EMMANUEL MACRON AND THE PASSIVE REVOLUTION OF FRENCH NEOLIBERALISM.
DISCIPLINE, DEFECTION AND DISSENT IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH POLITICS

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

JUNE 2022

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Abstract

Understanding the rise of Emmanuel Macron – and by extension, the expansion of French neoliberalism – necessarily entails a breakdown of traditional disciplinary boundaries. Political science alone cannot account for the seemingly contradictory patterns and dialectics of change and continuity inherent to the current French moment. Concepts and ontologies derived from history, economics, sociology, discourse analysis, international relations and political science must be mobilised and fused in this endeavour. In parallel, linguistic gaps – from French to English, and inversely – must also be bridged so as to combine the proximity offered by the source-language and the perspective afforded by the foreign language. An original contribution of this dissertation is thus to offer a single integrated approach – both in disciplinary and linguistic terms, drawing on various perspectives and upon both French and English language sources – to the election of Emmanuel Macron and its implications for French politics, economics, society, as well as social theory.

This research first aims to situate Emmanuel Macron's election in the *longue durée* of neoliberalisation efforts in France in order to contextualise the long decay of the traditional Left and Right, as such deliquescence laid the ground for the recourse to rigid solutions of the 'Caesarist' type which Emmanuel Macron seems to incarnate. Against this background, Fernand Braudel's conception of the *longue durée* is mobilised to delineate the long-term cycles and to distinguish the socio-political trends that derive from conjunctural circumstances from other types of tendencies which are deeply inscribed in the structural dimensions of society and politics. This study seeks to contribute to the development of a neo-Gramscian perspective on French politics, highlighting the French state's organic crisis and the role of organic intellectuals and subaltern social groups in the formation of historic blocs. It thus problematizes the strategic project of Emmanuel Macron as a molecular and group-specific *trasformismo* from the 'extreme centre' that gave way to a form of 'authoritarian anti-populism'. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of this project from above and its associated mode of governance – analysed as a 'passive revolution' with Caesarist elements – remains contested by opposition and resistance from 'subaltern' social groups in contemporary France.

Keywords: French politics, European politics, Antonio Gramsci, passive revolution, trasformismo, neoliberalism, longue durée

Acknowledgments

There is no such thing as ‘individual’ success, and the path towards completion of my PhD was paved with the generous help and kind support of mentors, colleagues, friends and family. This section acknowledges their influence on my academic and personal journey.

First and foremost, I would like to pay tribute to my mentor, and dare I say my colleague and friend, Professor Stephen Gill. None of the achievements during my doctoral journey would have been possible without Professor Gill’s great supervision, patient advice and thorough training. The very first class I attended at York University, days after landing in Toronto in the fall of 2016, was Professor Gill’s IR and IPE doctoral core course, where I was introduced to European authors (primarily Antonio Gramsci and Fernand Braudel) that I never had the occasion to study in France. Later on, Stephen Gill’s concepts (disciplinary neoliberalism, new constitutionalism) helped me develop a detailed analytical perception of French and European politics. But beyond academic concepts, Professor Gill’s erudition as well as expert supervision, encouragement and mentorship were key factors in developing insights on the politics of my own country, from Canada. I owe a great deal to Stephen in so many ways, and much of his advice will stay with me for the rest of my life.

I would also like to extend a warm thanks to my committee members Isabella Bakker and Stefan Kipfer. Isa Bakker’s advice and guidance throughout the different stages of this project helped me ask the right kind of questions on topics related to living conditions, subsistence and social reproduction in contemporary France. In particular, the questions and points that Professor Bakker raised during the defence help me draw new lines of inquiry to better frame the Yellow Vests movement as a crisis of social reproduction. I am grateful for Stefan Kipfer’s keen interest in the project and for his kind intellectual support. His expert knowledge of Gramscian theory and his deep familiarity with the French context have been invaluable and the last chapter on resistance in contemporary France owes much to Professor Kipfer’s influence. Some of the most promising and interesting leads for continuing and deepening this research have also been suggested by Isa and Stefan.

I would like to thank Heather MacRae, Justin Podur and Magnus Ryner for serving on my oral examination committee. I thank Professor MacRae for her thorough reading of my work and for the fascinating points that she made in relation to France’s role in the European Union. Professor MacRae was also the best possible chair for the defence, making the proceedings as smooth as can be. Professor Podur’s very stimulating questions drew new lines of inquiry on the French Left’s ‘war of position’, as well as on the deeper imperial roots of the French social formation and political economy.

I am very grateful to Magnus Ryner, who has been an exceptional external examiner. The ontological, methodological and epistemological questions that Professor Ryner raised during the defence are absolutely crucial for my future research endeavors. The reflections Magnus Ryner shared about the unit of analysis, the role of contingency in the social sciences, and the absence of linearity in economic and political history are extremely valuable. Overall, I have tremendously enjoyed the conversations and debates that I have had with all the distinguished internal and external members of the defence committee!

I would like to thank the administrative team from the Department of Politics – in particular Jlenya Sarra-de-Meo, Margo Barreto, Rose Gallucci and Despina Klinakis – for their precious

help as well as patient and careful advice on how to deal with the intricacies of the university system.

I would also like to thank my friends from Toronto. My academic colleagues, who I hold in high esteem and with whom I have the most interesting conversations about world affairs, have helped me grow as a researcher and as a person. For this, I thank Blake Stewart, Demet Evrenosoglu, Patrick Desjardins, Mike He and Alban Bargain. My friends outside of academia have been the most supportive as well, thanks to their humour and energy, and I thank Olivia and Julien Youngblud, Kat Duma and Colette Todoroff for the good times shared together.

My friends from France have been an integral part of my journey, both in Europe and Canada. I warmly thank Élise Phamgia, Loris Dérédec, Lolita Fauverte, Timothée Voyez, Éléonor Ouvrard, Marion Ducasse, Flore Montoyat, Marie-Louise Thebault, Corentin Bécrit and Sandhya Babin for their support and love. I feel blessed and grateful to be able to count on such old and faithful friends.

I owe much to my family as well, in particular to my parents Catherine Bortels and Bernard Biscahie, who both taught me the joy of reading and the importance of intellectual curiosity. My siblings Éva, Aurélien and Léopold Biscahie have also been there in good and in bad times, and bring me joy every time I get to spend time with them in our home in Forcalquier. I am grateful for all the discussions and moral support from my grandparents Marie-Claire and Jean Biscahie, Cécile Royer and André Bortels.

Most of all, I would like to thank my partner Cedric Galapia. As the person closest to me, Cedric has had to take some of the strain of this four-year-long project. His love and encouragement have been so precious as this thesis was coming to fruition. I could never have gone through all this without Cedric, and this dissertation is dedicated to him.

Forcalquier, 14 July 2022.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC: Alliance Centriste
AfD: Alternative für Deutschland
APL: Aides Personnelles au Logement
ATTAC: Association pour la taxation des transactions financières et pour l'action citoyenne
BAC: Brigade Anti-Criminalité
BPI: Banque Publique d'Investissement
BRAV-M: Brigade de Répression de l'Action Violente Motorisée
CAP 22: Comité Action Publique 2022
CDU: Christian Democratic Union of Germany
CERES: Centre d'Etudes, de Recherches et d'Education Socialiste
CFDT: Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail
CGT: Confédération Générale du Travail
CICE: Crédit d'Impôt Compétitivité Emploi
CIRL: Centre International d'Etudes pour la Rénovation du Libéralisme
CMU: Couverture Maladie Universelle
CPE: Contrat Première Embauche
CRS: Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité
CSG: Contribution Sociale Généralisée
DGFiP: Direction Générale des Finances Publiques
DLF: Debout La France
DVD: Divers Droit
DVG: Divers Gauche
ECB: European Central Bank
ECSC: European Coal and Steel Community
ECU: European Currency Unit
EDB: Excessive Deficit Procedure
EDF: Electricité de France
EELV: Europe Ecologie Les Verts
ELAN: Loi pour l'Évolution du Logement, de l'Aménagement et du Numérique
EM: En Marche !
EMS: European Monetary System
EMU: Economic and Monetary Union
ENA: Ecole Nationale d'Administration
EU: European Union
FLN: Front de Libération Nationale
FN: Front National
FNRI: Fédération Nationale des Républicains et Indépendants
FO: Force Ouvrière
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
GRECE: Groupement de Recherche et d'Études pour la Civilisation Européenne
GUSR: Guadeloupe Unie, Solidaire et Responsable

HLM: Habitation à Loyer Modéré
IFI: Impôt sur la Fortune Immobilière
IGF: Inspection Générale des Finances
IMF: International Monetary Fund
ISF: Impôt de Solidarité sur la Fortune
LCR: Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire
LFI: La France Insoumise
LR: Les Républicains
LREM: La République En Marche
LRU: Loi relative aux libertés et responsabilités des universités
M5S: Movimento Cinque Stelle
MDP: Mouvement des Progressistes
MJS: Mouvement des Jeunes Socialistes
MNR: Mouvement National Républicain
MODEM: Mouvement Démocrate
MP: Member of Parliament
MPF: Mouvement pour la France
MR: Mouvement Radical
NI: Non Inscrit
NUPES: Nouvelle Union Populaire Écologique et Sociale
OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PACTE: Plan d'Action pour la Croissance et la Transformation des Entreprises
PS: Parti Socialiste
PD: Partito Democratico
PCF: Parti Communiste Français
PFU: Prélèvement Forfaitaire Unique
PPP: Public Private Partnership
PRG: Parti Radical de Gauche
PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español
PSU: Parti Socialiste Unifié
RATP: Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens
RGPP: Révision Générale des Politiques Publiques
RIC: Référendum d'Initiative Citoyenne
RN: Rassemblement National
RMI: Revenu Minimum d'Insertion
RPF: Rassemblement du Peuple Français
RPR: Rassemblement pour la République
RSA: Revenu de Solidarité Active
RTB: Right to Buy
SEA: Single European Act
SFIO: Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière
SGP: Stability and Growth Pact
SMIC: Salaire Minimum Interprofessionnel de Croissance
SNCF: Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français

TCE: Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe
TSCG: Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance
UDI: Union des Démocrates et des Indépendants
UDF: Union pour la Démocratie Française
UE: Union Européenne
UK: United Kingdom
UKIP: United Kingdom Independence Party
UMP: Union pour un Mouvement Populaire
UNEF: Union Nationale des Etudiants de France
UNR: Union pour la Nouvelle République
UP: Union Populaire
VOC: Varieties of Capitalism
WTO: World Trade Organization
ZFU: Zones Franches Urbaines

« Ceux qu'Orsenna dans la naïveté de son cœur (…) appelle inconsidérablement transfuges et traîtres, je les ai quelquefois nommés en moi les poètes de l'événement. »

Julien Gracq, *Le Rivage des Syrtes* (1951)

<u>Introduction</u>: Discipline, Defection and Dissent in Contemporary French Politics

This study seeks to contribute to the development of a neo-Gramscian perspective on French politics. It does this by developing a critical political economy analysis of contemporary France that places specific emphasis on the ideological, discursive and strategic implications of the current predicament. This perspective on French politics is anchored in a Braudelian socio-historical framework that provides equal emphasis on the institutions inscribed in the *longue durée* of the development of the French state and the conjunctural ferments that shape patterns of discipline, defection and dissent in contemporary French politics.

La République En Marche et l'intérêt supérieur de la nation

On 8 June 2019, Secretary of State for Gender Equality Marlène Schiappa and MPs from *La République En Marche* (LREM) Olivia Grégoire and Laurent Saint-Martin published an op-ed in *Le Journal du Dimanche* entitled 'Qui est prêt à faire passer son pays avant son parti?' ('Who is ready to place their country before their party?', my translation). This was a call to citizens from every persuasion to join them in the presidential party, the political movement that allowed Emmanuel to win the presidential contest of May 2017 and to ensure a landslide majority at the National Assembly a month and a half later.

This call to congregate around the presidential majority was meant to 'abandon old dialectics in order to promote emancipation and to fight against inequalities of fate'[1] (JDD 2019). While seemingly engaging, this plebiscitary claim implicitly denied all legitimacy to existing parties

[1] Although the wording 'inequalities of fate' may seem odd to English ears, it is the exact translation for the expression '*inégalités de destin*' coined by the presidential majority (Élysée 2019). The adverb '*de destin*' is convenient insofar as it naturalises social and economic inequalities by implying that they depend upon 'fate', and cannot be envisaged as the material manifestation of an unequal repartition of wealth in French society.

– relegated to the ranks of enemies of the nation – while symbolically repudiating one of the founding principles of democratic life: political pluralism. The cornerstone of liberal democracy thus appeared to be flouted by those who purported to be its very defenders against 'the extremes'. Published in the wake of the European elections, this column substantiated the claim made by Emmanuel Macron's partisans that the reconfiguring of the French party system following the 2017 electoral cycle created new cleavages, namely a strife between 'progressive' and 'nationalist' forces, however vague such categories might sound.

Discursively, this binary shrinking of political cleavages was reminiscent of the rhetorical techniques based on the 'us versus them' paradigm that are used at length by the so-called 'populist' forces which LREM pretends to combat. Another example of that logic was provided on 31 May 2019 by Prime Minister Edouard Philippe's special advisor Gilles Boyer, who solemnly warned – before apologising a few days later – that a mayor elected in the forthcoming 2020 municipal election with the support of LREM and its ally MoDem would be considered an ally for the 2022 presidential election, whereas a mayor elected without their support would be considered 'an enemy of the president' (Bouchet-Petersen 2019). Standing against president Macron is therefore equated to ignoring or despising the national interest, or as the French call it, '*l'intérêt supérieur de la nation*'.

In the spring of 2017, Emmanuel Macron presented himself as a political revolutionary; a blessed prophet from outside who decided to impose a merciless *tabula rasa* to the existing order. Indeed, a profound shift in the balance of social and political forces followed Emmanuel Macron's election on 7 May 2017. Pretending to reject traditional parties in a new synthesis beyond Left and Right, former investment banker Emmanuel Macron was able to skilfully co-opt French political figures in his movement *En Marche* in the manner of

trasformismo, a process whereby Left and Right's programmes converge until there ceases to be any significant difference between them (Gramsci 1971, 58-59 Q19§24).[2] In a similar fashion to Prime Minister Agostino Depretis who decided to recruit his ministers 'indiscriminately from both sides of the parliament' in 1876 in Italy (Gramsci 1971, ibid), Macron – who was originally coming from the ranks of Parti Socialiste (PS), without however having served important functions within the party – decided to nominate Edouard Philippe – the mayor of Le Havre and member of mainstream Right party Les Républicains (LR) – as the Prime Minister of France on 15 May 2017.

Edouard Philippe, in turn, decided to recruit prominent figures from his soon to be ex-party to form his government. He thus appointed Bruno Le Maire (LR) at the Ministry of the Economy and Gérald Darmanin (LR) at the Ministry of Public Action and Accounts, thus sowing discord among the ranks of his *famille politique.* Furthermore, Edouard Philippe – under the aegis of Emmanuel Macron – also chose ministers from the ranks of Parti Socialiste, such as Jean-Yves Le Drian (François Hollande's former Minister of Defence) and Gérard Collomb (the former Socialist mayor of Lyon, who became Minister of the Interior). In late nineteenth century Italy, this *trasformismo* was 'nothing but the parliamentary expression of the fact that the Party of Action was co-opted, bit by bit, by the Moderates, and that the popular masses were decapitated, rather than absorbed into the ambit of the new state' (Gramsci 1966, 100, as cited by Bates 1975, 354). In contemporary France, the opportunistic circulation of French political personnel representatives from party to party has strongly blurred political frontiers, and contributed to an increasing indecipherability of the French political landscape.

[2] Throughout this dissertation, I will follow the international standard for referring to Antonio Gramsci's work, using the (Q) for notebook and (§) for note number. The concordance table for the 1971 *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (SPN) can be found on the website of the International Gramsci Society: http://www.internationalgramscisociety.org/resources/concordance_table/

As Stuart Hall put it, *trasformismo* 'poses in a new way the manner in which the given space of power provides opportunities for intervention and recuperation by emergent political and social forces' (Hall 1988, 124). In addition to Italy, a striking historical parallel can indeed be drawn with late 1970s Britain. After the Edward Heath interregnum, the period had witnessed 'the *de facto* erosion of the two-party dominance of the parliamentary scene, and the opportunist construction of temporary parliamentary coalition, alliances and pacts for the most-short term and pragmatic ends (…), which is a sign of the undermining of the representative parliamentary democratic system, and characteristic of the slow drift towards a "*government of national interest*"' (Hall 1988, 158).

Thus, in a similar vein than Margaret Thatcher's in 1979, Emmanuel Macron's election has to be understood in the *longue durée* of neoliberalisation efforts in France and in the perspective of the long decrepitude of the traditional French governing parties, especially on the Left. Indeed, what some have labelled Macron's 'meteoric' rise to power (La Croix 2017b, Janin 2017) did not emerge out of a vacuum; his way to the Élysée Palace was to a large extent paved by previous governments from both the governmental Right and Left throughout the postwar period. The last forty years, in particular, bore witness to virtually indistinguishable neoliberal policies implemented by governments from both sides of the political spectrum. As a result of this partisan identicalness, France has been experiencing an acute *ideological crisis*, whose temporary solution became embodied in the figure of Emmanuel Macron, who presented himself as a talented political newcomer guided first and foremost by a 'pragmatism' that was imbued with an unapologetically reformist and entrepreneurial élan.

Against this background, the lexicon of ‘revolution’ was abundantly used, not the least by Emmanuel Macron himself who chose this word to title his book-programme (2016). His presidency therefore seems to constitute a bold and contradictory bid to ‘transform’ the country: mixing the old with the new, mingling societal progressivism with a spirit of free enterprise – a traditionally unlikely combination in France –, associating monarchism with republicanism, fusing the national with the European, blending statism with neoliberal values.

From an ideological point of view, the word ‘neoliberalism’ in this dissertation is the umbrella term covering different strands of political-economic thought which are linked together by their shared purpose to build and institutionalise a ‘third way’ between *laissez-faire* liberalism and socialist or Keynesian type economic planning. As a political project, neoliberalism refers to an economic, philosophical and cultural endeavour to impregnate every aspect of social life with a logic of competition. As such, the term may stand in my usage for both the German-associated ordoliberal framework (‘social-market economy’) and the Austrian and Chicago theorising on neoliberalism, which gained more credence and appeal in the United-Kingdom with Friedrich von Hayek and in the United States with Milton Friedman.

From a public policy perspective, ‘neoliberalism’ is a form of political-economic governance associated with supply-side policies (reshuffling of taxation schemes and exemptions to benefit corporations and large capital holders, flexible labour markets, marginalisation of labour demands in favour of those of capital, etc.) that are aimed at facilitating private investment and attracting foreign investors, in short, to adhere and obey to the logic of ‘competitiveness’. The role of the state is also redefined in the process, with a step away from redistributive functions towards ensuring the apt conditions for market competition to thrive,

conditions whose aptness is being monitored by purportedly 'independent' technocratic institutions such as *Cour des Comptes* or *Inspection Générale des Finances* in France. More fundamentally, the neoliberal state strives *to separate economic issues from the political sphere* in order to insulate economic policy from popular pressures.

This research aims to situate Macron's election in the *longue durée* of neoliberalisation efforts in France in order to contextualise the long decay of the traditional Left and Right, as such deliquescence laid the ground for the recourse to rigid solutions of the 'Caesarist' type which Emmanuel Macron seems to incarnate. Indeed, Fernand Braudel's conception of the *longue durée* (1982) allows us to delineate the long-term cycles and to distinguish the socio-political trends that derive from conjunctural circumstances from other types of tendencies which are deeply inscribed in the structural dimensions of society and politics.

Understanding the rise of Emmanuel Macron – and by extension, the expansion of French neoliberalism – necessarily entails a breakdown of traditional disciplinary boundaries. Thus, it is my contention that political science alone cannot account for the patterns and dialectics of change and continuity inherent to the current French moment: concepts and ontologies attached to history, economics, sociology, discourse analysis, international relations and political science must be mobilised and fused in this endeavour. In parallel, linguistic gaps – from French to English and inversely – must also be bridged so as to combine the proximity offered by the source-language and the perspective afforded by the foreign language, a merging that ultimately provides a better understanding of the *problématique* at stake.

