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The Front national under Marine Le Pen: a mainstream political party?

Introduction

In 2011, Marine Le Pen (henceforth MLP) was elected leader of the FN, replacing her father. Just over a year later, on 22 April 2012, she scored 17.9% of the vote in the French Presidential election, coming third in the vote behind Hollande (28.6%) and Sarkozy (27.2%). This was better than the highest score ever achieved by her father, the 16.9% he achieved in 2002 (Shields, 2013: 179). In the 2012 parliamentary elections, the FN took 13.6% of the first round vote (3.5 million votes), its second best ever result.¹ It secured 2 seats in parliament after the second ballot, the first time since 1988 that it had had more than one MP elected. In March 2014, the party won control of a dozen municipalities, including the 7th district in Marseilles, where its candidate was elected mayor. Later that year, the FN achieved the largest score of any French political party in the European Elections, 24.86% of the vote, winning 24 of the 74 seats. On 28 September 2014 the party had 2 candidates for the Senate elected for the first time. In the first round of the regional elections in 2015, the party achieved 28% of the vote, the highest of any party, and although it failed to win any seats in the second ballot, it still polled better than ever before in such an election. In this year's Presidential elections, Le Pen came second in the first ballot with 21.3% of the vote. Although roundly beaten by Macron in the second ballot, she received 33.9% of the vote, 10,638,475 people casting their vote for her. The results in the June 2017 legislative elections were disappointing in the wake of this. However, the party's share of the vote in the first ballot was on a par with the previous 2012 election, and it won 8 seats making it the ninth largest party.

In this context, many commentators have suggested the FN belongs to the political mainstream, and thus should no longer be considered a party of the extreme right.² Indeed, a poll undertaken during the 2015 regional elections revealed that 57% of those polled now saw the FN as a party like any other (France-Info, 2015; see also Mondon, 2014: 302).

This paper argues that although the FN remains part of the extreme right party family, this does not prevent it from belonging to the French political mainstream. Seeing these two positions as contradictory is the product of the claim that the nature and values of the French republic are homogeneous and antithetical to the values of the FN. Thus, FN statements which seek to position the party as defending the Republic are rejected on the basis that such statements are incompatible with its status as an extreme right party. However, although the ideological position of the *mariniste* FN has a high degree of continuity with that of the party under Jean-Marie Le Pen (henceforth JMLP), this ideological continuity is perfectly concomitant with some form of republicanism. In order to more effectively combat the FN one must both recognize this and at the same time articulate an alternative, much more inclusive vision of the French Republic, which leaves no space for the vision of the Republic articulated by the FN.

In a first section I summarise ideological developments under MLP, then review the academic literature on the discourse of the *mariniste* FN. This highlights how readings of the ideology of the *mariniste* FN figure a particular relationship between the FN and the French republic. A second section will then interrogate the historical nature and values of French republicanism, noting that the supposed apotheosis of French republicanism in the 1871 foundation of the Third Republic was less grounded in universal values than some French republican commentators claim, and

that the more recent turn towards a form of national republicanism reflects this becoming much more explicit in the face of post-colonialism. On this basis one can see how the FN's articulation of a discourse rooted in a very strong sense of French identity and the need for others to assimilate in order to be accepted could be perceived as perfectly concomitant with claims to support the Republic. In a final section I argue for the contestation of this form of republicanism in order to ground the Republic on a much more inclusive basis than that allowed by national republicanism. This offers greater potential for undermining FN electoral support.

Approaches to the 'mariniste' FN

How one can ideologically situate the party under the leadership of MLP? One rhetorical shift is a toning down of the language, expressed by Alduy and Wahnich (2015: 55) as the silencing or muting of some of the more extreme elements of its discourse under JMLP.³ This can be seen, for example, in: the absence of references to World War 2 or French colonial wars from her speeches; a softening of the party stance on social issues: the advocacy of civil unions for same-sex couples (Front national, 2016, commitment 87), weaker positions on abortion (Samuel, 2016), and on the death penalty;⁴ the 'watering down' of themes such as fear of racial mixing,⁵ anticommunism and anti-Americanism (Marian, 2011: 97); the minimal invocations of Christian morality.⁶ This shift is perhaps best exemplified by MLP being the first major figure in the FN ever to stigmatize an opponent by calling him a 'Nazi' (Reynié, 2011: 469).

Alongside this one finds shifts in FN discourse to reflect the socio-economic challenges facing voters since the 2008 economic crash, a rise in unemployment, sluggish economic growth, and the worsening of public debt in turn feeding new

taxes and spending cuts. The crash, together with the fiscal consolidation and austerity packages caused by the Eurozone crisis, fuelled public discontent with both the national government and the EU, undermining support for the mainstream right and left. This created a space for the FN to articulate a programme addressing: the fears of those who no longer felt secure, the increased salience of salience of financial and economic management, and increased public support for redistribution and economic regulation (Ivaldi, 2015: 347-48).⁷ MLP increased economic references in her political discourse to persuade the public she had a credible economic policy and to demonstrate her economic competence, but sought to prevent this from suggesting submission to a technocratisation of politics which she elsewhere rejected through anchoring her economic discourse in the sphere of values, presenting the economy as something which should be at the service of the people, not the other way around.

Placing the economy, social protection and France's economic crises at the centre of its programme, the FN promoted such measures as wage increases for those on modest incomes, the reindustrialization of France, and the defence of the public service (Stockemer and Amengay, 2015: 370-390; Ivaldi. 2015: 355) in opposition to what MLP presented as a total, global, supranational State which threatened France.⁸

The FN manifesto for the 2014 European election stated that the FN 'would renationalize the CAP, stop the country's contribution to the European budget, introduce taxes at France's borders, stop all EU bailout plans, regulate the banking system, vote against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and fight the Posting of Workers Directive' (Ivaldi, 2015: 358).

