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University of Bath

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**The French secular hypocrisy: The extreme right, the Republic and the battle for
hegemony**
(7542 words)

Dr Aurelien Mondon¹

University of Bath
Bath BA2 7AY
United Kingdom
+44 1225 386258
a.mondon@bath.ac.uk

Abstract:

The success of the extreme right in France in the past two decades has not been limited to their electoral rise; a more long-lasting victory has taken place in the ideological field, where the discourse of the extreme right occupies now a prominent place in the mainstream liberal democratic agenda. Increasingly, their ideas are seen in the media and within the ranks of mainstream parties as ‘common sense’, or at least acceptable.

The growing acceptance of this ‘common sense’ is the result of very carefully crafted strategies put in place by extreme right thinkers since the 1980s. For over three decades now, in order to change perceptions and renew extreme right-wing ideology, New Right thinktanks such as the French GRECE believed it was necessary to borrow the tactics of the left, and more specifically the Gramscian concept of hegemony: cultural power must precede political power. With the use of contemporary examples, this article will demonstrate the continuing impact these ideas have had on the Front National and French politics and society, and how this change has originated in the association of populist rhetoric with the neo-racist stigmatisation of an ‘Other’.

Keywords: extreme right, front national, populism, neo-racism, Marine Le Pen, Islamophobia, same-sex marriage, Nouvelle Droite, hegemony

¹ Aurelien Mondon is a Lecturer in French and Comparative politics at the University of Bath. His research interests lie primarily in the recent mainstreaming of the extreme right, and the impact of neo-racist and right-wing populist discourse on liberal democracies. His first book *Mainstreaming the Extreme Right in France and Australia: A Populist Hegemony?* was published in February 2013.

**The French secular hypocrisy:
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(6925 words)

Introduction: From pariah to respectable candidate

Many commentators have argued that the 2002 French presidential elections, in which Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the second round, were an earthquake in French politics. Panic filled the air and the French took to the streets to demonstrate against the infamous Front National (FN), described by protesters as F for Fascist and N for Nazi. This comparison with fascism and Nazism was inaccurate, possibly even counterproductive, as shall be discussed in this article. Yet the strong reaction, initially only of part of the French population, but of the broader electorate during the second round, demonstrated that France was not yet ready to accept the FN as a normal contender. Indeed, after voters went to the polls for the traditional second-round face-off, Jacques Chirac, for whom only 13.75 per cent of those registered had voted in the first round, was elected with over 82 per cent of the vote, leaving Jean-Marie Le Pen with only a marginal increase on his dramatic first round. Once the dust had settled, a cold-headed analysis demonstrated that the FN's result did not mean an electoral breakthrough for Le Pen, but rather that the mainstream parties who had been leading French affairs since the Second World War now failed to appeal to voters. In terms of share of the votes, the FN made very little ground on its 1988 and 1995 results, while the vote gathered by the mainstream right and left dropped from 70.61 per cent in 1988 to 42.9 per cent in 2002, and their share of registered voters from 56.29 per cent to 29.67 per cent. While marginal parties on the left benefited from the protest vote, abstention was the real 'winner', reaching 28.4 per cent in the major French election. Yet in all this, all that would be remembered was the Le Pen 'earthquake'. Thirty years after its creation, the FN received a welcome boost in its hegemonic struggle, aided by the growing disillusionment of the population with parliamentary politics.² Fear campaigns waged by both the moderate left and right in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, and the complicity of the

² Céline Braconnier and Jean-Yves Dormagen, *La Démocratie De L'abstention; Aux Origines De La Démobilisation Electorale En Milieu Populaire*, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2007).

media, who played a major part in legitimising the distrust of a particular kind of immigration,³ made the Muslim community into the perfect scapegoat.

Ten years on, the 2012 presidential elections provided a convincing benchmark for the progress of the FN in its quest for cultural hegemony. Within a decade, France had witnessed the seemingly irresistible rise to power of Nicolas Sarkozy, and the advent of an 'unabashed' right, willing to break taboos and unleash the prejudice which had built up under the dictatorship of political correctness. Sarkozy's open courting of the FN electorate was undeniably successful at first. Aided by the wounds of 2002, he won the 2007 presidential elections in a landslide, with many voters turning away from their protest vote for the FN or the extreme left, and migrating back to the moderate parties.⁴ For a time, some of those who had turned to Jean-Marie Le Pen to express their frustration at the current situation, (re)turned to the more moderate right, and found in Sarkozy a man who promised to break away from the old ways and accommodate their exaggerated fears. The FN seemed to have lost its originality, and for some commentators, this was the beginning of the end for Le Pen's party. France had triumphed over the extreme right and there seemed little the old leader could do to change the tide. Yet strikingly, on the night of the first round of the 2007 presidential elections, Marine Le Pen declared that her father's disappointing result did not mark the end of the FN, but that the campaign marked 'the victory of its ideas'.⁵ With the Global Financial Crisis and the 'hyper-president's' inability to deliver much of his right-wing populist promises, with rising unemployment and the promotion within the media and politics of a divisive and exaggerated vision of society where the 'other' was increasingly menacing and Islam ever more virulent, the stage was set for Marine Le Pen, the FN's new president. In this context, it was therefore expected that Le Pen would poll well, and yet her performance went beyond most predictions as she gathered almost 1 million more votes than her father's best.

This article does not concentrate on Marine Le Pen's breakthrough per se, but instead goes deeper into the factors which made the FN so popular and, more importantly, acceptable in 2012. The aim of this article is to explain how and why the FN has become a

³ Thomas Deltombe, *L'islam Imaginaire : La Construction Mediatique De L'islamophobie En France, 1975-2005*, (Paris: La Decouverte, 2005).

⁴ Aurelien Mondon, 'Nicolas Sarkozy's Legitimation of the Front National: Background and Perspectives', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol.47, no.1, 2013, 22-40. Translations from the French, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.

⁵ Marine Le Pen, *Interview* in +Clair, Canal +, 22 April 2007.

serious contender in contemporary French politics, reaping the benefits of decades of right-wing Gramscist struggle for hegemony. By first highlighting the process by which the French extreme right reconstructed itself in the second part of the twentieth century, this article demonstrates that Marine Le Pen's rise in the polls was not simply due to a change of style and leadership, but to a deeper realignment of elite discourse over the past three decades. The focus of this article is therefore elite discourse, and more importantly its reception and impact, as the aim is to gauge the way in which ideas recently considered unacceptable have become the norm in the new millennium. Through a critical discourse analysis of political speeches and media articles tracing this evolution, this article stresses that the extreme right's key strength was not primarily its programme, but a changing society where its exclusivist rhetoric has become increasingly accepted. After covering the essential historical development of this hegemonic shift, this article provides an analysis of the tools which have allowed the FN to help redefine key concepts in French politics. It goes on to study the ways in which the FN has adapted its strategy through the use of neo-racism and populism to remove the stigma from its origins, and transform itself into *the* democratic alternative against all odds. In the final part, the concept of secularism and its evolution in recent years are used to illustrate this shift, by highlighting the elite reaction to two illuminating cases: the hijab and burqa 'affairs' and the Mariage pour Tous demonstrations.

