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# BRITTANY'S NEW 'BONNETS ROUGES' AND THEIR CRITICS<sup>1</sup>

Ronan LE COADIC

## Introduction: the Background

France is confronted by a triple crisis today. Its first aspect is a crisis of the 'first modernity,' marked by a weakening of the authority of the state, a reflexive turn in knowledge<sup>2</sup> and the eruption of the Other in the cities.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, France has become one of the Eurozone countries most affected by the global economic crisis.<sup>4</sup> Finally, France is affected by a moral crisis: the country's political elites have been ineffective in their struggle against unemployment and for the maintenance of living standards,<sup>5</sup> and have had their reputation challenged by a series of court cases.<sup>6</sup> From this, it follows that the French population not only has grave doubts about the country's economic future,<sup>7</sup> but has also become "ferociously suspicious" about political life.<sup>8</sup>

It was in this context that, in 2013, a battering ram from Brittany terrified the authorities. This was the movement of the 'Bonnetts Rouges,' 'Red Caps.' On 28 October 2013, several hundred people attacked an ecotax tollbooth<sup>9</sup> in Pont-de-Buis (Finistère).<sup>10</sup> They wore red caps—headgear which recalled the great peasant revolt of 1675 that was bloodily repressed with great severity by the soldiers of Louis XIV. There were violent clashes between the demonstrators and the forces of order. "This is not a demonstration, it's the start of a revolution!" shouted one protestor<sup>11</sup>. One CRS policeman and three protestors were wounded—one of the protestors had his hand ripped off by a CRS gas grenade. A call to demonstrate in Quimper<sup>12</sup> on 2 November followed. A vast wave of red caps and Breton flags

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from French by Sharif Gemie.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Les Conséquences de La Modernité* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2000), 44.

<sup>3</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Pouvoir et Contre-Pouvoir À L'ère de La Mondialisation* (Paris: Editions Aubier, 2003); Ulrich Beck, *What Is Globalization?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> "Les Huit Conséquences Désastreuses de La Crise de 2008 Sur La France," *La Tribune*, accessed June 29, 2015, <http://www.latribune.fr/blogs/generation-deficits/20140915tribe3d93ecbb/les-huit-consequences-desastreuses-de-la-crise-de-2008-sur-la-france.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Insee, "Le Taux de Chômage Au Sens Du BIT Est Quasiment Stable Au Deuxième Trimestre 2014," *Informations Rapides*, 203 (September 4, 2014), <http://www.insee.fr/fr/indicateurs/ind14/20140904/Chomage-T214.pdf>; Insee, "Revenu, Pouvoir D'achat et Consommation Des Ménages," accessed May 15, 2014, [http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/theme.asp?theme=16&sous\\_theme=2](http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/theme.asp?theme=16&sous_theme=2).

<sup>6</sup> Among many other, by the Bygmalion affair (involving fraud and the illegal funding of electoral campaigns) and the Cahuzac Affair (money laundering, involving funds gained by financial fraud).

<sup>7</sup> Nouvel Obs, "Les Français Pessimistes Sur L'avenir Économique," *Nouvelobs.com*, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/economie/20140226.OBS7666/sondage-les-francais-pessimistes-sur-l-avenir-economique.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Ipsos, *Fractures Françaises, Vague 2*, January 2014, [http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/201131539?access\\_key=key-1t3mqeo13t7ygr0cp930&allow\\_share=false&escape=false&show\\_recommendations=false&view\\_mode=scroll](http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/201131539?access_key=key-1t3mqeo13t7ygr0cp930&allow_share=false&escape=false&show_recommendations=false&view_mode=scroll).

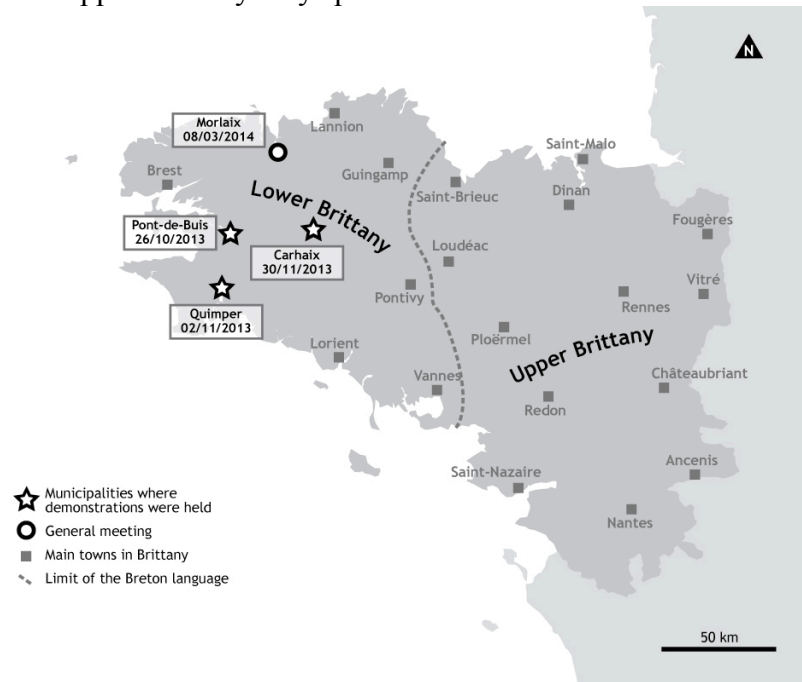
<sup>9</sup> The ecotax tollbooths were sophisticated units: they were equipped with lasers, high frequency radios and cameras. Each cost between 600,000 and a million euros. They were built to calculate and to impose a tax on each lorry of more than 3.5 tonnes that travelled on the French road network. The tax was due to be imposed on 1 January 2014: it has been suspended by the government, due to the movement of the Bonnetts Rouges.

<sup>10</sup> 3,887 inhabitants in 2011.

<sup>11</sup> *Le Télégramme* 2014.

<sup>12</sup> 63,235 inhabitants in 2011.

flooded the city. Between fifteen thousand and thirty thousand people demonstrated, and there followed clashes between some of the protestors and the police. A second demonstration was called in Carhaix<sup>13</sup>: here, between seventeen thousand and forty thousand people gathered peacefully. At the same time, five ecotax tollbooths were attacked or destroyed across Brittany, as well as approximately fifty speed cameras.



Mikael Bodloze-Penlaez 2014

*Map 1: Municipalities where demonstrations were held*

The movement made an astonishing impact in France, exacerbating a sense of tension and the fragility of power structures. All the mass media and the political commentators turned to Brittany to analyse the meaning and to evaluate the strength of this new protest movement.

### ***The Breton Context***

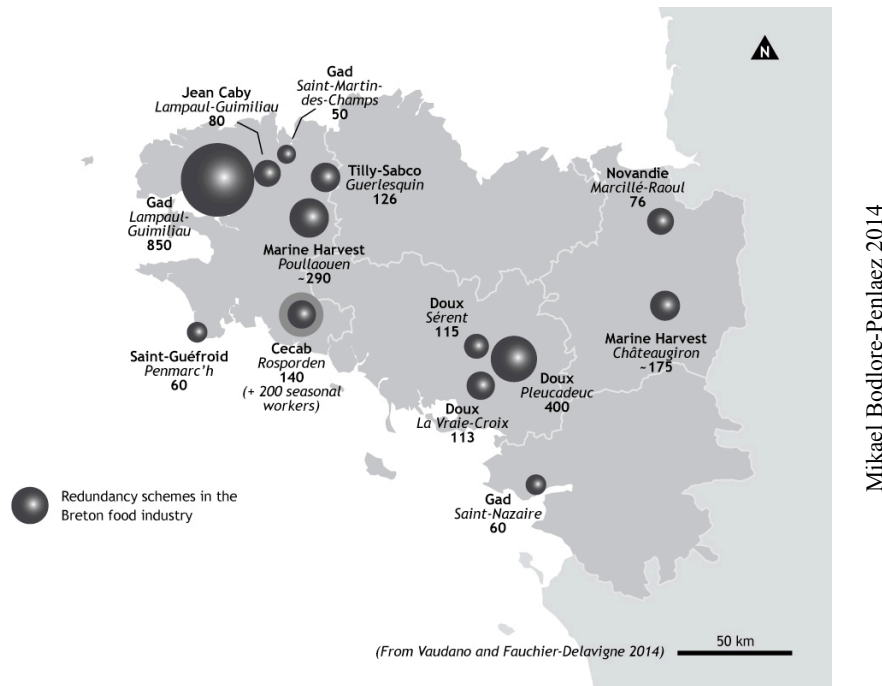
The movement of ‘Bonnets Rouges’ erupted during a period of structural crisis in Brittany. Breton agriculture has experienced serious difficulties: on the one hand, it faces economic stresses, with the rising challenge of competition from countries with low labour costs (such as Brazil and eastern Europe, in which social welfare legislation barely exists), the rising costs of production and the decline of EU subsidies; on the other hand, Breton agriculture has caused ecological problems, such as the pollution of the water supply by nitrates and the proliferation of green algae. As for Breton industry, it lacks diversity: it is over-concentrated on four sectors: food industries, electronics equipment and telecommunications, car industry and shipbuilding, and so it is susceptible to the current crisis; it looks weak.<sup>14</sup>

While Brittany was relatively untouched by the rise in unemployment until 2010, in 2012 Brittany had the largest rise in the number of job-seekers in France, and then in 2013 was confronted by a series of industrial policies which threatened, directly or indirectly, some seven thousand jobs. Public opinion was in “a state of shock.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> 7,541 inhabitants in 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ronan Le Coadic, “La Remise En Question (1992-2000),” in *Histoire D’un Siècle : Bretagne 1901-2001 : L’émancipation D’un Monde*, ed. Claude Geslin et al. (Morlaix: Skol Vreizh, 2010), 323–77.

