

FROM THE FRONT NATIONAL TO THE RASSEMBLEMENT NATIONAL

Une affaire de famille

Major Research Paper
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Dedication

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the life of millions of people worldwide. I would like to dedicate this Major Research paper to all of the medical personnel, public health and hospital workers, service providers, first responders and essential workers, who have worked tirelessly to keep us safe and provide critical services. I also would like to thank Dr. James Lunney, who was always there for my parents while they recovered at home from the virus.

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Abstract

In recent decades, far-right political movements – which tend to promote xenophobic and racist views towards migrants and refugees alike while portraying themselves as the voice of the working classes – have become prominent in several western societies. Those political movements are also present in France, where the *Rassemblement National* (RN) – a far-right party established in 1972 under the name of *Front National* (FN) – has been employing populist rhetoric to increase its political support and electoral base. The RN's current leader, Marine Le Pen, has sought to de-demonize the RN. She is working to portray her party as more mainstream than a far-right fringe party, which is perceived to be homophobic, anti-Semitic, xenophobic and racist due to her father's controversial and polarizing legacy as the RN's former leader and co-founder. In 2015, she even dismissed her father from the RN in part for his explicit anti-Semitic and racist comments, and changed the party's name from the FN to the RN in 2018. As part of her de-demonization strategy, MLP has continued to appropriate certain rhetorical elements employed by left-wing and mainstream political parties in addition to making her party seem more inclusive vis-à-vis with voters and political activists, who are not traditionally associated with France's far-right. Like several other politicians – who also employ populist rhetoric - her supporters have also created a cult of personality around her leadership style, name, and public image. Some of her supporters have even compared her to Joan of Arc, or have called themselves “Marinistes.” However, MLP nowadays uses political discourse and imagery linked to Christian values, secularism, LGBTI rights and feminism as veils to make her party's xenophobic, racist, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic rhetoric more ambiguous and less explicit. In three chapters, this paper analyses the following selected three criteria to see how they have evolved, or remained the same, within the RN: Xenophobia, which refers to the evolution of nativist ideology and anti-immigration sentiments within the RN; Personalism, which refers to the way the leader of the FN/RN, is portrayed and portrays him/herself; and Moralism, which refers to values and morals, such as secularism, emphasized by MLP during her political campaigns. The fourth chapter then briefly juxtaposes the RN's rise within French politics with the recent rise of other political movements – with populist tendencies – throughout several countries, including the United States and Brazil. Lastly, this paper's main conclusion looks at to what extent has the RN's de-demonization strategy succeeded in helping the party become an influential player in French politics, and whether that strategy has created challenges for the party moving forward.

Keywords: France, far-right, immigration, xenophobia, Islamophobia, cult of personality, secularism, populism, and de-demonization.

Acronyms Index

AMLO	Andrés Manuel López Obrador
COVID-19	Coronavirus
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
EU	European Union
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FvD	Forum for Democracy
FN	Front National
GRECE	Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne
JMLP	Jean-Marie Le Pen
LRM	La République en Marche
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
MLP	Marine Le Pen
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MAE	Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs
ND	Nouvelle Droite
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RN	Rassemblement National
UMP	Union pour un Mouvement Populaire
UN	United Nations
U.S.	United States

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Introduction

In France, populist¹ and far-right political movements are nothing new (Stockemer, 2017). Many of those non-mainstream political movements have been regaining political momentum in recent decades (McGregor, 2019). One of those movements, the far-right *Rassemblement National* (RN) party, has employed populist rhetoric to expand its political support and electoral base since it was first established in 1972 (Geva, 2020; McGregor, 2019; Stockemer, 2017). The RN,² formerly known as the *Front National* (FN), is currently led by Marine Le Pen (MLP), the daughter of the party's co-founder³ and former leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen (JMLP) (Barisione & Stockemer, 2017; Bastow, 2018; Geva, 2020). After taking over the RN's presidency in 2011, MLP has attempted to convince the general electorate that she has shifted her party's central policies "away from cultural and nationalistic issues [that her father strongly promoted] and [towards] economic and social issues" (Dumitrescu, 2016). MLP has sought to normalize the RN and transform her party into a mainstream political party, with populist elements (Bastow, 2018; Brubaker, 2017).⁴ MLP has also made efforts to expand her political base by adopting new strategies to attract more youth, gay people and women to her party; publicly condemning anti-Semitism; and softening the RN's stance on social issues, such as abortion and same-sex civil unions (Amengay, Durovic, & Mayer, 2017; Bastow, 2018; Geva, 2020; Stockemer, 2017).

¹ Populism can be defined as a political "repertoire," or style, which divides society into two homogenous and opposing groups: the political establishment, and the working people (Geva, 2020; Mudde, 2016)

² Unless otherwise indicated, this paper uses the abbreviation RN to refer to the *Rassemblement National* [RN], even when formerly known as the *Front National* [FN].

³ Although Jean-Marie Le Pen is closely associated with the founding of the RN. He is not the only founder of the party. The other founders included François Duprat, Alain Robert and François Brigneau (Stockemer, 2017).

⁴ Since 2012, a year after Marine Le Pen took over the party, party candidates running for office throughout different government levels in France have also sought to "portray themselves as mainstream political candidates" (Dumitrescu, 2016).

Moreover, MLP has portrayed herself as the defender of traditional French republican values, especially secularism, and as a voice for the working classes and the French public sector (Brubaker, 2017; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Le Pen, 2017). During France's 2017 presidential elections – which she lost to *La République en Marche* (LRM) presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron – MLP promised to protect individual rights, such as freedom of association and free speech (Le Pen M., 2017). Nevertheless, under the leadership of MLP, the RN has continued to propose strict immigration policies against migrants and refugees (Brubaker, 2017; Radio Canada, 2016; Williams M. H., 2011). MLP has also continued her father's legacy of promoting xenophobia, anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic sentiments, and nativism (Stockemer, 2017).

A. Central Premise

The purpose of this Major Research Paper (MRP) is to look at how the RN under MLP has used public repertoires; appropriated policies that have been traditionally associated with mainstream and left-wing political parties; and implemented certain strategies to soften its public image while also using those repertoires and policies to make its xenophobic, Islamophobic, racist, and anti-Semitic rhetoric more ambiguous and less explicit (Bastow, 2018; Crouch, 2018; Eltchaninoff, 2018).

More specifically, in the context of this MRP, I aim to analyze the following selected criteria concerning the evolution of the RN from a far-right fringe party to a party that is working to de-demonize its public image (Bastow, 2018; Eltchaninoff, 2017; Laxer, 2019; Stockemer, 2017): **Xenophobia**, which refers to the evolution of nativist ideology and anti-immigration sentiments within the RN; **Personalism**, which refers to the way the leader of the FN/RN, is portrayed and portrays him/herself; and **Moralism**, which refers to values and morals, such as secularism, emphasized by MLP during her political campaigns. In sum, the three criteria mentioned above

will be analyzed in the MRP to see how they have evolved, or remained the same, within the RN. The evolution of the three selected criteria indicates not only MLP's attempts to de-demonize her party, but also somewhat highlight whether the de-demonization of the RN has been effective in helping the party escape the fringes of French politics. She has also used several elements linked to those criteria to make her xenophobic, racist, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic rhetoric more ambiguous and less explicit.

B. Road Map

This paper is broken down into three chapters. The first chapter provides information and analysis on the RN's immigration policies and xenophobic rhetoric employed by MLP and her father. The second chapter is on personalism and MLP's recent efforts to soften the image of her party and the party's leadership. The third chapter focuses on the RN's evolving stance on several selected moral issues – such as secularism, women's rights, and Christian values, among others. The fourth chapter briefly juxtaposes the RN's rise within French politics with the recent rise of other political movements – with populist tendencies – throughout several countries, including the United States and Brazil. Lastly, this paper's conclusion looks at to what extent has the RN's de-demonization strategy succeeded in helping the party become an influential player in French politics, and identifies selected challenges for the party moving forward.

C. Sources of Data and Information

This MRP draws information from several sources of data. Most of those sources include secondary source documents, such as academic journal articles, newspapers, and online articles and books written by academics, political and academic experts, and journalists, among other sources (Collier, 2011). For example, this MRP draws information from magazines like *Foreign Affairs* and *The Economist*, including articles written by political experts and academics, such as

University of Georgia Professor Cas Mudde (Mudde, 2016). This paper also draws information and data from academic journals and books, which have been written about the RN's history, rhetoric and policies.

My research draws particularly on the works of James Shields, Cas Mudde, Michel Eltchaninoff, Abdelkarim Amengay, Daniel Stockemer, Rogers Brubaker, Dorit Geva, Emily Laxer and Efe Peker. Primary sources include speeches given by MLP, official news releases available on the RN's website and several social media posts (Rassemblement national, 2019), and party materials including the MLP's 2017 electoral program. I have also drawn on excerpts of interviews with supporters of MLP conducted between 2013 and 2017 by Dorit Geva (Geva, 2020).

Chapter 1: Xenophobia

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, xenophobia refers to the hatred and fear of strangers or foreigners (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Certain politicians, especially those found on the far right of the political spectrum, have indirectly or directly employed xenophobic rhetoric to denigrate and attack minorities, outsiders, migrants and foreigners (Drolet & Williams, 2020). In some cases, certain far-right politicians have portrayed migrants, refugees, and minorities as a threat to traditional values and blamed them for societal woes, such as economic stagnation, high unemployment, and insecurity (Brubaker, 2017; Herf, 1984; Orban, 2014). Those politicians, alongside far-right groups and certain media personalities, including Tucker Carlson, have used divisive language as part of their xenophobic and racist rhetoric (Bremmer, 2018; Carlson, 2020). For example, they often use the terms "them" and "they" to refer to foreigners and migrants, and the words "us" and "we" to refer to the middle class, the white working classes and individuals, who they see as representative of traditional western values (Bremmer, 2018; Brubaker, 2017). Moreover, far-right politicians have promoted their divisive and xenophobic rhetoric by using political imagery, discourse and slogans, and referencing historical figures and events (Downing, 2018).

This chapter analyses MLP's and Jean-Marie Le Pen's (JMLP) xenophobic rhetoric while also discussing their stance on immigration and highlighting selected immigration policies from JMLP's 2007 electoral programme and MLP's 2012 and 2017 electoral programmes. As well, it discusses MLP's recent opposition to the European Union's (EU's) 2020 Migration pact.

A. Xenophobic, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic Rhetoric

Since its creation in 1972, the RN has been synonymous with xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism (Geva, 2020). The RN's former leader, JMLP, has been a very polarizing figure in

French politics due to his strong anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic sentiments he has blatantly and publicly expressed through political discourse and other public remarks (Williams M. H., 2011). JMLP is known for making controversial comments about the Holocaust and expressing his support for the former French Vichy regime, which collaborated closely with the Nazis and abetted the deportation and genocide of Jewish people during Nazi Germany's occupation of France in the Second World War (Boissoneault, 2017; Shields, 2007).

Throughout most of his political career, JMLP has attempted to minimize and create doubts about the severity of the atrocities and genocide committed by the Nazis and their collaborators against the Jewish people; has previously described the Holocaust "as a [mere] detail of history"; and has often mocked and verbally attacked people of Jewish origin (Shields, 2007; Stockemer, 2017). In 1988, his critics and even members from his party condemned him for making an anti-Semitic joke, which involved referring to then French Minister of Public Service Michel Derafour as "Mr. Derafour-crematoire" (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Greenhouse, 1988). Three years earlier, in 1985, JMLP attempted to vilify journalists with names of Jewish origin, including Jean-Francois Kahn and Jean-Pierre Elkabbach, by including them in a list of alleged "persecuting" and "lying" journalists (Castro, 2017; Eltchaninoff, 2018). Most recently, in 2014, he was reported to have used the word "fournée," which means 'oven load', when referring to several Jewish singers, including Patrick Bruel (BBC News, 2014; Eltchaninoff, 2018). Based on his decision to continue publicly expressing his anti-Semitic and racist sentiments, JMLP has been fined and convicted multiple times for publicly expressing anti-Semitic remarks (BBC, 2015; Ganley, 2018). He was eventually dismissed from the RN by MLP in 2015 (BBC, 2015; Ganley, 2018; Stockemer, 2017). Moreover, in 2017, he was fined thousands of euros for publicly expressing explicit and racist

comments in 2013, when he referred to the French city of Nice's Roma population as "[having] an irritating and...smelly presence" (Al-Jazeera, 2017; Deutsche Welle, 2017).

JMLP has also publicly expressed racist remarks targeting France's Black and Muslim communities (Shields, 2007). For instance, he once publicly referred to black and Muslim football players from France's 1998 FIFA World Cup-winning team as not being "sufficiently French," and then subsequently criticized French football coach Raymond Domenech for recruiting "too many black" players to represent France in the 2006 FIFA World Cup (Beaumont, 2007; Kuper & Szymanski, 2014). According to Stockemer, the RN under the leadership of JMP "used anti-immigration or xenophobia more as its defining feature" than the RN under MLP (Stockemer, 2017).

Despite MLP's recent efforts to de-demonize her party and her decision to rebrand her party from the FN to the RN in 2018, the party itself continues to be seen by academics, critics of the party and many French voters as a symbol of xenophobia (Bridge Initiative Team, 2020; Reuters, 2018). Although MLP claims she is not an anti-Semite or a racist, she has been able to promote xenophobic sentiments towards migrants and refugees discreetly without having to explicitly express those sentiments as her father did during his time as leader of the RN (Brubaker, 2017; Radio Canada, 2016; Williams M. H., 2011). In fact, French philosopher Michel Eltchaninoff has argued that MLP's non-explicit xenophobic discourse is representative of a shift that has been occurring concerning the xenophobic rhetoric employed nowadays by far-right and nationalist politicians, who are seeking to publicly normalize their political image and that of their political parties (Eltchaninoff, 2018). Eltchaninoff refers to this shift in semantics and language employed by these far-right politicians, including MLP, as part of the "third generation of xenophobic discourse" used nowadays by far-right politicians and demagogues (Eltchaninoff, 2018).

Between the 1980s and 2010, the FN under JMLP used innuendos and circumlocution to expressed its xenophobic and racist discourse; however, under the leadership of MLP, the party has worked at times to make its xenophobic more ambiguous and less publicly explicit (Eltchaninoff, 2018). For example, during a 2014 speech, MLP used Islamophobic speech against Muslims without having to use the words "Islamistes" or "Islam" (Eltchaninoff, 2018). Instead, she used the words "swimming pools," "school canteens," and "fundamentalists" to refer to her stern opposition to decisions taken in certain French municipalities and public schools to modify their services to meet the religious needs of members of France's Muslim community (Eltchaninoff, 2018). As well, MLP's party has indirectly conveyed strong and inflammatory xenophobic rhetoric against non-French nationals and foreigners by expressing its support for having a French state comprised of only people who have the same blood, religion and culture (Stockemer, 2017).

Unlike her father, MLP has tried to portray herself as the protector of the Jewish people against the threat of "Islamist fundamentalism" (Bridge Initiative Team, 2020; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017). She has refrained from making anti-Semitic jokes about the Holocaust and Jewish people, and – in 2011 – she publicly mentioned that her party has "always been 'pro-Zionist'" (Bridge Initiative Team, 2020; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017). Nevertheless, critics of the RN and MLP, and academics and political opponents have accused her of continuing to employ several rhetorical elements of anti-Semitic discourse in some of her speeches and public statements, and of attempting to "whitewash" France's role in the Holocaust (El Amraoui & Safdar, 2017; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Wildman, 2017). According to Eltchaninoff, MLP has used similar rhetoric in some of her speeches as French Journalist Édouard Drumont (Eltchaninoff, 2018). Drumont lived during France's Third Republic. He was a writer, journalist and prominent

anti-Semite who blamed Jewish bankers for seizing economic power; exploiting the weak; subjugating and erasing the cultural traditions of people deemed to be of the Aryan race; creating a secret organization; and for manipulating the press and politicians (Anderson, 1967; Eltchaninoff, 2018).