1. The origins of the FN's hegemonic struggle

While Marine Le Pen's 2012 breakthrough was clearly facilitated by the context in France at the time, it would be wrong to assume that it was merely the state of the economy or the distrust and disappointment in mainstream politics which convinced over six million voters to choose the FN. Disillusionment in politics is not a new phenomenon in France and has grown constantly for decades, as demonstrated by the steady rise in abstention in most elections.⁶ As argued earlier, it was in fact this disconnect from politics from a growing part of the population which precipitated Jean-Marie Le Pen to the second round of the 2002 presidential elections, rather than an increase in his popularity. For his daughter, it is impossible to deny that beyond the failure of her mainstream competitors to convince the electorate, it was a real achievement to obtain over 6.4 million. However, while the new leadership certainly convinced some that the party had changed, a much

⁶ Braconnier and Dormagen, *La Démocratie De L'abstention; Aux Origines De La Démobilisation Electorale En Milieu Populaire*.

deeper evolution had taken place within French politics, one which started with the Nouvelle droite in the 1980s, and allowed for the eventual resurgence and acceptance of the FN as a normal contender within the French political landscape. While the early influence has been covered comprehensively by the seminal work of Pierre-Andre Taguieff in his 1994 *Sur la Nouvelle droite: Jalons d'une analyse critique*,⁷ and its theoretical contribution outlined in detail by Tamir Bar-On recently,⁸ it is essential to return briefly to the impact of Nouvelle droite thinkers on Le Pens' party.

Marine Le Pen's result seemed an unlikely prediction in 1972, when the FN was created by neo-fascist Ordre Nouveau to regroup a disbanded and electorally insignificant extreme right under one umbrella. From the beginning, the leadership was given to Jean-Marie Le Pen, whose credentials appeared both more moderate and more serious than those of the Ordre Nouveau leaders. Le Pen was an experienced politician, and had been part of many extreme right organisations and movements. As Jean-Pierre Rioux has pointed out, Le Pen 'had the gift of always being visible during important events and always showing his skills as orator and organiser whenever necessary'.⁹ However, after the failure of Poujadism, the crumbling of the empire, the scars of the Algerian war and the poor 1965 performance of Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour, for whom Le Pen ran the campaign, it was the events of May '68 which provided him with his first taste of Gramscist political strategy, as he realised that 'what famous generals and hundreds of thousands of *pieds-noirs* could not do, shake the throne, three thousand students uttering inanities through the voice of Cohn-Bendit, who isn't even French, did'.¹⁰ While he was then most likely unaware of Gramsci's theory, Le Pen already recognised that power had to be won through ideas and society, rather than by force. This translated into the FN's first programme: 'In defence of the French', whose sole aim was the channelling of the protest vote.¹¹

It took ten years to mark the first success of the FN in the early phase of its hegemonic struggle. This first breakthrough took place soon after the its first positive

⁷ Pierre-André Taguieff, *Sur La Nouvelle Droite: Jalons D'une Analyse Critique*, (Paris: Descartes et Cie, 1994).

⁸ Tamir Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right: Alternatives to Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge 2013).

⁹ Jean-Pierre Rioux, 'Des Clandestins Aux Activistes (1945-1965)', in Michel Winock (ed.), *Histoire De L'extrême Droite En France* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1994), 1 vol. (324), p.240.

¹⁰ in Harvey G. Simmons, *The French National Front: The Extremist Challenge to Democracy*, (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), p.58.

¹¹ Erwan Lecoeur, *Un Néo-Populisme À La Française: Trente Ans De Front National*, (Paris: La Découverte, 2003), p.35.

electoral results in Dreux. However, more than its own electoral appeal, it was the Socialist government which provided the FN with the help it needed to achieve national status. Facing bleak forecasts for the municipal elections, and seeing in the FN a possible enemy of the moderate right, François Mitterrand responded swiftly to Le Pen's concerns on the lack of media coverage of his party, facilitating his appearance on prime-time television, while the extreme left remained ignored by the media.¹² The FN's ideas were given an importance and legitimacy that those of other minor parties were not; as a result, from 1983, moderate right politicians increasingly started borrowing its anti-immigrant propaganda.¹³ The Socialist Party would go even further in its legitimisation of the FN by implementing proportional voting for the 1986 elections, leading to the election of 35 FN deputies, and more importantly to the migration of many moderate right-wing politicians to Le Pen's party, where they believed their electoral prospects to be better. By the mid-1980s, the FN obtained as many votes as the Communist Party. It was also at that time that the party began to be influenced and even infiltrated by Nouvelle Droite (New Right) thinkers. Born out of the May '68 events, the Groupement de Recherche et d'Etudes pour la Civilisation Européenne (European Civilisation Study and Research Group – GRECE) was the most theoretically sophisticated of these, and aimed to elaborate 'an ideological corpus as coherent as possible', a 'Nouvelle Droite culture' leading to the creation of a new world view.¹⁴ In order to change perceptions and renew right-wing ideology, GRECE believed it was necessary to borrow the successful tactics of the left and more specifically the Gramscist concept of hegemony.¹⁵ To achieve such goals, GRECE worked at the creation of a 'counter-cultural power'. For Simmons, the think tank's position was that 'the ability to determine the 'taken for granted' beliefs of the ordinary citizens was the ability to control society itself'.¹⁶ While initially a strong believer in racial inequalities and the racial superiority of the European civilisation, GRECE eventually opted for 'the right to difference'. As a result, anti-Semitic and racist vocabulary was replaced by the vocabulary of difference, people and

¹² Emmanuel Faux, Thomas Legrand, and Gilles Perez, *La Main Droite De Dieu; Enquête Sur François Mitterrand Et L'extrême Droite*, (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1994), p.25.

¹³ Simmons, *The French National Front: The Extremist Challenge to Democracy*, p.74.

¹⁴ Alain de Benoist and Pierre Vial in Ariane Chebel D'appollonia, *L'extrême-Droite En France De Maurras À Le Pen*, (Bruxelles [Evry]: Ed. Complexe, 1996), p.320.

¹⁵ Alain De Benoist, 'Pour Un "Gramscisme De Droite"', *Eléments*, vol. 20, 1977, Alain De Benoist, 'Une Droite Qui Soit À La Fois Et La Droite Et La Gauche', *ibid.* vol. 24-25, 1977-1978.

¹⁶ Simmons, *The French National Front: The Extremist Challenge to Democracy*, p.210.

culture, what Pierre-André Taguieff called 'cultural differentialism'.¹⁷ In a perverse twist, de Benoist conflated colonisation and immigration: both sought to impose one race upon another. The cycle was complete once the Nouvelle Droite was able to portray itself as the only really tolerant group against the intolerant internationalists: de Benoist grandiloquently argued that he was 'ready to defend [his] difference and, with an equal ardour, that of immigrants',¹⁸ and fight against the 'totalitarianism of egalitarianism'.¹⁹ In this, French neo-racism was born and an ideological struggle based on Gramscist theories was launched to shift the political spectrum to the right.

Even though the GRECE influenced the party, it officially avoided the FN. It is another Nouvelle droite think-tank, the Club de l'Horloge, that played an active part in reinvigorating the party's strategy and made the FN increasingly acceptable for a more moderate electorate. Extreme right measures and ideological tenets became hidden under a veneer of softer rhetoric; the concepts of invasion, conspiracy and violence remained omnipresent throughout the programme, but were camouflaged by apparently positive or at least non-threatening labels. For prominent *horloger* Bruno Mégret, attempts at infiltrating moderate politics with extreme right concepts were part of the 'vocabulary battle' against the left's hegemony. From then on, the FN would strive to substitute Marxist and human rights vocabulary with its own in order to spread its vision. The Club de l'Horloge claimed that in 1986 the FN's ideas had already infiltrated the moderate right's programme, as the Club de l'Horloge found only 14 points of contention between the moderate and extreme right manifestoes in the mid-1980s.²⁰ Moreover, while Jacques Chirac remained a strong opponent of any partnership with the extreme right, he appointed hard-right Charles Pasqua and traditionalist Philippe de Villiers respectively minister of the interior and state secretary to the minister of culture. These nominations were a clear signal to Le Pen's electorate that the moderate right was willing to take their discontent into account.²¹

Le Pen's positive result in the 1988 presidential elections – with 4.3 million of the vote – confirmed that the party was heading in the right direction:

¹⁷ Pierre-André Taguieff, *Sur La Nouvelle Droite: Jalons D'une Analyse Critique*.

