



The New Knight: The French Far Right's View of the Middle Ages

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Abstract

The far right has always taken an interest in the Middle Ages. For the French revolutionary far right, which shares an ideological matrix influenced by Julius Evola, fascination with the Middle Ages revolves around the image of the Holy Germanic Roman Empire as a political model for Europe opposed to the modern nation-state. The romantic image of the medieval knight also offers a watered-down way to celebrate and legitimize violence without having to allude to a taboo National Socialism. This obsession with the Middle Ages contrasts with the reality that these revolutionary far-right movements were rather pro-Arab during the Cold War decades. This shift reveals the transformation of their thinking and the new dominance of the Identitarian notion of ethnic withdrawal, with the knight as the symbol of a pure racial warrior defending his society against Muslim invasion.

Keywords: Far right, European New Right, Middle Ages, mythology, Julius Evola

The far right has always taken an interest in the Middle Ages. For eighteenth-century counterrevolutionaries such as de Maistre or Bonald, it is the peak moment of Christian society. For nineteenth-century racists, it is the time when the Germanic Barbarians gave renewed impetus to the old, decadent Latin society. During the Second World War, the Vichy regime celebrated Clovis as the founder of France. The Nazis called one of their SS divisions that recruited French citizens for the Eastern Front Charlemagne, despite the fact that the eponymous emperor actually butchered Saxons and was extremely religious. Under the Third Reich, Nazi party conventions were held in the “Imperial city of Nuremberg.” Hitler was sometimes portrayed as a knight, while Himmler was fascinated by the Teutonic Knights.

To this day, this period of history captivates the radical right and is given prominence in the discourse of some of its groups. While radical right militants since the nineteenth century have heavily emphasized the Germanic and Scandinavian worlds in the name of supposed Aryan superiority, they have also maintained a keen interest in the Middle Ages more generally. Referring to this period enables them to elaborate an ontology of humankind and to express their vision of the world, a vision inherited from the anti-modern esotericist readings of Julius Evola (1898-1974) and René Guénon (1886-1951). Some of them also refer to the French Dominique Venner (1935-2013), a dominant figure of the global European Far Right fascinated by neo-fascism, the Middle Ages, and the samurai culture, and who worked to revive racist discourses in their most radical versions.¹

What I propose herein is to investigate discourses of the French revolutionary far right, all of which share a similar ideological matrix influenced by Julius Evola.² In the revolutionary far right I include the neo-rightist, nationalist-revolutionary, identitarian, and so-called “revolutionary-traditionalist” leanings, all of which share similar roots. The revolutionary nationalists were members of GRECE; the neo-rightists and the revolutionary nationalists publish with Pardès, the main revolutionary-traditionalist publishing house. This latter group made up a sizable faction of GRECE in the 1980s and 1990s, and GRECE cadres participated in the birth of the Identitarian movement.

What role does the Middle Ages play in their ideology? What theoretical purpose does it fulfill? My aim is to show that the Middle Ages is a central political myth used to mobilize militants and theorize a conception of the world. Claude Lévi-Strauss stressed that myths are created through borrowings, permutations, inversions, and restructurings from pre-existent myths—in this case, a romantic reinvention of the Middle Ages.³ Syncretism thus appears not as a derived or secondary form of myth, but as its primary and in some sense inevitable form.

Similarly to mythologies, ideologies clash, mix, exchange, and interfere with one another. These points of contact, or mythemes, are what has made it possible to combine classic far-right ideas with esotericist “heterodoxographies” (unconventional discourses)—this, as we will see, is the role that Julius Evola’s thought plays. The militants who see themselves as new knights no longer fight off dragons, but instead what they interpret as a far greater danger: the racial chaos to come. The idea itself is not altogether recent, as it was exploited in the early 1950s by the survivors of National Socialism, such as members of the New European Order (NEO).

