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Righteous patriots, corrupted elites, undeserving poors

The construction of multiple social boundaries in the National Front

A literature on the «second National Front» (Wieviorka, 2012, p. 35) (hereafter NF) has developed in political sociology and in politics since Marine Le Pen took over from her father at the helm of this party in 2011. A number of recent studies have investigated the changes and continuities between the «first» and the «second NF» at different levels, including its ideology, policy and voters (Baubérot, 2012; Dézé, 2012; Mayer, 2013). Despite this growing scholarly attention, empirical studies focusing on party members under the new leadership are still rare (Crépon, 2012; Stockemer, 2014).

This article provides ethnographic insight into the neglected topic of NF activism by investigating how party members negotiate the changing party ideology. More specifically it addresses the relationship between two ideological components of radical right-wing populism (RRP) in the case of the «second NF» (Wieviorka, 2012, p. 35): anti-establishment populism on the one hand and ethno-nativist xenophobia¹ on the other (Rydgren, 2007). In the populist discourse, not only social and political elites are corrupted and excluded from the national community of the «pure people», but also migrants and ethnic minorities do. Both are constructed as outsiders threatening the unity of the nation. Based on ethnographic data, this article analyses how multiple bound-

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¹ Rydgren (2007) also mentions socio-cultural authoritarianism (such as conservative positions on law and order and the family). This definition echoes that of the populist radical right provided by Cas Mudde (2007), based on its ideological traits: nativism, populism and authoritarianism. However, the category of populism is controversial. Rydgren (2007) notes that non-right wing parties can use populism. Collovald (2004) notes that populism is a problematic notion for social scientists: it is a category used by the very political forces that are the object of their studies. For instance, in public debate, this category is used to delegitimise the working-classes as political actors, associating them with irrational xenophobic fears.

aries – pertaining to ethnic and political but also class and spatial divides – are constructed and negotiated in the NF. The biographical interviews reveal how members of different class background and origins accommodate the construction of the ethnic and political enemies forged by the party propaganda. In so doing, the article provides an original contribution to the study of NF membership, by considering the impact of ethnicity and class on activism as well as the experiences of «paradoxical» members: racialised individuals who have been attracted by the party's new «republican» discourse.

The first section of the article presents its methodological strategy. The second one reviews existing studies of RRP support and activism, while the third presents existing studies of the NF vote and membership, locating them in the specifics of the contemporary French economic, social and political context. The fourth section discusses current debates on the changes and continuities in the «second NF» and presents the party ideology, focused on constructing a double enemy of the «people». The fifth and main section of the article presents the research findings, showing how party members of different class background and origins negotiate the symbolic frames provided by the party at a micro-level². The final section discusses the main findings of the article.

1. Methodology

The article is based on life histories collected in a two-year ethnographic study of NF activism. Biographical interviews were conducted with seventeen (eight female and nine male) NF activists aged between 19 and 33 who were active in the Paris area in 2013. All interviewees had joined the NF within the past few years, after Marine Le Pen took over as leader. Seven held roles in the party and/or had run as candidates in recent elections; the rest did not have any formal role but regularly distributed flyers and attended the meetings of their local party branch or those of the NF youth organisation. A limited sample of life histories is appropriate to achieving the main purpose of ethnography: familiarising the researcher with the interviewees' worldviews and experiences in the very context of their lives (Bizeul, 2007). Indeed, the interviews were conducted with NF members whom I regularly met at meetings and actions. In-depth interviews such as life histories constitute «a window into the everyday worlds of activists» (Blee, Taylor, 2002, p. 96). The data were used to shed light on the members' motivations and strategies, and to locate their political engagement not only in relation to the external structural context but also to their agency and processes of interpretation across time (Lafont, 2001).

Negotiations related to establishing contact with interviewees are particularly delicate in studies of RRP movements, as research participants can express suspicion and even hostility towards outsiders and especially academic researchers and journalists. Significant effort and time can be taken up by ne-

² Gender, articulating with class and ethnicity, plays a major role in structuring activism (Taylor, 1999) including in male-dominated RRP parties (Author, 2014). However for this article I have chosen to focus on dynamics of ethnicity and class.

gotiating access: researchers may have to devise strategies such as observing from the margins of events, underplaying aspects of their identity which may enhance risk to themselves, elaborating ways of presenting the research objectives which may be perceived by the interviewees as less threatening to them (Blee, 2007) and, in some cases, adopting covert observation methods (Fielding, 1982). However, various scholars report positive experiences of interviewing RRP activists: while they expected some difficulties in persuading interviewees to be interviewed, they found that many individuals were cooperative and even enthusiastic about taking part in the research process, after their first suspicions had evaporated (Klandermans, Mayer, 2006). After all, RRP activists are keen to provide a genuine view of their organisation to overcome what they consider to be discriminatory coverage in the media. Further, recent ethnographic studies of NF activism suggest that the party is now more open and welcoming vis-à-vis researchers than it was under its former leader (Crépon, 2012).