As highlighted in some of her previous speeches, MLP has employed similar language as Drumont when publicly attacking the political establishment (Eltchaninoff, 2018). She has attacked the wealthy and bankers for supposedly exploiting and stealing from the working classes; subjugating France to the will of the international banking system and international organizations, including the European Union; weakening the French nation; subverting national solidarity; and attempting to erase French traditional values and customs (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017). Moreover, in 2017, MLP was condemned by her political opponents, members of France's Jewish community and representatives from Jewish organizations – including the French Jewish Union for Peace – for publicly expressing comments that diminished French involvement in the killings, arbitrary detention, and deportation of thousands of Jewish people as part of the "Vel' d'Hiv roundup" during Nazi Germany's occupation of France in the 1940s (Ayala-Hurtado, Lamont, & Park, 2017; Vinocur, 2017). MLP's comments on the Vel' d'Hiv roundup are anti-Semitic (Stockemer, 2017; Vinocur, 2017). Like her father, she attempted to portray an important and horrible event during the Holocaust as merely insignificant (Shields, 2007; Stockemer, 2017; Vinocur, 2017).

Similarly to her far-right European counterparts, MLP strongly opposes increased globalization and immigration from Muslim countries for allegedly undermining Christian and French traditional values (Brubaker, 2017; Crouch, 2018; Vergès, 2017). MLP has constantly used the word "Islamisme" to oppose extreme Islamic radicalization and terrorists of Muslim origin,

and denigrate and attack Muslims, who are strict adherents to Islam's religious teachings (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Le Pen M., 2020). In other words, Muslims, no matter whether they have been religiously radicalized or not, have become central targets of MLP's xenophobic rhetoric and Islamophobia (Brubaker, 2017; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017).

MLP's derogatory and xenophobic comments have also landed her in trouble with France's justice system. In October 2015, MLP faced charges for provoking hatred against Muslims after she publicly compared – in 2010 – Muslims praying in the streets on Fridays to France's occupation by Nazi Germany during the Second World War (Brubaker, 2017). However, she was subsequently acquitted in December 2015 on the basis that her comments were deemed by the courts to be explicative of her right to freedom of speech (Brubaker, 2017; Deutsche Welle, 2015). As well, according to Stockemer, most supporters of the RN are supportive of MLP's Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric (Stockemer, 2017). Her supporters perceive Muslims as a threat to France for allegedly imposing Islam upon French society, causing high levels of insecurity, undermining France's cultural traditions and values, and placing an economic burden upon the country's welfare system (Stockemer, 2017).

Concerning the broad issue of immigration, both JMLP and MLP have been opposed to immigration policies that seek to increase the number of migrants and refugees living in France (Stockemer, 2017). As discussed below in the next section on the RN's more recent proposed immigration policies, the party has continued to promote policies that seek to restrict the number of migrants, non-French nationals and refugees working and residing in, and entering, France (Bridge Initiative Team, 2020; Shields, 2013). MLP has been making efforts to "interweave" the RN's "anti-immigrant appeals" with the major concerns of certain segments of the French population (Barisione & Stockemer, 2017; Stockemer, 2017). Those concerns include domestic

terrorism, high unemployment levels for low-skilled workers, decreasing purchasing power, growing threats from radical Islam, and social and public insecurity (Barisione & Stockemer, 2017; OECD, 2018; Reuters Staff, 2020). Moreover, during one speech in her 2017 presidential campaign, MLP used her strategic modulation of rhetoric to cast more subtly the alleged threat migrants pose to France's social welfare, national security and economy, when she stated the following: “Countries are no longer nations but markets. Borders are erased.... Everyone can come to our country, and this has cut our salaries and our social protection. This dilutes our social protections” (Bremmer, 2018). In the speech above, she accused migrants of taking jobs away from French citizens; placing an economic burden on the country's social welfare systems; and being responsible for France's growing insecurity levels (Bremmer, 2018).

Selected Immigration Policies

Immigration has always been a critical policy issue for JMLP and MLP. Both proposed strict immigration policies in their previous electoral platforms in 2007, and 2012 and 2017 (Stockemer, 2017). However, direct references to immigration were more pronounced in the former's 2007 electoral programme than in the latter's 2012 electoral programme (Stockemer, 2017). Even when comparing JMLP's 2007 electoral programme to MLP's 2017 electoral programme, the word "immigration" appears approximately 40 times in the former's electoral programme, while the same word appears six times in MLP's 2017 electoral programme (Le Pen J. M., 2007; Le Pen M., 2017). On the other hand, the word "Islamistes" appears once and four times in JMLP's 2007 and MLP's 2017 electoral programs, respectively, but the words "Islamismo-terroristes" and "Islamisme" are also each mentioned once in the former's 2007 electoral programme (Le Pen J. M., 2007; Le Pen M., 2017). The word "Islamisme" also appears once near the end of MLP's 2017 electoral programme (Le Pen M., 2017).

1. Jean Marie Le Pen's 2007 Immigration Policies

As part of his 2007 electoral programme, JMLP "linked" immigration to a wide range of issues related to the labour market, social security, national identity, and public insecurity (Stockemer, 2017). For example, JMLP's 2007 electoral programme blames increased immigration to France for being a major factor behind high public spending on social welfare and growing insecurity levels (Stockemer, 2017). It also claims that migrants are abusing the French social welfare system and taking jobs away from French nationals (Stockemer, 2017). As well, leading up to the 2007 French presidential elections, JMLP proposed several immigration policies that scapegoated France's migrant population for the country's socio-economic woes (Stockemer, 2017). More specifically, concerning the issue of immigration, JMLP proposed to: expedite the deportations of convicted non-French citizens; dismantle organized crime groups within immigrant groups; provide preferential treatment to French citizens in regards to having access to paid social benefits, social housing and public sector jobs; suppress familial, social benefits for non-French citizens; prevent individuals – who do not have the right to contribution-based benefits, including migrants – from having access to unemployment benefits; and force non-French citizens to pay higher fees for their unemployment benefits than French citizens (Stockemer, 2017).

2. Marine Le Pen's (MLP's) Immigration Policies from 2012 and 2017

MLP, like her father, has also promised to implement similar immigration policies as highlighted in her electoral programmes from her 2012 and 2017 presidential elections despite there being some differences in her approach to the issue of immigration in regards to her father's 2002 electoral programme (Le Pen M., 2017; Stockemer, 2017). In fact, MLP has even proposed more "severe" immigration policies than her father, especially when it comes to targeting immigrants (Stockemer, 2017). MLP's 2012 electoral programme highlights restrictive policies

towards immigrants in areas related to social security and benefits, the economy and public safety (Stockemer, 2017). In regards to the issue of immigration and among other promises, MLP's 2012 electoral programme proposed to: deport all undocumented migrants; eliminate all pensions for non-French citizens; prevent non-French citizens from having access to family benefits; eliminate birthright citizenship for children born to families of non-French citizens; and provide preferential treatment to French citizens in regards to having access to public and private sector jobs (Stockemer, 2017).

Even with certain modifications, MLP's 2017 electoral programme also made similar promises as highlighted in her 2012 electoral programme concerning immigration (Stockemer, 2017; Le Pen M., 2017). Entitled *Les 144 Engagements Présidentielles*, the 2017 electoral programme mentions some of MLP's proposed immigration policies, including promises to increase the number of customs and border personnel by 6,000 people; end the automatic family reunion and acquisition of French nationality through marriage; eliminate birthright citizenship for children born to families of non-French citizens; deport all undocumented migrants; make it impossible for undocumented migrants to be naturalized as French citizens; and reform France's asylum system so asylum claimants can only apply for asylum in French embassies and consulates located in their respective countries of origin (Le Pen M., 2017). Furthermore, MLP's 2017 electoral programme promised to establish an immigration quota to reduce the number of legal migrants entering France annually (Le Pen M., 2017). When it was proposed, MLP's immigration quota aimed to reduce the number of legal migrants allowed to enter France annually by almost 95% from approximately 200,000 to 10,000 people (Galbreath, 2017; Le Pen M., 2017). During her 2017 presidential campaign, MLP also mentioned that if elected President of France, she would temporarily suspend all legal immigration to assess France's alleged migration crisis (Bastow, 2018).

Lastly, MLP's immigration policies remain similar to those of her father's, which further reinforces the fact that the RN's de-demonization strategy is mainly rhetorical than substantive (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017). MLP's immigration policies from her 2012 and 2017 electoral programmes show that immigration continues to be a central policy issue for the RN despite the party no longer being a single-issue party (Stockemer, 2019). As the next chapter discusses, the RN continues to target immigration – especially from Muslim countries – under the guise of other policy issues, including secularism, women's rights and LGBTI⁵ rights.

B. Marine Le Pen and the European Union's 2020 Pact on Migration and Asylum

Over the years, the European Union (EU) – which is a political and economic regional bloc comprising 27 countries, ⁶ including France – has enacted legal instruments, such as treaties, legislation, regulations and directives, that are either binding or non-binding on EU member states on a wide range of policy issues (European Union, 2020; European Parliament & International Organization for Migration, 2009). Those legal instruments have deepened European integration among EU member countries in areas related to immigration, the environment, foreign policy, public health, international trade, the economy, and the EU's single market, customs union, and common currency (Brunet-Jailly, Hurrelmann, & Verdun, 2018; McBride, 2020). However, like her father, MLP has been vehemently opposed to any immigration policies originating from the EU because she sees those policies as infringements of French sovereignty (Stockemer, 2017).

⁵ The term LGBTI has often been used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people (Annett, 2018). However, the term LGBTQ+ can also be used in order to be more inclusive of other identities (Halton Region, 2021). The Q stands for queer or questioning, and the plus sign stands for other identities represented within the LGBTQ+ community (Halton Region, 2021; PinkNews, 2017). In the Canadian context, the term LGBTQ2 is also used “to collectively refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and Two-Spirit community in Canada” (Annett, 2018).

⁶ The 27 member countries of the European Union are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden (European Union, 2020).

More specifically, she has been opposed to EU immigration policies that require EU members to take on asylum seekers and refugees from the Middle East and Africa (Dumitrescu, 2016; Le Pen M., 2017).

Back in 2017, MLP stated that if she were to be elected President of France, she would like to suspend France's membership in the Schengen Area so that France can have full control over its borders and the number of migrants entering the country (Agence France-Presse, 2017; Le Pen M., 2017; Smith P., 2017). The Schengen Area comprises 26 EU members, including France, and allows millions of EU citizens and Schengen visa holders to freely reside and work within those countries (European Commission, 2020; Government of Canada, 2020). Nevertheless, EU member countries like France have the authority to decide the number of people from non-EU member countries who can legally enter their jurisdictions (Schmid-Drüner, 2019). However, since losing her 2017 presidential bid to French President Macron, MLP has backtracked on some of her comments regarding France's potential departure from the EU because Euroscepticism is not popular among most French voters, including some RN supporters (Bastow, 2018; Chassany, 2017; Euronews, 2020; Faulconbridge, 2017). MLP also no longer sees "Frexit," France's version of Brexit, as a viable option due to its economic and political costs, and because she has found new political allies within the EU, such as Italy's far-right Lega party (Barbière, 2019).

Most recently, in late 2020, MLP launched a public campaign against the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum, which was adopted by the European Commission on 23 September 2020 (Eminoğlu, Erdoğan, & Kemal, 2020; Johannès, 2020). The EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum (Pact) aims to foster increased cooperation among its members, including France, to address the issue of relocating hundreds of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers throughout the region (Chadwick & Montalto Monella, 2020). The Pact also provides EU member countries with the

opportunity to opt-out from hosting some migrants and refugees (Chadwick & Montalto Monella, 2020). EU member countries, which decide to opt-out of the Pact, do not have to host migrants or refugees, but they are required to at least provide financial aid to EU member countries that will host the migrants (Chadwick & Montalto Monella, 2020; Eminoğlu, Erdoğan, & Kemal, 2020). As well, the Pact aims to improve immigration controls at the EU's external borders to curb illegal immigration and human trafficking (Chadwick & Montalto Monella, 2020; Government of France, 2020).

France's support for the EU's Pact and commitment to help resettle some migrants and asylum seekers has spurred MLP to continue her anti-immigrant rhetoric (Government of France, 2020). MLP has criticized the EU's new Pact for allegedly promoting and facilitating increased migration and illegal immigration to European countries, including France (Johannès, 2020). As part of her recent campaign against the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum, MLP has also argued that increased migration – especially from Muslim countries – poses a threat to France's economy and society (Johannès, 2020). For example, in October 2020, she stated that the arrival of millions of migrants in France would ruin the country's social welfare system; lead to increased levels of unemployment, homelessness, and insecurity; and will allow for Islamic radicals and terrorists to infiltrate and cause havoc within French society (Johannès, 2020).

C. Chapter Conclusion

The RN should continue to be characterized as a political party that continues to disseminate xenophobia and promote hate speech against foreigners, migrants, Muslims and refugees despite MLP's recent efforts to de-demonize her party (Bridge Initiative Team, 2020; Eltchaninoff, 2018). Unlike her father, MLP is more careful about the type of xenophobic discourse it employs because any major gaffe by her or an RN party member could negatively affect her de-demonization of the

party (Stockemer, 2017). Nevertheless, just because a wolf decides to dress itself up as a sheep does not mean that it cannot bite those it considers potential threats to its hunting territory.

In the context of immigration, migrants – especially of Muslim origin – and refugees continue to be targeted by the RN's xenophobic rhetoric and strict immigration policies (Bastow, 2018; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017). MLP's de-demonization efforts to improve RN's negative image regarding hate speech and anti-Semitism do not seem to apply to its rhetoric on Islam and Muslims (Bastow, 2018; Mayer, 2013). According to researchers from Georgetown University's Bridge Initiative on Islamophobia, Louis Aliot – an important RN party official – was once reported to have told RN party members that MLP's demonization efforts do not apply to its Islamophobic rhetoric (Bridge Initiative Team, 2020). Furthermore, just like any other far-right politician, MLP has employed xenophobic rhetoric to portray Muslims, migrants and minorities as the "other," and as internal threats to the social, political and economic stability of the French State (Brubaker, 2017).

To conclude this chapter, the RN continues to employ more extreme xenophobic rhetoric and stricter immigration policies than several French right-wing political parties have sought to appropriate certain far-right elements of the RN's rhetoric and immigration policies (Crouch, 2018; Stockemer, 2017; Laxer, 2019). Perhaps, two contributing factors, among others, that are linked to the RN's decision to continue to promote Islamophobia and xenophobia are France's continuing struggle to effectively address Islamic radicalization and domestic terrorism within the country's domestic borders and the aftermath of the 2015 European migration crisis (Boukhars, 2009; Crouch, 2018). Another contributing factor is the perceived threat that a growing migrant and Muslim population in France poses to French national identity and values, such as secularism and "Christian civilization" (Boukhars, 2009; Brubaker, 2017). As well, according to Laxer, RN's anti-

immigrant rhetoric and sentiments are linked to the party's opposition to increased European integration, which has been perceived by both MLP and her father as a threat to France's sovereignty (Laxer, 2019).

Chapter 2: Personalism

Personalism is a term that has several definitions based on the context in which it is employed. In philosophy, the term personalism can be applied to multiple schools of thought, which focus “on the centrality of persons and their unique status among beings in general” (Stanford University, 2009). In that regard, personalism also emphasizes the uniqueness, significance and inviolability of the person in question while also stressing that person's essential social or relational dimension (Stanford University, 2009). Other definitions of the term personalism include the character or quality of an individual or something considered to be personal (Oxford English Dictionary, 2005). Personalism can also be defined as the allegiance, whether political or not, to a person, including a political leader, rather than to an ideology or political party (Oxford English Dictionary, 2005). Personalism can also be used to categorize charismatic political leaders, who are either autocrats, demagogues, dictators or even freely elected leaders and are seeking to centralize political power under their will and even erode democratic institutions (Taussig, 2017; Thaler, 2020).

In this paper's context, the term personalism is used to analyze MLP and JMLP's leadership style and public image, in addition to looking at how the RN supporters have built a cult of personality around both party leaders (Geva, 2020; Stockemer, 2017). However, before analyzing the evolution of personalism from the time when JMLP was the RN leader to the current party leadership of MLP, this chapter discusses personalism's close connection to politicians and certain populist and political movements.

A. Personalism and Populism

Personalism is also closely intertwined with populism. As previously mentioned, several world leaders and political leaders have employed populist rhetoric that portrays them as representatives of the common people and working classes; populist rhetoric can also be divisive because populist rhetoric – but not all – sometimes divides society into opposing groups: the political establishment and immigrants, and the working people (Geva, 2020; Merriam Webster, 2020; Mudde, 2016). Like authoritarianism, populism is not closely linked to any specific political ideology, as it has always been present across the different political spectrums (Serhan, 2020). There have been far-right populists like current Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and far-left populists, such as former and deceased Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and his successor, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro (Barr, Clarke, Levett, Lewis, & Voce, 2019; Zalan, 2016). There are also other politicians – who employ populist rhetoric – like former U.S. President Donald Trump, far-right Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, and left-wing Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Foa & Mounck, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Luce, 2017; Financial Times, 2020).