¹⁸ in Simmons, *The French National Front: The Extremist Challenge to Democracy*, p.214.

¹⁹ Alain De Benoist, *Les Idées À L'endroit*, (Paris: Editions Libre-Hallier, 1979), p.145-56.

²⁰ Yvan Blot, 'L'union De La Droite Est-Il Possible?', (Club de L'Horloge, 1989).

²¹ Mathias Bernard, *La Guerre Des Droites, De L'affaire Dreyfus À Nos Jours*, (Paris: Odile Jacob Histoire, 2007), p.206.

today, the power of words has changed sides: now one hears the man on the street, politicians, and journalists situate themselves, in spite of themselves, in the problematic of the national movement when talking about 'identity', 'Lebanonisation', 'politico-media class', and more and more about the 'establishment', 'cosmopolitanism', the 'people', and 'hidden totalitarianism'.²²

The FN, under Mégretist influence, crafted a new programme: '*The National Alternative: 300 measures for the rebirth of France*'.²³ The choice offered to the French was clear and simple: 'civilisation or barbarism', 'national values or globalist ideology'. The old communist foe was no longer the main target. Instead, the party moved towards more rewarding enemies in the 'end of history' context: globalisation (*mondialisme*) and human rights, which threatened to destroy national identities. The new programme also exemplified their populist shift. Neo-liberal ideals, which became widely resented as the recession and unemployment hit France, were buried deep in the programme, and the most potent themes became protectionism and anti-Europeanism.²⁴ A social rhetorical veneer was applied to the most reactionary measures and, in hindsight, this programme represented something of a transition from Maurrassism to Sarkozism. The programme was apocalyptic in its portrayal of the future, reinforcing the necessity of a strong reaction, a rupture. Populism was central: France's fate was bleak because the '*mondialiste* ideology' had 'contaminated' the political establishment; yet there was hope in the people, 'whose common sense' remained intact.²⁵ In order to please the many faces of its electorate, the FN had to offer a simultaneous increase and decrease in the role of the state. Such a paradoxical proposal was directly in line with what the extreme right had offered during the interwar period: the dismantling of the social elements of the state, yet the reinforcement of the state in its repressive function, measures taken in the name of both 'liberties' and 'security'.

While the party continued to evolve, and despite the 1998 departure of those who had played a key role in precipitating the change, the shift which took place with the *300 measures* programme remains a cornerstone in the evolution of the party, as it marked the new-found reliance on both neo-racism and populism. Their use in the process of

²² in Simmons, *The French National Front: The Extremist Challenge to Democracy*, p.218.

²³ Front National, *300 Mesures Pour La Renaissance De La France L'alternative Nationale Programme De Gouvernement*, (Saint-Cloud: Ed. nationales, 1993).

²⁴ Steve Bastow, 'Front National Economic Policy: From Neo-Liberalism to Protectionism', *Modern & Contemporary France*, vol. 5, no.1 1997, p.61-72.

²⁵ Front National, *300 Mesures Pour La Renaissance De La France L'alternative Nationale Programme De Gouvernement*.

legitimation of the party were crucial in the results obtained by Marine Le Pen in 2012, for they allowed the party to shake off the demons of its past, and its ideas to shape politics beyond the party's boundaries.

2. The perfect storm – Populism and Neo-Racism as alternatives in times of crisis

a. The pseudo-democratic outsider – the populist illusion

More than the economic crisis itself, it could be argued that it is the crisis of liberalism and politics which has facilitated the resurgence of ideas such as those promoted by the FN. After the early excitement generated by the 'end of history' thesis, it has become clear that the emancipatory character of the liberal hegemony was limited. The ever-increasing reliance on economic rationalism, and its proportionate impact on political powerlessness and community disengagement, appears to leave little space for the people and hopes of a better future for all.²⁶ With the extreme left in shambles and social democrats seemingly unable to protect growing parts of the population left to fend for themselves in the neo-liberal order, disillusion with politics has become widespread. Many of those who have chosen not to join the ranks of abstention, and instead through their vote express their continued, albeit disappointed support for electoral politics, turned to the only party who could claim to have 'clean hands'. The FN has been the only major party able to state not to have participated in government, and could therefore lay the blame for the situation on all its opponents, particularly those it called the 'UMPS' (UMP + PS). With the growing distrust in political parties, this has proved to be an incredible strength, as it has made the FN a visible and 'novel' option on the political spectrum, offering real change and hope. No matter how flawed, this alternative has been appealing precisely because it has been the only one. The FN finds its appeal in the growing section of the population that suffers 'from the inability to give meaning to life and to the world' and 'from the loss of collective and individual identity'²⁷ which can be argued, following Chantal Mouffe,²⁸ to have been caused by the feeling of uselessness in the 'post-political' democratic machinery. The success of right-wing populism has then been the direct consequence of the death of alternative ideologies, Castoriadis' 'second disenchantment of the world': 'liberal progress

²⁶ Wendy Brown, 'We Are All Democrats Now...', in Giorgio Agamben et al. (eds.), *Democracy in What State? (New Directions in Critical Theory)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

²⁷ Lecoeur, *Un Néo-Populisme À La Française: Trente Ans De Front National* p.184.

²⁸ Chantal Mouffe, 'The 'End of Politics' and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism', in Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London ; New York: Verso, 2005)

appeared to part of the population as emptied of any meaning, while the communist was represented as a form of hell'.²⁹

In the context of the crisis, with the inability of the UMP to resolve rising unemployment and with little trust in the moderate Socialist campaign, Le Pen pushed the FN's populist strategy in the 2012 campaign further. After five years of legitimisation of her populist rhetoric under Sarkozy's presidency, convincing those who felt betrayed by the 'establishment' remained one of the main focuses of her campaign. Le Pen was the 'anti-system' candidate, standing alone against corrupt politicians and biased media.³⁰ She proudly admitted to being a 'populist':

*a word used by the elite to express their disdain of the people, their worries and aspirations. In France, the people suffer the decisions of their leaders. They have been the great forgotten of the past thirty years. Yet democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. If this is being populist, then I am a populist.*³¹

The strength of this message lay in the word 'peuple', whose singular form reinforced Le Pen's assertion that she was the defender of *one* people against division, defender of France itself. Le Pen was also the candidate of the weak, 'the candidate of the forgotten', of the 'invisible', those 'who don't complain, those who cannot be seen, those we don't want to listen to'.³² In the last days of the campaign, she stressed that she talked only to 'real people' about 'real life'.³³ Echoing traditional fascist movements, Marine Le Pen presented herself as the 'neither left nor right' candidate, the candidate beyond corruption, the outsider, the exact same embodiment her father and Sarkozy had successfully managed in the past. While it is commonly agreed that key to the extreme right's return to the forefront of politics has been populism,³⁴ it is crucial that the concept be understood here as a political style void of ideological content.³⁵ This means that the Le Pens' claim that they

²⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis and Roger-Pol Droit, 'Entretien', in Roger-Pol Droit (ed.), *La Compagnie Des Contemporains: Rencontres Avec Des Penseurs D'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002).

³⁰ Philippe Goulliaud and Guillaume Perrault, 'Marine Le Pen : «Je Suis La Candidate Antisystème»', *Le Figaro* (6 April 2012).

³¹ in *ibid.*

³² Marine Le Pen, 'Discours De Clôture', Front National, Metz, 12 December 2011.

³³ Marine Le Pen, 'Grand Meeting Au Zénith', Front National, Paris, 17 April 2012, Marine Le Pen, 'Réunion Publique À Hénin-Beaumont', Front National, Hénin-Beaumont, 15 April 2012.