<sup>15</sup> Ifop, “Pourquoi La Bretagne S’enflamme ?,” *Ifop Focus* 99 (2013): 1–4, at 4.



Map 2 : Redundancy schemes in the Breton food industry

In this tense situation, the government project to impose an ecotax on heavy good vehicles was met with hostility from a section of the population, because of its practical consequences: the most distant regions of the EU were, in effect, the most affected by this proposal, in which the principle ‘polluter pays’ was transformed into ‘periphery pays.’

Here, it should not be forgotten that at the end of the 1960s, General de Gaulle had granted Brittany a free motorway system to compensate for the peninsula’s distant position, which held back its economy. (In fact, in Brittany, there is an unfounded but widely circulating rumour that all roads in the region should be toll-free because of a clause imposed by Anne of Brittany, the last sovereign of the independent duchy of Brittany, in her marriage contract to Louis XII, the king of France. An amusing ‘interview’ with the duchess herself makes this point<sup>16</sup>) In 2013, the proposed ecotax was resented by many as it negated an acquired benefit (free motorways) and as it penalised Breton production, in a form that would make unemployment worse.

Breton public opinion was ‘in shock’ as a result of these plans: this formed the sub-soil from which the protest arose.<sup>17</sup> Managers were the first to voice their opposition to the new tax.<sup>18</sup> Then, ‘socio-economic organisations which had a long history of cooperation’ mobilised Breton public opinion.<sup>19</sup> They made clever use of historical symbols and played upon the Bretons’ ‘anti-Jacobin reflex,’<sup>20</sup> which can be traced back to the 1790s. In that era, the Jacobins defended popular sovereignty, the indivisibility of the French Republic and the

<sup>16</sup> Anne De Bretagne, L’interview Exclusive, accessed June 29, 2015, <http://mabretagne.com/anne-de-bretagne-linterview-exclusive>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>18</sup> Pontivy Journal, “Les Patrons Bretons Ne Veulent Pas Payer L’éco-Taxe,” *Pontivy Journal*, June 20, 2013, <http://www.pontivyjournal.fr/2013/06/20/les-patrons-bretons-ne-veulent-pas-payer-leco-taxe/>; Scarmor, “E.Leclerc, Intermarché, U : Fermeture Solidaire Des Hypermarchés Bretons Mercredi 16 Octobre,” October 15, 2013, <http://www.bretagneaucoeur.com/2013/10/15/e-leclerc-intermarche-u-fermeture-solidaire-des-hypermarches-bretons-mercredi-16-octobre/>.

<sup>19</sup> Ifop, “Pourquoi La Bretagne S’enflamme ?,” 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 4.

general principle of strong government. Their principal political opponents, the Girondins, defended more moderate forms of political culture, and proposed decentralised political structures. They suffered severe repression at the hands of the Jacobins: some Girondins were guillotined, others pushed to suicide. (Today, French people often use ‘Jacobin’ as a type of political short-hand to identify supporters of a strong state, governed in a uniform and centralised manner.) The struggle against the ecotax became an anti-Jacobin cause which united diverse currents; it was a ‘catalyst’ for a deep anger.<sup>21</sup>

The crowds which gathered for the Bonnet Rouges demonstrations at Quimper and Carhaix were diverse. Workers from firms that had been hit by redundancies joined vegetable farmers. There were fishers, artisans, traders and heads of enterprises. The call for the demonstrations was issued by the dissident-left mayor of Carhaix, by the trade-union federation Force Ouvrière,<sup>22</sup> the president of the Finistère branch of the agricultural syndicate FNSEA,<sup>23</sup> and the president of the General Confederation of Small and Medium Businesses (CGPME) of the Côtes-d’Armor. Among the demonstrators at Quimper were members of management organisations,<sup>24</sup> workers’ unions,<sup>25</sup> far left groups,<sup>26</sup> elected representatives from the left and the right,<sup>27</sup> members of Breton movements,<sup>28</sup> many unaffiliated people, some members of the National Front and a few violent identitarian<sup>29</sup> groups.<sup>30</sup> One of the most interesting points to consider is the relationship between these various tendencies.

### *Commentaries and Critiques*

However, it is not the movement of the Bonnets Rouges itself that I wish to discuss here. The movement blurred accepted categories: it has been documented<sup>31</sup> and has received some radically contrasting evaluations.<sup>32</sup> My objective, in this paper, is not to present a global

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> FO is the third biggest trade union federation in France. It is non-communist in nature, and includes socialists, anarchists and Trotskyists.

<sup>23</sup> « Fédération nationale des syndicats d’exploitants agricoles », the biggest French agricultural syndicate, which defends conventional agriculture.

<sup>24</sup> For example: the CGPME, the Movement of Businesses of France (Medef) and ‘Made in Brittany,’ an association of firms which encourages consumers to buy Breton goods.

<sup>25</sup> From the FO, and also — according to the NPA — many from the CGT, “who did not understand the position of their union”: the CGT did not officially support the demonstrations (NPA 29 2013).

<sup>26</sup> The New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), the Alternatives, an alter-globalisation movement; the Left Front, a coalition of left-wing and far left parties; the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizen Action (ATTAC), an alter-globalisation movement.

<sup>27</sup> Including Marc Le Fur, a deputy from the UMP, a large right and right-of-centre party, and vice-president of the National Assembly.

<sup>28</sup> Including Breizhistance, a far-left independentist movement; the UDB (the Breton Democratic Union), a left-autonomist party; the Breton Party, a centre-right autonomist party; and Adsav (Uprising), a right-wing nationalist party.

<sup>29</sup> The ‘identitarian’ current developed after 2000 following the Ministry of the Interior’s dissolution of the Radical Unity party.

<sup>30</sup> NPA 29, “Manifestation Du 2 Novembre À Quimper,” November 11, 2013,

<http://npa29.unblog.fr/2013/11/04/manifestation-du-2-novembre-a-quimper-mpa-29/>.

<sup>31</sup> Yves-Marie Le Lay, *Breton et Fier de L’être : Samedi J’étais À Carhaix*, November 3, 2013,

<http://blogs.mediapart.fr/blog/pyb29/031113/breton-et-fier-de-l-etre-samedi-j-etais-carhaix-par-yves-marie-le-lay>; Camille,

“Front de Gauche et Écologes, Vous Avez Insulté Les Bretons, Faudra Pas Venir Pleurer,” *Rue89*, November 11, 2013,

<http://www.rue89.com/2013/11/04/front-gauche-eelv-etes-coupes-bretagne-247208>.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Baguenard et al., *L’automne des bonnets rouges : De la colère au renouveau* (Brest: Editions dialogues, 2013);

Jean Cabaret, “Ecotaxe : La Confédération Paysanne Se Distingue,” *Ouest France Entreprises*, April 27, 2012,

<http://www.entreprises.ouest-france.fr/article/ecotaxe-confederation-paysanne-se-distingue-01-11-2013-116332>; CGT,

Solidaires, and FSU, “Le Combat Des Bonnets Rouges N’est Pas Celui Des Salariés,” October 31, 2013,

<http://www.cgt.fr/Le-combat-des-bonnets-rouges-n-est.html>; Éric Dupin, “Les Bonnets Rouges, Une Révolte Postmoderne,”

*Slate.fr*, accessed December 8, 2014, <http://www.slate.fr/story/79713/bonnets-rouges-revolte-postmoderne>; Alain Rebours,

“Les « Bonnets Rouges » Un Mouvement ! Quel Mouvement ?,” *ContreTemps*, 20, accessed December 8, 2014, [http://la-](http://la-sociale.viabloga.com/news/une-analyse-remarquable-sur-le-mouvement-des-bonnets-rouges)

[sociale.viabloga.com/news/une-analyse-remarquable-sur-le-mouvement-des-bonnets-rouges](http://la-sociale.viabloga.com/news/une-analyse-remarquable-sur-le-mouvement-des-bonnets-rouges); Emmanuel Todd, “Les Bonnets

analysis but to focus on the negative reactions which some politicians, journalists and intellectuals published in the press. Their words were often harsh. They saw the ‘bonnets rouges’ as a mixed movement, similar to Poujadism<sup>33</sup> and to other movements of the extreme right. For such commentators, the movement of 2013 did not seem a worthy successor to the revolts of 1675 and the symbolic use of red cap was—for them—a manipulation of history by bosses and autonomists.