Alongside this economic nationalism MLP defended the French Republic, associated with the defence of a certain vision of *laïcité* (Marian, 2011: 97). MLP's inaugural

speech as leader invoked Jean Jaurès; she claimed that the party could be trusted to defend 'the traditional values of the French Republic', and stressed *laïcité* as part of the 'one and indivisible Republic' (Shields, 2013:192). Her 2017 presidential programme, the 144 Commitments, called for the 'guarantee of freedom of expression and numerical liberty through their inscription in the freedoms fundamentally protected by the Constitution', for respect for freedom of association to be 'ensured', and for the defence of the rights of women. Commitment 95 was to 'promote secularism and to struggle against communitarianism', calling for the inscription into the Constitution of the statement that 'The Republic recognizes no community' (Le Pen, 2017, commitments 7, 9, 10, 11, 95). This economic nationalism and defence of the Republic transformed the FN approach to the State, which it turned into 'the central and unified pillar of economic, social, and national recovery' (Alduy and Wahnich, 2015: 43).

These commitments to the Republic were used to justify the FN anti-immigration platform. Mondon (2013: 88) notes that during the 2012 presidential campaign the majority of MLP's rhetoric 'typically drew links between France's problems and a particular type of immigration'. Amongst the 144 commitments were calls to: make it impossible for foreigners in France illegally to be regularised or naturalised, and making it easier for them to be automatically expelled; reduce the number of immigrants to an annual figure of 10000 through the ending of automatic family grouping and reconciliation and of the automatic acquisition of French nationality through marriage; end *droit du sol*, with French nationality to be solely the product of filiation or via a naturalization based on 'more demanding' conditions. MLP denied she was anti-immigrant, linking her rhetoric to the defence of a Republic she claimed was threatened by the 'islamisation of France' (Shields, 2013:192) in general and by

Islamic terrorism in particular. MLP's 144 commitments included calls for the: banning and dissolution of organisations of any kind linked to 'Islamic fundamentalism', and the expulsion of all foreigners with links to these organisations; closure of all mosques identified as extremist by the Ministry of the Interior, and a ban on all foreign funding of places of worship or their personnel; forfeiture of French nationality and the exiling of any dual national belonging to a jihadist group; application of article 41 I-4 of the Penal Code for intelligence with the enemy and preventative detention for French nationals with ties to foreign organisations provoking acts of hostility or aggression against France or the French; re-introduction of the crime of *l'indignité nationale*⁹ for individuals found guilty of crimes or infractions linked to Islamist terrorism. Immigration was MLP's main theme in the final days before the first round ballot of the 2017 Presidential elections, when she said she would, if elected, immediately suspend all legal immigration in order to reassess the 'uncontrollable situation' of immigration, and promised to ban religious symbols, including the Muslim headscarf, from all public places (Chrisafis, 2017). Most recently, MLP responded to the truck attack in Manhattan by calling on France to be 'rearmed against Islamism' (Le Pen, 2017).

Finally, the discursive shift under MLP involved a more developed populism. In criticising immigration in the name of the defence of liberal democracy, MLP has aligned the party with the populist protest movements that have appeared across Europe in the last decade and a half (Reynié, 2011: 467; Marian, 2011: 95-96).¹⁰ In part this populism is expressed through: a greater likelihood to claim to be speaking 'in the name of the people' – indeed, 'au nom du peuple' was the strapline for Le Pen's 2017 presidential campaign; the increasing use of a 'less party-centred and

more personalized' rhetoric;¹¹ and the much greater use of social media as a means of mobilisation (Stockemer and Barisione, 2016).

These discursive shifts extended the FN's attraction to voters with low education and in blue collar jobs. Such voters increasingly supported the FN from the 1990s on, but MLP amplified this attraction (Mayer, 2016).¹² MLP also attracted greater numbers of women than hitherto, with some suggestion also that the FN is attracting more young people (Mayer, 2016).¹³ Moreover, as Mayer (2016) has shown, this attraction was constant: 97% of voters for MLP in the 2012 presidential election voted for FN lists in the first round of the 2015 regional elections.

The failure to follow through from MLP's strong showing in the first round of the 2017 presidential elections showed the extent to which the FN still needs to break through the "republican front" of mainstream, left and right. This explains the subsequent ideological discord within the party, torn between a so-called *rassemblement patriote* of left and right advocated by Florian Philippot¹⁴ and a *rassemblement des droites* advocated by Marion Le Pen (Domenach, 2017). The key tropes of the discord were the Euro, Frexit and immigration.¹⁵ MLP realised that Frexit was an unpopular position for many centre-right voters, fudging her views on Frexit during the campaign for the legislative elections, promising a referendum rather than outright Frexit (Ottens, 2017). The unpopularity of elements of the programme advocated by Philippot, both electorally and amongst many party members, together with the potential to forge better links with elements of the Republicans in the light of Macron's election, perhaps explains MLP's eventual removal from Philippot of his brief as FN Vice-President in charge of strategy and communication, leaving him as vice-president without portfolio. This led to the departure from the party of Philippot and supporters such as Martel (Philippot,

2017). The full ideological impact of the FN's recognition of the continued need to break the "republican front" against it remains to be seen, however,¹⁶ and this paper does not therefore focus on ideological developments since Macron's election as President.

