



**RECODE** WORKING PAPER SERIES

---

Online Working Paper No. 30 (2013)

# **The New Front National: Still a Master Case?**

**Hans-Georg Betz**

This paper can be downloaded without charge from:  
<http://www.recode.info>

ISSN 2242-3559

## RECODE – Responding to Complex Diversity in Europe and Canada

### ONLINE WORKING PAPER SERIES

RECODE, a research networking programme financed through the European Science Foundation (ESF), is intended to explore to what extent the processes of transnationalisation, migration, religious mobilisation and cultural differentiation entail a new configuration of social conflict in post-industrial societies - a possible new constellation labelled *complex diversity*.

RECODE brings together scholars from across Europe and Canada in a series of scientific activities. More information about the programme and the working papers series is available via the RECODE websites:

[www.recode.fi](http://www.recode.fi)  
[www.recode.info](http://www.recode.info)  
[www.esf.org/recode](http://www.esf.org/recode)

Series Editor: Peter A. Kraus

Section 4, Workshop 4:  
*Solidarity Beyond the Nation-State: Diversity, (In)Equalities and Crisis*

Title: The New Front National: Still a Master Case?  
Author: Hans-Georg Betz  
Working Paper No. 30  
Publication Date of this Version: September 2013  
Webpage: <http://www.recode.info>

© RECODE, 2013  
Augsburg, Germany  
<http://www.recode.info>

© 2013 by Hans-Georg Betz  
*All rights reserved.*  
*Short sections of text, not to exceed two paragraphs, may be quoted without explicit permission provided that full credit is given to the source.*

*The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of the RECODE Research Networking Programme or the European Science Foundation.*

Hans-Georg Betz  
University of Zurich, Switzerland  
[hgb56@hotmail.com](mailto:hgb56@hotmail.com)

ISSN 2242-3559



Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS)  
Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)

# The New Front National: Still a Master Case?

---

## Hans-Georg Betz

Hans-Georg Betz, author of several books, articles, and book chapters on right-wing populism in Western Europe, currently is an adjunct professor of political science at the University of Zurich, Switzerland.

---

### Abstract

*Since ascending to the presidency of the Front national in January 2011, Marine Le Pen has pursued two main objectives: one, to transform the Front national into a “normal” party via a process of “dédiabolisation”; second, to rebrand the Front national as a populist party that claims to defend ordinary citizens against the ravages of globalization and to reaffirm the nation’s republican heritage against the threat posed by militant Islam. In the process, Marine Le Pen has to a certain extent adopted a discourse and rhetoric once espoused by the classic European left. Transcending the traditional ideological cleavages, this strategy is supposed to bring together all those French voters who consider themselves ignored and forgotten by the political establishment during one of France’s worst socioeconomic crisis.*

Among radical right-wing populist parties, the Front national for a long time assumed an eminent position. This was not only because of Jean-Marie Le Pen’s stature as a model of an authoritarian, uncompromising, and at the same time charismatic supreme leader of a successful, modern movement, which he appeared to control with an iron fist; it was also because of the party’s program, which seemed to successfully combine authoritarian positions with economic neo-liberalism – a mixture, which Herbert Kitschelt characterized as a “winning formula” and which made the Front national, in his view, a “master case” of a new type of right-wing extremist party. The shocking result of the first round of the 2002 presidential election – where Jean-Marie Le Pen surpassed the socialist candidate Lionel Jospin to advance to the second round – seemed to confirm this assessment. In reality, however, Le Pen’s triumph was less the climax of his political career than an unexpected upturn in an otherwise progressive decline, which had started in the late 1990s.

Its origins can be traced to the exclusion of Bruno Mégret, Le Pen’s campaign manager and, as *délégué général*, the number two in the party, from the Front national in late 1998. Mégret’s exclusion led to the defection of a large number of high-level local and national cadres aligned with the former *délégué général*. The result was a brain drain, which deprived the party of some of its leading ideologues, such as Jean-Yves Gallou, who had played a decisive role in conceptualizing the party’s anti-immigration position, Pierre Vial, the leader of the party’s “neo-pagan” current, as well as important exponents of economic neo-liberalism, such as Yvan Blot. In the years that followed, the drain continued. Thus in 2006, Bernard Antony, a prominent exponent of the party’s ultra-Catholic current, left the Front national after repeatedly clashing with Marine Le Pen over the ideological course of the party. Two years later, Carl Lang, general secretary of the party and a member of the party’s executive bureau, was suspended from his offices after expressing his opposition to the maneuvers designed to place Marine Le Pen in a favorable position for the succession of Jean-Marie Le Pen as president of the party. As a result, by the end of the dec-

ade, the Front national in its original form of a “*rassemblement*” of various far-right ideological groupings and tendencies had largely ceased to exist – to the great relief of Marine Le Pen. Never again, she affirmed, would the Front national serve as a “sounding board” for the obsessions of anachronistic, radical Catholics, admirers of Pétain, and those obsessed by the holocaust.<sup>1</sup> With the Front national no longer sympathetic to their cause, the various ideological strands of the extreme right were scattered and divided into a panoply of competing groupuscules, each one seeking to gather and unite the extreme right under its own banner while, at the same time, launching vitriolic attacks on the Front national (among them are the Mouvement national républicain de Bruno Mégret; the Parti de la France de Carl Lang; various regional “leagues” as well as small extreme right circles such as the anti-semitic *Œuvre française*).<sup>2</sup>

Those who remained in the party but objected to Marine Le Pen’s new course or refused to follow it unconditionally were marginalized, internally isolated (as was the case with Bruno Gollnisch, longtime considered Jean-Marie Le Pen’s heir apparent), or even purged. Thus soon after she assumed the presidency of the party in early 2012, Marine Le Pen stated her determination to root out anti-Semitic currents within the Front national (as was the case with Yvan Benedetti, a member of Bruno Gollnisch’s inner circle and leading exponent of *Œuvre française*, who was excluded from the Front national in early 2012) – and thus break with her father’s legacy.<sup>3</sup>

### The Spirit of Populism

This was part of a deliberate calculation on the part of the new Front national president designed to polish up the image of the party as part of a comprehensive strategy of “demonization” (in Marine Le Pen parlance, “*dediabolisation*”) and transform it into a genuine catch-all party of protest. This objective constituted a fundamental change in direction. Under Jean-Marie Le Pen, the Front national represented above all a rallying point for the various strands of traditional French right-wing extremist nostalgia (e.g., for the days of Vichy, *l’Algérie française* and, why not, the monarchy), dressed up as a populist movement, which it never really was. Against that, Marine Le Pen had come to realize that only a radical ideological and programmatic reorientation might allow her party once again to play a significant – perhaps even decisive – role in French politics. Acutely aware of the Western European populist right’s dramatic political gains and successes in recent years, Marine Le Pen looked to parties such as the SVP in Switzerland and the Dutch Party for Freedom for inspiration. The models are no longer the counter-revolutionary *maîtres penseurs* of integral nationalism, such as Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras, but modern populist politicians, unencumbered by the disreputable legacy of the past, such as Oscar Freysinger, the flamboyant poster boy of the Swiss People’s Party, who had gained notoriety as one of the main organizers and promoters of Switzerland’s successful anti-minaret referendum, and, to some extent, Geert Wilders, the no less flamboyant Dutch anti-Islam agitator.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2012: Marine Le Pen ira pour “gagner” à la présidentielle, *20 minutes.fr*, December 4, 2010, available online at <http://www.20minutes.fr/politique/633823-politique-2012-marine-pen-ira-pour-gagnera-presidentielle>

<sup>2</sup> See Cloé Leprince, Un front anti-Marine Le Pen qui brasse large à l’extrême droite, *Rue89*, January 30, 2011, available online at <http://www.rue89.com/2011/01/30/un-front-anti-marine-le-pen-qui-brasse-large-a-lextrême-droite-188110>.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, her interview with *Israel Magazine*, French edition, no. 123, May 2011, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> See Abel Mestre, A Lille, Jean-Marie Le Pen fait son show et cite Robert Brasillach, *Le Monde*, February 18, 2012, available online at [http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2012/article/2012/02/18/a-lille-jean-marie-le-pen-fait-son-show-et-cite-robert-brasillach\\_1645347\\_1471069.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2012/article/2012/02/18/a-lille-jean-marie-le-pen-fait-son-show-et-cite-robert-brasillach_1645347_1471069.html); Catherine Dubouloz, Marine Le Pen envie le “bon sens” helvétique. *Le Temps* (Geneva), January 7, 2011, available online at

