

Breton nationalism: Past and Present

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SUMMARY

Brittany, a French region located in the north-east of France, has a very rich history. Around the 5th century, Celts brought their culture and language to what was then known as Armorica. Then, Julius Caesar conquered the territory and “Romanized it” for many centuries. Later, in 1532, France and Brittany started an annexation process, which led to almost losing their Celtic roots and their language.

Nevertheless, in the 19th century, the Breton nationalist movement was born, and it was named Emsav. This movement had three phases. The first Emsav (1898-1914) gave great importance to culture, literature and folklore, but it did not have much power among the citizens. The second Emsav (1919-1945) happened between the First and Second World Wars. It was in this moment when the Breton history twisted. The choices some nationalists took left a stain that would last many years: Bretons were given the opportunity to collaborate with German Nazis. Between their hatred of France and the promises the Germans made to achieve greater autonomy for the region, or even independence, some Breton nationalists did not hesitate to collaborate and took the violent path by creating military-like and armed groups. These actions doomed the nationalists for long and gave France the opportunity to use that fact to condemn both the nationalist movement and their language.

After the Second World War and in such a hostile environment, started the third Emsav, which lasts up to these days. This phase is known for mass cultural movements. After many rough years, the movement became more leftist and started giving greater importance to their culture and language. They also changed the whole movement and started trying to achieve their goals politically. However, the French State did not cease the oppression of their language and their constant will to change things in their region. And some Breton nationalists started to take up arms, mainly blowing up buildings, infrastructures or statues with symbolic meanings until an unfortunate assassination provoked the decay of the armed groups.

Nowadays, the situation and their fights have much changed. Brittany is nowadays asking for a referendum on the reunification of the Loire-Atlantique department, trying to keep their language alive due to its difficult situation where the learning their own regional language is not guaranteed.

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1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The topic we chose for our thesis is the evolution of the Breton nationality through the years, starting after the First World War and ending nowadays. We chose this topic for it is something that is nowadays a topic of discussion in France, because it is different to the nationalisms that we have known up to now, for its proximity and also to broaden our knowledge in the nationality matter. Our main goal is to inform about the current situation in Brittany by analysing its past and present in different fields and to broaden the information there is about this topic in English.

For developing this work, we did a thorough research about Brittany's past and present using different sources, such as: academic papers, published papers, original documents, surveys, political party programmes, news articles, but, mostly, books that offer different perspectives of their history. Every book, paper or article we read was read in its original language. We also tried to contact Breton citizens that are close to this topic, but, despite repeated attempts, they could not help us due to health reasons.

The aim of this work has been to conclude if this concrete nationalism has made the best choices to achieve what they were looking for throughout the years, where these choices have led them and where they stand nowadays, to track political parties from the past and the present, and to analyse the Breton culture. As a secondary objective, we have analysed, within the movement, the Breton sentiment, politics, economy and culture, including language. We believe that we brought to light and in a single work most of the aspects that affect and have affected Breton nationalism.

Finally, we would like to thank Xabier Zabaltza for his guidance and knowledge that have led us to finish this work no matter the ups and downs, and also for his "*Lenguas y nacionalismos*" book, which allowed us to have a deeper view of what nationalism are. We would also like to thank those who dedicated their time to read this.

2. HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Breton nationalists are still remembered for the collaboration with the Nazis between 1933 and 1945. But why did that collaboration happen? Where did it come from? To understand all this, we would have to look back in time and analyse Brittany's history and identity.

One of the strongest aspects that nowadays links Breton to the ancient Celts is their language. Language they acquired when the Celts had most of the European territories. Brittany was Celtic until Julius Caesar conquered and left it “Romanized” for around five centuries, making Latin the main language of the territory. Between the 3rd and 5th centuries, Celts took Armorica (northwest of Gaul) from the Romans and established their language, at that moment, between the 5th and 7th centuries, and started the process of *receltisation*. Newcomers started speaking a mixture between the Breton rooted Celtic language and the Gaulish from Armorica. But not everyone spoke Breton, others spoke what is known as *langue d’oil*, a Roman dialect. So, at the Middle Ages, the Duchy of Brittany was trilingual. Latin was spoken in the church, French or Gallo in the region of Haute-Bretagne, and Breton in Basse-Bretagne. Since the Middle Ages, Breton started losing power because of the French language, this may have been because the main cities of historical Brittany, Rennes and Nantes, were French speaking.

Since this epoch, Bretons have been losing their Celtic roots. As very little was written in Breton and it was not used much in administration, not before, nor after 1532, when Brittany and France were annexed¹, the language went through a freefall. Even though we might think that the most decisive language in national consciousness is the spoken language, it hardly ever has more power than the written one, because what we write stays longer than what we say. Also, with such a powerful language as French so near, and with a high number of Breton people taking part in wars on France’s side, most of the people tended to prefer speaking in French².

Later on, in the 19th century, Breton nationalists used their language as a way to distinguish themselves from other nations (mostly, from France) and as they turned the nationalist movement into a fascist movement, it only made it worse for their language, leaving them with a stain for many years. At that moment, before the First World War, the Breton movement that this thesis is going to analyse was born.

For the French, the only valid language was, and is nowadays, French; and after the First World War, the Wilsonian principle came into force in France, in which the borders of the state had to coincide with the spoken language and nationality³. The rest of the languages that were spoken in the territory were left aside; not only Breton, but it also

¹ Barañano (2019) p. 8

² Calvez (2000) p. 28

³ Calvez (2000) p. 27

happened with the rest of the minoritarian languages too. As a result of this marginalization, interpreters were often used to communicate with the Bretons, mainly at courts, because even though the judges could speak Breton, they were obliged to speak in French⁴.