In this context, an original contribution of this dissertation is to offer a single integrated approach – both in disciplinary and linguistic terms, i.e. that draws on various perspectives

and upon both French and English language sources – to the election of Emmanuel Macron and its implications for French politics, economics, society, as well as social theory.

State of the Art

Indeed, the various underpinnings and manifestations of French neoliberalism, studies of the French political economy, and analyses of Emmanuel Macron's election have been taken up in separate literatures, rather than brought together in antegrated social science approach.

For instance, a great deal of research has examined the history and specificities of French neoliberalism (Schmidt 1996 and 1997; Denord 2001; Prasad 2005; Howell 2009; Levy 2008, 2016; Audier 2012; Clift 2013, 2019; Amable 2016, 2017; Masquelier 2021) with which I will engage throughout this thesis, especially in the genealogical section. Yet, these analyses do not directly address the Macron question and seldom adopt neo-Gramscian historical materialist concepts and frameworks (with the notable exception of Masquelier 2021).

As far as the current conjuncture is concerned, French political scientists and sociologists have quickly attempted to interpret the 2017 electoral cycle as a 'disruptive' one (Perrineau 2017) that was rich in plot twists – from the traditional parties' primaries to the embezzlement schemes of François Fillon up until the seemingly large and unexpected electoral majority won by LREM in the National Assembly in June 2017. Deploying an analysis on the specificities of media coverage (on television and on social media), the collective work edited by Pascal Perrineau (2017) attempts to contrast the intense storytelling of the campaign with the very high abstention rates recorded, a testimony to the lack of genuine adhesion to the Macron vote, a choice mostly motivated by a rejection of LREM competitors and the promise of 'political renewal' offered by Macron.

This volatile and fragile endorsement of Emmanuel Macron's project in the electorate is also underlined in the collective work supervised by Julien Fretel, Rémi Lefebvre and Bernard Dolez (2019), which places a strong emphasis on the networks – whether local, national or within 'civil society' – which the candidate for *En Marche!* (EM) was able to capitalise on. They demonstrate that EM and its personnel did not descend from the sky but surfaced from the existing parties, with notable barons from the traditional Left and Right repudiating their partisan affiliation to join the 'Macron enterprise', leaving their former political formations disoriented and disunited. In lieu of a 'spring revolution' that contributed to the 'remaking of France' in terms of political leadership and global vision (Cole 2019), the very strong abstention rates observed in 2017 lend credence to the hypothesis of an election 'by default' (Fretel, Lefebvre and Dolez 2019).

Based on data from the *Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po* (CEVIPOF) electoral survey of 2015-2017, Luc Rouban's analysis (2018) accredits that thesis, underlining the political and rhetorical construction of novelty and 'innovation' by the candidate Macron and the fact that this vote was partly motivated by a fear of Marine Le Pen and François Fillon in large swaths of public opinion. Doctrinally, Rouban assimilates Macronism to a convergence of societal and economic liberalism that extends a managerial ideology to the terrain of politics and thereby further excludes the popular classes from democratic politics. Although these political science contributions provide valuable electoral data and insights, they do not say much about the position, what Gramsci would call the 'historic role' of Emmanuel Macron, in the trajectory of French neoliberalism.

Similarly, a certain number of historians have published interventions aimed at interpreting what has been dubbed '*l'événement Macron*' (Rioux 2017), highlighting both the historically

incongruous election of a president not coming from the ranks of the traditional parties and emphasising the superficial character of the 'revolution' promised by the candidate from En Marche (Dittmar 2017; Raynaud 2018). Philippe Raynaud thus argued that the Fifth Republic institutions demonstrated their adaptability by allowing the election of an individual purportedly foreign to the existing system and who proposed an inclusive alternative to the 'neither Left nor Right' populist narrative (by being indeed 'both from the Left and the Right'). Building on this claim, Raynaud (2018) proposes an interesting historical comparison between En Marche and the British Whigs, who were in competition with the Tories during the 18th and 19th centuries. With his proclaimed societal tolerance, his inclination to social change against both traditions and successions, and his appetite for entrepreneurship and risk-taking, Emmanuel Macron would thus be the first French Whig to be elected president.

Moreover, a fair amount of attention has been paid to Emmanuel Macron's electoral victory by economists. Thus, borrowing the concept of 'historic bloc' (with virtually no reference to Antonio Gramsci, who originated the notion), Bruno Amable and Stefano Palombarini (2017) argued that a 'bloc bourgeois' has taken hold of French politics, with representatives from the traditional Left and Right united around core goals of further European integration and the need for 'structural reforms'. While compelling, their analysis remains economistic and slightly deterministic, leaving mostly untouched questions of ideology which Amable touched upon in previous works (2016; 2017). The book written by *Mediapart* economic journalist Romaric Godin (2019) provides us with a more holistic perspective. Godin explains the late permeation of neoliberalism in France with the difficulties experienced by the ruling-class in their attempts to dismantle the French social model due to frequent popular resistance, despite repeated and emboldened governmental efforts since the Valéry Giscard d'Estaing presidency (1974-1981). While from an ideological and doctrinal standpoint Emmanuel Macron does not

fundamentally break with his predecessors, he has been able to coalesce a social bloc mighty enough to ensure a fragile support for his policies. In agreement with philosopher Grégoire Chamayou (2018) on that matter, Godin explains that the forceful implementation of neoliberalism in France is associated with a creeping form of authoritarianism that might intensify *la guerre sociale*.

Finally, journalists and activists have assimilated Emmanuel Macron's rise to the acme of 'the void' in politics (Bernat 2017) or have on the contrary lauded the new president as a cunning 'philosopher' (Couturier 2017). In a concise essay, former editor-in-chief of *Alternatives Economiques* Philippe Frémeaux points to the repeated failures of the governmental Left from François Mitterrand's first term onwards – with the relative exception, he argues, of Lionel Jospin's prime-ministerial term – to fulfill their social-democratic promises and the ways in which they directly account for the rise of Macron. Frémeaux warns that although many LREM values can be associated with the reformist Left (equality of opportunity, entrepreneurship, European integration), Emmanuel Macron's fiscal policies are typical of the French Right, and are likely to increase existing inequalities. Against this background, what is needed is an extension and an integration of these different dynamics and dimensions into a coherent analysis that would be multidisciplinary in character and based on both French and English sources.

Emmanuel Macron, French Neoliberalism and Passive Revolution

This research provides a novel historical materialist outlook on French neoliberalism. It does so by historicising French political parties' ideological commitments (or lack thereof) and problematising their public policy manifestations within a neo-Gramscian framework.

One of the elements accounting for the absence of proper holistic theorising is the fact that Macron's policies and governance appear contradictory: very anti-statist from an economic standpoint but extremely *dirigiste*[3] in their strategic operations.

The sum of contradictions surrounding the French crisis of political representation and the success of the Macron enterprise seem to indicate that the current French model of economic accumulation and political representation has reached an impasse.

The stress placed on apparent paradoxes in the Gramscian framework of 'passive revolution' appears very well-suited to study the oxymoronic type of transformations unfolding in the French political economy. This concept, which Antonio Gramsci defined as 'a developmental project of a reactionary kind that fails to involve the masses' (Gramsci 1971, 106-20; Q15, Q10I, Q102), appears apt to encapsulate the complex dialectics of revolution and restoration that are at play in Emmanuel Macron's election, and that are more generally shaping the contours of the French road to neoliberalism.

To be clear, 'passive revolution' should not be conceived as an explanatory concept, but rather as an ensemble of questions and insights that could help shed light on situations whose contours are obscured by the complicated schemes of the life and framework of the nation and parties. A deeply uneven and contradictory process, a passive revolution involves a dialectic of change and permanence, with a combination of novel and regressive elements. It is fundamentally a *compromise* that allows for the subsistence of the old alongside the new, a self-preserving political attempt to sustain the features of the existing system by promoting

[3] System in which the government/the state maintains a strong control over the economy and related social matters.

'progress' and 'modernity'. The recourse to such stratagems – notably manifested in the aforementioned parliamentary practice of *trasformismo* – signals that Emmanuel Macron's hegemony is very fragile, if not unfulfilled, and that the lack of legitimation associated with neoliberalism in France means that his attempts at transforming the French model of welfare provision and social protection do not rally the consent of the majority of the population.

This research thus aspires to provide a *perspective* on France, a 'history of the present' (Foucault 1977) that would account for the fundamental contradictions besetting the French model of capitalism and for the forms of resistance it is being met with. What I mean by 'history of the present' is a method of critical inquiry developed by Michel Foucault that traces how contemporary practices, norms and institutions – what we take for granted as part of the 'common sense' – emerged out of specific and complex struggles, conflicts, alliances and exercises of power. This practice of inquiry, which Foucault termed 'genealogy', aims to trace the 'struggles, displacements and processes of repurposing out of which contemporary practices emerged, and to show the historical conditions of existence upon which present day practices depend' (Garland 2014, 373).

It does so by relying on a very large variety of disciplinary approaches. Thus, chapter one traces the origins of ordoliberalism and its influence on architects of the French postwar state, and is concerned with the history of economic ideas. Chapter two adopts a global political economy perspective in order to study world-order frameworks such as the new constitutionalism of disciplinary neoliberalism (Gill 2002), notably implemented in the European and Monetary Union (EMU) system. Besides, classical as well as contemporary French political science is mobilised throughout the dissertation in order to study the history of the Left, Right and centre in French politics.

Furthermore, the research engages with democratic theory, whether for the purpose of delineating the stakes of a situation of 'ideological crisis' (chapter three) or to study the implications of so-called 'populist' mobilisations and the 'anti-populist' discourses, strategies and ideologies that are used in response. Discourse analysis is also mobilised in chapters three (depoliticisation of language through a 'neoliberal *lingua franca*') and seven (the Macronite 'vocabulary of contempt') so as to study political symbols and signs as well as media rhetoric, in order to insist on their importance as apparatuses of 'common sense' and 'hegemony'. The influence of comparative politics also runs deep in this research, with frequent comparisons with political events, ideologies and programmes that unfolded in Germany (chapter one), Italy (chapter five) and the United Kingdom (chapters six and seven).

This dissertation thus provides one of the first analyses of France's politics and society that draws upon both French and English sources and that examines the French situation with concepts and frameworks pertaining to English scholarship, while bringing insights from French journalistic analysis, political discourse and academe to the English speaking world. In sum, this is therefore perhaps the first project to systematically explore France's neoliberalism as a multifaceted, complex and long-term 'passive revolution', one that is inscribed in the *longue durée* of French and European political-economic development.

Research Questions

In exploring the lineages, dimensions and consequences of the French political economy's current conjuncture, I situate my research around two broad sets of questions.

The *first set of questions* relates to structural issues that concern the French state and French political economy and society. These problems therefore stretch in the long-time span; indeed,

they are inscribed in the temporal dimension which Fernand Braudel termed the *longue durée* (1982, see 'theoretical framework' below). They relate to both the (1) national and (2) supranational ambits, both panoramas that should be analytically fused as opposed to separately examined.

1). *National ambit*

What is the French state and how do political parties relate to it? What economic and political forces are at its base? What internal ferments and institutions have been responsible for its process of development throughout the postwar period? By extension, what meaning do the political 'Left', 'Right' and 'centre' hold in France? What does positioning at those poles and core entail from a political-economic perspective?

2). *Supranational ambit*

What is the position of France in the capitalist world? What is the position of France in the European Union (EU)? What direction are the current lines of force towards the EU in France moving in, and what direction are they likely to move in the future? Most importantly, how can we understand neoliberalism in the French context? What has been the historical trajectory of this doctrine in France, and how does it relate to what Stephen Gill termed 'new constitutionalism' (2002), i.e. a ruling class project that entails the legal-juridical separation of the 'economic' sphere and the 'political'?

The *second set of questions* guiding this research pertains to the conjunctural and the contingent and touch upon some elements of *histoire événementielle* (Braudel 1982). They relate to both (1) Emmanuel Macron's election and (2) Emmanuel Macron and LREM's governance.

1). *Emmanuel Macron's election*

How was Macron able to conquer the *Élysée* Palace, to shake the whole political landscape, and to impose an unapologetic liberal creed in the European country that most energetically opposed the repeated attempts to reform its system of social protection? Through which *modus operandi* was this wind of change – that violently swept the traditional parties out of the game – orchestrated? Does this victory really mean that Macron has been able to impose a new 'common sense' in this polarised political landscape? Which symbols and narratives did he mobilise in this endeavour?

2). *Emmanuel Macron and LREM's governance*

How could we qualify Emmanuel Macron's economic creed, and what kind of methods does his majority use to implement the measures that are associated with it? If we take a continental outlook, how is the European balance of social and political forces affected by Macron's election, in the wake of Brexit and with the decaying rule of Angela Merkel in Germany? What previous European political experiences – in the United Kingdom or in Italy, for instance – could be likened to 'Macronism'? How does the LREM majority treat demonstrations of resistance? What is their vision of political strife? In sum, what are the elements of rupture and of continuity in Macronism?

Theoretical Framework

As it traces the trajectory of French neoliberalisation and the significance of Emmanuel Macron's election and political-economic mode of governance, this dissertation is primarily animated by an engagement with three interlocking theoretical approaches: critical political economy and neo-Gramscian theory, themselves embedded in a Braudelian framework. This

research therefore takes the form of a critical political economy of France guided by a neo-Gramscian framework and placed in a Braudelian perspective.

A Critical Political Economy (CPE) perspective analyses not only the economic effects of specific public policies but also how discourses and ideologies emerge and which role they play in political struggles (Jäger and Springler 2015, 3-7). This outlook is particularly informed by approaches that emphasise the active elite internationalisation, consent and co-ordination which help forge a relatively coherent neoliberal accumulation strategy in France and across the European Union (Gill 1998, 2017; Van Apeldoorn 2009, 2014) and the implications of the latter in terms of social reproduction (Bakker and Gill 2003; Bakker 2008). Furthermore, this CPE perspective is congruent with a constructivist framework of analysis that underlines the social construction of reality grounded in discourse analysis and cultural studies methods in order to study the rhetoric of political actors, pundits and editorialists. This project thus adopts a post-positivist approach that would consider neoliberal precepts and rules as a belief system located at the intersection of politics, sociology, psychology, linguistics, semiology and culture.

With this in mind, this research undertakes a genealogy and critique of French governmental political economy from the postwar period until the end of Emmanuel Macron's *quinquennat*. In particular, it aims to assess and understand the various strategies of *de-politicisation* (separation of the economic from the political) that have been undertaken by governments from the traditional Left and Right over the period.

The analytical apparatus provided by Antonio Gramsci in his prison writings form cogent lenses through which one may explore the attempts at depoliticising social and economic

issues in France. Indeed, the political and the economic are inextricably fused in the *Prison Notebooks*: culture, language, symbols and ideologies are fundamentally interconnected to material forces and financial interests and are linked together in the most holistic manner. These elements give shape and meaning to the constellation of social and political forces that strives to build or maintain the hegemony of a particular class. Far from providing easy answers or turnkey solutions, Gramsci's concepts allow us to garner many theoretical and practical insights by asking the relevant questions about a peculiar regime or a given political order. As Peter Thomas (2006, 65) eloquently put it:

> The sheer range of the *Prison Notebooks* – ranging from political economy, history and historiography, literary and cultural criticism, comparative sociology, political theory, linguistics, and folklore – coupled with the openness of his elaboration of historical materialism, or, in his specific sense, the philosophy of praxis as an integral and non-reductive conception of the world, gave his thought a wide resonance in a period attuned to the diversity of 'micronarratives'.

Antonio Gramsci's thought affords much importance to both material and immaterial forces – language, discourse, performativity, these elements that go hand in hand with ideology and that always reflect a certain 'common sense' or *world vision.* As Jan Rehmann put it (2013, 117), 'it was mainly Gramsci's fundamental opposition to economism and class-reductionism that enabled him to understand the ideological not in terms of mere ideas, but rather as a material ensemble of hegemonic apparatuses in civil society'.

Over the last few years, the name of Gramsci has become ubiquitous in the French media (Brustier 2017), among politicians from both the Left – Benoît Hamon, Jean-Luc Mélenchon – and the Right – Nicolas Sarkozy, Gerald Darmanin. This should come as no surprise, as it was French scholars who ignited the 'Gramsci Renaissance'[4] in the 1960s and 1970s under

[4] After 1945, Gramsci's thought had 'no more than a spectral existence in France, and his writings were almost entirely unknown (Crézégut 2020, 431). In the 1950s, Gramsci aroused the interest of Leftist artists and intellectuals such as Louis Aragon and Jean-Paul Sartre, who unsuccessfully tried to publish the Italian theorist, as most publishers declined to release Gramsci's work for commercial

the decisive but highly controversial impulsion of Louis Althusser.[5] The study of Gramsci's texts was later taken over by philosopher André Tosel, historian Jean-Yves Frétigné, and most recently sociologist Razmig Keucheyan (2012), who actively helped making Gramsci's name more familiar to French social scientists, as the latter had only marginally contributed to neo-Gramscian theorising in the 1980s and 1990s in comparison to their British – Stuart Hall, Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau in cultural studies and populism theory – and Canadian counterparts – Robert W. Cox, Stephen Gill in critical theory and global political economy.

Thus, several French researchers have drawn upon Gramscian notions to make sense of specific political junctures in recent French history. For instance, the rise of Nicolas Sarkozy, with his novel stances on the terrains of political representation, identity, security and *laïcité*, has been a moment of 'neo-republican' rupture analysed through a neo-Gramscian lens (Sgard 2007; Kouvélakis 2009; Lindner 2017). More recently, the concept of 'historic bloc' has been used to make sense of the restructuring of the French political field around a core comprised of a fragile 'bloc bourgeois' that would only represent a minority of the French citizenry (Amable and Palombarini 2017), but this work does not fully eschew the pitfalls of economism denounced by Gramsci himself. The most recent usage of Gramsci to make sense

reasons (Flammarion in 1953, Seuil in 1954 and Gallimard in 1955). The Parti Communiste Français (PCF) eventually took on the publishing project in 1957, albeit reluctantly, since Gramsci represented the autonomy of Italian Marxism (as opposed to the Stalinist-inspired orthodoxy of PCF). The period of 'Gramsci Renaissance' – whose coinage seems to originate in Tosel (2016) – spanned from 1965 to 1975. In the 1980s, Gramsci's writings sank into oblivion in France once more, as the philosopher became a collateral victim to the general offensive against Marxism, whereas his thought was being rediscovered in the English-speaking world, in India and in Latin America. Since then, Gramsci's work has nonetheless been rediscovered by French academics and activists (Mignemi 2016).

[5] In his contribution to the collective book *Lire le Capital* (1965), Louis Althusser developed a severe criticism of Gramsci. Despite his admiration for the Italian thinker, Althusser attacked Gramsci's 'historicism' and his theorisation in terms of superstructures, that he perceived to be antithetical to his own project of bringing back scientific rigour to Marxism (he argued that Gramsci was 'too political' and did not have the qualities of a political economist). In Althusser's defense, this oversimplified reading of Gramsci's conception of history and human action also derives from the fact that only a small portion of Gramsci's texts were published in 1965 (Crézégut 2020, 449-50).

of French politics has convincingly likened the mode of conduct of French industrial relations to the dynamics of a passive revolution (Masquellier 2021). Masquellier's analysis could however be expanded upon: the passive revolutionary logic of French neoliberalism extends beyond industrial relations and should be envisaged in a more holistic manner, i.e. in relation to other Gramscian notions.

The purpose of this research is therefore to apply more systematically Gramscian concepts to the study of the French political economy and society. As Stuart Hall put it (1987, 16), Gramsci gives us 'not the tools with which to solve the puzzle, but the means with which to ask the right kinds of questions'. Below are some of the questions that a holistic neo-Gramscian analysis of French politics and society should address.

Discursive and ideological considerations

How could the common sense of a specific period be encapsulated? What is it made of, and how has it evolved? What were the institutions and who were the organic intellectuals that were involved in shaping it? What historical forms did the neoliberal strategies of depoliticisation adopt in France?

Strategic considerations

What attitude did the political class adopt towards the concepts, rules, laws and norms promoted by these ideologues and institutions? What stratagems were used to neutralise, co-opt and domesticate oppositional and subaltern forces? What are the social and political forces that are absolved (and by extension, absorbed) by the LREM majority, and conversely, which of their counterparts are singled out and demonised?