The Front national's populist turn under Marine Le Pen represents a fundamental turning point in the history of the Front national. For genuine populism, within the confines of a democratic system, derives its drive and force from roots that are entirely different from those evoked by the traditional extreme right. It is often claimed that populism is difficult, if not outright impossible, to define. The history of early populist mobilization, and here particularly the case of agrarian populism in late nineteenth-century USA, suggests otherwise.<sup>5</sup> It shows that populist mobilization derives its force and legitimacy above all from its ability to appeal to essential intellectual/philosophical foundations of the polity, notions such as democracy, liberty and equality. Unfortunately, however, these principles, or so the populists charged, had been betrayed and corrupted by those in power. Therefore it was up to the populists "to mount an insurgency by the common people" to redeem and restore these principles and promises.<sup>6</sup>

In the United States, one major foundation is republicanism (articulated and promoted, most prominently, by Thomas Jefferson), derived from classical antiquity. Republicanism rested on the assumption that "a republican state required a general equality of property-holding among its citizens." It would cease to exist if "only a tiny minority controlled most of the wealth and the bulk of the population remained dependent servants or landless laborers. Equality was related to independence," both materially and spiritually and intellectually.<sup>7</sup> If American populists of the late nineteenth-century (represented by eminent and eloquent political figures such as Tom Watson from Georgia and Frank Doster and William Peffer of Kansas) successfully challenged the political establishment of the time (represented by the two major parties, the Democrats and Republicans) it was because they convincingly illustrated to what degree contemporary political reality had deviated from – if not debased – essential ideas – and ideals – informing the founding of the republic. As the prominent populist orator and politician Tom Watson put it in 1888, the notion that all men were equal fundamental to Jeffersonian democracy had given way to a reality of outrageous inequality promoted by a thoroughly corrupt government favoring the strong and rich at the expense of the weak and poor.<sup>8</sup> A nation of independent – and largely rural – smallholders had given way to a nation dominated by a small plutocracy, aided and abetted by a government, which granted special privileges to the few while "encouraging the strong to oppress the weak." In other words, American democracy had become a travesty, and it was up to the populists, as the genuine representatives of ordinary people, to redeem the "simple, majestic and true" ideals of the founders of the republic.<sup>9</sup>

Populism, Tom Watson wrote in 1905, stood for a number of simple, yet "vital principles, which in themselves are timeless," principal among them "the doctrine" that government belonged "to the governed and not to the governors." But the "very essence" of populism was "antagonism to class legislation and to special privilege." From this followed

---

[http://www.letemps.ch/Page/Uuid/052b520e-19dd-11e0-a565-8959e08567fa/Marine\\_Le\\_Pen\\_envie\\_le\\_bon\\_sens\\_helv%C3%A9tique#.UGGo164yBOg](http://www.letemps.ch/Page/Uuid/052b520e-19dd-11e0-a565-8959e08567fa/Marine_Le_Pen_envie_le_bon_sens_helv%C3%A9tique#.UGGo164yBOg).

<sup>5</sup> Norman Pollack, *The Humane Economy: Populism, Capitalism, and Democracy*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990; Gene Clanton, *Populism: The Humane Preference in America, 1890-1900*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991; Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> See Michael Kazin, *Democracy Betrayed and Redeemed: Populist Traditions in the United States*, *Constellations*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1998, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> See Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, New York: Vintage Books, 1991, p. 234; Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998, ch. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Watson, Commencement Address, Milledgeville, Georgia, June 1888, in Ferald J. Bryan, *Henry Grady or Tom Watson? The Rhetorical Struggle for the New South, 1880-1890*, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994, p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Watson, Commencement Address in Milledgeville, June 1888, in Ferald J. Bryan, *Henry Grady or Tom Watson? The Rhetorical Struggle for the New South, 1880-1890*, Macon: Mercer University Press, 1994, p. 147.

populism's "constant purpose," namely "to check the tendency which concentrates the political power and all material prosperity into the hands of the few."<sup>10</sup> It is hardly a coincidence that the populist mobilization of the late nineteenth century occurred at a time of dramatically increasing inequality, rampant political corruption, and widespread sentiments against government and the political establishment. Never in the nation's relatively short history did the gap between founding ideals and principles and everyday experienced social and political reality appear to have been wider than during those decades of the "Gilded Age."<sup>11</sup> As Ignatius Donnelly, the author of the preamble of the "Omaha Platform" (which launched the People's Party in 1892) put it, this was "a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin" where corruption dominated every level of public life. This was a nation where the "fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of those, in turn, despise the republic and endanger liberty." This was a nation where "governmental injustice" bred "the two great classes – tramps and millionaires." There was only one solution – to "restore the government of the Republic to the hands of 'the plain people,'" and thus lay the groundwork for the reestablishment of justice and the promotion of general welfare.<sup>12</sup>

### The Front National's Republican Turn

In France, the extreme right has traditionally rejected republican ideas in favor of an integral nationalism, which extolled the virtues of French history, cultural heritage, and a sense of common destiny, transmitted and passed on through the bloodline from one generation to the next.<sup>13</sup> Not only was the republic associated with revolution, regicide, and the violent disappearance of the *ancien régime*; the republic also displayed considerable hostility to religion and the Catholic Church, a hostility which found its reflection in one of the central pillars of French republicanism – *laïcité*. The Front national under Jean-Marie Le Pen was but the most recent manifestation and articulation of an intransigent "adversarial nationalism," united in its rejection of the republic.<sup>14</sup> In stark contrast to this tradition, Marine Le Pen's has made the promotion of the new Front national as a "republican party," which is the only genuine defender of the ideals reflected in French republicanism, but betrayed by the political establishment, the cornerstone of her strategy of normalization. The new FN leader claimed as much at the party congress in Tours in January 2011 (where she was elected president of the party) when she vowed that she and her movement would raise and restore "the traditional values of the French Republic" which the "*classe politique*" had abandoned and betrayed. For, as she concluded, "the true defenders of the Republic, that's

---

<sup>10</sup> Tom Watson, Populism, *Tom Watson's Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1905, pp. 257-260.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation – the Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*, New York: Harper Collins, 2009, p. 126 where he characterizes the Southern states in the 1880s as "a cesspool of corruption. The buying and selling of votes was common among both parties and both races." Chapters 4 and 5, which analyze the era of agrarian populism, provide further evidence of the degradation of political culture in the Gilded Age.

<sup>12</sup> The text of the platform can be found online at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5361/>.

<sup>13</sup> See Douglas R. Holmes, *Integral Europe – Fast Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000; Peter Davies, *The National Front in France: Ideology, Discourse and Power*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 144-149.

us.”<sup>15</sup> A few months later, Marine Le Pen reaffirmed her position, claiming that, with regard to a number of points, she shared common ground with Jean-Pierre Chevènement, the leading point of reference of the republican left.<sup>16</sup> Chevènement had presented himself as an independent presidential candidate in 2002. Obtaining a bit more than 5 percent of the vote, he was held responsible by the Socialists for Lionel Jospin’s disastrous defeat in the first round of the election, as a result of which Jean-Marie Le Pen advanced to the decisive second round against Jacques Chirac.

Chevènement vehemently objected to Marine Le Pen’s contention, rejecting the idea that there existed any ideological proximity between himself and his movement (the *Mouvement des citoyens*, MDC) and Marine Le Pen’s project, which he characterized as a “form of ‘ideological hold-up’ on the discourse of the republican left.” And he added that no one of significance in his movement had defected to Marine Le Pen.<sup>17</sup>

A few weeks later, Bertrand Duthéil de la Rochère, a founding member of the MDC and Chevènement’s former *directeur des cabinets*, announced that he had joined Marine Le Pen’s presidential campaign, where he was put in charge of questions regarding the republic and *laïcité*.<sup>18</sup> De la Rochère justified his decision in an open letter to his former “comrades” and political friends on the left (he was immediately expelled from the MDC) arguing that “under the present circumstances” Marine Le Pen was the only candidate to not only defend a republican program but also to have a chance, albeit small, to carry it through. Only with Marine Le Pen, the former *chevènementiste* maintained, a “republican restoration” was realistically conceivable. Republican restoration, de la Rochère noted, meant above all for France to regain her sovereignty, which it had lost to the banks, the international financial markets and speculators, and especially to the project of a common currency. France could only reclaim her sovereignty if the country regained control over her national money, i.e., if she abandoned the euro. This would allow her to embark on a course of “reindustrialization” via “the reconstitution of a public sector,” which would act as both a “sovereign base” for assuring national independence and as the “heart of the public service in order to promote equality between citizens and territorial entities.”

