcité*. According to it, the state and its institutions guarantee the equality of individuals by confining their differences to the private sphere and by adopting a public neutral treatment towards any particularistic group or community, including religious ones (p. 720). This principle has been codified by the 1905 law, which has subjected the freedom of religion

to public order concerns, has excluded it from state financial support, and has forbidden the existence of public institutions affiliated to religious creeds (National Archives of France, 2022). In this way, any private element is prevented from creating a social hierarchy, whereby law is applied unevenly, privileges are granted, and, by using a provocative quote, "some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell, 1946).

On the basis of these considerations, French republican identity clearly discloses a universalist ambition. Being created by a political act of general will and not by ancestral descent, it nullifies human diversity into the spirit that founded the political community. Any individual is believed to potentially endorse French identity and become part of its community, regardless of his own peculiarities. This is explained by the fact that the difference between individuals lies "in their corps and not in their spirit" (Gregory of Nazianzus, as cited in Roberto, 2013, p. 116). Nevertheless, this possibility is conditional upon the individual adherence to the republican rules of the socio-political community. This paradigm, defined as assimilationism, provides a universal incorporation of individuals into French society, but at the expense of the nullification of their cultural differences in the public sphere (Hargreaves, 2007). This feature responds to a historical reason and signals a double rift with pre-revolutionary society. First, by separating religion and politics, the principle of *laïcité* dismantled completely the previous legal system, where normativity was legitimized by an unfathomable divine source, and replaced it with positive law (Grimm, 2012, pp. 100, 103). Secondly, as stated by Choquet (2015), the principle of *égalité* rejected the existence of intermediate bodies, which during the *Ancien Régime* had defined a system of privileges. Indeed, the post-revolutionary identity totally refuted the philosophy of communitarianism, namely the dissection of society into communities, and condemned any juxtaposition between state and citizens as a potential threat to national unity. Thus, the main referent units of the state became single individuals, rather than communities of them.

This republican identity has been promoted in the post-revolutionary period through precise concretizations, exerting a form of soft power. While the revolutionary agents of the National Guard and National Assembly have been its first manifestations, the adoption of the "Declaration of the Rights of the Man and the Citizen" in 1789 has codified its principles (Hastings, 2023, p. 24). As a case in point, Article 6 defines the principle of equality before the law in the following terms: "La loi est l'expression de la volonté générale. Tous les citoyens ont droit de concourir personnellement, ou par leurs représentants, à sa formation. Elle doit être

la même pour tous, soit qu'elle protège, soit qu'elle punisse" (Conseil Constiutionnel, n.d.).[4] Moreover, the execution of Louis XVI by guillotine during the Reign of Terror (1793) has signified the irreversible transformation of the nation, whose life could be only ensured through the death of the king (Hastings, 2023, p. 32). This emphasis on national identity by means of tangible symbolism sought to respond to two exigencies. On the one hand, the establishment of the new democratic system inaugurated an era of vagueness of references. According to Lefort (1988, p. 19), it led to the "dissolution of the markers of certainty", namely the loss by individuals of a compass in the social, identitarian, and political aspects of their lives. This shift was caused by the abrupt disappearance of the king as the concrete form in which power manifested, leaving a void that could be filled only by transitory governments (p. 17). On the other hand, the stress on national identity consisted in a political weapon to fight reactionary forces, comprising the Catholic world and the nobles, who were still advocating for a return to the previous feudal order and associated influence (Penet, 2017, pp. 189-190).

Nevertheless, the notion of republican identity, along with its founding principles, had found no thorough realization. Certainly, it dismantled the inegalitarian order favoring nobles and clergy. Nevertheless, the triad of *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité* displayed more of a strategic-political connotation than empirical validity (Dumont, 1990, p. 120). On the one hand, in the aftermath of the Revolution, the promise of equality was realized only partially. While all French citizens were statutorily equal before the law, the adoption of census suffrage conferred the status of active citizen only to males, considering their age and tax payment (Crook, 2021, p. 17). Even if these requirements were gradually loosened, discrimination based on social status, ethnicity or religion had never formally vanished until the achievement of the universal male suffrage in 1848 (Crook, 2021, pp. 17, 39). Similar considerations can be applied to the universalist scope of French identity and the acquisition of citizenship by foreigners. As clarified by Brubaker (1989, pp. 30-34), the French Revolution codified for the first time the legal status of citizen and its associated rights. At the same time, it introduced a clear differentiation with foreigners, who were devoid of those rights enjoyed under the previous order. The 1795 nationality law founded the conferral of French citizenship on the basis of birth, residence, and tax payment in France (*ius soli*), signaling a rupture with the

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[4] "The law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to contribute personally, or through their representatives, to its formation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes."
[Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/le-bloc-de-constitutionnalite/declaration-des-droits-de-l-homme-et-du-citoyen-de-1789

former broader concessions granted by the king towards foreigners through the *lettres de naturalité* (Choquet, 2015). These criteria for granting citizenship have defined a specific vision of the foreigner and its insertion in French political system. Specifically, foreigners should first acquire French nationality, demonstrating their attachment to republican values, and then they would be worthy of French citizenship (Hargreaves, 2007). Thus, these measures exemplify the creation by the French Revolution of a permanent practical and legal exclusion of foreigners, considered enemies of the national order along with internal reactionary forces (Brubaker, 1989, p. 43). They are early demonstrations of further episodes of exclusion and instrumentalization of the republican identity made by French political actors, justifying foreign and internal policy decisions under the security of the nation. In this context, a first political polarization appeared, as political parties started to endorse different conceptions of national identity. While Jacobin Left supported the theme of revolutionary and voluntary republicanism, the Right sided with the reactionary-conservative forces by insisting on themes of culture and ethnicity (Ford, 1993, p. 31). Thus, this exhibited how the dualism between French and German ideas of nation was reproduced in the internal political struggles of the new nation.

All things considered, this philosophical and historical overview of the main characteristics of French revolutionary identity allows us to draw three significant conclusions. First, despite its fixed connotations of universalism, equality, liberty, solidarity, and secularism, French republican identity has no unique interpretation, as emphasized by intellectuals' contributions. This condition makes it liable to potential instrumentalization and discretionary use, emphasizing now the political aspect, now the common cultural origins. Secondly, these principles show more theoretical attractiveness, rather than practical concretization. Rather than ensuring universal equality and freedom, the revolutionary process led to the introduction of a Manichean division between citizens and foreigners, with the latter menacing the security of the newly established nation-state. Ultimately, the crystallization of the republican identity massively affected the political scenario: it posed the ground for a first Left-Right polarization which would continuously alter and rebalance itself. The first evolution of this identitarian positioning would be advanced by the events of the Third Republic.

## 1.3 The Third Republic: a double cleavage seizes the identitarian ground

The end of the Jacobin revolutionary experience signaled the opening in French history of a continuously changing 19th century political system, which shifted from imperial experiments,

monarchical revivals, and lastly, republican restorations. Against this volatile background, an element of steadiness was represented by the promotion of national identity. More specifically, the establishment of the Third Republic in 1871 can be interpreted as a significant historical juncture in the politicization and public communication of French identity. A convergence of events of historical memory, expression of the unequal relationship between classes in the social sphere, and internal political crises reconfigured the political narrative over *Frenchness*. In this context, the republican rhetoric became entrenched in new ideological and social battles engaged by political actors, following the transformations brought by *l'esprit du temps*.

The Third Republic saw the peak of French republican promotion through a programmatic political-institutional plan. Different measures of urban and infrastructural renovations were adopted, aiming at drawing public attention to the national idea through visible manifestations. As expressed by Baker (2012), the former landscape gradually changed under the public exhibition of the tricolored flag and the architectural homogenization of public spaces, such as schools, hospitals, *Hôtels de ville* and other departmental offices under the Parisian model. This promotion of national symbolism resembled in its methods a form of intra-national imperialism, resting on a mechanism of dependence of the national periphery (rural regions) to its center (Paris).[5] Furthermore, national unification was strengthened by the institutionalization of free and compulsory lay primary schooling under Jules Ferry Laws (1882), which enforced secular morals against the religious symbols of a surviving Catholic education (Robert, 2013, p. 192). This reform was backed by the militarization of nationality promoted since 1798, when the Jourdan Law legalized the creation of a popular-conscript army made of French male adults and idealistically gathered the "whole" population under national defense (Catros, 2007, pp. 7-8). According to D'Auria (2020, pp. 4-6), these measures accomplished both a constructive and revelatory objective: they strengthened the cohesiveness around national identity and revealed concurrently its Gallic ethnic roots, towards which the narratives of politicians and intellectuals converged in the 19th century. The republican conception of national identity started to be reinterpreted by detaching from its traditional definition. The common political will described by Renan was now understood as concealing elements of common cultural ancestry (Noiriel, 2007, p. 19). As a result, this ideological shift granted favorable conditions for the emergence of rampant nationalism, hinging on the German-like features of nation.

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[5] The dynamic between center and periphery constitutes the core of the Marxist-oriented dependency theory in IR, based on a structural dependence, also of cultural nature, of the states representing the periphery of the world to those representing its center (Galtung, 1971).

These measures took ground on a perpetual but renovated antagonism between political forces over the theoretical appropriation of national identity. The socio-political transformations occurring at the end of the 19th century shaped the debate along two different cleavages: a class-nation cleavage and a national-regional one. However, these two fractures represented the *ex-post* separation of a former alignment of visions caused by an event of traumatic resonance. The Prussian conquest of the territory of Alsace-Lorraine in 1870 and the crucial defeat of France allowed the convergence of revolutionary and reactionary forces over the sacral defense of nation from external threats (Noiriel, 2007, pp. 18-19). Claims of radical irredentism emerged, aiming at reconquering what had formerly pertained to France. The disfigurement of the "sinister" foreigner was reflected in the transformations of nationality law, which strengthened his exclusion from enjoying the legal status of French citizen. While the Napoleonic Code (1803) had harshened the paradigm of *ius sanguinis* and granted naturalization to foreigners born outside of France on a 10-year basis residence in France via their explicit declaration, the changes experienced up to the Third Republic required its amendment (Berdah, 2006, pp. 143-144). The 1889 nationality law granted nationality to foreigners according to two procedures: while the naturalization criteria were increasingly toughened, foreigners who were born in France could achieve citizenship if either one of their parents was born there or having reached the legal age, relying on the success of assimilation (Berdah, 2006, p. 145). Nevertheless, this intersection of French parties under the defense of the *patrie* against the Prussian invader, sealed by the loss of a part of the national corpus, did not definitely wipe out their ideological differences. Reflections on social equality and the retained authority of the Catholic Church over local claims of autonomy re-orientated the political logic. Both the Right and the Left started to prioritize internal elements, rather than foreigners, as threats to national identity. Thus, the relational nature of French nation identified the "Other" not only within the boundaries of the nation-state, but also within the legal category of French citizens.

On the one hand, the consequences of the Second Industrial Revolution, the increasing prominence of the individual in governing his life through democratic tools in a mass society, and the diffusion of Marxist philosophy inaugurated a new political sensibility and discourse (Noiriel, 2007, p. 29). Notably, the problem of inequality between social classes of capitalists and proletariat progressively broke into the political sphere, increasing its salience as a mobilization issue and evading the national boundaries by denouncing a global system of subordination. As a result, the French political Left turned its electoral strategy from prioritizing the identity of the nation to the one of the working classes (Noiriel, 2007, p. 29).

This political turn was counterbalanced by a symmetrical one operated by the Right. Due to the primacy given to race by the distorted interpretations of the Darwinist theory, it adopted a nationalistic and exclusionist definition of national identity, based on ethnic-hereditary elements (Graziosi, 2024, p. 191). Even if this phenomenon invested multiple European countries, the effects on the French political system echoed through two crises in the last decade of the 19th century. Boulangism and the Dreyfus Affair represented two outbreaks of the latent republican-reactionary antagonism, testing the endurance of the political system. The debates they had spurred, comprising also invectives from intellectuals, combined state loyalty with racial considerations. Specifically, they resulted in propositions of institutional makeover from nationalist Right forces, such as Boulanger's one-party state proposal, and defined a more precise polarization: the anti-militarism, anti-clericalism, and universal equality embraced by republican Left was opposed to the militarism and anti-Semitism of the nationalist Right (Curtis, 2015, pp. 23-44). The emergence of this class-nation cleavage should not be interpreted only in terms of discontinuity of partisan positions. Indeed, it can be seen as the long-term consequence of the revolutionary forces of 1789, who had laid the foundations not only for further nationalism but also for a revolutionary movement of Marxist type (Sewell, 1985, p. 84). Moreover, this fracture would reverberate in two main courses that had characterized the French history of the 20th century. On the one hand, the rising nationalist thought provided a significant support for colonial enterprises, constituting the origin of French imperialism. According to Andrew (1976), the lack of efficient governmental organization of the Third Republic paved the way for the creation of a limited colonialist movement, which hinged on the popular will of revanchism against Prussia to support external expansionism. Thus, French imperialism responded predominantly to the desire of increasing power vis-à-vis European imperial rivals, such as Germany and Great Britain, rather than to an exclusive fulfillment of internal profits (p. 148). These imperialistic ambitions would determine a striking change of understanding of French identity in the 20th century, due to the coexistence of settlers and native populations, and their spillover effects on the process of decolonization. On the other hand, this cleavage perpetuated in the battle over national identity operated during WWII, and its redefinition by French fascism. According to Carroll (1995, pp. 19-31), the ideology of Vichy regime exhibited an analogy of reasoning with the conception of nationalism elaborated by politician Maurice Barrés during the Third Republic. He conceived French national identity as the fulfillment of the individual in a "Collective Self": a self-sustaining absolute entity to which individuals pertained due to the share of common culture. In this regard, all elements which did not fall in the internal cultural homogeneity should be banished; an action which would

allow national members to discover and defend their decontaminated race. Thus, Barrés' nationalist thought and the then Vichy ideology crystallized French identity in a cultural and racial characterization.

In addition to the class-nation cleavage, a second level of antagonism was experienced in the political spectrum, mirroring an underlying opposition between social categories. This can be called a national-regional cleavage, consisting in what Ford (1993) defined as the competition between the state and the church on the definition of nation in linguistic terms. As argued by the scholar, the promotion of linguistic uniformity by republican forces, rooted in the original attempts of the First Republic, was revived during the Third Republic as an opposing tool to the clergy, which was exploiting in an anti-systemic way the complaints of idiomatic autonomy by regional areas. A partisan opposition broke out: while the axis of Republicans and Socialists endorsed linguistic uniformity for strengthening national cohesiveness, the nationalist Right supported linguistic decentralization (pp. 33-38). In this sense, language became a source of threat for the security of the nation as built by revolutionary forces, as long as the Catholic Church continued to exert its influence through the provision of education in local idioms.

In this period, these two cleavages demonstrated unsolved tensions between French centripetal and centrifugal forces, encompassing those that had arisen one century before, and those that had emerged when the disenchantment with the progresses of the capitalist system signaled a new understanding of the society. Even if distinct in logic and actors, these factures were maneuvered by political forces that shared a common belief: they had to undergo a *homo homini lupus*[6] mechanism to enforce their idea of French identity in the society. This prioritization of internal enemies, rather than external ones, in affirming their identitarian stances, however, was doomed to radically mutate after the end of World War II.

## 1.4 The post-WWII decolonization: where the Frenchman has left, the Other returns

The reassessment of political narratives on French national identity in the post-WWII era can be understood in light of a double dawn in global history, emerging out of the dark side of the World Wars. A constitutional renewal of democratic nature throughout the European continent was matched by the configuration of international relations according to new parameters. The

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[6] This expression is attached to the philosophical thought of Thomas Hobbes, who describes in *Leviathan* (1651/1885, p. 64) the dynamic unfolding in the so-called state of nature, whereby individuals are engaged in a perpetual state of war among each other.

bipolarity structure of the international system based on opposing ideological poles of US and USSR, the increasing reliance on the former by Western countries for reconstruction urgencies, and the progressive fading of empires into disintegration, culminating in the Portuguese decolonization, structured the interdependence between states. It is under this framework that French national identity experienced an irreversible modification in its constituting substance, individual understanding, and propagandization. This change finds its *raison d'être* in the process of decolonization, whereby the independence of former colonies of the French empire, and more specifically, the war in Algeria, defined a bursting point in its historical memory. On the one hand, this renewal of French identity can be understood by means of postcolonial, intersectionality and poststructuralist theories. They contribute to making sense of the impact of the achieved freedom of the colonized on the colonizer, with decolonization signifying here the consequences exerted on the imperial metropolis by the dismantling of dominion over colonies. On the other hand, any reflection should consider the issues posed by the fragile French institutional framework. The constitutional setting of the French Fourth Republic established after WWII, though characterized by the emblematic figure of Charles De Gaulle, was sustained by trembling columns of a proportional electoral system and weak partisan structures (Meriggi & Tedoldi, 2021, pp. 227-228).

The analysis of the liberation of Algeria from French colonization grants a two-fold understanding of postwar French identity. It highlights the impossibility of complete demolition of imperial structures, and the denial of republican values by means of explicit hierarchization of difference. First, the Algerian decolonization revealed in an exemplar way the relational nature of French national identity. As argued by Edward Said (1979, p. 3), France, and more broadly Occidental powers, depend on the existence and control over the Orient for building and strengthening their own identities. During the imperial era, this control manifested in the physical occupation of colonial territories, the rigid separation between settlers and natives in residential zones, and imposed limitations on natives' aspirations (Fanon, 1963, pp. 37-38). This approach responded to the nationalist ideology of the motherland, informed by a logic of racial discrimination and incompatibility between civilizations, due to the scientist consensus upheld since the Third Republic on the physical and psychological inferiority of certain people (Le Cour Grandmaison, 2008). This separation was also defined on a juridical level, as natives were granted a different legal status from settlers. Attempts of formal equalization, bestowing the rights and duties of French citizenship, were introduced in Algeria with the Lamine Guèye Law (1946), to strengthen the seizure of colonies after the destabilization provoked by the fascist experience (Genova, 2004). Nevertheless, this measure

only concealed a sense of paternalistic arrogance under the guise of a universalist doctrine and never resulted in material equality. The French imperial project of simultaneous domination and distinction, however, remained only formally accomplished, as the colonizer and colonized were never substantially desegregated. Their identities continuously modified each other, either through the experience of French citizens born in Algeria and who had never been in France, or through their violent clash once the process of decolonization had begun (Fanon, 1963). This dynamic was not halted even by the achievement of Algerian independence backed by the Evian Accords of 1962. Past domination lasted in the form of socio-economic and cultural legacies, whereby the former motherland and colonies established a "family of nations", based on commercial agreements and transmission of values and ideas (Brysk et al., 2002). Thus, this process underscored the perpetuation of French cultural imperialism in former colonies and revealed the unexpected molding of its republican ideal by the arrival of the "Other" in French territory.

The consequences of decolonization opened a moment of uncertainty, in which French national identity reconfigured under the collision of external inputs and internal political ideology. On the one hand, the loss of Algeria created a severe trauma in national memory. The French had to face failure in accomplishing their duty to defend their ideational universe for the sake of the generations to come and the commemoration of the ones that had left (McDougall, 2017, p. 792). At the same time, post-imperial migrations to France from former colonies played a considerable role in upsetting societal and political equilibria. In the Algerian case, both the return of former settlers (*pieds-noirs*) and the arrival of Muslim individuals (*harkis*) who had fought along the French army during the war, undermined the idealistic homogeneity of French society (Eldridge et al., 2023, pp. 164-165). In this sense, the traditional conception of French national identity modified into two different ways. On the one hand, its relational nature and loyalty to republican ideals were significantly undermined. The violent shock of war and resettlement experienced by *pieds-noirs* and their strategic unification with *harkis'* experience under a narrative of common marginalization (Eldridge, 2010) questioned the very meaning of the principle of *fraternité*. Returnees started to be considered as aliens in their own motherland, marking the vanishing of the traditional distinction between internal and external enemies to national belonging. Having left France as internal members of the *communitas*, *pieds-noirs* were now returning in their motherland in the guise of enemies, at best strangers. Their identity was located between exclusive French or Algerian characterization and distinguished them from other French citizens. Thus, they contributed to constituting a "clash of civilizations" (Huntington, 1993) internal to French society, namely the

coexistence of different identities, associated with external features of cultural and ethnic distinctiveness. This reality erected a barrier halting the application of the universalism of *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité*. As stated by Etoke (2017, p. 27), France struggled to combine "the republican project, presented as the redemption from a past of domination and exploitation, with the conflictual and particular situation in which heirs of slaves and colonized were still embedded". It is in this context that an exclusionist and racist view of immigrants, especially non-European ones, became entrenched in the newly established Fifth Republic, without being rooted in the origin of French imperialism (McDougall, 2017, p. 779). The French state adopted measures of hierarchization of individual immigrants, based on their closeness to French values according to their past and country of origin. This does not mean that the perception of individuals' alterity did not exist before, but its socio-political resonance was significantly minor. Indeed, before WWI migration fluxes to France concerned predominantly European countries, and were of restrained amount per country, thus posing minimal issue of identitarian threat (Safran, 1985, p. 54). Instead, after decolonization, the French state adopted a process which can be defined as "ranking the otherness of the Others": it concretized in differentiated treatment of immigrants, adjusting the endowment of rights to the externality of their traits. For instance, only *pieds-noirs* were first granted French "hard citizenship" in terms of rights of social assistance, housing and employment, while *harkis* were subjected to discretionary concessions based on contingent situations (Eldridge et al., 2023, p. 167). Nevertheless, the conferral of French citizenship did not correspond to complete national integration: *pieds-noirs* were stigmatized by French population, furthering the perception of their difference and their association with criminal behavior and urban disorder (Eldridge et al., 2023, p. 177). On the other hand, French national identity transformed along another line, by reassessing its stake in the international system. The French mission of reaching an internationally recognized *grandeur* shifted from imperialistic expansionism to inward-looking defense of French nature by means of rigid assimilationism (Etoke, 2017). This measure was fostered by the terms of the 1945 Ordinance: the acquisition of nationality for immigrants' children born in France was subjected to the reach of the majority age, and a reasonable degree of knowledge of French language and support of its values. Nevertheless, this provision was conditional upon the consent of the government over the successful result of assimilation. Instead, naturalization was submitted to habitual residence in France (Ordonnance n° 45-2441, 1945, pp. 6703-6704). This strategy, according to De Gaulle, responded to the preservation of French as "a European people of the white race, of Greek and Latin culture, and of the Christian

religion", opposed to the fusion of races, which was doomed to fail as "incorporating oil and vinegar" (Peyrefitte, 1994, p. 81).