Between the World Wars, as we can learn in Calvez's *La Radio en langue Bretonne* (2000) a great part of the population spoke Breton, but there were two different types of spoken Breton: daily Breton and "Sunday" Breton. The latter was far from becoming a daily spoken language because it had its own vocabulary and pronunciation. The Breton language also had a negative connotation: it was the language of the peasants, so the new parent generations stopped teaching the language to their kids in the 1940s.

The Emsav movement or the Breton nationalist movement was born from the will to be independent of the newly created nationalist parties and groups with power in Brittany. This so called Emsav socio-political movement had three phases.

3. BRETON NATIONALISM AND EMSAV

3.1. FIRST EMSAV

The first Emsav began in 1898 with the creation of the first Breton regionalist party, *Union Régionaliste Breton* or URB, and went on until 1914, the beginning of the First World War. This phase was purely a cultural, literary, and folkloric movement.

Breton men were called to go to war with the French and those soldiers had to learn French in order to communicate with the others, so this assimilation and adaptation was seen as a tragedy. As a consequence, the Emsav members tried to "create a new Breton citizen" by focusing on their history and coming closer to their Celtic roots.

The movement started promoting the Breton language at the end of the 19th century: In France a new «awareness towards the rest of the languages» was born and Breton started gaining power, even though it was not comparable to that of the French. Besides, Union Régionaliste Bretonne was founded, and with it, began a Breton cultural awakening movement. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 20th century, the French language was linked to high society, so, for that, and for many other reasons that will be explained later, the generation that was born in that century started putting Breton aside.

⁴ Barañano (2019) p. 9

In 1911 the first Breton nationalist party was created: *Parti Nationaliste Breton* in French (PNB). It was created to reject the moderate regionalism that the URB defended and fight for the national rights of Brittany⁵.

3.2. SECOND EMSAV

The second Emsav was political, and it happened between the two wars, from 1919 to 1945: The First World War had been terrible for Brittany: 150,000 Bretons estimated died fighting for France⁶. But this war had other consequences too: even though Breton citizens had been Frenchifying since the annexation to France, that is, to speak more and more French, this tendency intensified, which worried the nationalists. National parties started publishing programs where they claimed the decentralization of Brittany and Breton nationalism started gaining power. Groups of militants of the “national idea” started political campaigns trying to shed light on the rest of the nationalists⁷. Breton nationalists’ speech became racist, pan-Celtic and went against France. Right after the First World War, in 1919, a new organisation who defended pan-Celtism was born: Groupe Régionaliste Breton or *Unvaniez Yaouankiz Vreiz* (GRB/UYV) which would later become *Parti Autonomiste Breton* or *Strollad Emrenerien Vreiz* (PAB/SEV). These groups’ objective was to reach a greater level of autonomy in the region. The most radicals of this movement began a process that Gemie (2012) called “fascification”, in which racism, anti-Semitism and colonialism were praised. In 1919, along with the GRB, Olier Mordrel and Louis Nemo (Roparz Hemon), who would later become powerful collaborationists and part their ways in 1925 due to some disagreements, took important roles in the making of the *Breiz Atao* newspaper. The newspaper would later become the PAB’s organ and later the second PNB’s. This weekly paper started developing its contents closer and closer to fascism and it used to attack France and use its power to encourage violence against it⁸. Hemon would create his own newspaper, *Gwarlan*, in 1925 and it focused on Breton literature, while *Breiz Atao* focused on the political side.

In 1932 a second PNB was created. This party generated controversy during the German Occupation. They took part in the fascification process, collaborated with the Nazis, and

⁵ Cadiou (2006) p. 25

⁶ Cadiou (2006) p. 27

⁷ Calvez (2000) p. 24

⁸ Rubio Caballero (2012) p. 391

would later become representative of the Emsav movement⁹. The party became illegal in 1939, when the Second World War started.

In the year 1930 a paramilitary group was born, founded by Célestin Lainé: the GHD. These initials come from Gwenn Ha Du which mean “black and white” in Breton and refer to the Breton flag¹⁰. The group carried out many terrorist attacks against the symbols of the French Republic. They were organizationally independent. Even though they were linked to the legal branch of the Emsav, both Olier Mordrel and François Debeauvais made it clear that they were aware of GHD’s attacks and that they even stored and provided explosive materials to their clandestine co-religionists¹¹. The attacks were not very constant, but they all had truly clear intentions of the message they wanted to send

The 7th of August 1932 GHD put a bomb behind the statue representing Anne of Brittany kneeling in front of the French King. The statue was near the town hall and commemorated the annexation between Brittany and France. The bomb detonated a day before they celebrated the 400th anniversary of the annexation. GHD claimed responsibility for the attack. Some months later, the 20th of November 1932, GHD blew up the railroad that connected Paris to Brittany before the train that President Edouard Herriot took to visit Nantes to commemorate the annexation passed from there. This attack was followed by many others until the Second World War. They were all symbolic, in defense of Brittany against the French state.

After the Second World War GHD nearly died out and only carried out one attack, the 13th of May 1941. They put a bomb against the Carhaix gendarmerie. They disappeared after this attack.

In times of the German occupation, Lainé was one of the most distinguished personalities of the PNB, and he even ran it in 1944. Both PNB and GHD had similar political interests: They believed in a Breton nation and rejected the French-assimilated citizens; they believed that a conscious elite should take charge of directing the destinies of those who were assimilated and dormant¹². They both encouraged violence and the values of strength and youth. They showed great interest in the brotherhood between Celtic nations.