Characteristics that set all these populists and politicians apart from other political leaders include their personality, charisma, and ability to connect with the common people through political discourse, “showmanship,” style of leadership, and their perceived public image (Craig, 1976; Kabaservice, 2020; The Economist, 2018). In turn, the popularity of populists and other politicians – who employ populist rhetoric – with their supporters and even segments of the general electorate have contributed to the establishment of political movements based on their image, personality and ideas (Caldwell, 2020; Craig, 1976). This notion of building a political movement around a political figure resonates with the one of the previously noted definitions of personalism.

That definition defines personalism as the allegiance to a person rather than to an ideology or political party (Oxford English Dictionary, 2005; Craig, 1976). In some extreme cases, cult-like and conspiracy-driven groups like QAnon have portrayed politicians, such as former U.S. President Trump, as messiahs or prophets (Carmichael, Coleman, & Robinson, 2020; Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2018; Stratton, 2020). QAnon and cult-like Trump supporters have even portrayed former U.S. President Trump as their salvation against the political establishment, the allegedly corrupt Democrats, and the criminal networks – or the "the deep state" – that supposedly control government institutions (Carmichael, Coleman, & Robinson, 2020; Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2018; Stratton, 2020).

A number of those political and populist movements have outlived the political leaders around which they were first constructed to support and have contributed to the rise of other politicians, who claim to embody the ideals of those populist and political leaders (Caldwell, 2020). For example, in Argentina, former President Juan Perón, who served in office from 1946 to 1955 and from 1973 until he died in 1974, had a populist movement built around his persona and policies (Craig, 1976; Kandell, 1974; Taladrid, 2020). Perón's political movement has outlived him. Today, members of his political movement continue to refer to themselves as "Perónistas," or Peronists in English (Craig, 1976; Kandell, 1974; Taladrid, 2020). In 2003 and 2007, respectively, two Peronist leaders were elected President of Argentina: Nestor Kirchner and subsequently his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). Most recently, in the 2019 Argentine General Elections, Peronist leader – Alberto Fernández – was elected President of Argentina, with former President Fernández de Kirchner as his vice-president (Misculin, 2020; Taladrid, 2020). Furthermore, in the United States, among certain academics and journalists, including Christopher Caldwell, questions have been raised about whether

"Trumpism" will remain active long after former U.S President Trump is gone (Caldwell, 2020; Patman, 2021; Reid & Tanfani, 2020).

Like Peronism in Argentina and, possibly, Trumpism in the United States, French politics have not been exempted from populist political movements (Friedman, 2017; Peker, 2020; Williamson, 2016). Throughout France's political history, several political movements have been established around the personality, image, policies and ideals of several politicians, including Charles De Gaulle, who served as President of France from 1959 to 1969 (Leruth, 2019; Pickles, 2020; Williamson, 2016). According to Benjamin Leruth, De Gaulle's political legacy transformed "itself into a long-standing political movement representing key tenets advocated during his presidency" (Leruth, 2019). Several French politicians and political parties, such as *Les Républicains*, have been characterized as Gaullists for evoking some of De Gaulle's key tenets, including the need to have a strong centralized state and unified society (Leruth, 2019). However, there is no real consensus regarding which type of ideology across the left and right political spectrum Gaullism represents (Leruth, 2019). For instance, left-wing parties like the now-defunct *Union Démocratique du Travail* have previously promoted Gaullism's "social dimensions" (Leruth, 2019).

Unlike her father,⁷ MLP has quoted De Gaulle and made references to the former French president throughout some of her speeches; tries to portray herself as an adherent to several of De Gaulle's political ideologies, and promotes some of her policies on French national identity and

⁷ As a veteran of the Algerian War, Jean-Marie Le Pen has continuously expressed his disdain for De Gaulle and was opposed to the former French president's decision to grant independence to Algeria, a former French colony, during the 1960s (Soullier, 2020; Stockemer, 2017). Under JMLP's leadership, the RN was perceived as anti-Gaullist (Horton, 2020; Stockemer, 2017). Moreover, in his 2018 book, entitled *Mémoires: fils de la nation*, MLP blamed De Gaulle for being a "horrible source of suffering for France" (Soullier, 2020).

sovereignty as being compatible with some of De Gaulle's key presidential tenets⁸ (McAuley, 2017; Stockemer, 2017). For instance, in 2011, she appropriated De Gaulle's legacy of a Europe comprised of sovereign nations by expressing publicly the following: "...Politics is nothing than the art of reality. And the reality is that Europe is now made up of nations" (Eltchaninoff, 2018). Most recently, in a 25 June 2020 article from la *Revue politique et Parlementaire*, MLP honoured De Gaulle's legacy when she wrote that the former president – who was also the military leader of the Free French forces in the Second World War – was a "great man" (Hird, 2020; Soullier, 2020). In that same article, she wrote how the RN is the only French political party currently representing his ideals (Hird, 2020; Soullier, 2020). She also travelled on 17 June 2020 to Île de Sein,⁹ located in the region of Brittany, where she gave a speech to honour De Gaulle and the French military personnel, who fought on behalf of Free France in the Second World War (Horton, 2020). To put it briefly, MLP is trying to reshape the RN's image into a legitimate part of the mainstream political right and an older republican-nationalist tradition through her efforts to make the RN's policies seem compatible with De Gaulle's political ideology (Bastow, 2018; Eltchaninoff, 2018).

B. Leadership Style

MLP's leadership style concerning how the RN is run is similar to that of her father, albeit with some minor differences. According to several academics, there are certain similar leadership strategies and characteristics within the party that have been employed by JMLP and MLP as

⁸ The four key tenets of De Gaulle's presidency are: independence of France, which centers mainly around the notion of protecting France's sovereignty vis a vis supranational organizations; authority of the state, which emphasizes the idea of having a centralized government and a strong executive branch; unity of the French people, which refers to the concept of national unity "beyond right and left ideologies"; and leadership of Gaulle, which focuses on having a charismatic leader who assures that there is a strong relationship between the state and its citizenry (Leruth, 2019).

⁹ Marine Le Pen's visit on 17 June 2020 to Île de Sein was not welcomed by some of the residents of the island. Her visit was perceived to be provocative, especially because her party continues to be divisive due in part to its xenophobic and nationalist rhetoric and policies (Horton, 2020). She was also not invited the next day – on 18 June 2020 – by local government officials to attend the island's official ceremony commemoration of the 80th anniversary of Charles De Gaulle's June 1940 calls to French citizens to resist their Nazi occupiers (France 24, 2020; Horton, 2020).

leaders of the RN, formerly known as the FN until 2018 (Shields, 2013; Stockemer, 2017). In his 2017 book, entitled *the Front National in France*, Stockemer lists three similar leadership strategies employed by both MLP and JMLP, which this paper then expands upon in the three subsections found below (Stockemer, 2017).

1. Familial Connections

The first strategy is based on the notion of maintaining the RN's political leadership in the hands of members of the Le Pen family, close relatives, and close associates (Stockemer, 2017). Over the years, especially during the 1990s, JMLP's second wife – Jany Le Pen – and a number of his close relatives besides MLP have had influential roles in the party (Stockemer, 2017; Vattaire, 2021). In fact, MLP's two older sisters, Marie-Caroline Le Pen and Yann Le Pen have been actively involved in the RN (Gala, nd.; Stockemer, 2017). Although Marie-Caroline Le Pen was briefly expelled from the party in 1998 after she and her husband, Philippe Olivier, supported Bruno Mégret, a former political ally and subsequent political rival of JMLP, she returned to the party in the late 2000s (Avellaneda, 2020; Stockemer, 2017). Marie-Caroline Le Pen has had an active career in politics and previously served as a councillor for the Île-de-France region from 1992 to 1998 (Avellaneda, 2020; Gala, nd.). As well, during France's 2020 municipal elections, Marie-Caroline Le Pen ran for councillor in Calais; however, she eventually lost those elections (Avellaneda, 2020; Franceinfo, 2020).

On the other hand, Yann Le Pen has been involved in helping to organize RN meetings and events; previously worked as a parliamentary assistant from 2009 to 2014 for an RN Member of the European Parliament (MEP); and has served as an advisor to MLP (Gala, nd.; Stockemer, 2017). Yann Le Pen's husband, Samuel Maréchal, was also actively involved in the RN (Bizeul, 2019). Maréchal served as the RN's youth movement leader during the 1990s; and initially worked

alongside MLP to de-demonize the party (Bizeul, 2019; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Faye, 2017). As well, both Yann Le Pen and Samuel Maréchal are the parents of MLP's niece and the far-right's rising star, Marion Maréchal (née Maréchal-Le Pen) (Shields, 2013).

Marion Maréchal is a member of "the third generation of Le Pens," who has followed her aunt's and grandfather's footsteps into politics (Stockemer, 2017). Under the RN presidency of MLP, Marion Maréchal rose to political prominence in 2012, when she was elected at 22 years old to serve as a deputy of France's National Assembly until 2017 (Shields, 2013; Stockemer, 2017). Since then, Marion Maréchal's growing political popularity among far-right political groups has resulted in her being touted by those groups as a future presidential candidate (Carraud, 2019). Those groups have also seen her as MLP's anointed successor to the RN leadership (Carraud, 2019). However, Marion Maréchal left the RN after MLP lost France's 2017 presidential elections (Smith S., 2017). She reportedly left the RN due to disagreements with her aunt over party policies concerning economic protectionism, the euro, abortion rights, and the MLP's decision to make attempts to move the RN towards the centre of the left-right political spectrum (Smith S., 2017).

Even though she is currently not politically involved in the RN, Marion Maréchal's views on politics, religion, and other societal issues align closely with that of a segment of the RN's membership, which includes ardent supporters of JMLP, conservative-Catholics and party traditionalists (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Smith S., 2017). Marion Maréchal has more conservative views on social issues, as indicated in her stern opposition to abortion and increased LGBTI rights, but she also has expressed liberal views on economic matters (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Rolling Stone Magazine, 2016). However, Marion Maréchal recently suggested in September 2020 that her aunt seek a coalition with France's centre-right and right-wing parties, so those other parties could help

the RN increase its political and electoral support during France's 2022 presidential elections (Keohane, 2020).

Furthermore, in 2018, Marion Maréchal founded the non-accredited academic institution called the Institute of Social, Economic and Political Sciences (ISSEP) to educate the next generation of far-right politicians and members of the "new conservative elite, in business, culture, and politics" (De La Baume, 2018; Williams M., 2018). ISSEP aims to bring together academics, students and intellectuals, who embrace political ideologies of far-right movements, and conservative and right-wing parties, such as *Les Républicains*, among others (De La Baume, 2018; Jackson, 2016; Williams M., 2018). Most recently, in December 2020, Marion Maréchal announced the launching of the ISSEP's far-right think tank – the Center for Analysis and Prospective (CAP) – which would work towards contributing to the "public discourse" in France (Bermingham, 2020).

Lastly, other close relatives of the Le Pen family, who have been involved in the RN, include Philippe Olivier (Stockemer, 2017). As mentioned above, Olivier is married to Yann Le Pen, and he recently worked for MLP as an advisor since returning to the party in the late 2000s (Stockemer, 2017). MLP's former partner – Louis Aliot – is also politically active, within the RN. He previously served several official roles in municipal politics, including as councillor for the region of Languedoc-Roussillon from 2010 to 2015 (Soullier, 2020). As well, while serving as the RN's vice-president from 2011 to 2018, he was an MEP from 2014 to 2017; and a deputy of France's National Assembly between 2017 and 2020 (European Parliament, 2017; National Assembly of France, 2020). He was recently elected the Mayor of Perpignan, a city of approximately 100,000 inhabitants located in France's south (Soullier, 2020).

2. The Strong Leader

The second strategy, which was and has been employed by MLP and her father, respectively, is that of ruling the party with an “iron fist” (Stockemer, 2017). During his RN presidency, JMLP was known for expelling party members and officials, who posed a threat to his leadership over the party, such as Bruno Mégret. Mégret joined the RN in the 1980s and rose through the party ranks to become the party's general director. In other words, he subsequently became very close to and was perceived as the "right-hand" man of JMLP (Bizeul, 2019). While serving as the party's general director, Mégret was tasked with overseeing the RN's political strategy and discourse, and played an important role in reformulating the party's xenophobic rhetoric and policies to soften the party's image (Stockemer, 2017).

Mégret has also been credited with helping to develop some of the party's main anti-immigrant policies between the late 1980s and the 1990s (Stockemer, 2017; The Economist, 1999; Williams M. H., 2011). Those policies were centred around the term of "national preference," which was employed often by the party and JMLP to advocate for giving priority to French nationals over non-nationals when allocating housing, welfare services and employment opportunities (The Economist, 1999; Williams M. H., 2011). As well, he has been closely associated with the *Nouvelle Droite*,¹⁰ which is a far-right political movement established by Alain Benoist and other members of the far-right *Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne* think tank (GRECE) in the late 1960s (Bar-On, 2017; Chatterton Williams, 2017; François, 2014; Pfaff, 1998). During his time as a member of the RN, Bruno Mégret promoted anti-immigrant policies, such as deporting millions of migrants living in France, and

¹⁰ According to Professor Tamir Bar-On, the *Nouvelle Droite* strongly rejects Judeo-Christian traditions, liberalism, multiculturalism and socialism, while advocating for Europe's return to its more ethnically homogenous and paganist past (Bar-On, 2017; François, 2014). The ND has previously proposed the creation of a French society built on "a commitment to elitism, eugenics, paganism and an ethnologically rationalized racism" (Pfaff, 1998).

made ethnocentric and nativist remarks about “French civilization” being superior to other civilizations (The Economist, 1999).

Mégret’s close relationship with JMLP eventually came to an end in the late 1990s after a series of events that contributed to a political and personal rift between the two men (Stockemer, 2017). JMLP was not supportive of Mégret’s efforts to form alliances between the RN and French right-wing parties; he also opposed the latter’s attempts to transform the party from a fringe party to a mainstream political party (Stockemer, 2017; The Economist, 1999). Between 1997 and 1998, the ideological and political differences became more apparent between both men (Stockemer, 2017). During that period, they publicly exchanged personal insults, and JMLP was even quoted to have said that RN supporters of Mégret should stop supporting his political arrival and rally instead to his side (BBC News, 1998). The conflict between the two men culminated in the removal of Mégret¹¹ from the party (Stockemer, 2017; The Economist, 1999). JMLP also mercilessly sought out revenge on anyone who supported Mégret’s bid to become the new leader of the RN, and expelled them from his party (Whitney, 1998). As previously mentioned, supporters of Mégret who were expelled from the RN by JMLP included Marie-Caroline Le Pen and her husband, Philippe Olivier.

Like her father, MLP has not shied away from expelling or punishing party officials who are perceived to pose a threat to her authority over the RN. From the time when she was elected the leader of the RN, MLP has sought out to remove any supporters of any political opponents of hers, including those of Bruno Gollsnich in 2011 (Stockemer, 2017). As well, as part of her efforts to de-demonize the RN, she has removed or punished party officials and members – including her

¹¹ After leaving the RN, Mégret established the *Mouvement National Républicain* in 1999, which took a significant percentage of votes from Jean-Marie Le Pen’s party in the 1999 European Parliamentary Elections (Chrisafis, 2017). In those elections, the RN won only 5.7% of the votes that voters cast, while Mégret’s earned 3.3% of the votes (Stockemer, 2017).

father¹² – who have explicitly made either racist, anti-Semitic and, or xenophobic comments in public and do not represent her "more moderate views" on race (BBC, 2015; Morenne, 2017; Stockemer, 2017). In that regard, in April 2017, MLP forced Jean-François Jalkh to resign as RN's interim leader while she ran in France's 2017 presidential elections (Morenne, 2017). MLP demoted Jalkh for praising Holocaust deniers and stating in an interview that he doubted the Nazis used Zyklon B gas to commit the genocide of Jewish people during the Holocaust (Morenne, 2017).