All things considered, the French loss of former territorial dominion over its colonies signaled a point of no return for its national cohesion. The main threat to national identity started to be identified with the "Other" from colonies, being a former settler or native. This contributed to blurring the internal and external contours of enemies to the security of nation, despite what had been delineated in the previous century. Moreover, it radicalized the measures of assimilation of foreigners within the society. This atmosphere of radical shift, social tensions and injection of cultural pluralism would find its way through the protests of May 1968, animated by the outbreak of intersectional identities, and complaints over the scope of application of human rights under national and international law. In response to such ferments, new leftist partisan strategies would be enforced in relation to French identity, backed by a political system which would witness the rise of new critical issues and actors.

## 1.5 The liminality of the 70s-80s: the Socialist Party and the support of multicultural integration

The left side of the political spectrum, and more specifically, the French PS, represented the prime movers of a crucial innovation in the political battle over national identity. They reconsidered the narratives previously advanced to better understand the relationship between citizens, foreigners, and republican universalism, and accommodate the factual challenges arising from the concretization of the identitarian principles in the society. A general academic consensus detects this turning point in the protests of May 1968 and especially in the peak of changes experienced during the 1980s. To understand its significance, this process can be analyzed through the lens of the theory of liminality, applied in the 1960s by anthropologist Victor Turner to modern social systems and based on the original formulation by ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep (Thomassen, 2012, pp. 687-688). As reported by Thomassen (2016, p. 7), the term liminality defines the threshold of two different moments, whereby individuals' identity is suspended from its traditional substantialization and subjected to a fluid rectification, surrounded by a state of uncertainty and indeterminacy.[7] Social roles are detached from their

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[7] As exposed by Thomassen (2012), Turner and Van Gennep's formulations of the concept of liminality differ according to their constituting phases. Thus, Turner distinguishes four moments (breach, crisis, redress, re-integration), expanding the original definition of Van Gennep (separation, liminality, re-aggregation) (pp. 688-689).

definition under the pre-existing status quo and unexpected relationships are created: this moment signals a progressive change of political and social settings, ultimately reaching the inauguration of a new condition by an intervening authority (p. 92). Although French events of 1970s-1980s show limits of adherence to the theoretical framework of liminality passages, its application helps highlighting the crisis and revival of French national identity. Specifically, it focuses on the shift of political power and the revision of the relationship between culture and identity.

The social protests affecting France during May 1968 exposed the dispute between an elitist vision of nation enforced from above and critical popular instances manifested through means of democratic participation. Students' occupations of university spaces initiated a period of riots between police forces and civilians, demonstrating the separation between the security of the state and the one of population. Protests exposed a collective will of emancipation from the existing order, criticizing the directorship of President De Gaulle and the conveyed conception of national identity. According to Vincent Martigny (2016, pp. 26-30), Gaullist politics was based on the promotion of an absolutizing and homogenizing culture as a national mode of life, which could grant cohesion and be interpreted only by well-educated individuals, such as intellectuals, while passively acknowledged by masses. Thus, French citizens were believed to be entrenched within the sacral entity of nation, based on common values and characterized by an additional *quid* that differentiated it from the simple collectivity of them. It is against this conception of nation, its past imperialist deeds, the missed endorsement of state responsibility for colonial crimes and the imbalances caused by the increasingly globalized capitalist system, that 1968's voices were cast. This phase can be interpreted as a moment of liminality, due to the questioning of national identity operated by different actors, who, though representing distinct poles of the society, discovered intersectional commonalities. Students, working class members, immigrants, and intellectuals all contested state actions, benefiting from a framework of undermined strength of traditional ideologies and nation-states' sovereignty. On the one hand, the attractiveness of Marxist utopia of societal renovation was declining as the coercive measures of the USSR were publicly revealed and contested (D. Battistella, personal communication, October 21, 2024). This disillusion fostered a heightened emphasis on universal recognition and protection of human rights, following the legal codification operated under international and regional arrangements, such as the UN and the Council of Europe. This context favored the emergence of new supplementary issues to class one, considered salient for political mobilization, such as ethnicity and religion (Kastoryano & Escafré-Dublet, 2017, p. 85). Concurrently, the boundaries of nation-states' sovereignty were

questioned by the progress of globalization, encompassing its economic, political, and cultural nature. As a case in point, European integration and the growing reach of American culture throughout the world were regarded to eroding the originality of French identity in the present and its survival in the future (Safran, 1991, p. 225). In this context, the disintegration of national identity was also spurred by different generations of immigrants, who started to exert a critical opposition against the treatment resulting from state racialization. According to Jacobs (2023), they manifested an organized resistance against policies of assimilation, utilizing cultural means, such as magazines, theatre, and other artistic expressions. They advocated for a net of solidarity against a volatile discretionary approach of the state, whereby citizens and immigrants should "listen to [their] differences" and "overcome the millenarian and irrational fear of the Other, the fear [called] racism" (Mohamed, 1979, p. 16). This process raised awareness into French public opinion on the presence of multiple identities within the same territorial boundaries, distinguishing themselves for peculiar traditions of music, lifestyle, and symbols. As a result, these civilian mobilizations formed a unique identitarian pole, raising a new sensibility that countered the unfairness and indifference of French state over social questions of equality, freedom, diversity, and peace. This process of modulation of identities was also exhibited by the artistic performances in the streets of Avignon during summer 1968, defined as a liminal stage of freedom of spirit and agency (Huber, 2023, p. 83).

Even though this parenthesis of social clashes had lasted until the end of May, the analysis of the national identitarian dimension enables us to state that the liminal passage had found complete redress more than a decade later. This is traced to the victory of PS in 1981's presidential elections. The new president François Mitterrand crafted with his cultural proposals an original conception of national identity, overturning the previous political positions which had seen the Left suppressing any pluralism for the sake of national uniformity. This stance was introduced by Mitterrand during his inaugural speech in 1981 as follows:

C'est, en tout cas, l'idée que je m'en fais et la volonté qui me porte, assuré qu'il ne peut y avoir d'ordre et de sécurité là où règnerait l'injustice, gouvernerait l'intolérance. C'est convaincre qui m'importe et non vaincre. Il n'y a eu qu'un vainqueur le 10 mai 1981, c'est l'espoir. Puisse-t-il devenir la chose de France la mieux partagée. Pour cela j'avancerai sans jamais me lasser sur le chemin du pluralisme, confrontation des différences dans le respect d'autrui. Président de tous les Français, je veux les

rassembler pour les grandes causes qui nous attendent et créer en toutes circonstances les conditions d'une véritable communauté nationale.[8] (Mitterrand, 1981).

Accordingly, the PS framed national identity under the formulation of a new conception of culture, combining the battle for social equality against class privileges with attention over individual singularities (Martigny, 2016). Individuals started to be considered referent units of the identitarian discourse, not by being overarched by a venerable and intangible supra-individual nation, but retaining their peculiarities of social status, lifestyles, language, and background in defining it. According to Safran (1985), this project concretized in measures of bureaucratic and cultural decentralization on a regional level, concerning communication systems, such as radio and television programs, and provision of school courses in local dialects. The aim was to ensure the accommodation of differences not only for yet settled minorities, but also for new individuals falling into the migrant category, and groups distinguished for ethnic or religious customs (p. 51). Nevertheless, this promotion of regional diversity should not have loosened attachment to national cohesiveness. Thus, the acceptance of multiculturalism, based on ethnic, cultural, or religious diversity on a regional level, was conditional on the coexistence with Jacobin national identity, and its reinforcement against tendencies of uniformization (Martigny, 2016). The excesses of pluralism and uniformity were tempered by their reconciliation under the French principle of *egalité*. In this way, Mitterrand succeeded in reconciling the class-nation and national-regional cleavages spurred during the Third Republic under the paradigm of multiculturalism. The acceptance of cultural diversity intended to reinforce national security against those threats which were lying outside the scope of state regulations. In concrete terms, the state favored immigrants' integration through the right to association, family reunification, and due process, while it strictly punished arrivals of illegal nature (Vichniac, 1991, p. 43).

Since then, the Socialist Left has presented itself as the main supporter of multiculturalism and migrants' integration into society, detaching from the radical assimilationism of the Right. This political program could count on both organized institutional

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[8] "In any case, that's the idea I have and the will that drives me, convinced that there can be no order and security where injustice reigns and intolerance rules. What matters to me is to convince, not to win. There was only one winner on 10 May 1981, and that was hope. May it become the most widely shared thing in France. To that end, I shall never tire of advancing along the path of pluralism, confronting differences while respecting others. As President of all French people, I want to bring them together for the great causes that lie ahead and create in all circumstances the conditions for a true national community."
[Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.elysee.fr/la-presidence/l-investiture-de-francois-mitterrand

promotion and electoral support. On the one hand, the latter was favored by the strategic polarization of migrant groups, shifting their political allegiance from the radical Left to the PS (Jacobs, 2023, p. 382). On the other hand, the former was achieved through the working of Jack Lang, Minister of Culture during Mitterrand's presidency. In 1982, the Giordan Report (*Démocratie culturelle et droit à la différence: Rapport au ministre de la culture*, 1982) was presented to the Ministry to investigate the meaning of French identity under the lens of multiculturalism. According to it, cultural pluralism should be promoted both to ensure the normal functioning of a democratic regime and to fulfill legal compliance with international acts of hard and soft law. In this regard, the government recognized a "droit à la difference": a socio-democratic conception which mandated the state not only to allow the expression of diversity, but also to proactively favor it (p. 16).

These considerations unveiled a new relationship between culture and identity, which attested the reception by French political class of the changes occurring at the international level. The evolution of European integration and the increasing impulses towards globalization were counterbalanced by a concurrent devolution of power towards regional units, in order to combine French original identity with the traditions of regularly settled migrants and ethnic minorities (Vichniac, 1991, p. 40). Nevertheless, the concurrence of supranational and subnational decentralization corroborated also the perception of a national strength which was progressively undermined. This concern would be magnified in its resonance approaching the end of the century, when the representation of immigration as a fatal danger would be expressed in the political game through xenophobic and nationalist addresses. It is in this context that French national identity would be interpreted under a new fashion, albeit condemned of neo-fascist traits: Jean-Marie Le Pen would be its orator.

## 1.6 Tearing the *veil* of Maya: the institutionalization of the identity-security nexus and the Islamic question between Le Pen and Sarkozy

The identification of immigration as an effective threat to the subsistence of French national identity began to dramatically dominate the rhetoric of political actors in French public sphere in the late 1980s. This turn was inserted in a larger trend of changes in public policies, which were sacrificed before the altar of national interest to match shifts in socio-economic conditions and perception of public opinion. Since then, the political narratives on French national identity adopted permanently a security stance: immigration was institutionalized in the political scene as an immanent identity threat, signaling that the Socialist project of multicultural integration

had represented only a short-term infiltration into the French system. Traditional and emerging political forces began to call for defensive measures to preserve French national identity from the dangerous rise in arrivals of migrants. As reported by Insee (2024), out of a total population of 58.078 million individuals in France in 1990, migrants accounted for 7.3% and foreigners for 6.3%, framed within an upward trend since post-WWII and softened by the 1974 ban on non-Community work immigration.[9] This security narrative, however, had not been employed in previous decades. In the aftermath of WWII, the impact of migratory fluxes on discourses of national identity was significantly dampened by the necessity of workforce in a damaged state, which was losing its international prestige and was trembling internally for distrust towards the leadership of De Gaulle (Penet, 2017, pp. 192-194). This pattern did not change either at the beginning of the 1980s, when migrant communities were granted acceptance and affirmation of their cultural diversity by Mitterrand's presidency. Instead, restrictive measures to immigration became the norm in the subsequent political course, starting with the 1986 cohabitation between President Mitterrand and Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, founder of the Gaullist right-wing party *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR). According to Taguieff & Weil (1990), this securitizing turn of the national-identitarian discourse was marked by distinctive features. On the one hand, it responded to the rising unemployment following the oil crisis of 1973 (p. 89). On the other hand, it confirmed the polarization of the Right and the Left on the ladder of exclusion of foreigners from national community (p. 99). Ultimately, it blurred the distinction between regular and irregular categories of migrants in terms of their rights and risks (p. 98). It addressed a generalized problem of integration into French society towards the all-encompassing and undifferentiated category of foreigner, which included also the regularly residing *pieds-noirs* and *harkis*. This general category, however, was represented primarily by the Muslim ethnic community of Maghrebi origin (Hargreaves, 2007). In this context, multiple revindications were advanced by political actors to justify measures towards migrant communities and their culture, such as defending women rights from Muslim obscurantism, promoting the export of the French republican-democratic model for humanitarian purposes, or refraining the dissolution of the nation-state under the incentives of Europeanization. Despite the heterogeneity of arguments, the securitization discourse was

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[9] As stated by Insee guidelines (2025), the categories of migrants and foreigners are distinguished in the following terms: an immigrant is "a person born abroad and living in France", while the foreigner lives in France, regardless of its birthplace, but does not hold French citizenship. This implies the overlap of the two categories, as immigrants without French citizenship are still categorized as foreigners, and not all foreigners are immigrants, as some of them may have been born in France and waiting for the acquisition of citizenship.
Retrieved from https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3633212

structured around three major factors: the mobilization by emerging actors, the reinforcement of nationality requirements for citizenship, and the debate over Muslim customs.

On the one hand, the definition of immigration as a security threat to French identity was championed by the charismatic authority of Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the emerging party FN. According to Genga (2015), the effects of immigration on increasing crime and unemployment were already condemned by Right and Centre-Right parties, such as the RPR and UDF (*Union pour la démocratie française*), and by the French communist party (PCF). However, Le Pen's individual personality, the resonance provided by media platforms, and his efficient monopolization of salient issues granted him gradual electoral success. His party introduced itself in the political system as a *tertium genus*, relegated to nationalist, radical and populist right-wing dimension (Genga, 2015, pp. 12, 38). He founded his narrative on the stigmatization of the foreigner, mainly identified with Muslim believers, in order to restore optimal living conditions of French population through authoritarian measures; a strategic move which found consensus, albeit a short-term one, in right-wing parties, ideological associations, and proletariat. He condemned the dark side of immigration, encompassing delinquency, organized crime, economic losses, and national nullification, against the demographic benefits brought to the French aging state. His public speeches delineated a pantheon of martyrs and enemies, whereby he located Marianne and Jeanne d'Arc on the former side, and Mohammed on the other. He promoted the defense of an ethnic-cultural idea of nation echoing Barrés' conception: French people were identified by white skin color and Catholic religion (Taguieff, 1997, as cited in Majumdar, 2007, p. 219) and marked by an unbridgeable incompatibility with non-Europeans. According to him, cultural diversity between individuals was transposed on the legal level in inequality of rights, whereby French culture outstood for its superiority (Genga, 2015, p. 112). In this regard, Le Pen tiered the Maya veil: he revealed to the French population the danger posed to national identity by the coexistence of multicultural communities on equal terms, and the proper means to defend it, namely renovated care for "*morale, famille, and patrie",* battle against communitarianism and misguided migration policies favoring clandestinity (Le Pen, 1987). This conception was challenged by other discourses of political and civil actors. On the one hand, the Left faced an internal division of views on multiculturalism, questioning whether the positive discrimination for minority groups fulfilled the principle of equality or not (Majumdar, 2007, p. 219). On the other hand, the expression of cultural diversity through civil society organizations involved in anti-racist struggles, such as *SOS-Racisme* and the *Mouvement contre le racisme e pour l'amitié entre les peuples*, reached its height, boosting the associative ties between migrants (Choi, 2020).

Indeed, these movements amplified the mediatization of their conditions, fostering sensibilization via protests and periodical articles. Their activism embraced also the cause of *pieds-noirs* and *harkis*: they condemned a political system which continued to refute the responsibility of colonial enterprises and trauma of decolonization, despite passing laws on concessions of indemnities (Choi, 2020). Along with these contributions, intellectuals played a non-marginal role in interpreting, contrasting, and conveying the identity-security axis. Heterogeneity of positions spanned from those who criticized the inability of the state in promoting a secure integration without disintegrating the republican values (Taguieff & Weil, 1990), to those who denounced a crisis of the democratic regime that could be overcome by reinforcing French universalism and humanitarianism (Finkielkraut, 2015). Some of these considerations formed part of a larger intellectual engine, defined as "leftist republican nationalism", whereby scholars tried to restore the original revolutionary identity by addressing realistically the challenges of French society (Lorcerie, 1994). They argued that no alternative existed between right-wing assimilationism and Socialist integration, but they found the optimal solution in their compromises: for instance, Weil argued that granting formal and substantial equality to all individuals would have ensured the compliance with republican principles by foreigners (Lorcerie, 1994, p. 253). Ultimately, this interplay between multiple actors would foresee the greater participation of the 2000s in relation to the debate on national identity.

This coexistence between xenophobic and nationalist discourses on the one hand, and the attention over the precarious conditions of "foreigners", their indignation towards an inhospitable state and aggressions by security forces on the other, crystallized into two courses of actions. They saw the protagonism of parties pertaining to the Center-Right, which undertook measures limiting the scope of action of migrants but not falling into public condemnations of xenophobia (Marthaler, 2008, p. 385). First, the relationship between citizenship and nationality was redefined through the legal review of the *Code de Nationalité Française*, the document identifying French nationality of single individuals. Premises were posed by the initiatives of Prime Minister Chirac, resulting into the 1987 investigations of the Long Report (*Être français aujourd'hui et demain: rapport remis au Premier ministre par la Commission de la nationalité présidée par M. Marceau Long*, 1988). According to the text, requirements of nationality should be strengthened and subjected to state-centered programmatic measures. The motto was: "rechercher la plus grande cohérence possible entre

notre idée de la nation et le droit de la nationalité"[10] (p. 89), enforcing a liberal conception of nation which only recognized the possibility of diversity in a traditional republican framework, but did not favor the conditions of its expression, as the Socialist Giordan Report had instead done. Reforming attempts operated within a legal system that since 1889 had accorded nationality towards immigrants' children after they had reached the majority age and since 1945 had subjected it to the government control of compliance with preliminary conditions of lawful behavior, assimilation, and prior 5-year residence in France (Hargreaves, 2007). The succession of presidential and governmental mandates reiterated the reform to 1993, when the Pasqua laws were adopted under Balladur premiership. The modified legal provisions demanded from immigrants the proof of genuine adherence to Frenchness to access citizenship rights. As stated by Loi n° 93-933 (1993), immigrants' children were not granted automatic recognition of French nationality but should opt deliberately for it being compliant with the preliminary terms. These measures seemed to increase foreigners' disaffection towards the state rather than securing their assimilation. Nevertheless, this radical tendency was dampened by the Socialist government of Jospin through Loi n° 98-170 (1998), which restored the automatic acquisition of nationality for immigrants' children and demanded an individual declaration only when they were willing to reject it (Hargreaves, 2007).