My argument is that these harsh judgements are not simply expressions of justified criticisms of aspects of the Bonnets Rouges, but are examples of symbolic domination: a form of authority not based on physical violence, but on the assumed legitimacy of a particular authority which forms the base for the imposition of specific cultural norms.<sup>34</sup> On the one hand, this takes the form of the domination of popular opinion; it asserts that only the parties and unions of the classic French left are authorised to speak for the people. On the other hand, there is also a form of symbolic domination in the manner in which a collective identity is appreciated: Breton identity is reduced to the stigmatised definition given to it by the dominant.

To demonstrate this, I have pursued two lines of research: the first, a comparison between the protests of 2013 and the revolt of 1675, as seen by historians;<sup>35</sup> the second, a comparison of the discourse of the elites in 2013 with the established social representations of the Breton population.<sup>36</sup>

### If the cap fits...

Many commentators criticised or laughed at the use of red caps by the demonstrators of 2013. The most articulate argument came in an article entitled “No to the Manipulation of History!” in the Breton daily, *Le Télégramme* of 22 November 2013.<sup>37</sup> The three authors stated that: “For a month, we have seen a type of manipulation of the history of Brittany that has rarely been seen before.” Their analysis suggested that contemporary managers should be compared to seventeenth-century aristocrats: they argued that the revolt of 1675 “had opposed

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Rouges, Une Chance Pour La France,” *Marianne*, accessed December 1, 2014, [http://www.marianne.net/Emmanuel-Todd-Les-bonnets-rouges-une-chance-pour-la-France\\_a233812.html](http://www.marianne.net/Emmanuel-Todd-Les-bonnets-rouges-une-chance-pour-la-France_a233812.html).

<sup>33</sup> An anti-tax, anti-industrial and anti-urban populist movement of the 1950s.

<sup>34</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. 1979. *La Distinction : Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit); Weber, Max *Economie et société, tome 1 : Les Catégories de la sociologie* (Paris: Editions Pocket, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> “Numéro Spécial Sur Les Révoltes Bretonnes De 1675.” 1975. *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l’Ouest* 82 (4); Gauthier Aubert, *Les révoltes du papier timbré, 1675: essai d’histoire événementielle* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014); Alain Croix et al., *Bonnets rouges: une révolte rurale en Bretagne (1675)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes (PUR), 1998); Serge Duigou, *La révolte des Bonnets rouges en pays bigouden* (Quimper: Éditions Ressac, 1989); ESB, Arthur Le Moine de La Borderie, and Boris Porchnev, *Les Bonnets rouges*, (10-18 1045) (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1975); Yvon Garlan and Claude Nières, *Les révoltes bretonnes de 1675: papier timbré et bonnets rouges* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1975); Jean Lemoine, *La révolte dite du papier timbré ou des bonnets rouges en Bretagne en 1675: étude et documents* (Paris: H. Champion, 1898); Roland Mousnier, *Roland Mousnier. Fureurs paysannes, les paysans dans les révoltes du XVIIe siècle (France, Russie, Chine)* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1967); Michel Nassiet, *Qui étaient les bonnets rouges ? Les révoltes bretonnes de 1675* (Morlaix: Skol Vreizh, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Catherine Bertho, “La Naissance Des Stéréotypes Régionaux En Bretagne Au XIXe Siècle” (Thèse de troisième cycle. EHESS, 1979); Catherine Bertho, “L’invention de La Bretagne,” *Actes de La Recherche En Sciences Sociales* 35, no. 1 (1980): 45–62; Jean-Paul Champseix, “L’image de La Bretagne et Du Breton Dans La Littérature et La Para-Littérature Française D’audience Nationale de Chateaubriand À Bécassine” (Thèse. Université de Paris X, 1984); Pierre Corbel, “La Figure du Gallo: identité et représentations de la Haute-Bretagne” (Thèse de troisième cycle. Université de Paris X, 1984); Fañch Élégœt, “L’identité Bretonne: Notes Sur La Production de L’identité Négative,” *Pluriel-Débat*, 24 (1980): 43–67; Ronan Le Coadic, *L’identité Bretonne* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes (PUR) et Terre de Brume, 1998); Ronan Le Coadic, “Tout Est Bon Dans Le Breton,” *Ethnologie Française* 42, no. 4 (2012): 697–709.

<sup>37</sup> Alain Croix, Fañch Roudaut, and André Lespagnol, “Bonnets Rouges, Non À La Manipulation de l’Histoire,” *Le Télégramme*, November 22, 2013, <http://www.letelegramme.fr/ig/generales/regions/finistere/tribune-bonnets-rouges-non-a-la-manipulation-de-l-histoire-22-11-2013-2311284.php>.

Breton peasants and their Breton exploiters: it was above all a social movement. It is significant that the best-known rebel, Sébastien Le Balp, was murdered by an aristocrat.” Furthermore, the rebels of 1675 never opposed the King. The participation of bosses in the movement of 2013 demonstrated that it was, they argued, a type of trick: wearing a red cap as a sign of rage “against ‘Paris’” was a form of “caricature of history and led to its manipulation.”

Curiously, these three historians did not consider the entirety of the episode of 1675. Certainly, the revolt of 1675 was ‘above all’ social, but it also contained a dimension of Breton protest, as was stressed by the Soviet historian Boris Porchnev, a specialist in the study of popular revolts in the Ancien Regime. The peasantry of lower Brittany,<sup>38</sup> he noted, “felt a natural hatred and horror for all that came from France”<sup>39</sup>. “They thought that all was not yet lost, that they could liberate themselves, but at the same time they felt that armed forces of foreign France” was going to give them a fatal blow<sup>40</sup>. “French historians do not want to see these forms of struggle for national liberation in the revolt of 1675.”<sup>41</sup> Perhaps this is an example of Renan’s observation: “forgetting, and even historical error, is an essential part of the creation of a nation”<sup>42</sup> Our three historians forgot that the older struggle was against “a tyranny which was hostile to old Breton liberty.”<sup>43</sup> and—when they considered the murder of the revolt’s leader—they also failed to consider the circumstances. Yes, Sébastien Le Balp was assassinated by an aristocrat: but it was at the moment when he was going to ask this aristocrat’s brother, an ex-colonel, to lead the rebels against the royal army.<sup>44</sup> To use the Marxist vocabulary favoured by our three historians, Le Balp was engaging in an act of class collaboration! As for the point concerning the lack of opposition to the king: this was echoed in 2013 when the protestors wrote respectfully to the President of the Republic, and asked him to take account of their situation.<sup>45</sup>

The events of 2013 were not the first time that the revolt of the Bonnets rouges has been remembered and invoked for political reasons. It should be noted that the revolt of 1675 “marked several generations in Lower Brittany,” according to Alain Croix.<sup>46</sup> An old Breton-language ballad concerning the revolt has been identified, entitled *Ar Paper timbr* (The Stamped Paper). Eva Guillorel, after some painstaking research in the judicial archives, has concluded that the oral memory of the Bonnets Rouges was transmitted for at least three generations, which corresponds to the length of time that anthropologists normally accord intergenerational family memories.<sup>47</sup> In some families, however, the memory of the revolt seems to have been transmitted well beyond this period. The well-known Breton writer Pierre Jakez Hélias records that, in the 1920s, he learnt from his grandfather, a farmer, that two of his ancestors had been killed after the revolt. “One of them was just 14, not a year more, and they were hanged from the trees of Guiguiffen by the Duke of Chaulnes, that damned duke,

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<sup>38</sup> Lower Brittany is the western half of Brittany, where Breton was the language of almost all the population until the early twentieth century.

<sup>39</sup> ESB, La Borderie, and Porchnev, *Les Bonnets rouges*, 278.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-Ce Qu’une Nation ?* (1882; repr., Paris: Presses Pocket, 1993), 41.

<sup>43</sup> Expression used by the rebels at the Article 4 of the *Peasant Code*. ESB, La Borderie, and Porchnev, *Les Bonnets Rouges*, 92.

<sup>44</sup> Claude Péridy, *Sang bleu et bonnets rouges : le meurtre du marquis de Montgaillard* (Spézet: Keltia Graphic, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Le Figaro, “Les Bonnets Rouges Écrivent À Hollande,” *Le Figaro*, December 2, 2013, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-eco/2013/12/02/97002-20131202FILWWW00425-les-bonnets-rouges-ecrivent-a-hollande.php>.

<sup>46</sup> Alain Croix, “La Révolte Des Bonnets Rouges. De L’histoire À La Mémoire,” *ArMen* 131 (November 2002): 2-11, at 11.