³⁴ Cas Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 39, no.4 2004, 542-63, Yves Mény and Yves Surel, 'The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism', in Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

³⁵ This understanding is based loosely on the so-called Essex school; for more detail see Ernesto Laclau, 'Populism: What's in a Name?', in Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London ;

represent the people does not have to rest on their sincere belief, but rather on a strategic move aiming at the creation of a people against various minorities, depending on time and place (immigrants, media, elite etc.). This embodiment of the people proved crucial to the FN as it provided it with what it had been denied since its creation and reinforced its credentials: a form of democratic legitimacy whereby the party no longer represented its marginal and discredited core supporters, but instead the people as a whole in a post-democratic setting.³⁶ This has been ultimately reinforced by disproportionate media coverage of the party's performance since its creation. As demonstrated in Table 1, the 'Marine effect' has not been as significant as commonly advertised when registered voters are taken into account,³⁷ or as consequential as the hegemonic shift in political rhetoric.

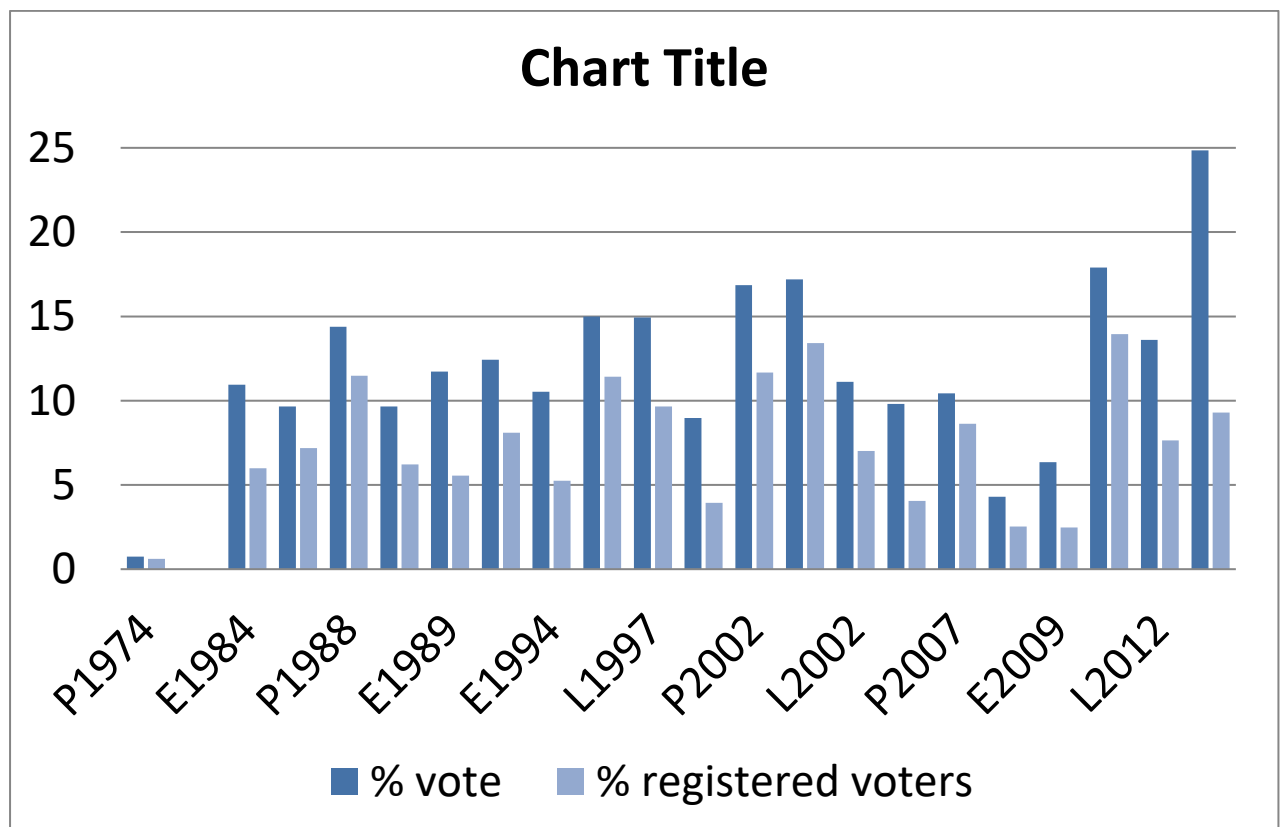


Table 1. The FN's electoral progress since its creation
(P: presidential elections; E: European elections; L: Legislative elections)

New York: Verso, 2005), xii, 276 p, Chantal Mouffe, 'The 'End of Politics' and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism', *ibid.*

³⁶ Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

³⁷ Aurelien Mondon, 'Nuancing the Right-Wing Populist Hype', *Policy Network*, 26 August 2014. Available on http://www.policy-network.net/pno_detail.aspx?ID=4719&title=Nuancing-the-right-wing-populist-hype

Besides this, the use of populist rhetoric alone as an answer to socio-economic issues was not enough to allow the return of the pariah; to effect a revival, adapting to the new framework of post-war politics was crucial. The main change was again rhetorical: the extreme right's solutions were no longer based on crude racism but relied instead on neo-racist rhetoric.

b. Neo-racism: the acceptable face of the old pariah

In early twentieth-century Europe, the Jews were the perfect target for exclusivist sentiment during times of crisis: they were denounced as stateless and cosmopolitan people, henceforth opposed to the nation, to the fatherland; they were 'imaginary foreigners'.³⁸ As with most types of exclusion, anti-Semitism, at times referred to as 'the Socialism of the stupid', was used as cement to bind the Nation against an enemy, an 'other', a 'Them'. Anti-Semitism was a decoy; it served to erase social differences, diverting the attention of workers from class struggle. After the Second World War, this type of racism became increasingly difficult to defend openly in western politics. While racism remained, it had to be hidden and the mainstream political discourse steered clear of crude racist references. While some mainstream politicians reassured the most radical parts of their electorate of their conservative credentials with the use of dog-whistle politics, these occurrences remained rare, and were often denounced by the majority of their colleagues to save face in the seemingly consensual post-racial society built on the ruins of the war. In this new context, the extreme right became unappealing and marginalised for much of the second part of the century. The lingering stigma of the Second World War and acclaimed policies of human rights and multiculturalism during post-war economic growth meant that their exclusionary discourse was out of touch with the population as a whole. With low unemployment rates, a strong economy and comprehensive welfare states, the lower-middle classes, traditional supporters of the extreme right, felt at ease. While some rare extreme right pushes occurred, it was widely believed that its time had passed and its short-lived and limited successes only represented the final bursts of a dying ideology.

Yet such a reassuring understanding of racism and the extreme right leaves aside their potential for evolution and transformation, key to all ideas and ideologies. As previously noted, the FN and the influence of pioneering thinkers from the Nouvelle Droite

³⁸ Léon Poliakov, *Histoire De L'antisémitisme*, vol.2 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1981), p.52.

crafted and popularised in France a new kind of racism akin to that which the United Kingdom witnessed from the 1970s.³⁹ This 'new-racism' did not rely on 'biological heredity, but [on] the irreducibility of cultural differences':⁴⁰ it is not the 'other' who is to blame, but rather its effect on 'us' and 'our' society. While not racist in the traditional biological sense, neo-racism rests on the same essentialising tenets but offers one main advantage: 'it allows for the transformation of traditional forms of racism into new forms of exclusion, less likely to lead to legal prosecution and/or to political discredit'.⁴¹ In rhetoric, contemporary exclusion is no longer based on natural superiorities and inferiorities, but on a different form of inequality: the innate and indelible *incompatibility* of cultures, at times even risking the 'genocide' of autochthon (to be understood western) cultures through submersion by aliens. Therefore, under a thin veneer of tolerance, neo-racists can express anti-immigrant sentiment based on the same innate and generalising elements central to traditional types of racism. This ideological tool became central to the hegemonic battle launched by the most radical parts of the right, and the FN in particular, to reclaim 'common sense'.⁴² While its reach receded in the 1990s, neo-racism, allied with populist rhetoric, returned as a powerful political tool in the 2000s as growing parts of the population became disillusioned with the post-political situation, and the 9/11 attacks served as a convenient justification for the targeting of the Muslim population in both politics and the media.⁴³ This led to the return of a 'racism without racial support',⁴⁴ based on culture and 'culturalism',⁴⁵ and often fuelled by populism and what Ruth Wodak has called the 'arrogance of ignorance'.⁴⁶ Those with a Muslim background became the new 'imaginary foreigners'.