The second practice differed from the first in the social clamor it created and its domain of intervention, which concerned the interference of religion in public life. Under the official denomination of *foulard affair*, the suspension of three Muslim girls in 1989 from public school due to the use of veil questioned the solidity of the educational system in promoting republican assimilationism. According to Tevanian (2009, pp. 153-154), the veil was considered as an overt, albeit symbolic, attack to French principle of *laïcité*, violating the neutrality of public spaces dedicated to the construction of nation. Moreover, it undermined the principle of *liberté* due to clothing obligations placed upon girls by Islamic customs. The controversy created a complex weave of divisions between and within political parties. While the ones ascribed to the Right side explicitly supported secularism, the Socialists struggled between loyalty to multiculturalism in all its forms and the prioritization of lay principle to curb religious fundamentalism (Vichniac, 1991, p. 46). At the same time, the affair revealed the inherent contradiction of French republicanism, which concealed under the proclaimed tolerance of

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[10] "To seek the greatest possible coherence between our idea of the nation and nationality law." [Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/32740-etre-francais-aujourdhui-et-demain-tomes-1-et-2-rapport-remis-au-pr

cultural diversity a substantial repudiation of its expression. According to Finkielkraut (2015), political actors instrumentalized the defense of republicanism to perpetuate the cold violence of a religious ban. Thus, France did not abide by the teaching of John Locke to tolerate the intolerants, or in this case, the perceived ones, and shortly realized how external measures, such as the veil ban, could not "have any such efficacy as to make men change the inward judgement that they have framed of things" (Locke, 1689, pp. 7-8). More specifically, the affair was resolved along different lines. While under the Ministry of Education of Jospin the veil was deemed not sufficient to approve the expulsion of students, this decision was overridden by the Right when, in September 1994, the new Minister François Bayrou banned with a circular the exposure of any inappropriate religious symbol in public schools, that could be considered as a tool of indoctrination and contributed to atomize French nation (Majumdar, 2007, pp. 224-225). This position was supported also by President Chirac during the discourses held in 1996 and 2003 after having initiated his first presidential mandate. He prioritized the theme of security as the precondition for the correct functioning of republican principles: this state of security consisted in the rejection of communitarianism and in the continuous affirmation of French identity within spaces of socialization. Thus, religious symbols should be prohibited from public schools, to ensure teaching neutrality and the dignity of girls from oppressive religious precepts (Chirac, 2003). This vision of equality of genders, however, was opposed to the inequality of cultures, an ambiguity which crystallized in Loi 2004-228, adopted during the right-wing administration of President Chirac, Prime Minister Raffarin and Minister of Education Ferry. As stated in Article 1: "in public schools, colleges, and high schools, students are prohibited from wearing signs or clothing that ostentatiously display their religious affiliation".[11] This legal provision, though being compliant with the 1905 law, was based on a criterion of arbitrariness, which legalized the wearing of modest crosses in public schools while banning Muslim veils (Majumdar, 2007, p. 225). Its poor efficacy ultimately corroborated a history of non-solved tensions.

The inability of these courses of action to guarantee more security would be disclosed to public opinion in the first decade of the 2000s. A series of controversial events would demonstrate that the root cause of previous social tensions, namely the underlying malaise of migrant communities, had not been understood. Indeed, the immigration policies adopted until then constituted an unsatisfactory interpretation of a more complex security picture, including

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[11] "Dans les écoles, les collèges et les lycées publics, le port de signes ou tenues par lesquels les élèves manifestent ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse est interdit."
Retrieved from: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000417977

demographic conditions, urbanistic distribution of population, unresolved indignation for colonial past, and socio-economic differentiations between communities. Specifically, urban and social marginalization fostered a sense of alienation, misplacement, and increased attachment to parents' traditions in second-generation immigrants (Safran, 1985, p. 55). Thus, the political elite was not easing the process of integration. Rather, its measures were perceived as a direct attack on migrant communities and, according to the sociology of competition, resulted in the unintended strengthening of their intra-solidarity.[12] It is in 2005 that the gap between the objective reality of migrants and their nominal inclusion into French nation became urgently visible: French *banlieues* were stroke by massive arises of North African youth, complaining about their banishment from civilization operated by the state (Petrillo, 2009, p. 120). These conditions, however, did not trigger any change of strategy in policy implementation. Instead, they revealed how the political process responded to rationales of inward-looking identitarian preservation, seizure of the electorate mostly convinced about the immigrant threat, and ideological competition between parties.

It is in this context that Nicolas Sarkozy emerged as the main interlocutor for migration issues, entering the political scene by first siding the personalities of the RPR and adhering to its subsequent convergence in the center-right *Union pour un mouvement populaire* (UMP), of which he became President in 2004 (Sauger, 2007, p. 1169). During his political career, he adopted a strategy of transformism. He sustained conflicting narratives on immigration and national identity, which marked its ground of political activity, success, and widespread criticism, and concurrently disclosed the artificial nature of the national community. Although this approach responded to different aims, including vote-seeking, configuration of political dialogues, and intra-party conflicts, it ensured Sarkozy electoral success (Marthaler, 2008). Indeed, he presented an innovate image of the Center-Right political front, which was not afraid of inserting in the domain occupied by the FN, and demonstrated at the same time more reasonableness than Socialists, who had categorized the issue of national identity as reactionary (Martigny, 2009, p. 29). As reported in the documentary by *Le Figaro* "2007-2012: les années Nicolas Sarkozy" (2019), he revolutionarily injected in French political system the idea of a "droite décomplexée", aiming at uniting the different sides of the Right into a bundle of common ideas. During his first mandate as Minister of the Interior, under Chirac's presidency, he endowed with tougher traits the migration policy originally endorsed by the moderate Right

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[12] This finding pertaining to the branch of sociology of conflicts has been exposed by Lewis Coser in "Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change" (1957), underlining how the sense of unity and identity within a group results strengthened after experiencing the dynamics of attack with an external entity.

(Marthaler, 2008, p. 387). This shift aimed to respond to contingent social disorders, which were moving the electorate towards the stances of the FN and nearly granting Le Pen victory in the 2002 presidential elections (Marthaler, 2008, p. 338). In his public speeches he defined his role of missionary, who was entitled to guide French people to overcome the national crisis. He replaced Le Pen in tearing the veil of Maya, by renovating politics through the fortification of democratic institution and its confrontational logic, and the revitalization of French creativity, unity and freedom (Sarkozy, 2005). According to Marthaler (2008), Sarkozy diverged from an initial immigration policy based on curbing the arrivals of asylum-seekers, strengthening deportation measures, but easing the procedures of integration of cultural diversity, to a more restrictive solution guided by critiques from political figures and external distress. As a case in point, the articles of Loi n° 2003-1119 (2003) described harshened terms for foreigners' access to citizenship, such as tougher punishment for criminal offenses and for civil acts with elusive purposes, such as getting married with a French citizen. At the same time, they subjected naturalization to knowledge of French language and values. Concurrently, he exhibited a more accommodating perspective towards Muslim immigrants. In 2003 he condemned the debate on Muslim veil, stating that the principle of *laïcité* was upheld only formally by the French Republic, which, instead, did not grant the same aids for infrastructural facilities to the Muslim community (Sarkozy, 2003). The latter were provided by Sarkozy himself, promoting the creation of representative bodies of central and local nature (*Conseil Français du Culte Musulman*, *Conseils Régionaux du Culte Musulman*) (Sarkozy, 2003). Nevertheless, these tolerant, albeit strategic, measures towards diversity were doomed to be overturned. The social ferments of ethnic minorities exacerbated when the state mandated with a law in 2005 the public teaching of French colonial enterprises, framed as virtuous spread of civilization and culture towards other people (Choi, 2020, p. 139). A new course of action was embraced with Loi n° 2006-911 (2006), which increased the requirements of assimilation into French society by foreigners. According to article 5, a foreigner who intended to reside permanently in France should submit to a "Reception and Integration Contract", representing an agreement with the State on the terms of integration within the Republic. It encompassed courses of civic and linguistic formation, which aimed at granting knowledge of the constituting principles and history of French Republic to the foreigner and were subjected to the control of compliance by state authorities. Strict requirements were also established in relation to the acquisition of nationality by a foreigner out of wedding with a French citizen. According to Article 79 and 80, they encompassed the knowledge of French language, adherence to monogamy, and not having committed specific criminal offences covered by the

Criminal Code. Similar terms of continuative respect of the national tradition were applied to the release of residence permits.

The harshened tones of these maneuvers preannounced the adoption of a broader initiative, which Sarkozy would present as a promise for the French population, its security, and prosperity, given his prospective election as President of Republic out of the 2007 round. This would crystallize in the institution of the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidarity Development: a significant example of securitization practice, which would open a scandalous course of four years of debate, renegotiation, and rejection of the meaning of French national identity.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has aimed at posing the basis for understanding French national identity in its constitutive characters and historical evolution, highlighting the different narratives through which it has been conveyed by political and civil actors. On the one hand, it has proposed a theoretical framework to analyze the concept of national identity, underlying its constructivist nature, rather than essentialist, and its process of public enforcement. On the other hand, French national identity has been subjected to a historical dissertation, stressing the turning points that have given salience to interpretations by specific political forces. The exposition of three centuries of French history, spanning from the French revolution (1789) to the beginning of the presidential mandate of Sarkozy (2007) permits us to draw appropriate conclusions. First, it is evident that the ideological positions originally embraced by political parties have been overturned, along with the modernization of party structures. Despite this discontinuity, some common themes can be identified. First, political discourses on national identity have always been constructed in comparison with and opposition to the existence of the "Other", whose identity has changed throughout time. While in the aftermath of the French revolution it was associated with foreigners and Catholic Church, during the colonial period it shifted to natives and settlers, while since 1980s it was recognized mainly in the Muslim immigrant. Secondly, these political narratives have been nurtured by the acts of resistance exerted by the "Others". These have encompassed the maintenance of linguistic pluralism for religious education during the Third Republic, the creation of cultural associations to perpetuate native traditions after decolonization, and the protests in suburbs and use of the Islamic veil against the revival of extremist nationalism at the end of the 20th century. Thirdly, the historical overview has permitted us to fix the different positions of political parties at the turn of the century. The PS has favored multiculturalism by reuniting it under traditional Jacobin ideology, the moderate

Right of the UMP has professed a perpetual loyalty to French republican values embracing assimilationism against ethno-cultural pluralism, while the FN has exacerbated this narrative by supporting a homogeneous national community based on the expulsion of Muslim foreigners. Lastly, all the narratives presented have displayed, in more or less explicit terms, the existence of the "Other" as a problem of security for national identity and its survival. This framing would peak under the creation of the Ministry of National Identity by Sarkozy in 2007. In this regard, the following chapter would investigate the theoretical interplay between identity and security, its concretization in practical measures and public communication, adopting the Ministry as a case-study.

# Chapter II

## The identity-security nexus: a Critical Security Studies perspective

**Introduction**

> Il faut bien prendre la mesure du danger: l'identité nationale ne résistera pas longtemps à l'effritement de la cohésion sociale. Pour retrouver la confiance des Français qui ont été si souvent trahis il n'y a pas d'autre moyen que de tenir ses engagements, de dire ce que l'on fera et ensuite de le faire.[13] (Sarkozy, 2007d).

This excerpt is only one of the many that can be extracted from the discourses held by Nicolas Sarkozy in the period approaching his presidential mandate, on the eve, and during its unfolding. Particularly, it emphasizes the severe consequences brought by the disruption of societal cohesion on the security of national identity and demands responsibility in the exercise of political power. This chapter would insert in these considerations by introducing the theoretical framework that ties national identity to security. The first and second parts will deal with two major contributions brought by the discipline of CSS, intended to explain in scientifically rigorous terms national identity as a matter of security. On the one hand, the concept of societal security will help distinguish the constituent components of the security of national identity from the threat of immigration. On the other hand, the theory of securitization will disclose its constructive ontology. It will describe a model to create issues of security, characterized by the interaction between speech acts of political figures and public reactions. The mechanism of this model would be then extended to the role of media, in order to understand their contribution to the process of securitization. Ultimately, these conceptual premises would be applied to the Ministry of National Identity, created by Sarkozy in 2007. It would be interpreted as evidence of securitization and would be sectioned into its foundational speech acts and practical realizations. These speeches have been the object of multiple studies

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[13] "We must fully understand the measure of danger: national identity would not resist much longer the erosion of social cohesion. To recover the trust of French people who have been frequently betrayed there is no other mean than maintaining commitments, saying what one will do and then do it."
[Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/165824-nicolas-sarkozy-13032007-identite-nationale-transmission-de-la-culture

by scholars (Noriel, 2007; Martigny, 2009; Hailon et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the present analysis would diverge from them by adopting the theoretical perspectives of CSS.

## 2.1 The societal security

The consideration of national identity as a topic of security has relatively recent origins. Indeed, it is the result of the concurrent transition in international dynamics in the late 1980s and in the production of academic knowledge. As reported by Saleh (2010, p. 229), the closure of the Cold War era led to changes in the structure of the international system, states' priority of internal and foreign policy towards issues of development, environmental sustainability and migration, and rising areas of tensions within Third World countries. Parallelly, this period had remarkable repercussions on the discipline of IR, which shifted its dominant epistemological paradigm from neorealism to social constructivism: the same process concerned the sub-discipline of Security Studies. This research field is centered on dissecting specific situations, defining which phenomenon poses a problem of security (the security threat/acting subject), and which is the object whose security is potentially threatened (the referent object of security) (Beier, 2016, p. 110). It responds to both theoretical purposes of granting a common framework of reference for multiple disciplines dealing with security, and practical realization through public policies.

Research on the security of national identity has constituted an internal fracture and opportunity of renovation for this academic field. Since WWII, the so-called "Mainstream Security Studies" were founded on the hegemony of realism and neorealism as lenses for apprehending the objective-empirical reality, dictated by US foreign policy and its prevalence in IR theorization (Malik, 2020, p. 5; Smith, 2020, p. 16). Their analysis focused on "national security", characterized by two components: the identification of the state and its population as the main objects to be protected and whose security was considered as unified, and military strikes as their security threats (Krause & Williams, 1996, p. 230). While this content was shaped by the relevance of military attacks brought by the cycle of the two World Wars and theoretically validated by the political-philosophical thought of Thomas Hobbes, who had defined inter-state relations as endlessly bellicose; the 1990s new international issues and relations revealed the inadequacy of such an analytical setting. The new research strand of CSS emerged, trying to critically emancipate from research limitations. It introduced different domains and themes of analysis, counterbalancing the previous tradition of military security without abandoning it (Krause & Williams, 2018, p. 20). Its origins can be detected within a

specific date and authors, namely the 1994 Canadian York Conference and the paramount books of Krause and Williams (1997) and Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998) (Mutimer, 2016, p. 89). It revealed a multitude of internal debates and opposing currents, whereby each one tried to find its proper *Lebensraum* in the field and distinguish itself from the others. This pluralism has constituted both a virtue and a condemnation of CSS. As reported by Krause and Williams (2018, p. 15), the indeterminacy of the concept of security has spurred continuous research activity, whose boundaries have increasingly enlarged. Nevertheless, it has halted the reach of a single point of agreement among scholars. Or better, their only reason for agreement has lied in their disagreement over security itself, being considered unceasingly vague.

The first contribution by CSS to this analysis of French national identity consists in what academics have called attempts to "broaden and deepen the neorealist agenda of security studies" (Krause & Williams, 1996, p. 230). The intellectual monopoly of this process is attributed to the so-called Copenhagen School and regards a dual dynamic: the horizontal expansion of security domains from exclusively military to non-military ones, and the vertical stretching of the referent object of security from the state to other scopes, such as the individual or the globe (Emmers, 2016, p. 169). Thus, the combination of non-military dimensions with intra-state units has favored the introduction of national identity in security studies. Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998, pp. 119, 122) have labelled it as "societal security", concerning the security and survival of society against external or internal, military or non-military threats to its identity, subsistence, and stability over time. First, society has been defined in terms of "identity, the self-conception of communities and of individuals identifying themselves as members of a community" (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 119). This definition reveals the ambiguous nature of society: it relies on an abstract but rooted sense of belonging to a group, and is uncoupled, at least in definitional terms, from the political organization of the state. Due to its broadness, scholars have reconducted it to multiple externalizations: specifically, Wæver has talked about "politically significant ethno-national and religious entities", including tribes, nations, and groups identified by religious creeds or racial traits (Roe, 2016, p. 218). As a result, these different definitions allow to include under the notion of society the one of nation in both its political and ethnic-cultural formulations. Secondly, Buzan et al. (1993, p. 121) have identified three principal threats to societal security, namely the cross-fertilization of identity from immigration, contending neighboring groups (horizontal competition), and political centralization or decentralization (vertical competition). These factors, though different, may equally disrupt what is perceived as the essence of one's national identity. Roe (2016, p. 221) reports the following consequences produced specifically by immigration: an imbalance of the

demographic composition of the population, the visibility of difference through the influx of peculiar symbolism, and the manifested rejection by immigrants of forms of state control or calls for assimilation.

To the purposes of this study, societal security refers to the protection of French national identity, considered as the referent object of security, from threats to its survival, which are identified in immigration flows. More specifically, it falls under a peculiar case of societal security. Indeed, it does not pertain to the major segment of studies which attaches societal security to conflicts between ethnic groups in multinational states, such as the case of dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1992 (Bilgin, 2003, p. 211). Instead, the French case outstands for the nearly total overlap between nation and state in the definition of identity. This share of a homogenous identitarian sense permits political personalities at the top of the state to frame national identity in security terms and adopt relative responses, whether some conditions are satisfied (Roe, 2016, p. 226). As we have seen in the first chapter, this power of representation has interested political parties of different ideologies, distinct historical periods, and multiple threatening groups: they have considered immigration as menacing French identity, along with fostering criminality and economic degradation among the population. Although at certain points immigration was not the main priority issue for societal security, as evidenced by tensions of greater destabilization, politicians have not refrained in alarming the public opinion of its risk. The definition of threats to French national identity by political actors, its dynamic process and consequential adoption of countermeasures for the sake of national cohesion is explored by another development of CSS, namely the theory of securitization.

## 2.2 The process of securitization: constructing security through language, actions, and reactions

As we have previously noticed, the notion of societal security defines tangible elements of security threat and referent object to be defended, corresponding in this case to immigration flows and national identity. However, the acknowledgment and enforcement of the security issue in the public domain rests upon a non-objective dynamic. This consists in the process of securitization, which is the second contribution by CSS that would be herein utilized for the analysis of French national identity. It would help understanding how immigration has been recognized as an existential threat for French national identity by public opinion, and why some framings have succeeded in acquiring more consensus than others. For instance, when Le Pen defined insufficiently integrated migrants as a revolutionary attack against French identity, why

did his warning not result in conferring extra powers to police forces as he had suggested (Le Pen, 2001)? How can a declaration of a security threat be translated into practical responses? And what does differentiate declarations that are successfully approved from those that are disregarded? (Wæver, 1995, p. 53).

Securitization has been subjected to the explanations of consistent academic research. Thus, it is not devoid of internal debates regarding its structure, the exhaustiveness of its definition, and constraints to its functioning. Nevertheless, it is possible to state that this theory crystallizes a new epistemological understanding of reality by security studies: securitization can be deemed as the meeting point between CSS and social constructivist approach (Balzacq, 2010, p. 56). This is evidenced by its new formulation of security: according to Wæver (1995, p. 51), security does not correspond to an objectively existing reality but is a linguistic performance. He defines it as "a speech act [...] the utterance itself [of security] is the act. By saying it, something is done (as in betting, giving a promise, naming a ship)" (Wæver, 1995, p. 52). Thus, the definition of security becomes extremely fluctuating, because a linguistic act determines its existence in a time point and can overthrow it just after that moment. Moreover, the distinction between threats that effectively materialize in real life and those that derive from subjective perception loses importance (Saleh, 2010, p. 232). As stated by Balzacq (2005, p. 177), "inasmuch as security is a logos, that is, a linguistically manifested agency, no issue is essentially a security problem. (In)security is not an objective condition, a state of affairs that predates discourse". These considerations exhibit the intent of evading the objectivity of societal security by drawing on a mutual and subjective construction: any deed or element can be turned into a security problem, regardless of the effective threat it poses and as long as it is enforced through a particular process.

The securitization theory describes a three-step model to explain the construction of security issues. Emmers (2016, p. 170) has synthesized it in the following terms: first, a "securitizing actor", encompassing state authorities, media institutions, or even private individuals, must perform a speech act, whereby he/she defines an issue as endangering the very survival of a referent object. In this regard, we can call this actor an atypical *bouche de la securité*[14], as he/she both speaks security and creates it. Afterwards, the identified threat, the object to be protected, and their vital importance are received by the public audience, who can decide whether to abide by this representation (Emmers, 2016, p. 171). Its eventual acceptance

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[14] This expression refers to the original one of *bouche de la loi*, utilized to refer to the role of judges in legal systems based on civil law.

paves the way for the adoption by state authorities of emergency measures, as they are deemed appropriate for the purpose of survival (Emmers, 2016, pp. 172-173). However, even if securitization proves to be successful, it is not exhausted by the implementation of such measures. As stated by Salter (2008, pp. 324-325), "securitization is not an instantaneous or irrevocable act [...] that removes an issue from deliberative politics forever" but is a process whereby different actors continue to interact with each other, including and retracting the issue from the security domain. In this regard, it can be reversed by the practice of de-securitization. Accordingly, actors can contest the narrative of security enforced by others and constrain them to restore the initial management of the issue by means of ordinary politics, rather than emergency ones (Emmers, 2016, p. 170).