At the same time, de la Rochère sought to preempt obvious objections from his former friends on the left, particularly with respect to the Front national’s position on immigration. To limit the influx of foreign workers at a time when the country suffered from mass unemployment, de la Rochère charged, was not only a sign of common sense, but it also contributed to protecting wages and the country’s social net. And to stand firm against any attempts on the part of Muslim fundamentalists “to introduce their religious practices into the public sphere and to force those they consider their co-religionists to conform to them” only meant to come out in defense of *laïcité*.<sup>19</sup>

The defection of a relatively significant exponent of “*chevènementisme*” to her camp not only boosted Marine Le Pen’s strategy of normalization; it also provided conceptual substance for her programmatic reorientation, which to a large extent consisted of a

<sup>15</sup> Marine Le Pen cited in Caroline Fourest and Fiammetta Venner, *Marine Le Pen*, Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2011, p. 225. For the two authors, highly critical of Marine Le Pen, the new course represented a “180-degree turn” compared to the party’s traditional position.

<sup>16</sup> Dominique de Montvalon et Tugdual Denis, Marine Le Pen: Dix millions de fausses cartes Vitale circulent! Interview with Marine Le Pen, *France Soir*, July 11, 2011, available online at <http://www.francesoir.fr/actualite/politique/marine-pen-dix-millions-fausses-cartes-vitales-circulent-117496.html>

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Pierre Chevènement, Contre Marine Le Pen, la République, la vraie! *Chevenement.fr*, blog from march 25, 2011, available online at [http://www.chevenement.fr/Contre-Marine-Le-Pen-la-Republique-la-vraie-\\_a1104.html](http://www.chevenement.fr/Contre-Marine-Le-Pen-la-Republique-la-vraie-_a1104.html)

<sup>18</sup> Abel Mestre, Un ancien proche de Chevènement rallie Marine Le Pen, *Le Monde*, September 27, 2011, available online at [http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2011/09/27/un-ancien-proche-de-chevenement-rallie-marine-le-pen\\_1578279\\_823448.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2011/09/27/un-ancien-proche-de-chevenement-rallie-marine-le-pen_1578279_823448.html).

<sup>19</sup> Bertrand Duthéil de la Rochère, Lettre ouverte aux républicains de gauche, September 27, 2011, available online at <http://www.nationspresse.info/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Lettre-ouverte-BDLR.pdf>.

“hostile takeover” of republican ideas. Behind this was the hope that the adoption of a substantial republican program would allow her to attract a portion of Chevènement’s former supporters and thus broaden her base.<sup>20</sup> One of the driving forces behind the new Front national’s programmatic reorientation was Florian Philippot, a young technocrat, whose political trajectory had also started with *chevènementisme* in 2002. After serving as an economic advisor to Marine Le Pen beginning in late 2011, Philippot was appointed to the post of strategic director for Marine Le Pen’s presidential campaign in early 2012 and, a few months later, was promoted to vice-president in charge of strategy and communication.<sup>21</sup>

### Socio-Populism

In April 2008, Jean-Pierre Chevènement wrote a programmatic article for *Le Monde*, in which he maintained that the left would only have a chance to regain power if it managed first, to unite behind a political project that lived up to the challenges posed by globalization and, second, managed to re-conquer the “popular electorate” – the “*couches populaires*” – which the left had largely lost by embracing economic liberalism.<sup>22</sup> Three years later, a major socialist think tank, *Terra Nova*, issued a rather controversial report, in which the authors suggested that the left, instead of running after the *couches populaires*, put together a new coalition composed of those social groups – the young, women, the better educated, and French citizens with a migrant background – most likely to support a progressive program.<sup>23</sup> The message was rather suggestive: the pursuit of the *couches populaires* was a lost cause, not only given their backward, anti-libertarian inclinations but also because under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the Front national had adopted a new program likely to have considerable appeal to these voters.<sup>24</sup>

One of the main features of the Front national’s new program was a strong emphasis on economic and social issues, which represented a marked departure from what the Front national had promoted during Jean-Marie Le Pen’s tenure.<sup>25</sup> The intention was to present a comprehensive, coherent electoral program that went far beyond the party’s traditional bread and butter issues, such as security and immigration, and that would allow Ma-

<sup>20</sup> The “hostile takeover” charge was advanced, for instance, by Caroline Fourest and Fiammetta Venner, in chapter 4 (“OPA sur la République et la laïcité») of their book on Marine Le Pen (Paris: Grasset, 2011, pp. 225-338). See also Sylvain Crépon, *Enquête au cœur du nouveau Front national*, Paris: Nouveau Monde éditions, 2012, ch. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Abel Mestre, Florian Philippot, technocrate passé de Chevènement à Le Pen, *Le Monde*, January 11, 2012, available online at <http://www.rue89.com/2011/10/05/fn-philippot-lhomme-qui-sait-tout-rejoint-marine-le-pen-224754>. See also Nowenn Le Blevenec, FN: Philippot, “l’homme qui sait tout”, rejoint Marine Le Pen, *Rue89*, October 5, 2011, available online at <http://www.rue89.com/2011/10/05/fn-philippot-lhomme-qui-sait-tout-rejoint-marine-le-pen-224754>.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Pierre Chevènement, Un grand parti de gauche pour un New Deal, *Le Monde*, Avril 24, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Olivier Ferrand and Bruno Jeanbart, Gauche: Quelle majorité pour 2012 ? Fondation Terra Nova, a synthesis of the report available online at [http://asset.rue89.com/files/110421\\_-\\_Gauche\\_quelle\\_majorite\\_electorale\\_pour\\_2012\\_-\\_Ferrand\\_Jeanbart\\_Prudent\\_0.pdf](http://asset.rue89.com/files/110421_-_Gauche_quelle_majorite_electorale_pour_2012_-_Ferrand_Jeanbart_Prudent_0.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> The argument is clearly spelled out on page 2 of the synthesis, when the authors seek to account for the reasons for the “divorce” between the left and its traditional (working-class) constituency and page 8, where the authors discuss the impact of the Front national’s programmatic turn under Marine Le Pen. On the reception of, and response to, the report, see Gauche et électoralat populaire: le rapport Terra Nova suscite des remous, *L’Express*, May 13, 2011, available online [http://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/1/politique/gauche-et-electoralat-populaire-le-rapport-terra-nova-suscite-des-remous\\_992645.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/1/politique/gauche-et-electoralat-populaire-le-rapport-terra-nova-suscite-des-remous_992645.html)

<sup>25</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of these changes see Gilles Ivaldi, Permanences et évolutions de l’idéologie frontiste, in Pascal Delwit (ed.), *Le Front national: Mutations de l’extrême droite française*, Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 2012, pp. 95-112.



rine Le Pen to present herself as a serious presidential candidate who did not shy away from taking over the reins of power.