³⁹ Cccs, *The Empire Strikes Back : Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, (London: Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1982).

⁴⁰ Martin Barker, *The New Racism : Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe*, (Frederick, Md.: Aletheia Books ; dist. by University Publications of America, 1982), Etienne Balibar, 'Y a-t-il Un 'Néo-Racisme'?', in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (eds.), *Race, Nation, Classe; Les Identités Ambiguës* (Paris: la Découverte, 1997).

⁴¹ Aurelien Mondon, *The Mainstreaming of the Extreme Right in France and Australia: A Populist Hegemony?*, (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), pp.24-25.

⁴² Taguieff, *Sur La Nouvelle Droite: Jalons D'une Analyse Critique*.

⁴³ Deltombe, *L'islam Imaginaire : La Construction Mediatique De L'islamophobie En France, 1975-2005*.

⁴⁴ Didier Fassin, 'Nommer, Interpréter. Le Sens Commun De La Question Raciale', in Didier Fassin and Eric Fassin (eds.), *De La Question Sociale À La Question Raciale?* (Paris: La Découverte/Poche, 2009).

⁴⁵ Alana Lentin, 'Post-Race, Post Politics: The Paradoxical Rise of Culture after Multiculturalism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol., 2012, 1-19.

⁴⁶ Ruth Wodak, 'Anything Goes!' - the Haiderization of Europe', in Brigitte Mral, Majid Khosravini, and Ruth Wodak (eds.), *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

Therefore, like other political ideas, the limitation of racism to its original (and biological) form would be detrimental to the study of its contemporary forms. As previously mentioned, calling extreme right parties racist is counterproductive as it can be (and has been) easily refuted, further reinforcing their reputation as martyrs. Yet it would be wrong to assume that this rejection of biological racism means that the rhetoric and programme of parties such as the FN are not racist. It is in such settings that the concept of neo-racism becomes essential, as it makes a form of racism void of the biological idea of race possible. This process of transformation takes time and diligence, and, as the following section shows, the Le Pens' efforts and patience took over forty years to be rewarded.

3. A mainstreamed FN: The new meaning of the Republic

To further its cause, neo-racism often distorts universalist and secularist arguments, which again separates it from traditional forms of racist politics. To be accepted, the Other must follow paradoxical rules whereby they are asked to downplay and eventually lose their originality and origins to fit within 'Our' tolerant and progressive societies. In France, it has been the idolised image of the Republic and its secularist foundation that have served as pawns in the legitimization of neo-racism and the vilification of Islam.

a. Islam as the enemy

While it is undeniable that Marine Le Pen has helped to moderate the image of the party,⁴⁷ the 2012 presidential campaign demonstrated that it would be a mistake to assume that the FN had been mainstreamed and become a 'normal' contender for power. However, the party's neo-racist vilification of minorities has been evident from the beginning of her leadership. One striking example took place six months after defeating the more radical Bruno Gollnisch in January 2011, when Marine Le Pen refused to alienate her base by standing against her father's polemical comments in the wake of Anders Breivik's terrorist attacks in Norway. For Jean-Marie Le Pen, what was most concerning in the attacks was not the terrorist threat emanating from the extreme right, but rather Norway's naivety prior to the attacks.⁴⁸ Marine Le Pen refused to denounce her father's comments and instead

⁴⁷ Nonna Mayer, 'From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen: Electoral Change on the Far Right', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 66, no.1 2013, 160-78.

⁴⁸ Reuters, 'Jean-Marie Le Pen Critique La "Naïveté" De La Norvège', *L'Express*, 29 July 2011.

declared that she was ‘not in disagreement’ with him on this point,⁴⁹ a wording which demonstrated the uneasiness of the new leader, and yet the impossibility to break away from what had made the party an alternative for 40 years. In contrast to the FN’s description of the Utøya massacre, the Toulouse and Montauban terrorist attacks in March 2012 ‘were not the result of a madman’s action, but the start of green fascism in *our* country’.⁵⁰ The term ‘madman’, used in both cases demonstrated that terroristic violence was only a calculated threat when its basis was found in Islam. Despite Breivik’s incredibly detailed and planned ideological trajectory, his actions did not represent a crisis for the FN, but were merely accidental. On the other hand, Merah was not a *madman*, he was not even an individual; he was a symbol, a synecdoche: Islam. Turning history on its head, as many had before with flawed comparisons to the 1930s and 1940s,⁵¹ Marine Le Pen described herself as the resistant against ‘green fascism’,⁵² the one who would take up the war the state had lost against the barbarous invaders from the suburbs who ‘want to put France on its knees’. For Le Pen, the shootings demonstrated that ‘the risk of fundamentalism [had] been underestimated in France’.⁵³ Adding to the already pervasive suspicion of Islam, Le Pen warned of a ‘war against politico-religious fundamentalists who kill our Christian sons, our young Christian men, our young Muslim men and Jewish children’. As she promoted the return of the death penalty in a France traumatised by the recent events,⁵⁴ she felt confident to claim days before the election that it was natural for the French ‘to no longer want French-Algerians like Merah’ in their country.⁵⁵

During the campaign, Le Pen’s neo-racist attacks on the Muslim population made it clear that her moderate stance was little more than a façade.⁵⁶ Early on, she created a storm by claiming that 100 per cent of the meat sold around Paris was halal.⁵⁷ While she never divulged the proofs she claimed to hold, this added to the stigma attached to the Muslim

⁴⁹ Le Monde and Afp, 'Attentats D'oslo : Marine Le Pen Refuse De Condamner Les Propos De Son Père', *Le Monde*, 31 July 2011.

⁵⁰ Marine Le Pen, 'Discours À Lyon', Front National, Lyon, 07 April 2012, Marine Le Pen, 'Discours À Nantes', Front National, Nantes, 25 March 2012.

⁵¹ Olivier Roy, *La Laïcité Face À L'islam*, ([Paris]: Stock, 2005), p.60.

⁵² Marine Le Pen, *Toulouse : Marine Le Pen Pointe "Un Certain Nombre De Négligences"* in Les invités de France Info, France Info, 22 March 2012.

⁵³ Marine Le Pen, 'Toulouse : Marine Le Pen Suggère À Nouveau Un Référendum Sur La Peine De Mort', *Le Monde*, 21 March 2012.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Le Pen, 'Grand Meeting Au Zénith'.

⁵⁶ Mondon, *The Mainstreaming of the Extreme Right in France and Australia: A Populist Hegemony?* pp.91-92.

⁵⁷ Reuters, 'Marine Le Pen Veut Saisir La Justice Sur La Viande Halal', *Reuters*, 18 February 2012.

population in the same manner anti-Semites created suspicions about the Jewish community at the turn of the twentieth century. Le Pen played on the belief that Islam was insidiously taking over France and had in fact already colonised our plates, imposing *their* religious practice on *our* daily habits. To counter this 'invasion', Le Pen stated in an authoritarian manner that with her election 'street prayers ... would come to an end' and that, if she was to be elected, '*intégristes*' would face, for the first time in decades, 'an extremely determined power'.⁵⁸ Here again, Le Pen linked various elements of Islam into a one-size-fits-all demonisation of anyone associated with this religion, by creed, ethnic background, name or origin. While the link was never clearly stated, in this conception relatively innocuous or rare occurrences such as halal food, street prayers and mosques all eventually led to extreme Islamism. Even though her critique of Islam went directly against the principles of the law of 1905 which guarantees the free exercise of religion (1st article) and its public aspect (25th article), Le Pen claimed as early as 2010 to be the defender of secularism against the 'occupation'.⁵⁹ In September 2012, the invasion scare was reiterated by her father who declared during the FN conference that the presence of 'two hundred million Muslims at our doors, south of the Mediterranean, is a serious threat'.⁶⁰ This time, it was no longer extremists within the Muslim community which were a threat, but Muslims in general.