Florian Philippot is another former important party official, who like Mégret, had a close relationship with the RN leader before departing from the party (Chrisafis, 2017). Philippot joined the RN in 2009; became an important influencer regarding MLP's ongoing efforts to de-demonize the party; eventually rose through the party ranks to become the Vice-President responsible for the RN's Communication and Strategy; and helped to attract new and younger members from a wide range of professional backgrounds – including university graduates and public servants – to join and support the RN (Lorimer, 2017). However, MLP's defeat in France's 2017 presidential elections to French President Macron not only resulted in the departure of her niece, Marion Maréchal, from the party, but also of Philippot (Eltchaninoff, 2018).

Several RN members actually blamed Philippot for MLP's electoral loss in France's 2017 presidential despite a number of his proposed policies on social and economic issues being credited with attracting more voters and supporters to the party (Chrisafis, 2017). More specifically, far-right RN members and other party traditionalists accused him of being behind MLP's attempts to soften the RN's stance on social issues like abortion, same-sex civil unions and contraception, and

¹² Jean-Marie Le Pen's constant criticism of her daughter's leadership style also contributed to his dismissal from the party (Stockemer, 2017).

shifting the party's economic policies to the left of the political spectrum (Chassany, 2017; Chrisafis, 2017). Other RN supporters and party members were also critical of Philippot's support for a potential "Frexit," which was a policy that MLP previously promoted before she realized that it was not as popular among most French voters (Bastow, 2018; Chassany, 2017).

Before resigning from the RN in September 2017, Philippot established an association called *rassemblement patriote*¹³ within the party (Bastow, 2018; Chassany, 2017; Lorimer, 2017). The creation of that association contributed to Philippot's demotion from overseeing the RN's political strategy and communications (Chassany, 2017; Chrisafis, 2017). MLP saw his association as a potential threat to her leadership (Chassany, 2017; Chrisafis, 2017). In sum, as Bastow notes, several factors contributed to Philippot's removal from his role as the RN's vice-president, including the growing unpopularity among RN members of his more progressive views on social issues; his decision to continue to advocate for France's departure from the EU despite MLP's decision to soften her stance on that issue; and his subsequent efforts to form alliances with certain elements of *Les Républicains* (Bastow, 2018). Furthermore, Philippot's resignation shows that MLP, like her father, seeks to punish anyone, who is a threat to her autocratic control over the party or even, no longer has her support due to political differences (Bastow, 2018; Chassany, 2017; Chrisafis, 2017).

3. Cult of Personality

The third leadership style strategy employed by MLP and her father has been the creation of a cult of personality around their family name and, especially in the former's case, her first name and gender (Geva, 2020; Stockemer, 2017). Similar to the use of the terms "Gaullism" and

¹³ Following his departure from the RN in 2017, Philippot established a new far-right and Eurosceptic political party called *Les Patriotes* (Nordstrom, 2017).

"Gaullists" to refer to political movements associated with De Gaulle and those who adhere to a certain number of his political ideologies, similar terms exist regarding JMLP's and MLP's political ideologies (Leruth, 2019; Pickles, 2020). Some of those terms include "Lepéniste," which, like "Gaullist," has been used to refer to individuals who support and adhere to the political ideologies and movement of JMLP (Mayer & Perrineau, 1992; Mayer, 2013). On the other hand, the term "Lepénisme" has been used to refer to the "ideological-discursive system of the Front National" and its former leader, JMLP (Alberdi, 2020). Moreover, the term "gaucho-lepénisme," which was coined by political scientist Pascal Perrineau, has been used to categorize certain segments of the French electorate – who, despite identifying themselves as being on the left of the left-right political spectrum – support the anti-migrant policies and political agenda of the RN, and, or have voted for the party in previous elections (Perrineau, 2016). The terms "Lepénisme" and "Lepéniste" can also both be used to refer to MLP's political movement and ideologies (Stockemer, 2017). Still, the term "Marinisme" is nowadays more often used to highlight her decision to "break away with the party's hardline tradition[s]" (Stockemer, 2017).

MLP is credited with creating the term "Marinisme," and the common use of that term among her followers has contributed to forming a cult of personality around her name and public image (Geva, 2020; Stockemer, 2017). In a series of interviews conducted between 2013 and 2017 – with RN members, Dorit Geva heard from political activists, party members, and representatives from the party's youth organization about their views on MLP's leadership style and public image (Geva, 2020). During one of those interviews, an RN politician told Professor Geva that she only became involved in politics after MLP took over the party leadership (Geva, 2020). Like many other new party members, the interviewee considered herself to be a "Mariniste" (Geva, 2020). Furthermore, as maintained by María Carmen Alberdi, the term "Marinisme" is sometimes

employed as an attempt to attract more political support from individuals who traditionally did not vote for JMLP (Alberdi, 2020). The use of the term "Marinisme" is part of MLP's de-demonization strategy to make the party's identity politics, nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric, and anti-immigrant policies more appealing to ordinary citizens (Alberdi, 2020; Stockemer, 2017).

There are several other reasons why the cult of personality strategy has been more prominent under MLP's leadership of the RN. Several official party communiqués and programmes have emphasized portraying MLP as an advocate for the people's general will and as a new kind of modern leader who is more adept than her father at addressing new policy issues (Stockemer, 2017). For example, the slogan "au nom du peuple"¹⁴ was the main theme of MLP's 2017 presidential campaign (Le Pen M., 2017; Willsher, 2017). During her campaign, party posters, the 2017 electoral programme, and other party material used the slogan alongside the words "Marine Président" rather than the party's logo or name (Le Pen M., 2017; Willsher, 2017). As well, MLP's 2017 presidential campaign and other party materials have sought to convey an image of MLP as a political outsider and someone who "is the saviour of France" (Le Pen M., 2017; Stockemer, 2017).

Several references to MLP, which place her at the centre of her political party, can also be found throughout the RN's social media platforms and official website (Rassemblement National, 2021). There is even a link to the party's new online social platform, *M L'Avenir*, whose official name includes her first initial on the RN website. Marine Le Pen launched *M L'Avenir*¹⁵ – on 25 January 2021 – to encourage party members and officials, and her supporters and future voters to

¹⁴ Marie Le Pen's 2017 campaign slogan literally translates into "In the Name of the People" (Galbreath, 2017). Still, it could also be deciphered as a nationalist, racist and nativist slogan, which calls for returning to an era when France only belonged to the French whites (Galbreath, 2017).

¹⁵ The new platform is also seen as an attempt for MLP to attract more supporters to her political cause as she potentially plans to run for President of France in 2022 (Geoffroy, 2021; M L'Avenir, 2021).

use the platform to discuss and publish articles on a wide range of issues, including immigration, the economy, and France's membership in the European Union (Geoffroy, 2021; M L'Avenir, 2021). An image of MLP is actually found near the bottom of M L'Avenir's welcome webpage alongside a message – "let's build together the France of tomorrow" – which invites participants to join her new social platform and political movement (Geoffroy, 2021; M L'Avenir, 2021).

Lastly, other reasons that explain the existing cult of personality around MLP include her attempts to portray herself as a caring mother while also conveying the image of having the same masculine virtues of a male leader like her father (Geva, 2020). Her supporters see her as the embodiment of the RN's past and as the party's political daughter because she has been actively involved in politics since the age of 18 (Geva, 2020). However, they also see her as a maternal¹⁶ caretaker of France's future; a modern working woman; a captain responsible for leading her troops in defence of the French nation; a commander like Napoleon Bonaparte or De Gaulle due to her authoritative rule over the party; and even, as a seductress because she has been “sexualized”¹⁷ by some of her followers (Geva, 2020).

C. Public Image

As previously noted, JMLP has constantly made public remarks which are outright racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic (Shields, 2007; Williams M. H., 2011). His "slips of the tongue" have created a lot of political embarrassment for the party and his daughter, who has made attempts to soften the RN's public image (Clifton, 2013). JMLP's use of blatantly racist imagery and inflammatory language has contributed to the RN's political stigmatization, especially

¹⁶ More specifically, younger members of the RN tend to see MLP as a caring mother, while older adherents, who have supported the party since Jean-Marie Le Pen was the leader, see her as the party's daughter (Geva, 2020).

¹⁷ According to Professor Dorit Geva, the “sexualization” of MLP among certain of her followers has helped to soften her public image despite it being normally used to undermine the political authority of women political figures (Geva, 2020)

during his time as leader of the party (Clifton, 2013). JMLP is someone who does not really care about whether he is publicly portrayed in a negative image because, according to Eltchaninoff, he likes to be seen as the villain as long as his ideas and comments remain in the public spotlight (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Shields, 2007). Like former U.S President Trump's explicit use of xenophobia and racism to make an appeal to extreme factions within his base, which are xenophobic, racist and white supremacist (Albertson, 2020). JMLP has also directed his "slips of the tongue" towards some of his more ardent supporters, who are racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic and xenophobic (Albertson, 2020; Stockemer, 2017). Furthermore, similarly to Trump, JMLP's popularity among most of his supporters also stemmed in part from his charismatic and "populist approachability" to conducting politics (Stockemer, 2017; Williams M. H., 2011).

MLP has followed her father's steps in continuing the type of populist and charismatic politics that JMLP employed while serving as the RN leader (Clifton, 2013). MLP is known for her populist and charismatic politics, which are more pronounced than her father's and have contributed to the existing cult of personality around her image and political appeal among her supporters (Stockemer, 2017; Williams M. H., 2011). MLP does not have the same oratory skills as her father (Eltchaninoff, 2018). However, she shares his ability to use political discourse and imagery to manipulate people's emotions on immigration, domestic terrorism, economic stagnation and globalization (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Galbreath, 2017; Geva, 2020; Pedder, 2016; Stockemer, 2017). Marine Le Pen could even be compared somewhat to a science-fiction villain, such as Emperor Palpatine from *Star Wars* through her use of political rhetoric and imagery to appeal and manipulate the negative emotions of her supporters – including hate, fear, the desire for violence and revenge (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Guerrero & Jamora, 2007). Likewise, in *Star Wars*, Emperor

Palpatine drew his political power in part from manipulating people's feelings of fear, anger, revenge, hatred and aggression (Guerrero & Jamora, 2007).

Another shared characteristic between JMLP and MLP are their attempts to portray themselves publicly and the RN as victims of the media and the "bankrupt" political establishment (Michelot & Quencez, 2017; Stockemer, 2017; Sayare, 2017). Both of them have effectively used the media as an important political tool to expand their audience, even if most media outlets tend to be hostile towards their xenophobic rhetoric and nativist policies. According to Professor Stockemer, during the 1980s, had then French President François Mitterrand¹⁸ and several media outlets not granted JMLP, with the opportunity to publicly appear on popular televised shows like *L'heure de vérité*, it might be possible that the RN would not have been brought to the political forefront (Sayare, 2017; Stockemer, 2017).

MLP has better relations with the media than her father due to her attempts to de-demonize the RN's public image and her ability to publicly engage with journalists without having to use inflammatory and explicit xenophobic language (Carnegy, 2014; Stockemer, 2017). She has mostly been careful in refraining from often using words or making direct comments that could negatively affect her and the RN's public image. However, she has had several "slips of the tongue" regarding some of her previous Islamophobic comments (Brubaker, 2017). Unlike her father, she does care about how the media portrays her publicly and is known for scrutinizing the media's coverage of her party and political campaigns (Sayare, 2017; Stockemer, 2017). MLP's charisma and somewhat close relationship with the media have also enabled her to publicly appear in some

¹⁸ Former French President Mitterrand's government also temporarily introduced the proportional representation system into France's 1986 legislative elections. Those temporal changes to France's electoral system helped Jean-Marie Le Pen's party win 35 seats in those elections and opened a door for far-right parties to be able to influence French politics (Petroni, 2002; Stockemer, 2017).

of France's most-watched television channels, including TF1 (Sayare, 2017). In some cases, a number of French media outlets have even portrayed MLP as an embodiment of the new generation of political leaders, who seem to be more politically in tune with most voters' social and economic needs (Stockemer, 2017).

MLP has also resorted to employing the “neither left nor right, but French” slogan as part of her rhetorical efforts to de-demonize the RN and improve her public image (Bizeul, 2019; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Faye, 2017). The slogan in question has been an important instrument for helping MLP and her party to earn more votes and political support from voters, who traditionally vote for left-leaning or mainstream political parties (Eltchaninoff, 2018). MLP has constantly used the slogan to rebuke any type of criticism aimed at portraying the RN as an extreme far-right party, (Eltchaninoff, 2018). However, the "neither left nor right, but French" slogan has also publicly been used – since 1995 – by other party officials to improve the party's public image before MLP became party leader (Bizeul, 2019; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Faye, 2017).

Marion Marechal’s father, Samuel Maréchal, is credited with creating the slogan, which was even the title of his 1996 book, entitled *Ni droite, ni gauche...Français !* (Bizeul, 2019; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Faye, 2017; Lorimer, 2018). In his 1996 book, Samuel Maréchal argued that the RN is neither a left nor right political party, but rather a political party that fights for all French nationals' interests and which can be found outside of the left-right political spectrum (Lorimer, 2018). Therefore, MLP's use of the "neither left nor right, but French" slogan is part of a continuation of efforts to soften the party's image in addition to portraying her party and herself as political outsiders (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Lorimer, 2018). As well, MLP's efforts to soften her public image and that of the party encompass the type of rhetoric she has employed to convey an image

of herself as a political outsider and defender of the working classes as opposed to being a member of the corrupt political establishment (Eltchaninoff, 2018).

In her past speeches, MLP has used vocabulary – such as "le grand patronat," which translates literally into big businesses – that were previously associated with France's communist and far left-wing parties to criticize members of the political establishment (Goldhammer, 2015; Le Pen M., 2015). In some of her previous speeches and official party material, MLP's has also quoted public figures not associated with the far-right, such as Karl Marx, George Orwell, Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, and left-wing politicians George Clemenceau, Jules Ferry and Jean Jaurès, among others (Castro, 2017; Eltchaninoff, 2018). Regarding the French civil service, she has made recent efforts to portray herself as their ally even though her party previously attacked civil servants for being "the embodiment of a blinkered governing class" (Sayare, 2017). For instance, in 2018, the RN released a press release not only highlighting MLP's opposition to French President Macron's reforms to the public service – which included reducing public spending and the number of civil servants (Le Pen, 2018). That same press release also attacked the French government's proposed reforms to privatize several services provided by the French public sector (Le Pen, 2018).

D. The RN Electorate

Like any other political party, the RN's political survival and ability to win elections depend on its capacity to engage the electorate and its partisan base to persuade them to support the party's policies and leadership (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992). Since taking over the RN's leadership from her father, MLP has managed to more than double her party's vote share throughout France's recent elections (Amengay & Stockemer, 2015). A considerable portion of the RN's electorate consists of individuals with low education levels and from France's working-class (Amengay & Stockemer, 2015). MLP has successfully expanded her electorate base to include more political supporters,

who "belong to the socio-demographic strata traditionally, overrepresented within its electorate" (Amengay & Stockemer, 2015).

A significant difference between MLP's electorate and her father's electorate is that the number of younger people supporting the RN's policies has also increased over the years (Amengay & Stockemer, 2015; Geva, 2020). The RN's youth organization – *Génération Nation*, formerly known as *Front National de la Jeunesse* – has been an important asset for MLP in engaging younger voters to vote for her party in France's presidential, regional and municipal elections, and the European parliamentary elections (Geva, 2020). *Génération Nation* has helped young representatives from the party to get elected into office and has been involved in recruiting more youth to join the RN's membership (Geva, 2020; Schultheis, 2017). Additionally, more youthful people throughout western Europe – who have become increasingly mistrustful of mainstream political parties and democratic institutions – are reported to be more supportive of politicians, including MLP, who employ populist rhetoric to portray themselves as political outsiders (Bamat, 2017; Foa & Mounck, 2016). During the first-round runoff of France's 2017 presidential elections, MLP won approximately 21% of the total votes cast by youth aged between 18 and 24 years old, while also winning 24% and 29% of the total votes cast by voters aged 25 to 34 years old and 35 to 49 years old, respectively, during the first-round runoff of France's 2017 presidential elections (Bamat, 2017; Schultheis, 2017).

