Abstract

This chapter draws together research in the social sciences on the neo-fascist resurgence with perspectives on the invention of tradition from folklore studies to consider the material and intangible resources drawn upon by transnational white supremacists to evoke a shared cultural tradition: a ‘white nation.’ The chapter will offer an account of the role of the sunwheel symbol in British Movement materials in print and online and will show how it is used in the production of a composite ‘nation’ from a bricolage of improvisational millennialism (*pace* Barkun) that combines historical traditions, mythic constructs composed of established traditions (i.e., Celtic myth) and hybrid fictional forms. The quoted text in the title is taken from a post about Samhain on the British Movement’s Women’s Blog which exemplifies this tendency. Drawing on the work of Emilio Gentile, the central idea that informs this chapter is that current neo-fascist formations depend upon a hybrid, religio-political conception of the nation. Through a combination of Gentile’s and Marion Gibson’s conceptualisations of ‘vernacular religion,’ it demonstrates that neo-fascism has developed an aggressively syncretic racial lore to feed and sustain its constructed notion of tradition.

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‘Our Community Could Start Our Own Traditions’

The Commingling of Religion, Politics and the Folkloresque in a Far-Right Groupuscule

Andrew Fergus Wilson

This chapter draws together research in the social sciences on neo-fascist cultures with perspectives on the production of folkloresque traditions from folklore studies to consider the material and intangible resources drawn upon by a far-right groupuscule to evoke a shared religio-political identity. It offers a thematic analysis of the British Movement blogspace and earlier printed materials to show how this white nationalist, neo-Nazi groupuscule produced a composite ‘nation’ from a bricolage of improvisational millennialism (*pace* Barkun) that combines conspiracy theory, historical traditions and mythic constructs composed of established traditions and hybrid syncretic forms. The quoted text in the title is taken from a post about Samhain on the British Movement’s Women’s Blog which exemplifies this tendency.

Drawing on the work of Emilio Gentile (2006), the central idea that informs this chapter is that current neo-fascist formations depend upon a hybrid, religio-political conception of the nation. Recent materials produced by the British Movement, in particular its use of the sun cross as a defining symbol, are examined in this context. Drawing on Marion Bowman’s (2014) conceptualisation of ‘vernacular religion,’ the chapter demonstrates that neo-fascism, within the British Movement, has developed an aggressively syncretic racial lore to feed and sustain its constructed notion of tradition. In effect, it is producing a loose-knit and affective folklore that contributes to the cultural boundaries of the group’s ethnonational imaginary. Further, Michael Barkun’s (2013) term ‘improvisational millennialism’ is used to highlight the syncretic

incorporation of millennialist and conspiracist materials into the British Movement’s beliefs. In the broadest sense, then, the British Movement draws upon invented traditions to give its community its ‘sense’ of itself. The appeal to tradition implied by these invented traditions mirrors Foster’s (2016) concept of the ‘folkloresque’ in that they draw upon popular understandings of history and connections to an idealised antiquity. The chapter further demonstrates that the British Movement’s loose-knit construct of identity is equally dependent on religious ideals as political ones.

The chapter offers an analysis of the role that the British Movement gives to its stylised version of a sunwheel. This acts as a polysemic object that bears multiple meanings within the context of the group’s ideology, as well as being a generic symbol of white nationalism. Moreover, it is loaded with religious, political and folk symbology that combines to provide a relatively nuanced sign of the complex commingling of religious and political aspiration that identifies the specificity of the group’s beliefs.

The British Movement

The current British Movement is the continuation of an organisation that has undergone the splits, schisms and discontinuous existence that typify far-right groups. The group has significantly diminished in size since its most influential period during the late 1970s and early 1980s when it claimed several thousand members and followers. Extensive detail of this period is provided by Paul Jackson’s (2017) study of the British Movement’s founder, Colin Jordan. The British Movement (BM) was founded in 1968 by Jordan, who had previously been the leader of the National Socialist Movement, a neo-Nazi splinter from the British National Party. Jordan saw the BM as an opportunity for political respectability and a chance to redefine himself following his imprisonment in 1967 for offences against the Race Relations Act (1965). With his leadership effectively passed to Michael McLaughlin, Colin Jordan’s formal association with the British Movement ended in 1975 after his arrest for shoplifting three pairs of women’s

underwear and a box of chocolates from a supermarket; Jordan and his dwindling support tried to suggest that this was all part of a Jewish plot to bring down one of Britain’s most notorious anti-Semites. From this low point, the British Movement’s fortunes waxed and waned. As is typical of the political extremes in Britain, the group staggered from one schism to another and was preoccupied by rivalry with other groups on the same end of the political spectrum as much as with its stated enemies.