The FN and the political mainstream

In the face of the above changes in FN discourse, and the corresponding levels of electoral success, there is quite a diverse range of approaches to the issue of whether one can see the FN as now part of the political mainstream. Analysis of these approaches raises interesting questions about the FN's relationship to French republicanism.

Mondon (2015: 147) has argued that public acceptance by many people of MLP's claim to incarnate a new form of 'patriotic' politics is a product of a 'lack of historical or theoretical analysis of their (and their parties') ideological trajectories in much prominent public commentary as analysis has relied increasingly on survey analysis'. This can perhaps be seen in Shields' reading of the relationship between the FN and the 'mainstream', which focuses on voting and the party system. He argues that by the time JMLP was replaced as leader, the FN had reached the stage of representing a voting bloc that could not be described as absolutely extreme right, but as representing the radical wing of the right bloc, the difference between the party's voters and those of the moderate right being more a matter of intensity than direction (Shields, 2011: 96). Whilst acknowledging the historic anti-system values of the party around a fundamental anti-Republicanism (Shields, 2014: 494-495), he argues that this anti-Republicanism began to decline from 2002, and reached fruition under MLP (Shields, 2013: 191).

On the other hand ideological analyses tend to argue that FN programmatic change is only at the surface and thus challenge the republican values of the party. D  z  , for example, presents the discourse of the *mariniste* FN as drawing on one of the two main ideological variants within the FN in the latter years of JMLP's leadership: the national populism associated with such figures as Bruno M  gret. Thus, MLP's attempt to place at the forefront themes perceived to be new to the FN, such as the theme of the 'social', merely reproduce the shift away from ultraliberalism to a more social focus which took place from the party's 8th Congress in 1990 onwards (D  z  , 2015: 35-36), this shift reflecting the triumph of national populism over neo-liberal populism (Bastow, 1997, 1998).¹⁷ He traces MLP's use of the ideas of 'national priority', of secularism, and of the Republic back to the suggestion in the 1980s by the then recent transferees from the Parti R  publicain (PR) and the Rassemblement pour la R  publique (RPR), Jean-Yves Le Gallou and Bruno M  gret, that the party adopt the concept of 'national preference' in order to 'get around anti-racist legislation and make the xenophobic legislation of the frontist organisation more acceptable' (D  z  , 2015: 34). Whilst the references to secularism and the Republic 'can certainly give the illusion of an alignment with the norms and values of the French institutional system', breaking away from the discourse of the party under JMLP these serve 'above all as a source legitimating the islamophobic positions of the party'. In general, MLP's use of secularism is intended 'to better justify the discriminatory measures she proposes to take with regard to the Muslim populace' (D  z  , 2015: 34-35. See also Almeida, 2014: 229). Hence, for D  z   the FN under MLP is 'not new, either in its principles or in its modalities', and remains anti-system in character, rejecting 'the foundations and values of the political system in which the FN has evolved' (D  z  , 2015: 44-47).

Dézé's analysis demonstrates well the ways in which the ideology of the *mariniste* FN has been influenced by national populism, which is useful in understanding some of the strategic and ideological tensions in the party since MLP's perceived relative failure after the first round of the presidential election. It is less helpful in analyzing the differences between the discourses of JMLP and MLP, however. Other ideological analyses, although they come to similar conclusions have been more nuanced. A key text in this regard is Alduy and Wahnich's 2015 *Marine Le Pen Prise aux Mots*, which acknowledges shifts in the form and content of frontist discourse under MLP, many of which are noted in the above summary of FN ideology under MLP. Their analysis maintains, however, that ultimately this frontist discourse has an ideological relationship to the extreme right. Alduy and Wahnich (2015: 32-33, 66) argue that, notwithstanding MLP's attempt to renovate the party's image it has 'not abandoned ... the 'rhetorical principles of the traditional extreme right', even making the 'paternal legacy' of nationalism, national identity, and immigration flourish. Just as it is for her father, they argue, for MLP the nation is a 'closed nation of citizens born French of French people', open only to French nationals (Alduy and Wahnich, 2015: 45). If MLP uses democratic and republican terms more frequently than did JMLP the uses to which they are put reinforce the idea of a closed nation. The term 'equality' is barely used, but when it is it refers to equality between French citizens. Likewise, the term 'respect' is used to refer to respect for French identity, whilst the term 'liberty' is largely used to position France vis-à-vis the rest of the world, thus inextricably connecting the terms 'liberty' and 'national sovereignty', and articulating a sense of liberty as a collective property which concerns the nation and refers to the need for protectionism and security, rather than something individual, referring to the rights of man and citizen (Alduy and Wahnich, 2015: 46-48). They conclude

that the 'ideological system and governmental programme' proposed by MLP is, 'despite the surface renovations, in the lineage of the political family of her father, a nationalist and xenophobic extreme right', and that the underlying meaning of her discourse is 'fundamentally the same as that of her father' (Alduy and Wahnich, 2015: 244, 248).

The only differences from her father stem either from the exploration of a domain left untouched by the Front national (the economy) or from the decision not to venture onto slippery terrain.¹⁸ The remainder differs only in the rhetorical strategies, in the refreshment of the vocabulary of patriarchy, in the style in which nationalism is presented, or in the vocabulary used. Nationalism and xenophobia are not revised, amended, or condemned (Alduy and Wahnich, 2015: 245-46).

The 'Republicanism' of the mariniste FN

Notwithstanding the complexity of the arguments underpinning the positions above, we are at root faced with two distinct positions. Ideological analysis suggests that the FN has changed little, remains antithetical to the values of the Republic, and thus should be seen as extremist. Analyses focusing on the party system suggest that it is now part of the mainstream, and so should be seen as having embraced the Republic and republican values. One way of dealing with this apparent contradiction would be to suggest, as does Mondon, that: 'While the FN had adapted to the new context and modernised its rhetoric, it was not so much an ideological change which took place, but a change in the way the party was viewed: the mainstream had been radicalized more than the extreme had been moderated' (Mondon, 2014: 311).