MLP has also been receiving increasing political support from certain segments of France's LGBTI, Jewish and immigrant communities, and individuals with university degrees due to several factors including her decision to soften the RN's socially conservative stance on a number of social issues – including same-sex civil unions and abortion (Adamson, 2017; Chalk, 2017; Geva, 2020). Her father would not have achieved a similar feat of attracting a wider range of voters due to his

anti-Semitic, misogynistic, racist and homophobic explicit views (Geva, 2020; Stockemer, 2017). JMLP was also not fully committed during his time as party leader in transforming the RN into a mainstream political party (Chalk, 2017; Geva, 2020; Stockemer, 2017). Moreover, during one of her first public speeches as RN party leader, on 1 May 2011, she invited women, gay people, Jewish people, Muslims, and other minority groups to join and support her party (Dumitrescu, 2016). However, as it is later discussed in this paper's main conclusion, MLP's de-demonization strategy could lead to decreased support for some members of the RN's traditional base.

Nevertheless, as highlighted in a series of surveys between 1988 and 2012 on French voters' stance on immigration and the death penalty, most RN voters were found to have the same political stance on immigration and the death penalty as individuals found on the far-right of the left-right political spectrum (Mayer, 2013). According to those surveys, approximately 88% of RN voters – who voted in 2012 – agreed with the statement that "there are too many immigrants in France"; 70% of MLP's voters from 2012 were also supportive of restoring the death penalty in France (Mayer, 2013). When JMLP ran for President of France in 1988, 1995, 2002 and 2007, the surveys mentioned above found similar percentages among his voters: the percentage of RN voters who believed there were too many migrants living in France ranged from 90% and 95%, while the percentage of support from RN voters for the reestablishment of France's death penalty ranged between 75% and 95% (Mayer, 2013). According to French political scientist Nonna Mayer, a significant number of MLP's electoral supporters are still socially and ideologically very similar to her father's electoral supporters despite the former's success in attracting more women, youth, and working-class voters to her political cause (Geva, 2020; Mayer, 2013). As well, Mayer states in her 2013 article, entitled *From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen: Electoral Change on the Far*

Right, how “ethnocentrist-authoritarian” attitudes are still some of the main distinctive features of RN voters (Mayer, 2013).

E. Party Membership

MLP's recent efforts to soften the image of her party has indeed resulted in more people, with different societal, religious and cultural backgrounds, supporting and joining the ranks of the RN even though most party members are from France's lower societal classes (Amengay & Stockemer, 2015; Chalk, 2017; Geva, 2020; Stockemer, 2017). The party no longer seeks to only attract to its membership individuals from the working-classes and who have been affected by globalization or further European integration. To paraphrase Stockemer, the RN's ability to attract more supporters to its political cause has basically transformed the party into a “catch-all.... Volksparty” (Stockemer, 2017).

Since 2011, MLP has not allowed "skinheads" and far-right extremists from attending her political rallies and events to prevent any further political and racial clashes, which previously occurred at several RN public events (Bon, 2011; Melander, 2017). She has publicly dismissed neo-Nazis, "skinheads," and RN ardent supporters – who do not adhere to or support the party's de-demonization – while embracing individuals who have not traditionally supported her party, including gay people (Stockemer, 2017). Among the party's membership, there are even members, who are Muslim,¹⁹ even though MLP has continued to target France's Muslim community as part of her xenophobic rhetoric and anti-immigrant policies (Geva, 2020).

¹⁹ As part of her 2013-2017 interviews with RN supporters, Professor Geva interviewed an RN youth of Sunni Moroccan descent, who expressed his support for Marine Le Pen by comparing her to Joan of Arc (Geva, 2020).

Before France's 2017 Presidential elections, MLP's efforts to allow a wide range of supporters to join her party contributed to a rise in the party's membership, which almost quadrupled between 2011 and 2014 (Stockemer, 2017). During that time, the RN's official membership rose from about 20,000 card-carrying members to more than 80,000 (Stockemer, 2017). However, according to several news reports from 2018,²⁰ during that same year, the RN's membership was reported to have decreased to more than 30,000 card-carrying members (Europe1, 2018; Galiero & Sapin, 2018). Most recently, in 2019, it was reported that there were approximately 25,000 card-carrying members of the RN (Le Baron, 2018).

The recent decrease in the number of RN card-carrying members could be due to several factors, including the departure of the popular and socially conservative Marion Maréchal from the RN; the party's growing debt; the lack of enthusiasm around the party leadership since MLP's loss in the French 2017 presidential elections; and her "disastrous" televised debate with then LRM presidential candidate Macron during which MLP seemed unprepared to debate her rival (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Europe1, 2018; Smith S., 2017). However, as of 29 January 2021, the RN's website continues to claim that the party has approximately 83,000 members and supporters (Rassemblement National, 2021).

F. Chapter Conclusion

Despite the change in leadership, the RN brand continues to be closely associated with the Le Pen family. The RN is perceived as the equivalent of a "family run business" because, as mentioned above, members of the Le Pen family and their close relatives have always held influential roles

²⁰ Le Figaro was one of the main media outlets to have reported the decrease of RN card-carrying members based on the number of registered party members and contributors when the party held its March 2018 congress in Lille (Galiero & Sapin, 2018). However, at that time, the news outlet was also cautious with confirming that there were only 38,000 RN card-carrying members since the party had trouble registering online some of its members (Galiero & Sapin, 2018; Les Inrockuptibles, 2018).

within the party (Chrisafis, 2015; Fraser, 2014; Wessel, 2014). With the Le Pen surname being so closely associated with the RN's brand and image, it is nowadays difficult to think of a scenario where the party is no longer run by a Le Pen family member (Beardsly, 2017). Although MLP has managed to distance herself from her father's more radical views on race, sexual orientation, religion and social issues, his legacy continues to cast a shadow over the party's public image and political popularity (Ray, nd.; Stothard, 2017). MLP's critics have sought to constantly remind French voters that the RN continues to be a far-right party, which continues to have close connections to its xenophobic and anti-Semitic roots (Strothard, 2017).

MLP's policies, rhetoric, political views and persona continue to be compared to that of her father because, as previously mentioned, there are similarities, but also differences in regards to those characteristics (Shields, 2013; Stockemer, 2017). It seems like the cult of personality is more pronounced regarding MLP than her father because of her supporter's devotion to her public image, charisma, gender, and leadership role (Geva, 2020; Stockemer, 2017). However, one should not forget that MLP's popularity among her followers is also due to her being the daughter of JMLP, one of the RN's co-founders (Geva, 2020; Stockemer, 2017; Williams M. H., 2011). It is also not fair to fully credit MLP with the RN's de-demonization because she did not start the process of softening the public image of the party (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017). Throughout the RN's history, other individuals – such as Samuel Maréchal, Bruno Mégret, and Florian Philippot – played an important role in de-demonizing the party's public image (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017). Even JMLP could be credited with trying to soften the image of France's radical and far-right movements when he co-founded the RN in 1972, to provide a "respectable face" to those movements, with neo-fascist, anti-Semitic, racist and xenophobic ideas (Eltchaninoff, 2018).

MLP's appropriation of left-wing policies and rhetoric is another strategy to soften the RN's public image and target specific voter groups not traditionally associated with right-wing and far-right political movements (Bastow, 2018; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017). In that regard, she is attempting to make herself and her party more appealing to France's working classes, who are considered losers of increased globalization and innovation within the labour market (Galbreath, 2017; Luce, 2017). Her appropriation of left-wing rhetoric and policies is also aimed at strengthening the notion that the RN is neither left nor right, but rather a political party, which represents and defends the French Nation against the political establishment, mass immigration, and the ever-encroaching EU (Bizeul, 2019; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Faye, 2017; Lorimer, 2018).

However, the RN has not really shifted away from the far right of the left-right political spectrum; the RN's de-demonization process has rather been rhetorical than substantive (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017). Instead, according to Eltchaninoff, she has replaced her father's far-right ideals with her own based on her appropriation of left-wing ideas and even conspiracy theories (Eltchaninoff, 2018). For example, she has previously promoted conspiracy theories on how the "global elites" – with support from the world's major financial and banking institutions – are members of a totalitarian "globalist-Islamist alliance" responsible for controlling and undermining the rights and freedoms of the working classes and those left behind by globalization (Eltchaninoff, 2018). She also uses her pro-worker rhetoric like many other far-right politicians to convey anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiments, such as when she links immigration to the loss of jobs in France (Galbreath, 2017; Strain, 2020).

Chapter 3: Moralism

Moralism is closely intertwined with any worldview, no matter whether the latter is based on religious, scientific, political, ethical, cultural or emotional beliefs, among others (Davis L. C., 2016; Gray, 2011). In turn, those different world views can influence a person's opinions on a wide range of moral issues (Jensen, 1997). Furthermore, according to a 2019 study on the relationship between moralism and political ideologies, a person's political ideology – whether liberal or conservative – can influence that individual's worldviews on moral issues (Khazan, 2019). For example, a person's political ideology could influence their stance on issues, such as abortion or same-sex marriage, just like their non-political beliefs and life experiences could also shape that person's mindset on perceiving those issues as morally wrong or right (Khazan, 2019). Concerning moralism, this chapter discusses how the RN's stance on Catholicism, secularism, LGTB and women rights, traditional family values, and feminism has evolved even though the party continues to be a far-right party.

A. Joan of Arc and Catholicism

Joan of Arc is a Catholic Saint and martyr, who was a 15th-century female French heroine during the Hundred Years' War between France and England (Geva, 2020; Green, 2017). Popularly known as the “Maid of Orléans,” Joan of Arc has become an important symbol of feminism, and French nationalism and militarism, but also of religious piety (Downing, 2018; Miller, 2020). The RN has sought to tie itself to her legacy, and symbolic, historical and religious importance (Downing, 2018; Geva, 2020). Both MLP and JMLP have publicly expressed their devotion to Joan of Arc, and have made multiple references to the French Saint in their speeches and at RN political rallies (Downing, 2018; Geva, 2020; Green, 2017). According to Demetra Demetriou, the two of them have perceived Joan of Arc as the embodiment of French virtues and

France (Demetriou, 2021). MLP and JMLP also see Joan of Arc as a personification of their efforts to purify French society from outside influences, and expel minorities and migrants – who are perceived to be a threat to traditional French values – from France (Brubaker, 2017; Demetriou, 2021).

The RN has held on an annual basis – since the late 1980s – public commemorations on 1 May to honour Joan of Arc; most of those commemorations have been held at the Joan of Arc Square located in Paris, France (Downing, 2018). Paris’ Joan of Arc Square has become a rallying point for RN supporters and MLP, who has often compared herself to the French heroine (Geva, 2020). During RN's May 2013 annual commemoration of Joan of Arc, Marine Le Pen delivered her speech in front of a large banner, which depicted Joan of Arc alongside the following slogan: "the people first" (Geva, 2020). She has delivered, as well, some of her previous commemorative speeches in front of the emblematic golden statue of Joan of Arc located in that same public square in Paris (Demetriou, 2021; Geva, 2020; Fraser, 2014).

The RN’s continued infatuation with Joan of Arc has also contributed to the cult of personality created around MLP, which was mentioned previously (Downing, 2018). Some of her supporters have compared her "warrior-like" leadership qualities to those of Joan of Arc, while others see MLP as the French heroine's reincarnation (Demetriou, 2021; Geva, 2020). Moreover, the RN uses the image and legacy of Joan of Arc to promote French patriotism and nationalist sentiments (Demetriou, 2021). However, the party’s close ties with the “Maid of Orléans” also highlights the RN’s more recent overall use of Catholicism and Christian identity as part of its political and nationalist discourse (Brubaker, 2017; Demetriou, 2021; Geva, 2020).

Roman Catholicism has been the predominant religion²¹ in France throughout most of the country's history (Piser, 2019). The former RN leader, JMLP, is a practicing Catholic,²² and there is even a conservative-Catholic wing²³ within the party (Green, 2017). Marion Maréchal is also known for being a devout Catholic; MLP, on the other hand, does not have a close relationship with Catholicism (Agence France-Presse, 2018; BBC News, 2019; Green, 2017). However, under the leadership of MLP, the RN has made Christianity and Catholicism a more central theme of its populist and xenophobic rhetoric, even though JMLP was also known for "overtly evoking Catholic rhetoric" (Brubaker, 2017; Peker, 2020). Nevertheless, certain elements of paganist ideals, imagery and symbols were more influential than Christian ideals in some of the rhetoric employed by the RN and a number of its members²⁴ during the 1980s and 1990s, when JMLP was party leader (Brubaker, 2017).

MLP's relationship with the Catholic Church (the Church) is filled with several contradictions (Green, 2017). On the one hand, she does not shy away from publicly attacking political opponents, who use the Catholic faith to promote their policies; and the Church for allegedly meddling in France's political affairs (Callus, 2017; Green, 2017; Le Figaro, 2017). More specifically, in a 2017 interview, with the French Magazine *La Croix*, Marine-Le Pen accused French Bishops and other Church personnel of being involved in France's political affairs (Le Figaro, 2017). During that

²¹ In 2015, an estimated 63-66% of France's population were identified as being Roman Catholic (CIA, 2021). However, in recent years, there has been an increase in non-practicing Catholics due to several factors, including the sexual abuse scandals within the Catholic Church. (Piser, 2019)

²² In January 2021, Jean-Marie Le Pen held a religious ceremony, which was presided by a Catholic "traditionalist" priest, to exchange his marriage vows with his wife, Jany, whom he married civilly in 1991 (Le Normand, 2021). His daughters, including Marine Le Pen, were excluded from the ceremony (Bremmer & Sage, 2021).

²³ According to the Pew Research Centre, in 2016, more than 25% of French catholic voters were found to have favourable views towards the RN (Green, 2017; Wike, 2017).

²⁴ Since its creation, the RN's membership has also consisted of individuals belonging to far-right political movements that embrace paganist ideals (Bar-On, 2017; François, 2014). One of those groups is the *Nouvelle Droite*, or New Right [see Footnote 10 for more information on the *Nouvelle Droite*] (Bar-On, 2017).

interview, she also criticized Pope Francis for calling on European leaders to provide refuge to migrants and refugees because she argued that the Pope's call on migration requires countries to undermine the general interests of "their own people" (Piser, 2019). On the other hand, MLP has evoked Catholic saints like Joan of Arc and the Catholic Church as part of her rhetoric on French identity (Demetriou, 2021; Green, 2017).

Another apparent contradiction was MLP's decision – during her 2017 presidential campaign – to strongly promote France's "Christian roots" while also making constant references to the country's embedded secularism (Brubaker, 2017). However, as Brubaker has argued, MLP's promotion of "Christian Roots" – which has no spiritual substance – is an example of the type of "secularized" Christianity employed by populists throughout Northern and Western Europe as part of their divisive language on immigration and European identity (Brubaker, 2017). She perceives Islamic religious beliefs and culture as being "incompatible" with French secularism and values (Bar-On, 2017; Piser, 2019). MLP has also blamed the rise in the country's Muslim population as a factor behind the demise of France's Catholic identity (Bar-On, 2017; Piser, 2019).

B. Secularism

According to its 1958 Constitution – which established the Fifth Republic – France is a secular, indivisible, social and democratic republic (Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs [MAE], 2020). The French State is responsible for treating before the law all citizens equally regardless of their respective religion, race, ethnicity or cultural origin (MAE, 2020). In 1905, the country's "Law on the Separation of the Church and State" was enacted to separate the French State from the Catholic Church, and more specifically, to establish state secularism within the "public sphere" (MAE, 2020; Piser, 2019). Moreover, the enactment of France's 1905 secularism law is part of a series of events aimed at separating religion from the State, which dates back to France's

Revolution of 1789 (Laxer, 2019; MAE, 2020). The 1789 Revolution is also closely intertwined with the French national motto of "Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité" (Laxer, 2019; MAE, nd.). The French national motto is meant to highlight the State's responsibility in promoting equality under the law among all citizens; fostering the creation of a brotherhood based on the shared principles of equality and liberty; and granting all citizens freedom of expression, among other civil rights (Laxer, 2019). As well, the motto's promotion of brotherhood includes the implicit notion of establishing a community, which also embraces secularism (Laxer, 2019).

Since the 1789 Revolution, other laws and measures – besides the 1905 secularism law – have been implemented to ensure and strengthen secularism within the French State, including the “Jules Ferry Laws,” which led to the creation of free public and secular education, among other things, in 19th century France (Boring, 2016; Laxer, 2019; MAE, 2020). On 15 March 2004, France enacted a law, which bans the wearing of religious garbs and clothing – including hijabs and kippahs – in schools (BBC News, 2018; MAE, 2020; Sciolino, 2004). In 2011, the French government implemented further legislation banning people from covering their faces with veils – such as burkhas and niqabs, among others – and other clothing apparel (BBC News, 2018). However, the implementation of some of France's most recent laws on secularism, including the ban on face coverings, has not been without some controversies (BBC News, 2019). The UN Human Rights Committee and several human rights organizations – including Human Rights Watch – have criticized France's recent secular laws for violating Muslims' human rights and religious freedoms, especially Muslim women who wear hijabs, burkas or niqabs (Miles, 2018; Sunderland, 2012).