Following Jordan’s departure, his quest for electoral respectability was abandoned and the group became more militant and associated with violence. As the 1970s progressed and the National Front made the same journey in the opposite direction, the British Movement recruited from its disaffected membership. Its numbers were similarly buoyed during the late 1970s by an association with skinhead subculture through prominent scene figure Nicky Crane’s membership. The British Movement went into decline following a split engineered by *Searchlight* mole Roy Hill and was wound up and relaunched as the British Nationalist and Socialist Movement in 1983 by McLaughlin, following a court case against Hill in which the BM’s funds were exhausted. Contemporaneously, a long-time BM member, Steven Frost, (re)launched the British Movement, and this group convened a leaderless, cell movement within the new BM called the British National Socialist Movement (BNSM). Both BM and BNSM maintained links with skinhead, white-power subcultures as well as 1980s football hooliganism (Goodrick-Clarke 2003). The influence of both became diminished as Combat 18 grew increasingly influential. Once noted for its street-level organisation and capacity for organising violence, the group is now predominantly noted for its internet presence and sticker-based graffiti campaigns. It has links with other neo-Nazi organisations, both nationally and internationally, but its influence is limited (Jackson 2017; Jones and Jackson 2018).

The Relevance of the Folkloresque

British Movement membership is low, but it remains a persistent presence among British hate groups. The BM is studied here in order to demonstrate the role of quasi-religious symbols, rituals and vernacular beliefs in sustaining its internal cultural frames. Many of these have survived since the original organisation’s inception by Jordan. The symbols, motifs and points of reference that sit outside the overt political content are considered here as religiously infused cultural resources drawn upon by BM members as points of communal orientation and the foundations of a protean religion; as shall be suggested, this religious formation can be understood more clearly using Marion Bowman’s development of the concept ‘vernacular religion.’

Whilst many of the religious forms drawn upon and discussed in this chapter are Germanic or Nordic in origin (or in the BM’s understanding of them), they do not signify a commitment to any religion in its entirety. Rather, they collectively produce a field of signification that is intended to convey a shared folkish heritage. It is here that Michael Foster’s (2016) term ‘the folkloresque’ is of service. In its articulation of the play between invention and tradition, there is a useful way of understanding the pliability of religious symbols in the improvised beliefs of the BM. That is not to equate the use of religious symbols with folklore, but to make evident that the appropriation and reuse of them in a meaningful bricolage is suggestive of more than one of Foster’s (2016, 43) folkloresque forms: ‘(1) version or adaptation, (2) precise allusion (folklorism), and (3) fuzzy allusion (folkloresque integration).’ It is these latter two that are of most relevance here, and they are worth sketching out a little further. Precise allusion involves, as the term suggests, the accurate reproduction of folkloric content but recontextualised in a way that sufficiently transforms it into a unique and distinct usage. Fuzzy allusion is less clear; Foster (2016, 46) gives the example of fictive worlds that are suggestive of folklore but through no consistent motif:

> It smells of folklore, but we can’t locate the particular sources of the odor. This is not to say there are no associated referents, but there are no direct correlations; indexical relations are lacking, or at least extremely vague.

Instead, the folkloric is present in fragments, refractive shards that shimmer with unplaceable familiarities. These can be transposed across multiple traditions and historical moments. Each articulation is meaningful within its own context, and whilst the ‘authentic’ roots of the original become diminished, the novel articulation can be productive of its own context-driven cultural resonances.

Foster is primarily intent on tracing the exchange and cross-fertilisation that occur between commercial and ‘unofficial’ cultures; he suggests that a commercial work that is fuzzily folkloric could be used by ‘a creative vernacular artist [who might] disassemble and refashion the product itself’ (2016, 57). What is being considered here is the refashioning of motifs, tropes and symbols in a purposive and structured way in order to produce religious (or, *pace* Foster, religiousesque) effects.