Mondon's arguments regarding the FN merit a closer analysis as they clarify what is at stake in how we view contemporary French republicanism.

Like Dézé, Alduy and Wahnich, Mondon argues that a historical and theoretical analysis of the FN demonstrates that ideological change under MLP ‘remained at best minimal’ from the ideology of the FN under JMLP (Mondon, 2016: 38). This claim draws partly on Alduy and Wahnich, partly on his own analysis of MLP’s campaign in the 2012 Presidential elections, on the basis of which he argues that under MLP, ‘despite an effort at modernising and moderating aspects of the party, the broad lines of the programme remained unchanged, still based on a strong anti-immigrant sentiment and exaggerated nationalism’ (Mondon, 2013: 87).

At the same time, however, Mondon (2016: 40) argues that MLP is in the process of completing her attempts to normalize the FN, to shift it closer to the mainstream. Mondon seeks to reconcile these two statements through the claim that ‘three decades of right-wing Gramscism initiated by the Nouvelle Droite and the Front National’ (Mondon, 2013: 170), together with the shameless populism of the UMP under Sarkozy, mirroring FN policies in an attempt to attract the vote away from them, produced a situation in which the mainstream right came to accept a ‘common sense’ view that both secularism and the Republic were against Islam. This explains, for example, the UMP’s mirroring of the anti-Islamic policies of MLP in the run up to the 2012 Presidential election (Mondon, 2013: 169-70) or the radical shifts in the interpretation of *laïcité* post-9/11 to make it predominantly anti-Islam (Mondon, 2016: 39). These shifts ‘allowed Le Pen to portray herself increasingly as the most radical protector of French *laïcité*, and by extension the Republic’, making her ‘no longer the threat to the Republic its enemies could rally against, but its ultimate defender’. Indeed, some of the FN’s discriminatory measures against Muslims, and its support for secularism, aligned the FN with the mainstream left as well as the right.¹⁹ In turn, the blurring of the distinction between the FN and the mainstream right

enabled by this common defence of a *laïcité* aimed at Islam made it 'more difficult to characterise it [the FN] as "extreme right" without concurrent and lengthy definitional and conceptual discussions'. This blurring supported the idea that the FN should be seen as a populist party rather than a party of the extreme right, a shift in categorisation which the FN was more than happy to accept, as such a term often blurs 'the contours of parties traditionally defined by their position on the right' (Mondon: 2016, p.40).

Mondon's approach has a lot of merit, helping to explain how the discourse of the FN has become ideologically blurred in ways which facilitate an apparent reconciliation with the Republic. The problem with this approach, however, is that it assumes that French republicanism was historically homogeneous and inclusive, and that it has only shifted away from this in the last thirty years. It logically follows that a return by the political mainstream to traditional republican values would undermine the FN and reveal it for the extreme right, anti-system party that it really is. It is on the basis of these assumptions that it is claimed that the ideology of the FN alienates it from the Republic and republican values. In the section which follows I note that these assumptions are problematic, that French republicanism is relatively heterogeneous, that its proclaimed colour-blindness is an obstacle to inclusivity, and that the shift in French republican discourse over the last 30 years or so is a reflection of an implicit ethnocentrism of French citizenship being made more explicit in the face of the tensions caused by post-colonialism and the emergence of a multicultural society. In order to challenge the FN's position within the republican family a more radical and inclusive understanding of French republicanism is necessary.

Republicanism and citizenship

Although historiographies of the French republican tradition trace it back to the universal values of the French Revolution (Hazareesingh, 1994: 68), and argue that it achieved its apotheosis with the development of the Third Republic, associated in particular with republican schooling, *laïcité*, and a unified state, this historiography is problematic. It is a long-standing theme of nineteenth-century republican historiography that 'French identity was never rooted in racial or ethnic homogeneity', basing this claim on the argument that France was a 'large, heterogeneous country originally made up of a variety of "Celtic, Iberic, Germanic" components' and that any national unity had been achieved through force from 'an unusual degree of social and cultural diversity' (Laborde, 2008: 174-75). A basic principle of French republicanism is that anyone can become a French citizen, whatever their ethnicity. Thus, rather than ethnic bonds or shared descent, republicans claim that French national identity is based on citizenship. However, as Laborde notes, by the Third Republic 'French nationality had come to acquire a substantive content, in terms of socialization into a common national culture', and official republicans, whilst perhaps disagreeing over the relative weighting of passive socialization and expressed desire, 'all agree that French nationhood, while excluding objective blood ties or common descent, involves a mixture of "cultural belonging and political will"', and thus conceive of nationhood as an inclusivist and an assimilationist ideal' (Laborde, 2008: 176-77).²⁰

This insistence on shared socialization into national culture distanced the French republican conception of nationhood from the universalist and contractual conception of the nation articulated in the Enlightenment and the 1789 Revolution because 'national culture was intended to function as a *civic and democratic* bond, the

foundation for the affective solidarity binding together the “community of citizens” (Laborde, 2008:177-78, emphasis Laborde). In other words, shared cultural membership was used to achieve the ideal of political citizenship, harnessing ‘cultural identity to the political purpose of constituting a democratic self-governing community’. This insistence on shared socialization into national culture is precisely what Pierre Rosanvallon refers to, across a vast array of texts,²¹ as an ‘aspiration to unity’ (Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français*, p.24, cited in Chabal, 2015: 179). This aspiration was articulated around an essential tension between this unity and a radical individualisation contained within the idea of universal suffrage, which saw the revolutionary citizen ‘not as a piece in a hierarchical whole’, but as an ‘individual in a direct and equal relationship with the nation’ (Chabal, 2015: 179).²²