<sup>47</sup> Eva Guillorel, *La plainte et la plaine: chanson, justice, cultures en Bretagne XVIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes (PUR), 2010), 479.

may he burn forever in hell, even after judgement day, the bastard!'<sup>48</sup> This exceptional familial transmission was probably sustained by the fact that the material legacy of the revolt is visible in Hélias's Bigouden region of Brittany to this day: some of the steeples of the rebel communes were destroyed by Louis XIV's soldiers as they repressed the revolt, and have never been rebuilt.

In the 1930s, the symbolism of the Bonnets Rouges began to be used occasionally by the SFIO (Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière—the first incarnation of today's French Socialist Party)<sup>49</sup> and by the left-wing of the Breton nationalist movement.<sup>50</sup> But the real turning-point came in the 1970s, because of three factors: the ethnic revival,<sup>51</sup> the refoundation of Breton movement as left-facing movement in the 1960s, and the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of revolt.<sup>52</sup> Many publications illustrate this point: some academic works,<sup>53</sup> some musical and literary invocations,<sup>54</sup> some political pamphlets (from the UDB, a left-wing Breton autonomist party, the Communist Party and the PSU, an anti-colonialist left-wing party). Many demonstrations celebrated the revolt of 1675, and there was even a rivalry between these different currents to control the sense of the memory of the revolt. Who was best placed to claim the legacy of the Bonnets Rouges? The left-wing Breton nationalists? Or the Communists? There was an angry debate on this point in Carhaix, one of the old centres of the Bonnets Rouges. Since the 1970s, and up until 2013, the memory of the Bonnets Rouges was far less controversial: their name (or the name of their leader, Sébastien Le Balp) was given to several roads in Brittany, tourism offices offered information on the revolt, and there was even a beer named after them!

There are some anecdotal similarities between the protests of 2013 and the revolt of 1675. In both cases, the movement was pre-figured in Rennes (as a revolt against taxes in April 1675, and as opposition to the Janais plan in early October 2013), and then gripped lower Brittany. In both cases, a precise object was the focus of their rage: a clock in 1675, which the peasants thought would be used to impose the *gabelle* salt tax,<sup>55</sup> and the ecotax tollbooths in 2013. Furthermore, in both cases, an anti-tax protest was the expression of a far wider sense of discontent. In both cases, a leader came from outside the world of peasants: a dishonest lawyer in 1675, the mayor of Carhaix in 2013, who represented a coalition of left-wing groups. In both cases, finally, the protestors aimed at the city of Quimper: in 1675, the peasants did not succeed in taking it and 'never recovered' from this setback,<sup>56</sup> in 2013, on the other hand, they demonstrated there. But as well as these anecdotal points, there are some more important similarities.

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<sup>48</sup> Pierre Jakez Hélias, *Le cheval d'orgueil : mémoires d'un Breton du pays bigouden*, Collection Terre humaine (Paris: Plon, 1975; repr. Paris: Presses pocket, 1982), 479.

<sup>49</sup> Benoît Kermoal "Les Bonnets Rouges, Le Socialisme et La Bretagne: Histoire et Mémoire (1900-1940)," Billet. Accessed March 20 2015. <http://enklask.hypotheses.org/798>.

<sup>50</sup> Alain Croix, "La Révolte Des Bonnets Rouges. De L'histoire À La Mémoire," *ArMen* 131 (November 2002): 2-11, at 2.

<sup>51</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>52</sup> Croix, "La Révolte Des Bonnets Rouges," 10.

<sup>53</sup> "Numéro Spécial Sur Les Révoltes Bretonnes De 1675." 1975. *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest* 82 (4); ESB, Arthur Le Moyne de La Borderie, and Boris Porchnev, *Les Bonnets rouges*; Yvon Garlan and Claude Nières, *Les révoltes bretonnes de 1675: papier timbré et bonnets rouges* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1975).

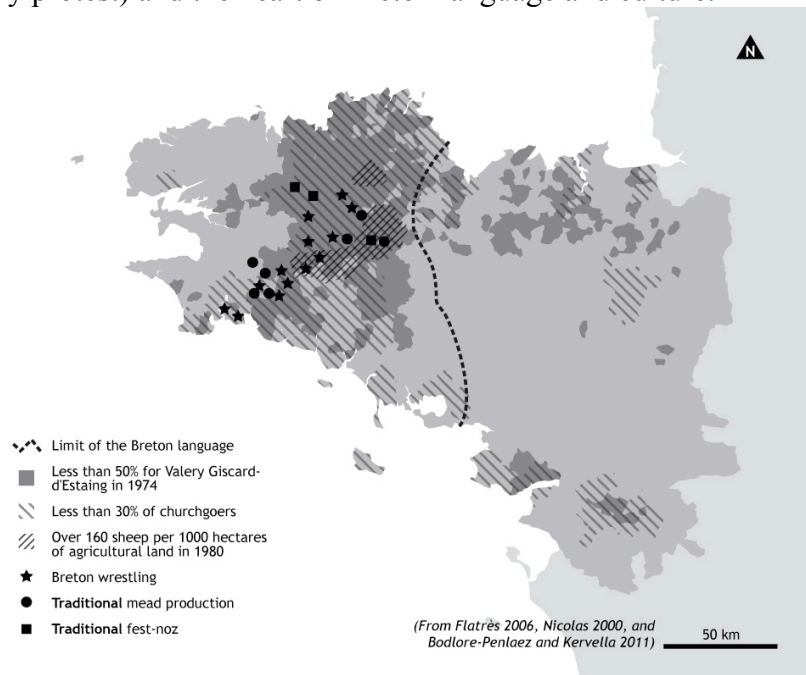
<sup>54</sup> Particularly Paol Keineg, *Le Printemps des Bonnets Rouges: théâtre, [Vincennes, Cartoucherie de Vincennes, 9 décembre 1972]*, Théâtre hors la France (Paris: P. J. Oswald, 1972).

<sup>55</sup> Joël Cornette, *Histoire de La Bretagne et Des Bretons : Tome 1, Des Âges Obscurs Au Règne de Louis XIV* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 619.

<sup>56</sup> Yves Le Gallo, "Postface," in *Histoire Littéraire et Culturelle de La Bretagne*, ed. Jean Balcou and Yves Le Gallo (Paris-Genève: Champion-Slatkine, 1987), 3:395.



Both these movements, if one puts aside their start in Rennes, came from a ‘diagonal of protest’ of lower Brittany, running from the west of the Côtes-d’Armor to the south-east of Finistère, which is at once the centre of the political avant-garde in Brittany (and sometimes of revolutionary protest) and the heart of Breton language and culture.<sup>57</sup>



Map 3: The diagonal of protest of Lower Brittany

Secondly, in both the protests of 2013 and the rebellion of 1675, hostility to taxes was a focus from a far wider sense of discontent, which possessed the dual character of radical social critique and Breton-orientated demands. And, strikingly, in both 1675 and 2013, Bretons affirmed their will to control their own destiny. In 1675, the peasants attempted to legislate: they produced a *Peasant Code* and other texts which aimed to end the feudal order.<sup>58</sup> In 2013, the protestors chanted the slogan “live, decide and work on our land” and they received 15,000 messages of support, which they reduced to eleven ‘key demands’ at a meeting of an ‘Estates-General’ of Brittany at Morlaix on 8 March 2014.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, many observers questioned whether the protest of 2013 constituted a *popular* movement, because of the heterogeneous nature of its support. “Workers in threatened positions, heads of firms and militants of many organisations, including the NPA, the FO trade union federation and regionalist movements, formed a varied crowd” noted the Communist daily *Humanité*, amongst others. Critics noted above all the presence of farmers belonging to the mainstream FDSEA agricultural syndicate (which has promoted a policy of agricultural concentration and defended the role of the free market), and of workers who had been dismissed or who were threatened with the loss of their jobs. But this heterogeneous mix is another reminder of 1675: according to Porchnev, in reality “the peasants of lower Brittany were far from all being poverty-stricken: there were well-off people among them. Between these two wings there should have been a social chasm... But these differences were, to some extent, neutralised by the fact that both sections were crushed.”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Pierre Flatrès, *La Bretagne* (Paris: PUF, 1986), 12.

<sup>58</sup> ESB, La Borderie, and Porchnev, *Les Bonnets rouges*, 91–93.

<sup>59</sup> Ouest-France, “Bonnets Rouges. Onze Revendications Phares Pour La Bretagne,” *Ouest-France.fr*, accessed November 24, 2014, <http://www.ouest-france.fr/bonnets-rouges-onze-revendications-phares-pour-la-bretagne-1988576>.

<sup>60</sup> ESB, La Borderie, and Porchnev, *Les Bonnets rouges*, 347.