⁹ Barañano (2019) p. 13

¹⁰ Rubio Caballero (2012) p.392

¹¹ Rubio Caballero (2012) p. 393

¹² Rubio Caballero (2012) p. 394

In the 1930s, even though a great part of the population was not in favour of the attacks, most nationalist groups, even those considered left nationalists, such as the *Ligue Fédéraliste Bretonne* (LFB), showed a sympathetic and even benevolent attitude towards GHD's actions.

The GHD believed too much in the predisposition of the Breton nationalists to try to achieve independence and overvalued their ability to succeed at it. As their actions did not receive any kind of response from the French, their threats were just that, threats. As legal fascist groups started having more power, the GHD reached a point where it did not make much difference. Even more, in spite of the various attacks, France did not pay much attention to the GHD or other minor identitarian movements. It was more concerned about the instability that was going on in the country¹³.

In this second phase, more precisely in 1933, began the collaboration with the German Nazis. Germany had wanted to collaborate with states that could weaken its enemies since 1919, and so Germany promised them they would help them gain autonomy in return for their support. The election of collaborating with Nazis was due to many reasons: there were ideological similarities, but also strategic intentions. Brittany would probably never achieve the autonomy they wished for without such a powerful help as the Nazis.

The collaboration had benefits not only for the Breton, but also for the Nazis. Brittany's location was strategically perfect for the Nazis. It was inside France, a country they wanted to occupy, and it was also pointing to Great Britain, the enemy. The Germans tried to block Great Britain through France. Brittany would also provide them with soldiers, or so the Breton side promised.

Nazis and Breton nationalists had many things in common. Both groups reached their highest level of primordialism during 1939 and 1945. They both relied on their racial origins (Bretons on Celts and Germans on Aryans) to justify their political projects. In relation to their patriotism, they also gave significant importance to the insertion of a lineage. In terms of race, both groups were considered racists and anti-Semitic. Their speeches were impregnated with hate towards people of a different race than theirs and Jews.

¹³ Rubio Caballero (2012) p. 395

But as mentioned before, it was not only for ideological reasons that Breton nationalists decided to take part in this collaboration, there were also strategic reasons, even though they may not seem as clear as those of the Nazis.

The first and most important reason was to obtain an independent or sovereign regime for Brittany. The latter was to be on the Nazi side, this way they would avoid another Franco-German war. Uniting with France to fight against Germany would mean the definite fuse with the Republic of France, and losing the lives of Bretons, as they did in the First World War. In addition, collaborating supposed a liberation politic in which they freed Breton prisoners in exchange of their political affiliation¹⁴.

The collaboration would decay after 1940, when Germans stopped keeping their word, because Nazis were more interested in being on the side of Pétain, who had just become head of state of Vichy France and had more power than the Bretons. The war had started, and the Germans could not keep up with everything they had promised. After the Phoney War¹⁵ (1939-1940) it was made clear that Germany would not help them achieve independence. So, when they turned their backs to the Bretons, the Emsav was left with no support, and they lacked tools to continue with what the Nazis promised by themselves. So even though the Germans were still interested in the Emsav's survival, their help was reduced¹⁶.

With the Second World War around the corner, the Emsav had two options: prudence, or radicalization. They chose the latter one. And they chose it for the belief to be part of a civilization with a glorious past, the rejection of communism, admiration for the Irish, and the will to get more power amongst other reasons. Nevertheless, as we said before, they tended to overvalue their capacities to influence the people; but taking advantage of the collapse of the Third Republic, they obtained results that otherwise, following an ordinary political action, they would never have obtained.

But after everything, as the invaders did not hold up their end of the bargain, their illusions became futile. The moment Bretons served their purpose to the Nazis as a supplementary occupation force to keep France, they turned their back on them and bid on a more conservative, and open to collaboration government¹⁷.

¹⁴ Rubio Caballero (2013) p. 35

¹⁵ An eight-month war after the start of the Second World War

¹⁶ Rubio Caballero (2013) p. 36

¹⁷ Rubio Caballero (2012) p. 396

During this period, in 1940, the *Comité National Breton* (CNB) was funded by Olier Mordrel and François Debeauvais, who would later be given each a death penalty. This group was, in their own words, “*representative body of the Bretons concerned with the greater good and the honour of their people. It will act at the time chosen by it to provide Brittany with a National State, within its natural framework and in the spirit of its tradition, so that it can finally live as an organized nation, free of its aspirations and master of its interests*”.¹⁸ Devaubais became its president. This group used to work in similar ways of the military: they had a Roman salute, aligned with PNB’s actions, they also had a black uniform, white tie and a bracelet that had a triskele¹⁹, and a hymn expressing their ideology explicitly. The youth group the PNB created, called *Sparfelled Breiz*, encouraged their members to stay in good shape and exercise every day. Even though they tried to prepare the Breton youth to fight, training them in isolated lands, abandoned houses or even forests, they ended up never having to involve themselves in a war.

The last paramilitary formation formed by the nationalists was *Bezen Perrot* was founded in 1943 and run by Lainé and it would later join the German army. Even their uniform was similar to that of the SS. They would carry police work against the maquis²⁰. Even when things got ugly, when the ally’s troops were entering from Normandy, and their press was being held, the Emsav continued acting.

The Emsav movement is a clear example of a minoritarian, elitist and radicalized political movement that lost its way. By trying to achieve their goals, they chose the violent path.

