**Terrorism and the discursive construction of national identity in France.**

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**Abstract**

This article aims to analyse the impact of the two terrorist attacks that occurred in France in 2015 on the construction of French national identity. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis, it discusses the nation-affirming strategies implemented by President Hollande and the role they play in restoring the authority of the state. It reveals how Hollande used the figure of the terrorist Other to recreate an imagined community based on an idealised Republican model and how he constructed an exclusionary discourse of sameness, which led to a closure of identity that risks alienating large sections of the population.

**Keywords:** Discourse analysis; Terrorism; France and terrorism; National identity; Nation-affirming communication strategies.

**Word count**: 8996 (text only).

In 2015, France was the target of two terrorist attacks, on 07 January against the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and on 13 November against various locations in Paris. France may have a long history of terrorist attacks on its soil (Start GDT, 2017) but the reactions to these two warrant them to be characterised as ‘critical events’ (Browne et al., 1984). The then French President, François Hollande, characterised them as ‘the most tragic ordeal that we have experienced in the last fifty years’ (2015a) and stated that ‘nothing will ever be like before these events’ (2015a). Furthermore, the first attack led to demonstrations throughout France, culminating in a mass gathering in Paris with many world leaders in attendance (Le Monde, 2015), and the second saw the immediate implementation of a state of emergency (Vie Publique, 2017).

Research has shown that terrorist violence, in its indiscriminate nature, leads ‘to a kind of moral panic’ (Garapon, 2015) and reactions of unbearableness among the population affected. In so doing, terrorism fundamentally undermines the authority of the state and its social contract with its citizens. As argued by Campbell (1998, p.12), states are in permanent need of reproduction to justify their existence, which is achieved both through actions and the creation of constitutive myths, the core one being the monopoly of legitimate physical violence (Weber, 2004) and its implicit tenet of ensuring safety. Terrorist attacks shatter this myth and lead to what Campbell (2002) called ‘a void of meaning’, i.e. a structural gap in understanding that needs to be filled by state authorities to restore their power.

Discourses are crucial in this respect. State authorities will attempt to offer their specific ‘systems of narration’ (Laclau, 2005, p.106) in order to make the world intelligible again. Thus, a comprehensive body of research, focusing on the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001, has uncovered a large number of discursive strategies implemented by states to reassert their authority (Esch, 2010; Jackson, 2005, 2006; Lazar & Lazar, 2004). They include the construction of narratives such as the ‘War on terror’ (Cap, 2008; Hodges, 2011; Jackson, 2005; Oddo, 2011), the state uniting its citizens with call-to-arms speeches (Graham et al., 2004), the state discursively re-asserting itself as a protector defending its citizens via anti- and counter-terrorism measures (Lazar and Lazar, 2004) as well as through sstate-power metaphors (Charteris-Black, 2005; Lakoff, 2001).

This body of work has highlighted the key role national identity has played in those strategies. As theorised by considerable research (Anderson, 1991; Billig, 1995; Gellner, 1983), nations are ‘imagined political communities’ (Anderson, 1991) and national identities are a social construct, shaped and reproduced through discourse (Bourdieu, 1994; Hall, 1992). Because of its nature as a construct, the definition of any specific national identity is a field of struggle between social groups, open to be contested and re-interpreted, and is therefore, at its core, deeply political and ideological (Campbell, 1998). The state is of primordial importance in this struggle (Bourdieu, 1994), as imposing its own version of national identity and discarding competing narratives is constitutive of its power (Doty, 1996). Imposing its narrative becomes even more crucial after an event like terrorism that shakes its legitimacy. Thus, much research has shown how President Bush reasserted state power by discursively re-constructing American identity after 2001 (Edwards, 2004; Hutcheson et al., 2004; Jackson, 2005; Margulies, 2013). Hutcheson et al., amongst others, showed how US political leaders ‘publicly emphasize the strength, values, and vision of America as a nation and Americans as people’ (2004, p.27) in order to unite the country around the state in its War on terror (Nabers, 2009). Such nation-affirming strategies have included, inter alia, the use of cultural symbols (Silberstein, 2002), national myths and values (Jackson, 2005, 2006; Winkler, 2006), as well as popular culture (Skoll, 2013).

The figure of the terrorist “other” has played a crucial role in these strategies. Any construction of a national “self” is dependent on the creation of differences with an “other” (Billig 1995). Much research has shown how state authorities have redefined the national in-group by demonising the terrorists (Lazar & Lazar 2004, p.236) through binary oppositions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, most significantly the relational pairs between ‘good’ and ‘evil’, ‘moral’ and ‘immoral’, ‘civilisation’ and ‘barbarism’ (Leudar et al, 2004). The evil terrorist other has therefore acted as the ‘enabling other’ of the state (Jackson, 2005, p.153) by facilitating both the re-assertion of a national self, and the creation of an enemy from whom the state has to protect the in-group, thereby justifying its existence.

The importance of national identity in the face of terrorism was apparent in France in the aftermath of the 2015 attacks. A discourse of national identity ran throughout President Hollande’s response. He expressed fear over identity when he stated that ‘the biggest threat that can affect our country would be to lose our identity, I was going to say our soul, i.e. the idea that we have of ourselves, that we have inherited and that we need to carry forward for the future’ (2015a). He then reasserted a French national identity by defining ‘The French’ as ‘proud to belong to the same whole’ (2016) and by interpreting their demonstrations against terror as a desire to display their ‘pride as to what the country should be’ (2015b). This begs the question of what ‘our identity’ and ‘our soul’ are, and who is included in the collective ‘the French’ and ‘whole’. Establishing identity is a crucial element in the various acts of performativity that any state implements to constitute itself (Devetak, 1995, p.32). It is ‘a boundary-producing political performance central to the production and re-production of the state and identity in whose name it operates’ (Ballbach, 2015, p.142). Hollande’s expression of national identity therefore provides a case study to analyse the links between terrorism, national identity and the reassertion of state power.

This article aims to enrich the body of research on national identity and terrorism in three ways. First, it will illustrate how terrorism discourses are localised ‘within specific historical, geographical and socio-political contexts as well as within social relations of power’ (Talbot, 2008) by demonstrating how Hollande anchored the attacks within a historical and political framework specific to France through a re-interpretation of the French Republican model. Second, France experienced two attacks within several months. An analysis of whether Hollande’s discursive strategies changed after the second attack and, if yes how, will therefore provide an insight into how a discourse on national identity in response to terrorism is developed over time. Third, there has been of lack of research analysing terrorism-related rhetoric deployed by French authorities and this article aims to fill this gap.