My overall experience confirms these remarks. However, the treatment I received from NF members was strikingly uneven: while many party representatives and activists were helpful and welcoming, others were overtly hostile. Relationships were sometimes tense when establishing contact with the interviewees, whom I accessed through the party or by approaching them directly, but during the interviews the atmosphere was mostly relaxed. This supports the finding that a methodological strategy based on in-depth interviews, such as life-histories, can help defuse hostility and allow the interviewees to frame their views in a way which is not threatening to the researcher (Williams, Heikes, 1993). While the uneven treatment I encountered may be partly explained by the ideological diversity within the party, encompassing more moderate and more radical positions, as well the local political context of the fieldwork, this should also be located in the party's current historical phase. Much is at stake today for the NF with regard to its public image as a respectable political formation and an organisation which is open and democratic about its objectives and forms of action. The challenge for the NF is to nurture its anti-establishment extremism, which constitutes a key element in its political identity, while preventing this becoming an obstacle to political office (Wieviorka, 2012). This tension was probably particularly acute during the specific timeframe during which the fieldwork was conducted – in the run-up to the French municipal and later the European elections in 2014 – thus contributing to exacerbate the differences between those members who made an effort to be open with me, and those who had aggressive attitudes. Last but not least, prior to the elections many of the activists were busy distributing flyers and attending to other tasks, particularly those who were candidates. The interviews took up a good amount of the interviewees' time during a period which was already hectic for them.

2. Studies of RRP vote and activism

Most studies of RRP parties examine their electoral support and ideology: until recently, they have mainly focused on issues of structure as opposed to agency and on «external» conditions – demand-side factors such as the structural con-

text and how this shapes the electoral demand for such parties – as opposed to the dynamics which are internal to the political organisations (Minkenberg, 1992). Explanations of RRP support have associated this with economic restructuring in post-industrial societies, where industrial (mainly male) workers who appear as the «losers» of globalisation seek a return to an idealised past (Betz, 1994). The RRP vote is also associated with the cultural deprivation of the working classes in post-industrial societies, where knowledge and education are key resources. RRP voters, often low-skilled workers with intermediate levels of education, can be seen as the «cultural losers of globalisation» (Bornschier, Kriesi, 2013, p. 27), with their dislike for cultural modernity and universalism functioning as the driving factor behind their RRP vote. Meanwhile, the worst-off in terms of education and class do not vote at all. Supply-side factors such as the parties' strategies and organisation, including party membership, and the incentives they provide to promote and sustain activism (Mudde, 2007) have also been proved to be crucial in RRP dynamics. Indeed the ideological and policy flexibility of these parties may explain their appeal for working-class voters. Their emphasis on economic protectionism in the current economic crisis can be analysed as a deliberate strategy which has proved to be effective (Betz, Meret, 2013). Furthermore, the activists, who provide the bulk of unpaid volunteer work especially during electoral campaigns, are seen as a crucial internal resource for RRP parties (Stockemer, 2014).

In contrast, only a minority of ethnographic studies of the RRP focus on the micro-dynamics of activism. Developing as a result of a growing articulation between the sociology of the RRP and the sociology of social movements, however, there has been a recent increase in empirical studies focusing on the RRP. This literature focuses on processes of interpretation and the experiences and trajectories of activists, showing that the activists' group provides members with structures of sense which they appropriate and negotiate in original ways to make sense of their political engagement and of their lives, and addressing how individual and collective identities such as Us versus the racialised Other are constructed through activism (Blee, 2007). The role played by emotions in social movements is central to construct and strengthen collective identities: political organisations manipulate their members' emotions by training them to fear the outside world and create an enemy (Berezin, 2007; Blee, 2002; Crépon, 2012; Stockemer, 2014; Goodwin, 2011). Belonging to the activists' group and to the nation thus emerges as membership of a «community of victims» (Bizeul, 2003, p. 19; Dematteo, 2007). The experience or the perception of stigmatisation by outsiders – which is directly linked to the RRP anti-immigration agenda and discourse – is a key element in the experiences of these activists (Klandermans, Mayer, 2006).

Ethnographic studies of RRP activism have also led to the development of typologies of members' trajectories and motives: some have deep-rooted ideological ethno-nativist views and motives and look for a group in which to express their views, while others are individuals with less strongly entrenched values, who are driven by the perceived costs and benefits of activism (Klandermans, Mayer, 2006). «Compliant» (Linden, Klandermans, 2007) members have few

ideological motives for joining and do not feel a strong sense of belonging to the group; rather, they predominately identify with other individuals in the movement, with whom they can maintain a relationship through affiliation. Finally, existing studies indicate that many RRP activists are politically socialised into xenophobic and populist worldviews by their families (Klandermands, Mayer, 2006). Generational differences interplay with class and gender to shape political socialisation – taking place in the family as well as in other sites such as religious or sport groups. The family transmits moral as well as political attitudes to younger generations, which may include the sense of national belonging (Percheron, 1993). The analysis of age and political behaviour relies on the distinction between biographical age, generation (the commonalities in terms of political socialisation shared by the members of a generation) and period (the historical events shaping individual political experiences) (Muxel, 2011; Percheron, 1991): belonging to the same generation thus impacts on the way in which an activists' cohort is socialised into politics. Today, youth political socialisation is located in a scenario where economic cleavages are losing ground to the advantage of identity cleavages in structuring political conflict and where there is growing disaffection regarding political institutions (Gougou, Mayer, 2013).