The counterpart of this search for political citizenship through cultural affinity was fear of factional interests (see Jennings, 2006). Laborde notes that during the French Revolution republican fear of factionalism ‘was exacerbated by the perceived association between corporatist and regionalist movements and counter-revolutionary forces’, leading Jacobins to call for the drastic reduction of regional, occupation, religious, and linguistic powers, sweeping away intermediary powers (Laborde, 2008:178-79). The indivisibility of the ‘people’, of the nation, meant that identification was not possible with both the nation and sub-categories within the nation, at least not without tension.²³ It follows from this that there is no specific form of integration for immigrants, that all undergo the same process of assimilation, and that France is not a multicultural country:²⁴ once Frenchified, the ethnic origins of immigrants are supposed to become irrelevant; ethnic or cultural communities were never granted public recognition by the state (see Laborde, 2008: 184-85).²⁵ This is encapsulated in Jennings suggestion that, ‘despite an astonishing level of

cultural and ethnic diversity, France has seen itself as and has sought to become a monocultural society' (Jennings, 2000: 575).

National Republicanism and the FN

The problem with the above approach to citizenship and identity is the nature of the monoculture it supports, which is widely seen as validating white French culture as the 'norm', devaluing non-white cultures at the same time as perpetuating relations of domination between white and non-white in French society. There is a wide literature from French scholars of colonialism and postcolonialism arguing that the aim of assimilation or integration was not naturalization, but the rejection of the 'other' in order to maintain relations of dominance that can be traced back to the colonial order (see Hajjat, 2012). This became increasingly explicit in the 1970s and early 1980s when it became clear that workers from former colonies, who had been expected to remain for a few years then return to their homeland, not only chose to stay, but brought over their spouses and settled in France. The response to this was a revival of the tradition of 'republican integration and national citizenship' by many republican thinkers in the form of a *national républicanisme*.²⁶ This theorized assimilation as the keystone of a 'French model of national integration' (Laborde, 2008: 185), a stance marking France out from other countries during this period, when most Western countries were moving away from assimilationism and embracing some form of multiculturalism.

The republican response to multiculturalism then, articulated in such academic works as Schnapper's, *La France de l'intégration*, Taguieff's, *La force du préjugé*, and Noirel's, *Le creuset français*, as well as in the official reports of the Nationality Commission and the Haut Conseil à l'Intégration, was to 'revive' the tradition of

‘republican integration and national citizenship’, emphasising ‘the need to articulate a “strong, ... but non-ethnic ... French identity” capable of providing a focus of affective solidarity in a context of fears of social breakdown and national decline’ (The Long Report, cited in Laborde, 2008:186). This *national républicanisme* introduced a model of integration²⁷ with two key tenets: that most immigrants became assimilated into French culture over a few generations at most; and that ‘integration had been a success because immigrants genuinely wanted to participate in French society and become French’ (Laborde, 2008: 188-89). This model allowed only for the transitory continuation of particular cultures, their long-term continuation held to ghettoise such communities, and thus exacerbate their marginalization and stigmatization.²⁸

The cumulative impact of this *national-républicanism* was a set of collective practices and discourses surrounding the treatment of immigrants including a ‘set of repressive and humiliating methods ... to which all foreigners catalogued as “immigrants” are subjected on a daily basis’ (Balibar and Swenson, 2009: 36). Such collective practices and discourses intensified due to the increasingly visible signs of multiculturalism in France as a result of changes in social composition brought about by both the resumption of immigrant flows in the second half of the 1990s and ‘the transition to adulthood of the second generation of immigrants who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s’.²⁹ Thus, under Sarkozy, the passing of Immigration Acts in 2003,³⁰ 2006,³¹ and 2007, reasserted the ‘pre-eminent role of national identity in fostering social cohesion’, ‘toughening’ the clause regarding the duty of immigrants in the ‘republican contract and instrumentalizing national identity for exclusionary purposes’, giving prominence to the question of loyalty in the debate on national identity.

Rather than integrating the non-white other into a monocultural Frenchness, however, national republicanism has problematised the possibility of non-whites ever being truly French. This can be seen in the tendency to label children and grandchildren born in France as “second- or third-generation immigrants”. The incorporation of *jus soli* in nationality law means that the children of North African immigrants theoretically have the same rights as any French citizen. However, as Bouamama and Tevanian (2013: 527) note the children of North African or sub-Saharan African immigrants are the only French citizens to be ‘condemned to the absurd—but politically eloquent—appellation of “second-or third-generation immigrants” and the accompanying forms of discrimination’. This reinforces their claim that the children of North African or sub-Saharan African immigrants suffer from a ‘specific kind of racism that has been constructed in order to legitimize colonial aggression and privilege’, based on an essentialization and naturalization of the Muslim ‘other’. It highlights cultural differences from the white majority whilst at the same time minimizing differences within the majority around such issues as social class, and has been passed down through the generations since the development of the colonial order.³²

The outcomes of the national republican model of integration demonstrate that French republicanism is insufficiently accessible and inclusive to accommodate diversity from the French “norm”. As Jennings’ puts it: ‘A rationalist universalism, rooted in the philosophy of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, now looks more and more like a form of European ethnocentrism, and thus like a form of domination rather than liberation’ (Jennings, 2000: 579). French republicanism is itself subject to many of the tensions around identity articulated by the FN, indeed is complicit with the othering of immigrants from former colonies. This explains the ability of the

mainstream right – and frequently the left – to adopt terminology around national identity in an attempt to attract the FN vote in more recent years. The national republican model of integration ‘endorsed’ the far right’s ‘concerns for the crisis of national identity and seeming “desacrilisation” of French citizenship’, even as it articulated a vision of Frenchness which sought to exclude the FN (Laborde, 2008: 187). At the same time it reinforced the image of the immigrant as a burden on French society (Simon, 2013: 207), and assisted the FN’s credence in presenting its strategy of ‘national priority’, which as we have seen is but a repackaging of its long-standing policy of national preference (Balibar and Swenson, 2009: 39).