As Breton nationalists were indifferent to what was happening with France, the Emsav believed it to be the ideal pretext to expand their concept of “*avant-garde*” with arguments that lead to comprehend their reason to continue this war: ideological arguments of belonging to a superior civilization, theological arguments that impregnated an anti-Semitic Catholicism, historical arguments (the Irish), and psychological arguments to cherish an unexpected conquest of glory or to overestimate the capacity of the elite of a movement to be accompanied by all the people. Furthermore, Breton nationalists

¹⁸ “Le Conseil National breton, organe représentatif des Bretons soucieux du bien collectif et de l'honneur de leur peuple, agira à l'heure choisie par lui pour doter la Bretagne d'un État National, dans son cadre naturel et dans l'esprit de sa tradition, afin qu'elle put vivre enfin en nation organisée, libre de ses aspirations et maîtresse de ses intérêts” Declaration-Program of the CNB (1940)

¹⁹ Or Triskelion. Celtic symbol that consists of three intertwined spirals.

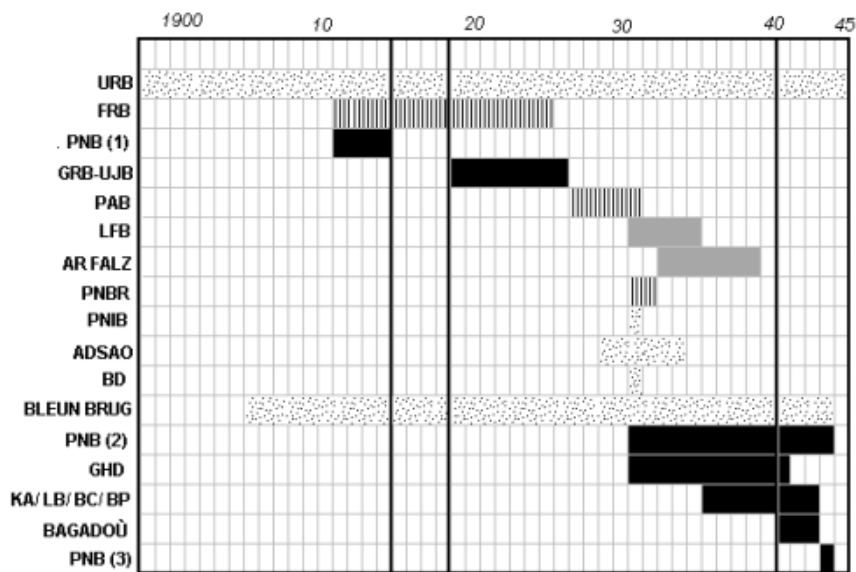
²⁰ Pulido Azpíroz (2012) p. 58

achieved some results that they would not have achieved with a democratic political action and without benefiting from the Nazi invasion to France²¹.

Their tendency towards violence can be explained in many ways: Firstly, as many other tendencies in the 1930s, they chose the violent path to defend their sacred idea of homeland. And secondly, violence was not just a means to coerce the enemy, but it was much more profound: the repulsion towards the modern world, in which every individual is equal and has its own liberty to do with it as he or she pleases. So, this violence is a way to express their repulse and try to build a new community.

In this situation, the violent (Breton nationalists) saw themselves as the victim and those receiving the violence (the French State) were seen as the executioners: the violent become victims because history has forced them to risk their lives for the wellbeing of their endangered nation²².

In the next graphic are showed the parties between the last years of the First and the end of the second phase of the Emsav movement classified by their political tendencies²³:



1. Figure: political tendencies of Breton parties

Traditional regionalism is represented by the spotted lines, left or centre federalism by grey or striped lines and the fascist right, most of the Emsav movement, by black lines.

²¹ Rubio Caballero (2012) p.399

²² Rubio Caballero (2012) p. 399-400

²³ Rubio Caballero (2012) p. 390

Even though we have focused on those who collaborated until now, there were many more who stood up to it as we can learn in Monnier's *Résistance et conscience bretonne* (2007), a book in which he talks about some of the most remarkable people of the resistance and their achievements.

It is true that some Bretons collaborated with the Nazis, but they were not as many as the resistants. The problem is that those who collaborated caused more stir than those who fought against the Occupation. Monnier (2007) represented the proportion of collaborationists/resistants or neutrals:

In a commune in the Black Mountains of 1,500 inhabitants, a mecca for early guerrillas, there are painfully four "political" collaborators, including no "Breton activists". The rest is acquired at the Resistance or neutral. (translated)

As we have already mentioned, the PNB had a tendency towards European fascism, and it was growing more and more, they were already making racist statement publicly. So, the nationalists, federalists, autonomists... all anti-fascists started standing up to them. Some remarkable names were Maurice Duhamel, LFB missionary, Fañch Eliès, writer and leftist federalist, René Le Roux, who helped create Celtic-rooted neologisms, among many others.

Many resistants were quite young when they joined the cause. One of these groups was named *Liberté* and they achieved great goals because of their strong collective conscience. These independentist group was formed of people between the ages of 16 to 23 years²⁴, and that may have been the reason they remained so unknown.

There were also resistants among the PNB who took part in the maquis, and while it might seem quite controversial, there is an explanation: some of them may have been PNB activists and evolved when they became aware of the links between their party and the occupier, or others may have been people who did not see any contradiction when fighting against occupation and Breton action²⁵.

These dozens of Breton activists or people with a strong Breton conscience are given the actors in the revival of the Breton movement after the war, active revival, on new bases and in a difficult climate where a sentence pronounced in Breton could raise the accusation of autonomism - to hear separatism - and nostalgia for Nazism²⁶.