Despite the party's extreme and neo-racist behaviour towards Islam in particular, the FN appeared ever more respectable. In November 2011, polls highlighted that FN supporters had become more comfortable with admitting their support for the party, breaking away from what used to be considered a shameful act.⁶¹ In early 2012, a TNS Sofres survey confirmed that a record 31 per cent of respondents agreed with FN ideas and that only 35 per cent entirely rejected them,⁶² striking figures compared to those recorded by Jean-Marie Le Pen throughout his career. In the north of France, where the FN has

⁵⁸ Abel Mestre, 'Marine Le Pen Prend Pour Cible Les "Intégristes" Au Nom De La Laïcité', *Le Monde*, 15 January 2012.

⁵⁹ Jean Baubérot, *La Laïcité Falsifiée*, (Paris: La Découverte, 2012), pp.16;50-62.

⁶⁰ Jean-Marie Le Pen, 'UDT 2012 - La Baule : Intervention De Jean-Marie Le Pen', Front National, 23 September 2013.

⁶¹ Thomas Wieder, 'Les Électeurs Fn Sont Plus Nombreux À Assumer Leur Vote', *Le Monde*, 19 November 2011.

⁶² Le Monde, France Info and Canal +, *Baromètre d'image du Front national : Janvier 2012* (TNS Sofres, 2012). Available on <http://www.franceinfo.fr/sites/default/files/2012/01/11/495063/pdf/fichier/Sondage%20TNS%20Sofres%20France%20Info%20Le%20Monde%20Canal%202B%2020la%20p%3%A9n%3%A9tration%20des%20id%3%A9es%20du%20FN.pdf>

traditionally been successful, up to 40 per cent declared having a good opinion of Le Pen and 70 per cent felt it was a party like any other.⁶³ Her defeat in the election has in no way reversed the trend and recent polls suggest that even though a strong majority of respondents still had a 'bad opinion' of Le Pen (65 per cent), her popularity was increasing dramatically amongst right-wing supporters (from 34 per cent in 2011 to 56 per cent in 2012).⁶⁴ Similarly, a more recent BVA poll suggested that although the results of the 2014 European elections were 'worrying' for 65 per cent of respondents, 53 per cent believed the FN should be considered a 'party like any other'.⁶⁵ After five years of Sarkozist presidency and the constant and overt pandering of the mainstream right to extreme right supporters,⁶⁶ the lines had clearly shifted in France and concepts central to French politics, such as the Republic and secularism, have been redefined to suit the new political paradigm.

b. The secular hypocrisy

While it has been detailed elsewhere that the mainstream right has both benefited from and helped the extreme right in its process of mainstreaming,⁶⁷ it is interesting for the purposes of this article to explore the reaction to the law allowing same-sex marriage in France, in light of the aforementioned hegemonic struggle. While Marine Le Pen remained silent during the 2013 demonstrations against same-sex marriage, her party played a prominent part in them, with leading figures standing at the front of the march.⁶⁸ Beyond the FN's failure to break loose from its roots, these events also showed the newfound confidence in the most reactionary circles in France and their unexpected ability to gain momentum.

Yet, for this article, these events are particularly interesting in the context of the hegemonic rise of an exclusivist understanding of the concepts of the Republic, and more

⁶³ La Voix Du Nord, 'Marine Le Pen : Plus Appréciée Dans Le Nord - Pas-De-Calais Que Dans Le Reste De La France', *La Voix du Nord*, 23 February 2012.

⁶⁴ Le Parisien, *La personnalité de la semaine : Marine Le Pen* (BVA, September 2013). Available on http://www.bva.fr/fr/sondages/_la_personnalite_de_la_semaine/la_personnalite_de_la_semaine_marine_le_pen.html

⁶⁵ Itélé, *La place du Front national dans la vie politique française* (BVA, May 2014). Available on http://www.bva.fr/fr/sondages/questions_d_actu_bva-cqfd/la_place_du_front_national_dans_la_vie_politique_francaise.html

⁶⁶ Mondon, 'Nicolas Sarkozy's Legitimation of the Front National: Background and Perspectives'

⁶⁷ Mondon, *The Mainstreaming of the Extreme Right in France and Australia: A Populist Hegemony?*

⁶⁸ Nouvel Obs and Afp, 'Mariage Homo : Copé Appelle À Manifester "En Masse", Le Fn Aura Sa Délégation', *Nouvel Obs*, 19 April 2013. Available on <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/mariage-gay-lesbienne/20130419.OBS6400/mariage-homo-cope-appelle-a-manifester-en-masse-et-le-fn-aura-sa-delegation.html> [accessed: 14/05/2013].

particularly one of its cornerstones, one with purposefully fuzzy and multiple meanings: secularism or *laïcité*.⁶⁹ While its original aims, as stated in the 1st article of *the 1905 law on the separation of Church and State*, order the Republic to ensure ‘freedom of conscience [and] guarantee freedom of worship limited only by the following rules in the interest of public order’,⁷⁰ a new understanding aimed directly at the singularising and stigmatising of Islam took clear precedence in the 2000s.⁷¹ To understand the importance of the recent demonstrations against same-sex marriage in France in explaining the hegemony of neo-racism, the 2004 law on religious symbols in public schools and the 2010 law banning the dissimulation of the face in public space must be discussed briefly.

In 2004, the French government banned the wearing of ‘conspicuous’ religious symbols in public schools. As John Bowen highlighted, ‘although worded in a religion-neutral way, everyone understood the law to be aimed at keeping Muslim girls from wearing headscarves in schools’.⁷² Some opponents of the law argued that it stood against the very values of the Republic: it was discriminatory as it was aimed at a particular kind of students whose religious habits were perceived as threatening.⁷³ In fact, those who were obliged to wear these oppressive religious symbols would risk further alienation if they were removed from schools as a result. Those who had made their own free choice to wear such symbols, on the other hand, would find that the promise of liberty, equality and fraternity only applied once they gave up on their individuality and free will. In 2010, the government went further, passing a law clearly directed against the burqa, with Sarkozy himself stating that ‘we cannot accept in our country women imprisoned behind a fence ... this is not the idea the French Republic has of women’s dignity’.⁷⁴ In times of economic crisis, high unemployment and social unrest, this issue was prominent in the media and high on

⁶⁹ John Richard Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves : Islam, the State, and Public Space*, (Princeton, N.J. ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.32.

⁷⁰ Assemblée Nationale, 'Loi Du 9 Décembre 1905 Relative À La Séparation Des Églises Et De L'état', in République Française (ed.), (Paris: Assemblée Nationale, 1905).

⁷¹ The hijab affair began earlier, but the 2000s marked a propagation and a hardening of the neo-secularist position. For Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohammed, the High Council for Integration played a major part in this shift in 2002-2003, when it imposed an ideologically-motivated ‘new definition of *laïcité*’ Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohammed, *Islamophobie. Comment Les Élités Françaises Construisent Le "Problème Musulman"*, (Paris: La Découverte, 2013), p.144..

⁷² Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves : Islam, the State, and Public Space* 1.

⁷³ Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), Laurent Lévy, *'La Gauche', Les Noirs Et Les Arabes*, (Paris: La Fabrique, 2010).