The central theme informing the Front national's new program as well as Marine Le Pen's various public speeches and interventions during the presidential election campaign was the question of national sovereignty. Charging those in power for the past several decades with having completely hollowed out French sovereignty while handing over the remaining "levers of the free people" to Brussels, she vowed she would do everything in her power to restore national independence and sovereignty to the French people.<sup>26</sup> If elected, she would return to the French people their country and their pride, and, as she put it in her book *Pour que vive la France*, which appeared a few weeks before the election, rebuild "the pillars of a republican nation."<sup>27</sup> This entailed nothing less than a complete reversal of the direction politics had taken during the past few decades. It meant, above all, a complete break with the dominant "globalist ideology" (*idéologie mondialiste*), which, in her view, obsessed France's political, cultural, and financial establishment and which served but "the interests of an oligarchy."<sup>28</sup>

Accusing the established political class, both left and right, of being more interested in the welfare of the financial markets than in that of ordinary French citizens, Marine Le Pen promoted herself as the advocate and representative of the "invisible majority," of "the forgotten."<sup>29</sup> In order to appeal to these voters she used a language borrowed from the traditional left. Thus with reference to the current economic and financial situation, she noted that not everyone was affected the same by the crisis. "For the silent majority," she noted, "there is unemployment, the decline in their living standard, insecurity, and fear of the future. For a minority that was getting smaller and smaller and, at the same time, richer and richer, there are astronomical salaries, scandalous bonuses, untaxed capital gains, and the limitless accumulation of ever more power and riches."<sup>30</sup> To meet these challenges, Marine Le Pen's advisors put together a comprehensive economic program, which, as both analysts and detractors noted, constituted a fundamental reversal of the party's traditional rather market-friendly position. Yvan Blot, for instance, the former exponent of the party's neoliberal wing, in a review of *Pour que vive la France*, charged Marine Le Pen with having turned into a neo-Marxist "Marine la rouge."<sup>31</sup> Other detractors on the far right accused her of embracing jacobine traditions and, in the process, betraying the party's ideological heritage.<sup>32</sup> The fact that in her book, Marine Le Pen cited a number left-wing critics of capitalism, such as Serge Halimi, the director of *Le Monde diplomatique*, and particularly Jean-Claude Michéa, an ex-communist philosopher known for his unorthodox positions provoked further outrage in extreme – right circles once close to the Front national.<sup>33</sup>

The new Front national economic program represented a synthesis of traditional republican/nationalist and traditional left-wing/socialist positions.<sup>34</sup> On the nationalist side,

<sup>26</sup> Speech given at Metz, December 11, 2011, available online at <http://www.frontnational.com/videos/meeting-a-metz-discours-de-cloture-de-marine-le-pen/>

<sup>27</sup> Marine Le Pen, *Pour que vive la France*, Paris: Éditions Grancher, 2012, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> Speech given at Metz.

<sup>30</sup> Marine Le Pen, *Pour que vive la France*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>31</sup> Yvan Blot, Un livre néo Marxiste? Quand Marine Le Pen devient Marine la rouge, *atlantico.fr*, March 4, 2012, available online at <http://www.atlantico.fr/decryptage/marine-pen-pour-que-vive-france-livre-marxisme-rouge-yvan-blot-301601.html>

<sup>32</sup> Eric Letty, Le virage à gauche du Front national, *Le choc du mois*, May 2011, pp. 36-37.

<sup>33</sup> See Blot, Un livre néo-Marxiste? Pp. 2-3.

<sup>34</sup> The party presented a first 37-page draft of its "economic project" in April 2011. It is available online at <http://www.frontnational.com/pdf/projet-eco-fn-orientations.pdf>.

the emphasis was on regaining national sovereignty as the most effective way to protect ordinary French citizens against the economic and social ravages caused by globalization. To achieve full national sovereignty, Marine Le Pen propagated in her electoral program the notion of “economic patriotism” which included, among other things, a call for “intelligent” protectionism against “disloyal competition” and the economic dislocations associated with it, and the demand that the French state at all administrative levels be required by law (*Achetons français*) to award procurement contracts exclusively to French companies.<sup>35</sup> To regain sovereignty also meant, according to the election program, to liberate the French state from the financial markets, by abrogating the law of 1973, which forbade the Treasury to borrow directly from the Bank of France. This law, Marine Le Pen argued, had not only made the French state more and more dependent on financial markets while at the same time given them the power to dictate their conditions to the state, it had also contributed to the dramatic rise in public debt, which represented a steady source of “rent” for the financial markets.<sup>36</sup> Finally, and most importantly, regaining national sovereignty entailed above all exiting from the common currency and reintroducing the French franc. By abandoning the euro, France would gain room for maneuver with respect to monetary policy, allowing her, for instance, to devalue the currency and thus recuperate competitiveness.

With respect to social policy, Marine Le Pen charged that the protection of ordinary citizens from the vicissitudes of the economy presumed above all the reestablishment of a strong state, capable of exercising its regulative and protective duties. This was nothing less than a call for the revival of traditional French policies of *dirigisme* and *étatisme*, reflected in the various roles accorded to the state by Marine Le Pen toward the end of her book and ranging from “*L’État protecteur*” to “*L’État stratège*.”<sup>37</sup> A strong state also entailed a strong public sector that was in a position to fulfill its central role as a provider of services, which guarantee “the equality of the citizens,” as Marine Le Pen put it in a programmatic speech from early 2011 that was supposed to launch “the social wave.”<sup>38</sup> Equality also meant social justice, particularly with respect to taxation, and, thus redistribution. Whereas the Front national had traditionally supported lowering taxes, Marine Le Pen called for making taxes more progressive by increasing the rate for higher incomes while reducing it for lower ones. At the same time, she called for a revision of the tax laws regarding dividends, so that capital gains would no longer be favored compared to income derived from work. Marine Le Pen justified these measures arguing that the *classes populaires* and the middle class would only truly benefit from growth if “the financial sector and the stockholders” saw their share of the value added proportionately diminished. This, she added, would lead “to a lowering of profit rates and a parallel reduction in inequality.”<sup>39</sup>

The positions adopted by Marine Le Pen in the run-up to the 2012 presidential election reveal a strong dose of republicanism. This is hardly surprising given the background of some of her key advisors, such as Florian Philippot.<sup>40</sup> By evoking key principles of French republicanism, such as equality, sovereignty, a strong state, and, as discussed below, *laïcité*, while constantly repeating how these principles have been betrayed and debased by those in power, Marine Le Pen adopted a central mechanism of populist mobiliza-

<sup>35</sup> Marine Le Pen, *Mon projet pour la France et les Français*, 2012, p. 3, available online at [http://www.frontnational.com/pdf/projet\\_mlp2012.pdf](http://www.frontnational.com/pdf/projet_mlp2012.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Marine Le Pen, *Pour que vive la France*, pp. 62ff.; *Mon projet*, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Pour que vive la France*, pp. 193ff.

<sup>38</sup> Marine Le Pen, *Discours social*, Bompas, March 11, 2011, available online at <http://www.nationspresse.info/?p=126839>. The National press site published the speech under the title “Marine Le Pen lance la vague sociale.”

<sup>39</sup> Marine Le Pen, *Pour que vive la France*, p. 41.

<sup>40</sup> See Eric Dupin, *Die rote Marine Le Pen*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, deutsche Ausgabe, April 13, 2012, available online at <http://www.monde-diplomatique.de/pm/2012/04/13.mondeText.artikel,a0053.idx,18>.

tion. It is within this context that her appeal to “the invisible” and “forgotten,” i.e., the *couches populaires* abandoned by the traditional left, derives its logic. Recent French surveys have revealed a dramatic increase in fear of falling into poverty. Thus in the most recent poll, 55 percent of respondents said they had already experienced a moment where they thought they were on the verge of experiencing poverty; 85 percent thought that the chances their children would one day know poverty were higher than for their own generation (55 percent thought very much higher).<sup>41</sup> In the face of rapidly growing inequality, which in early 2012 provoked a broad debate about the rich in French society, the evocation of the principle of equality together with a broad attack against the political class, the financial markets (and their alleged collusion) as well as the super rich was guaranteed to resonate among ordinary citizens.<sup>42</sup> In this context, the results of a poll on taxing the rich from March 2012 are highly revealing. The survey sought to find out the level of support for a proposition made by François Holland to drastically raise the marginal tax rates on revenues above one million euro (to 75 percent). The poll found roughly two thirds of respondents agreeing with this proposition. Among supporters of the UMP, however, four fifth were against it. Against that, the proposition found approval among more than two thirds of Front national supporters – a clear indication that Marine Le Pen’s populist economic positions were largely in sync with the attitudes of her main constituency.<sup>43</sup>

### National Preference, Laïcité, and the Mobilization of Identitarian Panic

In December 2010, during a speech that was supposed to promote her candidacy for the presidency of the Front national, Marine Le Pen committed one of these outrages for which her father was famous. In Lyon, a bastion of right-wing extremism and the stronghold of her competitor for the presidency of the party, Bruno Gollnisch, she compared Muslim prayers in the streets of the major French cities to the time of German occupation – “without tanks, without soldiers, but an occupation all the same.”<sup>44</sup> The provocation was, as had been the case with her father, fully intended.<sup>45</sup> Not only was it supposed to convince the undecided that she could be as tough as her father; it was also supposed to promote Marine Le Pen’s new self-assumed role as the defender of liberty and *laïcité* against a new enemy – Islam, and thus score points against Gollnisch, who was close to ultra-Catholic circles.<sup>46</sup> As could be expected, her inflammatory remarks caused a considerable uproar among the polit-

<sup>41</sup> IPSOS, 6ème vague de l’Observatoire de la Pauvreté: les enfants et la pauvreté, September 2012, available online at <http://www.ipsos.fr/ipsos-public-affaires/actualites/2012-09-03-6eme-vague-l-observatoire-pauvrete-enfants-et-pauvrete>.