Governance and resistance considerations

How stable is this order that presents itself as hegemonic? At which point does the crisis of authority occur? What are the social groups that make up the subaltern classes in contemporary France, and how combative can their bouts of resistance be? What are the possibilities for convergence and alliance, and ultimately, for emancipatory change?

A neo-Gramscian perspective

A neo-Gramscian perspective should therefore strive to acknowledge the role of *organic intellectuals* in shaping the metaphoric trenches of the ideological *war of position* in order to legitimate and naturalise a certain vision of the world, a specifically molded form of *common sense* that serves certain ideological interests and fits certain strategic purposes. This work of persuasion is conducted within the very crevices of *civil society,* a paramount dimension of the *integral state*, alongside political society, 'with which it is all too often mistakenly identified' (Buttigieg 1995, 4). A neo-Gramscian framework also provides the best interpretative scheme to scrutinise periods of *organic crisis*, often temporarily resolved through re-alignments of the political space that take the form of *trasformismo* and that are indicative of a deep-rooted process of ideological degeneracy and partisan disaffiliation.

Periods of crisis and upheaval may also be resolved by developing a political dialectic of change and permanence, a combination of novelty and conservatism which Gramsci termed *passive revolution*, that is, a *compromise* that allows for the subsistence of the old alongside the new, a political attempt to promote modernity that preserves the features of the existing system. Thus, social relations are reorganised in a seemingly 'progressive' manner in order to perpetuate class domination, keeping intact the existing relations of forces inherent to the prevailing mode of production and accumulation. This can sometimes be accompanied with

Caesarism, a symptom of political-economic stalemate and social anomia. Caesarism is born out of the power vacuum which enables a seemingly heroic or charismatic leader to seize control of the state in a context of political crisis. Such development is predominantly not associated, however, with any type of empowerment or emancipation for the *subaltern* classes, a situation which may in the long haul cause unrest and ignite resistance.

The Longue Durée *Framework*

Finally, this research has to be situated in historical time. Indeed, Emmanuel Macron's election needs to be contextualised in the *longue durée* of neoliberalisation efforts in France and in Europe so as to examine the long decay of the traditional Left and Right parties, as such deliquescence laid the group for the recourse to rigid and 'central' solutions of the Caesarist type which Emmanuel Macron and LREM seem to embody.

In this context, French historian Fernand Braudel's contribution is invaluable inasmuch as it allows us to delineate the long-term cycles and to distinguish the socio-political trends that derive from conjunctural circumstances from other types of tendencies which are deeply inscribed in the structural, the perennial or the secular. Thus, although Emmanuel Macron's election has undoubtedly been an original historical moment in the history of the Fifth Republic – signifying the eclipse of traditional parties and signaling a significant step towards the reconfiguring of the socio-political relations of force in France –, one should oppose the sometimes myopic vision that Fernand Braudel termed *histoire événementielle* ('event-history'), to make sense of Emmanuel Macron's victory.

One could for instance argue that Macronism, with its exaltation of entrepreneurial values and its rigorous consolidation of the executive branch of government, represents the martial political synthesis long-awaited by the French financial oligarchy. Yet, Emmanuel Macron's

rise has nothing of a novel, pioneering ideological enterprise because it does not fundamentally alter the existing relations of capitalist production and social reproduction (Bakker and Gill 2003); it can thus be interpreted as an 'event' in the long history of French neoliberalism. This suggests that Macron's election and the 2017 electoral cycle have to be contextualised in a wider socio-historical context.

Indeed, the presence and influence of neoliberalism as a set of competing ideas about the market, the state and society have to be entrenched in what Fernand Braudel called the *longue durée*, in addition to the conjuncture, and as opposed to *histoire événementielle*. Indeed, the fundamental idea of neoliberalism – the possibility of a liberal alternative to both *laissez-faire* and the planned economy – has been present in different political agendas of the Left and Right since at least the end of World War II (Amable 2016, 527). The influence of neoliberal ideas should therefore be problematised in *social time*, in 'the multifarious, contradictory times of the life of men, which not only make up the past, but also the social life of the present' (Braudel 1982, 26). Against accounts of the penetration of neoliberal policy principles in the French polity, which tend to overemphasise the importance of the 'individual' or the 'event' – for instance, François Mitterand's 1983 'U-turn', or the wave of privatisations led by Jacques Chirac in 1986, or Emmanuel Macron's 2017 election victory – one should favour the 'exceptional value of the long-time span' (ibid, 27).

That is not to say that events are meaningless. For Braudel (1982, 28), an event can take on a whole range of meanings and associations, and can occasionally bear witness to very profound movements. In that sense, the event is interesting for what it *reveals* rather than for what it *triggers*, for what it *shows* rather than what it *does*. Because the short time frame can be capricious and misleading, one should favour the *longue durée*, and the particular attention

such perspective pays to the solidly entrenched structures of social and political affairs. Apprehending French neoliberalism in the *longue durée* unveils the social, cultural and economic circumstances that paved the way for these ideas and allows for a better comprehension of how they were successfully spread out and gradually accepted thanks to a thorough work of persuasion within civil society, with the help of journalists, interest groups, think tanks, this constellation of actors that Gramsci called the 'organic intellectuals'.

Comprehending historical time in the framework of the *longue durée* also exposes the relationship between the nation-state under scrutiny (in this case, France) and the world structures (such as the European Union) with which it is intertwined, thus unveiling 'the hierarchy of forces, of currents, of particular movements' that should be tackled 'as an entire constellation' (Braudel 1982, 34).[6] Lastly, envisaging the history of neoliberal ideas in the *longue durée* helps deconstruct the monolithic vision of neoliberalism sketched in certain strands of the literature (Bourdieu 1998) and allows for a vision of French neoliberalism that places greater emphasis on matters of hybridisation and variegation.

Although this topic is beyond the scope of the present research, one may also very well apply the *longue durée* framework to the development of the far-right, and a series of contributions have done so convincingly (Saull 2015; Saull, Anievas et. al 2020). These historical sociologists argue that patterns of internationally derived transformation and crisis associated with uneven capitalist development have been integral to the development of the far-right. Indeed, long-term geopolitical expressions of capitalist development best account for enabling

[6] In his *Civilization and Capitalism* cycle (1984, 71-88), the French historian clearly echoes the triptych *event/conjuncture/longue durée* by delineating the *seasonal shifts* (obscured in the complicated economies of the present), the *cycles* (which imply a much longer time span) and the *secular trends* (a cumulative process best measured century by century). Although they represent different epochal frames, the seasonal shift, the cycle and the secular trend are deeply connected: 'the short and the long-term coexist; they cannot be separated' (Braudel 1984, 85).

domestic political contexts that facilitate far-right mobilisations from below because they have progressively destabilised (existing) social order through crisis conditions resulting from imperialism and its associated rivalries (Saull 2015, 619-20).[7] Thus, a *longue durée* analysis of the French far-right would trace the origins of the *Front National* (FN) to 1972, when members of the neo-fascist and anti-communist group *Ordre Nouveau* (the progeny of *Occident*,[8] that was founded in 1964 in the aftermath of the Algerian war of independence) selected former MP and Algeria veteran Jean-Marie Le Pen to be the figurehead of their new movement. Gradually, Le Pen marginalised the members of *Occident* and took full control of the FN and became an extremely important figure in French political life, until he was himself dismissed by his daughter Marine in 2015, who rebranded the movement as *Rassemblement National* (RN) three years later.

Furthermore, an emphasis on the far-right would unveil the importance of race to French class relations and would interrogate the imperial aspects of the French social formation. Although these issues are addressed multiple times throughout this research, they do not have a direct conceptual bearing on the core concepts developed in this dissertation (*trasformismo*, passive revolution, Caesarism, authoritarian anti-populism). Besides, addressing in depth the imperial

[7] For Richard Saull (2015, 624), two trends were favourable to the emergence of the far-right: (1) the constitution of geopolitical rivalries due to the uneven geographical development of capitalism across and within European states and (2) the concomitant transformation of Europe's social structure undermined existing traditional social and political institutional arrangements. It was thus in a context of multi-layered crises of capitalism that fascism emerged in Germany and Italy and the far-right triumphed in Austria, Poland, Spain, etc. (ibid, 628). Yet, economic crises alone did not produce the fascist threat: what was determining was 'the way in which institutional frameworks and the balance of class forces determined the political response to the economic crisis' (Mann 2004, 24-25 and 60-61, as cited by Saull 2015, 630). Against this background, fascism would probably not have triumphed in Italy and Germany without the support of dominant classes.

[8] Several members from *Occident* would later join the ranks of the most neoliberal factions of the traditional French Right (UDF, RPR and UMP), such as Patrick Devedjian (Minister and MP under Chirac and Sarkozy), Gérard Longuet (Sarkozy's Minister of Defense and senator), Hervé Novelli (secretary of state and MP under Sarkozy), Alain Madelin (minister during Mitterrand's cohabitations and European MP) and Claude Goasguen (Paris MP).

dimensions of the French polity would require a significant amount of additional research, so would a demonstration substantiating the centrality of race to French class relations. In the conclusion, I therefore suggest ways in which these *problématiques* can be more tightly connected to the insights yielded in this dissertation and I draw lines of inquiry for future research.

In sum, this research uses history as a means to critically engage with the present in an attempt to identify traces of the past – power struggles, modes of control, alliances – and the ways in which they continue to operate in the present day. My attempt to associate an analysis of the *longue durée* with the concept of 'genealogy' is therefore, as David Garland put it (2014, 373), motivated not merely by 'a historical concern to understand the past (…) but instead by a critical concern to understand the present. It aims to trace the forces that gave birth to our present-day practices and to identify the historical traditions upon which they still depend'. This work of knowledge production is ultimately aimed at encouraging the emancipation from certain forms of power and control and proposing a glimpse of an alternative future, sketching an image of what a possible and desirable project of political and social change could entail for the French society.

Discipline, Defection and Dissent and the Two Syntheses of French Neoliberalism

This research intends to trace and characterise the processes and doctrines of de-politicisation – that is, the means and strategies mobilised in order to separate the economic from the political – in recent French history. By anchoring the analysis in a *longue durée* perspective, this contribution critically maps the genealogy of the diverse repertoire for political action and governance of the political economy that was devised since the beginnings of the Fifth Republic.

The separation of the economic from the political was undertaken by the traditional Right from the early 1960s to the late 1970s and influenced by German ordoliberalism, before being eclipsed by an Austrian and American inspired version of neoliberalism that was being favoured by the free-market oriented strand of the political Right, gravitating around Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF). As the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) started to lose credence in the 1980s, the traditional Left (Parti Socialiste), despite its statist and social-democratic rhetoric, gradually paved the way for the further neoliberalisation of the French political economy.

It was indeed under the French Socialists' leadership that the *first* (ideological) *synthesis* of French neoliberalism was surreptitiously orchestrated (see Figure 1). Various institutional arrangements paved the way for the implementation of the Maastricht treaty in 1992 under bipartisan concord in France, with the exception of sections of the sovereigntist Right. Both the traditional Left and Right were therefore allied under the banner of *new constitutionalism* (Gill 2002), a world-order project imposed through the supranational backdoor, thus operating a first communion in the French party system, an ideological rapprochement in favour of neoliberalism under the banner of what Adam Harmes (2019) calls 'market-preserving federalism'.[9]

[9] Market-preserving federalism is a global project of political-economic governance that seeks to impose constraints on socialist or even social-democratic forms of government intervention by locking in inter-jurisdictional competition. Two broad principles apply for the design of market-preserving federal systems: (1) subnational governments should not have the ability to limit the right to exit (or enter) their jurisdictions in order to ensure a national economy characterised by the free movement of individuals, firms and goods; (2) neoliberals generally advocate decentralisation of labour and environmental regulation and certain forms of tax collection and social spending. Whereas classical fiscal federalism seeks policy efficiency by having the supply of public policies match the demand for them, market-preserving federalism emphasises the 'locking-in' of free-market frameworks through policy competition and the creation of an exit option. See also Harmes 2019 and Biscahie and Gill 2022.

This enterprise of depoliticisation was not just imposed by the state but carried out in civil society as well, thanks to the importance devoted to 'expertise' (organic intellectuals and ideologues) and 'technocracy' ('independent' administrative authorities), themselves supported by editorialists and politicians, in manufacturing the neoliberal 'common sense' in France. Furthermore, the permeation of competitiveness into the very crevices of the everyday was permitted thanks to the production of a new subjectivity for French workers through igniting possessive-individualistic instincts and the progressive decentralising of collective bargaining, i.e. giving workers concessions in return for their responsibility to negotiate the terms of workplace flexibility with employers holding a lot more bargaining power than them (Masquelier 2021, 80).

The consequence of the first synthesis of French neoliberalism, however, has been the development of a profound *ideological crisis* born out of the political-economic convergence between the two traditional parties and the disaffection of these political formations by the French voters. This crisis is characterised by (1) the stalemate of the class struggle, (2) the depoliticisation of society, and (3) the discrediting of the Left/Right cleavage.

Beyond the exhaustion of traditional parties, Emmanuel Macron's election signalled a major re-alignment of political forces from both the traditional Left and Right in his party LREM. This dynamic gave shape to the *second synthesis* of French neoliberalism, a partisan merging 'at the centre' of the French political space which, in the attire of 'change' and 'modernity', thoroughly preserves the features of the existing system. Emmanuel Macron's election can therefore be interpreted as a *synthesis within the synthesis* (see Figure 1).

At first sight, the characteristics of Emmanuel Macron's election and presidential term seem to fit perfectly within the analytical framework of passive revolution described above. Nevertheless, adopting a *longue durée* perspective on French liberalisation reveals that the passive revolution of French neoliberalism can be traced back to the early 1980s onwards. In lieu of its renewal, the Macronite governance might therefore signal both the acme and the impasse of the French passive revolutionary process.

Positing that the recent history of French neoliberalism has been a history of passive revolution means that its implementation has required the reiteration, under different guises, of an old strategy of depoliticisation that consists in separating the economic and the political sphere, or to move the economy to a realm above popular pressures without saying it outright, with the aim to making neoliberalism acceptable to French society.

With the *second synthesis* of French neoliberalism, *trasformismo* has become a systemic feature of French political life, the political manifestation of an increasing ideological confusion and democratic degeneracy.

This explains why the rise in feelings of alienation among the electorate now favours either widespread abstention or the vote for so-called 'extremist' or 'populist' political formations, which in turn amplifies the fear of the masses – what John Mc Cormick (2019) called 'ochlophobia' – that has characterised French political society for so long. The dislocations produced by the advance of the competitive logic also fuel demonstrations of resistance that sometimes turned violent in the French banlieues, in the streets of large cities, on roundabouts and in the heart of Paris *beaux quartiers*, as well as at the margins between inner suburbs and countryside.

This state of affairs explains the shift towards the coercive end of the spectrum observed since the end of 2018. In lieu of envisaging democratic conflict and deliberation as a healthy process, Emmanuel Macron's chosen mode of governance, what I term 'authoritarian anti-populism', demonstrates the limits of passive revolution as a mode of regulation of the French political economy. This unabashed tilt towards coercion might therefore signal the end of the long passive revolution of French neoliberalism, and the eclipse of its techniques by a more confrontational and totalising approach.

To evaluate these hypotheses, the research examines patterns of *discipline*, *defection* and *dissent*, as this triptych encapsulates the types of political reactions that have accompanied the advance of neoliberalism in contemporary French politics.

The *first synthesis* of French neoliberalism (ideological, through new constitutionalism) is therefore examined in the framework of a genealogy of French neoliberalism (first section) that spans from 1938 to 2017. This genealogical approach delineates doctrinal elements that have been ideologically constructed as part of the neoliberal 'common sense' and sketchs the global constraints and agreements that have limited the capacities of states to undertake redistributive and investment policies in the framework of the European Union. Both these ideological and global institutional frameworks had profound *disciplinary* effects on state elites and continue to deeply shape political discourses and economic policy-making.

The *second synthesis* of French neoliberalism (partisan, through LREM) is addressed in the study of the 2017 election cycle. This analysis traces the historical processes of partisan re-alignment 'at the centre' of the French political ecosystem, orchestrated by individual and collective behaviours of *defection* mediated through what Gramsci called *trasformismo*. The

second section thus explores the democratic consequences of the complete restructuring of the French party system that followed the 2017 presidential and legislative elections.

Against the background of these two syntheses that express the formation and restructuring of historic (neoliberal) blocs of rule, the third section of this research deals with matters of governance and resistance in contemporary France. This focus on the Macronite mode of governance ('authoritarian anti-populism') and on forms of struggle and displays of *dissent* on the part of the subaltern political and social forces is intended to illustrate the pitfalls and contradictions of Macronism, and intends to substantiate the obsolescence of the logic of passive revolution as a mode of regulation of the French political economy.

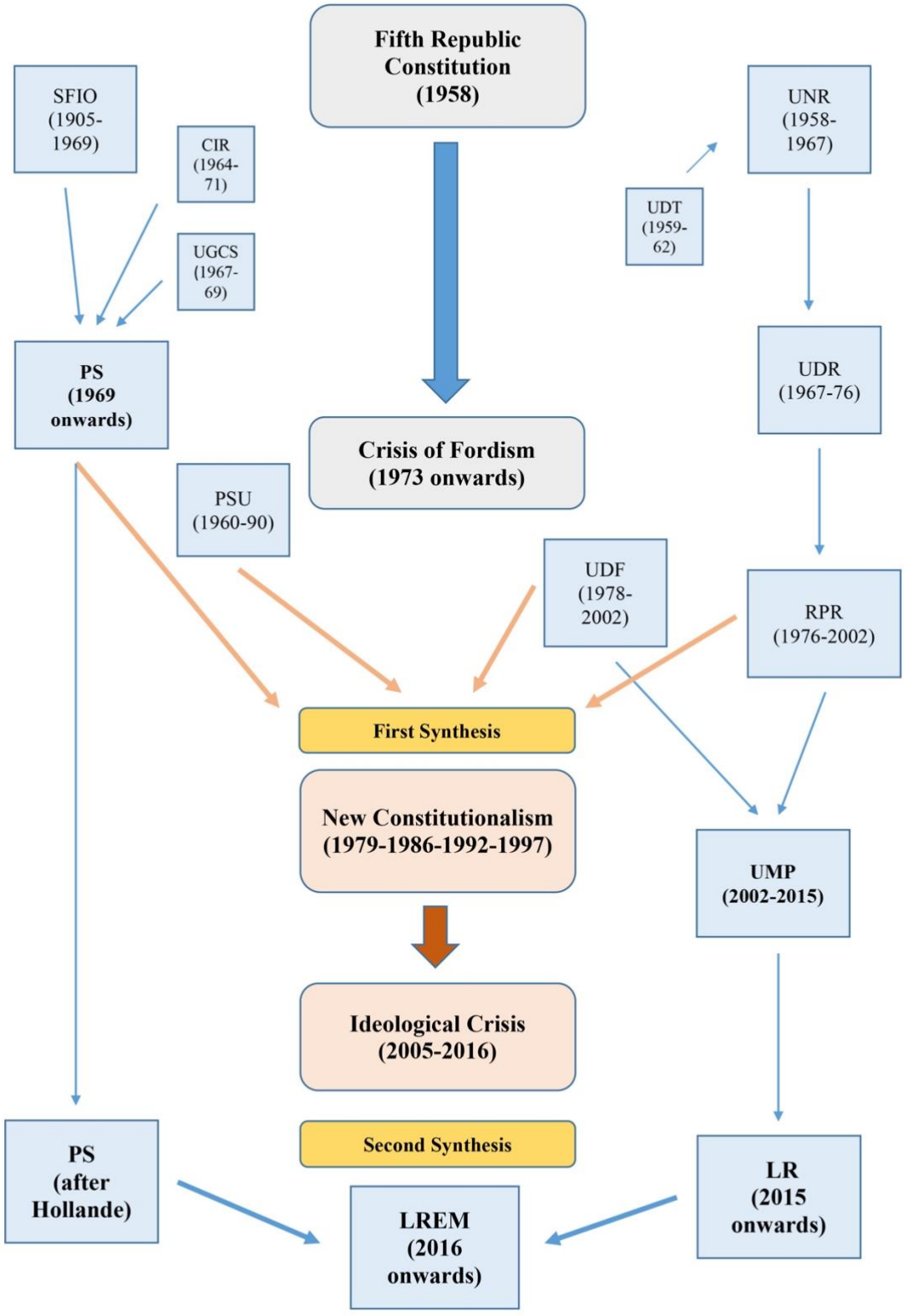

Figure 1: Political Parties Restructuring and the Two Syntheses of French Neoliberalism under the Fifth Republic

Outline of Chapters

Nine chapters follow this introduction, divided into three distinct parts. The parts are dedicated to (I) a genealogy of French neoliberalism, (II) an examination of the 2017 election cycle and (III) an analysis of the pitfalls and contradictions of Macronism.