Informing this article’s methodology is an empirical analysis of the theoretical output of these circles since the end of the 1970s (in books, articles, internal pamphlets, and so on), though I deliberately leave aside the far-right intellectual output of the traditionalist Catholic and/or monarchist circles. The article focuses primarily on three themes: the figure of the knight, admiration for political symbols related to the Middle Ages, and the idea of a new organic society. The argument thus revolves around three points: Julius Evola’s influence, praise for the image of the Holy

1 Stéphane François and Nicolas Lebourg, “Dominique Venner et le renouvellement du racisme,” *Temps Presents*, May 23, 2013, <https://tempspresents.com/2013/05/23/dominique-venner-renouvellement-racisme-stephane-francois-nicolas-lebourg/>.

2 Stéphane François, *Le Nazisme revisité. L'occultisme contre l'histoire* (Paris: Berg International, 2008); Stéphane François, *La Nouvelle Droite et la “Tradition”* (Milan: Archè, 2011); Stéphane François, *Au-delà des vents du Nord. L'extrême droite française, le Pôle nord et les Indo-Européens* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2014).

3 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962).

Germanic Roman Empire, and the myth of the new knight defending his society against “immigration-colonialization.”

Julius Evola’s Influence

The image of the knight has long appealed to the far right. Traditionalist, monarchist, and counterrevolutionary circles were the first to mobilize it. For them, the knight harked back to a definitively destroyed past and to a hierarchical society ordered by birth.

However, little by little this counterrevolutionary aspect was supplanted by another discourse of a more revolutionary tenor. Indeed, in the 1930s the national socialists reprised the figure of the knight by identifying it with the racial fighter born of the trenches—the new aristocrat.⁴ Upon gaining control of the SS in 1929, Himmler reshaped it as a new knightly order. His reforms were in fact modelled on the Teutonic Knights⁵—an order of knight-monks established to evangelize the peoples of the Baltic—and on the Jesuits. To reinforce this medieval aspect, he had ruins of medieval castles bought and restored. The best known of these “Order Castles” was Wewelsburg, laden with esoteric symbolism.⁶

In Italy, Julius Evola, himself an aristocrat (he was a baron), sought to give prominence to the image of the knight, and especially to the Indian figure of Kshatriya.⁷ He championed the figure of the knight in his classic work on the conflict between the Papacy and the Empire.⁸ Evola is essential for our purposes since he is one of the dominant intellectuals of the post-war European far right. In addition to being a Dadaist artist and an esotericist, he was also a follower of a form of Roman neo-paganism, the so-called Italic religion; his thought developed in reaction to the Catholic aristocracy from which he came, the Christian tradition, and the “modern world.” Politically, Evola’s outlook was antimodern, aristocratic, inegalitarian, and Europeanist: as a reactionary, he was indeed radical.

Similarly to René Guénon, Evola became an essential figure of traditionalism, a form of esotericism that postulates the existence of a “primordial tradition” that is by nature supra-human and transcendent. Nietzsche also influenced him. Though cast out from the Fascist regime, he supported it until the very end, including the Italian Social Republic. After World War II, his books—notably *Orientations* (1950),⁹ in which he defended the idea of a European organic empire—gave rise to a leaning called revolutionary-traditionalist.

Revolutionary-traditionalism can be defined as a commitment both political and spiritual, collective and individual, that aims to accelerate the return to a Golden Age often associated with the Middle Ages. The term “Tradition,” which refers to Guénonian vocabulary, is not synonymous with attachment to the past or with

4 On the mythical aspect, see Jean-Pierre Sironneau, *Sécularisation et religions politiques* (Paris: Mouton, 1982), 293-298.

5 The German House of the Teutonic Knights of St. Mary’s Hospital in Jerusalem was founded in the Holy Land in 1190 to treat pilgrims. It was later transformed into a military order. It gradually abandoned its missions in the Holy Land, confining itself to the Germanic and Slavic world, especially Prussia and Livonia.