According to Peker, France's laws on banning religious symbols in public schools and the wearing of face coverings in public are partly the products of the country's 1989 Islamic Veil Affair

(Peker, 2020). In 1989, a French school located in the commune of Creil decided to suspend three female Muslim students for wearing hijabs (Peker, 2020). The three female Muslim students' suspension led to nationwide debates about secularism, the public display of religious symbols, and the wearing of face and head coverings in public settings (Peker, 2020). Among other factors, those nationwide debates resulted in several measures – such as France's ban on face coverings – which helped to securitize Islam (Peker, 2020; Zurcher, 2021). The securitization of Islam – which Peker defines as the portrayal of Muslims as a threat to the French people – has contributed to the creation of nationalist and Islamophobic narratives linked to secularism (Peker, 2020; Zurcher, 2021). Those narratives seek to stigmatize and discriminate against France's Muslims based on their religious practices and cultural traditions (Peker, 2020; Zurcher, 2021).

France's recent secular laws have opened a window of opportunity for far-right and nationalist parties like the RN to capitalize on the issue of secularism to portray their anti-Muslim and xenophobic rhetoric as compatible with those laws, and the country's secular and republican values (Bastow, 2018; Zurcher, 2021). As well, several mainstream political parties – including *Les Républicains*, formerly the *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) – and several left-wing politicians have portrayed “‘radical’ Islam as a threat to French republicanism” (Knapp, 2017; Laxer, 2019; Peker, 2020). For example, since the turn of the 21st century, those political parties and politicians, including former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, have sought to appropriate and reshape the RN's “securitization narrative” around Islam for political gain, and to be able to compete with the RN's growing popularity among certain segments of the French electorate (Knapp, 2017; Laxer, 2019; Peker, 2020).

Under the leadership of MLP, the RN has more often sought to weaponize secularism against Muslims living in France than the party ever did when her father was party leader (Peker,

2020; Zaretsky, 2016). Nevertheless, before continuing, it is worth mentioning that the RN's first attempt to securitize Islam publicly came when JMLP was still the RN's leader (Fieschi, 2020). For instance, in 1987, the RN published an anti-Muslim poster to portray Islam as a threat to national security and French secular values (Fieschi, 2020). The 1987 RN poster showed a minaret alongside the word "Inshallah" and a previous quote from Islamist militant group Hezbollah saying that France will be converted into an Islamic country over a period of 20 years (Fieschi, 2020).

MLP and her party have been critical of France's Muslim community for not allegedly respecting and embracing the country's *laïcité*, or secular values (Brubaker, 2017). For politicians like MLP, Muslims represent a threat to French and European societies because of their perceived inability to conform to Western society's values and principles – including freedom of speech and secularism – and integrate into European society (Brubaker, 2017; Drolet & Williams, 2020). Furthermore, as Bastow highlights in his article, entitled *The Front national under Marine Le Pen: a mainstream political party?*, MLP's attempt to promote the RN as a republican party that respects France's secularism could be a cunning plan from MLP to "justify" her party's Islamophobic policies and measures concerning France's Muslim population (Bastow, 2018). In other words, and to paraphrase Peker, the RN – especially under the leadership of MLP – has attempted to claim ownership of French secular values not only as part of its de-demonization strategy to soften the party's public image, but also to make its Islamophobic and xenophobic stances less controversial and publicly explicit (Bastow, 2018; Peker, 2020).

MLP is against the public display of any religious symbols (Brubaker, 2017). She has even been opposed to people wearing religious garbs, such as burkas and hijabs, for recreational and leisure purposes, including swimming (Silk, 2019). In 2016, several French cities and towns – including Grenoble – banned Muslim women from wearing burkinis (Rubin, 2016). In turn, those

burkini bans resulted in another nationwide debate throughout France regarding the wearing of religious clothing in public (Bastow, 2018; Demetriou, 2021; Rubin, 2016). In that same year, a number of French government officials, including then French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, and other politicians – including MLP and former French President Sarkozy – publicly expressed their support for the ban of the burkini because they perceived the burkini as not being compatible with French secular values (Knapp, 2017; Kroet, 2016; Quinault-Maupoil, 2017).

During a 2016 interview with the *Foreign Affairs* magazine, MLP called the burkini “an Islamist uniform,” which – according to her – represents Islam’s subjugation of women (Foreign Affairs, 2016). She also accused “Islamic Fundamentalists” – whom she perceives as enemies of the French State – of seeking to impose their religious laws and beliefs in France that undermine the country’s 1958 Constitution and secular laws (Foreign Affairs, 2016). Of note, during the same interview, MLP attempted to portray herself as a political outsider concerning the issue of Islamic fundamentalism (Foreign Affairs, 2016). She blamed the French political establishment for “[rolling] out the red carpet” to Islamic fundamentalists by supporting the construction of Mosques and Islamic cultural centres (Foreign Affairs, 2016). Concerning France’s religious accommodations for Muslims, she complained about the “French political class” acting in “the spirit of Canadian-style reasonable accommodation rather in the spirit of an intransigence that would allow us to protect our civil liberties” (Foreign Affairs, 2016). She also used combative phrases throughout the interview to refer to Islam – such as “the battle we face against Islamic fundamentalism” and “we cannot fight an enemy if we do not name it” (Foreign Affairs, 2016).

More recently, at a press conference held on 29 January 2021, MLP referred to “Islamist Ideologies” as murderous and totalitarian, and proposed a ban on wearing hijabs – which she considers an “Islamist item of clothing” – in public settings (Agence France-Presse, 2021). She

made those comments on hijabs and Islam following French Prime Minister Jean Castex's recent refusal to support a proposed law to ban religious veils for children (Agence France-Presse, 2021; Nussbaum, 2021). The proposed ban on religious veils for children was also supported by MLP and a number of members from French President Macron's LRM party (Agence France-Presse, 2021; Nussbaum, 2021). In short, MLP seems to want to portray herself as the protector of French secular values and republicanism, but also as the new version of Joan of Arc, who will defend France against the threat of internal and external "outsiders" (Brubaker, 2017; Demetriou, 2021; Foreign Affairs, 2016; Geva, 2020).

C. LGBTI Rights and Same-sex Marriage

Throughout his political career, JMLP has made homophobic comments, such as when he compared, in the 1980s, members of the gay community dying from AIDS to lepers, whom he argued should be isolated from society (Adamson, 2017). He has not shied away from using homophobic slurs to refer to gay people, in addition to making denigrating and disparaging comments about LGBTI people (Adamson, 2017; Demetriou, 2021). JMLP even previously mentioned that "there are no queens" in the RN (Adamson, 2017). Since being expelled from the RN in 2015, JMLP has continued his homophobic rhetoric, which – in 2018 – actually landed him in legal troubles for publicly inciting homophobia and making sexually inappropriate comments about gay people (France 24, 2018).

As the RN's current leader, MLP has attempted to soften her party's stance on LGTBI rights in addition to employing a strategy referred to as "pinkwashing" (Adamson, 2017). MLP's "pinkwashing" strategy has provided increasing opportunities for RN gay members to become influential actors and political advisors within the party (Adamson, 2017; Geva, 2020). RN members, who are gay and open about their sexual orientation, include former RN Chief Campaign

Strategist and current deputy of the National Assembly Sebastien Chenu (Adamson, 2017; National Assembly of France, 2021). MLP has also used her "pinkwashing" strategy to make her party seem more inclusive and welcoming of individuals belonging to France's LGBTI community, with the aim of increasing LGBTI support for her political cause (Adamson, 2017; Dumitrescu, 2016). During the 2017 French Presidential elections, the RN received increased political support from a number of younger members of France's LGTBI community, who like her embrace "nationalist sentiments" (Adamson, 2017). MLP's LGBTI supporters also support the RN due to her softer stance than her father's on LGBTI rights, and because they perceive her as "a strong, combative, [and] honest woman" (Adamson, 2017).

Unlike her father, MLP has made attempts to rebrand her party and herself as more liberally progressive on social issues like same-sex civil unions (Brubaker, 2017; Downing, 2018). MLP has refrained from publicly supporting right-wing and conservative movements that seek to abolish marriage between people of the same sex (Goldhammer, 2015). In 2013, she did not join a protest against France's legalization of same-sex marriage; the main organizers of that protest were France's network of Catholic associations and conservative groups (Brubaker, 2017). However, in an attempt to appease her party's conservative and Catholic voters, her previous promise to abolish same-sex marriage was present throughout her political campaign for the 2017 French presidential elections (Adamson, 2017). For example, on 16 September 2016, MLP made a social post on Twitter, which stated how she would like to "end same-sex marriage and replace it with an improved form of civil unions"²⁵ for gay and lesbian couples (Demetriou, 2021; Le Pen M., 2016).

²⁵ In 2016, Marine Le Pen proposed repealing France's "Taubira Law," which allows for same-sex couples to adopt children and get married (Demetriou, 2021).

In summary, the RN continues to be socially conservative on LGBTI rights, as shown previously, regarding its stance on ending same-sex marriage (Demetriou, 2021; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017). Former RN Vice-president Florian Philippot even once publicly stated that the RN sees itself as being "French Friendly" rather than a "gay-friendly" party (Demetriou, 2021). Moreover, just because MLP has sought to make her party more inclusive for RN members, who are gay, does not mean that those members are not the victims of death threats and homophobia originating from within the party (Vinocur, 2016). A significant portion of the RN membership continues to have very conservative views on social issues – including LGTBI rights – plus several current and former gay party members, including Philippot, have been targeted by those conservative factions for being gay and politically outspoken (Vinocur, 2016).

D. Feminism, Traditional Family Values and Women's Rights

The RN's views on gender roles and women's rights are still socially conservative despite MLP seeking to soften her party's stance on those issues (Scrinzi, 2017). When her father was party leader, the RN did not even make attempts to make itself an ally of feminist movements (Demetriou, 2021). Instead, the party promoted traditional gender roles²⁶ (Demetriou, 2021; Downing, 2018; Scrinzi, 2017). The party's previous sexist views on gender roles and women's rights stemmed in part from JMLP's ultraconservative and sexist views on those issues (Downing, 2018; Scrinzi, 2017). JMLP belongs to a generation of far-right and socially conservative politicians, who mainly see women as caregivers, stay at home mothers and child-bearers (Downing, 2018; Scrinzi, 2017). In some cases, he has spoken positively about women, but only when referring to women like Joan of Arc or Marianne, whom he sees as embodiments of justice,

²⁶ Under Jean-Marie Le Pen's leadership, the RN implemented traditional gender roles within its ranks as the division of political tasks between party officials, activists and members were often based on their gender (Scrinzi, 2017). For example, women were sometimes tasked with conducting political work on social issues related to education and family values (Scrinzi, 2017).

freedom, patriotism, and warrior-like characteristics (Downing, 2018). However, similarly to his explicit comments on LGBTI people, he has not refrained from using sexist, misogynistic and derogatory language to refer to women and members of feminist movements (Downing, 2018).

Between the 1970s and early 2000s, the RN used a "traditional approach to address the issues of women's rights, family, and gender, which emphasized the importance of having women become 'mothers of the [French] nation'" (Scrinzi, 2017). JMLP and the RN promoted a wide range of measures – including maternal salary – to encourage French women to bear more children and devote themselves to the care of their infants and households in order to address the decreasing birth rate among French nationals (Scrinzi, 2017). On 1 May 1990, the RN even organized a demonstration – comprising RN women party members pushing empty baby carriages – to protest France's decreasing birth rate and chastise French women for not adhering to their childbearing duties (Downing, 2018). As well, in 1989-1990, the party used a poster depicting a Caucasian mother – with her two Caucasian kids – alongside a motto stating "the Front National represents you" to convey an image of the RN as the defender of traditional family values and protector of "white women" against non-white migrants (Downing, 2018). The same poster also called on women to take their childbearing and household responsibilities more seriously (Downing, 2018). More recently, in a 2016 interview, with French philosopher Eltchaninoff, JMLP mentioned how the RN's main "ideological tenets" throughout his leadership were centred around a number of principles, including traditional family values (Eltchaninoff, 2018). During the same interview, he blamed the "feminization of society" and feminist movements for encouraging women to become more independent, while expressing at the same time his disappointment towards women, who prioritize their professional careers instead of "their vital function of reproduction" (Eltchaninoff, 2018).

Concerning abortion, JMLP and his granddaughter, Marion Maréchal, have a pro-life stance on the issue, and are supportive of traditional family roles and values. Under the leadership of JMLP, the RN's pro-life stance was centred in part on the party's efforts to repeal France's abortion law, which was enacted in the late 1970s (Demetriou, 2021). JMLP has also made several explicit and sexist comments regarding abortion, such as when he mentioned in 1996 that pregnant women do not have the right to decide to undergo an abortion because their bodies belong to "nature" and to the French State (Scrinzi, 2017). He even once referred to abortion as genocide (Poirier, 2017). Furthermore, as someone who is more radically conservative on social issues than her aunt, Marion Maréchal has often clashed with MLP over the latter's decision to soften the RN's stance on abortion (Chrisafis, 2018; Demetriou, 2021; Poirier, 2017). Maréchal has expressed her support for the reversal of state-funded abortion in addition to stating, in 2013, that French families should only consist of heterosexual couples characterized by traditional family roles (Chrisafis, 2018; Demetriou, 2021; Poirier, 2017).

On the other hand, within the RN, MLP has attempted to instil a more progressive view of gender roles, abortion and feminism (Downing, 2018). MLP seems to be aware that if she wants to attract more women to support her party, she must break away from the party's previous ultraconservative stance on pro-life, women and gender-related issues (Scrinzi, 2017). As a result, she has called on her RN members, activists, and officials to become more supportive of women's rights, and to see women as "working mothers" instead of as "mothers of the [French] nation" (Downing, 2018; Scrinzi, 2017).

As a single mother of three children, MLP has placed an emphasis throughout her recent political campaigns on the important role working mothers like her play in contributing to society besides bearing children (Downing, 2018; Scrinzi, 2017). According to Francesca Scrinzi, MLP

wrote in her 2006 memoir, entitled *À contre flots*, about how she truly comprehends the plight of French working mothers (Scrinzi, 2017). MLP has made attempts to portray herself kind of like a patron saint of "modern" working mothers (Downing, 2018; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Scrinzi, 2017). She wants to be perceived as someone who seems to understand working mothers' efforts to balance their work life with raising a family (Downing, 2018; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Scrinzi, 2017). As well, MLP has rebranded the RN as a purveyor of "sexual modernity," gender equality, and even feminism (Downing, 2018; Eltchaninoff, 2018; Scrinzi, 2017). For example, in her 2017 electoral programme, she promised to implement a national plan to address the existing income inequality between French women and men (Le Pen M., 2017).

French philosopher Eltchaninoff refers to MLP's version of feminism as "contrasting feminism," which is basically a diluted version of feminism because she only seeks to invoke her support for past feminist movements and the status quo regarding women's rights (Eltchaninoff, 2018). In some of her "feminist" rhetoric, she has also praised the accomplishments of other women besides Joan of Arc, including Marie Curie and 18th-century women's rights activist Olympe de Gouges (Eltchaninoff, 2018). Moreover, she wants to be publicly seen as the defender of feminism and the "forgotten" working women, whom she sees as victims of the French political establishment (Scrinzi, 2017). In that regard, MLP accuses the political establishment of being sexist and betraying women (Scrinzi, 2017). According to her, mainstream politicians have given up on defending gender equality while continuing their promotion of neoliberal economic policies, which have negatively impacted the livelihood of working women (Scrinzi, 2017).

E. Chapter Conclusion

The RN's softening stance on moral issues – such as abortion, LGBTI rights, and women's rights – is part of MLP's strategy to de-demonize the RN (Downing, 2018; Eltchaninoff, 2018;

Stockemer, 2017). Her apparent embrace of LGTB rights, French secular values and feminism seems to be aimed at attracting more voters and political supporters, who might have been initially opposed to supporting the RN (Reuters, 2018). Yet, MLP uses political discourse and imagery linked to Christian values, secularism, LGBTI rights and feminism as veils to obscure her xenophobic, racist, and Islamophobic rhetoric (Adamson, 2017; Brubaker, 2017; Demetriou, 2021; Peker, 2020).