**Methodology and theoretical framework**

François Hollande was chosen as the focus of the analysis due to a French President representing the authority of the state (Grossman & Sauger, 2013). The empirical source material of this study therefore consists of all the speeches Hollande made in relation to terrorism from the first attack until its commemoration one year later. 38 speeches, chronologically listed in Appendix 1, were collected from the official website of the French presidency (Présidence de la République, 2016). The original version was used in the analysis but the citations in this article were translated by the author.

The analysis is based on discourse analysis in general and more particularly the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA). In this article, discourse, following Fairclough (1992, p.64), is not seen as a neutral way of describing the world but as ‘signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning’. Political discourses are therefore not neutral reflections of reality but construct that reality through language (Jackson, 2005). CDA is a particularly fruitful perspective for analysing national identity communication strategies because it has developed its grammar. Thus, Wodak et al. (1999) have identified the key strategies by which national identity is imagined in discourse. They are: construction, including dissimilation (constructing national differences as opposed to an out-group) and assimilation (constructing national sameness); perpetuation (maintaining a sense of national identity), transformation (transforming the meaning of a relatively well-established aspect of national identity into another one); destruction (erasing elements of a previous sense of collective self).

CDA concerns itself with a qualitative analysis of discourse and its tradition is to engage in a close reading of specific texts (Fairclough, 2003). However, in order to uncover more general patterns in a large corpus, as is the case in this study, CDA can be married with corpus linguistics, under corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS). Corpus linguistics offers the ability to uncover patterns of change and continuity in a large corpus (O’Keefe & McCarthy, 2010), by focusing on lexical patterns, concordances (the context that terms occur in), collocations (terms frequently occurring near each other) as well as keywords (words that appear significantly more in one corpus compared to another one). This was considered appropriate for this study in order to uncover both the linguistic patterns at the heart of President Hollande’s discursive construction of national identity and to track any evolution between the two attacks.

Based on this theoretical underpinning, Hollande’s speeches were analysed in three stages. The first stage involved an overall inductive thematic analysis of the material, to identify salient thematic patterns. In the second stage, discursive nation-affirming strategies were classified following Wodak’s framework. The final stage involved an examination of linguistic means, carried out under CADS. Two sub-corpora were entered into Wordsmith Tools (Scott 2008), one representing Hollande’s speeches from 7 January to 11 November 2015, and one for speeches made after the second attack, in order to track any evolution. Corpus linguistic techniques were then implemented to identify lexical patterns of interest.

**Analysis**

The analysis of Hollande’s expressions of national identity in his speeches on terrorism identified three supporting discourses, which I have labelled discourse of unanimism, exceptionalisation and strength. They contributed to the state reasserting its authority by establishing identity and fixing differences with the terrorist “other”. The analysis which follows outlines how each discourse functioned, linguistically and discursively, to restore state power by imposing a specific version of national identity grounded on France’s Republicanism, and demonstrates how Hollande’s discourse is a deeply ideological construction with far-reaching political consequences.

**A – Discourse of unanimism: The Republican Self.**

Constructing a national self involves delineating who the in-group is. The French writer Jules Romains (1933) coined the concept of unanimism to describe how atomic individuals can become one as part of a bigger whole. Hollande discursively constructed a Republican in-group in a unanimistic way by defining “the French” as being made one through the Republic. In doing so, he constructed a discourse of sameness that assumed in-group homogeneity, all the while suppressing alternative representations.

First, a quantitative analysis of Hollande’s speeches reveals that France was thoroughly equated with the Republic, as the noun ‘Republic’ and its associated adjectives were the most commonly used terms when referring to France, after the generic term ‘country’ but far ahead any other possible labels, as illustrated by the following table:

Table 1. The labelling of France

[Insert Table 1 here]

The Republic being used to refer to France was particularly marked after the first attack, when this labelling ranked first, with a frequency of 0.32 as opposed to 0.28 for ‘country’. Its frequency may have dipped after the second one (0.15 against 0.38 for country) but it still remained high and far ahead any other labels. It can be argued that the first attack, which took the country by surprise, led Hollande to re-construct French identity around the Republic in a more forceful way than after the second one, as further attacks had been expected and their likely occurrence repeatedly expressed by the President. That France was the Republic was further underlined, after each attack, through various anthropomorphic metaphors that assigned agency to the Republic and constructed it as representing the country. As Wodak et al. (2009, 44) showed, personification ‘favours identification of the addressee with that of the personified collective’, and presumes intra-national similarity, which in Hollande’s case served to anchor France’s republicanism as the bedrock of French national identity. Thus, it was the Republic who was wounded by the attacks (‘it is the whole Republic which has been attacked’[1]), it was the Republic who acted (‘The Republic will destroy terrorism’[20]), it was the combative Republic who would lead the fight against terrorism (‘The Republic is going to be inflexible and implacable’[11]).

Second, Hollande constructed a homogeneous Republican in-group by fusing the Republic and the category “The French” together through personal pronouns, metaphors and lexis. CDA has shown how the use of personal pronouns, in particular “we”, and family metaphors, are a key strategy to create a homogeneous in-group (Wodak, 2011). Hollande’s repeated use of the pronoun ‘our’ to describe the Republic and its values as well as the metaphorical description of French citizens as ‘the children of the Republic’ (23) constructed sameness and homogeneity through the Republic. The fusion with the Republic was further enhanced with the discursive construction of a united ‘we’ spontaneously rising to defend it against terrorism. The following sentence epitomises the unanimistic construction of individuals being made one by the Republic: ‘after each attack it is around [the Republic] that the French united to oppose terror; it is by displaying its symbols that they stated their unity and their desire to resist’ (35). The homogeneity of the category “The French” was reinforced by their gatherings being described as encompassing ‘every’ and ‘each’ French person and occurring ‘in every village, in every town’ (8).