Part I: A Genealogy of French Neoliberalism

Chapter one addresses the influence of the ordoliberal theoretical framework of statecraft on French economic debates and policy-making, from the Lippmann Colloquium (1938) to the end of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's presidency (1981). Drawing on two Gramscian concepts – 'organic intellectual' and 'war of position' – this chapter investigates the intellectual reception and theoretical co-conception of ordoliberalism by French economists, academics, and epistemic communities (clubs, foundations, think-tanks) in an effort to build a 'third way' between *laissez-faire* and economic planning. This took the form of a *rule-based* economic doctrine prioritising inflation control, the promotion of free trade and capital mobility, and the rejection of price control and large-scale redistribution. The progressive decline of *dirigisme* was initiated in a context of deep crisis and constitutional renewal, which the stabilisation plan Pinay-Rueff (1958) – based upon ordoliberal principles – was supposed to resolve.

Charles de Gaulle's purported *dirigisme* is often wrongly amalgamated with the truly interventionist economic policies drafted by the Conseil National de la Résistance (CNR). Indeed, the Gaullist era was not 'social' in character, as the weakness of its redistributive ambitions can attest. Instead of consolidating the planning mechanisms elaborated in the 1950s, de Gaulle orchestrated their dismantlement. Seven principles of economic governance that are common to both France and Germany over that period are sketched out in the demonstration.

The chapter also addresses the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981), that witnessed the gradual eclipse of ordoliberal thinkers by proponents of the more positivist Chicago School and Public Choice Theory, gathered in the *Nouveaux économistes* collective. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's term was nonetheless marked by the further alignment of French economic policy to the German model, under the aegis of economist Prime Minister Raymond Barre. Despite the credence gained by 'modernist' ideas and a relative eclipse of ordoliberal intellectuals in the 1970s, European integration provided an additional legitimation for ordoliberal restructuring. From the Treaty of Rome (1957) to the European Monetary System (1979), the process of European unification strove to separate the economic from the political through constitutional means, a logic that reached its acme in 1992 with the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, as studied in Chapter II.

Chapter two investigates the specificities of the French political economy under successive Socialist majorities in the period spanning from 1981 to 2007. While de Gaulle's and Giscard d'Estaing's commitment to fiscal and budgetary consolidation and anti-inflationary policies was clear, the French Socialist Party's position towards the state and its prerogatives remained discursively at odds with the policy orientations followed once they were in power. As soon as 1983, the Socialists' mode of governance became the continuation of the policy programme implemented by Raymond Barre at the end of the 1970s. The so-called 'U-turn' (1983), far from being a sudden conversion of the French political class to market fundamentalism, nevertheless came to symbolise the conversion of French Socialists to economic 'realism'. It was thus under Franco-German impulse that the norms and rules acknowledged in successive European treaties – Single European Act (1986), Maastricht Treaty (1992), Stability and Growth Pact (1997) – came to directly translate ordoliberal tenets into EU law, thus building-up the fundamental normative structures of the social market

economy on the rest of the continent through the supranational door. The commitment of the French Socialists to the 'new constitutionalism of disciplinary neoliberalism' (Gill 1998, 2017) was manifest at home, as well as globally, with eminent transnational representatives of the French Socialist Party advocating for further liberalisation in international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the EU and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Abdelal 2005). New constitutionalism therefore constituted the 'first synthesis' of French neoliberalism, the umbrella under which the governmental Left and Right joined their forces to intensify the neoliberalisation of the French political economy.

Chapter three is concerned with the political climate in France in the decade that preceded Emmanuel Macron's 2017 presidential victory, from the election of President Nicolas Sarkozy to the end of the François Hollande's presidency (2007-2017). The chapter focuses on the social and ideational factors and fractures that ultimately triggered the elimination of the two traditional governing parties of the Fifth Republic – the Gaullist right and Parti Socialiste – from the second round of the 2017 presidential election. It theoretically demarcates the terrain on which the neoliberal war of position is played out in the French media by examining the prominent role of 'experts' in shaping the contours and contents of socio-political debates. Since the early 2010s think-tank representatives benefit from a much larger visibility in the French media, and their influence on political parties' rhetoric, semantics and programmes, as well as on public policy, is more manifest than ever. Financed by the wealthiest tax payers, these institutions encouraged a move away from traditional working class grievances in order to position the main parties closer to middle and higher classes' concerns. The connivance of think-tank organisers and experts with the rather closed circles in which French political journalists associate explains the omnipresence of the former on television sets and radio programmes. Together, they shape a new language that appeals to

'common sense' to borrow Gramsci's phrasing, one that is articulated through the use of *euphemism* and *repetition* and that I call the neoliberal *lingua franca*.

While Nicolas Sarkozy's stylistic rupture with the traditional Gaullist Right standards entailed a glorification of individual effort, secularism and law and order, his rather skilful co-optation of reformist Leftist figures ('*ouverture*') was short-lived. Sarkozy's discursive radicalisation and creeping authoritarianism led to fratricidal tensions within his party and cost him re-election. Meanwhile, the global financial crisis occasioned large bail out for the big players of French capitalism and a renewed allegiance to market discipline for small firms and workers in the European Union. Abiding by the Treaty on Stability, Cooperation and Governance in the EMU (TSCG) that he initially promised to renegotiate, François Hollande enacted some of the most pro-business policies of the last decades in the form of multiple tax cuts aimed at enhancing 'competitiveness', creating destabilising tensions within his own party and substantiating the claim that the differences between the traditional Left and Right rested on 'the interpretation of reform, rather than antithetical visions for the transformation of society' (Raymond 2018, 422). The chapter theorises these historical developments in the framework of what I call the 'French ideological crisis', which is characterised by three successive and mutually reinforcing dynamics: (1) the stalemate of the class struggle (marginalisation of labour from the governance of the political economy, refusal of antagonism along class lines); (2) the depoliticisation of society (fragmentation of socio-economic vindications), and (3) the discrediting of the Left/Right cleavage (alignment of the Right and Left's programmes around European integration and structural reforms, breeding abstention and democratic withdrawal). The loss of substance of the terms 'Left' and 'Right' has therefore provided fertile ground for Emmanuel Macron's political project, that was presented as going 'beyond Left and Right'.

Part II: Emmanuel Macron's Election

Chapter four examines the 2017 electoral cycle (presidential and legislative elections). For the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, the candidates representing the mainstream Right and Left – *Les Républicains* and Parti Socialiste – did not win through the second round of the presidential election. The interchangeability and deliquescence of the traditional Left and Right parties in France opened the door for the emergence of a new, seemingly innovative movement (*En Marche*!), whose representatives pretended to think and govern beyond cleavages. Conjunctural events punctuated the campaign and indirectly benefited the candidate from En Marche – such as the public disgrace of conservative candidate François Fillon following investigations for embezzlement of public funds. Furthermore, the high degree of support for Front National's candidate Marine Le Pen – who reached the second round but proved her incompetency in the last weeks of the campaign – granted Emmanuel Macron his fragile victory and initiated the second synthesis of French neoliberalism.

The chapter first critically discusses the 'making' of Emmanuel Macron in the mainstream media, and scrutinises the political and ideological journey of the young presidential candidate. A pure product of the French elitist tradition, Emmanuel Macron became close to François Hollande during the 2012 presidential campaign, before being appointed Secrétaire Général de l'Elysée in 2012 and Minister of the Economy in August 2014. He founded his political movement in the spring of 2016 and resigned in the summer. Cheered and joined by several prominent members from the reformist strand of Parti Socialiste, Macron's endeavour articulated a critique of existing parties and a purportedly 'disruptive' style and rhetoric glorifying entrepreneurial values while projecting an outdated image of the traditional, ossified political formations in the run-up to the 2017 presidential election. This narrative of audacity was much greeted by the press.

The chapter then exposes the balance of political forces involved in the presidential election campaign and provides a summary of the unusual 2017 contest, which was run mostly on socio-economic issues and France's place within the EU, as well as an analysis of its results. The two runners-up framed their opposition as one between 'globalists' and 'patriots' (for Le Pen) and between 'progressives' and 'nationalists' (for Macron). After Le Pen's piteous performance in the between two-rounds debate and the almost unanimous rallying of the traditional Left and Right to *En Marche* (LREM), Emmanuel Macron won the second round of the election with 66.10 per cent of the vote share. Noticeably, 12 million French people chose to abstain from voting and 4 million French voters cast invalid ballots to express frustration and discontent at this outcome.

Chapter five analyses the contemporary mutations of the French party system brought about by the 2017 electoral cycle in light of the Italian concept of *trasformismo* ('transformism'). A profound shift in the balance of social and political forces followed Emmanuel Macron's election in May 2017, orchestrated by *trasformismo*, a process whereby Left and Right's programmes converge until there ceases to be any significant difference between them (Gramsci 1971, 58-9 Q19§24). The initial phase of this process was marked by (1) early individual defections during the presidential campaign and (2) the appointment of governmental figures from seemingly different political persuasions and from the ranks of so-called 'civil society' in the spring of 2017. In June, *trasformismo* became a behaviour observable among candidates to the 2017 legislative election. Indeed, Emmanuel Macron's presidential victory provided an unprecedented opportunity for political executives – whether at the local or national level – whose political career were at a standstill. Disillusioned with their original political grouping, they repudiated their former partisan affiliation to join a nascent and potentially fruitful political enterprise.

After a short genealogy of the concept of *trasformismo* in the Italian context, the first section reviews the sociological and ideological background of the new LREM majority, whose deputies entered Palais Bourbon after the second round. Their professional background – as consultants, entrepreneurs, senior executives and to a lesser extent senior officials or university professors – illustrates the strongly elitist conception that Emmanuel Macron's party gave to the celebrated notion of 'civil society', hereby analysed as intrinsic to what Gramsci called the 'integral state'. Focusing on the conduct of the June 2017 parliamentary elections, the chapter demonstrates the analytical relevance of the concept of *trasformismo* in attempting to interpret the series of mutations that unfolded in the 2017 electoral cycle. Two contrasted and overlapping phases to this process are distinguished, based on a distinction established by Italian political scientists (following Gramsci) between 'molecular' and 'group' transformism. The consummation of this process constituted the second synthesis of French neoliberalism. The rapprochement initiated at the international level (through abidance to new constitutionalism) materialised nationally in the virtual merging of the moderate factions of the two mainstream parties, with the purpose of deepening the neoliberalisation of the French political economy.

Chapter six scrutinises Emmanuel Macron's tacit claim to the centre and considers the potential for rupture or continuity of such types of positioning in the French context. It does so by reviewing elements of discourse and programmes that seem to substantiate Emmanuel Macron's claim to the centre – 'both from the Right and from the Left' – before examining this positioning in light of Anthony Giddens' concept of the 'Third Way', the ideological backbone of Prime Minister Tony Blair's New Labour governance, which Chantal Mouffe (1998) labelled as 'radical centrist'. Yet, the social-liberalism of the Third Way resonates much more with François Hollande's and the Socialist Party' practice of government than

with Macron's and LREM's. The chapter then investigates the ideological underpinnings of 'centrism' in the French context by reflecting on Maurice Duverger's concept of the *éternel marais*, which posits that France has, for most of its history since the French Revolution, been governed at the centre (1951; 1964). After tracing the lineage of the centrist positioning in French politics, the chapter engages with Pierre Serna's claim that Macron's rise led to the emergence of a new 'extreme centre' (Deneault 2016; Ali 2018; Serna 2019) imbued with totalitarian ambitions. The final section thus interrogates the potentials of the 'extreme centre' as a conceptual tool to characterise Emmanuel Macron's political and socio-economic creed.

Part III: The Pitfalls and Contradictions of Macronism

Chapter seven applies the Gramscian concept of 'passive revolution' to the current French political moment and to the rise of Macron and evaluates its potentials for encapsulating the larger development of French neoliberalism as a long passive revolution, the limits of which are today visible in the radicalisation of LREM's governance, with a tilt towards the coercive end of the spectrum under the form of 'authoritarian anti-populism'. The chapter starts with an overview of the institutional and political specificities of the French presidential regime and explores how Macron fully espoused and eventually aggravated the executive logic of power concentration and the subordinate status of the legislature in France, a posture consistent with the Gramscian notion of 'Caesarism'. The section reviews the symbols, signs and semantics mobilised by Macron, and how they have sometimes been interpreted as a form of contempt towards the French population.

On the economic front, the first two years of the quinquennat had the character of a legislative blitzkrieg, with several reform packages hastily passed through ordinances and decree-laws in order to simplify and lower taxation, with the ultimate goal to augment French 'attractiveness'

and ‘competitiveness’ in the framework of the European common market. Thus, the immediate economic objectives of the Philippe government included: (1) budgetary austerity, (2) lower taxation of businesses, (3) measures of liberalisation and privatisation and (4) political-economic convergence with Germany and with Great Britain. These priorities were informed by a trickle-down economic logic positing that the wealthier citizens are the motor of the economy, and that lowering taxation in an open economy necessarily garners positive collective outcomes in terms of productive investment and employment. In that sense, Emmanuel Macron’s economic policies are ‘market-preserving federalism’ (Harmes 2019) in action.

The chapter argues that passive revolution is a very useful analytical lens through which the contradictions of Macronism can be apprehended. At first sight, Emmanuel Macron’s election and presidential term seem to fit well within the analytical framework of passive revolution, in both strategic and ideological terms. Yet, a *longue durée* perspective on French liberalisation reveals that the passive revolution of French neoliberalism can be traced back to the early 1980s onwards. Thus, the ideological novelty of Macronism, what I call ‘regressive modernisation 3.0’, appears rather limited, with no significant material compensation offered to counterbalance the expansion of the competitive market logic and the social violence that ensues. With the radicalisation of executive pre-eminence and the passing of decree-laws, the new presidential majority’s creed privileges imposition over persuasion. In lieu of its renewal, the Macronite governance might therefore signal both the acme and the impasse of the French passive revolutionary process.

Chapter eight reflects on French, European and global developments. It does so by reviewing the vast literature on ‘populism’ and infers that scholars have interpreted it as an *ideology*, a

discourse or a *strategy*. This characterisation has implications for assessing populism's effects on the political system. The chapter identifies a causal relationship between neoliberalism and populism: the latter constitutes a political blowback against 'the neoliberalisation of social-democracy' (Judi 2016). 'Populism' does not constitute a threat or a corrective to democracy in and of itself: whether populist forces threaten or renew democracy eventually depends on the specific socio-cultural context in which they emerge and develop. Certain 'technopopulist' (Bickerton and Accetti 2021) political movements – New Labour, Movimento Cinque Stelle, En Marche – do not fit within the 'populist'/ 'anti-populist' cleavage because they offer a synthesis of expertise and the appeals to the people. In LREM's case, the populist dimension was circumscribed in time to meet strategic goals: to ridicule as obsolete the existing political offer.

Against widespread anguish regarding the 'populist surge', the chapter analyses the democratic consequences of 'anti-populism' as a political discourse, strategy, and ideology in Western European countries, and in France in particular. The 'populist' label is always pejorative and aims to discredit, neutralise and delegitimise any political claim that does not conform to the status quo. In that sense, *anti*-populism has detrimental effects on democracy, as it socially constructs political deviance through simplistic dichotomies and thus places considerable material and discursive limits on what is ideologically and politically possible. Against this background, Emmanuel Macron and his party LREM adopted ambiguous postures and seem entangled in a paradoxical dialectic of populism and anti-populism. On the one hand, the presidential majority positioned itself above traditional parties and rejected an old political class presented as corrupted. On the other hand, Macron and LREM have also exploited European-wide anxieties regarding the 'populist phenomenon' – with direct or indirect reference to ('nationalists') Viktor Orbán, Matteo Salvini and of course Marine Le

Pen – by presenting themselves as the only credible ('progressive') force to counter them. The chapter concludes by drawing on Stuart Hall's concept of 'authoritarian populism' which described 'an exceptional form of the capitalist state' (1979) in order to advance the analytical potentials of the concept of 'authoritarian anti-populism' to make sense of the ambiguities and contradictions of Emmanuel Macron's mode of government in contemporary France.

Chapter nine is dedicated to the contemporary forms of subalternity and resistance in France. Covering the period spanning from 2018 to 2021, it accounts for the 'three winters of discontent' – the *Gilets Jaunes* ('Yellow Vests') movement, the mobilisation against the pension reform and the protests against the *loi de sécurité globale* ('global security law') – that considerably complicated Emmanuel Macron's reformist ambitions. After a thorough examination of the Yellow Vests uprising, the chapter problematizes this popular revolt as a crisis of social reproduction bred by the widespread intergenerational anguish stemming from deteriorating standards of living and looming environmental threats. The chapter argues that such blows of resistance signal a 're-proletarianisation' of French society. In parallel, the development of new anti-racist movements – notably organised by Comité Vérité et Justice pour Adama, led by Assa Traoré – have put on the agenda the racial question, fifteen years after the 2005 riots in French *banlieues*, and initiated a de facto alliance with the Yellow Vests. Furthermore, the largely followed strikes and demonstrations against the pension reform in late 2019 and early 2020 showed that mass-scale mobilisations were still possible in France, some 25 years after the strikes against the Plan Juppé. The chapter also addresses the backlash to these mobilisations, which consisted in a strengthening and radicalisation of the logic of 'authoritarian anti-populism'. It does so by engaging with the notion of 'securitisation' (Waever 1995) to analyse the various forms of constitutionalising of emergency in France that followed not only the 2015 terrorist attacks, but also the Yellow

Vests movement and its ferocious repression. Yet, these efforts were once again met with blowback in the streets, particularly when the controversial and creepingly authoritarian *loi de sécurité globale*, which made a point to forbid the filming of police officers in duty, thus preventing the denunciation of widespread police violence and the identification of faulty officers, brought thousands to the streets in the winter of 2019-2020, before the Covid-19 pandemic abruptly interrupted the third massive social movement of the Macron years.

The concluding remarks survey the trajectory of *La République En Marche* after five years in power, highlighting the difficulties of the presidential majority and providing an update on the transformist trajectories of LREM MPs, a significant number of them having seceded from the parent company to join smaller parliamentary formations (*Agir*, *Territoire de Progrès*, *Horizons*). The conclusion accounts for the recomposing balance of political forces leading up to the 2022 electoral cycle, notably the rise of fascist pundit Eric Zemmour, whose presidential bid reshuffled the cards on the extreme right. Finally, the concluding remarks analyse the 2022 presidential contest and results, and sketch briefs notes for future research.

Part I

GENEALOGY OF FRENCH NEOLIBERALISM

Chapter I

The Rise and Eclipse of French Ordoliberalism

> Is it perhaps both France's tragedy and the secret of its charm
> that it has never really been won over to capitalism?
> (Fernand Braudel, 1990)

Introduction

This chapter addresses the influence of ordoliberalism as theoretical framework of statecraft on French economic debates and policy-making, from the Lippmann Colloquium (1938) to the end of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's presidency.

The historical survey that follows suggests that strict theoretical delineations between *dirigisme* and the German 'social market economy' have neglected the numerous commonalities between two hybrid developmental projects partly inspired by the ordoliberal framework. Indeed, while it is common to oppose German ordoliberal policies with French post-war *dirigisme,* the two trajectories have more in common than is generally assumed.

The chapter argues that recognising these commonalities can help us apprehend the peculiarities of French neoliberalisation, as well as the gradual codification of European integration along ordoliberal lines, as the principles cited above gradually came to inform the content of future treaties that would constitutionalise the foundations of European economic unification. It concludes with a call to envisage ordoliberalism not just as a German project, but as a transnational one, one in which the figure of Jacques Rueff played a pivotal role.