3. The NF: support and party membership

There is evidence of growing working-class support for the RRP across Europe, including for the NF (Rydgren, 2013). Low-income NF voters, especially those living in suburban areas³, where the NF appears to have gained support in recent elections, are currently under the media spotlight. Sociological studies however point to the fact that abstention is the «first party» of the French working classes; in addition, this hyper-visibility of working-class voters combines with the fact that NF voters of other social classes remain invisible (Collovald, 2004). Further, this representation obscures the complex socio-economic and political changes in post-industrial France, involving increasing precariousness and the crisis of working-class collective identities and forms of sociability (Emmenegger *et al.*, 2012) as well the growing presence of migrants and «second-generation migrants» in stigmatised suburbs. In this context, marked by a racialisation of social relations, postcolonial migrants and their children are highly exposed to unemployment and discrimination at work (Wieviorka, 1993). The NF voters living in suburban areas correspond to an upper fraction of the working classes. These «low-means» households moved to the suburbs at a time when this represented a form of upward social and residential mobility; aspiring to social respectability, they fear the arrival of poorer racialised «newcomers» or neighbours (Cartier *et al.*, 2008; Mayer, 2014).

However, some ethnographic studies nuance the generalising picture of an «ethnic competition» at the core of social and political processes in the suburbs

³ Debates focus specifically on the statistical «periurban» category: socially diverse areas which are distant from large cities but within their sphere of influence.

by providing evidence of concrete forms of solidarity, including in the workplace (Beaud, Pialoux, 2006). The growing working-class support for the NF can be read also as a result of the strategies deployed by the party. This NF has mobilised widespread ideas of cultural Otherness and fears concerning the ethnically stigmatised youth (often referred to using the derogative term *racaille*) in suburban areas (Cartier *et al.*, 2008). Finally, other studies have pointed to the important role played by other political actors such as the media: the feeling of being a white minority threatened by an overwhelming majority of racialised «newcomers» needs to be located within a context where «ethnic riots» and acts of violence in deprived suburbs are intensely mediated (Macé, Peralva, 2005).

Thus the antagonism between the working classes and the stigmatised (working-class) ethnic minorities is largely a social construction brought about by academics, think tank experts and the media. Nonetheless, in this context a new «triangular» working-class form of identification is emerging, centred on the negative identification of the working classes vis-a-vis both the middle classes located above them and those (the migrants and racialised working classes) who are located below (Schwartz, 2009). In this situation, poverty and precariousness do not create the perception of a collective destiny and the sense of belonging to one class; instead, social antagonism is expressed along ethnic lines. Post-industrial change has profoundly reshaped class relations, through a massive transfer of manual jobs from industry to the service sector and through increasing levels of education as well as of unemployment and economic precariousness. Today, the working classes, defined by economic and cultural disadvantage, include blue-collar workers and non-skilled lower-level employees in the service sector. While many industrial jobs are highly precarious, some manual workers have managed to negotiate a social and professional mobility and to access housing property in suburban areas (Collet *et al.*, 2012). In this context, the contemporary working classes experience a distance from the middle classes endowed with socially-valued cultural resources as well as from the precarious «newcomers», fearing the downgrade in social mobility associated with the latter's arrival in the suburbs.

Ethnographic studies of NF members⁴ largely focus on issues of identity and point to experiences or perceptions of stigmatisation and victimhood, which are paramount among them (Klandermans, Mayer, 2006). The party is experienced by its members as an internally cohesive community which counters and is reproduced by stigmatisation by political and ethnic outsiders, serving as a space for members to openly express their views and emotions (Bizeul, 2003). Stigmatisation may be the result of political engagement rather than its cause, as NF activism does not necessarily originate from individual alienation and isolation (Lafont, 2001). Even under the new «republican» party line, NF members express a racialised view of national belonging (Crépon, 2012; Stockemer, 2014), as the identification with the French nation constantly implies and is sustained by the stigmatisation of postcolonial migrants and their children.

⁴ According to official party figures, there are 60.000 members, mostly men. Working-class members have increased from the late 1990s (Stockemer, 2014).