Hollande further enhanced the fusion between the French and the Republic by constructing it lexically as being revered by them. It was a ‘hope’, a ‘promise’, a ‘shield’, a ‘symbol’. The French revered it as their relationship with the Republic was based on the lexis of love (‘The French have shown it, their love for the Republic remains intact’[11]), transcendence (‘It is exceptional that millions of French take to the street, not to protest, not to challenge, but to display their attachment to what unites us all: the Republic’[9]), hope (‘Who did the French turn to when fundamental values were challenged? The Republic!’[9]), pride (‘They also expressed their pride in the values of the Republic’[9]) and expectation (‘they are expecting the Republic to provide a ruthless response against the enemy who targeted us’[35]).

Hollande’s discourse of unanimism constructed sameness on the nation-affirming strategies of assimilation, with the Republic transforming the French into a homogeneous in-group, and perpetuation, by reactivating the foundational myth (Wodak, 1999, p.83) of the Republic as the bedrock of French identity. As this idea has been reiterated since its inception (Duschennes, 2005), Hollande tapped into what Mazlish called a ‘psychic repository’ (1990) to establish sameness. However, it is argued that this construction of sameness was based on an ideological manipulation of supporting claims, which led to an exclusionary conception of national identity. Fairclough has shown how what is excluded from a discourse can be as politically significant as what is included (Fairclough 2003, p.149). Van Dijk (2006, p.364) has also shown how ‘omitting very important information’, thereby imparting biased and incomplete knowledge, leads to a discursive manipulation of reality. Hollande omitted crucial information, which enabled the production of a particular interpretation of national identity based on an idealisation of the Republic. The spontaneous gatherings reported by Hollande did not take place in ‘every village and every town’ and large sections of the French population refused to take part in the march to defend the Republic on 11 January 2015. Many pupils also refused to observe a minute of silence on 8 January 2015 (Berretta, 2015). Furthermore, various criticisms were directed at the Republic after the attacks, based on the feelings of exclusion and alienation from it felt by large sections of the population (Fassin, 2015). Indeed, much research has shown how the very concept of the Republic has been challenged over the past decades in France. Its various failures in terms of racism, discriminations, poverty, and inequalities have been repeatedly stressed, which has led to the Republican model being questioned and sometimes rejected (Béland & Hansen, 2000; Chabal, 2015; Fassin, 2002; Murray, 2006). All of this contradicts Hollande’s unanimistic vision of a homogeneous French in-group rising as one to defend the Republic. This was omitted and replaced instead by the idyllic vision of a Republic uniting all the French against terrorism, which points to Hollande manipulating a much more complex reality and mythifying the Republic. Politically speaking, this has far ranging consequences because he effectively excluded from the in-group anybody who criticised or did not feel part of the Republic. By ignoring any form of discontentment, Hollande therefore reasserted state power by imposing an exclusionary discourse of sameness that reproduced existing dominant hegemonies. His second discourse deepened the mythification of the Republic and the exclusionary nature of his construction of national identity.

**B – Discourse of exceptionalisation: the virtuous and glorious Republic**

As Billig (1995) argued, there can be no national “we” without a foreign “other”. Establishing the boundaries is crucial for the authority of the state, as fixing differences enables it to demarcate the identity of the territory it represents from the foreign outside. Hollande restored state power by using the terrorist perpetrators to define what “we” are, what “we” are not and what “we” have to fear. He established a French identity by contrasting the evilness of the terrorist other to the goodness of the in-group. National self-glorification is a well-known nation-affirming strategy aimed at “gluing” the in-group by providing distinctiveness and uniqueness (Hall, 1996). However, as Van Dijk (2000) showed, positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation is not value-free but loaded with ideological norms and values. It is argued that Hollande sought to impose a particular version of French identity based on a mythification process that reinforced his exclusionary discourse of sameness.

*1 – The terrorist other as evil*

Hollande constructed the homogeneity of the in-group first through a dissimilation strategy that involved demonising the terrorist other by exceptionalising their evilness which, by contrast, constructed a “good” Republican “Us”. A close analysis of the vocabulary used to name the perpetrators of the attacks reveals their demonisation, as illustrated by the following table:

Table 2. Nomination of the terrorist other

[Insert Table 2 here]

These lexical fields were further bolstered by being collocated to adjectives explicitly underlining their evilness:

Table 3. Adjectives used in the nomination of the terrorist other

[Insert Table 3 here]

The way their actions were named reinforced their demonisation, as illustrated by the following table:

Table 4. The terrorist other - Nomination of their actions.

[Insert Table 4 here]

This network of interrelated lexis demonised the out-group, through the metaphors of terrorism as a disease, as a crime and as barbarism. This served to glorify the national self, construed as a stark contrast. Indeed, the French were defined in morally glorifying terms, as illustrated by the following lexis: ‘brave’; ‘courageous’; ‘not afraid’; ‘generous’; ‘showing solidarity’; ‘dignified’; ‘open-minded’; ‘fraternal’; ‘peace loving’; ‘selfless’. Hollande’s discursive strategy arguably created a strong dichotomy between a brave and morally good in-group and an abhorrent evil terrorist other, which served to reinforce the sameness of the in-group. This strategy was hardened after the second attack. Indeed, tables 2, 3 and 4 show how, within each lexical field, a stronger lexis appeared more frequently, as illustrated by ‘terrorists’, ‘cowards’, ‘killers’, ‘barbarians’ and ‘foul’, and in particular the very strong ‘act of war’, which dominated Hollande’s speeches after the second attack. In addition, new stronger words appeared such as ‘vile’, ‘totalitarian’, and ‘Jihadists’. Finally, collocations became far stronger. Thus, ‘murderers’ became collocated with ‘hordes’ and its strong imagery of a savage invading other. The evolution between the two attacks therefore underlines how Hollande deployed an intensification process in the dissimilation strategy of identity construction, with the implementation of ever more negative lexis.

The traits attributed to both actors enhanced the demonisation of the terrorist other through a series of binaries. Linguistically speaking, the following table highlights how the French ‘we’ was glorified as inherently good as opposed to the evil other:

Table 5. Predication of the French and the terrorist other

[Insert Table 5 here]

Discursively speaking, a series of values were put in stark contrast, which demonised the terrorist other and led to its moral exclusion from humanity, as opposed to a glorified self, as highlighted by the following table:

Table 6. Binary construction of the French and the terrorist other

[Insert Table 6 here]

It is worth noting that these binaries were constructed to elicit maximum opprobrium. Thus, many examples were located in the non-Western world, which served the strategic aim of underlining the other’s utter lack of humanity as they attacked anybody indiscriminately. Similarly, the multiple examples of messages of sympathy from the Muslim world, of massacres perpetrated against Muslims, and the use of the highly connoted expressions ‘perverted Islam’ (23; 28) and ‘they negate the message of their sacred book’ (28) served to reinforce the sense of opprobrium, by underlining how they were beyond the pale of even their own religion.