This general description of the model, however, appears rather incomplete. Indeed, securitization has undergone multiple and divergent interpretations. First, scholars have debated the need to meet all the steps to consider securitization as accomplished. Balzacq (2005, p. 172) has argued that it is not a one-size-fits-all procedure, but depends on the contingent compatibility between speech act, audience, and external context. In other terms, a speech act is not *a priori* successful but only when it matches the other components through linguistic attractiveness. Instead, Huysmans (2011) has emphasized the sensational power of speech act, regardless of the audience reaction and policy implementation. Other discussions have concerned the concept of emergency measures, which is ambiguously defined. As exposed by Emmers (2016, pp. 172-173), it is unclear both if they must be implemented to fully realize securitization, and what is their constituting substance, namely if they must fall into the legal category of emergency power or detach from the political habits utilized until then. Moreover, scholars have debated the objectives that securitization strives to achieve. On the one hand, Huysmans (1998, p. 232) has underlined that it aims at introducing certainty in the chaotic reality of individuals, giving definite meanings to the elements composing their surroundings, such as identifying enemies and allies in the social sphere. On the other hand, it is not devoid of an egoistic nature. It can be exploited by politicians in democratic regimes to dangerously fulfill their self-interest: they can increase their electoral popularity, extend the scope of emergency powers, and jeopardize the enjoyment of liberal rights by individuals under the banner of security (Emmers, 2016, p. 173). These interests are pursued by politicians not only through their speech act but also exploiting reinforcing devices. Among these, Balzacq (2005, p. 191) has highlighted how media can amplify their securitization due to the privileged relations, approach, and sometimes control, politicians have of them. In this regard, the

following paragraph would be dedicated to briefly discussing the power of media in contributing to the securitization process.


## 2.3 Securitization and the role of media

As exposed above, the theory of securitization includes within the category of securitizing actors all entities which are capable of exerting influence over public opinion. Thus, it comprehends not only the speech acts of political actors, but also the conveyance, adjustment, and eventual opposition to such speeches by media devices. In this regard, the analysis would be herein enlarged to the relationship between media and securitization, which would help understanding the role exerted by the press in the context of the Ministry of National Identity. Brief insights would be offered, without endorsing the extensive framework of communication sociology and media studies, which do not fall into the scope of this research and would require deeper examination.

Press journalism is principally devoted to providing fair, balanced, and objective representations of news in the articles, hinging on the cultural references of the audience to enable the reception and comprehension of information (Vultee, 2023, pp. 44-45). Substantially, however, the framings it proposes are never neutral. They are influenced by power relations and can result in moves towards or against securitization (Vultee, 2023, p. 99). Although these moves are rather variable, as they can change shortly throughout the unfolding of an alleged crisis, they reveal how media rely on and privilege frameworks deemed captivating for the audience (Gray & Franck, 2019, p. 276). This function responds to the complex but considerable role which is played by media in democratic societies. According to Sorice (2021, p. 37), media accomplish the function of mediation, namely they endow with specific meanings empirical experiences and transmit them to the audience through representations and images. In the specific case of securitization, they contribute to reverberating or constraining the securitizing framings proposed by authority figures and, ultimately, they influence the fruition by public audience (Tagliapietra, 2021). This phenomenon has been evidenced by different scholars in relation to French national identity. They have underlined how media have endorsed dominant securitizing interpretations proposed by political figures and how this process has re-molded the common conception of French national identity. According to Hargreaves (2007), media have recurrently associated migrants with the dark side of social conflicts, delinquency, and disorders in French society upheld by politicians. The repetition of such nexus, as highlighted by Thomas (2012, p. 133),

has crystallized into a mainstream perception of foreigners, which has erroneously merged immigrants and residing ethnic minorities into a unified threat. More specifically, Noiriel (2007) has pointed out how during the 1980s, articles from newspaper *Le Figaro* were apparently sustaining the narrative proposed by Le Pen's political party, discrediting the foreigner due to its "brutal" habits and external appearance. Overall, these examples show a tight alignment between media and politicians, which seems to erode the idea of press as a Fourth Estate (D. Battistella, personal communication, November 18, 2024). Nevertheless, media can also convey de-securitizing and oppositional views to the dominant one, abiding by their role in a democratic society by permitting clashes between conflicting opinions and monitoring the behavior of elites (Hass, 2009, p. 84).

All in all, these considerations exhibit how media convey information which is never value-free but is always laden by some perspectives. In the specific domain of this study, they fulfill the power of representation which has been described in the first chapter: they perpetuate a specific image of national identity and security, reporting deeds, discourses from eminent personalities, and exposing more or less explicitly critiques. This action falls within the intervention of media in the process of securitization: regardless of their support or contestation to the dominant securitizing approach, it can be argued that media contribute to keeping the process of securitization susceptible to changes, influencing how it progresses over time. Nevertheless, their action can be fully understood only at the weave of the plural dimensions which have been described so far: the social construction of security issues, the interplay between political power and media in democratic settings, and their repercussions on the social sphere. This framework backs the practical analysis of securitization of national identity which would be performed in the following chapter. Before introducing it, the case-study of the Ministry of National Identity would be approached as an example of securitization, analyzing its main components of Sarkozy's speech acts and implemented measures.

## 2.4 The Ministry of National Identity (2007-2010): a practical application of the CSS

Adopting the theoretical background of societal security and securitization, the Ministry of National Identity can be fully grasped in its intentions and nature. On the one hand, the Ministry responds to the concept of societal security, whereby it defines French national identity as the referent object of security, and immigrants, both residents and non-residents, as security menace. On the other hand, the inclusion of the Ministry within the securitization theory requires an initial caveat. The consideration of the Ministry as an example of securitization is

debatable, given the ambiguous nature of emergency measures recognized by academia. Indeed, the creation of a ministerial entity does not correspond to the exercise of emergency powers, insofar as they are defined as evading normal courses of political activity (Krause & Williams, 2018, p. 22). Moreover, the Ministry is part of a historical pattern of French securitizing attempts: it pertains to a long-standing process of governmental xenophobia, which has introduced in the public opinion and the political system a negative representation of the foreigner (Valluy, 2008). In these terms, it can be seen as the backlash of past measures, such as the 1993 Pasqua Laws and the regime of immigration enforced by Sarkozy during his second ministerial term. Nevertheless, the Ministry stands out exceptionally among these trials. According to Valluy (2008), the institutionalization of immigration and national identity in combined ministerial measures represents original evidence. Thus, it can be argued that this feature endows the Ministry with the nature of emergency, as mandated by some currents of securitization theory.

The analysis of securitization through the Ministry of National Identity would be structured in the following way: the component of the speech act would be investigated by means of Sarkozy's discourses, turning then to the practical measures implemented via the Ministry. The selected temporal interval would regard the period of electoral campaign and the presidential mandate until the abolition of the Ministry (2007-2010), owing to the multiple contributions of Sarkozy to the issue and policy changes set by the two succeeding Ministers, Brice Hortefeux and Éric Besson. The aim is not to deconstruct meticulously the entire process of securitization, which would require a different type of analysis for its contextual and interconnected nature, but to focus on its main components.

First, the analysis of the different speeches held by Sarkozy in both domestic and international forums enables us to state that he has recurrently presented national identity as being under the severe attack of immigration flows. These discourses have been retrieved online from audiovisual sources of television and radio interviews, and written transcriptions of public discourses, and would be analyzed on the basis of commonality of topics. The period of election campaign preceding Sarkozy's victory saw the introduction of the identitarian issue. This aspect was the very element that detached his narrative from the other main political competitors, namely Ségolène Royal for the PS and François Bayrou for the UDF and then centrist party *Mouvement Démocrate* (MoDem) (Valluy, 2008). He exhibited a rhetoric of both continuity and rupture with his previous claims, whereby he endowed with crucial emphasis the themes already exposed during his ministerial mandate, addressing the sake of French people and the preservation of their national devotion. Through different speech acts, he

conveyed the image of a multidimensional crisis, whereby French national identity was assaulted from different poles. He warned of a situation "when everything changes, when the safest benchmarks are erased, [...] when it is the principles, morality, representations that are called into question"[15] (Sarkozy, 2010), highlighting the pressure to act. Moreover, he attributed to this crisis the dramatic characterization of "severe", "profound", and "risky" features (Sarkozy, 2007d), outstanding from other national dramas for the unprecedented uncertainty of values (Sarkozy, 2007b).

Dissecting his discourses, it is possible to clarify both the referent object and security threat which he intended to communicate. On the one hand, he addressed a specific conception of French national identity as referent object of security. According to Sarkozy (2007b), French identity is formed through the conjunction of individual diversity into the wider body of nation, whereby everyone pulls back his own peculiarity for an intentional commitment to the national good and strength. In this way, he recognized the existence of diversity of religions, beliefs, and ethnicities in the single national body, affirming that:

France is united and diverse, unified and mixed: this is the France we have been

building for centuries! And here, French people also come from Africa, China, India,

and they are Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. All of this makes up

France.[16] (Sarkozy, 2007a).

He continued by assessing that this diversity does not threaten the existence of nation and does not produce inequality among individuals, as long as their private distinctions are subjugated to French national attachment. This concept can be encapsulated in the following reformulation of Article I of the 1958 Constitution, whereby France demands the love of the nation "de tous les citoyens sans distinction d'origine, de race ou de religion" (Conseil Constitutionnel, 2024).[17] This Rousseauian conception of national identity, whereby

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[15] "Quand tout change, quand les repères les plus sûrs s'effacent, [...] quand ce sont les principes, la morale, les représentations qui se trouvent mises en cause."
Retrieved from: https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/177833-declaration-de-m-nicolas-sarkozy-president-de-la-republique-sur-la-re

[16] "La France une et diverse, unitaire et mélangée : c'est d'ailleurs la France que nous construisons depuis des siècles ! Et ici les Français viennent aussi d'Afrique, de Chine, d'Inde et ils sont musulmans, hindouistes catholiques, protestants, juifs. Tout cela fait la France."
Retrieved from : https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/165472-nicolas-sarkozy-15022007-ump-election-presidentielle-identite-nationale

[17] "From all citizens without distinction of origin, race or religion."
[Translation]

individuals adhere to French nation in light of their freewill and responsibility, however, is not devoid of Fichtean traits (Martigny, 2009, p. 33). As described in the first chapter, they consist in naturalistic elements of rooted traditions and myths, which are deemed indispensable for the identitarian subsistence. Among these, during the speech of Caen (2007b) and an interview by France Inter (2007c), Sarkozy cited the republican values, namely the equality of rights between women and men and the principle of *laïcité*, the knowledge of French language, and an unforgettable long history of Christian faith. By combining these two conceptions, he considered France in anthropomorphic terms, possessing mythical origins and transforming continuously through the passage of time and the meeting of human lives through migration and integration processes. Indeed, France eternally modifies itself (Sarkozy, 2007b), in the guise of "rien ne se perd, rien ne se crée, tout se transforme".[18] All things considered, Sarkozy's discourses reconduct national identity to both a universal political belonging and the possession of fixed characteristics, such as Christian tradition and French language, which cannot be eradicated. In this way, however, they appear rather contradictory. This enables us to state that Sarkozy adopted a clear transformist and catch-all strategy in presenting French identity. He intended to maximize the breadth of its inclusiveness under the flag of French renaissance, reaching also the electoral constituency of the FN (Martigny, 2009, p. 24).

Turning to the second component of the speech act, Sarkozy defined a plurality of threats posed to the security of national identity. He attributed the fading of the *volonté générale* to convergent pressures from domestic and international politics. Specifically, he mentioned the homogenization produced by capitalistic globalization and the spirit of surrender and repentance of French population for past imperial offences (Sarkozy, 2009). These factors contributed to generate a sense of "cultural renunciation" among French people (Sarkozy, 2007d), namely the abandonment of their identity, the general indifference towards injustices and ineffective state power, and the disillusionment with the democratic reward for individual merits in occupation and education (Sarkozy, 2007b). This broad representation of the national crisis, however, was explained by Sarkozy along with specific causes, which constituted the very dangers for national identity. According to Noiriel (2007, pp. 92-96), they are illegal immigration and communitarianism. They pertain to both internal and external dimensions of security threat, breaching the republican values on which French national identity is founded. While illegal immigration violates the national rules on the legality of settlement, ethnic and

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[18] This expression is traditionally related to the chemistry experiments and discoveries of Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier.

religious communities transgress the principle of *laïcité* and do not fully integrate in the national body due to their practices. Specifically, Sarkozy condemned the issues associated with Muslim community, namely the "the veil, [...] forced marriages, the Turkish community where some women don't speak a word of French, newcomers who live among themselves, difficult neighborhoods with ghettos"[19] (Sarkozy, 2007e) and any individual "who refuses to recognize that a woman is equal to a man, wants to confine his wife, force his daughter [...] to undergo female mutilation"[20] (Sarkozy, 2007b). These elements were deemed incompatible with French civilization and must be tamed, and eventually expelled, to preserve the national cohesion. Overall, this identification by Sarkozy of unsupervised immigration and integration as principal threats to French identity matches the requirements of securitization theory, namely the constructed nature of security issues. Indeed, as shown by French polls of the 2007 elections, immigration was not among the primary concerns of the electorate, who, instead, showed a balanced approach towards migrants. As reported by the survey of IFOP (2007), respondents prioritized themes of occupation (48%) and inequality (22%) as the most important problems for the existence of France, while immigration stood only at 6% (p. 8). Moreover, most respondents declared to feel secure in their own state and be favorable to grant administrative voting rights for immigrant residents, while rejected predominantly the state financialization of mosques' construction (p. 14). These results show that the prioritization by Sarkozy of immigration issues for identitarian sake was not significantly confirmed by the will of the electorate, but it was *ad hoc* manufactured. Indeed, by saying that immigration was a security menace for French nation, Sarkozy transformed the nominal into the substantial through public communication and warning.

Sarkozy's apparatus of rhetoric and public appearances proved to be successful, as he won the presidential campaign and became President of the French Republic. Thus, we can argue that his election signaled the initial public approval of his attempt of securitization. His effectiveness was also sustained by the alignment with media platforms. According to Campus (2010, pp. 228-231), the dominance by Sarkozy of media representations significantly emerged during these elections and favorably depicted him as the heir of the Gaullist firm power. After

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[19] "Le voile, [...] les mariages forcés, la communauté turque dont certaines femmes ne parlent pas un mot de français, les nouveaux venus qui vivent entre eux, les quartiers difficiles avec des ghettos."
Retrieved from: https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/166473-nicolas-sarkozy-12042007-ump-election-presidentielle-2007
[20] "Celui qui ne veut pas reconnaître que la femme est l'égal de l'homme, celui qui veut cloîtrer sa femme, obliger sa fille [...] à se faire exciser."
Retrieved from: https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/165843-declaration-de-m-nicolas-sarkozy-ministre-de-linterieur-et-de-lamena

his victory, he translated his rhetoric in specific measures to overcome the identitarian crisis. He presented himself as a messiah guiding the resurrection of French *grandeur*, accomplishing the mission which had been delegated to him by French people via the social contract and which he had devoted his life to (Sarkozy, 2007f). His plan was to revitalize French national identity in both its universalist and sovereignty traits by directly hearing, consulting, and loving French citizens, and incentivizing their pride for the nation (INA Société, 2007). His promises concretized in the institutionalization of the Ministry of National Identity by the Decree of the 18th of May 2007, signed by the new President Sarkozy and Prime Minister François Fillon, member of the UMP. This decree codified the legal existence of the Ministry and appointed Brice Hortefeux to the role of relative Minister. Subsequent legal sources completed its mission, such as the Decree 2007-999 of the 31st of May concerning its functions and powers. Looking at these provisions, the objective of the Ministry can be defined as follows: it provided meticulous, comprehensive, and centralized organization and control over processes of migration and integration within the French society. It aimed at stabilizing the internal conditions of the nation-state through a multifaceted immigration policy: it was supposed to select migrants to host in the national territory, curb irregular arrivals by aiding the development of countries of origin, and ease the process of integration for regularly entered and residing migrants (Thomas, 2012, p. 113). This permitted to reconcile the universalist and humanitarian spirit of French identity with the preservation of its essential traits from the potential erosion caused by immigration and integration. Hortefeux accomplished this task in the guise of a Saint Peter promoting the word of Sarkozy. According to his letter of mission (Sarkozy, 2007g), two domains of intervention can be distinguished: the repression of illegal immigration and the simplification of integration to be realized in the national territory. On the one hand, illegal immigration was curbed through a regime of contingent regularization of migrants and developmental assistance to emigration powerhouses; a measure which aimed at protecting French population and safeguarding migrants' rights from human traffickers (Sarkozy et al., 2007). On the other hand, Hortefeux restructured the process of integration according to the following logic: the prospective inclusion of a migrant within the French society should have been *a priori* successful, by conferring on him a sufficient degree of Frenchness before his settlement. As reported by the "Secrétariat Général du Comité Interministériel de Contrôle de l'Immigration" (2008, pp. 142-162), he reformed the Reception and Integration Contract introduced by Sarkozy in 2006, by setting courses and evaluations on French language and republican values in extra-EU countries, instructing and including immigrant parents to the education of their children, aiding and evaluating the proper

placement in the labor market by immigrants. When the process of integration was deemed completed, the acquisition of nationality was granted for naturalization or marriage with a French citizen according to different rules, excluding the acquisition by legal age (pp. 163-165). Both procedures were planned to culminate in a symbolic public ceremony, whereby new citizens were given an eternal reminder of their legal status in the form of a small book (pp. 166-168). They could rely on a "Bible of Frenchness", testifying the deserved result out of their accomplished duties. Moreover, these measures were bolstered by their strategic mirroring within EU management of migration. In 2008, Hortefeux took advantage of the French presidency of the European Council to profitably exploit EU normative power[21] to increase the reach and efficacy of the Ministry's lines of action, which crystallized in the European Pact on Migration and Asylum (Secrétariat Général du Comité Interministériel de Contrôle de l'Immigration, 2008, p. 10).

The measures of securitization were not exhausted by the institution of the Ministry but evolved continuously until its abolition on the 30th of November 2010. A significant step was represented by the debate on national identity initiated by the new Minister Éric Besson in 2009. As reported by the archive of the Ministry of the Interior (2009), this project aimed at creating venues for discussions and suggestions on the meaning of Frenchness, grouping representative poles of the population on a departmental level. Respondents were questioned about their individual perception of national identity, interpreted in cultural and political terms, their opinion on national iconography, public singing of the national hymn imposed to the youth, and strengthening of the terms of integration and nationality previously disposed by the Ministry (Ministère de l'Intérieur, 2009). It was presented as an opportunity of collective reflection on the nature of French national identity and its relationship with social and cultural diversity, whether already present or continuously incoming in it. In an RTL radio interview (2009), Besson emphasized the sensational triumph of the debate: it had restored participative democracy by permitting the *volonté générale* to investigate the essence and delimitation of French identity. Instead, as exposed by Karaca (2023), its outcomes were rather ambiguous: it united French population under the same concern for the identitarian realization, but bolstered critiques and condemnations from political parties and intellectuals.

Overall, the analysis of securitization through the Ministry of National Identity permits us to extract a significant understanding of the relationship between security and national

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[21] The expression "normative power" has been referred to the EU in the discipline of IR by Ian Manners in "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" (2002).

identity. The combination within the Ministry of a policy of selected immigration with strengthened assistance towards Third World countries was presented as confirming French humanitarianism and openness. The same logic applied to the cultural diversity internal to French nation, which was praised to be necessary for its survival. Nevertheless, these remarks were not genuine demonstrations of French *égalité* and *fraternité.* Instead, they revealed the persisting consideration by French political class of civilizations different from the Western one as essentially atavistic, exemplified by Muslim believers (Thomas, 2012, p. 117). This conception was exhibited by Sarkozy in his Dakar speech of 2007, whereby he blamed the African continent having not reached the end of history0[22] as others had done (Sarkozy, 2007h). Thus, it can be stated that Sarkozy had conducted the securitization of national identity by swinging between the blurring lines of humanitarianism and paternalistic imperialism. The process of securitization, however, did not end with the establishment and operations of the Ministry. It continued to be molded by the reactions and responses of public opinion, exhibiting favorable or doubtful stances towards its nature, measures and objectives. In this regard, the following chapter will look at the different understandings of the Ministry which have been conveyed in the public domain by media framings, specifically by national newspapers. They would be evaluated for their contribution to the process of securitization, namely if they tended to express support or contrast to the activity of the Ministry and aligned with some actors more than others, reporting their stances or taking their sides.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have assumed that the institution of the Ministry of National Identity by Sarkozy has constituted an act of securitization. This claim has been formulated on the basis of the theoretical framework exposed in the initial paragraphs. First, the Copenhagen School of CSS has encapsulated national identity in its innovative theorization of security. Through the concept of societal security, it has shown how the identitarian feeling of a community, such as the nation, could feel endangered by different subjects, such as movements of migrants entering and settling in the national territory. Secondly, the theory of securitization has permitted us to understand the ultimate essence of security. It does not correspond forcefully to an extant situation, but is an artifice intentionally produced by authority figures via a specific model of construction. Accordingly, actors can impose a security issue of existential nature to the public

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[22] The expression of "end of history" has been coined by scholar Francis Fukuyama in "The End of History ?" (1989), who has attached to the collapse of the Cold War international system the definitive victory of liberalism and human rights protection in ideological and political structures.

opinion, urging the adoption of countermeasures and waiting for the potential acceptance or refusal by the collectivity. Subsequently, this model has been transposed to another category of actor, the media: the aim was to highlight that the political-mediatic nexus can promote or deter the ultimate outcome of securitization. Finally, these considerations have backed the case study presented in the last paragraph. The Ministry of National Identity has been examined under the lens of CSS, dissecting the process of securitization enforced by Sarkozy in its proposal and operationalization. Having set this theoretical background and adapted it to the specific case of the Ministry, our intent for the next chapter is to understand how the process of securitization proceeded during Sarkozy's presidency in terms of conveyance and reactions in the public domain. More specifically, we would perform a data analysis based on digital articles of French national press. The aim would be to analyze whether different French national newspapers have upheld the securitization discourse or have tended to de-securitize it, due to their interpretation of French national identity.