NF affiliation has different meanings for different generations of activists who joined in different phases of the party's history (Lafont, 2001; Boumaza, 2004). Finally, some data – albeit limited – are available which shed light on how ethnicity impacts on NF membership and affiliation. Crépon (2012) and Lafont (2000) provide some insight into the experiences of NF activists of European migrant descent, but not of racialised members of non-European descent. Orfali (2011, p. 99) draws on social psychology to analyse the «paradoxical affiliation» of racialised individuals who choose to identify with a stigmatised (political) group such as the NF: by *choosing* to associate themselves with a stigmatised political movement, they aim at neutralising the *passive* stigmatisation they endure because of their origins.

4. The double enemy of the NF

Marine Le Pen has re-framed the anti-immigration agenda of the party by appropriating a republican repertoire and emphasising secularism (Baubérot, 2012). The project of normalising the party image was initiated by Bruno Mégret and then taken up by a group of younger party members, including Le Pen herself, at the start of the 2000s. They pushed for a greater focus on the necessity of a «French Islam» and of a policy of assimilation into the Republic. The «republicanisation» (Shields, 2013) of the NF discourse and its breaking away from the anti-egalitarian tradition typical of the French far right has enraged older generations of members, many of whom either quit the party or were marginalised. Similarly, the adoption of more liberal positions on issues of gender, sexuality and the family aims at building a consensus among younger French generations (Scrinzi, 2014). Discontented with Marine Le Pen's declaration that she will not abrogate the right to abortion and with her tolerant attitude on same-sex unions, the party's Catholic fraction has rallied around her former leadership rival Bruno Gollnisch.

While pointing to these significant ideological changes, existing studies indicate that there are substantial continuities with the «first NF». The NF anti-immigration discourse is re-framed through reference to a struggle against radical Islam and the cultural sectarianism (*communautarisme*) of the ethnic minorities which are claimed to threaten the unity of the Republic. However, the NF's «republican» discourse retains a racialised conception of citizenship and the nation and stigmatises migrants and Muslims (Dézé, 2012). Secularism is considered as a legacy of Christianity and a value that is specific to the French culture (Crépon, 2012). Further continuities in the party programme are exemplified by the resilient principle of «national preference» in access to welfare services and jobs, though this has been renamed as «national priority». The 2012 presidential campaign also saw a new emphasis on (exclusionary) redistributive policies to attract the working classes. Unlike her father, Marine Le Pen argues for a strong role for the State in the context of the economic crisis and the need for more public services, presenting herself as the defender of the workers and the «forgotten of France». Party propaganda tends to portray the «people» as victims: the wrongdoers appear to be the national mainstream parties and in-

ternational economic elites as well as migrants and radical Islam. The NF also claims that there is a functional relationship between these two sets of enemies, whereby each receives support from the other. These views are expressed in the party programme. Here, the threat constituted by the racialised Other is directly associated with the political and cultural dominance of the mainstream parties⁵ which – it is claimed – have promoted massive immigration and «anti-patriotic» policies promoting «multiculturalism»:

In France, [...] the left-wing and right-wing political elites have imported this model [of multiculturalism] and called it «diversity politics», which is a new name for the policy of advantaging migrants that has been implemented for over thirty years. (<http://www.frontnational.com/le-projet-de-marine-le-pen/refondation-republicaine/laicite/>)

According to the NF, the immigration policies implemented by mainstream parties have attracted a massive level of immigration, which is leading to the collapse of the national Welfare state system and the fragmentation of the Republic, establishing an Anglo-Saxon «multicultural» model of integration. In turn this model of integration is depicted as leading France to social fragmentation and cultural ruin. Opposed to this is the French republican model of integration, based on secularism and the assimilation of migrants' cultural specificities. In this representation, the French political elites are the allies of non-national and anti-patriotic political and economic forces which foster globalisation and cultural homogenisation worldwide. The French model of integration must be restored to counter the vituperative multiculturalist model. Thus the NF propaganda conjures a triple (class, political and ethnic) boundary between the corrupted elites, the patriots deserving social mobility and the racialised poors who are deviant, dangerous and «welfare-parasites».

5. Whose victims? Narratives and identity among middle-class and working-class NF members

The interviews show how activists belonging to different social groups negotiate the party discourse concerning the two enemies of the nation, and mobilise these representations to make sense of their political engagement and of the difficulties encountered in their lives. The interviewees' narratives were analysed according to three criteria: whether the activists mainly identified negatively with the enemy above or with the enemy below; what were their declared motives for joining the NF; and the arguments they used against immigration.

⁵ «UMPS» is the expression used by the NF to signify that the French mainstream right-wing UMP (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*) and the left-wing PS (*Parti Socialiste*) have the same objectives and policy. This is consistent with the claim that the NF is neither a right-wing nor a left-wing party as these political divides are obsolete.