6 François, *Le Nazisme revisité*; Stéphane François, *Les Mystères du nazisme. Aux sources d’un fantasme contemporain* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2015).

7 Julius Evola, *Métaphysique de la guerre* [1935] (Milan: Archè, 1980); *La Doctrine aryenne du combat et de la victoire* [1940] (Puiseaux: Pardès, 1987).

8 Julius Evola, *Le Mystère du Graal et l’idée impériale gibeline* [1937] (Paris : Éditions Traditionnelles, 1967).

9 Julius Evola, *Orientations* [1950] (Puiseaux : Pardès, 1988)

reactionary thinking. On the contrary, it alludes to a supposed primordial tradition still present in the West and the “East” (Islam). This revolutionary-traditionalism defends a revolutionary conception of history that is involutive and cyclical and that breaks with evolutionism, scientism, and progressist utopias. It is revolutionary because it proposes a radical rupture in both the collective (rejection of the world stemming from the Enlightenment and return to an organic society) and the ontological (return to the spiritual) spheres.

In 1945, with the war coming to a close, Evola was wounded in Vienna. His lower limbs paralyzed, he, the “warrior,” was forced to enter the path of contemplation. After the war, he published two important political works: *Men Among the Ruins* (1953) and *Ride the Tiger* (1961). Though he was never a party member, Evola was considered as a mentor by the most radical members of the postwar European far right. He refined and radicalized his discourse right up until his death. Evola’s position can be characterized as radical reactionary, an acknowledged far-right outlook¹⁰ whose models are the old orders of knighthood and spiritualist-political movements, in particular the Legion of the Archangel Michael, better known as the Iron Guard.

These medievalist references are also to be found on the postwar revolutionary far right (revolutionary-nationalists, neo-fascists, and neo-Nazis), which likewise drew on forms of extra-European knighthood like the samurais, from their martial art to their code of ethics, bushido. What compels these militants to adopt new intellectual references from the European and extra-European radical right is their political situation and pariah status.¹¹ For these revolutionary, far-right groups, knighthood, the samurais, and the Japanese far-right writer Yukio Mishima (1925-1970), who attempted a putsch in Japan in 1970,¹² are crucial and persistent centers of interest. Dominique Venner saw himself as a “samurai of the West,” to quote the title of his last work.¹³

If the reference to Julius Evola has become so significant for the post-war far right, it is because radical thoughts can be developed without having to cite national socialist authors. Evola made use of themes close to National Socialism (glorification of a European empire, fascination with Aryanism, promotion of so-called spiritual racism, glorification of combat and virility, rejection of capitalism and communism, anti-Semitism, and so on), but the National Socialists considered him a reactionary figure who had to be treated with suspicion.¹⁴

Evola came to enjoy renewed respectability after hippies rediscovered him in the 1970s; it was thanks to them that he became known as an Indianist and a specialist of yoga and sexual magic. Evola also became a classic reference for the U.S. Alt-Right, an informal movement of ethnic-differentialists, white supremacists, and neo-Nazis who make use of the theoretical output of the European revolutionary far-right. Alt-Right activists are particularly interested in two points developed in Evola’s system

10 Alain de Benoist, “Julius Evola, réactionnaire radical et métaphysicien engagé. Analyse critique de la pensée politique de Julius Evola,” *Nouvelle École* 53-54 (2003): 147-169.

11 Pauline Picco, “Des réseaux culturels, éditoriaux et militants transnationaux: Ordine Nuovo and les edizioni Europa (1955-debut des années 1970s),” in *Supports et vecteurs des droites radicales au xx^e siècle (Europe/Amériques)*, ed. Olivier Dard (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), 90-109.

12 Faced with the failure of his attempt, he committed suicide by making himself seppuku, thus imitating until the end the samurai he admired.

13 Dominique Venner, *Un samouraï d’Occident. Le bréviaire des insoumis* (Paris: Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, 2013).