That there have been attempts to synthesise a new religion in fascist contexts is well understood; Italian fascism under Mussolini did so explicitly and inaugurated what Emilio Gentile (2008, 295) calls a ‘political religion.’ Gentile’s (ibid.) description of the manner of this foreshadows the bricolage of Foster’s fuzzy allusion; he describes how fascism’s activity in the cultural realm

> is expressed more aesthetically than theoretically through a new political style and through myths, rites and symbols of a lay religion, established to favor the process of acculturation, socialization and fideistic integration of the masses.

Post-war fascists have also sought to bring about a revolutionary collective consciousness through the development of religio-political forms. Notable among them for its influence within the milieu, the quasi-Nordic Wotansvolk was developed by the American white nationalist David

Lane with his wife Katja Lane and Ron McVan. Mattias Gardell (2003, 207–8) describes Wotansvolk as ‘a racial mysticism inspired in part by Aryan pre-Christian pagan traditions, Gnosticism, Theosophy, and Jungian psychology.’ Its racialism characterises Wotansvolk as a ‘blood religion’ in which ‘the folk’—and its purity—is central to the collective credo.

The British Movement’s Vernacular Religiosity

Colin Jordan was impressed by Lane and, during the 1990s, suggested a new religion that would serve as the ideological motor of a racially defined—and revitalised—society. Paul Jackson (2017, 213) describes Jordan’s proposal of a synthesis of nature religion and ‘lost pagan traditions’ as ‘combining old and new elements to create a new alternate worldview.’ Moreover, Jackson isolates disparate elements that are not formally associated with any religious traditions in Jordan but are presented as indeterminate folkloric fragments. Jordan also took interest in creatively reinterpreting folk memories. He claimed that interpreting folk tales was a way to recover a nearly forgotten history of the Aryans (Jackson 2017).

This creative appropriation of folk memories strongly echoes Foster’s fuzzy allusion. Although tantalisingly described, the nature of these folk memories is not explored further, so while it cannot be used as a concrete analytical tool in what follows, it is nonetheless a useful framing device through which to begin to understand some of the disparate elements present within the BM’s protean belief system. Although Jackson is discussing a position that Jordan explicitly laid out in his *Gothic Ripples* magazine during the 1990s, these elements are present in BM materials from the 1970s onwards. So, while Jackson outlines a conscious exploration of the perceived need to found a new, racially ‘pure’ religion in Jordan’s later thought, it can be seen that the syncretic amalgamation of diverse ‘traditional’ and religious sources had been present in BM discourse for some time.

The unstructured nature of this process, in distinction to Jordan’s more formal and later reflections, is suggestive of what Marion Bowman (2014) has described as a vernacular religion.

Bowman is valuable in making clear the analytical richness that is produced in the interdisciplinary exchange between religious studies and the study of folklore. She identifies, for instance, the central role that nineteenth-century works of ‘fakelore’ had in the formation of modern Druidry. This is not to undermine the validity of the beliefs of modern Druids, but to highlight the Möbius strip–like nature of the relationship between folkloresque inventions and their subsequent absorption into folk cultures that Foster (2016) describes. The authenticity of the materials used by the Druids is, in the end, neither here nor there. What is crucial is that they are incorporated into the synthetic imagining of ‘Druidism’ as such. Given the centrality of religious belief to adherents’ sense of self, Bowman (2014, 111) is thus in a position to highlight ‘the processes that operate in the creation, transmission, collection and transmutation of folklore in culture, and folklore’s complex role in identity formation and expression.’

It is in the idiosyncratic, lived and expressed use of fragments of lore and belief that their vernacular character is revealed. Within far-right discourse, the idea of the nation is bound up in imagined spaces that transcend the state or culturally and ethnically diverse realities, and thus their appeal is to a transcendent nation that is encoded in the symbols and codes of the nationalist imaginary. Jordan’s or Lane’s invented religion provides the mythic ‘truth’ of this idealised community. This is sustained and fed across borders by ongoing networking through white supremacist communications. It is in the conversations, the position pieces, the public commentaries and blog posts that the idiomatic patterns that articulate the cultural frameworks sustaining far-right identities are revealed. In the following analysis, blog posts, magazine articles, letters and forum comments, in addition to the design choices and elements of published materials, are explored in order to demonstrate how central the shared symbology of a vernacular religion, or folk belief, is to the British Movement.