The first section draws on two Gramscian concepts – surveying the activities of neoliberal '*organic intellectuals*', who are part of collective projects of rule and strategy and engage in

an ideological '*war of position'* – to investigate the intellectual reception and theoretical co-conception of ordoliberalism by French economists and academics. It thus exposes the fundamental tenets of ordoliberalism and explores how the concept of 'social market economy' found its way into German political and economic policies. That is not, however, a specific German story. Since the 1938 Lippmann Coloquium in Paris, epistemic communities – clubs, foundations, think-tanks – and 'organic intellectuals' – Jacques Rueff, Maurice Allais, Raymond Barre – aspired to build a 'third way' between *laissez-faire* and economic planning. As will be seen, their promotion of a *rule-based* economic doctrine prioritising inflation control, the promotion of free trade and capital mobility, and rejecting price control and redistribution, have considerably influenced political discourses and policy orientations over the postwar period.

The second section examines the progressive decline of *dirigisme*, that was initiated in a context of deep crisis and constitutional renewal, which the stabilisation plan Pinay-Rueff (1958), drafted by Jacques Rueff – France's most accomplished ordoliberal theoretician – was supposed to resolve. Indeed, this 'constitutionalising context' provided an opportunity to follow Walter Eucken's recommendation to assert principles of economic constitutionalism as soon as a new political constitution is conceived. The priorities and interests governing France's comparatively large state were informed by ordoliberal principles. Despite the myth that contemporary representatives of the French Right propagate, the Gaullist era was not 'social' in character, as the weakness of its redistributive ambitions can attest. Indeed, the purported *dirigisme* of de Gaulle is often wrongly associated with the truly interventionist economic policies implemented under the Fourth Republic (1946-1958), following the 1944 programme drafted by the Conseil National de la Résistance (CNR). Throughout his term in office, de Gaulle did not consolidate the planning mechanisms elaborated in the 1950s but

orchestrated their dismantlement. Seven principles of economic governance that are common to both France and Germany over that period are sketched out.

The final section addresses the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981) and the context of renewal for French neoliberalism that saw the gradual eclipse of ordoliberal thinkers by proponents of the more positivist Chicago School and Public Choice Theory, gathered in the *Nouveaux économistes* collective. Nonetheless, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's term is marked by the further alignment of French economic policy to the German model, under the guidance of economist Prime Minister Raymond Barre. Despite the credence taken by 'modernist' ideas and a relative eclipse of ordoliberal intellectuals in the 1970s, European integration provided an additional legitimation for ordoliberal restructuring under successive Left and Right majorities in the years that followed. From the Treaty of Rome (1957) to the European Monetary System (1979), the process of European unification strove to separate the economic from the political through constitutional means, a logic that reached its acme in 1992 with the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, as will be further studied in Chapter II.

The Ordoliberal Framework on Both Sides of the Rhine

The Lippmann Colloquium (1938): Foundational Encounters and Lasting Divergences

While much attention has been devoted to the foundation of the Mont-Pèlerin Society in April 1947 as the founding act of a transnational 'neoliberal thought collective' (Mirowski and Phlewe 2009), the Lippmann Colloquium should be widely recognised to be the first, decisive collective attempt to theorise and institutionalise a new form of liberalism (Denord 2001, 2007; Audier 2012; Diemer 2014), in a context of prolonged economic crisis, social unrest and political mutations on the European continent and following the discrediting of *laissez-faire* principles in the wake of the Great Depression.

Four weeks separate the colloquium from the Munich Agreement, perhaps the most concrete omen of the profound chasm European civilisation was about to fall into. As classical liberalism was experiencing the worst intellectual crisis of its history in the wake of the 1929 crash, the French government was crafting its most ambitious social reforms programme under Leon Blum's *Front Populaire* (1936-1938). In that rather adverse context, French philosopher Louis Rougier organised the Walter Lippmann colloquium in Paris in order to celebrate the ideas developed by American reporter and editorialist Walter Lippmann in his 1937 *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Good Society* (published in France as *Cité libre,* at éditions de la librairie Médicis). A rather marginal intellectual specialising in scientific philosophy, religion and political economy, Rougier called for the emergence of a 'new' liberalism (which he baptised *libéralisme constructeur*) that would take its distance from both classical *laissez-faire* liberalism and economic planning (Denord 2001, 10-12).

In August 1938, the meeting thus gathered a clique of European intellectuals expressing nascent and alternative liberal proclivities. Many prominent foreign intellectuals travelled to Paris to participate in the colloquium: Friedrich von Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Wilhelm Röpke, Michael Polanyi and Alexander Rüstow were among them. The forum also gathered some of the most influential French senior civil servants (Jacques Rueff, Roger Auboin, Robert Marjolin), intellectuals (Raymond Aron, Louis Baudin, Bernard Lavergne) and corporate managers (Auguste Detoeuf, Louis Marlio, Ernest Mercier) (Denord 2009, 48). There is a large consensus in the literature over the fact that the four-days long meeting, although a fundamental milestone in advancing a theoretical guide to renovate a liberal doctrine in disarray, ultimately revealed the deep heterogeneity at the heart of (neo)-liberal

thinking. Before examining the elements of discord, it is necessary to assess the political and economic implications contained in Lippmann's arguments.

In his book, Walter Lippmann aspired to theorise the foundations of a new kind of economic and societal order, one that would be articulated around the *common law*. The law not only had to prescribe individual rights and obligations, it also served the purpose of instituting the market and the rules under which this latter functions. For Lippmann, the market is a historical construct whose existence depends upon the establishment of a specific institutional and legal framework: if competition is not effective, the state must impose it (Denord 2001, 20-21), an insight that would have a decisive influence on the partisans of ordoliberalism. Indeed, Lippmann refused to consider property rights as natural: on the contrary, they would not exist without the law. By extension, the free-market economy results from a specific juridical framework that necessarily entails a legal intervention by the state, a vision that echoed Rougier's concept of *libéralisme constructeur*, as well as the latter's mixed feelings about democracy.[10]

Indeed, a profound elitism stemming from a distrust of democratic mechanisms frames the contours of this desired legal order. As a former socialist militant, Lippmann adhered to the technocratic tendencies of the Fabian Society and developed a 'realist' vision of democracy – akin to the approaches later developed by Joseph Schumpeter or Raymond Aron – that asserts the impossibility for the ordinary citizen to possess the ability, the time or the willingness to develop an informed knowledge about political and socio-economic issues, let alone be

[10] According to Serge Audier (2016, 83), Louis Rougier's interventions during the colloquium drew a distinction between 'good democracy' – a liberal democracy founded upon the limitation of state and executive power by a superior juridical entity – and 'bad democracy' – a 'socialising' democracy founded upon popular expression which, by opposition, would lead to demagogy and a totalitarian state.

attuned to their institutional proceedings. Against this background, Lippmann saw the principle of a government 'of the people, by the people, for the people' as a myth leading to demagogic excesses (Audier 2016, 62-64). Differently put, politics and economics are serious matters whose governance ought to be left to 'independent' experts who can responsibly craft elements of common law that are then defined, applied and amended by the people's representatives (Lippmann 1937, 317 as cited in Audier 2016, 71). This separation between 'ordinary' and 'constitutional politics' dear to James Buchanan (1994) and deemed to be quintessential of a free society, was to form the basis of constitutional economics.

However, the varied intellectual cliques that congregated in Paris in 1938 had adopted multifarious epistemological and ontological commitments. For this reason, the participants could hardly be envisaged as a coherent organism with shared immediate purposes and policy suggestions in the realm of political-economic governance. In particular, a major theoretical line of conflict emerged out of the discussions between partisans of the Vienna School and sympathisers of the Freiburg School, a division that could be summed up as a chasm between radical libertarianism and an order-based framework; a partition between the rejection of interventionism and the embrace of strong institutions. Indeed, the Austrians Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek were not prepared to discredit *laissez-faire* entirely and their priority was to strengthen liberalism theoretically in the face of collectivism and economic planning. For them, state intervention inherently violated the competitive order. In contrast, German ordoliberals such as Wilhelm Röpke and Alexander Rustöw maintained that the state was the main actor that could and should fend off and resist the attacks against competition and the constitution of cartels and monopolies (Amable 2017b**,** 15). The notion of competition was thus central to their disagreements: while partisans of the Austrian school deemed competition not 'natural' but rather 'spontaneous', German ordoliberals developed an anti-

naturalist and socially-embedded[11] understanding of competition. From a methodological standpoint, both schools nevertheless coalesced in their refusal of envisaging economics as a natural science reducible to complex mathematical equations (Caré 2016).

Although its participants exposed very different ideational understandings of what a 'new' liberalism could mean, the colloquium turned out to be a foundational encounter. Almost a decade before the creation of the Mont-Pèlerin Society, the Parisian meeting started the intellectual 'war of position' of different neoliberal streams. Nevertheless, these thinkers coalesced in their opposition to Keynesianism, and this alliance in abhorrence drove their willingness to be vocal and voluntarist alongside, and to agree on holding regular meetings to continue the conversation.

Significantly, an 'agenda for liberalism' was agreed upon, structured around the belief of the superiority of the market economy over state intervention, a principle that was leaning against the wind in the depths of the Great Depression. To this end, priority was given to the price mechanism, the free enterprise, the system of competition and a strong and impartial state (Mirowski and Plehwe 2009, 13-14). Yet, it was recognised that the market equilibrium was affected by the juridical framework governing economic life, and that this framework was neither natural nor spontaneous, and thus remained reversible at all times (Audier 2016, 74). Against this background, the next sub-section discusses the intellectual contribution of the Freiburg School and postwar ordoliberal thinkers, and the influence that they had on the institutionalisation of the German 'social market economy'.

[11] With this premise, the ordoliberal understanding of markets does not differ fundamentally from the anti-naturalist and constructivist conception of markets which Karl Polanyi develops at length in *The Great Transformation* (1944).

The Freiburg School and the German Social Market Economy

The Freiburg school of liberalism was born in the 1930s, under the notable impulsion of economist Walter Eucken (1891-1950) and jurists Hans Grossman-Doerth (1894-1944) and Franz Böhm (1895-1977). The South-western German city provided a haven for a small and interdisciplinary group of intellectuals who rejected both Nazi totalitarianism and state socialism (Gerber 1994, 25).

Freiburg school thinkers proscribed the concept of *homo economicus* and considered that *laissez-faire* was an intrinsically flawed, idealistic, asocial and quasi-religious belief. What is worst, unfeterred competition leads to the constitution of markets and monopolies, whose growth distorts the market equilibrium. For them, market competition was an 'artificial phenomenon' that was produced and maintained through a so-called competitive order that had to be developed 'in a collaborative effort between jurisprudence and economics' (Biebricher 2017, 105). Interwar ordoliberal thinkers therefore believed that the general principle of the ideal economic regime should have the character of the *Rechtsstaat* (the state under the rule of law), hence the need for an economic constitution as soon as a political constitution is conceived (Lechevalier 2017, 27), so that the state could become the legitimate 'guardian' of the competitive order.

Indeed, the state ought to be strong enough to provide an 'order' (*Ordo*) so as to develop 'order-based policies' (*Ordnungspolitik)*, that is, a framework governing the actions of both the state and the firms. For jurist Franz Böhm, the economic constitution is the 'comprehensive decision (*Gesamtentscheidung)* of a society concerning the nature and form of the process of socio-economic cooperation' (Blyth 2013). This suggests that the economic has no independent existence. For Walter Eucken, economic constitution (*the rules of the*

game) is a political matter, and its institutional core should comprise strict competition policy and tight monetary policy (Eucken 1992). With the overarching protection of an economic constitution, policy goals and prescriptions become part of a distinct realm. Certain economic logics and procedures should be adopted once and for all, and therefore insulated from democratic interference. It is thus asserted that various ideational commitments cannot be called into question by the parliamentary state, even less so by the street, and that they henceforth had to be governed by independent authorities.

Among these, a monetary policy that is 'independent' and geared towards price stability, associated with rigorous competition laws that aim to prevent the formation of cartels and monopolies. These two constitutional priorities would form the guiding principles of what economist Alfred Müller Armack coined the 'social market economy' in 1947 (Strassel 2013, 69-71), an expression that underlines the influence of ordoliberalism in postwar Germany. In 1948, the journal *ORDO* was created, forming the primary terrain of the ordoliberal war of position in West Germany, with a diverse congregation of contributing intellectuals ranging from Alexander Rustöw and Wilhelm Röpke to Leonhard Miksh and Alfred Müller-Armack (Caré 2016, 7).

However, postwar ordoliberals did not necessarily concur with all the recommendations of the Freiburg school. While interwar ordoliberals started on the premise that the market order depended on the nature of the legal-institutional framework within which market forces operated, the ordoliberal branch represented by Rustöw and Röpke was more sociologically grounded and exhibited more socially conservative tendencies (Gerber 1994; Young 2015, 10). For Röpke, economics should be understood as a 'moral science', a conception that seemed to be shared by French economist and fellow Lippmann Colloquium participant

Jacques Rueff (1945, 523).[12] Postwar ordoliberals tended to exhibit rigid elitist tendencies, as the doctrine was based on the conviction that the agents of a strong state are the 'guardians of a common societal interest' (Young 2015, 9).

Indeed, the governing principle of ordoliberal *social policy* is to prevent the politicisation of the worker as a proletarian and to instead transform workers into 'energetic, vitalised, and self-responsible individuals' (Bonefeld 2012, 641). To counter the 'revolt of the masses' that processes of *proletarianisation* necessarily engender in terms of democratic pressures from below and their related social crises, Röpke promoted instead 'the revolt of the elites', those that he called 'the aristocrats of public spirit' (Röpke 1958). The agents of the strong state are thus modern day 'aristocrats of the common good', who are able to connect with the honest core of the workers (Rüstow 1932) on the basis of reason, and through educational effort (Eucken 1932, as cited by Bonefeld 2012, 650). They help governments to make policy according to economic insight (Böhm 1937). Thus, under the direction of committed civil servants and under the expert guidance of economists and lawyers, the state is insulated from societal pressures and the defects of pluralist democracy are overcome (Biebricher 2017, 110).

In September 1949, Ludwig Erhard was appointed Federal Minister for Economics under the Chancellorship of Konrad Adenauer (1949-1963). He later replaced Adenauer at the Chancellery from 1963 to 1966. Erhard, whose closest advisor was none other than Alfred Müller-Armack, shared the conviction that a prosperous, free and just society could develop only where the market was embedded in a constitutional framework that would guarantee a

[12] 'A high dose of religious, moral and social constraint' is necessary to leave behind the 'wild order' (Rueff 1945, 523; as cited by Daou 2019, 577).

competitive order solid enough to prevent market distortions and the 'deviant' constitution of cartels and monopolies. For Müller-Armack, this 'social market economy' was *social* in character, because it stimulated production and increased output, leading to greater demand for labour. Indeed, ordoliberals believe that a proper *social policy* does not redistribute wealth. It is aimed instead at establishing a connection between the 'human beings and private property' in order to make competition 'socially effective' in its task of *enabling* individuals as self-responsible entrepreneurs (Müller-Armack 1976, as cited by Bonefeld 2012, 647).

In this framework, monetary stability constitutes the absolute priority, and no conjunctural policy – designed with the purpose to combat unemployment, for instance – could be deemed more important than the long-term reassurance of investors. In that sense, the price mechanism is seen as a 'public good' needing protection.

As Minister and Vice-Chancellor, Ludwig Erhard orchestrated most of the 'structural reforms' from the late 1940s to the 1960s. This included the creation of the Deutsch Mark and the abolition of rationing and price controls in 1948, as well as various privatisations and measures to reinforce West Germany's commitment to free trade. Thus, Ludwig Erhard is largely credited to be the architect of the post-war *Wirtschaftswunder* ('Miracle on the Rhine') or *miracle économique allemand.* In 1948, both the occupation law and the generous American sponsorship provided Erhard with tremendous power that enabled him to achieve the 'double-market-economical reform' (currency reform and the end of price controls) almost singlehandedly, without parliamentary control or oversight (Ptak 2009, 121).

One decade later, as Federal Vice-chancellor, Erhard enacted the 'German Act Against Restraints on Competition' (*Gesetz gegen Wettbewerbsbeschränkungen*) aimed at prohibiting

cartels and preventing abuses of economic power (Gebert 1994, 65). The same year, he passed the 'Bundesbank Act', a rather unconventional step according to the standards of the time, which guaranteed the 'independence' of the German central bank and, in so doing, the rejection of the temporary arbitration between unemployment and inflation that is associated with Keynesian policies. Thus, from 1948 to 1966, austerity-focused ideas allowed German authorities to curb inflation and increased the purchasing power of wages.

Throughout Erhard's time in office, Germany consolidated its export-oriented manufacturing, a developmental path that required a strict policy of cost competitiveness which included wage control and strong anti-inflationary stances. With its competitive prices and its open borders for exports, the postwar German order was characterised by political-economic stability and maintained a solid export surplus. This leads Julian Germann (2021, 93) to argue that, beyond the ideology of ordoliberalism, the framework of price stability was considered the best means to cheapen German exports, which made Germany an 'unwitting architect' of the ordoliberal doctrine.

Indeed, some of the features of the 'social market economy' contradicted the tenets of the ordoliberal framework, such as the status of the German *Bundesbank* (Bibow 2009), or the high degree of concentration of industrial companies and the Bismarckian social insurance system (Lechevalier 2017, 31). The German 'social market economy' was therefore a hybrid construction. Indeed, dissensions existed within the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), as illustrated by the recurring opposition and tensions between Chancellor Adenauer and his Finance Minister Erhard (Strassel 2013, 72). Furthermore, the postwar policies were somehow tamed once the latter left office in 1966, and provided an opportunity for hybridising the existing ordoliberal-inspired policies with Keynesian interventions, although

his successors did not repudiate the fundamentals of the social market economy reforms conducted in the 1950s. With the German postwar trajectory in mind, how could we assess the French reception of those ideas at the same period?

The French Reception of Ordoliberal Principles

Motivated by the same ambition to build the foundations of a 'new' liberalism rejecting both collectivism and traditional *laissez-faire*, the French participants to the colloquium were receptive to this *néolibéralisme à l'allemande* (Commun 2016). Wilhelm Röpke, Walter Lippmann and Louis Rougier were united by the same conviction that there was a 'third way' to be found between planning and Mancunian liberalism. Taking their distance from Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek's dogmatic positions, French intellectuals Jacques Rueff, Louis Rougier and Maurice Allais argued that this novel form of liberalism had to entail a legal interference from the state, which they considered necessary to the protection and safeguarding of free competition at all times, as the state should be in charge of undoing the pervasive influence of trusts, holdings and cartels, while counteracting by the same token the 'tyranny' of syndicates.

It would however be short-sighted to consider that the French passively incorporated policy recommendations formulated on the other side of Rhine. Indeed, the fundamentals of ordoliberalism were jointly theorised by both French and German intellectuals.

In France, one may find the sources of this activist vision of statecraft in the works of Jean Coutrot, the leader of the technocratic intellectual movement X-Crise, created in 1931 by formers students of Ecole Polytechnique ('X'). Indeed, Coutrot expressed a strong distrust of popular instincts. He argued that the core of the 'co-ordinated economy' he wanted to see

emerge should be composed of managers characterised by their competence and their high morals (Amable 2017b, 19), which is consistent with the ordoliberal principle that the leading elite class should always favor stability and expertise over the whims and wrath of public opinion (Eucken 1952). Following this logic, Louis Rougier was also advocating for the implementation of a constitutional measure requiring a 'healthy public finances' that prioritised budgetary equilibrium over conjunctural interventions (Audier 2016, 84).

As former students of Ecole Polytechnique, Jacques Rueff and Maurice Allais concurred and did not hesitate to adopt a resolutely 'scientist' approach in their demonstrations, embracing mathematical modelling. In parallel, they posited a profound analogy between natural sciences and moral sciences, suggesting that 'morals' and 'political economy' could be analysed through similar scientific lenses (Rueff 1922; Caré 2016, 37). Despite distinct epistemological premises, Rueff and Röpke also shared the belief that economics was akin to a moral science, and that the state was in charge of manufacturing a virtuous juridical framework deemed indispensable to the establishment and maintenance of competitive markets.