14 Stéphane François, “Evola, l’antisémitisme et l’antimaçonnisme,” *Critica Masonica* 6 (2015): 103-122.

of thought: his anti-egalitarian discourse and his non-Christian, even anti-Christian, traditionalism—even if Evola is now also celebrated by traditionalist Catholic Alt-Right figures such as Breitbart former executive chairman Steve Bannon.¹⁵

Glorifying the Holy Germanic Roman Empire

These far-right militants, Evola included, promote a supposedly traditional view of the Middle Ages, which they regard as the summit of European civilization. In so doing, they project two sorts of fantasies onto it. The first is racial: the Holy Germanic Roman Empire is seen as the embodiment of a white, pure Europe and its knighthood culture. Evola's adept Bernard Marillier (1957-2013), who was a cadre of *Unité Radicale* (Radical Unity), a French nationalist-revolutionary group founded by Christian Bouchet, and an Identitarian militant, proclaims a link between “nobility” and “Nordic race.”¹⁶

Lay texts often describe to us the racial model of the “true knight”: grand, svelte, white-skinned, well-built, with a gracious and even-featured face, wavy blond hair (a symbol of psychic forces emanating from God, of spiritual warmth and royal beauty), in the image of King David, who is always depicted as sandy blond, and above all of Christ, with radiant blond hair similar to the Pagan Uranian gods. Even if this beauty, of Nordic origin, remained an ideal, and served as a symbolic reference, it nonetheless corresponded, at least insofar as knighthood originated from a Nordic-Germanic racial substrate, to an ethnic reality that was conserved in the upper levels of the order of knights (emperors, kings, princes, and barons) and is nowadays attested by some French and European noble families that have resisted degeneration—beauty and nobility being linked.¹⁷

A second point of interest relates to the nature of the political order ideal for Europe. All of them reject the nation-state and instead promote a supranational entity that they call empire and which marries ethnic and cultural diversity (its various “peoples,” or ethno-regionalism) with racial unity (the “white race”). This empire, directly inspired by the Holy Germanic Roman Empire, has to be seen as a counter-model to the modern nation-state. The imperial schema—that is, subjection to a universal, transcendent principle by the mediation of an emperor—is presented in opposition to political modernity as represented by the nation, the universality of which is circumscribed by territorial limits.

Thus conceptualized, the empire aims to exempt politics from history. This model emerged through the combined influence of Nazis, regionalist theorists, European nationalists, and the Guénon-Evola disciples. Evola, for his part, was also wont to present himself as a “Ghibelline,”¹⁸ a Middle Ages defender of the Germanic Roman Empire against the Church. In fact, many far-right militants define themselves as “neo-Ghibellines,” seeing the Empire, like the Church, as a supernatural type of institution that associated imperial sacredness and Germanness. As the French

¹⁵ See Stéphane François, “Qu'est-ce que l'alt-right?” (Paris: Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2017), <https://jean-jaures.org/nos-productions/qu-est-ce-que-l-alt-right>; Benjamin Teitelbaum, *War for Eternity: The Return of Traditionalism and the Rise of the Populist Right* (London: Penguin Books, 2021).

¹⁶ François, *Au-delà des vents du Nord*.

¹⁷ Bernard Marillier, *Chevalerie* (Puisseaux: Pardès, 1998), 36-37.