Gardell (2003) makes clear the importance of spiritual movements to the sense of continuity enjoyed by groups within the pagan revival. And although this is a politically contested area (with anti-fascist communities present across all forms of modern paganism), the appeal to a continuity with religious forms that predate the spread of Christianity is attractive to

fascists dedicated to religions ‘of the blood.’ Discussing the work of Helen A Berger on Wicca, Gardell (2003, 139) stresses the importance of the concept of a ‘community of memory’ and how ‘group cohesion is constructed by recounting stories of the glory of the old religion and the persecution suffered during the witch craze.’ Here again, the complex nature of authenticity is evident. In a later discussion of the origins of Wicca, Gardell (2003, 146) notes that the ascription of Wicca to Celtic sources enables the incorporation of it into fascist beliefs:

> Celticism, for instance, is regarded by some Wiccans as the bulwark of Western tradition against Middle Eastern Judaism/Christianity/Islam and Eastern spirituality, referring to the mystery of blood as the carrier of racial memories from the Celtic golden age and decrying non-Celtic influences and members. Some Wiccans even suggest a Celtic foundation for white racial unity.

Whilst noting that this is contested by anti-racist modern pagans, he refers to the Celtic Druid school Ecole Druidique des Gaules and Celtic Wiccan Pamela Constantine as exemplifying this current in the modern pagan revival.

Here, then, the presumed origin of vernacular elements becomes a crucial component of fascist ideology. The correspondence between these (minority) approaches to modern pagan belief and fascism makes evident the ease with which the materials incorporated into BM discourse are drawn upon with loaded significance; it is not that they are lent meaning by their presence within BM materials, but that by being set in that context, the potential they already had for fascistic interpretation is realised.

Fascist Millennialism

The community of memory described by Berger and Gardell is also resonant with the palingenesis central to Roger Griffin’s (1991) influential model of fascism. Griffin (2008, 18) stresses the deeply syncretic tendency of all forms of fascism and describes its forms as realised

in the fascist states of the 1920s and 1930s as ‘a nebulous myth which admitted many permutations.’ Consistently present within this was the idea of a golden age that provided the inspiration for a rejuvenation of the national spirit and the nation itself, giving rise to ‘the need to draw on the values of an idealized, largely invented, national past to regenerate the future’ (ibid). Gardell’s account of fascist elements in Wicca and the pagan revival is not immediately concerned with national cultures, but their use of Celticism aligns with Griffin’s account of rejuvenating national myths: Wicca or Celtic Druidism is seen as means to revitalise Western European spiritual life and ‘the white race.’ Griffin describes this kind of rejuvenating myth as a product of modernity; for him, it is of a secular, political nature rather than being religious in intent. In Griffin’s scheme, then, religious symbols or causes may be put to political ends. In this there is a danger in losing sight of the importance played by the religious content; instead, it is worth noting the more symbiotic relationship that the political and the religious enjoy in Gentile’s position, in which politics can be understood as religiously informed—-he method of modernity but the aim of religion. As Michael Barkun (1997, 1998, 2013) has shown, there is an explicit strand of millenarian thought in US far-right formations that combines political and religious thought.

As with many of the works discussed, Barkun is concerned with demonstrating the strands of discursive continuity that draw together the extraordinarily disparate elements in the milieu of marginal beliefs. Pertinent here is the particular mode of politicised millennialism formed from a melange of narratives, textual shreds, beliefs and intricately delineated hermeneutic positions that Barkun (2013) characterises as ‘improvisational millennialism.’ It is Barkun’s position that there has been an increase in the circulation and commingling of conspiracy theories and apocalyptic beliefs since internet technology has become more widespread. Moreover, he makes evident that these kinds of knowledge, by dint of sharing a similarly degraded status and by being forced into networks of circulation outside ‘official culture,’ are more likely to cross-fertilise each other. Barkun (2013, 113) refers to these similarly low-status forms of knowledge as ‘stigmatized knowledge’ and includes in this a disparate

collection of ideas and beliefs spanning new-age spirituality, lost civilisations, suppressed alternative science, divination, psychic abilities and so on. The internet facilitates and accelerates this process of commingling and circulation. Indeed, as new forms of communication, such as the internet, have become available, the frequency with which such ideas are expressed increases rather than decreases. This trend occurs because more extensive communication networks facilitate the spread of all forms of stigmatised knowledge, regardless of the quantity or quality of supporting evidence.