²⁴ Monnier (2007) p. 128

²⁵ Monnier. (2007) p. 225

²⁶ Monnier (2007) p. 300

3.3. THIRD EMSAV

Finally, the third Emsav took place after the war and the collaboration between the Nazis and Breton nationalists, and it remains until these days. This third period is known for mass cultural movements and armed groups, such as FLB-ARB.

When everything started to calm down, after the collaboration, the name of the Emsav movement was damaged; in the end, the collaborationist episode represented a great failure for them, so Bretons wanted to clear their name and started to have more interest in what it meant to be Breton. Things started to change in Brittany, even the leftist nationalist movement started gaining power: In 1945, most deputies from the five Breton departments were leftist.

The end of the second Emsav made it possible for a new, more left-wing and modern tendency to develop, whose main exponent since 1964 has been the *Union Démocratique Bretonne* (UDB).

The 1970s were a period of renewal and significant dynamism for the Breton movement, whose concerns and demands were for the first time disseminated relatively widely among the population and among the main social and political forces. Let us evoke a Breton culture that was dusted off and in tune with society, with the return to favour of Breton music and dance. The *festoù-noz*, a festive gathering based on the collective practice of traditional dances of Brittany²⁷, became very popular. The image of the Breton language was rehabilitated among the population, and particularly among young people, a generation after the break in generational transmission. UDB also made an electoral breakthrough for the first time in its history.

Around that time, the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) was working to bring the Breton question to the forefront in an increasingly convincing way, both in terms of language or in terms of institutions. They set up a regional coordination and reflection structure in 1972, the BREIS (*Bureau Régional d'Étude et d'Information Socialiste*), participated in the Breton Progressive Cultural Front from 1977 onwards, and even used the notion of "Breton people", for example in the Breton Socialist Regional Manifesto (1978).

On the contrary, the decade of the 1980s was a difficult period of time for Breton nationalists. The Government refused to integrate the Diwan schools (Breton immersion

²⁷UNESCO (2014)

schools) in national education²⁸. Breton could barely be heard in the media and public life, and Breton music and culture were no longer popular. The *festoù-noz*²⁹ attracted fewer and fewer people. Many artists left the scene or turned to more poetic texts and were forced to satisfy a more modest audience³⁰. Cultural associations also suffered from this crisis. Moreover, UDB went into a negative spiral: most of the militants abandoned the party to join PS, and by 1986 they hit rock bottom, they had a huge debt and catastrophic electoral results³¹. From that moment on, the party started to reinvent itself and became open to make alliances with alternative leftist parties.

While UDB was struggling, traditional right-wing nationalism was also reinventing itself during the 1980s. *Strollad ar Vro*, the last avatar of the *Mouvement pour l'organisation de la Bretagne* (MOB), disappeared in 1977. Its newspaper, *L'Avenir de la Bretagne*, was however relaunched in 1980. In 1982, the *Parti pour l'organisation d'une Bretagne libre* (POBL) was created, and it had an explicitly nationalist ideology, claiming to be part of the heritage of the Breton movement, and did not hesitate to pay homage to Olier Mordrel and Célestin Lainé. Although the party claimed to be "neither left nor right", its ideological references and practices clearly anchored it to the right of the political spectrum.

Breton militants focused on the teaching of their language during the 1980s, mainly in the developing of the Diwan schools: In the start, they only had 1 school and 5 students, but by 1990, those numbers increased to 20 schools, 1 college and 630 students.

In the year 1983 a new leftist movement was born: *Emgann*. This movement was a national liberation movement to achieve a self-governing socialist nation. The movement remained active until 2009.

After such rough years, the Breton nationalist movement was reborn. In 1993, *Dan ar Braz* made a remarkable comeback with *L'Héritage des Celtes*, a show that brought together artists from various Celtic countries on both sides of the Channel. Its success marked the return in force of Breton music in the public space. At the same time, the

²⁸ Diwan web page

²⁹ UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage

³⁰ Kernalegenn (2018)

³¹ Kernalegenn (2018)

festoù-noz experienced a new dynamic, carried by the young people formed in the 1980s, with groups such as *Ar Re Yaouank* and *Carré Manchot*.

In what concerned the Breton language, *Skol an Emsav*, a Breton cultural movement that fought for the language, was able to professionalise its activity thanks to subsidies. It gradually lost its character as a militant organisation and focused on evening classes and publishing, in particular publishing the information magazine *Bremañ*, from 1980 onwards. Nowadays, *Skol an Emsav* keeps offering afternoon classes, internships and different activities in Breton³².

Ar Falz, was also a Breton cultural movement that claimed a Breton education, it was founded by Yann Sohier and it focused on publishing (*Skol Vreizh*). New structures were created, such as the publisher *An Here*, in 1983, which quickly became the main publisher of books in Breton, particularly for young people³³.

The magazine *Ar Falz* campaigns for the teaching of the Breton language and culture in public schools and offers its readers, especially teachers, articles and educational sheets on various themes: language, music, history, literature, folklore.³⁴

The political and cultural organisations were receiving a very strong opposition from the French State in the mid-1960s, and they were not achieving any of their goals, so new nationalist armed organisations, such as *Front de Libération de la Bretagne* (FLB) and *Armée Républicaine Bretonne* (ARB), which would later become *Armée Révolutionnaire Bretonne*, were born, probably inspired by the previous Breton armed group, GHD.