Overall, Hollande used a dissimilation strategy to establish French identity, which involved creating a mirror image of pure evilness as opposed to a glorified self and served the function of ‘unification by a foe shared in common’ (Burke, 1969, p.408). As Derrida (1981) showed, binaries have political consequences by engendering unequal relations. In Hollande’s case, this demonisation process de-humanised and de-politicised the other, because such a stark contrast between the glorified good ‘us’ and the utterly immoral ‘them’, as explained by Spencer (2012, p.406), ‘automatically excludes the question of why these actors perpetrate these acts of terrorism as the answer is inherent in their evilness’. This, in turn, oversimplified and manipulated reality because, as Bartolucci has demonstrated (2012, p.568), demonisation ‘serves to obscure the complex historical relations between those so construed and those who seek to “eradicate” them’. Hollande therefore manipulated reality by omitting the crucial fact that many of the perpetrators were French nationals and helped by other French nationals. By framing them as an evil other he removed them from the national in-group, thereby glorifying the sameness of the Republican self. This was further reinforced by an assimilation and perpetuation strategy that exceptionalised the traits of the in-group.

*2 – A beacon of civilisation*

Hollande reinforced the sameness of the in-group by constructing the metaphor of the Republic as a beacon of civilisation, which placed the national self as part of an exceptional entity, as opposed to the terrorist other who, as just seen, wanted to destroy civilisation. This metaphor was constructed first through the twin lexical fields of ‘guiding’ and ‘looking up’. The ‘guiding’ lexis constructed France as leading the world: it was a ‘rallying point for the world’, ‘an example’, ‘a reference’, ‘a particular expectation’, which were collocated with a vast range of lofty ideals, such as ‘freedom’, ‘humanity’, ‘aesthetics’, ‘culture’, ‘language’, ‘justice’ and ‘peace’. This leading role was enhanced by the lexical field of ‘looking up to’, which constructed France as having a special status in the world, in particular with the collocations ‘the world looks at France’ and ‘in the eyes of the world’, associated with the same range of lofty values, for example ‘the world that looks at France because it is there that one finds more freedom than anywhere else’ (22). Hollande further anchored the French ‘we’ as a beacon of civilisation by framing a series of values as having been created by France and passed onto the rest of the world. Thus, hyperboles abounded to describe how France created human rights (‘France is the land where human rights were written’[8]), was equated by the world with freedom (‘France, which is considered as the land of freedom throughout the world’[30]) and was seen as a country where ‘there is more freedom than anywhere else’ (22). It did not simply create human rights but it also refined language, culture and aesthetics, as illustrated by ‘France is expected for freedom. France is expected for the idea of humanity, for aesthetics, for culture, for language’ (14).

This hyperbolic construction culminated in France being elevated to the centre of the universe through the religious metaphors of France being a ‘light for humanity’ (20) and the world being ‘plunged into darkness’ (20) when France was attacked. It was further enhanced by constructing the reactions from other countries to the two attacks as evidence of France’s unique standing in the world, as illustrated by the following two extracts:

Why is it that so many Heads of states and Governments came to Paris to take part in the march? It’s because we were France. There are, unfortunately, many regions in the world that have been struck even more than us but they don’t arouse the same surge of fraternity and solidarity, because we are France (14).

Look at all the messages that are sent when France is hit […]: messages of support, messages of solidarity but more than that, message of esteem, gratefulness, admiration, and friendship. Because France has, in the eyes of the world, a special place (37).

These extracts are remarkable in the way Hollande, all the while acknowledging that France was not the only country to have experienced terrorist attacks, established a ranking system between affected countries based on how many marks of support were received and, more importantly, drew the conclusion that France not only received more support but that the reason for it was because it was France, thereby underlining its exceptional standing in the world. As a result, Hollande could logically state at the same time that France was ‘a country that we consider unique in the world’ (24) and that France was ‘speaking for the world’ (24). With the values of the world being French by origin, with France the light leading the world and with the marks of support evidence that France had a special place in the world, the attacks against France became an attack against the whole world, which reinforced the exceptionalisation of the French self.

Hollande implemented both a constructive strategy of assimilation, by establishing sameness on the in-group being part of an exceptional entity, and a perpetuation strategy by reactivating the universalism trope that has infused French Republicanism since the French Revolution, which rejected the old regime by presenting itself as universal (Jennings, 2011). The appeal to universalism and the special place France has in the world has indeed been a staple of Republican discourse ever since (Schnapper, 2000), at the heart of many policies, for example the colonisation process, carried out in the name of spreading universal values (Wieviorka, 2005), and a key part of French identity construction (for example Costelloe 2014). Hollande therefore fitted his construction of the historical importance of France within a pre-existing French cultural cognitive model, providing the in-group with a sense of Republican distinctiveness and superiority. It is argued that Hollande manipulated reality and imparted biased knowledge that sanitised France’s past and mythified the Republic. He omitted the ‘underbelly’ of French universalism, such as colonialism and its ensuing wars (Chafer, 2001), neo-colonial interventions around the world (Thomson, 2016) as well as universalism being used to hide concrete inequalities in France (Lefebvre, 2010), which led to it being challenged (Schor, 2001). Instead, he constructed a hagiographical and idyllic version of the Republican self, the creator of human rights, the bearer of universal values, the guide of humanity. Hollande completed the construction of a homogeneous in-group by assigning them exceptional values.