To conclude this section, it seems to me that—alongside some well-founded critical points concerning how the policies advocated by managers and the FNSEA have led to the current problems experienced by Breton agro-industry—the new Bonnets Rouges of 2013 were principally opposed by those who considered that they possessed the monopoly of public discourse. The historians claimed their right to pronounce on history. The three academics cited above acted as if they were able to pronounce on who was able to make authentic use of the phrase ‘bonnet rouge.’ They refused this right to an unorthodox social movement, but they did not seem concerned that the French Communist Party has used it on several occasions.<sup>61</sup> Secondly, the political parties and unions of the orthodox French left claimed a monopoly over popular protest: ‘the people’ were represented by its political and union organisations, and they alone were allowed to act in its name. But when the representative organisations of the French tried twice (on 2 and 23 November) to compete with the movement of the Bonnets Rouges by organising their own demonstrations, they did not succeed in gathering as many protestors as the Bonnets Rouges.

Let us now turn from the comparison with 1675 and consider the meaning of the representations of Bretons which emerge from the commentaries on the movement of 2013.

### **Idiots, Chouans and Nationalists**

Many comments on the Bonnets rouges of 2013 can be situated in a long line of ethnic stereotypes of Bretons, whose origins stretch back into antiquity.

From the Middle Ages, Bretons were presented as barbarians.<sup>62</sup> Bernard Maris, a university lecturer and a journalist, uses precisely this expression: “These demonstrations by Bretons, the Bonnets rouges, are a prehistoric barbarity. I can’t find any other term to describe them.”<sup>63</sup> Also in the Middle Ages, Bretons were depicted as brutes.<sup>64</sup> This still seems to be the opinion of Yves Paccalet, a philosopher and journalist, for whom the Bretons’ red cap is “a sign of hatred, the symbol of an anti-ecological, irrational, violent, egotistical, destructive social wave,” by those who “screamed against the ecotax.”<sup>65</sup> In the Middle Ages, Bretons were mocked for their bizarre language, their taste for alcohol and the ridiculous stubbornness with which they defended their privileges.<sup>66</sup> All these three points could be found in the comic video that journalist Didier Porte made about the Bonnets Rouges: it was posted on 4 November 2013 on the website Mediapart.<sup>67</sup>

During the French Revolution, a new image of the Bretons appeared, which shaped public opinion for decades afterwards: that of the Chouans, the royalist rebels from the region north of the Loire: they were not only active in Brittany, and in fact were only present in parts of

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<sup>61</sup> From 1972 to 2002 the newsletter of the Carhaix section of the Communist Party was called ‘Le Bonnet Rouge’. Furthermore, in 1975, the PCF organised a large festival to celebrate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolt, and every year until 2002, it continued to organise a ‘festival of the Bonnets Rouges’.

<sup>62</sup> Le Coadic, *L’identité Bretonne*, 101–127.

<sup>63</sup> Bernard Maris, Invité de 7h50. “Le 7/9”. *France Inter*, November 25, 2013..

<sup>64</sup> Le Coadic, *L’identité Bretonne*, 101–127.

<sup>65</sup> Yves Paccalet, “Bonnets Rouges: Quand Le Symbole de Paix Du Commandant Cousteau Devient Un Signal de Haine,” *Leplus.nouvelobs.com*, November 11, 2013, <http://leplus.nouvelobs.com/contribution/968797-bonnets-rouges-quand-le-symbole-de-paix-du-commandant-cousteau-devient-un-signal-de-haine.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Jean-Christophe Cassard, “Les Premiers Immigrés,” *Médiévales* 3, no. 6 (1984): 85–94; Gwennolé Le Menn, “Les Bretons Bretonnants D’après Quelques Textes et Récits de Voyage” (XIVe-XVe Siècles), *Mémoires de La Société D’histoire et D’archéologie de Bretagne* 61 (September 1984): 105–34.

<sup>67</sup> Didier Porte, “Ils Ont Des Bonnets Rouges, Vivent Les Bretons,” April 11, 2013, <http://www.didierporte.fr/2013/11/18/mediaparte-ils-ont-des-bonnets-rouges-vivent-les-bretons-41113/>.

Brittany. The Chouans took up arms against the Revolution, the Republic and then the Empire.<sup>68</sup> For journalist Bruno Roger-Petit, “a large section of the minority who votes for the right [in Brittany today] is loyal to a nostalgic memory of the pressure put on the enlightened Republic by the Chouans of 1793.”<sup>69</sup> In 1829, Balzac described these Breton Chouans as “more intellectually impoverished than the Mohicans”<sup>70</sup> and Victor Hugo described their war as “absurdity on heat.”<sup>71</sup> Today, Christian Delarue, a (small) star of the French radical left, writes of the Bonnets Rouges that “their form of rebellion consists in smashing the doors of toll-booths and speed cameras. Reptilian!”<sup>72</sup> The Chouans were often described as peasants who followed their masters, namely the nobles and the clergy.<sup>73</sup> Jean-Luc Mélenchon, then President of the Party of the Left, used the following terms to describe the Bonnets rouges: “In Quimper, the slaves are demonstrating for the rights of their masters.”<sup>74</sup>

Brittany’s once-thriving maritime commerce was ruined by the British-French wars during the Revolutionary decades, and there was little industrialisation in the region. As a result, in the nineteenth century, Brittany was a poor area. From the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, a large proportion of the Breton population emigrated. These points were the basis for the sneering clichés of the poor Breton, stupid, backward-looking and pious.<sup>75</sup> Mélenchon wrote an analysis of the movement of the Bonnets Rouges, which can be connected to all those nineteenth-century clichés. According to him, the Bretons who demonstrated at Quimper are “idiots,” who give their region an “old-fashioned, folkloric image,” as they follow “the lead of the priests, who march at their head with the local bosses.”<sup>76</sup> For him, these Breton idiots are manipulated by their bosses. This was the argument was repeated by many other left-wing intellectuals.<sup>77</sup>

During the twentieth century, new themes were devised. A section of the Breton nationalist movement collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War: the whole movement was tarnished by this episode, and for years was associated with the far right. Today, several observers saw in the Bonnets rouges “a drift towards autonomism.”<sup>78</sup> For Delarue, this was worrying as “a dominated [Breton] nationalism is as much of an emotional sickness as a dominant nationalism.” One reader of *Le Monde* contributed the following statement to its blog, referring to the Bonnets Rouges: “Regionalism and nationalism (which are the same thing) are the plague of modern societies, along with religion.”<sup>79</sup> Even more

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<sup>68</sup> In fact, the Breton population was initially largely in favour of the Revolution. Then, for different reasons (in particular, a perception that the Revolution had been stolen by the bourgeoisie, but also a wish to defend religion), a section of Bretons rebelled against it. Other Breton regions remained loyal to the Revolution. Outside of Brittany, Chouanneries spread to Maine, Normandy, and to the north of the Anjou region. South of the Loire, the rebellion spread into the Vendée and the Poitou.

<sup>69</sup> Bruno Roger-Petit, “Les ‘Bonnets Rouges’ : Un Mouvement Réac, Entre Manif Pour Tous et Dieudonné ?,” *L’Obs – Le Plus*, April 11, 2013, <http://leplus.nouvelobs.com/contribution/965119-les-bonnets-rouges-un-mouvement-reac-entre-manif-pour-tous-et-dieudonne.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Les Chouans* (1829; repr., Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 39.

<sup>71</sup> Victor Hugo, *Quatrevingt-treize* (1874; repr., Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 251.

<sup>72</sup> Christian Delarue, “BZH : Le Nationalisme Dominé Est Aussi Une Peste,” *Mediapart*, November 18, 2013, <http://blogs.mediapart.fr/blog/christian-delarue/181113/bzh-le-nationalisme-domine-est-aussi-une-peste>.

<sup>73</sup> Hugo, *Quatrevingt-treize*; Balzac, *Les Chouans*.

<sup>74</sup> AFP, “Mélenchon: ‘À Quimper, Les Esclaves Manifesteront Pour Les Droits de Leurs Maîtres,’” *Libération*, November 2, 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Bertho, “L’invention de La Bretagne.”

<sup>76</sup> AFP, “Mélenchon: ‘À Quimper, Les Esclaves Manifesteront Pour Les Droits de Leurs Maîtres.’”