# Chapter III

# A text analysis of the securitization of French national identity

**Introduction**

The first and second chapters have laid down a propaedeutic basis for the purposes of a practical analysis. In this regard, the aim of this chapter is to combine the historical and theoretical perspectives previously shown, attaching national identity to security, to perform a data analysis on the securitization of French national identity provided through the homonymous Ministry. More specifically, a text analysis based on the technique of Correspondence Analysis (CA) would be undertaken, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The sample of the analysis would consist in articles from French national newspapers, which would permit us to understand how national press reacted to the practice of securitization implemented with the Ministry of National Identity. To this end, the first section would be dedicated to illustrating the research design of the analysis. Then, elucidatory remarks would be provided to explain the methodological logic underlying the combination of CA with contextual interpretation of newspaper articles. In the third section, the findings would be interpreted in the form of visual representations (plots, tables), which would serve to extract the narratives associated with each newspaper based on their relation to the securitization of the Ministry. This would enable us to distinguish newspapers that have contributed to the practice of securitization from those that have tended to contrast it, and the eventual presence of outliers. Ultimately, the discussion of results would define common remarkable traits and highlight the limitations posed to the external validity of the model.

**3.1 Methodology**

This analysis intends to combine a quantitative method of text mining, namely the CA, with a qualitative technique of interpretation based on the importance of textual context. This mixed methodology is deemed functional to the main objective of this study, which seeks to understand the contribution of French press to securitization.

As reported by Beh and Lombardo (2014, p. 20), the simple CA is an analytical technique which transposes a two-variable contingency table, displaying two categorical variables respectively within rows and columns, into a graphical representation made of points placed in the four quadrants of a Cartesian plane. This method permits us to catch in a

straightforward way how the categories of the two variables are related: their association can be retrieved by means of the spatial distance between the points representing them (Greenacre, 2010, p. 613). In this specific case, this method is applied to understanding the relationship between newspaper articles and words extracted from them in defining stances towards securitization. This is performed by measuring the spatial distance between their representative points, with the aim of understanding the nature of their connection in security terms. Moreover, it must be noticed that the articles belonging to each newspaper are the product of different journalists with personal writing styles. In this sense, the CA technique enables us to overcome these peculiarities by returning a unified picture which synthesizes the narrative of each newspaper on the basis of its nearest words.

For the purposes of this analysis, the CA has been performed utilizing Python software for the process of data collection, analysis, and visual representation, following methodological insights (Beh & Lombardo, 2014; De Blasio et al., 2017; Keita, 2017; Manning et al., 2009). The sample of the analysis has consisted in 267 articles, retrieved online from 5 French national newspapers: *Libération*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, *Le Parisien*, *La Croix*. They have been selected among the most relevant daily printed ones at national level in terms of visibility and number of copies (Lenoir, 2019, p. 20). Among this corpus, only one newspaper has been excluded, namely the extreme-left *L'Humanité*. This choice has been justified along two reasons. First, the 5 selected newspapers already granted a comprehensive representation of diversity of political and ideological stances, with *La Croix* denoting catholic characterization, *Le Parisien* deemed as an alleged neutral newspaper, *Libération* and *Le Monde* being attached to the center-left position, and *Le Figaro* to the center-right (Cohen, 2012; Lenoir, 2019, pp. 2, 25). These characterizations are functional to understanding *post hoc* the interpretation of the analysis. Secondly, the inclusion of *L'Humanité* would have posed technical difficulties for an efficient visibleness of the plot and association patterns due to the excessive concentration of dots related to newspapers. The articles have been selected on the basis of a temporal interval spanning from 2007/01/01 to 2010/12/31, encompassing Sarkozy's presidential campaign, the institution of the Ministry and its abolition. The research design has comprised multiple progressive steps from the construction of the dataset to the improvement of graphical representations. For the sake of linear comprehension, it is possible to dissect the research structure in three different phases.

First, the construction of dataset has implied the selection of articles sourced online from the 5 French national newspapers previously mentioned. Their retrieval was molded on 8 queries, reported as follows:

1. Ministère "Immigration" "Intégration" "Identité" nationale Développement solidaire site:<SITE>

2. "Sarkozy" "Besson" intellectuels débat "identité" nationale site:<SITE>

3. "Identité" Immigration Valeurs républicaines site:<SITE>

4. "Burqa" Islam immigration "Identité" site: <SITE>

5. "Identité" nationale "Ministère" "Sarkozy" "Royal" site: <SITE>

6. "Identité" nationale sécurité crise site: <SITE>

7. Ministère Identité Nationale site: <SITE>

8. "Sarkozy" "Hortefeux" "Identité" nationale site: <SITE>

   where <SITE> is replaced by the URL of the newspapers, and the quoting marks ""
   force Google search to include the term as displayed in the query results. Each query is
   run for each of the 5 considered newspapers.

The elaboration of queries has been conducted on the basis of the historical insights offered in the first two chapters, namely the relationship between French national identity and the "Other", their single substantialization, and the framework of security underlying them. Criteria of balance and objectivity have been followed in their formulation to prevent biases in the findings of the analysis. More specifically, the first and seventh queries refer exclusively to the Ministry of National Identity in its complete and partial denomination. The second and eighth relate it to their respective Ministers, namely Hortefeux and Besson. Furthermore, the third and fourth queries explore the relationship between French identity and the perceived Muslim threat, while the fifth and sixth ones tend to focus on the presidential competition and security discourses embraced by Sarkozy and Royal. The definitive sample has resulted in 267 articles, which have been saved as HTML files into a specific folder. More specifically, the distribution of downloaded articles among the newspapers resulted in the following: 44 articles for *Libération*, 101 for *Le Monde*, 63 for *Le Figaro*, 28 for *Le Parisien*, and 31 for *La Croix*.

The second passage of the analysis was functional to prepare the downloaded articles to the CA technique. First, text has been extracted from each HTML file, identifying the title, subtitle, and main corpus of articles, while excluding the remaining parts. Before being saved to a folder, the text of each article has been subjected to pre-processing. Following the clarifications of Manning et al. (2009, pp. 22-34), this method has permitted filtering the integral text, by removing disturbing and superfluous elements, such as extra spaces, punctuation, stop words (e.g.: non-relevant words for the task, such as prepositions) and numbers. To complete the procedure, the text has undergone lemmatization, which has allowed

us to reduce and group the multiple forms in which words were expressed into lemmas. The lemmatized texts have been then saved into a specific folder.

Thirdly, additional refinements have been performed to optimize the execution of CA. First, labels have been assigned to newspaper articles, identifying them by means of their acronym associated with incremental numbers up to their total amount (LM1, LM2, ... LM101, with LM standing for *Le Monde*). Furthermore, lemmas have been manually refined to maintain only words considered strictly related to the topic of analysis. To raise the efficacy of CA, the list of lemmas has been further narrowed on the basis of the TF-IDF: it has permitted to assign to each lemma from the whole corpus of articles a specific weight, tending to assume higher scores whether the lemma was repeated many times in a lower number of articles (Manning et al., 2009, p. 119). According to the parameters on which the TF-IDF has been bound, a lemma should appear in at least 3% of the total sample of articles, namely 8 articles, and at most in 80% of it, roughly 214 articles, to be included in the execution of CA. The choice of these two boundaries was functional to balance the asymmetry of articles attached to each newspaper, with *Le Parisien* displaying only 28 articles compared to the 101 ones of *Le Monde*, in order to weigh the excessive rarity or commonality of words throughout the corpus and extract meaningful representative terms from each newspaper. Moreover, the criterion was set to include both unigrams and bigrams within the lemmas. After having performed the TF-IDF, the set of lemmas has resulted in 386 terms: they could be internally distinguished in actors (Sarkozy, Besson, Royal, PS, etc.) and words as strictly defined (*identité, menace, histoire,* etc.). They have been visualized in a first graphical representation, namely the Word Cloud, displaying the most significant lemmas extracted from the articles (Figure 1). These preliminary steps have set data in the necessary form to perform the CA. The initial phase of the analysis has consisted in the creation of a contingency table based on the TF-IDF, with newspaper articles being assigned to the row variable (267 rows), and lemmas (actors and words as strictly defined) to the column variable (386 columns). Based on the contingency table, the CA was performed obtaining a new representation of data, which has been displayed in two different plots. A first CA plot has delineated the single distribution of articles throughout the Cartesian plane (Figure 2), while the second has added lemmas to the first to grasp their patterns of association (Figure 3). Due to limits of visual observability, the spatial distance between articles and lemmas has been measured by calculating the distance of the whole corpus of lemmas to newspapers' centroids and displaying the 15 nearest ones to each newspaper in a tabular form. This list of terms has been further subjected to a qualitative method of interpretation, with the aim of understanding the place of meaning occupied by each word in

the relative article from which it was retrieved and inferring a comprehensive narrative. The combination of these qualitative and quantitative methods would be investigated in terms of their results in the third section of this chapter. First, however, insights on the ratio of this mixed methodological approach would be provided.

## 3.2 Preliminary remarks: research limits and adjustments

Before delving into the findings of the analysis, preliminary observations are required to clarify the reasons for the mixed methodology utilized. Undertaking solely the quantitative method of CA would not have provided sufficient basis to respond to the purpose of this analysis, namely, to identify positions of securitization in newspapers. Thus, it needed to be complemented by filtering data through a personal contribution, backed by historical and political knowledge on French identitarian issues.

Following the logic of CA, understanding the approach of newspapers to securitization requires analyzing the distance between the two variables displayed, namely articles and words. In this peculiar case study, even if this method allows us to understand which newspaper is nearer to one word rather than another, it gives us an incomplete picture. Indeed, words are complex structures of meaning (Giuliani-Seguin, 2012, pp. 140-141), which can assume different senses according to the context in which they are conveyed. In contrast, a statistical technique is not fully able to grasp the structure of significance and eventual subtexts which are concealed behind a term. For instance, if the word "*crise*" emerges among the nearest to a newspaper, this may not forcefully suggest that this newspaper speaks about the crisis of national identity upholding the line of the government. Rather, it could be included in a firm invective against the Ministry or stress the existence of another type of crisis. Therefore, while the measured distance elucidates the closeness of a word to a newspaper in terms of its presence in the articles or proximity to other words utilized, it does not clarify the connotation the word assumes in them. This does not mean that the CA technique is not suitable for these studies, as it has received widespread implementation in social sciences and linguistics (Greenacre, 2010, p. 613). However, examining newspapers' approaches to securitization or de-securitization needs to clarify the context in which such words are expressed: thus, a comprehensive interpretation of the word-article closeness and the framework of meaning in which the word is placed is required. Therefore, in this analysis, the results of CA are interpreted by focusing on the positioning of words in the context of articles. This methodology is founded on the contribution to the discipline of linguistics by French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. According to

him, the context of expression of words, namely the discourse, tends to nullify the ambiguity of meanings, and permits to perform its "understanding", synthesizing its multitude of claims into a single logic (Ricoeur, 1976, pp. 17, 72). Thus, the rationale underlying a text can be roughly deduced, and, in this case, being attached to a peculiar security characterization, not by focusing on words as self-standing but grasping their meaning within the unity of the discourse. This method of interpretation has been embraced by analyses similarly focusing on the approach of press to securitization (Gray & Franck, 2019; Hass, 2009). Moreover, this procedure does not aim at absolutizing newspapers' positions by locating them into a binary distinction between securitization and de-securitization. Rather, it infers from the CA findings approximate tendencies within a hypothetical spectrum ranging from securitization to de-securitization with intermediate nuances. These narratives must be considered as illustrative representations of a newspaper line of thought on securitization, based on what the articles associated with the nearest words have displayed in their majoritarian stance.

### 3.3 The interpretation of the findings

This section is dedicated to discussing the findings of the analysis, based on the methodological notices previously exposed. The aim is to respond to the following research question:

> *In the context of the establishment of the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidarity Development, which narratives have been employed by French press in relation to the securitization of French national identity as expressed in digital articles, and can any identifiable pattern of securitization or de-securitization be distinguished?*

To this end, the following interpretation of different graphical representations, building on one another, would enable a progressive understanding.

The first step consists of the visual representation provided by the Word Cloud (Figure 1). This device allows us to have a first glance over the top 100 significant words (actors and words as strictly defined) from the corpus selected on the basis of the TF-IDF and to notice the eventual presence of lexical or thematical clusters. A primary striking feature is represented by the predominance of the following words: *débat*, *français*, *Sarkozy*, *Besson*, *ministère*, *Hortefeux*, *UMP*. Notably, *débat* and *français* stand out from the others. These words catalyze the attention over the Ministry, its main protagonists and, more specifically, one of its policies. Indeed, the debate launched by Besson (*débat*) seems to acquire more resonance than migration policies associated with the administration of Hortefeux, whose terms are displayed in smaller

size (*titre*, *asile*, *régularisation*, *frontière*). Moreover, the actors (*Sarkozy*, *Besson*, *Hortefeux*, *UMP*) refer all to the governmental apparatus, downplaying the role exerted by members of the opposition, intellectuals, and non-governmental organizations. Certainly, these words are general references to the institution of the Ministry. However, their importance lies in the centrality they have occupied in press articles based on the research technique utilized: we can argue that they have been key subjects of news reporting or expressions of plural opinions, whether critical or not. On the other hand, it is interesting to notice the repetition of the word *identité* which, however, does not pertain to the first keyword group. Additionally, it is always part of a bigram (*débat identité*, *immigration identité*, *identité français*, *intégration identité*): this may suggest that the topic of identity is not self-sustaining and finds necessary completion when put in relation to another subject. A third level of positioning within the corpus is represented by lexical choices of securitarian nature: they comprise both general references (*sécurité*, *crise*, *problème*, *accuser*, *contraire*) and specific attributes of security threats (*musulman*, *islam*, *clandestin*, *communauté*). Ultimately, another category is identifiable in the terms associated with the nature and substantialization of French national identity which, though still significant, do not peak among the other words (*liberté*, *fraternité*, *laïcité*, *égalité*, *valeur républicain*, *langue*, *culture*). Considering these results, this overview permits us to denote remarkable aspects for the purposes of this study. Indeed, among the 100 most significant words within the corpus, the ones associated with a securitizing framework appear relevant. Moreover, this result is not biased by the inclusion of the terms *sécurité* and *crise* in the sixth query, as they still appear along similar terms in the top 100 words over a total of 386 words. Thus, this suggests that the narrative of security has been central in newspaper reporting when dealing with the Ministry and national identity, even if the nature of their narratives needs to be clarified.

Figure 1: Word Cloud displaying the 100 most significant words extracted from the corpus of words based on the TF-IDF

These general observations are only a preliminary step for undertaking the more articulated method of CA. Based on the elaboration of data through CA, two plots have been produced (Figure 2, Figure 3). The first plot illustrates the distribution of newspaper articles in the graphical space of CA (Figure 2). Each newspaper article is represented by a colored dot and associated label: this method permits to clearly identify the correspondence between each article and newspaper in a discernable way. The distribution of articles develops apparently in three main directions, resembling the form of an inverted "Y": the dots are more dispersed throughout the upper and lower quadrants of the right side of the plot, while they remain close to the identity line for the quadrants of the left side. It is in this area that the distribution of data concentrates the most. Analyzing the single newspapers, some clustering patterns can be noticed:

- *Libération* (LB, red dot) tends to distribute mostly in the right quadrants. Notably, it is placed in correspondence to values that are further from the origin of axes. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that it occupies with *Le Monde* the highest values of the upper right quadrant: this spatial proximity may disclose a similarity of framings or expressions.

- *La Croix* (LC, purple dot) and *Le Parisien* (LP, yellow dot) are characterized by a roughly equal dispersion throughout the three main directives delineated in the plot.

- *Le Figaro* (LF, green dot) concentrates mainly along the identity line of the left side of the plot and in the lower right quadrant, while only four articles are distributed in correspondence of high positive values.

- *Le Monde* (LM, blue dot) showcases the most balanced dispersion throughout the plot. This can be justified on the basis of the highest number of extracted articles (101 articles). Except for the major occupation of the upper right quadrant with *Libération*, no significant pattern can be highlighted.
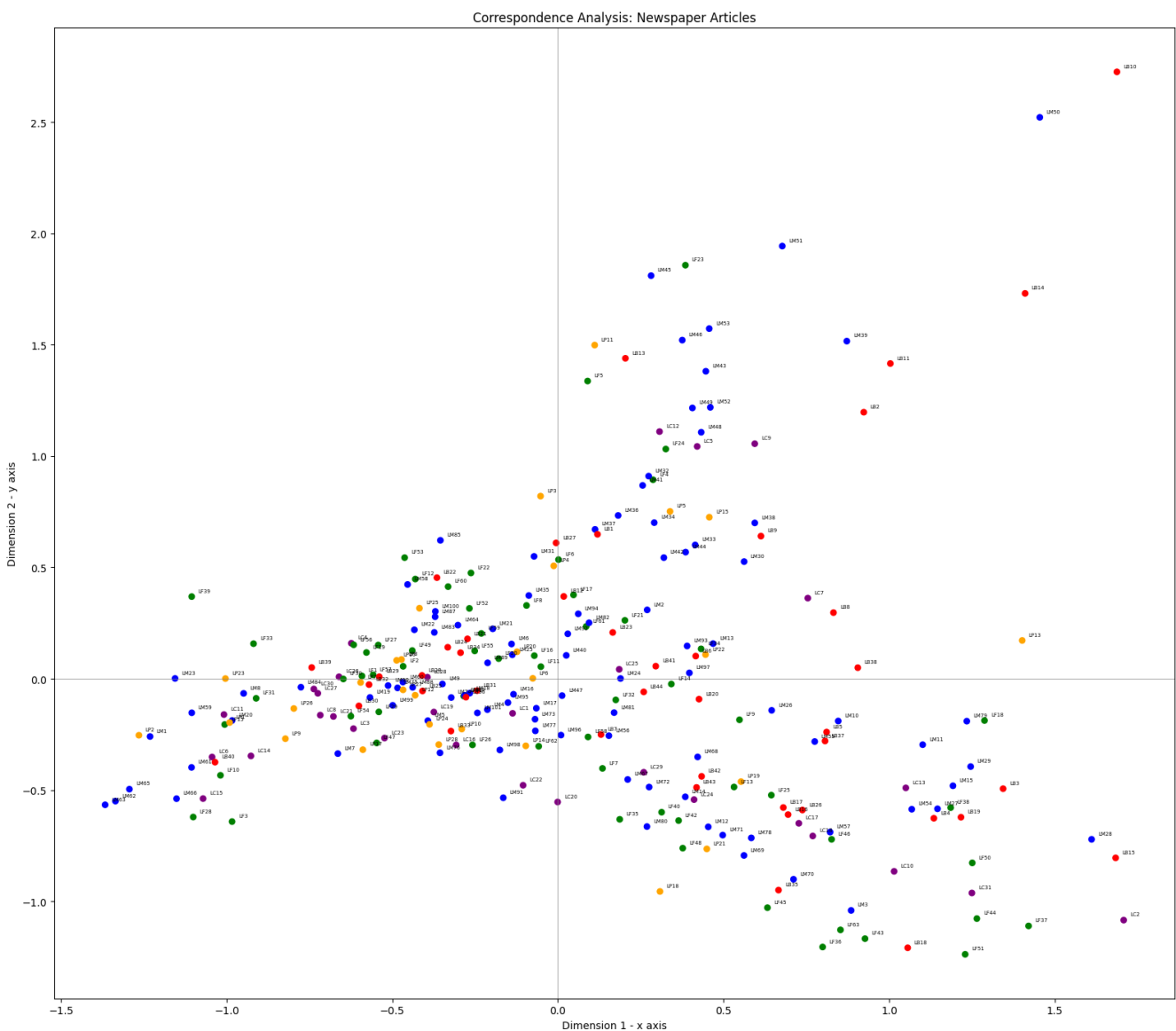


Figure 2: Correspondence Analysis plot, displaying the distribution of newspaper articles, identified by a colored dot and assigned label

The next passage of interpretation lies in the evaluation of the second plot (Figure 3): it displays words and articles in the latent space of the CA, whereby their position signifies their mutual relation. In simpler terms, we can argue that the more an article is close to a word, the more the word is related to the article and can be representative of its narrative. As shown, the actors are represented by a black cross sided by their respective names, while words as strictly defined are displayed in green. Moreover, the dots identifying newspaper articles are increased in transparency to render overlapping elements more visible. In this regard, it is useful to understand if a precise rationale underlying the positioning of words within the three directives can be detected. This passage is functional to the analysis which would be performed in the following section, namely understanding the narratives associated with each newspaper in light of the correspondence between words and articles. Specifically, a pattern among words can be approximately discerned, even if some exceptions are noticeable:

- The tail of the inverted Y (Figure 4), positioned in the left side of the plot, gathers words which mainly pertain to a relational-integrative framework. This term refers to words that link French national identity and the "Other" in terms of integration and antagonism. On the one hand, French identity is defined by foundational principles and symbols (*appartenance*, *culture*, *drapeau*, *école*, *égalité*, *esprit*, *fierté*, *fraternité*, *identité*, *liberté*, *patrie*, *républicain, tradition*, *tricolore*). On the other hand, the relational nature is expressed in terms of attributes of the "Other", its impact and reception in French society (*assimilation*, *communautarisme*, *compatible*, *différence*, *ensemble*, *équilibre*, *métissage*, *minorité*, *racisme*, *stigmatisation*, *tolérance*). Specifically, the negative values of the lower quadrant are monopolized by words correlated to Muslim believers (*burqa*, *islam*, *mosquée*, *musulman*, *religion*, *voile*). Overall, these terms are mainly related to the topics discussed via Besson's debate on national identity, whose name is displayed in the quadrant.
- The left stem of the inverted Y (Figure 5), located in the upper right quadrant, can be framed within political-identitarian rhetoric. It encompasses references and arguments which have been mobilized by Sarkozy, Royal, and Bayrou in their presidential competition. Indeed, candidates and their associated parties (UMP, PS, UDF) are included in the quadrant. Words such as *aimer*, *banlieue*, *délinquance*, *démocratie*, *immigration identité*, *promettre*, *rupture*, *sécurité*, *vague*, *violence* relate to an emotional and defensive register, utilized by Sarkozy in his speeches to qualify the correlation between national identity and immigration and the consequences exerted on French society.