MLP and a number of other far-right politicians have used Christianity to define those who they perceive as "European" as "us" while depicting Muslims and other minorities – who do not seem to conform to European or Christian values – as "outsiders" (Brubaker, 2017; Green, 2017). They also employ Christianity as part of their nationalist rhetoric to convey a notion that a “clash of civilizations”²⁷ exists between Islam and the Western “Judeo-Christian”²⁸ World (Brubaker, 2017). MLP, alongside several other far-right politicians, has supported measures to ban the public display of religious symbols and clothing garbs linked to Islam, and even, Judaism (Brubaker, 2017; Green, 2017). On the other hand, they see crosses and other Christian symbols as representative of European traditions and western civilization (Brubaker, 2017; Green, 2017). Moreover, MLP has sometimes been photographed clearly wearing a crucifix around her neck during her speeches, and although she is vehemently opposed to any public display of religious symbols (Brubaker, 2017).

²⁷ American political scientist Samuel Huntington is credited with coining the term "clash of civilizations" to refer to future global conflicts caused by cultural and religious differences between certain countries and regions (Huntington, 1993).

²⁸ Despite his criticism of liberalism and secularism, Steve Bannon – who previously served in 2017 as chief strategist for former U.S. President Donald Trump – has made similar comments that there is an ongoing clash between "the Judeo-Christian West" and "jihadist Islamic fascism" (Brubaker, 2017; McCarthy, 2017). On 10 March 2018, Bannon attended and spoke at the RN's annual congress in Lille, France – where he publicly praised Marine Le Pen, and told RN party members and politicians to wear the labels of nativist, racist and xenophobe as badges of honour (Reuters, 2019; Winsor, 2018).

Regarding LGBTI rights, MLP has sought to portray herself as a supporter of French gay and lesbian people even though that stance contradicts her 2017 campaign promise to repeal same-sex marriage (Brubaker, 2017; D'Adesky, 2017). She has also not shied away from depicting herself as the protector of LGBTI people, whom she has argued are the victims of “[murdering and misogynistic] Islamists” (D'Adesky, 2017). In 2016, following the mass shooting at a gay night club in Orlando, United States, she publicly responded to the shooting by linking homophobia to Islam (Demetriou, 2021). At that time, she stated how "homosexuality is attacked in countries that live under the Islamist yoke" despite the Orlando shooting occurring in a country where Islam is not the state religion (Demetriou, 2021). Furthermore, MLP's has previously made claims about being empathetic towards the alleged plight and personal hardship experienced by gay people living in French suburbs (Mayer, 2013). Those claims are also examples of MLP's attempts to make her Islamophobic rhetoric more ambiguous and less publicly explicit (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Mayer, 2013). Because, in France, the term "suburb," or *banlieue* in French, is nowadays more often associated with several impoverished suburbs – which consist of large Muslim populations, and are located in the outskirts of some of the country's urban centres, including Paris (Bajekal & Vivienne, 2015; Packer, 2015; Scrinzi, 2017).

MLP's ambiguous and xenophobic comments on the alleged hardship experienced by gay people living in the suburbs also include references to Jewish people, women and French nationals and “white people,” whom she perceives to also be victims of Muslims living in those suburbs (Scrinzi, 2017). Therefore, her ambiguous comments on French suburbs are racist – as well – besides being Islamophobic and xenophobic (Scrinzi, 2017). Moreover, she is not the only far-right European politician to portray Islam as a threat to LGBTI rights (Brubaker, 2017). Similar Islamophobic rhetoric linked to LGBTI rights has been employed by far-right Dutch politicians

Geert Wilders and Pim Fortuyn (Brubaker, 2017; Matthews, 2016). As an openly gay politician, Fortuyn – who was assassinated in 2002 – is often credited with being the first far-right European politician to portray himself as a defender of LGBTI members against Islam's perceived threat (Brubaker, 2017; Matthews, 2016).

Not surprisingly, MLP also has linked her political stance on gender equality and feminism with migration and Islam (Eltchaninoff, 2018). As previously mentioned, MLP scapegoats Muslims and migrants for France's economic and societal woes and for the apparent threat, they pose to the country's gay population (Demetriou, 2021; Downing, 2018; Mayer, 2013). Likewise, she uses feminism as an element of her Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric to portray Islam as a threat to women's rights (Eltchaninoff, 2018). MLP has blamed mass migration – especially from Muslim countries – for creating a scenario where French women living in certain suburbs are no longer able to freely express themselves through the wearing of clothing (Eltchaninoff, 2018). She perceives the wearing of hijabs, burkas, niqabs and burkinis by Muslim women as symbols of patriarchal oppression (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Foreign Affairs, 2016; Poirier, 2017). Furthermore, in her political discourse, MLP presents French "working women" as the ideal opposite to Muslim women, whom she perceives as victims of their own patriarchal culture and Islam (Demetriou, 2021). However, several feminist groups and women's rights organizations have criticized her for not truly being a feminist (Demetriou, 2021; Poirier, 2017). Those groups accuse her of appropriating certain feminist elements to promote anti-immigrant policies and xenophobic rhetoric towards migrants, especially Muslims (Demetriou, 2021; Poirier, 2017).

Lastly, MLP has sought to advance her Islamophobic agenda – which she often links to secularism – by taking advantage of the growing anxieties and fears among certain segments of the French population regarding Islamic radicalization (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Stockemer, 2017;

Peker, 2020). Throughout France, the recent death of French teacher Samuel Paty²⁹ at the hands of a young Muslim man and the previous terrorist attacks of the mid-2010s – including the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack – have fueled Islamophobic sentiments within the country (Bryant, 2020; Onishi & Méheut, 2020). Those acts of terrorism have led to further nationwide debates about the compatibility of Islam with French secular and republican values, and questions about French Muslims' loyalty towards the French State (Agence France-Presse, 2021; Barton & Mansouri, 2020; Bryant, 2020). However, several questions have arisen on whether domestic terrorist attacks perpetrated by young French Muslim men are the consequential and perceived failures of France's integration policies and stringent secular laws (Bryant, 2020; Cornish, 2015; Shain, 2010). Those laws and policies could be contributing factors to the recent increase in Islamic radicalization among several young French Muslim men, who see themselves and their respective communities as being shunned by the rest of French society (Bryant, 2020; Cornish, 2015; Shain, 2010).

²⁹ On 16 October 2020, a young Muslim man killed French teacher Samuel Paty after several students told him that Paty had shown them in a class on free speech caricatures previously published by Charlie Hebdo of the Prophet Muhammad (Onishi & Méheut, 2020).

Chapter 4: The Bigger Picture

The RN's recent rise in French politics and its "growing influence" over mainstream politics is not exclusive to France (Brubaker, 2017; Michelot & Quencez, 2017). Throughout Europe, other far-right political parties – which tend to promote similar xenophobic and Islamophobic views as to those of the RN – have become prominent yet again (BBC News, 2019). Many of those parties have garnered enough electoral votes to win a significant number of seats in their respective national legislatures or the European Parliament (BBC News, 2019). For example, *Vox* – a Spanish far-right party – is now the third-largest political party in Spain (Rama & Zanotti, 2020). With strong anti-immigrant and nationalist inclinations, those political parties have also been elected into government in certain eastern European countries. In 2010, Hungary's far-right and populist party *Fidesz* led by Viktor Orbán was elected into government, and over time, Orbán's government has become more authoritarian (Brubaker, 2017).

The RN has recently been able to form closer ties with like-minded European politicians – including the leader of Italy's far-right *Lega*, Matteo Salvini – who are currently leading other far-right political parties (Barbière, 2019). Like MLP, other far-right political leaders have been opposed to increased globalization and increased immigration from developing countries to developed countries, which they criticize for supposedly undermining traditional values and communities in western countries (Crouch, 2018). Furthermore, within the European Parliament, as of 25 January 2021, the RN's Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are part of a far-right political coalition comprising 75 MEPs, who belong to the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) parliamentary group (Identity and Democracy, 2020; European Parliament, 2021). The ID parliamentary group includes Italy's *Lega*, with 28 MEPs; France's RN, with 23 MEPs; and Germany's Alternative for Germany, with 11 MEPs (European Parliament, 2021). Also,

approximately one-quarter of the European Parliament's current membership includes MEPs, who either belong to far-right or right-wing parties (Davis & Rivera, 2019). For example, the European Conservatives and Reformists, which currently has 62 seats, also comprises right-wing political parties like Poland's Law and Justice party, which shares similar anti-immigration and anti-muslim sentiments as the RN (Brubaker, 2017; European Parliament, 2021; Davis & Rivera, 2019).

Outside of Europe, far-right politicians – including Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro – and politicians with populist tendencies have also been elected (Goldstein, 2019; Schneider, 2020). Brazilian President Bolsonaro has not shied away from publicly expressing his support for the right-wing military leaders of Brazil's right-wing military dictatorship of 1964-1985 (Schneider, 2020). In 2019, he even left the far-right Social Liberal Party to form his own far-right party, Alliance for Brazil (Deutsche Welle, 2019). Like MLP, he has also employed populist rhetoric to portray himself as the voice of the working classes and those left behind by globalization (Mudde, 2016; Goldstein, 2019). Furthermore, Brazilian President Bolsonaro is known for making disparaging comments against minorities, Indigenous peoples, women, and Brazil's LGBTI community (Goldstein, 2019; Schneider, 2020).

In the United States, former President Trump appropriated similar rhetoric nowadays more often associated with right-wing populists throughout his presidency and 2016 presidential campaign (Kazin, 2016; Tabachnick, 2019). He used populist rhetoric to convince the American working class that he cares about them and those negatively affected by globalization (Ayala-Hurtado, Lamont, & Park, 2017). He also used populist language to portray himself as a political outsider, who is standing up to the “global elites” and political establishment on behalf of the American working class despite actually being a billionaire (Ayala-Hurtado, Lamont, & Park, 2017; Cohen, 2020; Keaten & Wiseman, 2019; Trump, 2020). Furthermore, the 6 January 2021

“domestic terrorism” attack on the U.S. Capitol by a wide range of Trump supporters – including far-right extremists, white supremacists, confederate sympathizers, neo-Nazis, QAnon conspiracists, U.S armed forces veterans, and even, a member of the Trump administration³⁰ – shows the threat that rhetoric employed by demagogues could pose to democracy itself (Kornfield, 2021; Foa & Mounck, 2016; Smith, 2021). Former U.S. President Trump and other demagogues – including U.S. Representatives Marjorie Taylor Greene and Matt Gaetz – have previously promoted xenophobic and racist views against minorities and migrants, but also conspiracy theories aimed at further diminishing the public’s trust in democracy and its political institutions (Cohen S. , 2020; Kornfield, 2021; Foa & Mounck, 2016; Smith S. M., 2021; Zurcher, 2021).

The rise of far-right politicians like MLP, populists, and demagogues, such as former U.S President Trump, is representative of the recent decline of democracy across several countries (Foa & Mounck, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). The rise of populism is also linked to multiple factors – including people's growing mistrust in existing democratic institutions, the political establishment and western liberal institutions; the growing left-right polarization within a number of western democracies; the rise in domestic terrorism; and the loss of traditional blue-collar jobs to increased globalization (Foa & Mounck, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Luce, 2017). Another factor is right-wing populists’ and far-right politicians' ability to tap into the fears and anxiety of certain white people, who feel threatened by the growing number of migrants and non-white minorities living in their communities (Chatterton Williams, 2017). In that regard, MLP, alongside demagogues like Gaetz and other far-right politicians, has employed French writer Renaud Camus's *Le grand remplacement* theory – which claims that non-white minorities are working

³⁰ On 4 March 2021, Federico Klein – who served as a Trump administration appointee to the U.S. State Department from 2017 until 19 January 2021 and previously worked in former President Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign – was arrested by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI] for his involvement in the 6 January 2021 attack on the U.S Capitol. He faces several criminal charges, including for using a riot shield as a weapon to assault police officers during the attack (Durkin Richer, 2021).

towards replacing white people in western societies – as part of their xenophobic and racist rhetoric (Chatterton Williams, 2017; Cohen S., 2020; Eltchaninoff, 2018).

Of note, the phenomenon of subverting democracy is also coming from several left-wing populists and far-left politicians, especially in Latin America (Kurmanaev, 2020). For instance, left-wing Mexican President López Obrador's (AMLO's) victory in his country's 2018 presidential elections – and his ongoing strong levels of approval among Mexicans – shows in part that there is strong support from within certain democracies towards left-wing anti-establishment and populist leaders (Moreno, 2020; Financial Times, 2020). AMLO is also not the first Latin American left-wing and populist leader to undermine the authority of democratic institutions through the increased centralization of power within the executive branch in recent years (Kurmanaev, 2020; Financial Times, 2020). There have been other left-wing and far-left Latin American leaders – such as Hugo Chavez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Nestor Kirchner and Christina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua – who carried out anti-democratic or authoritarian policies (Belli, 2018; Kurmanaev, 2020; Philipps, 2020).

Main Conclusion

The RN's de-demonization has succeeded to the extent that it is no longer considered a single-issue party (Bastow, 2018; Stockemer, 2019). It seeks to broaden its political appeal to a wider audience besides traditional RN voters. Although immigration continues to be an important issue for the party, the RN has continued to expand its policy agenda to propose solutions to other issues, including high unemployment among France's working classes (Le Pen M., 2017). For instance, as part of her attempts to appropriate policies previously associated with left-wing and pro-labour political movements, MLP promised – in 2017 – to increase wages for low-income individuals (Bastow, 2018; Le Pen M., 2017). As Stockemer concludes in his 2019 article – which analyzes the party's and RN supporter's media posts on Facebook – several far-right parties like the RN have developed over time “policy propositions in the realm of the economy, Europe, and national security” (Stockemer, 2019). Furthermore, under MLP's leadership, the RN launched its own “nationalist” environmental agenda in 2014, entitled *Nouvelle Écologie*, to promote environmentally friendly policies, including a proposal to expand France's development and use of renewable energies, such as solar energy (Astier M., 2017; Keating, 2017). In her 2017 electoral programme, MLP also promised to develop France's renewable energy sector further and reduce its dependence on fossil fuels through increased research and development in clean energy production (Le Pen M., 2017).

Another success regarding the RN's de-demonization strategy is linked to the party being perceived as more inclusive regarding its electoral base and party membership than it was under her father's leadership (Astier, 2014; Eltchaninoff, 2018). As previously mentioned, the RN has managed to increase its political support among France's youth population and certain segments of the country's LGBTI, Jewish and migrants communities due to her decision to soften her party's

stance on several social issues. (Adamson, 2017; Chalk, 2017; Geva, 2020). The de-demonization strategy has also managed to convince more French voters that the RN is no longer closely associated with its neo-fascist roots and neo-Nazi skinheads since MLP has worked to eliminate any negativity surrounding her father's political and neo-fascist legacy (Melander, 2017; Symons, 2017). An increasing number of MLP's youth followers are also no longer ashamed to publicly identify themselves as RN supporters or afraid to be interviewed by media outlets (Melander, 2017). For example, during the 2017 presidential elections, several members from the RN's youth movement agreed to be publicly interviewed by the news agency *Reuters* without having to hide their personal identities, which according to the news agency, was a new phenomenon because, during previous elections, RN youth supporters asked journalists not to publish their names (Melander, 2017). In sum, the RN's de-demonization strategy has helped to de-stigmatize to some extent the party's public image and that of MLP and her supporters. Far-right parties like the RN have been "gaining broader [electoral and political] acceptance [by] gradually chipping away at the stigma surrounding them" (Nathanson, 2020).