¹⁸ Julius Evola, *Le Mystère du Graal et l'idée impériale gibeline* [1937] (Paris: Éditions Traditionnelles, 1967).

medievalist scholar Jacques Le Goff (1924-2014) has remarked:

This empire had the significant name of the Holy Germanic Roman Empire. This title indicates, first, the sacred character of the empire; then it reminds us that it is heir to the Roman Empire and that Rome was its capital; and, lastly, it underscores the prominent role that the Germans played in the institution.¹⁹

For theorists working after World War II, including Evola, French ex-SS officer Saint-Loup (pseudonym of Marc Augier, 1908-1990), and the American Francis Parker Yockey (1917-1960), Europe necessarily had to take a stand and reject the two great powers of that time, the United States and the Soviet Union, if it was to find its voice and identity. The myth of a return to the Holy Germanic Roman Empire contributed to the elaboration of this European-nationalist discourse. As a result, some far right militants still defend the idea of a return of the Empire to this day. Some of them have even gone so far as to write up a “Defense of the Holy Empire,”²⁰ only the new Empire is not essentially Germanic but European, or even—for the partisans of Nazi-inspired hyperborean theories—Arctic.

Adopting the imperial model makes it possible to go beyond modern nationalism. The Empire is indeed that which unifies by respecting local particularities. As Alain de Benoist (1943), the central figure of the French New Right, put it, the Empire seeks to associate its different peoples “to a community of destiny, but without reducing them to the identical. It is a whole in which the more autonomous the parts are, the more solidly they are united—and these parts constituting it remain differentiated organic ensembles.”²¹ The French geopolitologist Frédéric Encel (1969) concurs: “The logic of empire, not necessarily an imperialist one, consists for a given power in admitting into its areas of influence or of sovereignty religious communities, ethnicities, or sometimes very diverse peoples, in general, granting to a part or to the totality among them a certain internal autonomy.”²²

The militants defending these ideas are fervent partisans of subsidiarity, now rid of its retrograde image. For, according to Alain de Benoist,

Such a model makes it possible to resolve the problem of regional cultures, of minoritarian ethnicities, and of local autonomies, a problem that does not receive any real solution within the frame of the nation-state. It would also make it possible to reconceive, in relation with all the problems arising from uncontrolled immigration, the problematic of relations between citizenship and nationality. It would make it possible to guard against the threats, dangling over us once more today, of ethnolinguistic irredentism, convulsive nationalizing, and Jacobin racism. Lastly, thanks to the decisive place that it grants the notion of autonomy, it would give ample space to the procedures of direct democracy.²³

19 Jacques Le Goff, *L'Europe est-elle née au Moyen Âge?* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), 61.

20 Rodolphe Badinand, *Requiem pour la Contre-Révolution* (Billère: Alexipharmaque, 2008), 115-124.

21 Alain de Benoist, *L'Empire intérieur* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1995), 131.

22 Frédéric Encel, *Horizons géopolitiques* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), 100.

23 Alain de Benoist, *Critiques. Théoriques* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 2002), 467.

This desire to revive empire is also geopolitical. As the French political scientist Maurice Duverger (1917-2014) reveals:

Stretching from Ireland to the mouth of the Danube and from the North Cape to Malta, grand Europe will, at the start of the twenty-first century, embrace more than thirty nations and more than 500 million men and women. It will thus form the greatest imperial space in the world, lacking only in the institutions enabling it to make decisions efficiently and quickly in a collective fashion. However, neither can it nor would it want to organize itself on the model of the United States, whose fifty federated states do not have the juridical status, the political importance, or the historical tradition of genuine nationhood, which exists only at the level of the federation. None of the countries of the Old World is ready to melt into a super-state that would weaken the diversity of public institutions and economic structures, of political parties and social organizations, of forms of knowledge and beliefs, of cultures and conducts that comprise the wealth of European civilization. Everything is in place for a new model of republican empire.²⁴

For its part, GRECE (Groupe de Recherches et d'Études de la Civilisation Européenne—European Civilization Research and Studies Group), the major identitarian and supranationalist school from which emerged the European New Right and heir to Dominique Venner's ideas, insists that, "On a globalized planet, the future belongs to the grand civilizational unities that can organize into auto-centered spaces and endow themselves with enough power to resist the influence of others."²⁵

Lastly, the imperial model is called upon to combat globalization, which is deemed uniformizing and destructive of identities. New Right militants endorse the idea of a federal Europe because