- The right stem of the inverted Y (Figure 5), placed in the lower right quadrant, displays predominantly a procedural-migratory framework, namely the practices and issues related to the process of migration and insertion within French society (*accueil*, *aide*, *clandestine*, *citoyenneté*, *contrôle*, *droit asile*, *éducation*, *emploi*, *frontière*, *nationalité*, *pacte*, *régularisation*, *titre*). This domain recalls the subjects of migration policy enforced by Hortefeux in terms of the Reception and Integration Contract. Compared to the first directive which has been analyzed, focused on terms of identitarian integration, the lexical choice in this quadrant deals mainly with legal categories of action.
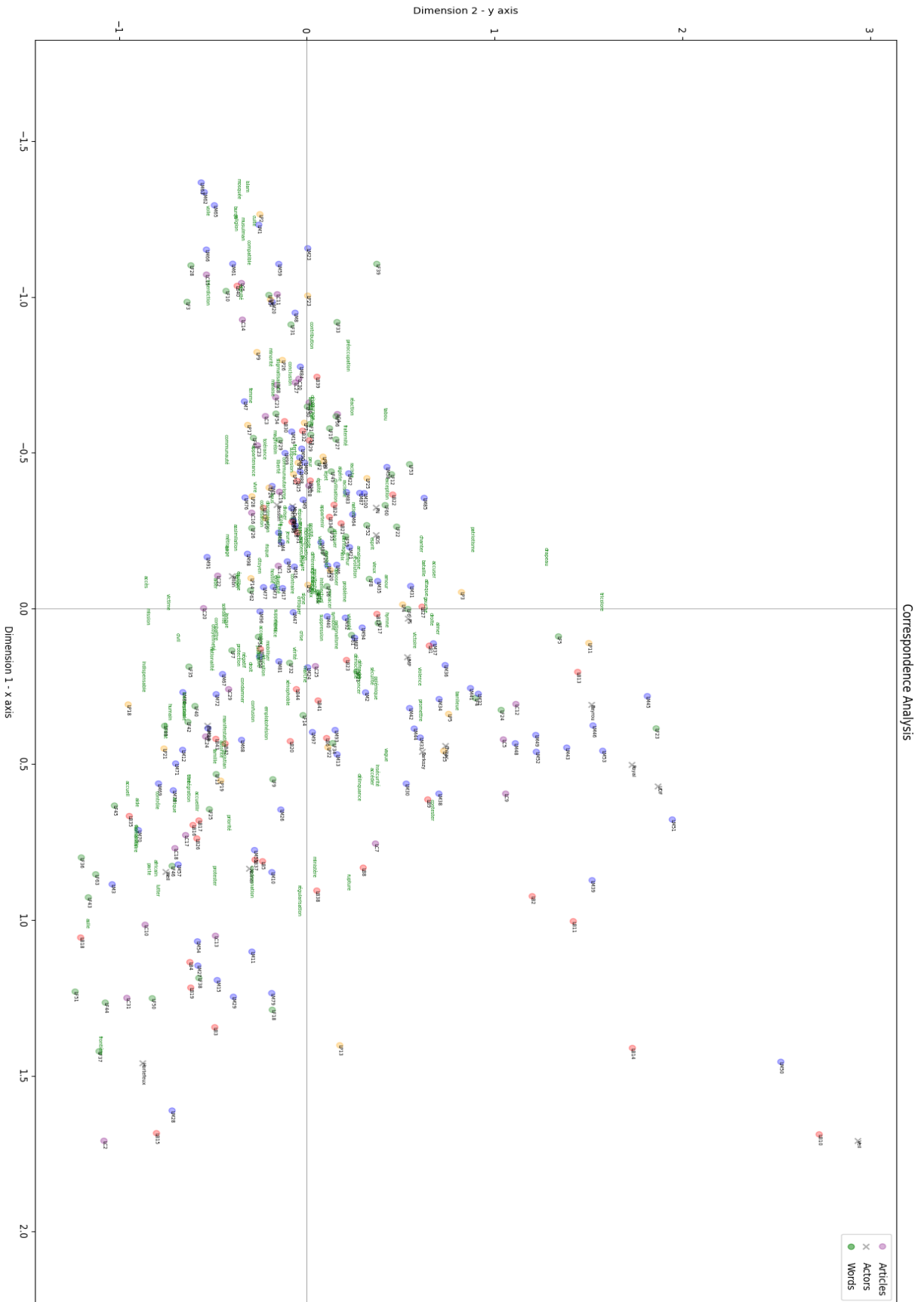
Figure 3: Correspondence Analysis plot, displaying the distribution of newspaper articles and words. Actors are identified by a black cross and relative name, while words as strictly defined are displayed in green
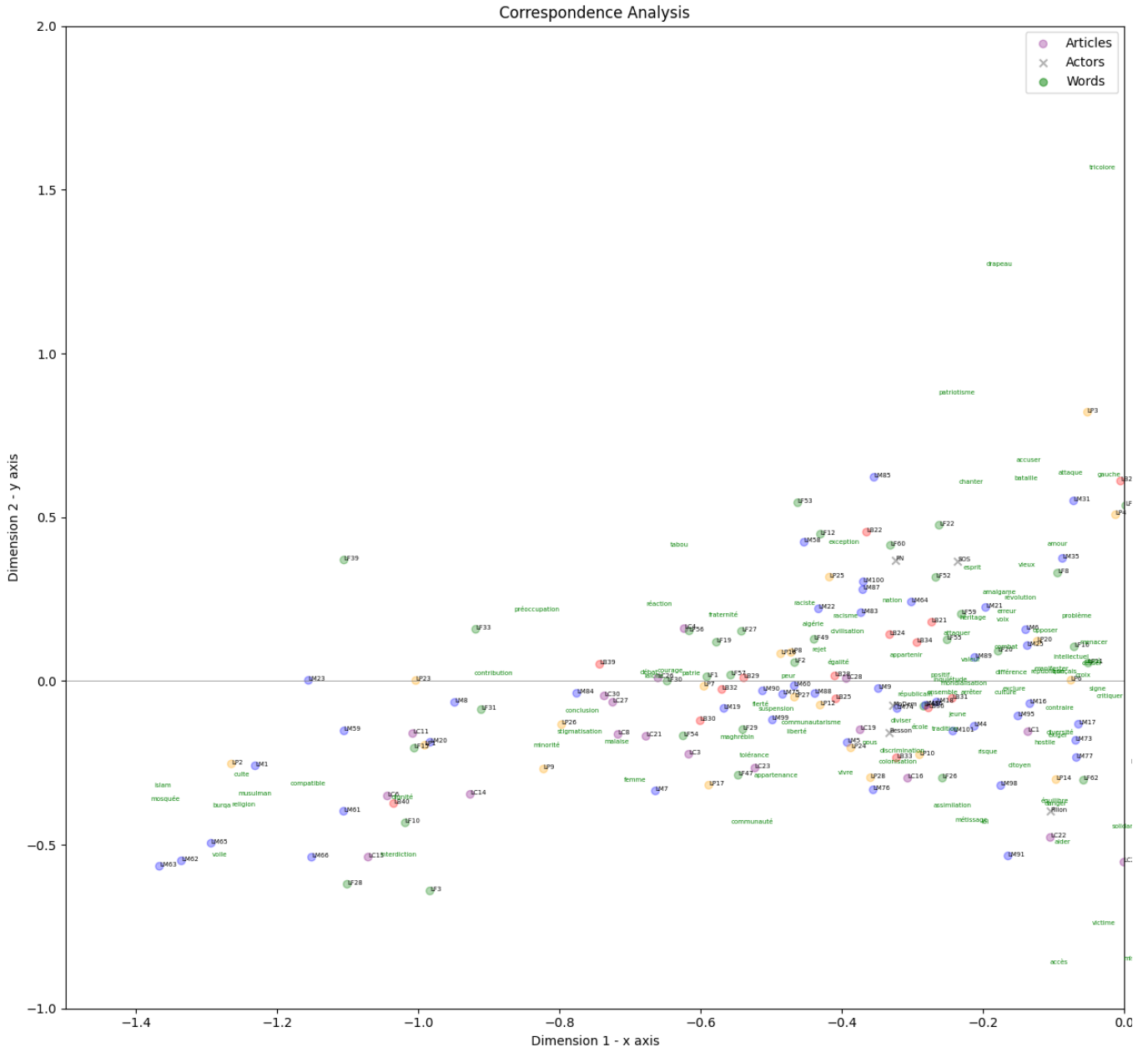
Figure 4: Zoomed-in left side of the Correspondence Analysis plot, displaying the distribution of newspaper articles and words
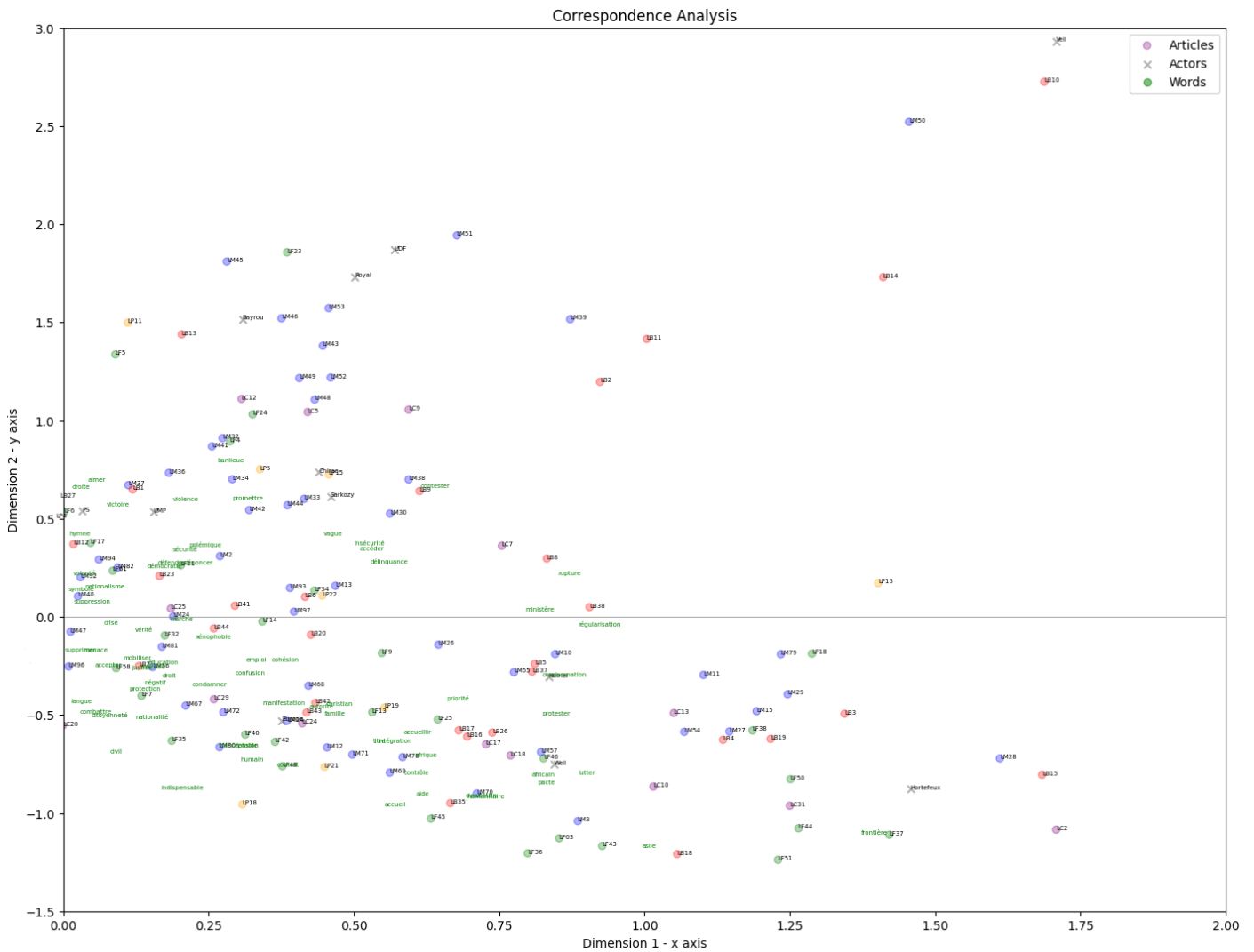
Figure 5: Zoomed-in right side of the Correspondence Analysis plot, displaying the distribution of newspaper articles and words

The visual examination of these two plots, namely the single distribution of newspaper articles and the addition of words in it, has served as a propaedeutic step to understand the general contours within which newspapers' narratives are located. In this respect, a more accurate analysis would now be performed: the aim is to assess precisely the stances of the 5 newspapers towards the securitization of national identity enforced through the Ministry. Newspapers would be analyzed singularly through a contextual interpretation of the 15 nearest words to each of them, calculated on the basis of their distance from newspapers' centroids and displayed in relative tables. The articles would be referred to by the labels exposed in this section and they would be reported in full citation in the Section "Appendix". Newspapers' narratives would be inferred considering the predominant meaning adopted by the nearest words in the articles from which they have been extracted and synthesized in concise labels.

***Libération* (LB): an enlightened de-securitization**

As shown in Table 1, the top 15 nearest words to *Libération* suggest an overall representation which draws attention to the Ministry (*français ministère*, *Besson ministère*) by utilizing lexical choices that tend towards oppositional stances, motions of action and urgency (*marche*, *immigration problème*, *dénoncer*, *défendre*, *crise*). Moreover, there is no precise reference to the content and substantialization of French national identity. This trait appears congruent with the main concentration of its articles in the right quadrants of the CA plot: although it reports bigrams on French identity, they are mainly related along with other terms to the political-identitarian nature of the upper right quadrant. However, words must undergo further examination to understand their sense and positioning in the general narrative.

Undertaking the contextual analysis of the displayed words, we can assume that *Libération* engages principally in an implicitly de-securitizing approach. This means that it is critical towards the foundation and working of the Ministry, but does not reveal it in explicit terms, namely using words such as *suppression*, *supprimer*, and *suppression ministère*. Instead, it conveys what can be regarded as an appeal or recommendation to the abolition of the Ministry, by reporting the opinions and deeds of dissenting actors or directly exhibiting those poses. More specifically, we can argue that *Libération* refutes the condemnation by French government of immigration as a threat towards national identity. Consequently, it engages in a pervasive denunciation (*dénoncer*, LB4, LB9, LB13, LB19, LB21, LB24) of its measures. It overthrows the rationale of the identitarian crisis envisaged by Sarkozy, identifying in his discourses the inauguration of a deeper and multidimensional crisis at the national level (*crise*, LB4, LB17, LB23). This severe plight in French political system, undermining social cohesion, republican principles, and the correct functioning of democratic society, is attributed to different factors. On the one hand, the definition of immigration as an issue of security (*immigration problème*), encapsulated in the rationale of the Ministry, is presented as an erroneous and vacuous political expediency (LB6). It joins under the same ministerial entity two fields, namely immigration and national identity, which are sufficiently independent per se and have always been managed separately: thus, their unification represents a "*confusion*" and "*régression historique*" (LB16; Didelon, 2007). Moreover, it betrays the universalist principles of *égalité* and *fraternité* accentuating the detection of differences within French society: the rules on integration implemented by Minister Hortefeux contribute to crystallize a dualism between French citizens and other individuals (immigrants or foreigners), whose differences could only be erased through their solemn self-immolation (LB43). Thus, the equivalence

between *immigration* and *problème* is mirrored in the one between *français* and *intégration:* an individual of immigrant status or origin stops representing an existential danger and achieves the pacific status of French person only when he/she accomplishes full integration. In this way, the Ministry is accused of a perpetual stigmatization of the "Other", echoing a latent colonialism which is still embedded in the mindset of governmental actors and consolidates its xenophobia (*xénophobie*) (Valluy, 2008), portraying immigrants as "potential risks or menaces to the integrity of national identity" (LB5; Coroller, 2007) and inextricably attached to societal delinquency (*délinquance*, LB7, LB25, LB38):

> L'annonce et la promesse fracassante de sa création ne sont pas séparables d'une stratégie électorale qui aura consisté depuis le début à focaliser sinon détourner l'attention d'une partie de l'électorat sur ce que le sociologue Zygmunt Baumann appelle des «cibles de substitution», dans un étrange amalgame qui mêle, depuis toujours, immigration et délinquance.[23] (LB7; Crépon, 2007).

More generally, the Ministry is considered as the emblem of an intrinsic decline of democracy (*démocratie*), due to the manipulation of channels of democratic participation and the renaissance of conservative-hereditary features of national belonging (LB7, LB23). For instance, the debate on national identity initiated by Besson mystifies under its democratic appearance instances of hatred, discrimination, and racism among the population, fragmenting the unity of society and the democratic promotion of pluralism (LB39, LB44). In tougher terms, this is the symptom of a more comprehensive crisis affecting the whole political system, initiated since Sarkozy permeated French institutions with a closed, exclusivist, and essentially "Barresian" nationalism (LB24):

> Aux bricolages électoralistes, populistes et déjà xénophobes de cet ancien ministre [Pasqua], a succédé un véritable dispositif politique, juridique, administratif et policier conçu pour traquer et expulser ceux qui sont désignés comme de nouveaux ennemis

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[23] "The announcement and the promise of its creation cannot be separated from an electoral strategy which will consist since its beginning in focusing, if not diverting, the attention of a part of the electorate on what sociologist Zygmunt Baumann calls "substitutive targets" in a strange amalgam which has always mixed immigration and delinquency." [Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.liberation.fr/france-archive/2007/11/08/la-peur-raison-d-etre-du-ministere-de-brice-hortefeux_105678/

intérieurs jugés responsables de nombreux maux sécuritaires et sociaux qu'il faut conjurer au plus vite pour sauver la France des périls supposés menacer sa cohésion, sa tranquillité et son identité.[24] (LB42; Le Cour Grandmaison & Valluy, 2010).

This opposition towards the Ministry concretizes in emblematic marches (*marche*, LB41) representing a wake-up call to public opinion and political officials, collective initiatives perpetuated by intellectuals from bodies set up by the government, such as the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration* (CNHI) (LB4, LB5, LB6, LB23) in order to express their departure from any unity of intentions and philosophy with the dominant political class. Moreover, it is shown by complaints by non-governmental organizations (*Réseau Éducation sans frontières*, LB19) and presidential competitors, such as the "*ignoble amalgame*" claimed by Ségolène Royal (LB9; Reuters, 2009) and the "*obsession nationaliste*" by François Bayrou (LB13; Liberation.fr, 2007). The solutions advocated by this pole of dissent consist in the repression of the measures of the Ministry, the disengagement between immigration and national identity, and partly, the responsible communication of the true essence of national identity by the left side of the political spectrum (*vérité*, LB22). These measures are believed to guarantee the defense of French national identity and its grounding values from their real threats, which are identified in the distorting arguments perpetuated by Sarkozy (*défendre*, LB12). This atmosphere of activism, mainly coming from the civil society, can be assimilated for its manifestations and fervour to the protests of May 1968.