The RN's de-demonization strategy has also successfully transformed the RN from a fringe party to an important and influential political actor in mainstream French politics (Bastows, 2018). Even though the RN has not won any of France's presidential elections and legislative elections, it has succeeded in "shifting [within French politics] the debate on immigration, secularism, and security to the right" (Mohdin, 2017). The RN's growing popularity due in part to its de-demonization strategy has contributed to certain mainstream political parties' attempts to appropriate certain elements of its immigration policies and xenophobic rhetoric as part of their efforts to stop France's far-right from further gaining political support (Knapp, 2017; Laxer, 2019; Peker, 2020). Mainstream French politicians on the right have co-opted certain far-right elements

of the RN's anti-immigration policies and anti-Muslim stance to persuade RN supporters to vote for them instead of MLP (Laxer, 2019). For instance, Nicolas Sarkozy of the then centre-right *UMP* party won France's 2007 presidential elections. During those elections, Sarkozy³¹ persuaded some of the RN's supporters to vote for him because he appropriated certain elements of the RN's xenophobic rhetoric on immigration and Islam (Laxer, 2019). Leading up to the 2012 presidential elections, Sarkozy made further attempts to appropriate some of the RN's far-right policies and rhetoric on Islam and immigration as part of his strategy to attract voters, who would usually vote for the RN, to support his political cause (Bastow, 2018). In 2012, then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who was running for re-election, even promised to limit social benefits for legal migrants, and reduce immigration to France by half (Chrisafis, 2012). These developments illustrate how several of France's centre-right parties and politicians have drifted further right on issues like immigration in an effort to compete with the RN's growing popularity (Bastow, 2018).

Among those centre-right and right-wing politicians, a growing common consensus also exists about Islam posing a threat to French republican values, including secularism, and France itself (Bastow, 2018; Laxer, 2019). For example, *Les Républicains* presidential candidate, François Fillon, promoted xenophobic rhetoric during France's 2017 presidential elections that echoed the RN's Islamophobia towards Muslims when he once compared radical Islam to "totalitarianism [under] the Nazis" and accused French Muslims of "[denouncing] the values of the [French] republic" (Mohdin, 2017). Fillon also called for immigration to France to be restricted (Mohdin,

³¹ Nicolas Sarkozy was President of France from 2007 until 2012; he launched a presidential bid for re-election in 2012 but eventually lost to former French President Francois Holland (Zaretsky, 2016). Sarkozy also tried to run for president in 2016. However, in 2016, he lost *Les Républicains*' nomination to François Fillon, who then lost the first-round runoff of France's 2017 presidential elections to Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron (Chrisafis, 2016; Oliver & Sollety, 2017). In March 2021, Sarkozy was indicted on corruption charges and sentenced to a one-year prison sentence for attempting to bribe a judicial magistrate "in exchange for information about a legal case in which he was implicated" (Associated Press, 2021).

2017). As well, the centre-right French government of former French President Chirac is reported to have enacted France's 2004 ban on the wearing of religious garbs and clothing partly based on Chirac's decision to then distract voters from his decreasing political popularity as a result of the country's low economic growth, increased police brutality towards migrants and a rise in immigrant-led riots across France's main suburbs during the early 2000s (Mohdin, 2017). According to journalist Aamna Mohdin, Chirac's decision to enact France's 2004 ban on face coverings demonstrates how Chirac eventually "bowed to the [RN's] fearmongering" and Islamophobia aimed at targeting the country's Muslim population (Mohdin, 2017).

François Hollande – a center-left politician and French president from 2012 to 2017 – has also made several comments in the past that are critical of increased migration to France and which echo some of the RN's anti-immigration rhetoric (France 24, 2016; Kroet, 2016; Zaretsky, 2016). In 2016, as part of a series of approximately 60 interviews with journalists Gérard Davet and Fabrice Lhomme, then-French President Hollande reportedly said that "there have been too many arrivals, too much immigration [in France] ... and at some point, it has to stop" (France 24, 2016; Kroet, 2016). Former French President Hollande's 2016 comments on immigration contradict several of his previous immigration remarks from 2014. In that year, he was reported to have defended the important contributions made by migrants to French society and condemned the RN's and Sarkozy's xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia (Dodman, 2014). Of note, the far-left political party *France Insoumise* previously rejected calls for France to host a portion of North African and Middle Eastern migrants seeking refuge in Europe despite Jean-Luc Mélenchon's constant condemnation of Islamophobia and xenophobia (Crouch, 2018; Saad, 2020).

It is also important to note that the RN is not the only party that has promoted strict immigration laws and policies, possibly representing a growing acceptance of the party's strict immigration

policies among certain mainstream French politicians and government officials (Le Pen M., 2017; Laxer, 2019). In an attempt to address France's immigration issue, previous French governments have implemented strict immigration policies over the decades, which have been aimed at limiting the inflow of migrants into France (Murphy, 2006; Hilliar, 2020). For instance, in 2006 and 2018, respectively, the French government introduced and adopted legislation to improve France's immigration and asylum system and combat illegal immigration (Murphy, 2006; Hilliar, 2020). However, the two pieces of legislation also attempted to limit the number of migrants and refugees that would have access to asylum and permanent residency in France (Koenig, 2019; Lotem, 2018; Murphy, 2006). Furthermore, the 2006 immigration law – which was introduced to the National Assembly by then French Minister of the Interior Sarkozy – was aimed at using controlled migration to integrate migrants into French society better (Murphy, 2006). The 2006 immigration law permitted France's government to be selective on which types of migrants are allowed to remain based on their ability to properly adapt and contribute to French society in addition to embracing French values (Murphy, 2006).

Concerning France's 2018 immigration law, critics of French President Macron and human rights activities have criticized the 2018 law for weakening the rights of asylum seekers and migrants and for reflecting a "traditional right-wing policy [approach]" to tackling France's policy issue of immigration (Koenig, 2019). French President Macron has also recently been accused of attempting to attract far-right wing voters – including RN supporters – to his political cause after his government announced – in November 2019 – a labour quota³² on the number of work visas given annually to foreign nationals (Chrisafis, 2019; France 24, 2020). Nevertheless, French

³² French President Macron's Immigration labour quota aims to address France's hiring needs and implement a similar immigration program for regulating the flow of labour-skilled migrants as that of countries like Canada and Australia (Chrisafis, 2019; France 24, 2020).

President Macron's labour migration quota demonstrates a shift away from his former more liberal stance on immigration (Chrisafis, 2019; Wolff, 2017). In 2017, he was opposed to the idea of implementing an immigration quota of any type and mentioned: "that asylum is ... [an important] right [for asylum seekers], and migrants are a strength for the economy" (Chrisafis, 2019; Wolff, 2017).

In short, the appropriation of certain elements of the RN's xenophobic rhetoric and policies by several French government officials and mainstream politicians shows how those actors have become entrapped by the RN's political influence on several issues, especially immigration (Bastows, 2018; Laxer, 2019; Mohdin, 2017). As pointed out above, several of MLP's main political opponents on the right and within the conservative sphere have sought to counter the far-right party's increasing popularity through any possible avenue. Even it means for those politicians to drag themselves down to the same low level as the RN and its far-right ideals on immigration to promote similar xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric often associated with far-right parties (Bastows, 2018; Laxer, 2019).

MLP's de-demonization strategy has also created several challenges regarding the party's future. One of those challenges is linked to whether the RN will continue on its trajectory to further become part of mainstream French politics by softening its stance on social issues and appropriating left-wing economic policies. Not everyone who is an RN member or supporter is supportive of MLP's efforts to soften the party's stance on a wide range of issues, including LGBTI rights and abortion. MLP's embrace of a broader range of voters and softening of her party's stance on social issues has caused her party to lose electoral and political support from several RN's members, who supported her father's more conservative views and explicit comments on immigration, race, and anti-Semitism (Geva, 2020; Mayer, 2013; Rioux, 2020). A number of her

political allies, such as Béziers Mayor Robert Ménard, have even questioned whether MLP's de-demonization strategy could actually bring her some unexpected negative consequences concerning her ultra-conservative supporters (Rioux, 2020). Perhaps, in France's next elections, MLP could lose some support from more conservative supporters if she continues to appropriate left-wing policies on social and economic issues (Rioux, 2020).

In a 2020 interview, Ménard told Canada's *Le Devoir* how MLP's appropriation of several left-wing policies has made it more challenging for voters to discern her stance on labour and economic issues from that of far-left French politician Mélenchon (Rioux, 2020). In turn, certain voters' inability to distinguish her economic agenda from that of Mélenchon could negatively affect her chances of attracting increased political support from the right and conservatives to her cause (Rioux, 2020). Marion Maréchal's departure from the RN in 2017 also indicates that MLP could further lose to some extent political support from some of her family members either based on a clash of political ideologies or her continued failure to win France's presidential elections (Smith S., 2017). Even her father did not shy away from demanding that MLP resign as party leader following the latter's loss to Macron in France's 2017 presidential elections (Vinocur, 2017). After those elections, several RN party members also allegedly called on MLP to return the party to its more socially conservative, nativist and far-right roots and "drop any pretensions of further courting" voters on the left (Chrisafis, 2017).

The second challenge of MLP's de-demonization strategy encompasses her ability to address any future tensions and ideological conflicts among the party's different factions even though she continues to rule the RN with "an iron fist" (Stockemer, 2017). It is impossible for there not to be any form of internal tensions within the RN's membership as MLP seeks to attract increased political support from a wide range of political supporters, who the party's traditional

base might not fully embrace. As discussed before in the third chapter, the party is not really inclusive, especially for individuals not traditionally associated with the party – such as gay people, who have been subjected to death threats and homophobic slurs originating from segments of the RN's ultra-conservative factions (Vinocur, 2016). And as in the case of Philippot, far-right and ultra-conservative party members have scapegoated party members – who embrace more progressive views on social issues – for any of MLP's recent electoral failures (Chassany, 2017; Chrisafis, 2017). Some of the ultra-conservative and far-right party members were even critical of Philippot's push for having the RN embrace a more socially progressive agenda (Chrisafis, 2017). They also blamed Philippot's political influence over MLP as a reason why the RN lost the French 2017 presidential elections. (Chassany, 2017; Chrisafis, 2017). Therefore, an important question remains on whether the RN could continue to survive in mainstream politics if MLP's political movement were to implode like the Netherland's far-right Forum for Democracy (FvD)³³ party due to possible in-fighting in the future among the RN's opposing factions over a difference in ideologies or politically damaging scandals (Barber, 2021; Mudde, 2020). As well, like Wilders' Far-right Party for Freedom party, the RN could potentially lose some political support if increased migration, especially from Muslim countries, was to become a less pressing electoral issue since MLP scapegoats Muslims and migrants for France's societal and economic woes (Barber, 2021; Eltchaninoff, 2018).

Another important challenge for MLP – and even for mainstream politics – regarding the RN's de-demonization strategy is linked to the party's "neither left nor right, but French" slogan. She has used the neither left nor right slogan not only to portray the RN as a non-establishment party

³³ The Forum for Democracy became an important actor in Dutch politics after winning the Netherland's 2019 provincial elections (Barber, 2021). However, in 2020, the FvD lost its political momentum as a result of internal confrontations among party members over several political scandals linked to "cases of anti-semitism and racism" within the FvD's youth movement; and the eventual resignation of the party's leader Thierry Baudet (Mudde, 2020).

but also as a nationalist party (Eltchaninoff, 2018). For example, in a 2020 interview, with the UK's *Telegraph*, MLP said that she “no longer believe[s] in a “left-right [political] split,” but in “a new split between globalists and nationalists,” who like her seek to promote nationalist ideas to “guarantee the security and protect the identity of the [French] people” (The Telegraph, 2020). MLP's decision to position the RN as a neither or left party could somewhat hamper her efforts to soften the party's public image because that political position provides more opportunities for some of her opponents like Mélenchon³⁴ to continue calling her a fascist (Eltchaninoff, 2018; McPartland, 2014). As previously mentioned, the RN has fascist roots. Some of the party's founding members included anti-Semites, Nazi sympathizers, neo-fascists and former Vichy collaborationists (Stockemer, 2017).

French philosopher Eltchaninoff has argued that the RN's “neither left nor right, but French” slogan echoes similar ideals embraced by 20th-century national socialists and fascists, and that it represents “a third way” besides conservatism and liberalism of doing politics (Eltchaninoff, 2018). Like MLP, national socialist leaders – such as Hitler – and other fascist politicians during the 20th century promoted xenophobic, nativist, racist and anti-semitic rhetoric and policies in addition to portraying themselves as the people's protectors against the threat of the global and political elites (Berman, 2016; Eltchaninoff, 2018). Even the RN's continuous push to have a French society comprised of citizens – who share the same race, blood and culture – echo similar nativist discourses employed by 20th-century reactionary modernists, including the Nazis, against minorities and the Jewish people (Herf, 1984; The Economist, 2019; Alduy, 2017). Of note, there are still Holocaust deniers, anti-Semites and Nazi sympathizers among the party's ranks, which

³⁴ Far-left politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon called Marine Le-Pen a fascist when someone questioned him – in 2012 – about an election poll showing the latter as a leading political candidate in France's 2012 presidential elections. In response to the question about that poll, Mélenchon was reported to have said the following: “Why do you think that the French people would be the only people to want a fascist as a leader?” (McPartland, 2014).

further indicates that MLP's rhetoric on dismissing neo-Nazis and skinheads from her party and reality do not match up (Symons, 2017). In fact, one of her closest advisors, Frédéric Chatillon, has been accused of promoting antisemitism; performed the Nazi salute in 1993 during a commemoration event of the Algerian war; and has even been reported to have organized past events celebrating Adolf Hitler's birthday (Brigaudeau, 2017; Symons, 2017). However, as Sheri Berman states in her 2016 article, entitled *Populism is Not Fascism*, MLP should not be labelled as a fascist. In that article, Berman mentions how even though MLP embraces similar ideals as Hitler on immigration, citizenship, race, and capitalism, MLP is not fully committed to overthrowing democracy (Berman, 2016).

Instead, MLP wants to make democracies "more efficient... and responsive" to citizens' needs, and considers herself the democratic voice of the people (Berman, 2016). In some of her speeches, MLP has referred to the global elites and international organizations – including the EU – as anti-democratic (Berman, 2016; Stockemer, 2017). For instance, during a 2017 press conference, MLP used pro-democracy rhetoric to call on RN supporters and voters "to support more than ever the National Front and democracy" against the alleged threat of global financial bankers' attempts to influence France's democratic process (Le Pen M., 2017). According to Edward Luce, the global stateless elite whose interests are not to the country where they are from have indeed focused on their prosperity rather than helping the poor and middle classes, who have been left out by globalization (Luce, 2017). Moreover, several international institutions led by unelected officials have binding rules that dictate some of the decisions taken by their member states – including western democracies – regarding issues like trade and immigration (Luce, 2017; Drolet & Williams, 2020).

Nevertheless, as both Berman and Luce have argued, MLP and other politicians like Trump are the "symptoms" of troubled democracies (Berman, 2016; Luce, 2016). In flawed democracies³⁵ like the United States and France, far-right and populist politicians have become more popular due to mainstream politicians' inability to address pressing socio-economic issues – including stagnant wages, increased political corruption, public insecurity and income inequality (Berman, 2016; Luce 2016). The RN's political rise does pose a threat to democracy because the party takes advantage of socio-economic crises to advance its political agenda, and could seek to establish an illiberal democracy in France once elected into power (Eltchaninoff, 2018; Michelot & Quencez, 2017; Stockemer, 2017). Just like the RN's de-demonization strategy seems to be more rhetorical than substantive, MLP's pro-democracy rhetoric could also be a rhetorical ploy to attract more voters to her cause (Berman, 2016; Stockemer, 2017).

To conclude, although MLP lost France's Presidential 2017 elections, the RN's political influence on French mainstream politics remains somewhat strong (Belkin, 2018). Two years later, during France's 2019 elections to the European parliament, MLP's RN defeated French President Macron's LRM and Former French President Hollande's Socialist Party during those elections to win the highest number of seats in the EU parliament (Baker, 2019; Henley, 2017). Moreover, MLP could reach the second-round runoff of the country's upcoming 2022 presidential elections due to several contributing factors, including the lack of viable presidential candidates from France's mainstream political parties (Rosman, 2020; Torsoli, 2020; Smith J., 2020). Other factors include French President Macron's recent decreasing popularity due to his mismanagement

³⁵ According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's [EIU's] 2020 Democracy Index, France and the United States, which both ranked 24th and 25th out of 167, respectively, are flawed democracies. The EIU defines flawed democracies as countries where free and fair elections are held and civil liberties are respected. However, within those countries a wide range of issues can be present, including widespread corruption, low levels of political and civil participation, weak rule of law, and constant harassment of journalists (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021).

of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economy; his inability to effectively address France's pressing socio-economic issues; and the fact that immigration and domestic terrorism both continue to be important electoral issues in France (Rosman, 2020; Smith J. , 2020; Sollety, 2021).

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