The nation state, arising from the absolute monarchy and revolutionary Jacobinism, is henceforth too large to tackle the small problems and too small to cope with the big ones. [...] Europe is thus summoned to establish itself on a federal basis, recognizing the autonomy of all its components and organizing cooperation among the regions and nations comprising it. Civilization will be created by the addition, and not by the negation, of its historical cultures, regional as well as national, thus enabling all its inhabitants to take full cognizance of their common wellsprings.²⁶

The federalist Alain de Benoist has thus made himself a champion of the notion of empire, a point on which he concurs with the traditionalists. Indeed, he writes that the empire, in contrast with the nation,

²⁴ Maurice Duverger, "Présentation," in *Les Empires occidentaux de Rome à Berlin*, edited by Jean Tulard (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 4.

²⁵ GRECE, *Manifeste pour une renaissance européenne. À la découverte du GRECE son histoire, ses idées, son organisation* (GRECE: Paris, 2000), 79.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

is not only a territory, but also, and even essentially, a principle or an idea. In it, the political and juridical order is indeed determined, not by merely material factors or by the possession of a vast geographical expanse, but by an idea of a spiritual nature.²⁷

Julius Evola's influence can be seen here: the Italian thinker, too, defended the idea that the concept of *auctoritas*, the full sovereignty of the Roman Emperor, gave the *Imperium* a quasi-mystical dimension.

The positions thus laid out, a question remains: What Middle Ages is being spoken about? It ought to be borne in mind that the texts and objects that have come down to us from the Middle Ages have become obscure to us. Arguably, therefore, the historian's task is to study them by breaking from the frame of the categories of thought inherited from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and nineteenth-century Romanticism.²⁸ This argument is central because it helps us to understand the anti-modern position of the traditionalists, since the barriers erected in the eighteenth century between the notions of "politics," "religion," and "economics" today obscure our understanding of medieval societies, which had the Church as their backbone.

Guénon and Evola idealize the medieval period, particularly insofar as they desire to re-establish a traditional society structured around religion and metaphysics. Specialists have shown that the concept of "Middle Ages" rests in large part on a theoretical simplification of a vast historical period, stretching *grosso modo* from the fourth/fifth centuries to the fifteenth century.²⁹ *A contrario*, René Guénon for his part envisioned a shrunken Middle Ages extending from Charlemagne to the fourteenth century,³⁰ an idea that Evola updated but that leaves a historical void corresponding to the establishment of the barbarian kingdoms during the Merovingian period.

The notion of empire also provides far-right militants of the Cold War period with a coherent geopolitical framework: the European empire would occupy a "neutralist" position, supporting neither the United States—the country of decadence *par excellence*—nor the USSR—the country of triumphant communism. In other words, it provided a model that was neither capitalist nor communist, federating the various European populations around the ideas of a common history and racial unity. It made it possible to argue for Europeanism insofar as it theoretically exceeds nationalism, and thus seems to owe nothing to the New European Order promoted by National Socialism, despite being heavily dependent on it.

The New Knight's Fight Against "Immigration-Colonization"

This theorization of empire goes hand in hand with a reappropriation of the figure of the knight. The far-right militant must be heroic and reject cowardice. He must be prepared to go into combat (indeed, to brawl). As the Identitarian militant (and now a leading member of Rassemblement National) Philippe Vardon (1980) lyrically

²⁷ de Benoist, *L'Empire intérieur*, 117-118.

²⁸ Alain Guerreau, *L'Avenir d'un passé incertain. Quelle histoire du Moyen Âge au XXI^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).

²⁹ Alain Boureau, "Moyen Âge," in *Dictionnaire du Moyen Âge*, edited by Claude Gauvard, Alain de Libera, and Michel Zink (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 950-53.