These groups asked for greater autonomy in economic, cultural, and political administration, but it seemed like they did not give enough importance to their language. These organisations were clandestine armed groups. The FLB was created in 1966, and along with the ARB, they remained active until 2000. They performed several hundred attacks during their active years, mostly blowing up buildings and infrastructures which had deep symbolic meanings, but they did not kill people. The armed group started attacking once a month, but the attacks were becoming more frequent.

During the long period that the FLB lasted, a large number of arrests were made by the authorities, but when fighters were arrested, more fighters came after them. The

³² Skol an Emsav web page

³³ Kernalegenn (2018)

³⁴ Ar Falz web page

organization was in constant movement. These groups had to equip themselves, they did not have any kind of funds to buy the arms and explosives, so all the money came directly from the fighters³⁵.

A quite important fact about the FLB-ARB was that Bretons were not afraid of them: their attacks did not cause terror, unlike the majority of terrorist movements in the world. The FLB did not commit criminal acts against people since the beginning of their illegal actions and did not arise any moral disapproval. If that had been the case, maybe they would have lost the benevolence of the rest of the Breton nationalists that were not taking part in the armed groups.

In October of 1971, when 11 Breton militants were being accused of being part of the FLB-ARB network, a great part of the Breton population and the press were in favour or supportive of the processed. There were even protests so that they would be absolved, nevertheless, 8 out of the 11 accused were condemned³⁶.

After 10 years of armed struggles without a single death, a FLB militant died in Finistère due to an accident with a bomb when attacking a home of a soldier while the family was inside. This event created much of a stir, questioning whether the FLB was really capable of killing a family or not, but this question was never solved.

Between the years 1978 and 1980, the number of processes raised, and the sentences became much tougher. So, from 1981 to 1990, clandestine action became nearly inexistent, and people started to opt for other ways to fight for Brittany.

At the end of the 60s and through the 70s, Breton nationalists started claiming their linguistic rights: marches, signature campaigns, fundraising campaigns, they served for nothing because France did not recognize expressions other than those made in the language of the Republic. But after 1981, nationalists make some progress: a Breton license was created in 1981, a Breton CAPES (a teaching competition) was born, and in 1989, the DEUG, a university diploma of Breton, was set up in Breton universities. The university course was a success, but still, less than 1% of the population studied in Breton

Around that time, many Basque people were fleeing from Spain either because they were being condemned of being part of the terrorist group ETA or because they would be

³⁵ Henry, L., & Lagadec, A. (2006) p. 16

³⁶ Henry, L., & Lagadec, A. (2006) p. 117-128

tortured due to their participation in illegal protests, for having hosted militants themselves, or even for protesting against the Spanish repression. One of the destinations many Basques chose was Brittany, so Breton nationalists started hiding them from the authorities in their houses.

In the year 2000, an attack in a McDonalds building in Quévert (Côtes d'Armor) ended up killing one young woman³⁷. The bomb was supposed to have exploded the night before, but it did not. Nobody claimed the attack. They had never killed or even seriously injured anybody, and the number of explosives did not match their *modus operandi*. The ARB denied its participation in the attack, but the organization no longer manifested itself after that, whether or not it was responsible for it. This attack remains unexplained to these days, but it is widely thought that it was FLB-ARB.

After the McDonald's attack, the Breton nationalism movement would decay because of the stigma that would weigh in their shoulders for many years.

3.4. BRITTANY NOWADAYS

The situation in Brittany has quite changed in the last years: nowadays Breton nationalists are fighting for different causes: the union of the Loire-Atlantique department to the Breton region, keeping their language alive and having Breton public schools, *inter alia*.

All this is impulsed by the nationalist and regionalist political parties that are nowadays working in Brittany. Two of the most notable parties, the ones that we are going to analyse, are the Union Régionaliste Breton, for its long history in Brittany, and the Parti Breton. In general terms, the UDB has a more leftist view of what Brittany should achieve. But both these parties have a limited representation as none of them have enough votes to achieve a seat in the regional elections.

In the first place, the Parti Breton was created in 2000 and it is a republican and reformist political party who says to serve everyone from the centre left to the centre right and gives priority to their commitment to Brittany and the full recognition of its national identity. It also has an internal newsletter called "*Unité Bretonne*".

They want to convince Breton citizens that only a democratic Breton state can preserve the Breton identity and culture, allow harmonious development that respects the territory

³⁷ Henry, L., & Lagadec, A. (2006) p. 299-304

and its people, create wealth and establish a just and united society, as well as being part of the United Nations as an independent nation.

They give much importance to Brittany's history at the beginning of their political programme, and they talk about how the French took Brittany from Breton citizens while these opposed and resisted. They also mention that France wishes to totally erase Brittany and any Breton feeling, to deprive the Bretons of their memory and therefore of their history, but they fail to mention any detail about the Collaboration, the only time they may have made a reference is when they say that the party is aware that the historic situation of justice in Brittany is complex and that it is unrealistic to propose the creation of a Breton justice system out of nowhere, but that the European examples of emancipation from which they wish to draw inspiration (Scotland, Wales, the Basque Country, Catalonia) show that justice is one of the competences that is belatedly wrested from central power.

In political and democratic terms, they wish to build autonomic political and democratic institutions that are equivalent to other European countries. They demand Breton representation in Brussels with a significant increase in the number of its delegates and the presence of a Breton representative in COREPER, the Permanent Representatives Committee responsible for preparing the work of the ministers before the European Councils, the creation of a "Breton Committee" bringing together representatives of the various local authorities to define the areas of intervention and the direct management of structural funds by the Breton people. In addition, Parti Breton, which voted in 2005 for the adoption of the European Treaty on the European Constitution, calls for the continuation of the European Union integration process. As we can observe, Parti Breton opts for a full integration in the European Union.