*3 – The virtuous Republic*

Hollande furthered his constructive strategy of defining national identity against the terrorist other with a metaphor that exceptionalised the in-group’s Republican values, which, as seen earlier, represented everything the terrorists hated. Hollande assigned virtue to the ‘Republic’ first by constructing ‘our Republican values’ as a long list of wide-ranging ideals, as illustrated by the following table:

Table 7. Republican values

[Insert Table 7 here]

The list of values was remarkably similar between the two attacks, as illustrated by the top ten values listed for each:

Table 8. Top ten Republican values

[Insert Table 8 here]

Second, not only were all these values lofty ideals but they were constructed in a hyperbolic way, which further glorified their virtuous nature. Thus, Hollande deployed a religious lexis to describe them, as they were ‘sacred values’, ‘Republican rites’, ‘a promise’. In addition, various hyperboles led to a flawless representation of the Republic by describing how the Republic and its values were inherently good. Indeed, it was ‘the land of human rights’ (20), it was fighting in an ‘implacable way’ against any form of oppression such as racism, antisemitism and islamophobia, it respected ‘everybody’, ‘every belief’, ‘every religion’, it was born out of immigration and diversity and therefore recognised ‘everyone’. The repeated collocations of ‘respect’ / ‘recognise’ with ‘wherever’, ‘whatever’, ‘whoever’, ‘every’ and ‘each’ further glorified the virtuous character of the Republic for being all-encompassing, as illustrated by the following extract: ‘I’m saying that the Republic recognises all its children, wherever they were born, wherever they live, whatever their path in life, the colour of their skins, their religion, and their beliefs’ (11).

All the values Hollande listed are a staple of French Republicanism, having been constantly reiterated ever since the creation of the Republic (Berenson et al., 2013; Duschene, 2005). Hollande therefore implemented a perpetuation strategy of national sameness by glorifying values that had been at the very core of French Republicanism. In this respect, education being ranked first overall is not surprising, as the relationship between education and the Republic is constitutive of both, in that when the Republic was restored in 1875 it gave schools the mission of transmitting Republican values (Lelièvre, 2000). Similarly, secularism has defined the French Republic through its long struggle against the power of the Catholic Church that culminated in the 1905 law that separated the state and the Church (Moatti, 2011). Hollande therefore tapped into a long-established cultural cognitive model (Martín-Morillas, 1997) to reinforce his Republican national identity construction.

It is argued that such a perpetuation strategy is based on a discursive manipulation of reality and led to the idealisation of the Republic that stood in stark contrast with the bitter debates that have torn France over the realisation of its values. Although Republican values may appear non-controversial and indeed worthy, their actual realisation has been challenged. Much research has revealed that the principles of French Republicanism have led to discriminations being hidden (Lefebvre, 2010; Schnapper, 2000; Scott, 2004). This is because the Republican conception of citizenship rests on an abstract citizen devoid of all particularities. As Schor (2001, p.62) explained, ‘in order to become a rights-bearing abstract individual the citizen is unsexed, un-gendered, unraced, unclassed’. French Republicanism sees abstract citizenship as progressive because disregarding the attributes that distinguish people ensures equality between citizens. However, the drawback is that inequalities due to gender, class or ethnicity are ignored (Scott, 2004). This is why many French citizens have considered themselves citizens in name only (Jennings, 2011). This is particularly true of ethnic minorities. They have been suffering from deep discriminations, notably in terms of employment and housing (Adida et al, 2010; Simon, 2015), but the abstract conception of citizenship has prevented recognition of their specificities. This is why frustrations at social inequalities have resulted in heightened tensions, which have ‘been manifested in relatively frequent outbreaks of civil disorder since the early 1980s’ (Costelloe, 2014), and to feelings of exclusion. Indeed, as Schnapper (1994, p.121-122) showed, ‘transcendence through citizenship appears as purely formal, having only the function of consecrating the dominance of the other’. In establishing the traditional Republican values as defining the in-group, Hollande manipulated reality to construct a mythified sameness that ignored the numerous criticisms against them as well as the social and economic dominance their implementation led to. Politically speaking, this reinforced the exclusionary nature of Hollande’s construction of sameness initiated in his discourse of unanimism, by implicitly excluding from the in-group anyone not happy with the reality of Republican values, as opposed to their ideals.

The overall discourse of exceptionalisation enabled Hollande to restore state authority by imposing clear boundaries between “us” and “them”. Hollande justified the existence of the state by delineating the inside it represented from the foreign outside. In addition, by presenting the terrorist other as evil, therefore dangerous, Hollande defined what the in-group had to fear, which reasserted the central role of the state. Naming something as a danger ‘offer[s] the state as the appropriate solution to deal with this uncertainty’ (Alvarez, 2006, p.75) and turns the state into a necessary tool, which justifies its existence. Hollande’s final discourse deepened this link between identity, danger and state power.

**C – Discourse of strength: The Republic as a weapon**

Articulating a shared purpose is crucial in the construction of national identity, in order to project the in-group into the future. As Skilling (2012, p.186) explains, ‘Nation building projects, by their nature, require a positive account […] of a shared purpose in the present, working towards the promise of a bright future’. Hollande used the terrorist other to reconstruct a shared purpose through their defeat. This contributed to the state reasserting its existence by providing a bright future. However, this strategy, it is argued, hinged on a myth that led to a repressive closure of French identity.

Hollande reconstructed a sense of national strength first by appealing to history. Research has shown how moments of historical importance are a staple in identity construction (Wodak, 2007) by reminding people of what “we”, as a homogenous nation, share. Hollande tapped into a specific foundational myth, the Republic in arms. Born out of the French Revolution, it portrays the French as rising to defeat their enemies whenever the Republic is in danger (Moran & Waldron, 2002). Linguistically speaking, the lexical field related to the in-group “standing up” re-created the Republic in arms: ‘to rise’, ‘to stand up’, ‘being up’, ‘not backing down’, ‘to stand together’. Discursively speaking, history served to underline the resilience of the Republic. Consider the following statements: ‘the French Republic has overcome many other trials. It is still here, […] and those who tried to defy it have always been on the losing side of history’ (20); ‘happy days are a flame of hope lit in the darkness of the Occupation. This flame is still lighting us today’ (2). In both cases, Hollande equated the Republic to a weapon that had always defeated its opponents, thereby implying that it would do it again. This was reinforced by using symbols of Republican resistance such as De Gaulle, Jean Moulin and Robert Chambeiron, as well as through the repeated use of ‘never’ and ‘always’ to underline how the Republic always fought, never backed down and always won. Hollande therefore used history to project the national self into a bright future.