That the internet has been a crucial tool to all kinds of political and religious extremists should not be overlooked. Barkun is quite clear on the role that he feels it has played, and it is also apparent that the BM, at least, was aware of what the internet offered as a new technology. Without the overhead costs and problems of distribution of traditional print media, the internet offered an opportunity for the group to extend its reach beyond its modern West Yorkshire home. In the BM magazine *Broadsword*, one contributor was moved to verse by the opportunities offered by the internet:

Freedom Through the Internet

Tyrants and gurus and mattoids hate Internet,

It upsets their schedule, that pampered Jetset.

Overpaid EU gurus get very annoyed

when dissidents question (like Sigmund Freud).

Lies upon lies have been heaped upon us,

to carry them all one needs double-Decker bus,

But making it all easy via Bill Gates Micro-Soft chip,

disseminating factual history is now just a snip

Electron wizard Bill Gates is now known world-wide,

so use his toys and generate sparks of white-pride.

(Anonymous, n.d., 15)

Leaving aside the unexpected and (given BM’s neo-Nazism) inexplicable reference to Freud, it is evident that this crude paean to the internet demonstrates the awareness that the British far right had of its potential for spreading its beliefs.

Barkun offers a clear means by which to understand how the political commingles with stigmatised knowledge and with forms of faith (such as in, say, the Christian Identity movement). This is crucial in understanding the blurred categorical status of the far-right imaginary. The nation takes on a transcendent form and becomes realisable only through cataclysmic struggle, hence the apocalyptic content of current fascist teleology (white genocide, the great replacement and so on). The rebirth central to Griffin’s understanding of fascism is dependent on this millennialist structure and is sustained by the vernacular meaning-making that occurs in the everyday discourse of lumpen fascists as much as their ideational leaders such as Colin Jordan and David Lane.

Current far-right activists are too inchoate and lacking in structural power to establish a sustainable and comprehensive cult around their ethnocultural nation in the manner that Gentile describes during the inception of fascist Italy. But they do demonstrate a convergence of Barkun’s (2013) improvisational millennialism and Bowman’s vernacular religion in their aggregated usage of religious, spiritual and folkloric motifs, concepts, symbols and practices. It is the syncreticism that is at the heart of the neo-fascist imaginary that weaves in elements of religious, folkloric and mythic motifs.

Discussing Colin Jordan’s reflections on the value of religious content in neo-Nazi thought, Nigel Jackson (2017) acknowledges the importance of recognising the ‘higher’ aspirations—in reference to the spiritual domain—of neo-fascists and Colin Jordan in particular. Like Barkun, Jackson draws on Colin Campbell’s concept of the ‘cultic milieu,’ the cultural

underground of rejected and disproven ideas and outlooks, and combines this with Gentile’s insight into religious tendencies in (especially) extreme political formations. Jackson’s synthesis of these ideas helps to confirm the analytical approach being taken here: that it is vital to understand the shared religio-cultural resources that provide a sense of belonging and identity to individuals and groups across the far right. Their mobilisation of whiteness, British or European is as imprecise and riven by romanticisation and spurious claims to authenticity as that identified in the Celtic revival by Marion Bowman (1996, 2014). But this lack of precision does not undermine the value of these invented traditions to those participating in them. Cecily Morrison’s (2003, 2004) work on the role played in identity and community formation and sustenance by varied understandings of traditional Scottish dances is a case in point. Somewhere between the real and imagined are the lived experiences of different communities, and they are drawn together through their shared engagement with markers of communal folk cultures. In a far less joyful manner, the British Movement and other neo-fascist groupuscules bind their collective identity to the hybrid markers used to delineate their spiritual-cultural community.

The three dimensions of British Movement (BM) belief—politics, spirituality and the folkloresque—each interact to produce the effect of belonging and believing in the movement. The intensity of belonging is heightened by the apocalyptic structure within its nebulous beliefs. The community feels threatened by external forces that it believes conspires against its existence; the characterisation of these perceived threats is commonplace among the far right and are currently expressed through the ‘white genocide’ and ‘great replacement’ conspiracy theories. This serves to heighten the effect of membership: the mystery of the blood is resolved in the destiny of the collective, and thus the spiritual purpose of group membership is revealed (for a more complete discussion, see Wilson 2017).