Concluding remarks: Challenging the FN through challenging national-republicanisme

It follows from the above that FN discourse can be aligned with French republicanism, the latter being not only blind to the racism of French culture to which all immigrants are supposed to assimilate, but actively preventing action to oppose practices of ethnic discrimination, including labour market discrimination or institutional racism (Laborde, 2008: 211), on the basis that mobilization around ethnic issues prevents integration. To take employment as one of the indicators of this discrimination, we can note the large body of research demonstrating labour market discrimination against the children of immigrants, particularly of those whose parents hail from the Maghreb or sub-Saharan Africa (for example, Meurs, Pailhé & Simon, 2006; Duguet, Léandri, L’Horty, and Petit, 2010; Duroy, 2011; Pierné, 2012; and Aeberhardt & Rathelot, 2013). Against explanations which attribute inequalities in labour market access to differences in social environment or educational level, Aeberhardt, Rathelot and Safi’s (2015) analysis of the interrelationship between the

labour market, education and geographical location in the attainment of young people of immigrant background demonstrates that 'ethnic origin plays a decisive role' in explaining the magnitude of differences in the labour market between the children of African immigrants and those of French-born parents. FN racism should then be seen as part of a broader set of racist practices within a specific republican *dispositif* rather than as something radically separate from it. National republicanism seems to me to be perfectly compatible with the main features of FN discourse, and this explains how the FN can be seen both as part of the mainstream whilst remaining a party united by a form of extreme right political discourse, and as a party one can support without abandoning allegiance to proclaimed republican values. This suggests that what is at stake in assessing the ideological bearings of the FN is the nature of republican identity and values. National republicanism is not a 'moderate' set of ideas, as can be seen from the practices introduced in its name under Sarkozy,³³ or from the warnings about 'Islamic totalitarianism' and tough line on French national identity articulated by François Fillon in his abortive candidature for French presidency. Fillon drew a clear distinction between 'integration' as that necessary for people wishing to establish themselves in France, and assimilation as a 'necessity' for people 'wishing to acquire French nationality', the failure to demand this 'risking the overthrow of French society and provoking very strong community tensions', a redrawing of the distinction in this way 'returning the descendants of postcolonial immigration to their permanent state of "immigritude" and "foreignness", through their morals, their values, their attitudes and their behaviour closer to foreigners than to "true French people"' (Geisser, 2016: 9). Rather than focusing on whether the discourse of the *mariniste* FN is part of the mainstream, one should focus instead on the wider struggle around the nature of

French republicanism, seeking to reimagine republicanism in ways which make it more inclusive of otherness. As Achille Mbemba has argued the conflation ‘between colonial modes of control, treatment, and segregation, the treatment in metropolitan France of men and women judged undesirable, and the treatment of citizens considered to be second-class simply because they are not “French of pure stock” or “of the white race”’, reflects the fact that France has refused ‘to undertake its own decolonization’ (Mbemba, 2009: 52, 56).

Decolonizing the French Republic to make it adequate to the integration of the diverse identities of the 21st century, is possible through re-articulating it around the neo-republicanism associated with such figures as Skinner (2002) and Pettit (1997).

Neo-republicanism contends that republicanism is rooted in the conception of liberty as non-domination (Audier, 2004, pp. 71, 72-74; Urbinati, 2012, p.607). On the basis of just such a vision of liberty in the nineteenth and early twentieth century liberal socialists argued that true republican freedom required some form of equality of opportunity then prevented by the economic disparities found under capitalism (see Spitz, 2005; Bastow, forthcoming). Likewise, in the twenty-first century, as ‘critical Republicans’ like Laborde have argued, it is possible to demonstrate that a republic based on non-domination is contradicted by the ways the Republic, in making invisible the ethnic and racial discriminatory practices of the French Republic and in proscribing mobilization around ethnicity, serves to legitimize discrimination (Laborde, 2008: 16).³⁴ Reinscribing the ideal of liberty as non-domination – which was fundamental to the French Revolution, and is the basis for the unity of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* – in the practice of the French Republic implies breaking apart the political unity of the nation from the idea of cultural unity, this union feeding assimilationist and integrationist logics, to focus instead on equality between all

citizens (see Bouamama and Wahnick, 2009). This will provide a way for republicanism to better cater for the diverse social elements which make up the French 21st century 'people', ensuring that French citizens of North African and sub-Saharan descent feel they have a stake in society. A republican strategy articulating the 'citizen' around the concept of 'non-domination' is the best way to deal with the national republicanism both of the FN and of the right-wing orthodoxy around such figures as Sarkozy and Fillon which feeds support for the ideas of the FN.

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Endnotes

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¹ The FN received 14.9%, 3.8 million votes, in the 1997 parliamentary elections.