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, *Le Point*, April 19, 2012, the cover story of which suggested that if the presidential campaign had revealed one thing it was “the hatred of the rich.”

<sup>43</sup> BVA, Les Français et la taxation à 75% des revenus supérieurs à 1 million d’euros par an, March 2, 2012, available online at [http://www.bva.fr/fr/sondages/cap\\_sur\\_2012/les\\_francais\\_et\\_la\\_taxation\\_a\\_75\\_des\\_revenus\\_superieurs\\_a\\_1\\_million\\_deuros\\_par\\_an.html](http://www.bva.fr/fr/sondages/cap_sur_2012/les_francais_et_la_taxation_a_75_des_revenus_superieurs_a_1_million_deuros_par_an.html)

<sup>44</sup> Marine Le Pen compare les “prières de rue” des musulmans à une “occupation,” *Le Monde*, December 13, 2012, available online at [http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2010/12/11/marine-le-pen-compare-les-prieres-de-rue-des-musulmans-a-une-occupation\\_1452359\\_823448.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2010/12/11/marine-le-pen-compare-les-prieres-de-rue-des-musulmans-a-une-occupation_1452359_823448.html)

<sup>45</sup> At the same time, it could also be read as a thinly veiled dig at her father who, in 2005, had characterized the German occupation during World War II as “not particularly inhumane,” which earned him a three-month suspended prison sentence and fine for having trivialized war crimes. See Propos sur l’Occupation: Jean-Marie Le Pen condamné en appel à trois mois de prison avec sursis. *Le Monde*, February 16, 2012, available online at [http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2012/02/16/apres-ses-propos-sur-l-occupation-le-pen-condamne-en-appel-a-trois-mois-de-prison-avec-sursis\\_1644570\\_823448.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2012/02/16/apres-ses-propos-sur-l-occupation-le-pen-condamne-en-appel-a-trois-mois-de-prison-avec-sursis_1644570_823448.html)

<sup>46</sup> For an extended discussion of the significance of this speech see Silvain Crépon, *Enquête au cœur du nouveau Front national*, Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2012, pp. 167-171.

ical establishment and various human rights organizations. This gave Marine Le Pen the opportunity to reaffirm her position. Stating that she was the only “genuine defender of the republic” she made an urgent call to resist all “offences against *la laïcité*” and thus reconquer lost ground.<sup>47</sup>

Unlike other right-wing populist leaders in Western Europe, such as Filip Dewinter (Vlaams Belang), Hans-Christian Strache (FPÖ), or Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen largely avoided the hyperbolic, aggressive language characteristic of much of today’s anti-Islamic “discourse” on the populist right – much to the disappointment of Marine Le Pen’s far-right critics, such as Bernard Antony. Although the former leader of the Front national’s ultra-Catholic wing acknowledged that Marine Le Pen was right to stress “the immense danger” Islam posed to France, he attacked her full front for failing to understand that Islam was different from other religions. In fact, Antony charged, it was questionable whether or not Islam was a religion, given the fact that it was both faith and law, religion and state, doctrine and way of life. Instead, Islam represented a “totalitarian ideology,” which demanded complete submission and which, unlike Christianity, refused to acknowledge the “fundamental distinction” between spiritual and worldly order. The “spiritual, moral and cultural roots of the French nation of European civilization” were grounded in Christianity. A state that promotes “*une laïcité positive*,” i.e., one that respects the roots and values of the Judeo-Christian civilization therefore cannot treat the Catholic religion, “foundation of our values and our identity” equally to the “ideology of the Islamic Umma.” This, however, was, in Antony’s view, exactly what Marine Le Pen’s position on Islam tried to do, namely “to submit and control Islam within the framework of the ‘*laïcité republicaine*’ which aims to regulate all religions in an equal way.”<sup>48</sup>

A review of Marine Le Pen’s interventions against Islam largely confirms Antony’s assessment. To be sure, Marine Le Pen affirmed France’s Christian roots, pointing out that in her opinion, it was Christianity’s recognition of the separation of the temporary (“rendering onto Cesar”) and the divine, which was the basis for *laïcité* – a distinction unknown to Islam.<sup>49</sup> She also repeatedly noted that Islam was a relative newcomer in France, whereas Christianity had informed French history for centuries. It was therefore up to Islam to adapt to France and not the other way around.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, Marine Le Pen, in an interview with a Moroccan news magazine, maintained that in her opinion, Islam was generally compatible with *laïcité*; it was *charia*, which she considered to be fundamentally incompatible with the republic.<sup>51</sup> What she wanted, as she put it in an interview with a North-African magazine, was an “*islam laïcisé*,” which “accepts that the ‘mosque’ is separate from the state.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Julien Cabrouet, Marine Le Pen persiste, *L’Express*, December 13, 2010, available online at [http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/marine-le-pen-persiste\\_944871.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/marine-le-pen-persiste_944871.html).

<sup>48</sup> Bernard Antony, Islam: en quoi Marine Le Pen a raison, en quoi elle a tort, *Nouvelle Jerusalem*, May 8, 2012, available online at <http://nouvellejerusalem.forumactif.com/t7628-islam-en-quoi-marine-le-pen-a-raison-en-quoi-elle-a-tort>

<sup>49</sup> Samuel Pruvot, Marine Le Pen: L’État doit distinguer entre les religions, *Famille chrétienne*, April 18, 2012, available online at [http://www.famillechretienne.fr/societe/politique/marine-le-pen-letat-doit-distinguer-entre-les-religions-\\_t7\\_s37\\_d64876.html](http://www.famillechretienne.fr/societe/politique/marine-le-pen-letat-doit-distinguer-entre-les-religions-_t7_s37_d64876.html)

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, her interview with BFM-RMC tv, February 14, 2008, reproduced in part on the internet site Observatoire de l’islamisation, February 23, 2008, <http://www.islamisation.fr/archive/2008/02/23/marine-le-pen-clarifie-sa-position-sur-l-islamisation-sur-rm.html>; also Le projet de Marine Le Pen: Laïcité, available online at <http://www.frontnational.com/le-projet-de-marine-le-pen/refondation-republicaine/laicite/> and her speech given in Strasbourg, February 12, 2012, available online at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9WeThf\\_Jdc&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9WeThf_Jdc&feature=related).

<sup>51</sup> Marine Le Pen: L’islam, les Arabes et moi, *Actuel*, no. 86, March 18, 2011, available online at [http://www.actuel.ma/Dossier/Marine\\_Le\\_Pen\\_Lislam\\_les\\_Arabes\\_et\\_moi/401.html](http://www.actuel.ma/Dossier/Marine_Le_Pen_Lislam_les_Arabes_et_moi/401.html).

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Marine Le Pen, *Le courrier de l’Atlas*, no. 55, January 2012, p. 25.