5.1. White middle-class NF members

Most of these activists tended to consider the political elites as the main enemy of the nation while underplaying the threat constituted by the enemy below. At the time of the interviews, four of these interviewees were involved in an upward political career in the NF. All were higher education students: one had a university degree, three were attending university and another two were studying at nursing schools. Except for one, these interviewees expressed a strong identification with the Republic and the values associated with it, such as solidarity (*fraternité*); they used neo-Gaullist arguments to explain why they joined the party, such as patriotism and national sovereignty. They mentioned the lack of democracy affecting France as one of the main motives which induced them to take an interest in the NF. For example, Mathieu reported negative experiences at school and at university, which he felt were dominated by a left-wing ideological monopoly: it was impossible to have a real debate over issues of immigration with his teachers and fellow students, and that his right to express his ideas was refused. Other activists reported that the first political event to have an impact on them was the demonstrations against the NF in 2002, when Jean-Marie Le Pen went to ballot at the presidential elections; they told me how the discussions over this at school had induced them to sympathise with the NF.

The anti-immigration discourse of these interviewees was polished and exempt of references to ethno-nativist arguments. They never attacked migrants as the main enemy. Rather, they attacked political forces as well as economic actors and processes threatening French national sovereignty such as neoliberal capitalism, globalisation, the «banksters»⁶ and the European Union (EU). Sylvie did not even mention the issue of immigration; instead, she insisted on attacking EU policies which – she claimed – had led to the impoverishment of the middle-classes, with which she explicitly identified. She said that a sense of injustice had moved her since she was a child and eventually led her to joining the party.

I have always been very touched by injustice [...] for example I found that there were school mates who did not even have the money to buy decent food, this kind of things deeply move me and it is this feeling that the victims of injustice are always the same people, the middle classes, that induced me to join the NF. [...] I have grown up with the EU and with the impoverishment of the middle classes. (Sylvie, female interviewee)

These activists also attacked the French mainstream parties, criticising their policies, their anti-democratic nature and self-interested attitude. Mathieu reported a negative experience concerning his short participation in a regional youth organisation set up by the local institutions. Instead of providing the youth with a space to express and discuss their ideas to make a change in society,

⁶ A blend of «banker» and «gangster» coined in the 1930s and used by fascist movements as a pejorative term for high financiers. It is now used by the NF.

he saw the actions of this local organisation as a means used by local left-wing politicians for indoctrinating young voters.

The political elites – particularly the Socialist Party – and their ideological and political influence were also spatially located by these interviewees in the Left Bank or other wealthy Paris areas. For example, Sophie benefited from a bursary to study at one of the most prestigious academic institutions in France. However, she never identified with her university social environment and later on with her colleagues. She defined her workplace as upper middle-class and left-wing and expressed anger at the social disdain that, in her view, her upper middle-classes fellow students and colleagues expressed for uneducated workers; she identified with the latter in moral terms, condemning the patronising attitude of the *bobos*⁷. She joined the party at a time when she was feeling deeply unsatisfied with her job, which she found socially useless. In politics she thus found a sense of satisfaction which she had never experienced at work, and was able to use the skills she had acquired at university in her activism. In the NF, she found the values embodied and taught to her by her parents: righteousness; coherence and connection to reality; hard work aimed at achieving socially useful objectives as opposed to hedonistic consumerism; patriotism and love for the «people» as opposed to arrogant middle-class disdain.

I could no longer stand the contradiction, being among people who define themselves as «open to the poor» and promoted multiculturalism, but who actually all live in the same well-to-do area of the city... they consider themselves Marxists but they have iPhones and iPads and all that and they refuse to take the suburban train. I live in the suburbs, I see how people live there... I see the real life and these people live like in a myth. Also they are moralising, they always lecture the others about how they should think and talk. They say they are interested in the poors but as soon as they see that the poors do not think like them, they despise them. (Sophie, female interviewee)

Similarly, Mathieu described the *bobos* living in certain areas of Paris as people who are disconnected from reality and generally hostile to the NF. Conversely, he described poorer areas of the city largely inhabited by migrants and their children as more welcoming for NF activists. Thus he emphasised that the NF is a workers' party while avoiding an ethno-nativist discourse. Acting as a coordinator for local activities such as distributing flyers, he provocatively instructed the new recruits on the neighbourhoods where they would find hostility from passers-by.

When there is a new member I ask him or her to distribute flyers in different areas of the city. First I take the new member to Gare du Nord, where s/he arrives all trembling: it is the «station of crime», I hear frightening things about it... But there s/he is very well received. Then I take the new member

⁷ «Bourgeois bohemians», indicating the radical chic middle classes.

to St-Germain-des-Près and s/he would say: oh, it should be easy here... but there s/he is rubbished! [He laughs]. (Mathieu, male interviewee)

Christine, who lived in one of the wealthy areas of the city, expressed disdain for her own middle-class conservative Catholic *milieu*: here, she said, everybody (including her family and school fellows) would regard her with discomfort and even hostility when she declared her sympathy for the NF. She described her own social *milieu* as intolerant whereas she perceived the NF as welcoming and inclusive. Like Sylvie, she never mentioned the issue of immigration in her narrative; instead, she shared the concern expressed by the party over social issues such as the family. Christine had taken part in a recent demonstration against the French law establishing same-sex marriage together with her friends, who like her were former members of Catholic youth groups. However, she did not remain involved in this mobilisation: she ridiculed the other participants as privileged and spoiled young people who were using politics to have fun instead of taking it seriously. Her affiliation to the NF can be seen as an act of rebellion against her own social background: as she says, joining the NF was the ultimate anti-conformist act in her *milieu*, where everybody votes for the conservative right-wing party UMP (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*).