² The specificity of FN ideology has long been a matter of dispute. Some critics historically identified FN ideology as 'fascist' or 'neo-fascist' (see Fysh & Wolfreys, 1992: 325; Husbands, 1992: 267; Eatwell, 1995: 258), but issues with such a classification (see, for example, Milza, 1987: 431-33) and the diversity of the internal components of the FN – including integral nationalists, neo-fascists, *nouvelle droitistes*, and radical Catholics (see Camus, 1996; Algazy, 257-62) – meant that the majority of analysts identified the party as belonging to the extreme right. Notwithstanding both the conceptual difficulties in identifying the key ideological components of the extreme right (see Mudde, 1996; 2000: 7-11), the fact that some elements within the party have always been closer to the traditional right (see Bastow, 2002: 89), and the more recent literature linking the party to radical right wing populism, I shall use term 'extreme right' to refer to the ideology of the FN throughout the article.

³ Though they suggest this silence does not necessarily imply the denunciation of such elements.

⁴ MLP's 2017 presidential election programme omitted any call for a referendum on this issue

⁵ Though if MLP does not, like her father, articulate a belief in natural, biological difference Alduy and Wahnich (2015: 56) argue she nevertheless 'conserves the idea of transcendence and rootedness'.

⁶ Although she evokes the idea of 'Christian civilisation' as a principal kernel of French identity (Alduy and Wahnich, 2015: 57).

⁷ MLP does this above all through her critique of the 'ultraliberal' economic model, and its ideology, 'globalisation'. In this way she seeks to link her discourse on the economic to an ideological, even civilizational struggle. See Alduy and Wahnich (2015: 35-41).

⁸ In so doing, as Alduy and Wahnich note (2015: 45), 'surreptitiously gliding' between the terms 'State' and 'nation' as if they were the same. MLP's 144 *Engagements* for the 2017 Presidential election identified the 'enemy' of the people as globalists, who sought 'ever greater immigration and less cohesion between the French people'

⁹ An offense created at the Liberation to take into account reprehensible behaviours which occurred during the Occupation and in the Vichy regime not covered by the laws on treason or murder in place at the start of WW2. It ceased to be an offence in 1951.

¹⁰ For a useful summary of the FN's ideological positioning in relation to the European Radical Right see Ivaldi (2016).

¹¹ Stockemer and Barisione (2016: 5) note that MLP's 2012 presidential programme 'was not presented as a party programme but rather as Marine's "personal" project', a personification starting with the title of the programme: 'My Project, for France and for the French people' and 'Marine Le Pen, the voice of the people, the spirit of France'. This personification continued with her 2017 presidential programme, presented as a series of 144 commitments she made 'Au nom du peuple', and ending with a handwritten sentence signed by MLP.

¹² Goodliffe (2011: 280-309) links this trend both to the structural transformation of the French economy since the early 1980s, which 'had a catastrophic impact on the political and sectoral organizations, notably the Communist Party and trade unions, which had bound, from the 1930s on, the French working class to the republican order', increasing their occupational vulnerability, and to cultural change, notably the erosion of class identity. See also Goodliffe (2016: 128).

¹³ A survey prior to the 2017 presidential election showed that 30% of first time voters planned to vote Le Pen, with male first time voters more likely to vote Le Pen than female ones (35% against 26%). The proportion increased if the voter was working class, even more if they were unemployed

(60% of unemployed first time voters against 36% of the unemployed as a whole). See Chaillou *et al* (2016: 19-20).

¹⁴ FN Vice-President in charge of strategy and communication and MLP's right-hand man, widely credited as co-author with MLP of the strategy of normalizing the FN.

¹⁵ Philippot and figures around him argued that the party needed to make the issue of French control of its own currency a red line (de Boni, 2017): without a national currency there could be 'no economic patriotism, no possible control of our democracy' (Albertini, 2017a). Philippot claimed the presidential and legislative elections demonstrated that FN voters weren't concerned about the idea of quitting the Euro (Galiero, 2017). Figures hostile to Philippot's strategy argued that the Presidential and legislative elections saw the people reject the idea of France quitting the Euro and thus suggested the party needed to re-evaluate its stance around Europe and the single currency (Albertini, 2017a). Philippot and his supporters at the same time called on the party to become less strident on immigration. Julien Acard – the FN representative of the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté region who was suspended by the party from this role in summer 2017 – suggested the party needed to 'put an end to anxiety-inducing speeches, particularly on immigration and insecurity' (Albertini, 2017a). The MEP, Sophie Montel argued: 'On immigration, the choice of words is important. Some express things in a caricatural way and I worry about their will to reinforce even more the place of this subject in the discourse of the FN' (Albertini, 2017b).

¹⁶ To give just one example, a seminar on the Euro held during the summer put back the exit from the Euro to an unspecified date and made it less of a party priority. Whilst there is speculation that this will eventually lead to the party quietly dropping the idea, nothing more concrete has been announced thus far (see Escalona, 2017).

¹⁷ These groupings were identified by Betz (1994) as variants of what he called Radical Right Wing Populism.

¹⁸ Such as her repeated avoidance of any clear position on the issue of abortion on general, or of challenging the Veil Law on abortion, of any discussion of such feminist issues as equal pay, or the use of such phrases as 'the cause of women' (Alduy and Wahnich, 2015: 53-54).

¹⁹ Le Pen's articulation of the rights of women as a struggle against 'Islamicism, which reduces their fundamental freedoms' (Le Pen, 2017, commitment 9) was also articulated by the political mainstream in its critique of the veil. See for example, chapters 7 and 10 of Delphy, 2016. On the transformation of the meaning of *laïcité* in recent years see Baubérot (2012), and Daly (2013).