As a result, with respect to *laïcité*, Marine Le Pen rejected any kind of discrimination, whether positive or negative.<sup>53</sup> Instead, her strategy regarding the question of Islam in France consisted in evoking concrete examples where, in her opinion, the Muslim community in France infringed on the boundaries set by *laïcité*. The reference to public prayers during her speech in Lyon was one instance. A second instance was her campaign against the introduction of halal meat in school cafeterias and canteens, which she framed in terms of an intrusion of the religious into the secular realm.<sup>54</sup> This was followed by her charge that virtually all meat distributed in the Parisian region was halal. Since customers were unaware of that fact, they were in fact subjected to religious rules and practices. The charge provoked a major outcry – until it became clear that Marine Le Pen might have been, at least partially, correct.<sup>55</sup> A third example regards the construction of mosques. Although Marine Le Pen, unlike right-wing populist leaders in other countries, did not call for resisting plans to build new mosques in France, she vehemently opposed any public financial support for their construction, since this would constitute a severe violation of the law of 1905, which had codified and set the terms of *laïcité* in France. It was up to the faithful to finance their mosques, which, she maintained, should be “modest and not ostentatious,” unlike some of the minarets that had recently been constructed in major French cities.<sup>56</sup>

Marine Le Pen’s strategy consisted not only of appropriating *laïcité* for the new Front national, but also of pushing the logic of *laïcité* beyond its most extreme limits. This was particularly pronounced in the case of her recent call for a public ban on “ostentatious” religious symbols in public places (including streets), such as the Muslim headscarf and the Jewish kippa. Marine Le Pen justified her position arguing that one could not ban the Muslim headscarf while exempting other religious symbols from the ban, implying that this would run counter to the fundamental principle of neutrality, which was essential to *laïcité*. The remark provoked a vivid response from the political establishment and the media, one of which implied that Marine Le Pen had turned into a “‘fundamentalist’ of *laïcité*.”<sup>57</sup> And indeed, the law of 1905 does not forbid displaying religious symbols in public – as long as the display does not disturb public order.

For experts on the question of *laïcité* like the sociologist Jean Baubérot, Marine Le Pen’s represented a radical interpretation of the spirit of *laïcité*, which no longer only sought to keep religion and the state separate, but which sought to completely expel religion from public life, force it into the private sphere, and thus render it invisible.<sup>58</sup> As Marine Le

<sup>53</sup> See *Christianisme aujourd’hui*, special Internet edition, April 2012, p. 5, available online at [http://www.cpdh.info/~cpdhpdf/Election2012/DossierCompleet\\_Presidentielles2012.pdf](http://www.cpdh.info/~cpdhpdf/Election2012/DossierCompleet_Presidentielles2012.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> Stéphanie Le Bars, Le halal à la cantine, un fantôme loin de la réalité, *Le Monde*, March 10, 2012, available online at [http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2012/03/10/le-halal-a-la-cantine-un-fantome-loin-de-la-realite\\_1655942\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2012/03/10/le-halal-a-la-cantine-un-fantome-loin-de-la-realite_1655942_3224.html).

<sup>55</sup> Benjamin Roger, Marine Le Pen en croisade contre la viande halal, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, February 21, 2012, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/election-presidentielle-2012/20120221.OBS1951/marine-le-pen-en-croisade-contre-la-viande-halal.html>; Caroline Politi, Marine Le Pen a-t-elle raison sur le halal ? *L’Express*, February 20, 2012, available online at [http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/marine-le-pen-a-t-elle-raison-sur-le-halal\\_1084490.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/marine-le-pen-a-t-elle-raison-sur-le-halal_1084490.html).

<sup>56</sup> See Marine Le Pen s’attaque au financement des mosquées, *L’Express*, December 20, 2012, available online at [http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/marine-le-pen-s-attaque-au-financement-des-mosquees\\_946648.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/marine-le-pen-s-attaque-au-financement-des-mosquees_946648.html).

<sup>57</sup> Marine Le Pen veut interdire voile et kippa dans la rue: La *laïcité* n’est pas la négation du fait religieux pour Boutin, *L’Express*, September 21, 2012, available online at [http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/marine-le-pen-veut-interdire-le-voile-et-la-kippa-dans-la-rue\\_1164264.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/marine-le-pen-veut-interdire-le-voile-et-la-kippa-dans-la-rue_1164264.html). Amara Makhoul-Yatim, Marine Le Pen, une “intégriste” de la *laïcité*? *France24.com*, September 22, 2012, available online <http://www.france24.com/fr/20120921-marine-le-pen-integrisme-laicite-voile-kippa-republique-religion>

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Jean Baubérot, N’utilisez pas la *laïcité* contre l’islam, *La Croix*, February 10, 2012, available online at [http://www.la-croix.com/Debats/Opinions/Debats/Jean-Bauberot-N-utilisons-pas-la-laicite-contre-l-islam-\\_NP\\_-2012-02-10-767265](http://www.la-croix.com/Debats/Opinions/Debats/Jean-Bauberot-N-utilisons-pas-la-laicite-contre-l-islam-_NP_-2012-02-10-767265).

Pen put it in her first speech as the new president of the Front national in Tours, “faith must remain a strictly private matter.”<sup>59</sup> This objective, Baubéront maintained, was hardly confined to the extreme right, but was shared by many on the traditional right and even among some on the left.<sup>60</sup> In fact, Marine Le Pen’s interpretation was far from original. As early as 2003, the center-right, in response to Jean-Marie Le Pen’s success in the presidential election, had embarked on a radical ideological reconstruction of the spirit of *laïcité*. The objective was to transform the notion of *laïcité* into a repressive instrument of control, directed against Islam, while, at the same time, turning it into a justification of, and vehicle for, a new politics of identity.<sup>61</sup> In the years that followed, the propagation and promotion of this new restrictive, identitarian model of *laïcité* became central to Nicolas Sarkozy’s increasingly desperate attempt to retain Front national voters who in 2007 had voted for him but who in the meantime had become increasingly disenchanted with him as a person and with his policies. From the center right, the reinterpretation of *laïcité* quickly diffused among the far right. For, as Arnaud Gouillon of the extreme right groupuscule *Bloc identitaire* put it, “*laïcité* understood as an identitarian principle allows us to preserve our liberties and to fight against not only fundamentalist Islam (*l’islamisme*) but also Islamization.”<sup>62</sup>

Marine Le Pen’s focus on *laïcité* – as well as the new Front national’s ties to anti-Islamic groups such as *Block identitaire* – has to be understood in the context of what Nicolas Lebourg has characterized as a growing “cultural insecurity” within contemporary French society.<sup>63</sup> Within the Front national’s identitarian framework Islam – and, implicitly, France’s growing Muslim population – represent the “other” in comparison to whom *laïcité* as a fundamental element of French identity attains its significance as a political weapon against those allegedly promoting the implantation of Islam in France. This allows Marine Le Pen to respond to anxieties with respect to the cultural threat posed by the growing presence and visibility of France’s Muslim community. These cultural anxieties, as Yotam Margalit has shown, are particularly pronounced among less educated, lower class individuals.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, however, the new Front national has not followed other right-wing populist parties, which have made the “fight against the Islamization of Western Europe” central to their mobilization. As Marine Le Pen herself put it in an interview with an Arab magazine, the problem was not that there were too many North Africans in France; the problem was that there were too many immigrants in France.<sup>65</sup>

Immigration, of course, has always been central to the Front national’s political discourse. And the Front national’s position on immigration has, in turn, always accounted to a large degree for the party’s success at the polls. The strategic changes adopted by Marine Le Pen on economics and social politics certainly did not diminish the significance of the question of immigration in the party’s program. On the contrary. What did change, however, was the rationale behind the party’s position on immigration. If in the past, the

<sup>59</sup> Discours d’investiture, *Tours*, January 16, 2011, available online at <http://www.nationspresse.info/?p=121433>.

<sup>60</sup> Thus Caroline Fourest, in her coauthored biography of Marine Le Pen, remarks at the beginning of the book that on the question of fundamentalist Islam (*islamisme*), “I recognize phrases, which I could have written.” Fourest and Venner, *Marine Le Pen*, p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Jean Baubéront, *La laïcité falsifiée*, Paris: La Découverte, 2012, pp. 29-43, 63-84.

<sup>62</sup> Arnaud Gouillon, *La laïcité: valeur universelle ou identitaire?* *bloc-identitaire.com*, December 21, 2010, available online at <http://www.bloc-identitaire.com/actualite/1661/laicite-valeur-universelle-ou-identitaire>.

<sup>63</sup> Nicolas Lebourg, *La droitisation saisie par la rhétorique de ‘l’insecureté culturelle’*, *Le Monde*, November 30, 2012, p. 19; see also J. P. de Lisle (pseudonym), *La laïcité selon Marine Le Pen: Un principe perverti au service de l’Islamophobie, terra nova*, March 5, 2012, available online at <http://www.tnova.fr/note/la-la-cit-selon-marine-le-pen-un-principe-perverti-au-service-de-lislamophobie>.