With regard to the economic and social fields, they believe Brittany should provide greater support to businesses and that the economy should be at service of men and women by becoming a more solidarity-based society, as well as they promise to better business conditions and create a Breton economic development agency. They believe men and women to be equal and treat it as a priority.

In terms of education, they say that Brittany should take over the organisation of their schools and to develop knowledge economy to open up internationally and make the Breton economy more efficient. Even though the French education system has led to good

academic scores among Breton students, Parti Breton states that this system imposes an ideology that denies the Breton identity. They suggest an education system that would transmit each student humanist values that would consist of a core curriculum of basic subjects decided at national level. In addition, local authorities could add teaching modules, within time limits to be defined. This flexibility would allow each school to choose its own areas of excellence, and each Breton country to emphasise certain aspects, for example cultural or linguistic, that it would like to focus on. They blame France for not allowing to teach Breton in primary and secondary schools, and they say that the reason for this is to create in them a feeling of shame of their origins to make their languages, Gallo and especially Breton, disappear. And all this, by mentioning that at the beginning of the 20th century, more than a million Bretons spoke the Breton language and the last traditional speakers disappeared around 1950 and that French centralism is still trying to eradicate the richness of the Breton language. They talk about France's oppression and how Brittany would be more prosperous being independent.

In what concerns the Breton language, Parti Breton proposes the creation of a public Breton TV, the development and officialization of the Breton language, guaranteeing and favouring its teaching in the territory so that the citizens become bilingual. Parti Breton also promotes Breton culture in the arts and history fields and promises the creation of a Heritage Office.

With reference to the Breton departments, Parti Breton proposes the unification of the five Breton Departments (Côtes-d'Armor, Finistère, Ille-et-Vilaine, Morbihan and Loire-Atlantique, which is nowadays part of Pays de la Loire) and their fusion into a single administrative and political entity: the Breton Institution.

Secondly, the Union Démocratique Bretonne (UDB), created in 1964, is a left-wing, ecologist and autonomist political party, present in Brittany, including the Loire-Atlantique department, and a member of the federation of autonomist and regionalist political parties, *Régions et Peuples Solidaires*, which operates at the French state. The UDB, works for a society that places the economy at the service of human beings, campaigns for ecological transition and for a federal republic, in a more democratic Europe.

The UDB wishes for less power for the state and more power for the people, so that the citizens can be part of the administrative decisions, and decentralisation to rebalance wealth, infrastructure and population.

In terms of culture, one of the objectives of UDB's cultural policy is to stop cultural impoverishment by enabling Breton citizens to reappropriate their intangible heritage (language, history, etc.). They are also in favour of a vast policy of popular education, the only way for citizens to become emancipated.

Since 1964, the UDB has been working for the construction of a federal France and Europe, in which Brittany would be given a special status. They would like to create an Assembly of Brittany bringing together the current regional council and the five Breton departments. This Assembly would have legislative powers in certain areas.

In reference to politics, the UDB believes that it is necessary to ensure the existence of counter-powers. In the face of a vertically exercised power, the UDB advocates, on the contrary, a horizontality of power, which guarantees a better democracy and a better sharing of power. The UDB would therefore like to see a real status for elected representatives, a revision of the financing of political parties and a real place for trade unions in the social dialogue. Similarly, the press must have legal protections allowing it to work freely, both from the government and from private lobbies.

In terms of education, the UDB demands that part of the curriculum, particularly the history and geography, and literature subjects should be adapted to each territory. It also proposes that teaching staff be paid by the regions on the basis of a national scale. Finally, the UDB wants to promote the universities in Brittany and is campaigning for more research resources in them, and is campaigning for the recognition and public funding of the Breton language immersive teaching system.

About justice, UDB says that it opposes all forms of exclusion, whether it be racism, sexism, gender or class discrimination, and that it campaigns for a clear separation between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.

The Breton language plays an important part in UDB's program: for them, there are no "regional languages" as such, but rather minority and even minoritized languages. They would like the "co-officiality of languages", because, in their own words, endogenous languages of France do not deserve to be sub-languages. They claim very clearly the right

to dispose of their languages (which are specific to Brittany) implying legislative power. And while promoting Breton and Gallo, the UDB would like to give back their traditional names for the places.

Another important political matter in Brittany nowadays is the integration of the Loire-Atlantique department to the Breton region.

Both the Parti Breton and Union Démocratique Bretonne mention Loire-Atlantique when talking about Brittany's departments, a department that, as previously mentioned, is not part of the actual Breton region, but of the Pays de la Loire. Loire-Atlantique is part of the historical Brittany, but in 1941, Pétain decided to separate them while ruling Vichy France.

This has been subject of much debate the last decades, but the debate has become more intense in the last few years. In 2018, 105,000 signatures were collected to claim the organization of a referendum³⁸, but it never happened. In October 2020, about 150 elected representatives of Breton sub-state governments and associations met in Nantes and sent President Macron a letter to claim a referendum once again³⁹. Later, in March 2021, the capital of Finistère, Quimper, approached the French State and called for a referendum on the administrative reunification of the Loire-Atlantique department to the Breton region⁴⁰, but again, there was no referendum.

Seen the absence of response from the French State, more recently, the FLB-ARB group has threatened to take up arms if the French government does not organise a referendum that brings to question the autonomy or the independence of unified Brittany before the 31st of December 2022, stating that: *“The Breton Revolutionary Army notes that the Corsican people are only listened to by the government as a result of violent actions. We conceive the armed struggle as a complement to the political struggle. These referendums must be carried out before 31 December 2022, otherwise the ARB will take action”*.⁴¹ So far, there has been no intention of organising a referendum by the French State.