²⁰ This perhaps facilitated the move of Republican values to centre stage during the Third Republic, in being 'adopted by a wide variety of groups (such as the Orleanists) who had hitherto been opposed to republicanism and democratisation' (Chabal, 2015: 13).

²¹ Key texts include his *Le sacre du citoyen* (1990), *Le peuple introuvable* (1998), and *La démocratie inachevée* (2000).

²² Thus, for Rosanvallon: 'The Revolution is seen to sanctify the individual while simultaneously making unity the inalienable goal of the revolutionary project' (Chabal, 2015: 179). It is precisely because of this ambiguity within modern democracy that Rosanvallon sees democracy as a project, therefore open and incomplete. This ambiguity underpins the resistance to Jacobinism through the attempts to recover space for intermediary bodies (which Rosanvallon presents as French liberalism). See Chabal (2015: 181); Dimier (2004).

²³ This explains why historians such as Weber believe that a republic which is one and indivisible can 'only be reached (and was reached) through violent assimilation and centralisation' (Dimier, 2004: 838; Jennings 2000: 578), and underpins the late 19th century and early 20th century struggles around regionalism, various forms of corporatism, solidarism, and syndicalism (see Spitz, 2012: 253).

²⁴ This is the traditional republican narrative of "colour-blind" integration', according to which problems of immigration are presented as 'social' rather than 'ethnic' problems (Chabal, 2015: 84).

²⁵ The 2011 report by the Haut Conseil à l'Intégration, *La France sait-elle encore intégrer les immigrés?*, after summarising the history of immigration into France since the 19th century, argues that: 'All foreigners, whatever the difficulties they faced might have been, were progressively integrated until they dissolved into the French nation, they and their descendants all the more' (Haut Conseil à l'Intégration, 2011: 21).

²⁶ A term affirming that the nation-state is the limiting framework of the republic and democracy, and drawing on the Jacobin republican tradition.

²⁷ A term preferred to 'assimilation' in official discourse, seen as having 'repressive and colonial overtones', integration on the other hand being seen as a 'less coercive' and 'less pervasive' term, and

therefore as being 'more respectful of immigrants' cultures' (Laborde, 2008: 188; Simon, 2013: 209). The High Council for Integration's defined 'integration' in 1993 as consisting in:

'... fostering the active participation in the society as a whole, of all women and men who will be living permanently on our soil, by accepting without ulterior motives the persistence of specificities, particularly of a cultural nature, but emphasizing the similarities and convergences in the equality of rights and duties, in order to ensure the cohesion of our social fabric ... It postulates the participation of differences in a common project and not, like assimilation, their elimination, or on the contrary, as with inclusion, the guarantee that will ensure their long-term survival (HCI, *L'intégration à la française*, 1993, cited in Simon, 2013: 208-209). See also HCI, 2016.

It is noteworthy that commitment 98 of Le Pen's 2017 Presidential election campaign called for the 'Promotion of Republican assimilation, a more demanding principle than that of integration'. In practice, however, Simon argues, the distinction between assimilation and integration is much more ambivalent (Simon, 2013: 209).

²⁸ Simon suggests that visible signs of multiculturalism in French society problematize integration, with 'concrete signs of belonging to ethno-cultural or religious minorities in the public arena' being 'rapidly stigmatized as an expression of "communitarianism"', leading to calls for such groups 'to return to the collective norm', and concentrations of ethnic minorities in deprived neighbourhoods being presented as threats to national cohesion. The 'ghetto' is treated here, says Simon, 'as a source of "identitarian closure"' (Simon, 2013: 209).

²⁹ Simon points to a pronounced shift in the geographical origin of immigrants: up until 1975 63% were European, with only 27% North and sub-Saharan African, but in the last 10 years 'the overwhelming majority of newcomers have arrived from North and sub-Saharan Africa and Asia'. This visibility of the non-European immigrant not only makes them 'vulnerable to longer-lasting discriminations than those once directed at European immigrants', but 'challenges the main purpose of the integration model which is to assimilate outsiders into to national body politic by making them similar' (Simon, 2013: 210).

³⁰ This Act 'required immigrants to demonstrate their "republican integration"' to gain right of residence, the link between integration and immigration no longer something to be acquired over time, but needing to be demonstrated as already being possessed in order to enter the country (Simon, 2013: 208).

³¹ This Act made compulsory a 'reception and integration contract', signed with the issuing of the first residence permit. This included 'a commitment to live by the values and laws of the Republic, a civic-education training day and a language test', and acted, Simon claims, 'as an indirect method for selecting on the basis of ethnic origin, since these criteria tend to favour – on a cultural basis – certain profiles of immigrants deemed easier to assimilate than others' (Simon, 2013: 208).

³² Producing what Delphy has called a system of racial castes whereby the children of North African immigrants 'have "inherited" their parents' social inferiority', leaving them with no possibility of social mobility (Delphy, 2016: 76).

³³ As well as from some of his comments in 2016 as part of his campaign to become the official candidate of Les Républicains, notably those concerning burkinis. See, for example, Chrisafis, 2016a, Chrisafis and Farrar, 2016.

³⁴ The ties between the republican treatment of the class struggle in the 19th century and that of struggles concerning ethnicity in the contemporary period can be seen in the mainstream republican rejection of the Communard notion of the Universal Republic. Ross points out, for example, that the 'othering' of the Commune through associating it with the International facilitated the development of a nationalist vision of the Republic: "'Othering" on the part of the Versaillais, their perception of or need to perceive the Communards as "less French" (and thus easier to kill) was in this sense part of the historical tendency of the dominant classes to exhibit class racism, considering workers as, in fact, foreign to the nation' (Ross, 2016: 31).