Only one white middle-class interviewee, Maxime, held a different kind of discourse. His parents had some sympathy for the Socialist Party and did not approve of their son's political engagement. His maternal grandfather however had always been a NF supporter and had fought in Algeria; he also had a house in the countryside. Maxime, in explaining his NF affiliation, spoke about an idealised rural past – the France of his grandparents in the 1950s and 1960s – when the French cultural identity was not threatened and the national economy was solid. Further, Maxime strongly and explicitly identified vis-à-vis the enemy below while he rarely attacked the political elites. Before joining the NF, he had supported the UMP. In the interview he clearly defined his family as middle-class and took a distance from the working-class ethnic minority youth whom he met at school and while practicing sport in his neighbourhood. In his narrative, the racialised Other was also spatially located: he clarified that he lived in small single-family house (*pavillon*) and spoke about the «social housing youth» (*jeunes des cités*) as his social antagonists. He explained the motivation for his affiliation with the NF via his experience of belonging to a white middle-class minority in a suburban neighbourhood. Unlike the narratives of other middle-class activists, his narrative centrally revolved around the threat represented not by political elites but by the racialised Other – the enemy below. He described this as aggressive and threatening both physically and culturally – for example, he was enraged by the fact that some of his school mates spoke Arabic at school. He perceived himself as a victim of massive immigration, of cultural sectarianism and of anti-white racism.

I have played football and tennis for a long time and then I quit football because at some point I took a distance from my football friends, they all came from social housing blocks... as you grow up you inevitably become estranged,

because we don't belong to the same social background [...] so I focused on tennis because there I found people who belonged to the same class as I [...] to be clear about it, those who are white and middle-class in the suburbs are a minority. So, I was the minority. Also at school there are people who say: I don't love France, we are here for the money, long live Morocco! Long live Algeria! [...] This is why I have become a patriot, as a reaction against these populations who are non-assimilated and whom I live with in the suburbs. (Maxime, male interviewee)

Unlike other white middle-class interviewees, Maxime defined himself as a monarchist. He declared that he had joined the NF, which he saw as a republican party, despite this in order to improve the despicable state of the country. He refuted democracy, expressing the beliefs that innate intellectual and moral qualities justify social inequalities and that not everybody is equipped for politics. For example, he saw manual workers and women as being unfit for the complex negotiations and sophisticated discussions which are needed in politics. Paradoxically, however, his identifying as a white middle-class man did not seem to be associated with a great confidence in his own skills. Maxime did not express a sense of self-fulfilment through his activism and, although he stated he would like to pursue a political career, he did not see himself as someone who could do well in what he called «intellectual» party roles: he described himself as a «hands-on activist» who would devote himself to action (for instance by distributing flyers and making decisions on the ground). He did not feel that his higher education provided him with skills that would be useful to him in his activism. Indeed, he expressed a lack of interest in his studies and was unsure about his educational choices. Activism seemed to appear to him more as an intriguing alternative to the dullness of the university experience than as a passion in itself. Nonetheless, he ended up running as a candidate in the municipal elections. His affiliation appeared as an act of bravado and rebellion against his family, against the wider society which stigmatises the party and even against the republican ideology of the «second NF». Maxime was nostalgically attached to the values and worldviews of an older generation of NF activists, whose political socialisation was significantly affected by the Algerian war (Boumaza, 2004), as opposed to his parents' generation, marked by May 1968. Maxime was the only interviewee in this group who held political views that were strikingly different from those held by his parents.

5.2. Racialised working-class NF members

The second group of interviewees comprised five working-class racialised individuals of African and Northern African origins. Some of them held bachelor degrees while others were engaged in higher education, either at university or at colleges delivering professional certifications. Their parents belonged to the upper fractions of the working classes; they invested in their education but struggled to combine their studies with precarious jobs (as cashiers, distributing magazines, etc.). These activists identified themselves as the victims of the political elites and declared an attachment to the party's new economic agenda,

mentioning issues such as the unfair taxes introduced by the Socialist Party, the struggle against unemployment and labour precariousness, and moving out of the euro zone. Jean, who had voted for the Socialist Party before joining the NF, placed particular emphasis on issues of the economy and social justice.