The British Movement and Its Folkish Mythos

The predominant source of the materials discussed here is the current British Movement’s web presence, primarily its blog (currently found at www.britishmovement.info) and the equivalent *Women’s Division* blog. The current BM blog replaces an earlier version hosted at blogspot.com [*NS* (i.e., National Socialist) *Outlook* bmsunwheel.blogspot.com]. *NS Outlook* was actively updated between 2013 and July 2019, and a number of posts on the current BM blog reproduce material from *NS Outlook*. The new blog was necessitated by a Google ban on *NS Outlook* for breaches of hate speech rules (British Movement 2019).

There is also a youth group blog, *The Young Wolves*, but apart from a handful of posts made during 2013 and 2014, this is inactive. The blogs follow the standard blogging format and are open to comments by visitors to the websites, although this feature is rarely used. There are dominant visual and narrative themes present in posts made to all sites and in the printed materials, but the most frequently used is a sunwheel. A banner across the top features a logo aligned left and set against a background graphic of white clouds in a blue sky; below this, blog posts are arranged in three columns with the most recent on the left side of the screen. On a smartphone screen there is only a single column of posts with the most recent at the top. Layout differences across platforms are also apparent in the graphics at the top of the page. On a computer monitor or laptop the clouds in the background image are pixelated, whereas on phone or tablet screens the clouds are not visible and the logo is centred. With the presentational differences between platforms quite evident, it is unconvincing as the site of a professional organisation, whilst the clearer presentation on smartphones opens up the possibility that the site was composed via a smartphone. Technical and resource limitations are also evident in the logo that heads the page. It contains the watermark of imgflip.com, a web-based, commercial meme generator for individuals with web connections but without access to basic image editing software. The BM’s use of it for its logo underlines its diminished status.

The logo has at its heart a red sunwheel against a white background, within a narrow white and blue roundel that mimics the Royal Air Force (RAF) symbol. The BM uses the most basic sunwheel design: a simple cross bounded by a circle. Although this might be more

accurately described as a sun cross, the term ‘sunwheel’ is frequently used by the BM (for instance, in the URL for its blogspot) and so the term is used here. The symbol referred to as a sunwheel by the BM is in fact closer to a Celtic cross. This is set on a black background and garlanded by a dark grey laurel wreath. Above this design is the group’s name printed in white capital letters; below it, in the same size, colour and font, is David Lane’s slogan ‘14 words.’

A couple of details are worth considering further. Firstly, although it is a simplistic design, it conveys the basic thrust of what has been outlined in this chapter. The sunwheel has been a key feature of the iconography of the British Movement and its precursor, the National Socialist Movement, since the 1960s. It is, of course, a well-known and polysemic symbol outside the British Movement. With pre-Christian origins (ADL 2020), its appeal to elements of the far right with pagan leanings is clear; with slight variations, it is also known as a Celtic cross and thus offers a semiotic chain that draws in the array of meanings associated with the Celtic imaginary noted earlier. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) also makes clear that this is a well-recognised symbol within the current far-right and fascist milieu indicating sympathy to the cause. The figure was also used by Nasjonal Samling, the Norwegian fascist party of the 1930s and 1940s, topped by a stylised eagle with its wings displayed and extended. The laurel wreath is indicative of the classical era and also victory. As has been noted, the colour scheme used for the BM sunwheel is reminiscent of the roundels of the RAF but also stereotypically mod and mod-revival subcultures. The red, white and blue are also, of course, the colours of the British flag. From this, the red cross against a white background evokes the cross of St. George and thus the English colonial heart of Britain. The text anchors this chain of meanings to the BM itself and also to David Lane’s (see Michael 2009) apocalyptic white genocide conspiracy implied through his white nationalist axiom, the ‘14 words’ referred to on the BM logo: ‘We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.’ Thus, this basic logo is able to present to its audience(s) a complex matrix of possible meanings. As a readerly text, it offers a range of interpretations that include one, several or all of the following: Celtic cultures, spirituality, patriotism, Christian legend adapted into folklore, Englishness, Northern European paganism,

pan-European identity, Classical culture, martial prowess, victory, white nationalism, conspiracy, millennialism, authentic fascism, British military history (and the elusive memory of ‘the heroes’), youth groups, membership and political affiliation. It is in this suggestive admixture that the ‘odour of folklore’ (to borrow from Foster) enters fascist discourse. The BM sunwheel is a marker of the continuity between the idealised golden age and the longed-for future.