⁷⁴ Cécilia Gabizon, 'Sarkozy : «La Burqa N'est Pas La Bienvenue»', *Le Figaro*, 25 June 2009. Available on <http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/2009/06/23/01002-20090623ARTFIG00055-sarkozy-la-burqa-n-est-pas-la-bienvenue-.php> [accessed: 17/06/2013].

politicians' agenda, even though the French government services themselves had noted that only 367 women wore the burqa in France.⁷⁵ Apart from the inaudible opposition of those affected by the law and a handful of their supporters,⁷⁶ both laws were passed in a most consensual manner, satisfying most from the extreme right to the extreme left, albeit for different reasons.⁷⁷ For most politicians and commentators, such developments were in line with the emancipatory mission of the Republic: for Eric Besson, then minister of immigration and national identity, the 2010 law would allow 'life in society and civilisation to be explained' to those victims.⁷⁸ For the minister, subscribing to Islam could no longer be considered a question of agency: it meant being under the power of a sexist, violent, uncivilised community – women became the 'pawns of heritage politics'.⁷⁹ Hajjat and Mohammed describe the discourse around new secularism as 'revealing of the will to *discipline bodies and minds*: the bodies and minds of Muslims are undisciplined, they refuse to adapt to 'republican' mental structures and must be subjected to a particular form of discipline'.⁸⁰

Yet, beyond the inconsistencies highlighted by many scholars,⁸¹ it took the recent demonstrations against the law authorising same-sex marriage to fully uncover the extent of the French secular hypocrisy. On the 13th of January 2013, 340,000 demonstrators took to the Paris streets to protest against new legislation on same-sex marriage. The two main umbrella organisations were Manif' pour tous (Demo' for all - MPT) led by Virginie Merle, better known under the pseudonym Frigide Barjot, self-proclaimed 'press secretary for

⁷⁵ Nouvelobs.Com, 'Seules 367 Femmes Porteraient La Burqa En France', *Nouvel Obs*, 29 June 2009. Available on <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/societe/20090729.OBS5866/seules-367-femmes-porteraient-la-burqa-en-france.html> [accessed: 17/06/2013].

⁷⁶ Pierre Tévanian, Ismahane Chouder, and Malika Latrèche, *Les Filles Voilées Parlent*, (Paris: La Fabrique Edition, 2008).

⁷⁷ Lévy, 'La Gauche', *Les Noirs Et Les Arabes*.

⁷⁸ In Chloé Leprince, 'Burqa : La France Invente La Loi « Pédagogique »', *Rue89*, 16 September 2010.

⁷⁹ Jennifer A. Selby, 'French Secularism as a 'Guarantor' of Women's Rights? Muslim Women and Gender Politics in a Parisian Banlieue', *Culture and Religion*, vol. 12, no.4 2011, 441-62.

⁸⁰ Hajjat and Mohammed, *Islamophobie. Comment Les Élités Françaises Construisent Le "Problème Musulman"*, p.152.

⁸¹ Lévy, 'La Gauche', *Les Noirs Et Les Arabes*, Pierre Tevanian, *La République Du Mépris: Les Métamorphoses Du Racisme Dans La France Des Années Sarkozy* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), Pierre Tevanian, *Le Voile Médiatique. Un Faux Débat : « L'affaire Du Foulard Islamique »*, (Paris: Editions Raisons d'Agir, 2005), Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*, Christine Delphy, 'Antisexisme Ou Antiracisme? Un Faux Dilemme', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, vol. 26, no.1 2006, 59-83, Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves : Islam, the State, and Public Space*, p.32.

Jesus',⁸² and Printemps Français (French Spring - PF). Officially, neither organisation cited religious concerns to justify their radical position against the law. In their manifesto, PF described its fight 'against the programmed rupture of civilisation', for 'justice and solidarity' and to support 'the weakest, the poor, and those without rights'; nowhere is homosexuality even mentioned.⁸³ Similarly, MPT claims to be 'a movement of free citizens, non-partisan, non-confessional, plural and diverse'.⁸⁴ However, the religious affiliations of these 'movements' are obvious through their leaders' background and informal rhetoric. PF, the more radical of the two, is supported by ultra-Catholic groups, often with close links to the extreme right.⁸⁵ While MPT appears more moderate, it also has links to extreme right formations such as Secours de France.⁸⁶ While these links could have demonstrated the broad reach of the movements, a *Le Monde* investigation demonstrated that out of the 37 associations taking part in the Manif' pour Tous, 22 are 'empty vessels' and most of the others are linked to religious movements (mostly Christian).⁸⁷

Far from being 'for all' as the MPT's name suggests, the movements are clearly exclusive of those in favour of the law. Therefore, this leads to a particularly violent assessment of their purpose: if those who are not part of the demonstrations are not part of the 'all', then they are the 'other', excluded from the *demos* and thus from democracy. Just as violent, the name French Spring suggests that opponents to this group are classified alongside the tyrannical governments overthrown in Tunisia, Egypt and Lybia. Furthermore, beyond its visible presence in the streets, this radical understanding of society based on a religious vision of the family has infiltrated the Assemblée Nationale,⁸⁸ and gained the

⁸² Stéphanie Le Bars, 'Pari Réussi Pour Frigide Barjot, "Attachée De Presse De Jésus"', *Le Monde*, 19 November 2012. Available on http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2012/11/19/pari-reussi-pour-frigide-barjot-attachee-de-presse-de-jesus_1792768_3224.html [accessed: 11/10/2013].

⁸³ Printemps Français, 'Printemps Français', <http://www.printempsfrançais.fr/467/manifeste/> [accessed: 11/10/2013].

⁸⁴ La Manif Pour Tous, 'La Manif Pour Tous', <http://www.lamanifpourtous.fr/en/> [accessed: 11/10/2013].

⁸⁵ Zineb Dryef, 'Ex-Para, Ultracathos Et Fachos : Les Visages Du Printemps Français', *Rue89*, 10 April 2013. Available on <http://www.rue89.com/2013/04/10/ex-para-ultracathos-fachos-les-visages-printemps-francais-241299> [accessed: 14/10/2013].

⁸⁶ Abel Mestre and Caroline Monnot, '« Manif Pour Tous »: Quand Les Vieux Réseaux Oas S'en Mêlent', *Droite(s) Extreme(s)*, 19 April 2013. Available on <http://droites-extremes.blog.lemonde.fr/2013/04/19/manif-pour-tous-quand-les-vieux-reseaux-oas-sen-melent/> [accessed: 11/10/2013].

⁸⁷ Samuel Laurent, 'Derrière La Grande Illusion De La "Manif Pour Tous"', *Le Monde*, 21 March 2013. Available on http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2013/03/21/manif-pour-tous-la-grande-illusion_1850515_3224.html [accessed: 11/10/2013].

⁸⁸ John Lichfield, 'French Politicians Scuffle over Same-Sex Marriage Legislation', *The Independent*, 19 April 2013. Available on <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/french-politicians-scuffle-over-samesex-marriage-legislation-8580857.html> [accessed:11/10/2013].

support of prominent figures, in contrast with the teenagers wearing hijabs or women wearing burqas, who were argued to pose a threat to the survival of the secular Republic. The language of politicians supporting the movements posed a clear threat to the Republic: Christine Boutin, president of the Christian-Democrat party and former minister under Nicolas Sarkozy, made it clear that if the government does not offer 'strong and symbolic measures – that is the withdrawal of the bill' – 'it will blow up'.⁸⁹ As noted by RMC journalist Jean-Jacques Bourdin in reaction to her comments, Boutin 'threatened to topple the Republic', as she insinuated that violence would be justified if François Hollande did not renege on a campaign promise. During the debates, some parliamentarians were threatened,⁹⁰ and since then, homophobic attacks have increased in France⁹¹ and homosexuality considered less acceptable than in 2007.⁹²

The fervent secularism exhibited during the 2004 hijab and 2010 burqa affairs, and the 'holy secular alliance between once-opposed political trends',⁹³ would suggest that the sudden media prominence of a religious movement in France, the violence of its message and its infiltration of the highest political bodies would have created a backlash amongst French secular republicans. However, while many opposed the demonstrations, it was never considered that the threat posed by PF and MPT was a danger to the Republic and secularism. Nor was some members' extreme behaviour generalised to the entire Christian population in France. In the new France, it has become natural to impose double standards in regards to Islam, particularly as those associated with it, willingly or not, become more assertive with their rights as French citizens. As Olivier Roy mentioned in 2005 already, 'the defence of *laïcité* is more than ever that of an identity which has trouble defining itself positively'.⁹⁴

Conclusion: a new normal?