³⁰ Philippe Faure, "Tradition et histoire selon René Guénon: un regard sur le Moyen Âge," *Politica Hermetica* 16 (2002): 15-39.

puts it: “Each day we learn to fight, and each person learns to like it a little more; the head held high, we will perhaps fall ten times, but each time we will get up again and confront things anew.”³¹ Far-right militants are exhorted to keep up a commitment to fight: “Action is the daily challenge that one lays down to the world, and above all to oneself. Militancy is not experienced by the young Identitarians solely as a political means but also as a way to grow in stature and realize themselves. The primacy of action (in the form of deeds, blows, campaigns), understood as enthusiasm and creative frenzy, is indeed one of the hallmarks of the Identitarian movement.”³²

This conception of action provides the militant with a guiding image. In this vein, the August 2014 summer university seminar of the Bloc Identitaire (Identarian Bloc), a grouping born after the dissolution of Unité Radicale by the French state in 2002,³³ was called “Myth for a New Knighthood: From Excalibur to the Grail.” In *Militants*, a collection of short stories that are in part autobiographical, Philippe Vardon writes of himself as a knight-militant and suggests that militancy is a new form of search for the grail.³⁴

The Identitarian leaders originate from revolutionary-nationalist circles and are committed to creating or mobilizing myths,³⁵ such as those of the knight and Reconquista, to give meaning to their political action. After the terrorist attacks against *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, for example, they launched a poster campaign called “Je suis Charlie Martel” (I am Charlie Martel). This poster brings into play two critical ideas for far-right mythology. First, these right-wing militants consider themselves heirs to Charles Martel, a Frankish military leader who arrested an Arab army in Poitiers in 732.³⁶ Second, they consider Muslim immigration-colonization as hostile to European identity and as needing to be kept in check. This notion is regularly operationalized: the Identitarians had previously mobilized it during the occupation of the Poitiers mosque on October 20, 2012, a symbolic homage to the victory of Charles Martel. In the *Génération identitaire* manifesto, the leaders of the Bloc identitaire present this historical event as follows:

It will soon be 1,300 years since Charles Martel stopped the Arabs in Poitiers after a heroic battle that saved our country from Muslim invasion. That was on October 25, 732. It is now 2012, and the choice is still the same: live free or die. Our generation refuses to see its people and its identity vanish in indifference; we will never be the Indians of Europe. From this symbolic place of our past and our ancestors’ courage, we make a call to remembrance and to arms!³⁷

Philippe Vardon, for his part, provides modern context to his hero as follows:

31 Philippe Vardon-Raybaud, *Éléments pour une contre-culture identitaire* (Nice: Idées, 2011), 146.

32 *Ibid.*, 16.

33 A militant of Unité Radicale, Maxime Brunerie, tried to assassinate President Jacques Chirac during the parade of July 14, 2002. This action resulted in the dissolution of the movement by decree.

34 Philippe Vardon-Raybaud, *Militants* (Nice: Idées, 2014), 16-18.

35 Nicolas Lebourg, *Le Monde vu de la plus extrême droite. Du fascisme au nationalisme-révolutionnaire* (Perpignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 2010).

36 William Blanc and Christophe Naudin, *Charles Martel et la bataille de Poitiers. De l'histoire au mythe identitaire* (Paris: Libertalia, 2015).

37 *Nous sommes la Génération Identitaire* (Nice: Idées, 2012), 21.

A popular joke has it that in 732, he did not stop the Arabs in Poitiers, but only halfway... However, it is precisely by considering the currently disastrous situation in terms of immigration-Islamicization that Charles Martel is perceived truly, beyond his historical figure, as a founding myth.³⁸

The far-right militant/knight is therefore duty-bound to fight against the migratory “invasion,” in the form of a new *Reconquista*: “Against the colonization of Europe today, the *Reconquista* has become a mobilizing myth, whether one sees its meaning more metaphorically or more concretely... Together with the reconquest of our territories, there is another, prior reconquest to undertake: we must again conquer our roots, our identity, and even our souls.”³⁹ Accordingly, the French far right consider the city of Calais and its migrant “jungle” as the symbol and concrete manifestation not only of the current migration crisis, but also of the aforementioned reconquest, and even of the ethnic war to result from the current process of “immigration-colonization.”