I joined the NF because I no longer want to support the political elites who want to pursue their noxious policy of austerity and precariousness. Because you can see that there are loads of people in the streets who suffer. This is a real problem [...] and the NF helps the poor to live in a better world. For example something that I like very much in its programme is the idea of increasing all the salaries which are below the minimum wage. (Jean, male interviewee)

While Jean overtly attacked the enemy above on the basis of economic arguments, he also took a distance from the racialised poors located below him, in common with other interviewees in this group. Their anti-immigration arguments revolved partly around exclusionary redistributive policies targeted at those migrants who are seen as an economic threat. As Jean put it:

The NF defends values such as helping one's fellows who are in difficulties before helping those who come from outside. (Jean, male interviewee)

These interviewees attacked the enemy below not only an economic threat to the nation, but also as a cultural threat. They distinguished between a «patriotic immigration» (involving people willing to assimilate into the Republic) on the one hand, and an immigration leading to cultural sectarianism on the other. They strongly identified with the new «republicanised» discourse of the NF. Distancing themselves from ethnically marked and stigmatised neighbourhoods, inhabited by people who they described as prone to cultural sectarianism, was a prominent narrative strategy. These interviewees mobilised a spatial division in order to negatively identify with the enemy below: they made a distinction between property-owners and social housing inhabitants, between the city and the suburbs or between different areas in the suburbs. When explaining where they lived, they stressed that their place of residence was a rather well-off area of the suburbs, making it clear that they did not live in the social housing blocks. They told me that they feared migrants or people of migrant background moving to their neighbourhood and, in some cases, interviewees' families had moved house to avoid the growing insecurity and acts of incivility which they associated with the increasing number of migrant inhabitants in their area. For instance, François emphasised that successful assimilation depended on migrants' access to housing property: his parents had managed to achieve full assimilation thanks to the fact that they lived in their own apartment, in an area away from the deprived suburbs. He compared his family's successful assimilation with the cultural separatism of an area near his current suburban place of residence, which he said was in the hands of the Turkish migrants, where the practice of speaking Turkish was widespread in public spaces and all shop signs were in Turkish.

At the same time, these interviewees also described migrants and their children as victims of the political elites and their immigration policies. In this respect, they argued that some migrants are likely to be attracted by the NF because they are the ones primarily affected by economic precariousness and insecurity in the suburbs where they live.

We don't say that we have to stop immigration, we say that we need to regulate immigration. [...] We want to bring here patriot migrants who want to devote themselves to the wealth of France, who can earn a salary, who can buy a house and get an education thus eschewing economic difficulties and problems related to crime. Because we have to be honest, when there are migrants coming to France, they will live in unhealthy social housing blocks, will have problems with crime, like it happens in Roma camps. When the French watch all these problems of crime, precariousness, immigration on their TV they watch them live six minutes after they were filmed by TV cameras. But the migrants who live in their social housing blocks, who live in precarious and unhealthy conditions, they live that situation all the time, minute by minute. And this is why there is a growing number of migrants who join the NF. (Jonathan, male interviewee)

These interviewees were young people inhabited by feelings of frustration, struggling to start their adult lives in a context of reduced employment prospects. Their political socialisation is located in a scenario where economic cleavages are losing ground to the advantage of identity cleavages in structuring political conflict (Gougou, Mayer, 2013). They belonged to an upper fraction of the working class which perceives the «newcomers» as the cause of the degradation of their living environment and working conditions. Their engagement was situated in the context of the «republicanised» NF. The party provides them with cognitive frames to express their feelings of injustice vis-à-vis a double class/ethnic stigma and to make sense of acts of violence which they fear in their neighbourhoods. Their «paradoxical affiliation» (Orfali, 2011) materialises the central ambivalence of this «republican» discourse. Through choosing to belong to what they perceive as an unfairly stigmatised political formation, they attempted to neutralise the ethnic and territorial stigma affecting suburban working-class youth and Muslims.

5.3. White working-class NF members

The third group of interviewees was composed of six white working-class individuals (two women and four men), including some of European migrant background. None of these activists held higher education degrees but many held professional degrees. Two had had to quit university because of economic difficulties or because they failed their studies; three were unemployed at the time of the interview and another two held precarious jobs. Two interviewees had run or were running as candidates at the time of the interview. Their narratives resonated with ideas of victimhood and injustice perpetrated by the two enemies of the

nation but they mainly identified negatively with the enemy below and overtly attacked migrants and their children. Just like racialised working-class interviewees, they mobilised a spatial division to negatively identify with the enemy below, taking a distance from social housing inhabitants. These interviewees depicted immigration both as an economic and a cultural threat. However, unlike the racialised working-class interviewees, many of them stressed that immigration also constitutes a physical threat, associating it with crime and acts of violence. For example, Jeanne expressed fear of aggressions by the racialised Other and Michel reported his personal experience of having been attacked and robbed by «migrants» in his neighbourhood. The specificity of their anti-immigration arguments was that, in their narratives, the racialised Other was seen as the agent of anti-white racism; these interviewees identify as members of a white minority whose very existence is threatened by immigration.