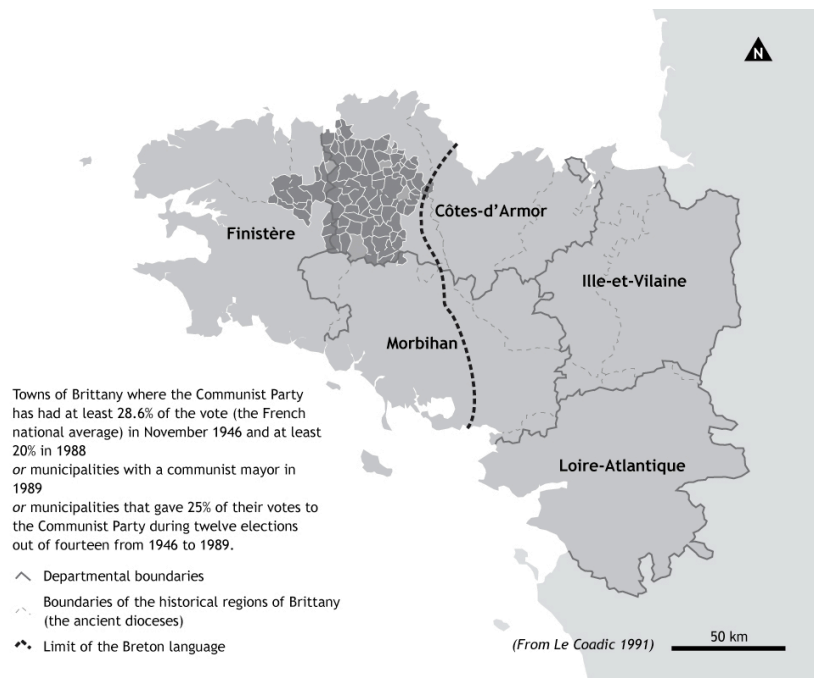
<sup>77</sup> Françoise Morvan and Christian Delarue, among others.

<sup>78</sup> Françoise Morvan, “Bonnets Rouges : Des Dérives Autonomistes Derrière Les Revendications Sociales,” *Le Monde*, November 13, 2013.

<sup>79</sup> Gaga42, November 14, 2013 (8:23 am), comment on “Bonnets rouges : des dérives autonomistes derrière les revendications sociales,” *Idées* (blog), November 14, 2013, [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/reactions/2013/11/13/bretagne-des-derives-autonomistes-derriere-les-revendications-sociales\\_3513215\\_3232\\_3.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/reactions/2013/11/13/bretagne-des-derives-autonomistes-derriere-les-revendications-sociales_3513215_3232_3.html).

seriously, “the Bonnets Rouges [would be] directed by the far right.”<sup>80</sup> “The Bonnets Rouges are populist, demagogic, nationalist, anti-European, anti-cosmopolitan: in brief, they are from the extreme right” noted Yves Paccalet, “either they knowingly serve it, or they are manipulated by it.”<sup>81</sup> The movement would have showed an “unashamed racism”: the proof of this was a photo of three Bonnets Rouges imitating the salute given by Dieudonné, an anti-Semitic French comedian. This photo of three unknown individuals was taken to demonstrate by itself, according to the journalist Bruno Roger-Petit, that the whole of the Bonnets Rouges movement was based in the far right.<sup>82</sup>

It should be noted here that while there is no single tendency dominating Breton politics, the vast majority of Bretons have always been reluctant to follow the far right. In fact, the National Front gets its lowest scores in Brittany. And the particular zone in which the Bonnets rouges were based has been, since mass voting was introduced, a centre of the left<sup>83</sup>. It is in the centre of the ‘protest diagonal’ discussed above, the ‘reddest’ area of Brittany.



Map 4: The communist stronghold of Brittany

So, even if the movement of the Bonnets Rouges was heterogeneous and largely outside of the established movements of the established left (in particular the Socialist and Communist Parties), there was definitely “something *rouge* in the *bonnets rouges*.”<sup>84</sup> For the political scientist Roman Pasquier, they were “a popular movement, not a bunch of

<sup>80</sup> S.G., “Bretagne: Les Bonnets Rouges Siphonnés Par L’extrême-Droite,” *L’Humanité*, November 21, 2013.

<sup>81</sup> Yves Paccalet, “Bonnets Rouges: Quand Le Symbole de Paix Du Commandant Cousteau Devient Un Signal de Haine.” *Leplus.nouvelobs.com*. November 11 2013, <http://leplus.nouvelobs.com/contribution/968797-bonnets-rouges-quand-le-symbole-de-paix-du-commandant-cousteau-devient-un-signal-de-haine.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Roger-Petit, “Les ‘Bonnets Rouges’ : Un Mouvement Réac, Entre Manif Pour Tous et Dieudonné ?.”

<sup>83</sup> Ronan Le Coadic, *Campagnes Rouges de Bretagne* (Morlaix: Skol Vreizh, 1991).

<sup>84</sup> Philippe Marlière, “Il Y a Du Rouge Sur Les Bonnets Rouges,” *Mediapart*, November 7, 2013, <http://blogs.mediapart.fr/blog/philippe-marliere/071113/il-y-du-rouge-sur-les-bonnets-rouges>.

fascists.”<sup>85</sup> Their demands certainly did not sound like a far-right platform.<sup>86</sup> In truth, they were flexible, stressed Emmanuel Todd:

It is certain: their demands were unclear [*floues*]. But how could this revolt have been coherent when the dominant ideology itself is no longer coherent, in this twilight period of the Euro’s setback, in a province which believes in Europe?<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, if one considers the whole of Brittany, one notes that while before the 1980s, the majority of Bretons voted for the moderate right (principally Christian-Democrats), since then Breton voters have turned to socialism. The *Figaro*, the right-wing French daily, was at least consistent: it argued that the evils from which Brittany suffered were caused by the Left, for which they had voted. So, they should refrain from protesting: “Who voted en masse for the Left in the last elections? The Bretons. So... a bit of calm, please.”<sup>88</sup>

A few years after Brittany turned to the left, in 1989, a new idea spread across France like wildfire: *communautarisme*.<sup>89</sup> This term was used in a pejorative and polemical manner to question the alleged attitude of some “ethnic, religious, cultural and social communities which can divide the nation, so preventing integration.”<sup>90</sup> According to Ulrich Beck, *communautarisme* is simply a myth.<sup>91</sup> But according to the critics of 2013, it was this *communautarisme*, inspired by “regionalist idiocy,”<sup>92</sup> which was behind the Bonnets Rouges’ movement. One reader of *Le Monde* compared the alleged Arab and Breton *communatarismes*. “*Communautarisme* begins when one claims a double identity. An immigrant from the Maghreb who waves an Algerian flag during a football match has the same identity-based explanations and same identity-based justifications as those who march with Breton flags.”<sup>93</sup>

This resentment of the Breton flag—or *Gwenn-ha-du* (‘Black and White’)—has a long history. The flag was devised between 1923 and 1925 by the architect Maurice Marchal (who adopted the Breton name ‘Morvan Marchal’). Some researchers argue that he was helped by René Rychwaert (also known as ‘Ronan Klec’h’).<sup>94</sup> The flag was displayed for the first time at the Exposition of Decorative Arts in Paris in 1925. Marchal, a proud modernist, wanted to replace the traditional, medieval banner of ermines, considered backward-looking, and which could be “confused with the French monarchist flag, with its design of golden fleur-de-lys on a white background.”<sup>95</sup> Marchal sought a flag which would be “a *modern* symbol of Brittany.”<sup>96</sup> It is quite possible that he was, in part, inspired by the flag of the USA. In the

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<sup>85</sup> Romain Pasquier, “Les Bonnets Rouges : Un Mouvement Populaire, Pas Une Bande de Fachos,” *Libération*, November 6, 2013.

<sup>86</sup> Ouest-France, “Bonnets Rouges. Onze Revendications Phares Pour La Bretagne.”

<sup>87</sup> Todd, “Une Chance Pour La France.”

<sup>88</sup> Le Figaro, “Trodec : «La Bretagne Est En Situation Pré-Insurrectionnelle»,” *Figaro Tv*, November 19, 2013, <http://video.lefigaro.fr/figaro/video/trodec-la-bretagne-est-en-situation-pre-insurrectionnelle/2849997065001/>.

<sup>89</sup> Ronan Le Coadic, “Faut-Il Jeter L’identité Aux Orties?,” in *Identités et Société de Plougastel À Okinawa*, ed. Ronan Le Coadic (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes (PUR), 2007), 49–54; Louis-Georges Tin, “Êtes-Vous Communautariste ? Quelques Réflexions Sur La Rhétorique “anti-Communautaire”,” in *De La Domination À La Reconnaissance : Antilles, Afrique et Bretagne*, ed. Ronan Le Coadic (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes (PUR), 2013), 315–23.

<sup>90</sup> Pierre-André Taguieff, “Vous Avez Dit ‘communautarisme’ ?,” *Le Figaro*, July 17, 2003.

<sup>91</sup> Beck, *Pouvoir et Contre-Pouvoir À L’ère de La Mondialisation*, 100–105.

<sup>92</sup> AFP, “Mélenc’hon: ‘À Quimper, Les Esclaves Manifesteront Pour Les Droits de Leurs Maîtres.’”

<sup>93</sup> Claude Doucet, November 15, 2013 (2:49 pm), comment on “Bonnets rouges : des dérives autonomistes derrière les revendications sociales,” *Idées* (blog), November 11, 2013, [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/reactions/2013/11/13/bretagne-des-derives-autonomistes-derriere-les-revendications-sociales\\_3513215\\_3232\\_2.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/reactions/2013/11/13/bretagne-des-derives-autonomistes-derriere-les-revendications-sociales_3513215_3232_2.html).