Overall, we can conclude that *Libération* engages in the de-securitization of the Ministry of National Identity by exhibiting an enlightened stance of resistance and opposition to it. It seems that it is striving to insert into the political competition. This strategy unfolds in the following way: it reveals to the audience the truth hiding behind this emergency management of immigration and national identity, namely its detrimental effects to the security and functioning of a democratic social and political system. Consequently, it identifies a different crisis, which detaches itself from the identitarian one claimed by Sarkozy. This crisis is the very consequential outcome of his political terrorism, and encompasses a larger spectrum

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[24] "The electoral, populist and already xenophobic tinkering of this former minister [Pasqua] has been succeeded by a veritable political, legal, administrative and police system designed to track down and expel those designated as new internal enemies deemed responsible for numerous security and social ills that must be averted as quickly as possible to save France from the perils supposedly threatening its cohesion, its tranquility and its identity." [Translation]

Retrieved from: https://www.liberation.fr/societe/2010/11/30/la-fin-en-trompe-l-oeil-de-l-identite-nationale_697171/

of problems, such as institutional stability, social and economic justice. To settle it, a solution is envisaged in the proper abolition of the Ministry and the return to the management of issues of immigration and national identity in ordinary practices entitled to different political bodies.

Table 1: On the left side, the 15 nearest words associated to *Libération*, on the right side their relative distance from the newspaper centroid

| Word | Distance |
|---|---|
| français ministère | 0.078387 |
| marche | 0.175566 |
| xénophobie | 0.210768 |
| français intégration | 0.219334 |
| Besson ministère | 0.221802 |
| dénoncer | 0.231843 |
| immigration problème | 0.253525 |
| vérité | 0.256569 |
| démocratie | 0.260124 |
| défendre | 0.261458 |
| identité immigration | 0.267665 |
| délinquance | 0.278659 |
| identité intégration | 0.282874 |
| crise | 0.286112 |
| UMP Besson | 0.289707 |

### *La Croix* (LC): a pluralistic-oriented de-securitization

The significance of the findings related to *La Croix* (LC) can be explored under two main perspectives: the different strategy of de-securitization employed in comparison to *Libération*, and the deployment of nearly the same words as *Le Figaro* but filtered through a substantially different lens. The words displayed in Table 2 sketch out an imperative and straightforward register, which can be considered at first glance as ambiguous. Indeed, it is unclear whether it promotes or distrusts the securitization process (*menace identité*, *contraire*, *accepter*, *critiquer*, *supprimer*). Nevertheless, the analysis of the positioning of words in the articles permits us to argue that *La Croix* engages in a strategy of de-securitization by emphasizing the contribution of diversity to the evolution of French national identity. Thus, it detaches from *Libération* insofar as it provides insights on the nature, components, and fabrication of French identity. In this regard, despite the dispersed distribution throughout the CA plot, *La Croix* tends to be majorly related to words displaying a register of relational-integrative nature, occupying the left side of the identity line.

The main ratio underlying the articles can be roughly defined as dissent with the Ministry of National Identity. This opposition does not question primarily the nexus established between immigration and identity but is focused on the concrete measures implemented in relation to societal diversity. This viewpoint is conveyed by multiple actors (French emigrated citizens, representative members of the Catholic Church, young immigrants residing in France, and politicians affiliated to religious creeds), which are united by a shared feature: they all represent an intimate individual approach to cultural, religious, and social diversity. On the one hand, the first significant evidence suggesting de-securitization is enclosed in the nearest word to the newspaper, namely *supprimer*. Since it is not directly present in its articles, it is placed in this position considering the measurement of the distance between the whole corpus of words and the newspaper's centroid. The same condition regards the word *exiger*. Hence, their ultimate sense can be interpreted only when put in relation to the set of remaining words.

The narrative advanced seems not to exclude the existence of an identitarian issue, or, at least, it does not specifically mention it. Rather, it questions the mode through which politicians deal with it. As reported, the protection and flourishing of national identity should not pass through the dissemination of fear and aversion, as it is done by the governmental securitarian logic by portraying identity as a threatened target (*menace identité*). Rather, it should undergo a profound reflection on the effects brought by individual diversity to national identity (*diversité*), namely the way in which diversity clashes and aggregates continuously to

form and modify it (LC13, LC16): "Mais pour discuter de ce qui nous rassemble, faut-il commencer par parler de nos peurs? Peut-être serait-il préférable d'explorer comment notre communauté nationale s'est précisément construite de métissages successifs, de rencontres certes toujours compliquées mais au final créatrices" (LC16; Ernenwein, 2009).[25]

Multiple contributions frame diversity in favorable terms, namely an element to be encouraged and that makes up the strength and uniqueness of national identity. As a case in point, members of the clergy praise the "extraordinary diversity" of urban neighborhoods (LC14; Tosseri, 2009) and engage in pacific debates with political officials to investigate how it can coexist with traditional republicanism (LC18). Nevertheless, this peaceful and fraternal vocation remains a hope to be cultivated. Indeed, it is contradicted by a rooted sense of suspicion by a part of French society, which appears recalcitrant to accept the settling of diversity in the national territory (*accepter*, LC6, LC19). This scarce tolerance towards foreigners is bolstered by governmental measures and is subjected to an equivalent unacceptance by political and civil actors (*critique*, *hostile*). For instance, critiques to Besson's debate on national identity are mentioned from members of the UMP, the PS, the MoDem, the larger political family of the Left, and advocates for migrants' rights (LC8, LC14, LC24, LC25). The same treatment concerns the harsher regime of interventions in detention centers following Hortefeux policies (LC29). Instances of criticism are also implicitly conveyed through the comparison with the way European, and more broadly, Occidental countries cope with pluralism. Two domains show a larger extent of permission embraced by countries such as Germany, UK, US, and Belgium *vis-à-vis* the tighter restrictions characterizing France. On the one hand, the wearing of the veil in public spaces reveal an imbalance of attitudes between France, Germany, and UK, with the former displaying a greater aversion in surveys and minor attachment to minority rights (*contraire*, *signe*, LC15). On the other hand, the insertion of France in the EU integration trembles when faced with linguistic pluralism (LC1), insofar as it imposes the knowledge of French language as a precondition for the settlement of immigrants (LC25) (*langue français*). In this respect, the general narrative condemns the securitarian approach coming from the government, because it aims at protecting French identity from risks of break-up, but ultimately injects them in the national system (*risques*, LC5, LC4). In this way,

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[25] "But to discuss what brings us together, should we start by talking about our fears? Perhaps it would be better to explore how our national community was precisely built from successive intersections, intersections that are always complex but ultimately creative."
[Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.la-croix.com:Editos:Ce-qui-nous-rassemble-_NG_-2009-10-26-567887

the Ministry is presented as having introduced a "downward loop" of progressive threats spanning from Hortefeux to Besson's administrations (LC16; Ernenwein, 2009). The main solution to this reality, thus, seems to be envisaged in the reappropriation by French nationals of their status of citizens and their reciprocal solidarity to repristinate a pacific coexistence between diverse faiths, cultures, and lifestyles (*citoyen*, LC13, LC16).

Synthesizing these remarks, we can claim that *La Croix* advocates for the resolution of the issues concerning national identity not through the emergency terms proposed by the Ministry but returning to resorting to an ordinary practice. This should consist in the recognition, promotion, and stimulation of the advantages of cultural pluralism embedded in French society, which would allow an efficient intra and inter-community dialogue to solve the most diriment matters. In these terms, this solution recalls the strategy embraced by the PS in the 1980s, when it underlined the benefits of recognizing a "droit à la difference" (Giordan, 1982, p. 16), accommodating diversity and reconducting it to national unity.

Table 2: On the left side, the 15 nearest words associated to *La Croix*, on the right side their relative distance from the newspaper centroid

| Word | Distance |
|---|---|
| supprimer | 0.044042 |
| exiger | 0.071701 |
| menace | 0.074815 |
| diversité | 0.076259 |
| hostile | 0.089083 |
| accepter | 0.112731 |
| Sarkozy Fillon | 0.121667 |
| contraire | 0.126931 |
| langue français | 0.135572 |
| menace identité | 0.135917 |
| critiquer | 0.138317 |
| mobiliser | 0.143337 |
| citoyen | 0.144778 |
| signe | 0.162420 |
| risque | 0.172197 |

***Le Figaro* (LF): the alignment with the governmental securitization**

As stated in the previous paragraph, the majority of words associated with *La Croix* are reproduced in the corpus attached to *Le Figaro* (Table 3). Notwithstanding this analogy, in this newspaper they assume a precisely different understanding, evading any ambiguity in their prevailing use. Indeed, the narrative extracted from *Le Figaro* displays a significant alignment with the securitization provided by the government through the entity of the Ministry. This assumption is justified in light of the predominant reference to discourses and opinions of governmental actors, such as Sarkozy, Besson, Hortefeux, Fillon, and of individuals defined by Noiriel (2007, pp. 127-130) as governmental-colluder intellectuals, namely Alain Finkielkraut and Max Gallo.

The most glaring proof of the mediatic closeness to securitization is exemplified by the firm acknowledgement of the crisis of French national identity, with the word "*crise*" being present in at least 10 articles. While *Libération* interprets this identitarian crisis as the cause and constitutive part of a more severe democratic and institutional plight, *Le Figaro* shows a different conception. Reporting the views of Sarkozy (LF6) and Max Gallo (LF16), it refers to a long-standing crisis of national identity in which different and smaller-scale ones are united. It goes on by defining an array of multiple causes to this situation (*menace*, *menace identité*). First, it urges to fight the spread of uncivilized practices, echoing Sarkozy's arguments: "Les revendications communauta-ristes sont en plein essor. À l'école, à l'hôpital, la mixité homme-femme est remise en cause. La polygamie touche 200 000 personnes, 70 000 jeunes filles sont menacées de mariage forcé" (LF7 ; Le Figaro, 2007).[26] Furthermore, it cites threats spanning from the erosion of the esteem of national ancestors caused by the remorse of descendants (LF20), to the effects of globalization on the degradation of national attachment for the sake of supra-nationalism (LF54, LF57). Its perpetuators are found in domestic politicians advocating for loosening national ties (LF20), and in historians and intellectuals who convey a one-dimensional interpretation of immigration, namely the beneficial one. Turning to migration as strictly defined, this narrative denounces the laxism of EU and extra-EU states, such as Turkey, in halting irregular movements and undermining the optimal functioning of the Schengen Area (LF26, LF43), which, in turn, should mandate a behavior of inflexible demand (*exiger*). Despite this multiplicity of threats, the primary target of *Le Figaro*'s invectives, whether silent or not,

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[26] "Communitarian claims are on the rise. In schools and hospitals, men and women mixture is being called into question. Polygamy concerns 200.000 individuals, 70.000 young girls are at threat of forced marriage." [Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.lefigaro.fr/debats/2007/03/21/01005-20070321ARTFIG90198-1_immigration_et_1_identite_nationale_deux_questions_inseparables.php

is represented by Muslim communities. Several articles refer to the adversity to French republicanism attributed to the radical expression of their faith, such as public religious practices and apparel (*contraire*, *hostile*, *signe*, LF10, LF15, LF26, LF30, LF49, LF54). These symbols, such as *burqa*, are deemed unacceptable by French politicians for public security reasons (LF10) and universal guarantee of human rights, especially women's ones (LF17), and can be tolerated in their softer expression only through the *a priori* acceptance of republican values by Muslim communities (LF4). In this way, these words reveal no praise of cultural diversity as shown in *La Croix* (*diversité*). Instead, diversity is here related to an internal mechanism to French society which contributes to changing its identity and which, overall, is interpreted in a negative and conservative-defensive way, as reported by the majority of respondents to Besson's debate (LF2, LF19). Overall, this reasoning resembles the one expressed by Sarkozy in his public speeches in relation to the identitarian crisis, as displayed in the second chapter.

On the other hand, a discordant note in this account seems to be played by the word *supprimer*, the second nearest word to the newspaper. Indeed, it can be interpreted as catalyzing the audience's attention on lobbying for the abolition of the Ministry. On the contrary, the word is here utilized to highlight the nationalist-conservative aspects of French policies to protect French national identity, namely the suppression of the regime of *ius soli* (LF2), and the survival of the Ministry's line of action after its formal abolition (LF34). Ultimately, to legitimize this narrative, the gambit of truthfulness is utilized (*vérité*). The issues raised by the identitarian crisis and charged on the government are smothered by honoring the dignity of French citizens. On the one hand, the political turmoil engendered by the identitarian crisis has permitted them to reach an ultimate truth: the discovery or re-discovery of a genuine love for the French nation (LF19). On the other hand, the argument of truth is utilized to reflect on the costs associated with the efficient operations ordered by the Ministry against clandestine immigration (LF62). These considerations highlight the beneficial actions of the Ministry, which are further accentuated by the pragmatic mobilization of prefects and politicians by Besson and Hortefeux (*mobiliser*, LF27, LF63), and in the continuous fight against internal and external enemies to their projects, including also the members of the UMP (*UMP Besson*, LF33, LF55).

All things considered, we can argue that *Le Figaro* displays support, or at best similarity, with the securitizing approach engaged by Sarkozy and the governmental apparatus to national identity. Maintaining caution in the interpretation of the findings, we do not define this approach as a straightforward and unchallenged propagandization of the governmental line of

action. However, comparing it with the other newspapers, *Le Figaro* presents to a fewer extent instances of criticism towards Sarkozy and the activities of his associates. Together with the absence of explicit claims to de-securitization, its framework cannot but be referred to as comprehensively securitizing. In this respect, it shows continuity with the line of action introduced by Le Pen in French political history, correlating identity and immigration into a bundle of perilous transformations.

Table 3: On the left side, the 15 nearest words associated to *Le Figaro*, on the right side their relative distance from the newspaper centroid

| Word | Distance |
|---|---|
| menace identité | 0.045102 |
| supprimer | 0.060825 |
| menace | 0.066208 |
| critiquer | 0.081960 |
| crise | 0.094682 |
| signe | 0.106667 |
| vérité | 0.117125 |
| UMP Besson | 0.127693 |
| contraire | 0.127964 |
| diversité | 0.132470 |
| exiger | 0.133893 |
| mobiliser | 0.135639 |
| accepter | 0.144947 |
| croix | 0.150551 |
| hostile | 0.161228 |

**Le Monde (LM): re-discovering the true essence of French republicanism**

Compared to the previous interpretations, *Le Monde* stands out for its peculiar positioning in the idealistic spectrum ranging from securitization to de-securitization. More specifically, it totally overturns the idea of a simplistic dualism, representing a *tertium genus* between the two instances. This feature reminds us that the contribution of media to securitizing attempts is not straightforward, is continuously variable and can only be approximately ascribed to a specific dimension.

The comprehensive analysis of the nearest words to *Le Monde* (Table 4) allows us to frame its narrative as a republican-oriented approach. It aims at reminding what French national identity has historically consisted in, namely its authentic republican version and foundational principles. This approach can be interpreted as an attempt to purify it from any distorting narrative, being identified primarily in the securitization embraced by Sarkozy. Indeed, *Le Monde* undertakes a clear opposition to securitization and expresses it in its articles when dealing with three main concepts: *crise*, *menacer*, and *nationalisme*. On the one hand, it fully embraces the concern over the national crisis repeated by governmental actors (*crise*). Nevertheless, it detaches it from its one-dimensional identitarian characterization and unveils its realization in social and economic domains. More precisely, it condemns the crisis of national identity as an electoral strategy utilized by Sarkozy to channel people's apprehension in the voting booths and obfuscate deeper threats to national stability (LM6, LM9, LM18, LM74, LM101). This is clearly synthesized by the following extract:

> La période de trouble est d'autant plus tangible que la classe politique française, depuis trente ans, toutes tendances confondues et pour des raisons électorales, a flatté les sentiments de peur des Français. Cela a été conforté par la crise économique et le chômage, la déshérence d'institutions sociales centrales de la République et des banlieues.[27] (LM86; Minassian, 2009).

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[27] "The period of turmoil is all the more palpable given that French politicians, for the past thirty years, regardless of political orientations and for electoral reasons, have played on the fears of the French people. This has been exacerbated by the economic crisis and unemployment, the decline of key social institutions in the Republic and the suburbs."
[Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2009/11/06/jean-francois-bayart-il-n-y-a-pas-d-identite-francaise_1263548_823448.html

Identitarian issues posed by the coexistence with Muslim communities, such as the clash between clothing practices and public security, the disturbance over *laïcité* and gender *égalité*, are deemed as secondary aspects. The attention catalyzed on them by the government is counterproductive, because it fuels inter-individual hatred and neglects a larger picture of long-standing trembling of institutions, business, and resource distribution, peaking especially after the 2008 financial crisis (LM7, LM74, LM88, LM89, LM92, LM95, LM96). In these terms, this narrative displays a clear opposition to the insights offered by *Le Figaro* and suggests readjusting the order of political priorities, as:

> Les Français sont encore plongés dans la crise, l'identité de la France ne parle pas aux gens. Cela ne fait pas partie de leur priorité. L'agriculteur, l'artisan, le petit entrepreneur, le salarié menacé de fermeture veulent entendre un discours, non pas de protection, mais d'ambition.[28] (LM88; De Montvalon, 2009).

The second term of opposition to securitization is enshrined in the interpretation of the Ministry's logic, which understands immigration as a threat to national identity (*menacer*, *identité immigration*). It is deemed as the construction of a flawed bridge (LM32, LM33), which attacks Muslim believers to divert the attention from true risks, such as degrading educational system and socio-economic injustices (LM58). Shame and discredit are directed to this correlation by an array of actors, comprising PS representatives, CNHI intellectuals, and migrants' associations: they condemn the attribution to the Islamic community of a one-size-fits-all evil imagery by the government (LM17, LM21, LM40, LM52, LM54, LM57, LM62, LM68, LM74, LM75, LM87, LM88, LM98). As stated by the PS member, Pierre Moscovici:

> La façon dont Nicolas Sarkozy a conçu ce débat, la manière dont il est mené par Éric Besson et absorbé par la droite, conduit à cette assimilation : identité nationale contre

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[28] "The French are still in the middle of a crisis, and France's identity does not resonate with people. It is not one of their priorities. Farmers, artisans, small business owners and employees threatened with shutdown want to hear a message not of protection, but of ambition."
[Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2009/12/19/identite-nationale-eric-besson-s-accroche-au-soutien-presidentiel_1283104_823448.html

l'immigration, immigration = islam, islam = ennemi. On est en train de créer un climat

dans le pays très malsain.[29] (LM8; Legrand & Fressoz, 2009).

Accordingly, these arguments are considered as expressions of a "closed nationalism" (*nationalisme*). It is an obscurantist and exclusivist definition of nation, which hides behind the principle of republican universalism, and which has been generally attributed to the right-wing political family (LM4, LM85).

To this degradation of national identity caused by securitization, *Le Monde* finds its panacea: the rehabilitation of a genuine conception of French identity. This is identified in the essence of French Republic, namely the aggregation of individuals within the collective body of "people", supervised by the triad of *égalité*, *liberté*, and *fraternité* (*république français*, LM31, LM34, LM36). This conception equalizes individuals under a mechanism of *do ut des*, whereby they enjoy equal rights at the same cost of complying with duties (LM75, LM96). These considerations reveal a different type of nationalism, named as republican, which ties national belonging not to criteria of descent, but to the respect, reception, and expression of a political and open general will, in both its revolutionary and reactionary desires (*volonté*, LM6, LM18, LM47, LM96). In this way, this nationalism does not impose any discriminative distinction between individuals on the basis of their physical or cultural traits, because they all voluntarily adhere to the general will (LM35, LM86). Indeed, as stated by Royal, French citizens are all "citoyens à égalité de droits et de devoirs, il n'y a pas les Français de souche et les Français de feuillage et de branchage" (*droit français*, LM35; Le Monde et al., 2007).[30] This universalist approach materializes in the practice of integration, provided that it is directed indiscriminately towards all individuals and imply only the political adherence to the republican body, without sacrificing the cultural peculiarity of each individual (*identité intégration*, LM69, LM95). Conversely, these considerations are confuted by the securitization

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[29] "The way Nicolas Sarkozy has framed this debate, the way it has been conducted by Besson and absorbed by the Right, leads to this equation: national identity versus immigration, immigration = Islam, Islam = enemy. A very unhealthy climate is being created in the country."
[Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2009/12/24/pierre-moscovici-une-loi-contre-la-burqa-c-est-de-la-demagogie_1284620_3232.html
[30] "Citizens with equal rights and duties; there are no native French people and French people of foliage and branches."
[Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2007/03/13/segolene-royal-n-abandonne-pas-le-discours-sur-l-identite-nationale-a-nicolas-sarkozy_882284_3224.html

of Sarkozy, who has institutionally dismissed French republicanism through the Ministry of National Identity:

> Si l'immigration doit rester une simple question de police relevant du ministère de l'intérieur, proposer comme le fait Nicolas Sarkozy un ministère de l'immigration et de l'identité nationale, c'est faire de l'immigration un problème politique fondamental, penser la République comme un simple Etat de police, faire le jeu de la xénophobie. C'est donc dénaturer profondément, et quoi qu'on dise, l'identité républicaine.[31] (LM95; Dahomay, 2007).