A variant of the Nasjonal Samling eagle sunwheel was used in the pamphlet ‘Where We Stand’ printed by the BM-affiliated British National Socialist Movement (BNSM nd) and dating to the early 1990s; in this, in place of an eagle, a phoenix reminiscent of the Nazi *Reichsadler* is rising from a flaming sun cross. The text, a narrow credo of the BNSM, presented beneath the graphic confirms the discursive fields implicated by the symbol:

> The Movement’s programme is to be more than just a political party, it is a movement which embraces a philosophy of life: political, spiritual and ethical.
>
> The movement intends to create for its members an alternative lifestyle to that offered by the established social and political order.

Many of the articles in the BM printed materials seek to be instructive to members, informing them of these three dimensions (political, spiritual and ethical), but it is the spiritual that predominates. It should be noted that in the BM literature spiritual also implicates national belonging. This is clearly stated in the article ‘The Myth of England, Part 2’ by the mononymous author (Oswald n.d., 16). In a section titled ‘The Spirituality of Patriotism,’ he refers to one of the myths of England as

> [T]he spirituality of our patriotism. Such positive feelings toward our national consciousness is not merely on the mental or emotional planes. It is a profound spiritual truth and it is linked to our Holy native Faith of our People. We talk about our watchwords being Faith, Folk and Family.

The three ‘watchwords’ are bound by what he sees as the highest form of love, a spiritual love that extends beyond ‘ego-consciousness’ and is realised in an unwavering bond with ‘family’ and ‘the folk.’ This is explicitly understood in terms of the mystery of the blood referred to earlier, ‘We hold that the Blood and the Bloodline is holy’ (ibid). Moreover, this is not simply a question of the worship of the blood of the folk as a religious obligation, but it is instead part of a religio-political calling in which the folk are destined to achieve a transcendent epiphany in which faith and folk identity are fulfilled. It is thus the role of the British Movement to contribute to the spiritual awakening of its spiritual kinfolk. Again, Oswald (ibid.) is explicit in this link:

> It is this kind of spiritual patriotism that is embedded in our Holy Faith. Yet how alien these concepts may seem to so many of our people, not yet properly restored to their Folk Soul as sons and daughters of Woden.

The folk soul is symbolised in the sunwheel that contains resonances of folk and spirit. In terms of the analytical framework outlined previously, the BM sunwheel conveys the three dimensions of politics, spirituality and the folkloresque. It is a continually metamorphising sign of folk, blood, spirit and destiny and is thus a fitting symbol of the folkish destiny outlined by Oswald.

Whilst the sunwheel may be polysemous, the political religion of the BM is nominally singular. Oswald identifies the ‘Folk Soul’ of the people as ‘sons and daughters of Woden.’ An article in an earlier edition of *Broadsword* argues for the development of Odinist faith schools in order to inculcate ethnically white British children. The author (RG n.d., 12) makes a case for improved attainment by ~~BAME~~ ethnic minority children in monocultural school environments and uses this to argue the case for Odinist schools:

> What would work for our Folk, as for the minority groups is if the British people had a folk faith base for schools, and of course we do. That faith is Odinism. . . . If we had Odinist schools our children could be taught in an environment of respect for their heritage and culture. They could learn their true identity.

Whilst RG recognises the challenges presented by this aim, the ideal again articulates the desire to build a pragmatic and grounded politics from the religio-political blood mystery. The revitalisation of a Folkist-Odinist culture at the heart of a racial nation is, of course, suggestive of the palingenetic ultranationalism at the heart of Griffin’s conceptualisation of fascism.

Lane’s 14 words (see Michael 2009) are repeatedly referred to across the blogging site, but the phrase was also featured in the printed materials. The cover of issue 26 of *Broadsword* quotes the 14 words verbatim beneath a picture of a young boy with a skinhead haircut. The boy wears a T-shirt emblazoned with the number 88, another neo-Nazi code number referring to a repetition of the eighth letter of the alphabet, HH—Heil Hitler. Behind the child is a large sunwheel. The 14 words are redolent of racial survival and the promise of a futural becoming for the folk.