<sup>94</sup> Jakez Gaucher, “Morvan Marchal, 1900-1963, Créateur Du Gwenn Ha Du” *Dalc’homp Soñj* 17 (1985): 22.

<sup>95</sup> Marchal, cited by Octave-Louis Aubert, “Pour le drapeau !” *Bretagne* 152 (October 1937): 289-292, at 292.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

American flag there are thirteen horizontal red and white rows: Marchal chose nine black and white rows, to represent “Breton diversity.”<sup>97</sup> The four white rows represented the parts of Brittany where the Celtic language of Breton was historically spoken, and the five black rows represented those parts where Gallo (a Romance language) was spoken. In memory of the old duchy, he retained the ermines in a square, next to the flag pole—like the stars in the American flag: he considered that he had produced a “perfectly acceptable synthesis.”<sup>98</sup>

Morvan’s political itinerary is a complex one, as was the case for many intellectuals during those difficult years. While at college, he identified with Action française (the French royalist movement), but he moved towards Breton nationalist ideas, picking up some Proudhonian libertarian ideas and the ideal of federalism. In the 1930s, he left the Breton nationalist movement and moved to Laval, where he joined the Radical-Socialist Party (a mildly left-of-centre movement), and a masonic lodge linked to the Grand Orient of France.<sup>99</sup> During the Second World War he wrote, using a pseudonym, some anti-Semitic articles and joined the collaborationist Rassemblement National Populaire (RNP—National Popular Assembly), a party created in 1941 by an ex-Socialist, Marcel Déat: the majority of the RNP’s members were ex-Socialists.<sup>100</sup> At the Liberation he was condemned to fifteen years of “national degradation,” but benefitted from an amnesty in 1951. He died in 1963; he had “fallen into the most absolute oblivion and misery.”<sup>101</sup>

The history of the Breton flag was quite different from that of its maker. It was adopted in 1925 by Marcel Cachin, representing the Association des Bretons émancipés (The Association of Free Bretons—an organisation close to the Communist Party), and by Eugène Reigner, representing the Cercles celtiques (Celtic Circles).<sup>102</sup> However, in the late 1920s and 1930s it was above all associated with Breton autonomists and nationalists. During the Second World War it was used by both resisters<sup>103</sup> and collaborators,<sup>104</sup> and was judged to be ‘seditious’ by French authorities who outlawed it on several occasions before, during and after the conflict.<sup>105</sup> After the war, many groups in Brittany adopted it. Folkloric associations, usually quite apolitical, popularised it in their parades, and sailors proudly raised it on the masts of their ships.<sup>106</sup> It grew still more common during the 1960s, but was rarely seen during the demonstrations of May 1968.<sup>107</sup> However, four years later, it made a dramatic appearance, alongside the red flag, at the strike of the Joint français.<sup>108</sup> This strike lasted eight

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Lionel Henry, *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement breton, XX-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Fouesnant: Yoran embanner, 2013), 318.

<sup>100</sup> Pascal Ory, *Les Collaborateurs: 1940-1945* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), 104-115.

<sup>101</sup> Daniel Le Couëdic, *Les architectes et l'idée bretonne: 1904-1945 d'un renouveau des arts à la renaissance d'une identité* (Rennes Saint-Brieuc: Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Bretagne Archives modernes d'architecture de Bretagne, 1995), 886.

<sup>102</sup> Wikipédia. 2015. “Drapeau de la Bretagne.” Accessed June 29.

[http://fr.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Drapeau\\_de\\_la\\_Bretagne&oldid=112369164](http://fr.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Drapeau_de_la_Bretagne&oldid=112369164)

<sup>103</sup> Monnier, Jean-Jacques. 2007. *Résistance et Conscience Bretonne (1940-1945): L'hermine Contre La Croix Gammée*. Fouesnant: Yoran Embanner.

<sup>104</sup> Frélaud, Bertrand. 1985. *Les Nationalistes bretons de 1939 à 1945*. Les Bibliophiles de Bretagne, ISSN 0299-0687 3. Brasparts: les Bibliophiles de Bretagne: Beltan.

<sup>105</sup> Kervella, Divi, and Mikael Bodlore-Penlaez. 2008. *Guide des drapeaux bretons et celtes*. Fouenant: Yoran Embanner, 71-72.

<sup>106</sup> Le Coadic, Ronan. 1998. *L'identité Bretonne*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes et Terre de Brume, 355-356.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Ina. 2015a. “Mai 1968.” Accessed March 23. <http://fresques.ina.fr/ouest-en-memoire/liste/recherche/mai%2068%20en%20bretagne/s>.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Ina. 2015b. “La Grève Du Joint Français.” Accessed March 23. <http://fresques.ina.fr/jalons/fiche-media/InaEdu01871/la-greve-du-joint-francais.html>.

weeks, and attracted widespread support from the Breton population.<sup>109</sup> This strike attracted widespread media attention and was arguably the moment when Bretons began to identify themselves en masse with this symbol. Henceforth, no cultural, political or labour meeting in Brittany was complete without the presence of the *gwenn-ha-du*. This flag has become the symbol of all Bretons, without distinction. “Today, those who wave the *gwenn-ha-du* at festivals and protests for all sorts of causes usually know nothing about its creator and often do not even realise that the flag had one, for they imagine that they are holding the timeless flame of real Brittany.”<sup>110</sup> Nowadays, businesses even place it on their products in order to encourage sales, most mayors choose to fly it on public buildings and even the French authorities, once so cautious, now place this symbol on the number-plates of cars from the administrative region of Brittany.

Lastly, a different representation of Brittany spread at the end of the 1990s: that of a region in which the environment had been polluted by high-yield agriculture. The spread of green algae on the beaches played an important role in the popularizing this image in the media. The algae were largely caused by the nitrates used by industrial-agricultural techniques and by agricultural fertilizers. Mélenchon referred to this theme when he noted “those demonstrating at Quimper are those who want to continue the defiling of our beautiful Brittany with the nitrates of high-yield agriculture.”<sup>111</sup> Elsewhere, Richard Nowak, a constitutional expert, noted on the blog of *Le Monde*, that “because of nitrates, there will soon be a sanitary barrier to ban the consumption of all produce from this region. If there is any resistance, it will come from the rest of France.”<sup>112</sup>

In sum, without discussing in detail the movement of Bonnets Rouges itself, I hope that I have shown the extent to which the criticisms of the movement made use of established ethnic stereotypes and simplistic generalisations.

## Conclusion

The movement of the Bonnets Rouges took everyone by surprise: politicians, journalists, and even the most experienced commentators on Brittany had not predicted it. There were a wide variety of articles concerning the movement: some were appreciative. For this paper, I have concentrated on the negative comments. These show, on the one hand, the claim of a monopoly of legitimate public speech and, on the other hand, the stigmatisation of a minority identity by the dominant ideology.

The monopoly of public discourse is a well-known concept which needs no explanation here. Authors such as Pierre Bourdieu<sup>113</sup> and Pierre Clastres<sup>114</sup> have shown how discourse serves to reinforce the prestige of the dominant.

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. Capdevielle, Jacques, Elisabeth Dupoirier, and Guy Lorant. 1975. *La Grève Du Joint Français: Les Incidences Politiques D'un Conflit Social*. Travaux et Recherches de Science Politique. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po et Armand Colin.

<sup>110</sup> Le Couédic, Daniel. 1995. *Les architectes et l'idée bretonne: 1904-1945 d'un renouveau des arts à la renaissance d'une identité*. Rennes Saint-Brieuc: Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Bretagne Archives modernes d'architecture de Bretagne, 886.

<sup>111</sup> AFP, “Mélenchon: ‘À Quimper, Les Esclaves Manifesteront Pour Les Droits de Leurs Maîtres.’”

<sup>112</sup> Richard Nowak, November 14, 2013 (2:20 am), comment on “Bonnets rouges : des dérivés autonomistes derrière les revendications sociales,” *Idées* (blog), November 11, 2013, [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/reactions/2013/11/13/bretagne-des-derivees-autonomistes-derriere-les-revendications-sociales\\_3513215\\_3232\\_2.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/reactions/2013/11/13/bretagne-des-derivees-autonomistes-derriere-les-revendications-sociales_3513215_3232_2.html).

<sup>113</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire: l'économie des échanges linguistiques* (Paris: Fayard, 1982).

<sup>114</sup> Pierre Clastres, *La Société contre l'État: recherches d'anthropologie politique* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1974).