Another very important matter that is being discussed nowadays is the integration of the regional languages in different fields, education and administration amongst others, in France. In 1999 France signed a charter to protect and promote historic regional and

³⁸ Naiz (2021)

³⁹ Nationalia (2020)

⁴⁰ Naiz (2021)

⁴¹ Ouest France (2022)

minority languages, this charter is called the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and it “*is designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages and to enable speakers to use them both in private and public life. It therefore obliges the States Parties to actively promote the use of these languages in education, courts, administration, media, culture, economic and social life, and cross-border co-operation*”⁴². In 2014, the National Assembly allowed this charter, but, in less than two years, the senate rejected it.

In addition to the charter that France signed but did not ratify, in 2021, the great majority of French deputies launched what is widely known as the Molac law, presented by deputy Paul Molac (former president of *Div Vreizh*, an association that taught Breton in public schools and vice-president of FLAREP, a federation for regional languages in public education and president of the Breton Cultural Council⁴³) to, again, protect and promote regional languages in France as it would give them the status of intangible heritage of France. The Molac Law intended to ensure that speakers of those regional languages were able to, in a way, live in their language by offering an education in their regional language and capacitating the diffusion and promotion of these languages⁴⁴, for this, they would translate inscriptions and public signs, as well as use diacritical signs of regional languages in civil status documents.

This law was soon claimed as unconstitutional by the Constitutional Council⁴⁵ and had censured two emblematic articles of this law, the first one concerning immersive teaching in regional languages, and the other one, the authorisation of diacritical signs⁴⁶ because they went against the second article of the French constitution concerning the republic’s language, which must be the French.

Regarding Breton’s sentiment about their nationality a recent survey carried out by CRAPE/ESF/CNRS⁴⁷ showed that only 1.5% believe they are Breton and not French, 50% are as much Breton as French and 9,3% believe they are French and not Breton⁴⁸. From all the people that took part in the survey, nearly 90% said that they were (in

⁴² Council of Europe Portal web page

⁴³ Paul Molac web page

⁴⁴ Légifrance web page

⁴⁵ Ponchon & Retinskaya (2021)

⁴⁶ Le Club de Mediapart (2022)

⁴⁷ Centre de Recherches sur l’Action Politique en Europe/European Science Foundation/Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

⁴⁸ CRAPE/ESF/CNRS survey in Agence Bretagne Presse (2009)

different levels) Breton, so the first thought would be that the Breton language is widely spoken in Brittany. As easy as it would be to assume that, it is far from being the reality. In 2018, TMO Régions surveyed 8.162 people to learn about the use of Breton and Gallo in historical Brittany, and the results showed that around 207.000 people speak Breton. With those numbers, we could assume that the language is out of danger, but, in perspective, those speakers are only 5.5% of the population and their average age is 70.⁴⁹ That means, that the next generation will not speak Breton as mother tongue, as only a small quantity of the parents' generation speaks Breton.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned throughout the work, Breton nationalists have tried to preserve their Celtic and Breton nationality for a long time now. They have tried to gain more State-level autonomy and even the independence of their region, but the paths some of those nationalists have taken to achieve their goals may have led them elsewhere and, they may have made the road even more difficult to the newest generations too.

The Collaboration created a huge historical burden for Brittany. Every Breton citizen had to suffer its consequences: the discrimination, the stigmatisation. It was even more unfair for the ones that did not participate in it, or even fought against it., The nationalist movement was criminalized for many years, even decades after the Collaboration, and France did well and used it against them to criminalize the movements and their language and succeeded for several years.

Now that all that is in the past, Breton nationalism has regained power among the citizens. They have chosen to take a more political path, leaving previous mistakes behind. But the power Bretons have in politics is not very significant neither socially nor economically.

The different fields analysed in this research clearly support the idea that Brittany is a region to which the French State gives little importance. One of the most decisive factors when measuring the relative importance of regions in a state is undoubtedly the economic one, since the more developed and beneficial the local economy is, the more power the state will grant to it (see the case of the Basque Country and Catalonia in Spain).

⁴⁹ Barañano (2019) p. 22

In this particular case of Brittany, they focus their economy on the primary sector, which is the least beneficial of all because of its high economic and environmental costs and its decreasing profits, which are becoming increasingly scarce due to the power of large national and international retailers. In other words, they have a very unproductive and labour-intensive economy.

The lack of economic power, and having so little to offer in return, leaves Bretons in a quite bad position to ask for more autonomic power to the French State. Nevertheless, as the CRAPE survey concluded, more than 50% of Bretons believe that their region should have more power⁵⁰.

To sum up, we believe that every nation should have the right to mobilize within legal channels to defend an ideology, including the sentiment of independence, as long as this independence has a strong basis. In the specific case of Brittany, they would have the historical factor and the cultural factor, the language being one of their best elements in their favour, but they have against them both the historical burden that came up with the Collaboration, which, as previously mentioned, France has so often used against them, and the economic factor which can put them at a disadvantage, as well as the centralist politics of France.

We believe that if, from now on, Britain made the right movements and followed other models such as Scotland with the United Kingdom, which achieved a bilateral referendum in 2014 (although the result was to remain part of the United Kingdom), it could achieve new goals of autonomy.

We also believe that Breton nationalism should give more importance to their culture and language and continue transforming the movement to become a movement for the people and not for the elite as they used to do back in the days.

⁵⁰ CRAPE/ESF/CNRS survey (2009)

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