On the basis of these reflections, we can conclude that *Le Monde* engages in an open critique towards the move of securitization. Nevertheless, this does not permit us to state that it parallelly undertakes de-securitization. This is due to the ambiguous meaning associated by the articles with the word *suppression*, which refers to both unremarkable and significant opposition towards the working of the Ministry (LM26, LM64, LM101). This ambiguity, however, is softened by a consensual condemnation of it as a symbolic more than effective policy, pertaining to the array of symbols exhibited by Sarkozy to prove the success of his battles (*symbole*, LM14, LM27). All things considered, *Le Monde*'s narrative can neither be categorized as securitizing nor de-securitizing. Instead, it represents an approach of anti-securitization, which opposes the Ministry by warning about the respect and restoration of a truly republican identity. This argument was already encouraged by leftist intellectuals of the 1980s-1990s "republican nationalist" thought, striving for recovering a Kantian republic for achieving universalist peace (Kant, 1795, as cited in Doyle, 1986, p. 1157).

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[31] "If immigration has to remain a simple police issue under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, then proposing, as Nicolas Sarkozy has done, a Ministry of Immigration and National Identity, is to make immigration a fundamental political issue, to view the Republic as a mere police state, and to play into the hands of xenophobia. It means therefore to profoundly distort, whatever anyone says, the republican identity."
[Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2007/04/11/renforcer-l-identite-republicaine-par-jacky-dahomay_894475_3224.html

Table 4: On the left side, the 15 nearest words associated to *Le Monde*, on the right side their relative distance from the newspaper centroid

| Word | Distance |
|---|---|
| Besson PS | 0.014820 |
| identité intégration | 0.020170 |
| droit français | 0.035861 |
| suppression | 0.040774 |
| nationalisme | 0.063296 |
| symbole | 0.066198 |
| UMP Besson | 0.079581 |
| identité immigration | 0.089920 |
| Besson ministère | 0.101101 |
| unité | 0.116232 |
| cesser | 0.122043 |
| menacer | 0.122305 |
| crise | 0.126479 |
| volonté | 0.133347 |
| république français | 0.139723 |

***Le Parisien* (LP): an ambiguous description of Besson's debate on national identity**

The findings associated with *Le Parisien* (Table 5) exhibit a significant level of deviation from the previous ones insomuch that it can be considered an outlier in the corpus of newspapers. Its difference lies in the coexistence between repetitive words (*république*) and ambivalent meanings. Although this aspect can be regarded as an obstacle inhibiting a straightforward understanding, the comprehensive examination of the words suggests a more neutral and descriptive approach to the Ministry of National Identity.

The articles from *Le Parisien* deal principally with the debate on national identity proposed by Minister Besson. They define in a roughly balanced way its lights and shadows. The argument of the debate is not accidental: it appears functional to providing a general qualification of French national identity, which ultimately acquires a universal resonance in French society. Due to the predominant investigation of French identity, *Le Parisien* register can be placed mainly within the relational-integrative corpus of words located on the left side of the CA identity line. Accordingly, the core feature of this identity is detected in the republican structure (*identité république*, *république*, *républicain français*). In contrast to dividing symbols, the *République* overcomes the sectarian lines established between the Right and the Left and achieves the consensus of historians and surveyed citizens (LP3, LP12, LP25). Moreover, it enlightens the very meaning of French national identity (LP4), in terms of its history, culture, and values (*français histoire*, *culture*, *valeur*). They are defined as fundamental conditions to access French community, by sincerely internalizing them without nullifying the specific traits that distinguish every individual (LP14, LP17, LP25). This rule applies also to Muslim believers, which can overcome their difference and achieve French nationality properly abiding by it (*différence*, LP2, LP14, LP26). These considerations are synthesized by Besson in the following extract:

> Si cela vous choque que de étrangers deviennent de « bons petits Français », moi je trouve que c'est une excellente nouvelle. Etre des « bons Français », ça ne veut pas dire renier son histoire, ses origines ou sa culture françaises. Moi, je me sens 1000% Français. J'ai du sang libanais par ma mère et je suis farouchement attaché au Maghreb, au Maroc où je suis né et où j'ai vécu mes 17 premières années. Il n'y a pas

d'incompatibilité, c'est simplement une hiérarchie d'appartenance.[32] (LP14; Le Parisien, 2010).

In this respect, Besson's debate is framed as a positive socialization tool, which aims at elucidating and revitalizing the content of French national identity towards all individuals, namely those who already pertain and those who strive to become part of it (*positif*, LP20, LP23, LP26). The virtues of the debate are identified in the compatibility with republican values, and in its nature of device of political progress, clashing and shaking an overall scenario of immobilism (*combat*, LP6). This positive image, however, is not devoid of shortcomings. On the one hand, the articles highlight instances advocating for the suspension of the debate in light of its "extreme" (LP9; Le Parisien, 2009g), "shameful" (LP12; Le Parisien, 2009h) and "uncontrolled" (LP7; Le Parisien, 2009e) dark side, as expressed by French politicians and citizens (*arrêter*, LP26). The debate is criticized for the hypocrisy shown when coping with some topics, namely granting unequal treatment to different faiths: anxiety towards Islam and confidence towards the others (*inquiétude*, LP1). Ultimately, it is charged of nurturing an increasing sense of exclusion and confrontation among French individuals (*exclure*, LP9, LP28), disintegrating the already weakened credibility of republican values (LP2, LP6, LP12).

Given this interpretation and considering that *Le Parisien* counts the smallest number of articles in the corpus (28 articles), we can grasp the following conclusion: its narrative detaches from the previous ones insofar as it does not display any straight stance of securitization or de-securitization. In these terms, it also diverges from *Le Monde*, because it does not even solely oppose Sarkozy's securitization. Thus, its contribution lies in providing a more descriptive approach to the Ministry of National Identity, utilizing the topic of the debate to clarify the nature and challenges of French republican identity.

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[32] "If it shocks you that foreigners become "good French people", I think it is great news. To be a "good French person" does not mean denying your history, origins or culture. I feel 1000% French. I have Lebanese blood on my mother side, and I am profoundly attached to Maghreb, Morocco, where I was born and I lived for the first 17 years of my life. There is no incompatibility; it is simply a hierarchy of belonging."
[Translation]
Retrieved from: https://www.leparisien.fr/politique/nous-devons-cultiver-la-fierte-d-etre-francais-28-09-2010-1085708.php

Table 5: On the left side, the 15 nearest words associated to *Le Parisien*, on the right side their relative distance from the newspaper centroid

| Word | Distance |
|---|---|
| identité république | 0.015412 |
| différence | 0.019556 |
| français histoire | 0.029966 |
| valeur | 0.045955 |
| Besson Sarkozy | 0.046263 |
| exclure | 0.062546 |
| culture | 0.067006 |
| mondialisation | 0.069520 |
| république | 0.069844 |
| arrêter | 0.070799 |
| inquiétude | 0.073028 |
| positif | 0.073224 |
| manifester | 0.074694 |
| républicain français | 0.075459 |
| combat | 0.076594 |

## 3.4 Discussion

The discussion of the results provided in the previous section permits us to understand the virtues and challenges posed by the combination of mixed methodology with this case study of securitization. First, while it has been possible to associate different narratives with newspapers, findings have demonstrated that there is no rigid line between securitization and de-securitization, but nuanced positions must be admitted. This has been exemplified by the distinctiveness of *Le Monde* and *Le Parisien* from the rest of newspapers and by the internal pluralism of de-securitizing views exhibited by *Libération* and *La Croix*. Secondly, the interpretation has succeeded in identifying parallelisms between newspapers and the identitarian perspectives mobilized by political and civil actors during French history, and which have been described in the first chapter. Moreover, the majoritarian position displayed by newspapers has converged towards a de-securitizing or anti-securitizing approach. This result aligns with the opposition to the Ministry exhibited by French social and political system during its existence and may be considered as evidence corroborating and elucidating it abolition in November 2010. Ultimately, the significance of findings is enhanced by confirmation from extant research on French newspapers and national identity (Noiriel, 2007; Holubowicz, 2017), regarding specifically the cases of *Le Figaro* and *Libération*.

These considerations must be counterbalanced by research notices. First, a major caveat regards the dimension of interpretation. Indeed, in the Section 3.1, the 5 newspapers of the dataset have been attached to a specific political inclination. While this feature may have a certain influence over the support or contrast to securitization, this analysis has not aimed to verify any correlation or congruence between political orientation and position of securitization. Hence, it has not assigned predefined categories to its units in the performance of the CA. The objective of this study has been solely to understand how newspapers approach comprehensively in their articles the securitization provided through the Ministry. However, the interpretations provided end up exhibiting noticeable analogies between newspapers' stances towards securitization and political leaning, such as in the case of *Libération* and *Le Figaro*. Moreover, it must be reminded that the dataset of the analysis has been guided by deliberate research choices. It has resulted from specific formulations of queries, though following a balanced approach, which have granted the retrieval of an asymmetrical number of articles from newspapers. Thus, the difference in the extent of articles collected from *Le Monde* (101 articles) and *Le Parisien* (28 articles) must be taken into account as exerting conditionality on the validity of the results.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has played the role of a convergent ground between the historical overview and theoretical perspectives shown in the first and second parts. A data analysis has been performed utilizing a combined methodology to investigate how French press has faced the securitization enforced by Sarkozy through the Ministry of National Identity. The structure of research has been presented in the first section, describing the CA technique, the research sample, and the progressive development of the analysis through graphical representations. Particularly, the sample has consisted in 267 articles drawn from 5 French national newspapers for the period 2007-2010. The second section has explained the logic underlying the choice of weighing the CA method with the qualitative interpretation of results. Afterwards, the interpretation of the findings has been performed by means of plots and tables, inferring from them different views on securitization associated with each newspaper. Ultimately, the final section has been dedicated to pointing out commonalities among the obtained results and considerations over their external validity.

Overall, distinctive narratives have been extracted from the selected newspapers. Although it is possible to cluster them within tendencies to securitization or de-securitization, similar stances still exhibit peculiar characteristics. On the one hand, approaches of de-

securitization have been ascribed to *Libération* and *La Croix,* adopting however different modes of communication. *Libération* has involved into a strategic inversion of the rationale of securitization underlying the Ministry. It has identified in a pole of dissenters, comprising intellectuals, historians, and leftist politicians, a humanitarian mission: revealing to French society the right path to re-establish the common good, namely the well-being of the democratic system. This solution has been envisaged in the abolition of the Ministry and the restoration of ordinary practices dealing separately with immigration and national identity. Accordingly, they would have permitted democracy to bloom and being purified from distortions, to re-equilibrate the political system and free public spaces from anti-democratic racist views. From these considerations, it has been possible to identify a historical parallel in the arguments upheld by intellectuals and youth during May 1968, condemning the crisis of French democratic state. Conversely, *La Croix* has displayed an explicit de-securitization due to the words utilized. Quoted members of clergy and civil society have not condemned mainly the combined ministerial management of immigration and national identity, but the erroneous practices dealing with cultural pluralism. Thus, it has envisaged the renaissance of national identity in the mutual understanding and promotion by citizens of the upsides of their differences. This approach has been considered as echoing the 1980s Socialist multicultural project championed by President Mitterrand. Instead, *Le Figaro* has been granted an antithetical interpretation. It has displayed a certain alignment with the securitization of the Ministry, reporting and backing the arguments advanced by governmental apparatus and colluded intellectuals on the crisis of French national identity. According to the analysis of the nearest words, the same threats to national identity condemned by Sarkozy have been evoked, namely the lack of European collaboration in the Schengen Area, colonial repentance, and Muslim communitarianism. Moreover, the articles have seemed to praise the government for telling the truth to French people on how to protect identitarian integrity from immigration. Overall, this narrative has ended up conveying a securitarian picture, rooted in the emergence of Le Pen's rhetoric at beginning of the 1980s.

Conversely, the two remaining narratives have been considered as occupying a grey space. On the one hand, *Le Monde* has not been specifically assigned to a securitizing or de-securitizing approach. Indeed, it has resembled *Libération* in the condemnation of the Ministry, insofar as it has highlighted the deterioration of French Republic due to the improper connection between immigration and national identity. However, it has not openly engaged in de-securitization. Instead, it has adopted a precisely anti-securitizing approach, by contesting the Ministry but proposing an alternative solution to its abolition. This measure rests on the

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rediscovery of original French republicanism, deemed as being dismissed and falsified by political actors such as Sarkozy. In this way, *Le Monde*'s narrative resembles the claims of leftist republican nationalists, arguing at the end of the 2000s for remedying to the distorted politicization of French republicanism. Ultimately, *Le Parisien* can be considered as the real outlier in the corpus, as it has not displayed neither straightforward securitizing, de-securitizing, or anti-securitizing approaches. Rather, it has seized Besson's debate on national identity to investigate in a balanced way the challenges and virtues produced by it in the relationship between French identity and the perceived "Other".

# Conclusion

This dissertation sought to analyze the interdependence between national identity, political discourses on security, and media communication in French socio-political system, relying on the technique of Correspondence Analysis (CA). More specifically, it has dealt with the Ministry of National Identity created by President Nicolas Sarkozy in May 2007, in light of the context of debate and confrontation it had inaugurated in French public opinion. In this respect, this research has contributed to the extensive literature on French national identity by proposing an innovative lens of analysis, namely the theoretical framework of Critical Security Studies (CSS). The pivotal theory of securitization has been utilized to define how national identity is publicly enforced by authority figures as a matter of existential security, mandating the resort to practices of extraordinary politics.

This study has strived to answer the following question: In the context of the establishment of the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidarity Development, which narratives have been employed by French press in relation to the securitization of French national identity as expressed in digital articles, and can any identifiable pattern of securitization or de-securitization be distinguished?

A progressive line of reasoning has permitted us to dissect the research question by tackling different dimensions. The first chapter has laid down a sociological and historical understanding of French national identity. It has been defined as an artificial entity, founded on the continuous opposition to the "Other" and enforced through devices of public communication. These traits have found different concretizations during the unfolding of French history, spanning from the act of creation of the French Revolution to Sarkozy's presidency. Multiple enemies, differing for social, civil, and political attributes, have been identified during these centuries, mobilized by an increasingly polarized political system which had ultimately crystallized into Left and Right dimensions. In this regard, the predominant right-wing condemnation of immigrants as enemies to French national identity, championed by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1980s, was seized by Sarkozy, whereby he blamed, albeit in more veiled terms, the Muslim community for issues of irregular immigration and communitarianism.

The interplay between French national identity and immigration has been elucidated in the second chapter through the theoretical framework of CSS. Specifically, the concepts of societal security and securitization have been mobilized. The first has permitted to introduce the analytical category of security of national identity, dissecting its objective components. Instead, the theory of securitization has clarified the open-ended process by which national

identity is constructed, imposed, and eventually accepted as a security issue, mandating the adoption of emergency measures. This mechanism relies on the interconnection between practices of different actors, encompassing politicians, institutions, civil society, and media (traditional and social), which contribute to keeping securitization continuously fluctuating by confirming or reconsidering its logic. Thus, the Ministry of National Identity has been interpreted as evidence of securitization, namely an "emergency" measure advanced by Sarkozy in the public speeches preceding his presidential victory to rehabilitate the security of French national identity.

The process of securitization symbolized by the Ministry has been explored in its dynamic evolution in the third chapter. More specifically, the influence exerted by French press on the legitimacy, mission, and effectiveness of the Ministry has been investigated, in order to understand the role of media in securitization. A data analysis based on the combined methodology of quantitative CA and qualitative interpretation has been performed on a sample of 267 articles from 5 French newspapers among the principal national printed ones: *Libération*, *La Croix*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, and *Le Parisien*. The CA technique has permitted us to infer from each newspaper a distinct narrative on the Ministry's securitization, based on the comprehensive meaning adopted in the articles by the 15 nearest words associated with each of them. These stances have been located within a larger spectrum shifting gradually from extreme poles of securitization and de-securitization, with similar approaches showing different shades of intensity. Critical instances towards the Ministry have been identified in the de-securitization engaged by the democratic renaissance of *Libération* and the praise for cultural pluralism by *La Croix*. Moreover, *Le Monde* has exhibited dissent with the Ministry by embracing an approach of anti-securitization which, however, has not overtly advocated for its suppression. On the opposite side, *Le Figaro* has displayed the nearest narrative towards the securitization of the Ministry, echoing Sarkozy's rhetoric. Ultimately, ambiguity has characterized the narrative of *Le Parisien*, which has engaged in a descriptive reflection on French national identity by utilizing the policy of Besson's debate, without endorsing explicit statements.

Overall, these results confirm the significant function exerted by media in modulating the process of securitization. Indeed, the majoritarian stance adopted by the selected newspapers has consisted in opposition to the Ministry, whether advocating for its abolition or solely opposing to it. Without presuming that these findings explain the ultimate abolition of the Ministry, they certainly insert into a line of continuous destabilization and restructuring, amplifying the clashes of identitarian positions spurred by securitization practice. More

generally, these considerations clarify how the nexus between national identity and security resulting from securitization is not simple political rhetoric. It is a device as powerful as perilous, which is capable to endow with existence phenomena whose reality is uncertain, influencing the public opinion and setting new equilibria for the society. This process has not lost attachment in the French contemporary scenario. Indeed, the abolition of the Ministry of National Identity in November 2010 may have signified the failure of Sarkozy's securitizing attempt, but not the general effectiveness of dealing with national identity in security terms. This conception has continued to dominate French political and social spheres, especially when the rise in Jihadist terrorist attacks fueled the anti-globalization and anti-immigration attitudes typically associated with right-wing political personalities, such as Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour.

These results provide fertile ground for the expansion of the present study along different lines. On a methodological side, the CA could be extended to analyzing the stances of private and collective actors included in the dataset, such as intellectuals (Gérard Noiriel, Max Gallo, Patrick Weil), political personalities (Nicolas Sarkozy, Ségolène Royal, François Bayrou), parties (UMP, PS, FN) and supra-national organizations (EU) to understand how they have approached the securitization of the Ministry, as exposed in press articles. A second directive could translate the temporal interval of the analysis to the most contemporary developments of the debate on French national identity, investigating the post-2015 radicalized atmosphere concerning Muslim immigrants. Ultimately, the suitability of CA technique to analyses on securitization could be enhanced by undertaking similar studies to different geopolitical scenarios. The recent redenomination of the US Defense Department into the War Department by President Donald Trump, occurred in September 2025, confirms the effective concretization of securitization attempts into measures of institutional and nominal change, whose development could be worth analyzing in terms of mediatic amplification or opposition.

All things considered, this research has reached an ultimate understanding: in present and past times, French national identity has always been inextricably related to considerations of security. In this regard, politicians and intellectuals have not refrained from defining what French national identity should not be, which enemies should be fought and elements eradicated. The Ministry of National Identity has identified them in anti-republicanism and communitarianism. Nevertheless, it should not be ignored that it is the very presence of the "Other" that determines the existence of French national identity, along with the passage of time, the clash of cultures, and change of habits. In this way, the words by historian Fernand

Braudel appear as veritable as eternal: France is "a residue, an amalgam, additions, mixture, […], a process, a battle against itself, destined to last forever" (1986, p. 16).

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# Appendix

## Newspaper Articles included in the dataset

The present appendix displays a list reporting the complete citation of the 267 newspaper articles included in the dataset, identified by the assigned label.

**La Croix**

LC1: Masson, M.-F., & Peiron, D. (2007, March 15). Comment se construit l'identité nationale. *La Croix*. https://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Comment-se-construit-l-identite-nationale-_NG_-2007-03-15-520666

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LC7: De Royer, S. (2009, May 28). Nicolas Sarkozy et l'UMP réinvestissent le thème de la sécurité. *La Croix*. https://www.la-croix.com:Actualite:France:Nicolas-Sarkozy-et-l-UMP-reinvestissent-le-theme-de-la-securite-_NG_-2009-05-28-599767

LC8: Gorce, B., & De Royer, S. (2010, April 16). Nicolas Sarkozy va clore le débat sur l'identité nationale. *La Croix*. https://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Nicolas-Sarkozy-va-clore-le-debat-sur-l-identite-nationale-_NG_-2010-04-16-602922

LC9: AFP. (2007, March 12). Polémique autour du ministère de l'immigration proposé par Sarkozy. *La Croix*. https://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Polemique-autour-du-ministere-de-l-immigration-propose-par-Sarkozy-_NG_-2007-03-12-597289

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LC11: Maudet, E. (2010, May 2). Sur un marché de banlieue, le refus de l'« islamalgame ». *La Croix*. https://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Sur-un-marche-de-banlieue-le-refus-de-l-islamalgame-_NG_-2010-05-02-603108

LC12: Rouden, C. (2007, May 6). Une nouvelle ère politique s'ouvre pour la France. *La Croix*. https://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Une-nouvelle-ere-politique-s-ouvre-pour-la-France-_NG_-2007-05-06-597754

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LC14: Tosseri, B. (2009, June 18). Vénissieux ne veut pas d'une croisade contre la burqa. *La Croix*. https://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Venissieux-ne-veut-pas-d-une-croisade-contre-la-burqa-_NG_-2009-06-18-599872

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