<sup>64</sup> Yotam Margalit, *Lost in Globalization: International Economic Integration and the Sources of Popular Discontent*, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2012, p. 490.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Marine Le Pen, *Le courrier de l’Atlas*, p. 24.

Front national associated immigration primarily with unemployment and insecurity, with Marine Le Pen there was a shift toward a concept central to republicanism – solidarity (the modern term for the revolutionary notion of *fraternité*). This is hardly a coincidence. There has been a lively debate among social scientists, whether or not immigration undermines solidarity and trust, which, in turn, are essential for the modern welfare state. The fear is that diversity might make it “more difficult to sustain expansive social programs and to achieve substantial redistribution toward the poor through taxes and transfers” since it is “difficult to generate feelings of national solidarity and trust across ethnic lines.” Or, as Crepaz has succinctly put it, “people will disengage from willingly contributing funds that are belied to be going disproportionately to ‘strangers’.”<sup>66</sup> At the same time, it has been suggested that the lower classes are particularly concerned “about constraints on welfare benefits” resulting from immigration.<sup>67</sup> Marine Le Pen’s strategy to appeal primarily to the *couches populaires*, whose members, in turn, are most at risk and therefore most likely to have to depend on the welfare state, logically implied that she would raise the question of solidarity in the context of immigration.

Marine Le Pen spelled out the argument during a programmatic speech she gave in early 2012 in Strasbourg when she charged:

*Stopping immigration is of urgent social necessity. Solidarity does not come by itself. Solidarity is a sentiment that can only exist as long as there is a community of values, a common cultural base, within which everyone recognizes him or herself. And ever since our societies are organized in nations, the nation is the natural framework for the exercise of solidarity. Social security, our whole system of social protection, our consent to pay taxes rest on this principle. The only reason we accept to pay for each other, to insure each other against the risks of life, to protect each other is that we recognize each other of the same family. And this family is France (...). [M]ass immigration carries with it the seeds of the destruction of our national solidarity. One cannot defend our social model and at the same time want to continue immigration, that’s impossible. One cannot welcome one million foreigners in five years and naturalize 160,000 without jeopardizing the equilibrium of our public finances (Marine Le Pen, speech, Strasbourg, February 12, 2012, <http://www.nationspresse.info/?p=168405>).*

Those who still defended immigration, Marine Le Pen wrote in her book, condemned those on the bottom of French society to compete for meager resources with those even poorer than they, “in a downward spiral the bottom of which today is not yet in sight.”<sup>68</sup> In addition, she maintained, it could not be that immigrants received services free of charge, for which ordinary French taxpayers had to pay, and that “these people” lived “thanks to the solidarity of the national community.”<sup>69</sup> In order to reverse these trends, Marine Le Pen advanced a program of social protectionism, centered around two policy proposals. The first was a slightly retouched version of an old FN notion – *préférence nationale*. Under Marine Le Pen, *préférence nationale* was transformed into *priorité nationale*, i.e., the no-

<sup>66</sup> Will Kymlicka and Keith Bantin, Immigration, Multiculturalism, and the Welfare State, *Ethics & International Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2006, p. 283; Markus M. L. Crepaz, *Trust Beyond Borders: Immigration, the Welfare State, and Identity in Modern Societies*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Jens Hainmueller and Michael J. Hiscox, Attitudes toward Highly Skilled and Low-Skilled Immigration: Evidence from a Survey Experiment, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 104, no. 1, February 2010, p. 19.

<sup>68</sup> Marine Le Pen, *Pour que vive la France*, p. 88.

<sup>69</sup> Dominique de Montvallan and Tugdual Denis, Marine Le Pen: Dix millions de fausses cares Vitale circulent, *France-Soir*, July 11, 2011, p. 2.

tion that French nationals, including naturalized citizens, should be given priority with respect to employment (given equal levels of competence), social services, and social housing.<sup>70</sup> Family allowances should only be paid to those families where at least one parent was a French citizen or of European origins. By shutting down the various incentives (what the Front national has called *les pompes aspirants*) that had made France attractive to migrants in the past, Marine Le Pen's program charged, France would regain control over the flux of migration. The goal was to radically reduce the number of immigrants from the current annual rate of about 200,000 to a mere 10,000.

The second proposal focused on social welfare fraud. According to official figures, social fraud cost the French state 2 to 3 billion euro a year. For Marine Le Pen, social fraud was primarily a result of the "explosion in immigration." In an interview with *France-Soir*, the president of the Front national explained the logic behind her charges. Starting with the claim that in France, there circulated some 10 million forged health insurance cards (*cartes Vitale*), she suggested that this was largely due to a growing number of areas – particularly in the *banlieus* surrounding big cities – where inspectors no longer dared to set foot. It was perfectly obvious to the average French reader who she meant – everyone remembers the suburban riots of 2005, which largely involved Muslim migrant youth.<sup>71</sup> In response, Marine Le Pen promised that if elected she would make the fight against social fraud a top priority of her administration. She advanced a panoply of anti-fraud measures, ranging from heavy fines for French entrepreneurs employing illegal migrants to strict controls of foreign students, a considerable number of whom, she asserted, only appeared to pursue their studies while in reality they were only interested in exploiting the various social services available to students. These measures would not only save the French state billions in expenditures, it would also strengthen the public sense of solidarity and social justice, which the government's failure to effectively combat social fraud had seriously compromised.<sup>72</sup>

With these propositions, Marine Le Pen articulated anxieties and *ressentiments* shared by a large majority of French citizens. Thus a representative poll from late 2011 found four out of five respondents agreeing with the statement that in France, too many people abused the social services. At the same time, three out of four subscribed to the notion that Islam advanced too much in France.<sup>73</sup> For the authors of the survey, the latter finding revealed a significant radicalization with respect to French "defensive identitarian fixations and reflexes" (*crispations identitaires*). This radicalization was also reflected in the results regarding concrete issues associated with the position of Islam in French society. Thus in the ifop poll, the vast majority of respondents expressed themselves against public financial support for the construction of mosques (with only 14 percent coming out in support). And in an earlier survey, almost 40 percent of respondents approved of Marine Le Pen's position with regard to public prayers, which she had compared to the German occupation during World War II.<sup>74</sup>

Approval was particularly pronounced among working-class respondents (almost 50 percent of them agreed with her charge). This was in line with the results of a survey on

<sup>70</sup> See Marine Le Pen 2012, *Le Projet: Immigration*, available online at <http://www.marinelepen2012.fr/le-projet/autorite-de-letat/immigration/>

<sup>71</sup> See Olivier Roy, *The Nature of the Riots*, ssrc.org, November 18, 2005, available online at <http://riotsfrance.ssrc.org/Roy/>

<sup>72</sup> See Discours de Marine Le Pen à l'issue du colloque "Idées Nation" sur la Santé, November 11, 2011, available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-XXMLxFDGs>

<sup>73</sup> Ifop, *Les valeurs des Français à 6 mois de l'élection présidentielle*, Paris, November 2011, available online at [http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/1695-1-study\\_file.pdf](http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/1695-1-study_file.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> 39% des Français approuveraient les propos de Marine Le Pen, *LePoint.fr*, December 15, 2010, available online at [http://www.lepoint.fr/fil-info-reuters/39-des-francais-approuveraient-les-propos-de-marine-le-pen-15-12-2010-1275361\\_240.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/fil-info-reuters/39-des-francais-approuveraient-les-propos-de-marine-le-pen-15-12-2010-1275361_240.php)



the subject of mosques and minarets from late 2009. At the time, two thirds of working-class respondents had declared themselves opposed to the construction of mosques (compared to roughly 40 percent of all respondents); 60 percent of working-class respondents had supported a ban on the construction of minarets (compared to 46 percent of all respondents).<sup>75</sup> Evidently, Marine Le Pen's broad-based strategy aimed at fanning the flames of identitarian panic resonated particularly well among the popular classes – Marine Le Pen's primary target of populist mobilization for the presidential election and beyond. The result of the first round of the presidential election confirmed that this strategy had paid out: Among working-class voters, Marine Le Pen (29 percent) outdistanced both François Hollande (27 percent) and Nicolas Sarkozy (19 percent).<sup>76</sup>