⁸⁹ Jean-Jacques Bourdin, *Christine Boutin: 'Ça Va Péter'* in Bourdin & Co (Jean-Jacques Bourdin (dir.) RMC, 26 March 2013.

⁹⁰ Le Monde and Afp, 'Mariage Pour Tous : Les Opposants Multiplient Les Provocations', *Le Monde*, 06 April 2013. Available on http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2013/04/06/mariage-homosexuel-pris-a-parti-le-rapporteur-du-texte-annule-ses-prochains-debats_3155409_3224.html [accessed: 11/10/2013].

⁹¹ Le Monde and Afp, 'Record De Témoignages De Victimes D'homophobie', *ibid.* 03 September 2013. Available on http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2013/09/03/record-de-temoignages-de-victimes-d-homophobie_3470615_3224.html [accessed: 14/10/2013].

⁹² Jonathan Parienté and Alexandre Pouchard, 'L'homosexualité Est Aujourd'hui Moins Acceptée Qu'en 2007 En France', *Le Monde*. 06 June 2013. Available on http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2013/06/06/l-homosexualite-est-aujourd-hui-moins-acceptee-qu-en-2007-en-france_3424577_3224.html

⁹³ Roy, *La Laïcité Face À L'islam*, p.12.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.60.

As France continues to struggle to emerge from the crisis, and unemployment fails to recede, the FN alternative seems bound to remain popular into the near future, as proven by its victory in the 2014 European elections. While they are second-order elections and do not necessarily prefigure a rise in the polls in major elections, they are a symbol of the growing acceptance of ideas which were until recently widely rejected as undemocratic and unrepublican. In January 2014, and for the second consecutive year, a CEVIPOF, Le Monde and Fondation Jean-Jaurès poll highlighted the growing tensions within French society.⁹⁵ Many results demonstrated respondents' negative views of their society and the future, creating thereby a fertile ground for the FN: 85 per cent of respondents believed that France is in decline, playing into the hands of the regeneration thesis typical of the extreme right. 84 per cent felt that politicians 'mostly act in their own interest' and 78 per cent that the 'democratic system' does not function well and that 'their ideas are not well represented'. 84 per cent believed a 'real leader' was needed to 'restore order', and 45 per cent that the death penalty should be restored. Respondents were overwhelmingly nostalgic, with 74 per cent declaring that 'in France, it was better before'. While the polls quoted above showed that homosexuality has become less accepted in France, it is Islam which, unsurprisingly, appears as the main threat, with 63 per cent of respondents believing that it is incompatible with the 'values of the French society' (compared to 24% for Judaism and 9% for Catholicism).⁹⁶ Research on the French Muslim population, which has demonstrated that, on many accounts, French Muslims were as, if not more, loyal to the values of the French Republic than a random sample of French citizens,⁹⁷ has held little value in the face of what has become a common-sense suspicion of Islam, and anyone related to it.

In this new political paradigm, it is now common to see prominent commentators ('taboo-breakers') predict, without even a semblance of evidence, the disappearance of western culture and the worldwide imposition of minority rights, be they embodied in gay rights or Sharia law.⁹⁸ This was exemplified by Nicolas Sarkozy's recent return to politics.

⁹⁵ Sciences Po, CEVIPOF, Le Monde and Fondation Jean-Jaurès, *Fractures Françaises Vague 2: 2014*, (IPSOS, January 2014). <http://www.cevipof.com/fr/france-2013-les-nouvelles-fractures/resultats/> [accessed: 15/09/2014]

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj, *Français Comme Les Autres? Enquête Sur Les Citoyens D'origine Maghrébine, Africaine Et Turque*, (Paris: Presse de Sciences Po, 2004).

⁹⁸ Sebastien Fontenelle, *Les Briseurs De Tabous*, (Paris: La Decouverte, 2012), Pascal Boniface, *Les Intellectuels Faussaires: Le Triomphe Médiatique Des Experts En Mensonges*, (Paris: Jean-Claude Gawsewitch, 2011).

While pretending to incarnate the solution to France's divided society, the former president made it clear that his strategy would remain couched in populist and ethno-exclusivist terms to appeal to the FN's electorate. With regards to same-sex marriage legislation and the demonstrations that ensued, Sarkozy declared that he would not 'use families against homosexuals, the way homosexuals were used against families'.⁹⁹ This statement epitomised the new hegemonic paradigm wherein a deeply anti-egalitarian proposition (homosexuals cannot make up families) is couched in uniting terms ('I respect both camps, but they will be kept separate'). In early October, the former president went further, stating that, 'to bring the French together on common values', he would recommend a constitutional amendment to limit medically assisted procreation techniques to infertile heterosexual couples and ban surrogacy altogether.¹⁰⁰ Following in Sarkozy's footsteps, and a few days before a new Manif' pour Tous event,¹⁰¹ the Socialist Prime Minister Manuel Valls pandered to the right-wing conservative movement, declaring his strong opposition to surrogacy in the catholic newspaper *La Croix*.¹⁰² In 2014, homosexual couples had become yet another 'other', despite polls indicating that a majority of respondents accept homosexual families as legitimate.¹⁰³ While surrogacy for homosexual couples remains a divisive issue (with a majority of respondents declaring their opposition), a majority of left-wing sympathisers are supportive, highlighting further the Parti Socialiste's decision to move rightward against the interests of its traditional electorate.

As shown through these examples, neo-racism and the associated right-wing populist rhetoric have become unavoidable in mainstream electoral politics, and a similar pattern can be witnessed beyond French borders. As the world faces crisis after crisis, the appeal of exclusion and prejudice will doubtless continue to rise. Many politicians will not resist the simplicity of drawing on the fears of a growing disillusioned electorate. As abstention increases in most western countries, it has become ever clearer that a growing

⁹⁹ Nicolas Sarkozy, *Interview in France 2 evening news*, (France 2, 21 September 2014)

¹⁰⁰ Nicolas Sarkozy, «Je veux redonner de l'espoir», *Le Figaro*, 2 October 2014, available on <http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/2014/10/02/01002-20141002ARTFIG00125-nicolas-sarkozy-je-veux-redonner-de-l-espoir.php>

¹⁰¹ Over 70,000 demonstrators took part in the Manif' pour Tous on the 6th of October 2014 in Paris.

¹⁰² Manuel Valls, « La France entend promouvoir une initiative internationale sur la GPA », *Le Monde*, 2 October 2014, available on <http://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Manuel-Valls-La-France-entend-promouvoir-une-initiative-internationale-sur-la-GPA-2014-10-02-1215549>

¹⁰³ ADFH, 'La position des Français sur les questions d'homoparentalité', *IFOP*, 3 October 2014, available on http://adfh.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/112512_ifop-ADFH-presentation.pdf

part of the population no longer believes in the solutions offered by the mainstream left and right. With a left still in shambles and failing to put forward a positive and/or appealing alternative, the growth of dystopian movements appears unavoidable. While it is important to remain cold-headed and not be overly alarmist, it is clear that prejudice and exclusion can be stirred, and racism can become a powerful weapon in a society where growing parts of the population feel justly threatened and insecure.

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