Second, Hollande furthered national strength by constructing core elements of French Republicanism as weapons at the disposal of an all-powerful and mighty Republic that would defeat the terrorist “other” and re-create harmony. The most prominent of these weapons was the Republican state. A collocation analysis revealed that it was an all-powerful entity that would solve any problem facing France, as highlighted in the table below:

Table 9. The all-powerful Republican state

[Insert Table 9 here]

A lexical analysis further reveals the predominance of the lexical field of raw power, which further enhanced its might, as illustrated by the following table:

Table 10. The strength of the Republican state

[Insert Table 10 here]

A series of adjectives bolstered this might, as the Republican state was repeatedly characterised as ‘ruthless’, ‘implacable’ and ‘inflexible’. Discursively speaking, this lexis created the image of a mighty Republic that can only defeat its enemies. In this respect, the intensification of the martial lexis after the second attack, which can be interpreted as an attempt to re-cement the loss of belief that might have occurred, underlines the strategic aim of constructing the Republic as mighty to project the Republican in-group into a bright future.

The might of the Republic was further bolstered by a shock and awe discursive strategy when presenting the numerous actions the Republican state was taking to tackle terrorism. Lexically speaking, Hollande’s speeches were dominated by verbs of action (frequency of 0.29), and the lexical field of measures/laws implemented (frequency of 0.26), thereby stressing how the state possessed the means to recreate harmony. Discursively speaking, his speeches were saturated by a litany of figures regarding, amongst others, the number of soldiers and security forces being deployed, the number of extra spending on security, and the number of air strikes being implemented. Thus, before November, the figure of ‘10,000’ extra soldiers being deployed was bandied in nearly every speech. After November, the litany was not only more present, with Hollande citing figures in every speech, but also widened to include a long list of extra posts created in any areas linked to security in the wider sense such as customs, justice or the prison system. As demonstrated by Wodak (2007), the use of figures is a well-known rhetorical device used to glorify the orator. In Hollande’s case, they served to boost the sense of the Republic state as all-powerful and mighty. The same effect was achieved through the intensification device attached to many of the measures announced. Thus, military deployment was described with the hyperbolic lexis of ‘exceptional’, ‘unheard of’ and ‘unprecedented’. Thus, France was constantly ‘intensifying’ its strikes against ISIS and it was expelling foreign terrorists ‘more quickly’. It was also ‘increasing’ prison sentences, implementing ‘more controls’, controlling suspected terrorists in a ‘draconian’ way and it was giving its army the ‘most up-to-date equipment’.

The hyperbolic construction of the Republican state points to its heroisation as a quasi-magical entity endowed with the power to solve any issues facing the Republican self, which reasserted a sense of national strength. Considering that France has a long tradition of what has been called the ‘vertical interventionist role of the state’ (Lefebvre, 2010, p.24), i.e. the state as the vector to provide solutions, it can be argued that Hollande deployed a perpetuation strategy by tapping into a traditional cultural model and reactivating the foundational myth of the state as purveyor of harmony. At the same time, this enabled Hollande to restore the authority of the state by reasserting its central role in providing future harmony.

Two other core elements of French Republicanism were re-constructed as a source of strength, education and secularism. As seen earlier, the relationship between education and the Republic is constitutive of both. Hollande reactivated this organic link and implemented a perpetuation strategy, both linguistically and discursively. Linguistically speaking, the repeated use of the traditional word ‘Masters’ to refer to teachers reactivated images that harked back to the initial Republican school (Chadwick, 2008). Discursively speaking, Hollande constructed the role of education in terms reminiscent of its initial mission, for example when he explained that ‘the mission of the education system is to pass on values, pass on knowledge, pass on the very idea of the Republic’ (10). In doing so, he framed education as a weapon to recreate harmony by instilling Republican values. That education would bring harmony back was made even more apparent by the long list of virtues it was going to reassert: ‘progress’, ‘equality’, ‘citizenship’, ‘civility’, ‘reason’, ‘freedom’, ’free will’. Similarly, secularism, which, as seen earlier, constitutes a staple of French Republicanism, was constructed as a weapon through glorification and exceptionalisation devices. It was glorified as Hollande constructed it as the very bedrock of the Republic without which it would not function, as illustrated by ‘everything starts with secularism’ (11). It was exceptionalised by being attributed a vast range of virtues constructed in such a way that it would re-create harmony: ‘enabling the French to live together’, ‘freedom of religion’, ‘freedom of conscience’, ‘enabling the various religions to live together harmoniously, ‘providing a guarantee against intolerance’.

The metaphor of the Republic as a weapon enabled Hollande to reconstruct a sense of national purpose. The appeals to history and the wide-ranging weapons at the disposal of the Republic constructed the French ‘we’ as a mighty in-group that would defeat terrorism . It has to be noted that the discourse evolved between the two attacks, with the stress increasingly on raw strength as opposed to the softer weapons represented by education and secularism. Although still very much present after November, the keyword ‘education’ was highlighted by Wordsmith in the pre-November corpus, as opposed to the increased stress on military power after the second attack. It can be argued that this attack prompted a reassertion of the strength of the in-group by displaying more prominently the raw power at its disposal.

Hollande implemented a perpetuation strategy by basing the shared purpose of the national self on the traditional Republican model, with its stress on the state, a Republican education system and secularism. It is argued that he mythified this model by manipulating reality. He gave incomplete knowledge by omitting issues that have been dogging the Republic for years. Hollande ignored the difficulties surrounding French education as a vector of harmony. Much research has shown that the vision of the Republican school as a purveyor of Republican values and a tool to fight social inequalities has become a myth (Robert, 2013; Roebroeck & Guimond, 2015), so much so that the Republican school has been heavily criticised for not ensuring its mission and instead reproducing inequalities (Peugny, 2013). Furthermore, Hollande omitted the very serious and bitter debates about secularism, which has divided French society for the past thirty years, in particular about pupils wearing headscarves in schools and even more so about banning the burka, which have led to fostering feelings of alienation from the Republic (Jansen, 2014; Leane, 2011). Finally, the heroisation of the state was clearly based on a securitarian narrative, with the predominance of a militaristic and security lexis and an increasingly martial undertone. This narrative ignored the numerous criticisms made against the raft of security measures Hollande implemented, against the state of emergency and against the danger of the state turning authoritarian (Amnesty International 2016; Manac’h 2016; Neuer 2015; Wahnich 2016). The construction of a shared purpose was therefore based on imposing a specific version that manipulated reality.