The purpose of this French tradition of 'legal *dirigisme*' (*dirigisme juridique*) was therefore to solidly protect private property rights, but also to control the currency and the banking system, which were fully recognised as man-made institutions emanating from the rule of law (Diemer 2014, 5). As a member of the very liberal *Société d'Economie Politique*, the strongly anti-Keynesian Jacques Rueff [13] – who helped fixing the level of devaluation of the *Franc*

[13] Jacques Rueff's wartime tome *L'Ordre Social* (1945) has often been compared to Hayek's better-known *The Road to Serfdom* (1944). According to Christopher Chivvis, both were attempts to reverse the trend toward economic planning and government interference in general by emphasising the ways in which intervention could be self-propagating and hence destructive of economic and ultimately civil and political liberty. Rueff was especially insistent on the link between stable money and liberal political order (Chivvis 2006, 704). The parallelism can be contestable: unlike Hayek and in a similar

Poincaré in 1926 before managing the French Treasury (1934-1939) – proposed the notion of *marché institutionnel* ('institutional market') as a framework for ordering markets, whose organisation is never spontaneous but always 'social' in character (Rueff 1945; Diemer 2010). Rueff insisted on the importance of property rights (the primary institution of a pacified economy), markets (which he deemed instrumental to economic democratisation) and government (whose intervention is essential, as long as it does not distort the price mechanism).

Nobel Prize winner Maurice Allais, who did not attend the Lippmann Colloquium but maintained an extensive correspondence with Rougier, would later echo Rueff's institutionalist vision with his concept of *planification concurrentielle* ('competitive planning') which emphasised the interdependent nature of state-market relations (Allais 1950; 1961). Allais did not reject both liberalism and socialism as the ordoliberals did, but was rather trying to merge these two ideologies in order to foster an idealised social-liberal order which he oxymoronically coined *socialisme concurrentiel* ('competitive socialism') (Allais 1947).

In fact, the ideas defended by Louis Rougier, Jacques Rueff and Maurice Allais did not emerge in a vacuum and are solidly anchored within the French economic tradition, whose tenets were laid out by Jean-Baptiste Say and Léon Walras (Diemer 2014, 19). In particular, they were influenced by the argument that:

> Laissez-faire should not mean doing nothing, but should mean allowing free competition to flourish. In the sectors where free competition is possible, the state

vein than the German ordoliberals, Rueff believed that the state played a critical role in establishing the foundations for a functioning free market (Rueff 1953), far beyond a mere protection of property rights. In fact, one might go as far as to argue that Rueff's anti-naturalist and constructivist conception of markets situates his work in a sort of middle ground between Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) and Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (1944).

> should intervene so as to organise it, in order to ensure the conditions of its good functioning (Walras 1880, 388 as cited by Potier 2011, 15; my translation).

In sum, Rougier, Rueff and Allais argued that the market was an *institution* whose existence and efficiency relied on robust social and political structures that formed the architecture of a Léon Walras-inspired 'organised competition', whose prime objective is to 're-embed' the market within society.[14] State and markets are thus conceived as fundamentally interdependent spheres.

After the opening skirmish of the neoliberal 'war of position' (the Lippmann Colloquium), French neoliberals started to build their own organisations. Louis Rougier thus created the *Centre International d'Etudes pour la Rénovation du Libéralisme* (CIRL), with the aim of distributing publications and organising public and private events to promote neoliberal ideas until the Second World War. The center recruited equally among academic economists trained and taught in law faculties (Louis Baudin, Charles Rist) and important corporate managers who promoted industrial rationalisation and the building of a legal order in which reasonable planning would be possible (Auguste Detoeuf, Louis Marlio).

Furthermore, the 1950s was a decade of generational change in French economics (Arena 2000, 969), and this provided a fine opportunity for the development of ordoliberal ideas in French academic and intellectual circles, thanks to a small number of economists and businessmen. While economists engaged in academia such as Daniel Villey (1910-1968) and Louis Baudin (1887-1964) remained the guardians of the French liberal legacy of Jean-Baptiste Say (1767-1832), intellectuals outside the university such as Jacques Rueff (1896-

[14] According to Marie Daou (2019, 584), Rueff analysis in *L'Ordre Social* (1945) is strongly inspired by Walras, who aimed to reconcile socialism and liberalism, individualism and communism. In his autobiography (1977), Rueff relates that when he was at Ecole Polytechnique, his reading of Walras was a real revelation for him.

1978) and Raymond Barre (1924-2007) had a lasting influence on the development of a 'new' liberalism *à la française*, thanks to their close ties with the Presidency – as in Rueff's case – or because of their political careers – as in Barre's case, who followed a similar trajectory than Ludwig Erhard, first appointed Minister of the Economy and Finance (1976-1978), and then Prime Minister (1976-1981).

The ideological inclinations of the aforementioned scholars strongly resonate with the elitism and social conservatism of Wilhelm Röpke and Alexander Rustöw. Thus, Daniel Villey was wary of the anthropological impact of reducing 'hereditary' social inequalities (Arena 2000, 974) and Louis Baudin was insisting on the necessity for an enlightened elite to *construct* liberalism and to 'guide' the masses in this endeavor (Baudin 1943, 2). Yet, these ideological positions were not hegemonic in the French academe, unlike the 'realist-sociologist' movement whose proponents coalesced around the *Revue Economique* journal (Arena 2000, 998). Therefore, despite the voluntarism of their proponents, it is often contended that ordoliberal ideas were less successful in France than they were in Germany during the 1950s (Canihac 2017, 242).

Yet, although these ideas did not gain immediate credence in France, they were successful exports. Thus, the CIRL paved the way for the creation in Switzerland of the Mont Pèlerin Society in 1947, a transdisciplinary 'neoliberal thought collective' which combined elite scholarship with popular writing and shed light on the numerous and transnational linkages and dimensions of neoliberalism (Denord 2009, 50; Mirowski and Phlewe 2009). Four years later, the French Mont Pèlerin Society was founded thanks to the financial support of *Conseil National du Patronat Français* (CNPF), the employer's organisation (*patronat*) that formed in the direct aftermath of World War II. Indeed, the ideas presented at the Lippmann colloquium

had been disseminated among members of the *patronat*, partly because prominent French businessmen and engineers had participated in the event, such as founder of Alsthom Auguste Detoeuf, industrialist Louis Marlio and founder of *Compagnie Française du Pétrole* Ernest Mercier.

This intellectual dissemination was facilitated by the growing importance of clubs and *sociétés de pensée* that strove to orient the postwar political-economic debate (the aforementioned X-Crise is a prime example, alongside the *Groupe de Recherches Economiques et Sociales* (GRES), founded by Auguste Detoeuf in the wake of World War II). In his capacity of president of the French section of the Mont Pèlerin Society, Rueff collaborated frequently with Louis Baudin on various publications in the conservative journal *La Revue des Deux Mondes* in the 1950s. Rueff and Villey were also active in the *Association pour la liberté économique et le progrès social*, a club created in 1966 dedicated to the promotion of economic liberalism. However, prominent members of the *patronat*, and of the French *bourgeoisie* more generally, became publicly discredited due to their collaboration with the Nazi occupation during the Vichy regime, and their influence was weakened by the growing power of trade unions. Thus, businessmen and *patrons* lost some ground in the neoliberal war of position in the immediate aftermath of World War II (Godin 2019, 63).

However, the intellectual tradition that they defended remained vivid and would shortly re-integrate French power circles, notably in the person of Jacques Rueff, one of the leading members of the French Mont Pèlerin Society who became, a few years later, the special economic advisor of President Charles de Gaulle when he came back to power in 1958. Indeed, in the twilight of the decade, a profound crisis of the French state would provide an opportunity for French ordoliberal *en chef*, Jacques Rueff, to have a decisive say on French

economic policy-making. The theoretical underpinnings of Gaullist *dirigisme* are therefore examined in the next section.

From *Dirigisme* to 'Modernism'

> Avec mon gouvernement, j'ai décidé de remettre les affaires en ordre réellement et profondément. Le budget en est l'occasion, peut-être ultime, très bonne en tout cas. Nous avons pris un ensemble de mesures, financières, économiques et sociales, propres à placer la Nation, sur une base de vérité et de sévérité, la seule, sur laquelle elle puisse bâtir sa prospérité (De Gaulle 1958).[15]

The Collapse of the Fourth Republic and the Plan Pinay-Rueff

In the direct aftermath of World War II, the economic reforms introduced by the transition republican government (1944-1946) entailed a wave of nationalisations, the creation of a social security system and the institutionalisation of industrial planning. In 1946, the *Commissariat Général du Plan* ('French General Planning Commissariat') was created by Charles de Gaulle and became the principal tool, under the initial direction of Jean Monnet, for co-ordinating French reconstruction after World War II, in coordination with the Communists and within the framework of the *Conseil National de la Résistance* (CNR, 'National Council of the Resistance') programme.

Alongside the nationalisation of vast swathes of the economy and the creation of a state-led social security scheme, the inception of an indicative planning through non-binding Five-Year Plans and the support of *grands projets* in high technology (Concorde, Airbus, high-speed train TGV) formed the backbone of the doctrine referred to as *dirigisme* (Warzoulet 2019, 79). For almost three decades, the policies associated with *dirigisme* put tremendous resources

[15] 'In agreement with my government, I have decided to put our country in order, deeply and utterly. The budget is the occasion to do so, maybe the ultimate one, but no doubt the best. We have taken a set of financial, economic and social measures in order to place the Nation on the path to truth and severity, the only path that will lead it toward prosperity' (Charles de Gaulle, televised speech, December 8, 1958, my translation)

in the hands of planners and industrial policy-makers in the form of subsidies, grants, loans and nationalisations (Schmidt 1996, 375). Therefore, after the Liberation, it seemed that neoliberalism had been left in the lurch in France (Denord 2009, 51).

Yet, both neoliberal intellectuals who served policy advisory functions and neoliberal politicians helped build the French postwar state (Mirowski and Plehwe 2009, 27). In what seemed like a typical neo-mercantilist fashion, state authorities sought to direct the strategies to business in order to accelerate investment and industrial modernisation. This nevertheless came with the cost of squeezing labour and shifting resources from wages and consumption to investment (Levy 2008, 418). Owing to the strength of anticommunism in French political life, economic and social policy around 1950 was characterised by the search for a balanced budget and the fight against inflation, with 'moderate' politicians such as Henri Queuille, Edgar Faure and Antoine Pinay seeking to re-create through state interventionism the conditions of a free competition (Denord 2009, 52). In this phase of reconstruction, preserving the capitalist market economy was thus a primary objective on both sides of the Rhine, with the adoption of *dirigisme* as the chosen method in France, under the Fourth Republic.

However, the political climate of the 1950s and 1960s became progressively averse to economic planning. Contrarily to the popular belief that associates the figure of Charles de Gaulle with the heyday of the *dirigiste* doctrine, the first President of the Fifth Republic was rather one of the prime architects of its eclipse. Thus, in a striking parallel with what had happened in West Germany a few months' prior, the year 1958 is to be looked upon as a year of momentum for French postwar capitalism, one that would shape the institutional character of the nascent Fifth Republic's political economy.

In clear contradistinction to the stability of the West German postwar institutional architecture, the period of reconstruction under the French Fourth Republic (1946-1958) was dominated by a succession of external crises and conflicts – First Indochina War (1946-1954), Suez crisis (1956), Algerian War (1954-1962) – and was characterised by acute institutional instability, with 22 governments in the span of 12 years. In June 1958, as the security of the French state became threatened, a government of 'national unity' was constituted and headed by Charles de Gaulle, who always endeavored to govern 'beyond parties' and deemed the juncture apt to secure his return on the national scene. The new government immediately engaged in efforts to mitigate the profound conjunctural crisis paralysing French institutions by delineating three major areas of reform: drafting a new constitution for a Fifth Republic, resolving the Algerian 'question',[16] and giving a novel, more balanced direction to French budgetary and monetary affairs.

This historic-constitutional turning point occurred as France became gradually enmeshed in multilateral economic organisations, such as the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) and the inchoate European Economic Community (EEC), created by the Treaty of Rome, which came into force five months earlier. The growing influence of European law, founded upon a liberal economic constitution (Article 102 A. of the Treaty of

[16] The Algerian war of Independence was fought between France and the *Front de Libération Nationale* (National Liberation Front, FLN) from November 1954 to March 1962. The most violent fighting took place during the Battle of Algiers (1956-1957), when French forces managed to regain control in the guerilla warfare waged against the colonists, but only through brutal measures. Facing a political and military deadlock, the French Fourth Republic collapsed following the May 1958 crisis ('Algiers putsch'), an aborted coup d'état supported by Algiers deputy Pierre Lagaillarde and French generals Raoul Salan and Jacques Massu, among others. This provided Charles de Gaulle with an opportunity to return to power after a twelve-year-absence in June 1958. Pragmatically, de Gaulle declared one year later that the Algerians had the right to determine their own future. In spite of terrorists attacks fomented by those opposed to independence (the 'second' Algiers putsch of April 1961, fometend by retired French Army generals, and the failed attempt to assassinate de Gaulle in August 1962 in Petit-Clamart), the Evian Accords were concluded on 8 March 1962 and formalised the status of Algeria as an independent nation.

Rome), alongside multilateral international law, had reinforced the commitment to free trade of 'the Six' Member-states. Thus the anchoring of national economic development in a wider space (the Common Market) created the conditions for introducing more neoliberal-inspired economic policies. Indeed, ambitious political and economic reforms were deemed necessary to prepare France's deeper integration into continental trade circuits (Warlouzet 2016).

Despite continuing volatility of prices and conjunctural budgetary imbalances, the French economy had been growing since 1950 (on an average of 4.6 per cent GDP growth per year), ushering significant improvements in productivity and living standards (Chélini 2001). The economic panorama was far from cataclysmic in 1958, but the promulgation of a new political constitution incited de Gaulle to leave an imprint on matters of economic governance, namely an interrelated vision of political and economic constitutionalism which loudly echoed ordoliberal tenets.

Indeed, the new French constitution mentioned in its preamble many norms that concerned economic law. The *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, inspired by individualist ideals, thus suggests an adhesion to a liberal economic order. Furthermore, the 1958 Preamble affirmed a republican conception of economic law that allowed for a very important role for the state in economic affairs, thus constitutionalising the foundations of a voluntarist organisation of the economy (*dirigisme*) that aimed to create the conditions for market efficiency. The implementation of the 'stabilisation' plan Pinay-Rueff marked a decisive step forward in this direction.

The collapse of the Fourth Republic and the comeback of de Gaulle provided Jacques Rueff with a new chance to play a key role in economic policy-making, first as the orchestrator of

the 1958 stabilisation plan which created the *nouveau franc* and reduced deficit spending, and second as a defender of the gold standard and free markets alongside de Gaulle's somewhat bombastic opposition to the dollar system (Chivvis 2006, 2010). Under the suggestion of *Trésor* (Treasury) director François Bloch-Lainé, de Gaulle nominated Antoine Pinay as Minister of Finances in June 1958, in spite of rather spare acquaintances. In a few months, Pinay successfully balanced public finances. The public deficit was stabilised at 690 billion Francs – at similar levels than in 1956 and 1957 – and the trade balance showed a surplus for the first time since mid-1956.

Yet, de Gaulle was not fully satisfied with Pinay's stabilisation efforts and believed that France deserved a more ambitious plan of renovation that would be remembered as the foundational economic milestone of his return to power (Chélini 2001, 106). This new plan was aimed at demonstrating French economic merits and symbolically testifying of France's willingness to meet the conditions deemed necessary to large scale trade liberalisation. Jacques Rueff, well-aware that conjunctural crises and the acceleration of history they induce offer the promise of rapid political change, did not miss the opportunity to appear as the providential technician.

Emboldened by his experience at the Ministry of Finances (1936-1939) and distinguished by his extensive diplomatic credentials – notably at the League of Nations and at the Court of Justice of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) – Jacques Rueff sent a note to Charles de Gaulle in the summer of 1958 to propose a program of 'financial and economic renovation' aimed at curbing what he considered to be the French evil *par excellence*: inflation. Conquered and convinced, Charles de Gaulle ended up persuading a reluctant

Antoine Pinay to form a committee in the fall of 1958. The workings of these eight 'expert' members[17] would operate under the coordination of Jacques Rueff (Chélini 2001).
The ideological consensus in the committee was decidedly liberal and anti-Keynesian. Yet, worries were raised that Rueff's radical suggestions would pave the way for a deep social crisis, and thus pose an acute risk of 'proletarianisation'. Gradually, three main areas of reform were nonetheless delineated: the budgetary (reduction of expenditures to avoid deficit spending), the monetary (guarantee a stronger, 'respectable' currency that would be easily convertible and would reassure investors: *le nouveau franc*) and the commercial (acceleration of the opening to trade through the OEEC and EEC). This very holistic framework aimed at 'renovating' the economy echoes the economic constitutionalism of Walter Eucken and abides by the constituting principles of the German social market economy, with the same recognition that competitive markets are the 'indispensable instrument of any free mass society' (Müller-Armack 1979), that their sustenance depends on the provision of a robust political-economic-ethical framework, and a similar conviction that the price mechanism – the signaling system of the free market – required monetary stability to effectively inform autonomous consumers and producers of the degree of scarcity in the whole economy (Bonefeld 2012, 638).

The Plan Pinay-Rueff's ambitions and recommendations were thus clearly of ordoliberal inspiration. The very beginning of the 1960s was a rare political moment of 'national unity' under the aegis of de Gaulle, and constituted a remarkable occasion to propose an economic complement to the new political constitution for the Fifth Republic. This novel ethical-

[17] In a very elitist fashion, four members of the committee came from the ranks of *patronat*: Jean Guyot and M. Lorain, respectively presidents of the banks Lazard and Société Générale; former head of the Confédération Générale du Patronat Français (CGPF) J. Gignoux, and industrialist Raoul de Vitry (president of Pechiney). The remaining three members came from the ranks of *haute fonction publique* (high administration): C. Brasart (Conseil d'Etat), J. Saltes (Banque de France), J. M Jeanneney (Economics Professor) (Chélini 2001, 107).

economic framework took the form of a proto-constitution that placed strict monetary control on debt financing and strived to enhance French competitiveness by deepening its insertion into the newly created European Economic Community, arguably the quintessential example of what Jacques Rueff (1945) termed an 'institutional market'.

The Plan was extremely coldly received by ministers from the coalition government, first and foremost by Antoine Pinay. Nevertheless, Charles de Gaulle remained convinced of the soundness of the project. Using the sweeping plenary powers in his possession, de Gaulle bypassed Parliament and enacted more than fifty ordinances and decrees related to finances and the institution of a new Franc, worth 100 old Francs (Chélini 2001, 112). These acts allowed for a lowering of tariffs, wage moderation, and the indexation of the Franc with the gold standard. Thus doing, de Gaulle fulfilled the EEC criteria, whilst continuing to be discursively hostile to a 'political Europe' (ibid). This liberal and market-oriented program, drafted by an unelected commission headed by Jacques Rueff, therefore helped lay the foundation for French economic growth in the 1960s and paved the way for the government of the 'experts', as Charles de Gaulle himself admitted in his memoirs (1970).[18] Five years later, in September 1963, a new stabilisation plan crafted by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing consolidated the goals of the Pinay-Rueff scheme: budgetary stabilisation, monetary consolidation and increased trade openness.[19]

[18] In the chapter of his *Mémoires d'espoir* (1970, 154) modestly entitled 'L'économie', Charles de Gaulle discusses at length the Plan Pinay-Rueff and solemnly declares: 'J'adopte le projet des experts (…) Du point de vue de la technique: taux, dates, spécifications, etc., je m'en remets dans l'ensemble aux spécialistes qui me les soumettent' ('*I endorse the project of the experts (…) when it comes to technicalities: rates, dates, specifications, etc., I rely for the most part on the recommendations of the specialists*' (1970, 154; my translation).