For months now, Calais has been the symbol in our country of the veritable invasion that confronts our continent. Recall that in 2015, more than ONE MILLION clandestine immigrants landed on European soil. Attacks against the forces of order, against motorists and truck drivers, riots in the city, total disintegration of the social and economic fabric—this is the daily reality of this martyr city, and it has accelerated most dreadfully over these last weeks. In the famous “jungle” itself, one no longer counts the acts of violence or sexual assaults, including against children (several journalists have paid the penalty for trying). This situation is the fruit of an irresponsible policy for which we can blame the national and European political leaders in Paris, Berlin, and Brussels.⁴⁰

The image of the knight has also been developed by Pierre Vial (1942), a former lecturer in medieval studies at the University of Lyon III and the author of a book on *European Knighthood*.⁴¹ In 2004, he made a similar call in his journal *Terre et peuple*, which shares a name with his political group, known for its violently anti-immigrant positions:

We thus call all Europeans who are concerned to remain as they are to come together, to unite to help one another and thereby to give one another the means to exist. For those Europeans who do not have this reflex of salvation, too bad for them... May they drop dead.⁴²

Chivalry, then, but within limits. Here, the revolutionary far right expresses two main ideas: first, the Other is inassimilable and fundamentally hostile; and, second, it is necessary to defend “our identity” and “our soil.” These revolutionary far-right militants thus view the threshold of the twenty-first century as a sort of new Middle Ages, symbolizing the end of civilization foundering in barbarism, under assault

38 Vardon-Raybaud, *Éléments pour une contre-culture identitaire*, 161.

39 *Ibid.*, 209-10.

40 Anon., *Identitaires* 23 (May-June 2016): 7.

41 Pierre Vial, *La Chevalerie européenne* (Boulogne-Billancourt: DÉFI, 1998).

42 Pierre Vial, “Appel pour un communautarisme européen,” *Terre et peuple* 24 (2004): 3.

from a wave of Arabo-Muslim immigration that amounts to colonization (hence “immigration-colonization”).

Indeed, according to them, the policy of family reunification has allowed for the permanent settlement of a population of foreign origin that is racially different (in contrast with the intra-European immigration of the 1900s-1970s) and therefore culturally inassimilable. The militant/knight, identifying with the Franks of Charles Martel, tasks himself with defending the new Holy Germanic Roman Empire that he so desires in order to prevent the creation of new Muslim enclaves in Europe such as existed in the Middle Ages (medieval Spain, Septimania).

Conclusion

One may draw three major conclusions from this brief overview.

First, the mythologization of the Middle Ages by the revolutionary far right confirms the power that this period of history continues to have in structuring European political mythology, as well as the extent to which historical memory shaped by the early nineteenth century, the Romantic Age *par excellence*, still influences our vision of Europe’s past.

Second, this obsession with the Middle Ages contrasts with the fact that these revolutionary far-right movements were historically rather pro-Arab. During the Cold War decades, they advocated for a form of far-right third-worldism because they positioned themselves as anti-imperialist—imperialism being understood as a project of Jewish/Christian/Anglo-Saxon domination. Once the Cold War world collapsed, the revolutionary far right had to move away from defense of the Arab world—which they had seen as anti-Western, anti-modern, and therefore close to “primordial tradition”—to fear of it. This shift reveals the transformation of their thinking and the new dominance of the Identitarian notion of ethnic withdrawal. They then, paradoxically, accompanied the French decolonization process by focusing on the supposed need to protect European nations from a southern invasion.

Third, the stress on the Middle Ages and the romantic image of a new knight offers a watered-down way to celebrate violence and legitimize it without having to allude to a taboo National Socialism.