This area has more social housing than normal housing. It is mainly social housing blocks inhabited by migrants, immigration is out of control. [...] And because France is a very generous country when it comes to providing financial assistance, such as unemployment benefits, inevitably it is like an Eldorado. There has been a progressive replacement of the population [...]. [The former inhabitants] are moving out of the neighbourhood and they are replaced by migrants. (Marc, male interviewee)

Jeanne and Eric, who had spent time abroad before they joined the NF, described their return to France as the marking event leading to affiliation. Upon their return, in a situation where they had to start their lives over again and find jobs, they experienced France as an unwelcoming and unsafe place, a country with which they felt no longer familiar. They identified their uneasiness with the presence of the racialised Other in public spaces. Jeanne emphasised the relevance of law and order issues to her motives for joining the NF; her activism was also motivated by a deep sense of the injustice caused by the migrant «welfare-scroungers». She told me she had personally experienced the extent of these problems in France while working at a pharmacy in a suburban area, which had been robbed by individuals of African origins. According to her, migrant clients used fake prescriptions to buy medicines which they would then sell at high prices on the black market back in their home country.

6. Conclusion

The NF propaganda aims at presenting itself as the only party defending the French workers against the «scroungers» located both above and below them. This construction of the outsiders/enemies of the nation combines political Otherness with ethnic Otherness and is located in the context of class restructuring and changes in working-class forms of identification. While the data concur with existing studies in pointing to the central experience of stigmatisation in RRP activists' experiences, it appears that the members' identification vis-à-vis the two enemies of the «people» is shaped by multiple social relations. The data

showed that various groups of interviewees differently experienced stigmatisation by the outsiders and that they stigmatised the racialised Other on the basis of diverse arguments. The biographical approach was used to shed light on the relationships between the activists (micro-level), the party (meso-level) and the structural context (macro-level) (Sawicki, Siméant, 2009). Thus the article has contributed to advancing existing studies by exploring the impact of ethnicity and class on affiliation and the experiences of RRP activists.

Middle-class white interviewees identified mainly vis-à-vis the enemy above, with immigration appearing to be only one of the themes at stake in their vision of the NF's politics. In their view, the «problem» of immigration originates from a lack of democracy (mainstream parties' policies, exclusion of the NF from institutional politics) and from macro-processes such as globalisation. These activists expressed a strong sense of injustice for being moralised at by the upper-middle classes and stigmatised as racists; in opposition to this, they claimed to have an ideological proximity with the working-classes. One white middle-class activist strongly identified negatively against the racialised Other located below; perceiving himself as a member of a white ethnic minority, he held an explicitly ethno-nativist discourse focusing on immigration as a cultural and physical threat. Altogether, this first group of interviewees seemed to be willing to seize the potential offered by activism to make a change, participate in self-fulfilling activity, pursue a career opportunity, or to express rebellion against one's social environment.

Racialised working-class members identified in relation to both enemies; their narratives were characterised by an emphasis on their own assimilation as opposed to that of other migrants, thus constructing the racialised Others as cultural sectarians. The «undeserving poors» located below were also perceived as «welfare scroungers» and consequently as an economic threat to the nation. At the same time, paradoxically, migrants were also seen as the victims of the immigration policies implemented by the political elites. The fact that racialised individuals join an RRP party should be understood in the context of the pursuit of social mobility by an upper section of the migrant-background working classes. These «paradoxical» activists identified with a group that made them feel recognised and through which they could express their own feelings of injustice and fear, in an attempt to dissociate themselves from the ethnic and spatial stigma assigned to them.

White working-class members also identified negatively in relation to both enemies. They experienced the activists' group as a cohesive group of people who were distant from the stigmatising view of the NF as evil. Their narratives were characterised by the representation of the enemy below as a physical threat, as well as a cultural and economic threat: anti-white racism was widely attributed to the racialised Other. The NF provided these members with a symbolic framework which enabled them to make sense of aggressions, incivilities or lack of services which they experienced in their neighbourhoods. These interviewees not only expressed resentment for being treated as racists but also fear in terms of belonging to a perceived (white) endangered minority.

In exploring how ethnic, class, political and spatial boundaries are produced in NF activism, this article has provided insight into the fluctuating definitions of the «people» *versus* its enemies at the heart of contemporary populism. Recent scholarship notes that today's populisms are characterised by the high flexibility of the definitions of the enemies of the «people» (Liogier, 2013). Old and new populisms share an emphasis on the outsider threatening Us and «our» culture. However, the cultural contents and values that contemporary RRP parties claim to defend are defined in diverse ways according to different contexts and audiences: the RRP ideology is becoming increasingly flexible as these parties mobilise arguments which were once the monopoly of progressive movements, such as gender equality and gay rights (Scrinzi, 2014). In this way, RRP propaganda can appeal to individuals who are differently positioned in social relations and who hold very different worldviews.

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