Other versions of the sunwheel are also found in BM materials. It is used to illustrate a series titled ‘The A–Z of British Nationalism’ that ran across multiple issues of *Broadsword*. In an uncredited illustration in *Blood & Soil* (nd, 1), it is depicted as the roots of the world tree; in a number of issues of *Broadsword* it is contained within a decorative sword design. In a blog post featured in the *Women’s Division* (BMWD 2019), a seasonal post shows how to make a festive Yuletide sunwheel wreath.

The sunwheel is also loaded with the sense of the unfolding of time. Materials from 1978 and 2019 both refer to this aspect of it. The late 1970s BM magazine *British Patriot* (British Movement 1978, 10) provides an explanation for its representation in the talons of the rising phoenix. The symbol had been newly adopted on BM membership cards and was described to members in the following way:

> The Phoenix, rising from the ashes and flames of the ‘old order’ symbolises the rise of the ‘new order’. Clutched in the bird’s talons is the Sun Wheel, one of the oldest symbols of the racial origins of the British people who share a common past with our brothers and sisters in Europe. Each of the four bars of the Sun Wheel represent a season. The Wheel symbolises eternal life.

Four decades later, a simpler explanation is provided (British Movement 2016, np) that is no less future-oriented and describes the ‘Phoenix rising up from the flames and ashes carrying the Sunwheel of British National Socialism into the future.’ Thus, the turning wheel also implicitly refers to the eschatological realisation of the millennial destiny of the folk, a single symbol encapsulating the improvised and contingent production of meaning in stigmatised knowledge forms described by Barkun.

Conclusion

Other symbolic forms might have been selected for discussion in this analysis. The BM makes extensive use of runes, and these become suggestive of the international links that the organisation enjoys with Nordic counterparts. Certainly, there is a conscious sharing of tropes and imagery. Similarly, the repeated use of images of an idealised British rural past would also have allowed an extension of the work of Garland and Chakraborti’s (2006) article examining the use of rurality by the British National Party in its Land and People campaign. Each would have added further nuance to the syncretic mix of elements evident in the bricolage of beliefs of the British Movement. It is active in producing an invented tradition that melds together legends, conspiracies, reconstructions of revitalised obsolete beliefs, the folkloresque and other disparate sources in the search for an authentic folk religion for white Britons.

Their politics is confrontational and the ethnonationalism that informs their faith quest is mired in the violence associated with conspiracist millennialism. It is also on the broad spectrum of far-right ideologies that are currently undergoing a resurgence and, worryingly, an increased acceptance. The risk to folk cultures, to the nebulous and dynamic appropriations and reinventions of the folkloresque and vernacular religions, is that like the sunwheel an increasing number of free-floating signifiers from the folk and popular religious traditions that have emerged in the pagan and spiritual revivals will become appropriated and tainted by the ideologies of extremist nationalism. If this is to be countered, then there must be contestation of

the traditions under threat—the Celtic imaginary, the Nordic religions and the nebulous but no less lived folkloresque. In the case of the latter, there is a conscious effort to reimagine a living folklore that refuses the fixed, terminal identities that would seek to claim the field. The art of Paul Watson (2019–20, 2018) in his ‘Acid Renaissance’ and ‘England’s Dark Dreaming’ projects and David Southwell’s ‘Hookland’ project are conscious efforts to reclaim the space of national imaginaries for open-ended and progressive purposes. Southwell (2019, 62–3) expresses his aims in the first issue of *Hellebore* in explicit terms:

> Folklore is the common wealth, but that link to place means that it too has become battleground. Those who love it find it increasingly weaponised to push spurious agendas of cultural or ethnic superiority; see it stitched uncomfortably into banners of hatred. . . . How do we fight this? How do we fight monsters? As in the best stories, with magic. Re-enchantment is resistance.

Following Southwell, manipulators and inventors of tradition like the British Movement cannot be countered by exposés of their flawed method, inaccuracies or inauthentic understanding of their source material. The syncretic hybrid forms that lie at the heart of their beliefs are idealised futures reflected rearward on history—golden ages yearned for in the future. It is in the wellsprings of these beliefs, in the feint and counter-feint of fakelore, the folkloresque and the emergent rituals and dynamic beliefs of vernacular religions, that the fixing of meaning to reactionary visions of impossibly pure pasts can be undone. It is not an ideational battle to be won on an academic terrain, but a creative and imaginative contestation that will win back the imagined past and future and keep open the idea of the folk.

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