Hollande’s discourse of strength enabled him to restore the authority of the state by linking the terrorist danger, national identity and state power. The danger posed by the terrorist other enabled Hollande to reassert the existence of a state needed to implement the weapons at the disposal of the Republic, and to fix national identity by providing the in-group with a sense of shared purpose. Another crucial aspect of state power is its ability to police identities by putting closures and limitations. It is argued that Hollande’s mythification of the Republic led to a closure of French national identity through a discipline and punishment frame for anybody not adhering to his Republican model and its promise of a better future. The lexis implemented to promote the role of the education system is of utmost importance to understand how Hollande imposed his version of the Republic as an unpassable horizon. First, the repeated use of the traditional word ‘Masters’ to refer to teachers alluded to the initial Republican school where a strict discipline was the norm. Second, a disciplinary lexical field ran throughout his statements about the role of teachers and how pupils were expected to behave, as illustrated by the repeated use of ‘the Master’s authority’, ‘reinforcement of Masters and their authority’, ‘respect for and being polite to Masters’. Third, Hollande used a strong punishment frame, with a threatening lexis. Consider the following statement:

Any behaviour challenging the values of the Republic or the authority of the master or the teacher will be reported to the headmaster. No incident will be left out. Every time […] a word is uttered […] that is challenging a fundamental value of education and the Republic, there will be a reaction. (10)

This statement epitomised a control and punishment frame, reinforced by the repetition of ‘each’, ‘none’ and ‘one’, which points to a permanent control over pupils and immediate punishment. This can be illustrated by the punishment given to pupils who refused to observe a minute of silence on January 8 or proved antagonistic, justified by the respect due to authority, as illustrated by the following statement: ‘some pupils were punished because when there is a breach, when there are insults, when there is transgression, they must be immediately punished’ (11). The punishment of any hint of ‘suspicious’ behaviour, which Hollande subsumed under the concept of ‘radicalisation’, is another illustration of the control and punishment frame in which Hollande embedded the Republic. Thus, the following extract, in which Hollande called upon head teachers to lead on the radicalisation agenda, showed the desire to control and punish any ‘deviant’ behaviour: ‘It is to them that I once again turn so that they can detect warning signs with their teachers, so that they can alert, including the police when it is necessary, and the judiciary when criminal acts took place’ (10). Finally, the unity of the French was also couched in a threatening way. When Hollande explained that unity was a weapon against terrorism and that ‘nothing can divide us, nothing should oppose us, nothing should separate us’ (1), the implicit message was that anyone trying to challenge this tight-knit unit would be punished.

The repressive nature of Hollande’s Republic led to a closure of national identity around a traditional Republican model, which, as outlined throughout this article, was based on a myth that ignored feelings of alienation and exclusion from it. Considering that these feelings have been increasing among large sections of the population (Boubeker, 2013; Chabal, 2015), considering that many French nationals see themselves as citizens in name only, and that dissatisfaction with the Republic has led to acts of violence, disobedience and in some cases to joining ISIS (Bertho, 2016), the closure of national identity around a repressive traditional Republic has far-reaching political consequences because it imposed a particular version of national identity that sought to silence dissent. By ignoring any feelings of discontentment against the traditional Republican model, casting them instead as a sign of radicalisation, Hollande excluded from the in-group anyone already alienated from the Republic, in particular minorities, or challenging the way it had been implemented. Hollande reasserted the power of the state by imposing limitations that can only further alienation by preventing any debates about the flaws of the Republic, and, at the same time, by upholding the existing unequal relations of social dominance.

**Conclusion**

In the wake of two terrorist attacks in 2015, the then French President sought state to make the world intelligible again by re-asserting France’s national identity. This article has analysed how such identity was articulated and what function it played. It is argued that Hollande’s discourse on national identity enabled the state, whose legitimacy was shattered by the attacks, to reassert its existence and power, by using the terrorist other to define what and who the in-group was, what and who it was not, what it had to fear, and what it had to look forward to. The finding of the research showed the pivotal role the terrorist other played in the recreation of an imagined community. They acted as the state’s enabling other in three ways: they established national sameness by being the in-group’s mirror image; they anchored this sameness on the Republic through Hollande constructing it as the target of their attacks and the French as rising as one to defend it; they provided the in-group with a shared purpose, as defeating them would recreate harmony.

CDA provided the analytical tools for examining the implicit assumptions behind Hollande’s discourse. The analysis showed how a particular version of French national identity was imposed, based on the reactivation of a very traditional model of French Republicanism. It also showed how Hollande manipulated reality to idealise the Republic, which led to its mythification. This involved constructing the Republic and the Republican self in a hagiographical way, all the while omitting countless facts that ran counter to his narrative, ignoring the key questions that have been the object of bitter debates over the years, ignoring feelings of alienation and exclusion from the Republic, as well as all the criticisms that have been made against it. Esch (2010) showed that political myths ‘respond to the fundamental need to create significance in a chaotic and perhaps indifferent world’ (p. 358) and are based on ‘social cues that create meaning and significance’ (p.360). Hollande created significance by constructing a unanimistic vision of a united people rising to defend a glorified Republic. He made use of numerous social cues by tapping into a very traditional Republican model. He therefore constructed a myth that he might have considered necessary to heal and unite a shocked country. In that respect he can be likened to De Gaulle uniting the French after the Second World War through creating the myth of ‘France the nation of resisters’ (Davies, 2001, p.71), which manipulated a very different reality. However, Hollande’s myth is politically very dangerous, as it imposed a version of identity that reproduced existing social hierarchies and excluded from the national in-group any dissenting voices. By imposing an exclusionary discourse of sameness and by developing a control and punishment frame aimed at anyone not adhering to it Hollande reified the traditional Republican model as an unpassable horizon. Considering the multiple issues facing this model, such a discourse can only lead to furthering the sense of alienation and exclusion already felt by large sections of French society.