[19] The Rueff-Armand Commission was thought as a complement to the Pinay-Rueff stabilisation plan of 1958. Both reports were imbued with Jacques Rueff's admiration for the social-market economy and fondness of ordoliberal themes. However, the recommendations provided by the Rueff-Armand Commission were deemed too radical to be implemented. The 1960 report targeted corporatism, the use of *numerus clausus* and the 'structural rigidities' of the French economy such as administrative defects, rent regulations, while castigating the archaic weight of agriculture in the French GDP

Dirigisme *and Ordoliberalism: The State at the Service of Capital*

At the dawn of the 1960s, while the end of empire seemed ineluctable and the pressures of international competition in a context of globalisation of trade circuits started to be felt, de Gaulle responded with an attempt to create a hospitable environment for industry. The massive state intervention (nationalisations, Planning commission) was focused not on objectives of social justice, but on increasing the role and potency of the French industry through the creation of 'national champions' capable of competing in export markets.

Most of the economic measures taken under de Gaulle were aimed not at improving the distribution of income, but at bolstering aggregate economic growth. To reiterate, a common misconception about the Gaullist developmental model is that the vigorous statist shift in the management of the political economy entailed 'progressive' measures such as the improvement of social and labour rights, or the development of a strong welfare-state committed to redistribution between classes. Yet, as the ordoliberal doctrine's tenets demonstrate, a larger state does not necessarily entail a political economy oriented towards issues of social justice. As Monica Prasad put it, France post-war regime might best be characterised as 'a strong state put at the service of capital, all in the service of nationalism' (Prasad 2005, 360).

While de Gaulle's discursive nationalism triggered an abundance of mercantilist interpretations and comparisons vis-à-vis his eleven years in power, the French developmental model adopted in the 1960s was decidedly liberal. Committing to trade openness, the French state turned an agricultural and artisanal economy into an economy based on heavy industry,

(Teulon and Fischer 2011, 57) and the lack of competition in trade and services that was accused of obstructing French economic development.

like its more industrialised European neighbors (Hall 1986; Prasad 2005). In the course of this rapid transition, French-style indicative planning evolved towards concentration and coordination, far from the 'command economy' that every school of neoliberalism abhorred (Amable 2017a, 74). Thus, processes of cartelisation aimed at creating 'national champions' were tolerated, especially in industry.

Furthermore, the French welfare state, which was developed by the Right, was based on the principle of social insurance for the middle-classes rather than a redistribution of wealth between classes. This generated loyalty to the welfare state across classes and reduced the incentives to cut too deep into benefits (Esping Andersen 1990, 1996, 1999, as cited by Prasad 2005, 362). Although this attachment to welfare seems to place French postwar capitalism at odds with the repulsion some ordoliberals like Röpke expressed for the very idea of welfare provisioning, the fact that it benefited all classes echoed the ordoliberal tendency to consider the members of the independent middle strata of society as the most important recruits for the ordoliberal political project, because they constituted what Röpke deemed the fertile soil (*Mutterboden*) of the desired order (Ptak 2009, 106). Accordingly, French public finances under Gaullism were organised on a regressive basis, with most revenues generated by sales taxes and social security charges paid disproportionately by employees, while inheritance and corporate taxes were set at low levels (Levy 2008, 420). In redistributive terms, the Gaullist era equated, at the very least, to a period of status quo, in line with the ordoliberal rejection of redistributive social and wage policies.

Against this background, one can delineate seven constitutive political-economic principles common to both the German 'social market economy' and *dirigiste* France.

(1) A commitment to *elite rather than mass influence* with regards to economic and political decision making. Owing to the ordoliberals, Rueff believed that the responsibility for steering society clear of the inflationary path rested with democracy's élites.

(2) This is associated with a strong *distrust of parliamentarianism and political parties*, with a clear Gaullist belief in the superiority of plebiscitary leadership (exercised among other methods through decrees and referenda). For ordoliberals, parliamentarians and political parties have very limited influence on policy-making, as they are supposed to follow the constitutional 'rules of the game'. They contended that parliamentary democracy was susceptible to destroy the dualism of state and society which in the past secured a balance between state authority and free individuals (Ptak 2009, 111).

(3) The common economic objectives of both regimes were therefore the *protection and expansion of private property*, despite temporary and strategic mercantilist-oriented nationalizations (for the most part restricted to the industrial sector) and exceptionalist foreign policy postures and discourse on the French side.

(4) In lieu of protectionism, both political-economic regimes were rather characterised by a *commitment to free trade*, in the framework of the nascent OEEC and EEC. These supranational processes of economic integration justified the goal to keep the currency stable in order to efficiently compete on foreign markets.

(5) This meant that the *protection of the price mechanism, the priority for a balanced budget and the fight against inflation* were deemed essential on both sides of the Rhine, with the assumption that monetary stability should be preserved through the control of inflation and a currency based on the gold standard. Rueff thus tried to convince de Gaulle that discretionary monetary policy would not be able to 'manage' the real money supply and that the gold standard offered an automatic adjustment of supply and demand for money, and therefore provided much better chances of price stability than a managed currency (Chivvis 2006, 704-5).

(6) To achieve these aims, both postwar France and Germany believed in *subsidiarity as primary principle for the political and social structure*. This manifested itself in the abidance by EEC monetary and budgetary norms and a clear recognition that supranational institutions were necessary to maintain co-operation, discipline, and thereby order in the 'institutionnal market' system.

(7) Finally, in both cases, *the welfare state was not fully rejected* as a matter of principle, as was the case in the Austrian tradition. However, strict limits were to be placed on its scope and redistributive ambitions. Thus, while German economic liberalism was mixed with an ancient *Sozial Staat* created by Otto von Bismarck in the 1880s – driven by the opportunistic aim of avoiding social unrest – French economic liberalism was very moderately socially-oriented, partly because prioritising budgetary constraints (e.g. Plan Pinay-Rueff) led French authorities to place a significant check on the growth of a truly redistributive welfare state. In both cases, the *social* was thus mainly conceived as the creation of conditions for efficient market-led economic growth rather than redistribution (Cerny 2016, 87).

From an organisational and institutional standpoint, however, large differences can be noted. The sophisticated decentralisation of the länder-based German political economy clearly contrasts with the centralised and vertical organisation of the French political economy and the unitary, Jacobin French state. Further comparative research would be needed to assess the manner in which unitarism and its top-down arrangements – the foundations of which can be traced as far back as the late XVIIth Century policies pursued by Jean-Baptiste Colbert – and federalism influenced the direction taken by ordoliberal-inspired policies on both sides of the Rhine.

What appears clear at the end of this comparison is that both the 'French' and 'German postwar models were fundamentally hybrid. Both displayed some influence of Keynesianism in a context of reconstruction. Yet, in accordance with the ordoliberal framework, strong were the pressures for orienting these developmental states on the road to strict, quasi-constitutional economic provisions that sought to stabilise the value of their respective currency, open-up their borders to trade and limit budgetary deficit by refusing to commit to ambitious redistributive policies.

As the next section demonstrates, both Keynesianism and ordoliberalism started to lose their appeal throughout the 1970s.

'Modernisation', the 'New Economists' and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's *Libéralisme Avancé*

In the 1960s, the French postwar 'Fordist' growth model allowed for high growth rates and full employment. In the 1970s, this compromise seemed to have come to exhaustion. With the end of the period of postwar reconstruction and catching up, a long transitional phase opened

up, characterised by a succession of ruptures and by the emergence of new socio-economic institutions (De Largentaye and du Tertre 2019, 134) in a context of successive oil crises and the intensification of European integration. The period witnessed the emergence of the 'Modernist' French tradition (on the Left), as well as the import of neoliberal theories developed by the Chicago School and Public Choice theorists (on the Right). As a consequence, the period saw the twilight of French *dirigisme*. This rupture was consumed with the election of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1974, who became the first French President being elected on a clear 'neoliberal' platform.

The French 'Modernisers', Les 'Nouveaux Economistes' *and the Twilight of French* Dirigisme

From the direct aftermath of the Second World War until the beginning of the 1970s, elites gravitating in business and administrative circles were converted bit by bit by some elements of the distinct ordoliberal 'governing rationality' (Foucault 2004). Ordoliberal ideas therefore permeated the French intellectual landscape rather early, through gradual translation and dissemination of the 'founding fathers' writings (with the notable exception of Röpke, who was teaching in Geneva and was thus already translated) but also through a process of joint theorisation. Jacques Rueff played, once again, a key role in that matter. A staunch admirer of the postwar German economic miracle, he believed this success was the direct consequence of the application of ordoliberal principles (Rueff 1953).

Economist Raymond Barre, who would later become Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's Minister of Economics (1976-1978) and Prime Minister (1976-1981), also contributed to building intellectual bridges through his collaboration with the publisher Plon, for whom he translated Hayek's *Scientisme et sciences sociales* (*The Counter-Revolution of Science,* 1952), for the 'Recherches en Sciences Humaines' collection in 1953. Interestingly, there were no jurists

among these French proselytes, a surprising development considering the importance given to the law in the German ordoliberal tradition.

This oddity was partly attributable to the hybridisation of ordoliberal norms with the French political debates of the time and signaled that the reception of the doctrine had only been partial in postwar France (Canihac 2017, 258). Indeed, the influence of the Modernist movement under the presidency of Georges Pompidou (1969-1974) is often credited for the hybridisation of ordoliberal ideas and policy recommendations in the French context (Amable 2017b; Canihac 2017). The training in engineering which characterised many modernists decidedly affected the ways in which the tenets of ordoliberal thought were received in France. The distinct methodological commitments and ideational mental maps of engineers from Ecole Polytechnique (X) and graduates from Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po) were merged with the austere legalistic framework of existing ordoliberals.

For this reason, it could be inferred that the marginalisation of a strictly rule-based approach to the economy meant that the implementation and surveillance of ordoliberal principles in France started to rely less on legal institutions than on so-called 'independent' administrative institutions. Thus, the enforcement of core ordoliberal principles did not rely so much on jurisprudence and hard law (as in Germany), but rather on more tacit principles acknowledged within monitoring institutional and administrative structures such as *Cour des Comptes*, *Direction Générale du Trésor*, *Banque de France* and *Inspection Générale des Finances*. These institutions' permanent and ad-hoc committees continue to be overwhelmingly composed of the most industrious graduates of Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA) and Polytechnique. Indeed, the building of new educative institutions such as Sciences Po and ENA also contributed to homogenising the economic training and thinking of a new

generation of elite civil servants (see also Chapter II). This is consistent with the ordoliberal conviction that economic policy should be largely driven by independent public authorities which should act as neutral referees (Warlouzet 2019, 81), 'on the basis of a strongly state-centred, interventionist and administrative governmentality' (Foucault 2004).

The intellectual tradition of French *Modernisateurs* initially drew on critiques formulated by sociologists Stanley Hoffmann and, in the French context, Michel Crozier, whose famous book *La Société Bloquée* ('The Stalled Society', 1970) depicted France as a stalemate society unable to enact institutional and economic reforms, with implicit and explicit comparisons with the United States. Both Hoffmann and Crozier were indeed 'preoccupied with how to avoid national decline by modernizing French illiberal political culture and practices' (Hayward 2007, 348). This urge to 'modernise' became the leitmotiv of industrial and administrative elites and must be understood against the background of the relative backwardness of the French economy, which was still largely dominated by agriculture in the first half of the twentieth century. First led by Pierre Mendès-France, 'Modernism' was thus a broad movement originating from the moderate Left and oriented towards the promotion of technical and organisational change, which had the double objective of enabling productivity improvements and rising living standards, and in turn keeping away the working classes from the temptation of socialist revolution (Amable 2017b, 16-17).

Once more, the dissemination of these modernising ideas was initially carried out by clubs and intellectual associations, such as Club Jean Moulin (1958-70), which drew upon *Mendésistes*, Left Catholics, Left Socialists and ex wartime resisters, and whose aim was 'not merely to modernize the Left (…) but to change French politics, by bypassing the traditional parties and relying on support from social movements' (Hayward 2007, 361). Together with

other clubs like Cercle Tocqueville and Citoyen 60, Club Jean Moulin called for decentralisation and democratic planning extended to a federalist European state. The ultimate aim of Modernists such as Pierre Mendès-France, Michel Rocard and Jacques Delors was to extend the 'rationalist ethos' learned by industrialists in elite *grandes écoles* (Polytechnique, Centrale) to the whole economy. As with ordoliberalism, the elitist bias was clear in the Modernist doctrine: Modernists considered that an administration populated by technocrats could work together in a partnership with private firms (Amable 2017b, 16), consecrating the unification of business interests and 'independent' expertise in economic policymaking.

As in Germany in the 1970s, ordoliberalism in France demonstrated its propensity for hybridisation. While Ludwig Erhard's economic policies abolished price and wage setting, led to the privatisation of public companies and opened West Germany to foreign trade, several features of the German 'social market economy' clearly contradicted the ordoliberal doctrine as well. The high degree of concentration of industrial big companies, the unique collective bargaining system designed in the post-war period (*Mitbestimmung*), as well as the reinforcement of the Bismarckian social insurance system (Lechevalier 2017, 29-31) suggest that German ordoliberalism was also 'hybrid' in its own right. In fact, the German collective bargaining system represented the Modernist dream *par excellence,* as commitment to social dialogue was thought to be the pathway towards the end of ideologies and the consequent pacification of social conflict, thus fulfilling the ordoliberal dream of the 'de-proletarianisation' of society.

Yet, in the course of the decade, a new French generation of radical Mont Pèlerin Society neoliberals eventually arose to attack – on their Right, this time – the postwar compromises effected by French ordoliberals, which certain organisations – such as the *Association pour la*

Liberté Economique et le Progrès (ALEPS), created in 1966 – perceived as an expansion of the welfare state.

Created in 1975, the *Nouveaux Economistes* group benefited from the intellectual crisis incurred by Keynesianism in the wake of the 'stagflation' resulting from the first oil shock. The group relied on three main networks: (1) former students from Sciences Po Paris gathered in the Jean-Baptiste Say seminar founded in 1962 by Alain Wolfesperger, Daniel Pilisi, Pascal Salin, Emil-Maria Classen and Pierre Salmon; (2) scholars from the applied economics faculty in Aix-en-Provence, gathered around Jacques Garello, the main organiser of the 'summer schools of new economy' and (3) a group of Parisian economists led by Jean-Jacques Rosa – who was the secretary general of Club Jean Moulin – that aimed to propagate the theses of Chicago School thinkers (Brookes 2017, 75-77).

The New Economists' ambition was not to invent new theories, but to encourage a renewal of French economic thought through the import of Chicago School and Virginia School theories, whose positivist epistemologies and mathematical modelling made their application, in the eyes of their propagandists, almost universal. Indeed, their economicistic vision was built on a rejection of the former philosophical epistemology of French ordoliberals (Brookes 2017, 78-80), which overemphasised the embedded aspect of economic life, as opposed to previous rationalist assumptions based on the concept of *homo economicus*. Their persuasion efforts would culminate in 1979, with the organization by the New Economists, alongside Michel Crozier, of a colloquium by the Club de l'Horloge[20] dedicated to the 'bureaucratic danger'

[20] It is interesting to note that *Club de l'Horloge* (1974-2015) was an organisation at the crossroads between neoliberal and far-right intellectuals. Created by *hauts-fonctionnaires* Yvan Blot, Jean-Yves Le Gallou and Henry de Lesquen (who all gravitated between the RPR, FN and more obscure extreme-right groupings throughout their political careers), the Club presented itself as a 'national liberal' organisation that convened colloquiums and produced publications on economic liberty, people's sovereignty and national identity. The Front National partly elaborated its doctrine based on

(‘*le péril bureaucratique*’), a thematic that would be largely mobilised by Jacques Chirac[21] throughout the 1980s, and that would result in large scale privatisations in the mid-1980s, when this latter became Prime Minister of Socialist President François Mitterrand, during the first *cohabitation* of the Fifth Republic (1986-1988).

Thus economists Henri Lepage,[22] Pascal Salin and Jacques Garello helped popularise monetarism and stigmatise Keynesianism through the creation of think tanks such as *Institut Economique de Paris*. Opposed to the principles defended by Jacques Rueff (who died in 1978), their goal was not to give the state an active role in defending free enterprise, but on the contrary to encourage a full-bore reinstatement of *laissez-faire* economics (Denord 2009, 62). The liberalism of the Nouveaux Economistes was therefore decidedly radical and anti-statist. They denied the redistributive and regulatory role of the state, and considered its interventions as illegitimate. Unlike their private counterparts, public companies were considered to be largelly dysfunctional and inefficient (Brookes 2017, 86).

activities and proceedings from Club de l’Horloge and *Groupement de Recherche et d’Études pour la Civilisation Européenne* (GRECE, created in 1968). The GRECE’s leader, organic intellectual Alain de Benoist, would become the main theoretician of an identitarian discourse that took on an anthropological dimension, highlighting not ‘inequalities’ based on ‘race’ but ‘differences’ based on ‘culture’ (Crépon 2016, 30-31). When Jean-Yves Le Gallou and Yvan Blot integrated FN, they thus imported their ‘ethno-differentialist’ ideology that postulates an equality between different cultures but commends that the latter should evolve separately from one another.

[21] Jacques Chirac did not hide his congruence with Hayekian thought and his personal proximity with and admiration for the Austrian economist in the early 1980s. As Mayor of Paris, he even awarded the *Médaille de Vermeil de la ville de Paris* to Friedrich Hayek in 1984. The same year, Chirac declared in front of the members of the Mont Pèlerin Society: ‘we need today an absolute liberalism to encourage us to make the necessary liberalism’ (Denord 2009, 63, my translation).

[22] Economic journalist Henri Lepage’s book *Demain le capitalisme* (1978) was strategically published a few weeks before the first ballot of the 1978 legislative elections. This enterprise of vulgarisation was aimed at introducing ‘scientific arguments’ derived from American neoliberal thought to defend economic liberalism against the popularity of the ‘deuxième gauche’ and their concept of *autogestion* (Brookes 2017, 87-89; see also Chapter II).

The middle of the 1970s was therefore an ideational turning point: the administrative and compromising branch of French neoliberalism – a branch of ordoliberalism which placed emphasis on 'legal interventionism' – became supplanted by a more radical branch, more hostile to the state, that would bear influence on the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981), under whose presidential term the objectives of price stability took manifest precedence over full employment, in a context of increased Europeanisation of French economic policy-making.

Indeed, the European Monetary System (engineered by Helmut Schmidt and Valery Giscard d'Estaing) was an anticipation of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU, created in 1992) and obliged member-states to keep the value of their currency within agreed parameters. Clearly, this was a major constraint on the monetary and fiscal policies of states (Hanley 2017, 141) and a decisive step towards the attempted imposition of the 'new constitutionalism' on a European scale (Gill 1998, see also Chapter II). The last section thus examines Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's presidency.

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's Libéralisme Avancé

Elected in May 1974, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was, until 2017, the youngest President of the Fifth Republic (at 48 years old). Giscard had held several ministerial portfolios under both de Gaulle and Pompidou, but he took his distance from both *dirigisme* and the policies of his Gaullist predecessors and called instead for a 'return to liberalism' that entailed an abandonment of the state's normative commitment to a 'general interest' transcending particular interests (Chabal 2016a, 52-57).

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's beliefs and programme were enshrined in his 1976 essay *Démocratie Française,* in which he introduces the concept of *libéralisme avancé* ('advanced

liberalism') that became the ideological political niche for his party Fédération Nationale des Républicains et Indépendants (FNRI), rebranded as Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF) in 1978. With his 'advanced liberal society' proposition that was aimed at empowering a more urbanised French 'civil society', Giscard d'Estaing concentrated on winning over centrist voters who were skeptical of the changes brought about by the 1968 social movements[23] but nevertheless welcomed innovations in political style and leadership in the face of an ossifying Gaullism and in a context of rapid technological mutations.

In his 1976 essay, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (VGE) identified two main problems in contemporary France (Berhent 2017, 254):

(1) A demographic and economic revolution connected to the baby-boom and the end of postwar industrialisation.