### Marine Le Pen's Project of Neopopulist Reconstruction

With more than 6.4 million votes in the first round of the 2012 French presidential election, Marine Le Pen not only celebrated a historic success, she also established herself as a major factor in French politics. This was, as the analysis presented above suggests, largely the result of Marine Le Pen's strategy of *dédiabolisation*. This strategy consisted, first, of riding the party of the remnants of the extreme-right tendencies that in the past had dominated the Front national; second, of abandoning much of the ideological baggage – and here particularly anti-Semitism and blatant racism – which in the past had made the Front national a political pariah; and thirdly, and most importantly, of developing a comprehensive, coherent populist program that allowed Marine Le Pen to market herself as a candidate to be taken seriously. With success. In September 2012, Harris Interactive published the results of a survey gauging public opinion towards François Hollande's first four months in office. The poll revealed not only growing disenchantment with the new president, but also a significant level of esteem for Marine Le Pen: Thus 40 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that the new president should take into account the proposals Marine Le Pen had advanced during her presidential campaign. Among center-right supporters, more than half agreed with the statement.<sup>77</sup>

Marine Le Pen's project is perhaps best characterized as an attempt at neopopulist reconstruction. Whereas the first wave of populist mobilization in the 1980s and 1990s relied to a large degree on relatively simplistic appeals to resentment against foreigners and the "political class," the neopopulist project derives its energy from the appeal to the fundamental philosophical and ideological underpinnings of society and the polity and their alleged betrayal by the cultural, economic and political establishment. For the populist right, this project has at least three advantages over the earlier version of populism. It lends an air of respectability to populist propositions and their justification, such as Marine Le Pen's charge that the policy of "positive discrimination" (the French equivalent to affirmative action programs in the United States) is fundamentally at odds with republican values such as equality and merit.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, it makes the task of the populist right's detractors and critics, used to dismiss the populist right as xenophobic and racist, considerably more difficult. Secondly, as recent controversies related to *laïcité* have amply illustrated, it

<sup>75</sup> ifop, Les Français et la construction de mosquées et minarets en France, December 2, 2009, available online at <http://www.lefigaro.fr/assets/pdf/Sondage-minaret.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Laubacher, Présidentielle: le profil des 6,4 millions d'électeurs du FN, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, April 24, 2012, available online at <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/presidentielle-2012-tous-les-resultats/20120424.OBS6980/presidentielle-le-profil-des-6-4-millions-d-electeurs-fn.html>.

<sup>77</sup> Harris Interactive, Retour des Français sur le résultat et les conséquences de l'élection présidentielle, September 2012, available online at [http://www.harrisinteractive.fr/news/2012/CP\\_HIFR\\_LCP\\_17092012.pdf](http://www.harrisinteractive.fr/news/2012/CP_HIFR_LCP_17092012.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> Le Pen, *Pour que vive la France*, pp. 182-184

tends to put the political establishment in the uncomfortable position to have to confront its own contradictory positions, double standards, and hypocrisy.<sup>79</sup> Thirdly, it has allowed Marine Le Pen to appeal to broader segments of the French electorate. Most notably, the party's new programmatic orientations seem to resonate particularly among women. Whereas in the past, women voters were consistently underrepresented among the party's electorate, Marine Le Pen has largely succeeded in closing the gender gap. There is reason to believe that these shifts in the party's constituency have engendered changes in the attitudinal makeup of its supporters. One notable example is attitudes toward gays and gay rights. Thus an ifop survey from August 2012 found almost half of FN supporters coming out in favor of gay marriage (compared to 65 percent of the French population as a whole).<sup>80</sup> These shifts, in turn, are likely to pose new challenges for Marine Le Pen. The question of gay marriage, for instance, led to significant internal differences of opinion in the early days of 2013. These, in turn, were exploited by traditionalist extreme-right currents outside the party intent on undermining Marine Le Pen and her inner circle.<sup>81</sup>

Marine Le Pen's neopopulist project is hardly original. The Danish and Norwegian populist right (Dansk Folkeparti and Fremskrittspartiet) have pursued a similar course, for the same reasons and with the same objectives. Like Marine Le Pen, they have attempted to position themselves as the main opposition party, ready to take on government responsibility. Given the Front national's particularly prominent position among right-wing populist parties in Western Europe, however, Marine Le Pen's neopopulist turn is especially significant. Recent elections in the Netherlands and Belgium have shown that electorally, first-wave, single-issue right-wing populism is a losing proposition, particularly in times of severe structural crisis. Under the circumstances, Marine Le Pen's neopopulist project is likely to induce imitation, if only because of its proven success. And the Front national might once again be seen as the master case of radical right-wing populism in Western Europe.

## References

- Baubérot, Jean. 2012. *La laïcité falsifiée*, Paris: La Découverte.
- Clanton, Gene. 1991. *Populism: The Humane Preference in America, 1890-1900*, Boston: Twayne Publishers.
- Crepaz, Markus M. L. 2008. *Trust Beyond Borders: Immigration, the Welfare State, and Identity in Modern Societies*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Crépon, Sylvain. 2012. *Enquête au cœur du nouveau Front national*, Paris: Nouveau Monde éditions.
- Davies, Peter. 1999. *The National Front in France: Ideology, Discourse and Power*, London: Routledge.
- Fourest, Caroline and Fiammetta Venner. 2011. *Marine Le Pen*, Paris: Bernard Grasset.

<sup>79</sup> See, for instance, the French law that prohibits covering or disguising the face in public (with, for instance, hoods and crash helmets), which, given the many exceptions included in the law, effectively targeted almost exclusively Muslim women wearing the traditional veil (niqab), and which, critics have charged, has fueled Islamophobia. Nancy Graham Holm, French Law Against Full-Face Veils Fuels Islamophobia, *The Guardian*, November 18, 2011, available online at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nancy-graham-holm/frances-law-against-full-\\_1\\_b\\_1100896.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nancy-graham-holm/frances-law-against-full-_1_b_1100896.html).

<sup>80</sup> IFOP, Les Français, les catholiques et les droits des couples homosexuels, August 2012, available online at [http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/1956-1-study\\_file.pdf](http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/1956-1-study_file.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> The main target was Florian Philippot, held primarily responsible for the Front national's break with major parts of its ideological past. See Antoine Vouillazère, Y a-t-il un lobby gay au FN? *Minute*, January 2, 2013, p. 6; Jérôme Bourbon, 'Mariage' gay: le FN contre la famille, *Rivarol*, January 11, 2013, p. 3.

- Hainmueller, Jens and Michael J. Hiscox. 2010. Attitudes toward Highly Skilled and Low-Skilled Immigration: Evidence from a Survey Experiment, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 104, no. 1.
- Hazareesingh, Sudhir. 1994. *Political Traditions in Modern France*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Holmes, Douglas R. 2000. *Integral Europe – Fast Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ivaldi, Gilles. 2012. Permanences et évolutions de l’idéologie frontiste, in Pascal Delwit (ed.), *Le Front national: Mutations de l’extrême droite française*, Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles.
- Kazin, Michael. 1998. Democracy Betrayed and Redeemed: Populist Traditions in the United States, *Constellations*, vol. 5, no. 1.
- Kymlicka, Will and Keith Bantin. 2006. Immigration, Multiculturalism, and the Welfare State, *Ethics & International Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 3.
- Le Pen, Marine. 2012. *Pour que vive la France*, Paris: Éditions Grancher.
- Lears, Jackson. 2009. *Rebirth of a Nation – the Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*, New York: Harper Collins.
- Margalit, Yotam. 2012. Lost in Globalization: International Economic Integration and the Sources of Popular Discontent, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 3.
- Pollack, Norman. 1990. *The Humane Economy: Populism, Capitalism, and Democracy*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Postel, Charles. 2007. *The Populist Vision*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Watson, Tom. 1905. Populism, *Tom Watson’s Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 3, September, pp. 257-260.
- Watson, Tom. 1994. Commencement Address in Milledgeville, June 1888, in Ferald J. Bryan, *Henry Grady or Tom Watson? The Rhetorical Struggle for the New South, 1880-1890*, Macon: Mercer University Press.
- Watson, Tom. 1994. Commencement Address, Midgetville, Georgia, June 1888, in Ferald J. Bryan, *Henry Grady or Tom Watson? The Rhetorical Struggle for the New South, 1880-1890*, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.
- Wood, Gordon S. 1991. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, New York: Vintage Books.
- Wood, Gordon S. 1998. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.