But what of the stigmatisation of the minority? I suggest that this is an example of ‘banal nationalism.’ Michael Billig introduced this concept in 1995, when he wanted to stop the assimilation of all nationalism with those movements “who struggle to create new states or with extreme right-wing politics.”<sup>115</sup> Billig wanted also “to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced.”<sup>116</sup> One of the characteristic expressions of banal nationalism is precisely the ethnic stereotype. “Stereotypes are often means of distinguishing ‘them’ from ‘us,’ thereby contributing to ‘our’ claims of a unique identity. [...] ‘We’ often assume ‘ourselves’ as the standard, or the unmarked normality, against with ‘their’ deviations appear notable.”<sup>117</sup> In Billig’s observations, ‘they’ of course means foreigners, but—as one knows—not all foreigners are outside the nation. For the banal nationalism of France, the minorities—in this case, the Bretons—seem to form a type of foreign body within the nation. Balzac himself wrote of Brittany as “an iced lump of coal, which stays dark and black in the middle of a fine fire.”<sup>118</sup>

## Epilogue

In response to the massive mobilisations of the Bonnets rouges, the then-Prime Minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault, presented a “Pact for the Future of Brittany” (funded by two billion Euros). He also announced a far-reaching reform of French taxation, and postponed the introduction of the ecotax until July 2014. The “Pact for the Future” was denounced by the Bonnets Rouges as a ‘smokescreen’, largely composed of re-assigning previously-identified funding and of existing measures<sup>119</sup>; the project to reform French taxation was halted by Ayrault’s successor; and, as for the ecotax: the new Ecology Minister announced its suspension on 9 October 2014. The Bonnets Rouges had won the battle concerning the new tax. Their other demands, however, were not met and the movement lost momentum.

The original coalition which had made up the Bonnets Rouges soon fell apart. The FO trade union confederation withdrew on 15 November 2013, in order to make it clear that it had not accepted “regionalism.”<sup>120</sup> After the demonstration at Carhaix, the movement was not able to organize any vast protests. However, it did create local committees across Brittany: the majority of them were in the western, Breton-speaking part of the peninsula. Their activities rapidly became much reduced in scale.

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<sup>115</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London Thousand Oaks (Calif.) New Delhi: Sage, 1995), 5.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

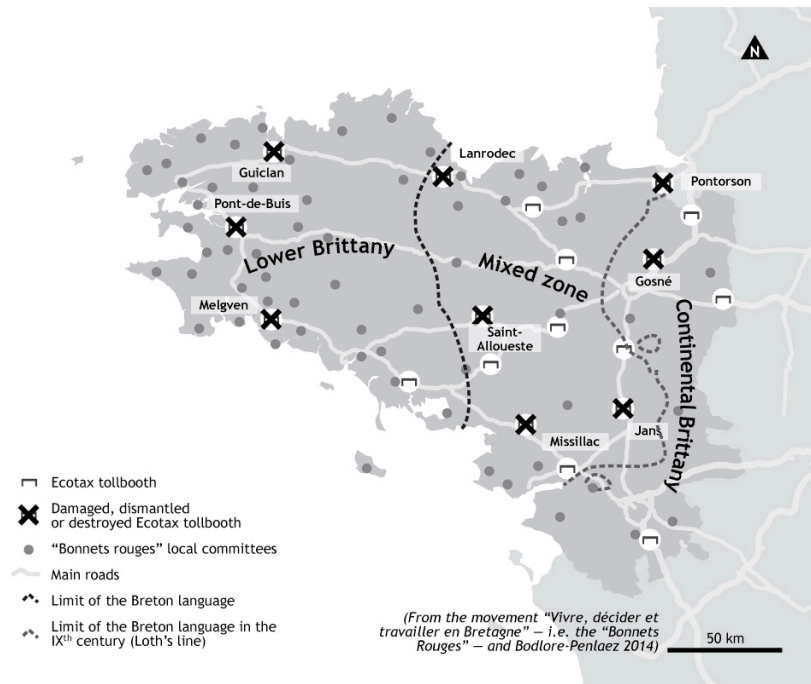
<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>118</sup> Balzac, *Les Chouans*, 39–40.

<sup>119</sup> *Le Figaro*. 2013b. “Aide À La Bretagne : Les Bonnets Rouges Dénoncent Un ‘enfumage.’” *Le Figaro*. December 4, 2014, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/conjoncture/2013/12/04/20002-20131204ARTFIG00593-deux-milliards-d-euros-accordes-a-la-bretagne-dans-le-pacte-d-avenir.php>.

<sup>120</sup> *Le Petit Bleu*, “FO Quitte Les «Bonnets Rouges»,” *LaDépêche.fr*, November 16, 2013, <http://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2013/11/16/1753705-fo-quitte-les-bonnets-rouges.html>.

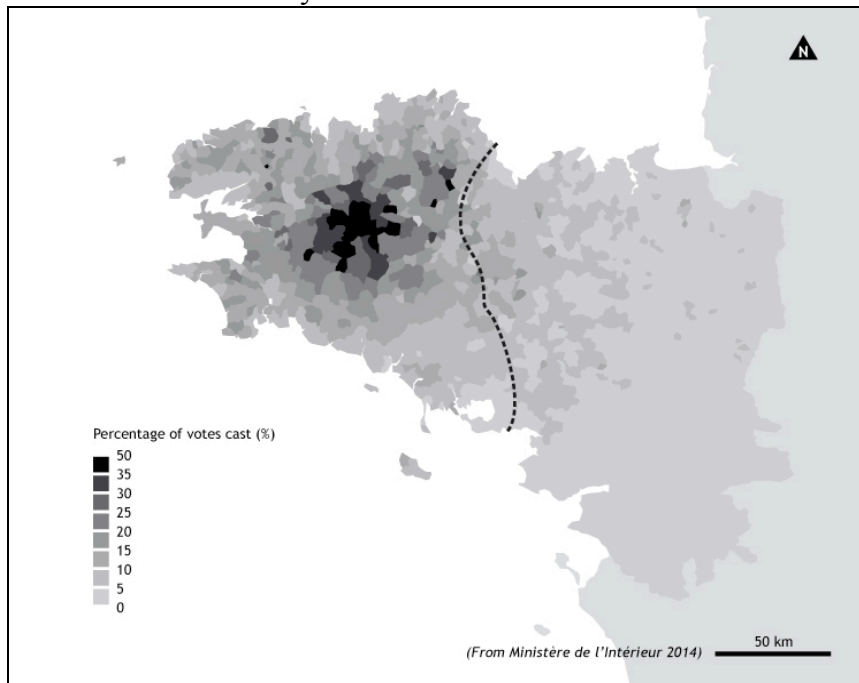




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Map 5: “Bonnets Rouges” actions and linguistic limits

In May 2014, at the European elections, the list led by Christian Troadec (one of the Bonnet Rouge leaders) won a significant proportion of the vote in the area which had been the stronghold of the movement. This did not, of course, stop the rise of the National Front—which spread across all of France—but it did hold it back in this area, showing, once again, that the assimilation of the Bonnets Rouges with the extreme right is not accurate.<sup>121</sup> The next elections will show if this tendency can be maintained.



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Map 6 : Voting for the Troadec list in the 2014 European elections

<sup>121</sup> Jérôme Fourquet, “Le Vote Troadec Ou Quand Les Bonnets Rouges S’invitent Aux Urnes,” *Le Huffington Post*, accessed December 1, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/jerome-fourquet/bonnets-rouges-christian-troadec\\_b\\_5483186.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/jerome-fourquet/bonnets-rouges-christian-troadec_b_5483186.html); Emmanuel Todd, “Préface,” in *L’automne Des Bonnets Rouges : De La Colère Au Renouveau*, ed. Jacques Baguenard et al. (Brest: Dialogues, 2013), 7–9.

On 19 September 2014, farmers specialising in producing vegetables, burnt a tax office and an agricultural social security office at Morlaix: their action was applauded by another leader of the Bonnets Rouges, Thierry Merret.<sup>122</sup> He commented: “Since the Pact, the abattoir at Lampaul-Guimiliau has closed, the poultry business is in poor condition. Nothing has been prepared for the future. I fear that people will be angrier in 2015, and there will be farmers in the street.”<sup>123</sup> The authoritative opinion poll organisation IFOP has voiced similar sentiments: its research indicates that there will be no rapid “disappearance of the anger and anxiety of the Bretons, whose roots run very deep.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Le Monde and AFP, “A Morlaix, le centre des impôts incendié par des agriculteurs,” *Le Monde.fr*, accessed December 1, 2014, [http://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2014/09/20/le-centre-des-impots-de-morlaix-incendie-par-des-agriculteurs\\_4491150\\_3244.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2014/09/20/le-centre-des-impots-de-morlaix-incendie-par-des-agriculteurs_4491150_3244.html).

<sup>123</sup> Jérôme Gicquel, “Bretagne: Un an Après La Révolte Des Bonnets Rouges, Le Pacte D’avenir «entre Dans Sa Phase Concrète»,” *20 Minutes*, December 2014.

<sup>124</sup> Ifop, “Pourquoi La Bretagne S’enflamme ?,” 4.