The political dangers in such a discourse became obvious in the light of the debates sparked by the banning of the burkini, following a new terrorist attack on 14 July 2016. The declarations over the security threats this garment was supposed to represent gave way very quickly to speeches about the burkini being against Republican values (Le Monde, 2016a), as illustrated by the then French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, defending it being banned in the name of Republican values (La Dépêche, 2016). By contrast, the banning led to deep anger over the perceived stigmatisation of the Muslim population and their being rejected outside the national self (Le Monde, 2016b). Similarly, the declarations of the former French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, over national identity, when he declared that ‘we [France] will not be happy anymore with an integration process that is broken, we will demand assimilation. As soon as you are French, your ancestors are the Gauls’ (L’Express, 2016) underlined how fraught the construction of national identity centred on the Republic has become and the real danger of excluding large sections of the population it contains.

Hollande’s discourse was characterised by continuity overall but with marked intensification both in the demonisation of the terrorist other and in the martial tone used to describe the might of the Republic. The main difference was found in the weapons at the disposal of the Republic, with education featuring far more prominently after the first attack compared with the increased stress on military and raw power after the second one. Hollande’s nation-affirming strategies therefore did not vary at all in terms of content but their linguistic and discursive construction changed significantly. They underwent a process of both intensification and militarisation. The fact that Hollande switched to a discourse of naked power demonstrates how terrorism challenges the very core of a state and forces it to use its discursive authority in an ever more strident way. To maintain its legitimacy as the purveyor of safety, a state has to convince the national in-group that they share a bright future. The more terrorist attacks the more the state therefore feels compelled to reassert its authority through a discourse of raw power. The new attacks on French soil since 2015 confirmed this pattern, with a further increase in the military lexis and new ever more coercive measures immediately announced (Vie publique, 2016; SciencePo 2017).

This article sought to contribute to the body of work on the links between terrorism, national identity and state power through a specific case study. The analysis confirms previous research in showing how state authorities use the terrorist other as a way of reasserting their authority, how national identities are based on a mythification process and how myths lead to a further reinforcement of state authority through the silencing of dissenting voices. However, the analysis has also brought to the fore how useful CADS is to drill down expressions of national identity, track the evolution of language and pave the way for a more fine-grained analysis. Thus, even though the content analysis of Hollande’s speeches showed no significant evolution in the discourse between the two attacks, a CADS analysis enabled to demonstrate how its expression changed dramatically, with militarism and stridency much more prominent. Furthermore, this article has highlighted the need to differentiate between discursive strategies, which are generalizable, and triggers that are country specific. Hollande’s strategies, which included assimilation, dissimilation, perpetuation, self-glorification, exceptionalisation, use of symbols and history, discursive manipulation, omission, and heroisation, are a staple of nation-affirming strategies. However, the triggers on which they were based were wholly context specific, based as they were on a conception of Republicanism specific to the political, cultural and historical context of France. Context dependency is therefore a crucial element of analysis to gain a deeper understanding of way states seek to impose their version of national identities.

The present study has of course its limitation. It focused solely on the state’s discursive reconstruction of national identity. It did not consider alternative narratives as provided for example by the various French political parties. It also did not consider the agency of the audience. As national identity is a never-ending field of struggle between social groups, it is vital to understand how its construction by state authorities is received. Additional studies should therefore analyse both alternative visions and the reaction of the French society to this type of discourse in order to determine how it was accepted, negotiated or opposed.

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**Appendix 1 Hollande’s speeches in chronological order:**

1. Allocution à la suite de l'attentat au siège de Charlie Hebdo 07 January 2015
2. Hommage national à Robert Chambeiron Les Invalides 8 January 2015
3. Adresse à la Nation à la suite des évènements des 7 et 8 January 2015 09 January 2015
4. Hommage national aux trois policiers morts en service Préfecture de Police 13 January 2015
5. Vœux aux forces armées 14 January 2015
6. Allocution lors de l'ouverture du forum "Renouveaux du monde arabe" à l’Institut du monde arabe 15 January 2015
7. Vœux aux corps diplomatiques Palais de Elysée 16 January 2015
8. Discours lors de la présentation des vœux aux Corréziens Tulle 17 January 2015
9. Discours à l’occasion des vœux aux Corps constitués et aux bureaux des Assemblées 20 January 2015
10. Vœux au monde éducatif 22 January 2015
11. 5e conférence de presse du président François Hollande 5 February 2015
12. Intervention du président de la République à la suite du Conseil de Défense 29 April 2015
13. Entretien télévisé en direct sur TF1 et France 2 à l'occasion du 14 Juillet 14 July 2015
14. Allocution du président à l'issue de l'inauguration de la mairie de Saint-Cirq-Lapopie 31 July 2015
15. 6e conférence de presse du président de la République 7 september 2015
16. Déclaration du président de la République à l'Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies New York 27 september 2015
17. Déclaration du président de la République à la suite des attaques terroristes à Paris 13 November 2015
18. Déclaration à l'issue du Conseil de défense Elysée 14 November 2015
19. Déclaration à la suite des attaques à Paris Paris 14 November 2015
20. Discours du président de la République devant le Parlement réuni en Congrès 16 November 2015
21. Intervention du président de la République lors de la 38e session de la Conférence générale de l'UNESCO 17 November 2015
22. Discours du président de la République au rassemblement des Maires de France 18 November 2015
23. Discours du président de la République lors de la remise du prix de la Fondation Jacques CHIRAC 19 November
24. Conférence de presse conjointe avec Barack Obama à la Maison-Blanche 24 November 2015
25. François Hollande : "Oui, la France triomphera des périls !" 25 November 2015
26. Déclaration conjointe avec la Chanceliere Angela Merkel 25 November 2015
27. Déclaration des présidents François Hollande et Vladimir Poutine à l'issue de leur entretien 26 November 2015
28. Hommage national aux victimes des attentats du 13 November 27 November 2015
29. Discours sur le porte-avions Charles de Gaulle 05 December 2015
30. Discours lors de l'inauguration du Monument des Fraternisations Neuville-Saint-Vaast 17 December 2015
31. Conférence de presse Conseil européen 18 December 2015
32. Voeux aux Français Palais de l’Elysée 31 December 2015
33. Voeux au Gouvernement Elysée 4 January 2016
34. Vœux aux autorités religieuses 5 January 2016
35. Vœux au Conseil constitutionnel 5 January 2016
36. Voeux aux forces de sécurité publique 7 January 2016
37. Voeux du président aux armées Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan 14 January 2016
38. Voeux aux Corréziens 16 January 2016