[23] One of the most influential cultural and ideological legacy of the student revolts and general strikes that spanned throughout May 1968 was the traction gained by the so-called 'New social movements'. In the eyes of many observers who were also looking at new forms of mobilisation in the United States and in other European countries, the 'post-industrial age' shifted the focus of mobilisation from material grievances aimed at improving economic well-being to 'societal' and cultural issues, such as environmentalism, pacifism and the fight against various forms of discriminations. New social movements moved the focus on forms of oppression that were also happening outside of the workplace, an attention to qualitative issues that transcended the economistic orientations of the orthodox Marxist Left, highlighting the ideologically coercive functions of consumer society and commodification in all its forms. Social mobilisations around these issues have been met with substantive success in certain domains, especially French women's rights (the adoption of Loi Veil that legalised abortion in 1975 is indeed a consequence of the societal modernisation brought about by the events of May), but have proven disappointing on other terrain, with the persistence of racist sentiments in increasingly large sections of the French citizenry. Gradually, grievances came to be formulated in a human rights language (women's rights, LGBTQ rights, civil rights movement) that also tended to be framed in more liberal and individualistic terms by this generation of intellectuals which is colloquially known as the *soixante-huitards*, some of whom – Pascal Bruckner, Alain Finkielkraut – turned frankly reactionary at the turn of the millennium, while others – Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Romain Goupil – became enthusiastic supporters of Emmanuel Macron once he was elected. Former president Nicolas Sarkozy was a fierce opponent to those on the Left whom he called 'the heirs of May 68', and he promised to 'wind up this legacy once and for all' during the 2007 presidential campaign (L'Obs 2007a). The fiftieth anniversary of May 1968 yielded many academic debates and events in 2018, but it was not officially commemorated by newly elected president Emmanuel Macron, who was caught in another social crisis of a scale comparable to that of May 68 with the Yellow Vests movement, that started in November 2018 and embarked for long months of protests and traffic blockades across France (see Chapter IX).

(2) The exhaustion of traditional political ideologies.

To cope with these societal and generational challenges, Giscard promoted the benefits of individual initiative, greater social pluralism through democratisation processes and a more responsible form of economic development, a patchwork of centrist societal and economic propositions which echoed the platform on which Emmanuel Macron would be elected more than forty years later (see Chapter IV). Indeed, VGE was the first leading politician of the postwar period to have an explicitly neoliberal agenda, with a search for a 'third way' between an 'antisocial liberalism' and 'a planned economy'. The work of persuasion of the Nouveaux Economistes succeeded in having Giscard endorse the 'neoliberal' label, alongside his organic intellectual and Minister of the Interior Michel Poniatowski (Bourdieu and Boltanski 1976).

A few months before Giscard's victory, the oil shock of 1973 led to a situation of 'stagflation', the alliance of economic stagnation and rampant inflation which was considered antithetical by most Keynesian economists. In parallel, the rise of unemployment became the main uniform trend throughout the period (from 2.7 per cent in 1973 to 7.4 per cent in 1981). Clearly, the oil crisis constituted an electoral opportunity for the neoliberal bloc, and indeed the history of neoliberalism in post-oil crisis is 'a history of stops and starts': between 1976 and 1981, a government that might be called 'proto-neoliberal' ruled France, with President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Raymond Barre indicating preferences for reducing state intervention and accomplishing important free-market objectives, such as the end of price control, while maintaining a centralised state apparatus type of organization (Prasad 2005, 366-71).

Indeed, the 1973 shock was the first major crisis of the postwar period and it consequently shattered the social consensus on which previous socio-economic policies were built. It thus provided businesses and governments with a unique opportunity to reconfigure capitalism along neoliberal lines (Beaud and Biron 1973; Behrent 2017). Thus, the middle of the 1970s decade saw the emergence of 'mass unemployment' and triggered liberal policy responses on the part of VGE's governments, first headed by Prime Minister Jacques Chirac (1974-1976), then by Prime Minister Raymond Barre (1976-1981).

Initially, France's response to the crisis fell into the category of the moderate Keynesianism experienced in Italy and the United-Kingdom before 1979, as opposed to the 'hard neoliberal' approach pioneered by West-Germany, whose success could be attributed to the government's ability to build societal consensus among trade unions around anti-inflationary and deficit-cutting policies aimed at strengthening the export market, which manifested in slower wage growth and aggressive industrial specialisation (Beaud and Biron 1979). The conventional measures implemented by France, such as stimulus spending, did not reach the stabilisation objectives and created unprecedented inflation, a rise in public debt and a massive balance of payments deficit (Behrent 2017, 49). From 1974 onwards, the average annual GDP growth rate was halved: it fell from 5.4 per cent over the 1954-1973 period to 2.5 per cent over the 1974-1992 period, while the inflation rate accelerated after 1973 to reach 11.4 per cent on average from 1974 to 1982 (De Largentaye and du Tertre 2019, 138). President Giscard d'Estaing decided to change strategy and his disagreements with his Prime Minister – by then a relatively Keynesian Jacques Chirac – over the economic policy to be pursued led to the latter's resignation in August 1976.

Despite the New Economists' lobbying, the last few years of the 1970s demonstrated the resilience of ordoliberal-inspired frameworks in France. Indeed, France tried to emulate the ordoliberal-inspired policies conducted in West-Germany in two different ways:

(1) Valéry Giscard appointed economist Raymond Barre as Prime Minister in the fall of 1976, which ushered a massive shift in political-economic trajectory towards anti-inflationary policies and balance of payment equilibrium objectives, with methods ranging from wage stringency to using unemployment as a way to pressure workers to moderate their demands, as well as new constraints on state expenditures.

(2) An acceleration of the Europeanisation process became the way through which Giscard d'Estaing's ordoliberal beliefs were to be expressed for the rest of his term, with the incorporation of ordoliberal norms, e.g. the adoption of the European Monetary System (EMS), a multilateral adjustable exchange rate agreement between EEC nations that was initiated in 1979 (Sangar 2020). Jointly engineered by Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the EMS was an anticipation of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), as it obliged member-states to keep the value of their currency within agreed parameters, creating a major constraint on the monetary and fiscal policies of European states (Hanley 2017, 141).

While the proclaimed aim of VGE was to promote a closer Franco-German relationship, the French government's purpose was to peg its inflation rate to the German rate. In fact, the EMS established the hegemony of the Deutsche Mark on the EMS Member-countries' currencies, and led to a strict harnessing of French monetary policy (De Largentaye and du Tertre 2019, 138). In retrospect, none of those policy options were met with success, as both

unemployment numbers and inflation rates continued to soar for the rest of VGE's presidential term.

Before his appointment as Prime Minister, Raymond Barre had a long career in European institutions. After working in ministerial cabinets under Prime Minister Michel Debré (1958-1962), Barre started teaching economics at Sciences Po Paris and Université Paris I. He then succeeded to Lippmann colloquium participant Robert Marjolin as Vice-President of the European Commission from 1967 to 1973 – where he took part in the elaboration of the EMS – before settling at the Banque de France for a couple of years. He was then appointed Minister of Trade by Jacques Chirac in 1976, then Prime Minister in the same year, until François Mitterrand's presidential election victory in 1981. A member of the Trilateral Commission, Raymond Barre was well-inserted in *haute finance* networks and a practitioner of jurisdictional competition, as it was officially revealed twelve years after his death that he had secretely placed close to seven million euros in Bâle, Switzerland (Le Point 2019). When he became Prime Minister, Raymond Barre did not belong to any of the traditional families of the governmental Right, despite his service as Chief of Staff in Gaullist ministerial cabinets.

Beyond his professorial and civil servant career and his strong international credentials, Raymond Barre was also an organic intellectual, who was very familiar with the ordoliberal and neoliberal traditions of thought and became indeed one of its prime disseminators in French intellectual and policy circles. Barre's early interest for ordoliberalism was methodologically motivated: he sought to demonstrate the practical aspect of what he termed the 'morphological' approach of Walter Eucken's economic method, an economist which Barre considered to be well-positioned to offer a renewal of perspectives in economics (Barre

1952; Canihac 2017). As a translator of Hayek, Barre was nonetheless interested in the larger neoliberal constellation.

The economic policy developed by Raymond Barre gave absolute priority to price stability, which implied a stringent wage policy and constraints on public expenditures. The aim of this 'disinflation' policy was to defend a 'strong franc' on currency markets, to improve the international competitiveness of French firms and to bring rampant inflation under control. In consequence, the name of Raymond Barre quickly became associated with the word *rigueur*, which was soon used as a euphemism for 'austerity', the word *rigueur* introducing some form of semantic smoothness, suggesting the need for seriousness rather than meagreness.

As soon as September 1976, Barre thus clearly stated what, in his opinion, was at the origins of France's precarious financial and budgetary situation: 'we need to understand that the main reason why we are experiencing the current situation can be summed up in one single formula: France lives above its means'.[24] With this assertion, Barre popularised the moralising 'household analogy' that would be used time and time again by editorialists and politicians in the decades that followed, entrenching the common sense idea that shaping the political economy of a nation-state is akin to managing the budget of a household.[25]

[24] « Il faut que nous comprenions que la raison essentielle de la situation que nous connaissons tient en une seule formule : la France vit au-dessus de ses moyens » September 22, 1976. https://www.ina.fr/video/I12191598

[25] As Lucy Barnes and Timothy Hicks put it in a recent publication (2021), 'public opinion on complex policy questions is shaped by the ways in which elites simplify the issues'. Among these subterfuges, the ubiquitous household analogy remains a persisting social myth in the context of fiscal policy. Indeed, many politicians seem to assume that voters would tolerate austerity if they understood government deficits and debt through an analogy to household borrowing. Common sense therefore commands that the government needs to live within its means, like a typical household. Lately, such analogy was extended to the private firm, with former Prime Minister François Fillon pretending to be 'at the head of a state that is financially bankrupt' with reference to France's chronic debt and unbalanced budget, during a visit he made to Corsica on 21 September 2007 (L'Obs 2007b). As a proud greengrocers' daughter and a conservative ideologue, Margaret Thatcher was also a champion of 'household' values and analogies. Yet, using original survey data from the United Kingdom, Barnes

Promoting budgetary austerity did not however entail a complete and sudden turn back on the French tradition of economic dirigisme, since Giscard and Barre were happy to continue using the state to ration the allocation of credit and bolster investment in huge infrastructural projects such as nuclear plants and the *Trains à Grande Vitesse* (TGV). Nevertheless, the economic priorities of the Giscard years made clear that neoliberal economic policies were required to limit the sluggish performances of post-*Trente Glorieuses* France and to curb inflation (Chabal 2016, 255). Barre's liberalising reforms and policy packages were nonetheless met with resistance from Communists, Catholics, conservatives and traditional Gaullists.[26]

The issue of industrial restructuring, in particular, was a thorn in the side of the Barre government. In the middle of the 1960s, France was the fourth European producer of steel (behind the USSR, West-Germany and the United Kingdom), with 20,000 millions of tons per year, and the Lorraine region accounting for two-thirds of this total production, thanks to its 90,000 steel workers in the 1970s. With the 1973 oil crisis, the situation of Lorraine deteriorated: while 14 million tons of steel were produced in 1974, that number dropped around 10 million in 1975 (Raggi 2013, 12). In 1979, the *Plan Barre* for the restructuring of industry created substantial havoc in the steel sector. As the world production of steel plummeted, the *Plan Barre* aimed to reorient France's national industrial policy by considering steel as a 'normal' type of production, as opposed to a strategic or symbolic one

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and Hicks (ibid, 15-16) found that the general public is not 'duped' by a false analogy, although it remains to be seen whether the latter might affect elite attitudes on policy. Future research should explore the impact of this form of discourse (also addressed in Chapter III with what I term the 'neoliberal *lingua franca*') in the context of fiscal policy perceptions in the larger French public.

[26] Despite this political opposition, Raymond Barre's policies were still openly supported by the Nouveaux Economistes: Jacques Garello thus congratulates Barre in *Paris Match* (1978) for his refusal to lead a conjunctural economic policy, while Henri Lepage rejoiced at the 'coherence' of the Barre government, away from the 'opportunistic interventionism of traditional French liberalism' (Brookes 2017, 92).

(Raggi 2013, 18). The plan thus intended to cut 20,000 jobs in the steel industry, especially in the Lorraine region. Many weeks of troubles and unrest followed in Eastern parts of France: in the city of Longwy, kidnappings, attacks and tensions were on the rise. On May 23, 1979, a massive protest in Paris turned violent, as well as in Denain (Nord). Progressively, Raymond Barre came to embody the sinking of French industry, while the fate of the steel sector was further sealed with the advent of the second oil shock in the summer of 1979.

With soaring oil prices in France, it became more and more complicated for Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Raymond Barre to maintain the consent of an increasingly disgruntled political class and citizenry. The efforts of Barre's government to close the country trade gap and to curb inflation came a long way from producing the desired effects: inflation headed up to 11 per cent in 1979, instead of the 8 per cent which the government initially predicted, and the country's growth dipped below the government's modest 3 per cent target. Personally identified with the ordoliberal-inspired Barre reform programme, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing did not manage to get re-elected in 1981 against François Mitterrand. This would not sign the end of his attempts to create a neoliberal 'third way'. In a later book, Giscard called for the emergence of a new social balance around a 'central group' that would, according to him, gather two-thirds of the French population united by 'common cultural attitudes' and 'similar lifestyles' (Giscard d'Estaing 1984: 246; as cited by Amable 2018, 6).

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the paralleled and sometimes complementary ideational history of ordoliberalism in France and Germany. Motivated by the shared ambition to build a 'new' liberalism beyond *laissez-faire* and economic planning that entailed a legal interference from the state, French organic intellectuals strove to create clubs, think-tanks and foundations to

promote this mode of political-economic governance. The gradual permeation and co-theorisation of ordoliberal ideas in French academic and business circles found its policy manifestations with the return of Charles de Gaulle to power in 1958. The stabilisation plan Pinay Rueff, with its objectives of balanced budget, monetary stability and opening-up of trade laid the ground for French growth in the 1960s, and also allowed France to meet the EEC objectives a few months after the signature of the Rome Treaty. The 1970s gradually bore witness to the twilight of French *dirigisme*, partly under the pressure of a certain form of radicalisation on the part of French neoliberal intellectuals on the Right (Nouveaux Economistes) who would gain a particular credence in the ranks of the free-market oriented Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF), and due to the growing influence of French *Modernisateurs* on the Left.

To be clear, neither the German 'social market economy', nor French *dirigisme* were 'purely' ordoliberal. Rather, both modes of governance were of a hybrid nature, abiding by ordoliberal tenets – elite rather than popular and parliamentarian influence in economic decision-making, budgetary and monetary discipline and protection of private property rights – but tolerating temporary neo-Mercantilist measures in France and Gemany – nationalisations, although the state share's in these companies started to decline under de Gaulle, and relative cartelisation in Germany (firm concentration). Both doctrines accepted moderate welfare state provisioning, although not in a redistributive spirit.

Further research should therefore seek to address the following:

(1) More study should be devoted to the role of *'co-theorisation'* of the ordoliberal framework on the part of French scholars and activists. As such, it would be wrong to

talk about a German imposition, as sections of French elites were already favouring political-economic solutions formulated along ordoliberal lines. On this matter, the important role played by Jacques Rueff – as theoretician, civil servant and economic advisor – should be scrutinised in terms of his contribution to doctrinal developments and ideational transnationalisation.

(2) Indeed, ordoliberalism should be conceived as a *transnational project*, as opposed to a mode of governance solely associated with the German state. Thus, the search for political-economic frameworks prioritising monetary and fiscal restraint and anti-inflationary policies was conducted beyond German borders: in France (Jacques Rueff, Raymond Barre), in Italy (Luigi Einaudi) and in Argentina (Alvaro Alsogarai). A study of ordoliberalism that would be comparative and transnational in character is long overdue.

Chapter II

New Constitutionalism and Expertise: The Socialists in Power

> Mais, ce qu'on appelle la crise, comme s'il s'agissait de la colère des dieux, d'un phénomène incontrôlable, d'une fatalité par-nature plus forte que le génie de l'homme, n'est au contraire que le produit de ce génie désordonné. Tout simplement, la société industrielle du XXème siècle n'a pas encore assimilé les effets de la technique et de la science sur ses structures de production et de travail, donc sur son mode de vie, et nous assistons aujourd'hui aux soubresauts d'un monde qui meurt, en même temps qu'un autre naît. Il n'y a là-dedans rien de mystérieux. On en connaît le mécanisme. Il suffit de s'en rendre maître.
> (François Mitterrand, television address, 23 March 1983)[27]

Introduction

Echoing a famous observation made by Antonio Gramsci,[28] François Mitterrand symbolically nailed the coffin of governmental socialism in March 1983, announcing the advent of a new economic era which 'the twentieth century industrial society' had to prosaically adapt to, thus spelling the end of the French Socialists' ambition to 'change society'.

While Chapter I examined the hegemony of the Gaullist right and the Giscard interlude in the period spanning from 1938 to 1981, this second chapter investigates the specificities of the French political economy under successive Socialist majorities, that is, the period spanning from 1981 to 2017. While Charles de Gaulle's and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's commitment to fiscal and budgetary consolidation and anti-inflationary policies was made clear throughout their time in office, the French Socialist Party's position towards the state and its prerogatives remained discursively at odds with the policy orientations followed once they were in power.

[27] 'What we call 'crisis' as if it were the product of the wrath of the gods, an uncontrollable phenomenon, or the result of a fate stronger than man's genius, is only the product of this disorganised genius. Very prosaically, the twentieth century industrial society has not yet assimilated the effects of technique and science on its structures of production and labour, and therefore on its way of life, and we are today witnessing the last jolt of a dying world, while another one is being born. Nothing mysterious in here. We know the mechanism. We just need to master it' (my translation).
[28] 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a variety of morbid symptoms appear' (Gramsci 1971, 275, §34).

Historically, account must be taken of the force of Jacobin tradition among French socialists who, ever since the French Revolution, have viewed the republican state – hardily reinforced by the Consulate and Empire – as a 'people's victory that must be preserved' (Bergounioux 2020, 58). How could this socialist vision of the state be assessed for the late twentieth century period, at the dawn of this era which Susan George (1997) dubbed 'the Age of Exclusion'? How strong was the 'Jacobin tradition' in the wake of François Mitterrand's victory in the 1981 presidential election?

Throughout the Giscard years, the French Socialist Party (PS), reformed by François Mitterrand in 1971, claimed to be different from the rest of European social democracy, which it found too reformist, and revived its plea for a 'break with capitalism' (Lazar 2020, 249). The previous years had been marked by the beginning of deindustrialisation, with 16,000 jobs destroyed in the steel industry in 1979 alone (Godin 2019, 70). The context was one of slow growth, accelerating inflation (from 9 per cent in 1977 to 13.6 per cent in 1980) and was marked by a very severe rise in the unemployment rate, from 4.1 per cent in 1975 to 7.4 per cent in 1981. Against this background, how did the Socialists act once in power? How successful were their efforts to combat increasingly widespread processes of exclusion? How did they position vis-a-vis the project of European unification?

To answer these questions, one must analyse the history of the French Socialists' relationship to the state in order to compare the ideological influences underpinning the French socialists' governance of the political economy with those of their more economically liberal predecessors de Gaulle, Pompidou and Giscard d'Estaing.

When it originated in 1905, the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO) defined itself as a party of 'class struggle' and 'revolution' (Bergounioux 2020, 58), and its approach to the state was still tainted with suspicion. While *dirigisme* was not fully embraced in the 1930s, Socialist resistance fighters became proponents of a Keynesian-dirigiste approach to economic problems after the Liberation, and planning was presented as an imperative method in both industry and agriculture. The strong *dirigiste* consensus (nationalisations of banks and key industries) at the heart of the SFIO programme in the postwar period reflected the influence of two European role models which had promoted economic interventionism: Clement Attlee's Labour Britain and Achille Van Acker's Socialist Belgium (Fulla 2020, 265-6).

European unification would prove a key market of the SFIO, whose leaders ratified the Treaty of Rome in 1957. But the stain of the Algerian war was attached to the party, and led to its split in the late 1960s. In 1971, François Mitterrand founded the Parti Socialiste, which prided itself with being the most Socialist in Europe throughout the 1970s. This ambition 'to change France' was further proclaimed in 1981, when the PS in power – against the tide of its Western partners – decided to reinforce the state's economic role through Keynesian stimulus mechanisms and the nationalisation of selected industries and banks (Lazar 2020, 250).

At the turn of the 1980s, the legacy of state-led industrialisation in the post-war period had created a resilient political-economic structure that benefited business and the middle classes and increased loyalty to the status-quo in France (Prasad 2005, 363). As early as 1983, the Socialists' governance became the continuation of the policy programme implemented by Raymond Barre. The so-called 'U-turn', far from being a sudden conversion of the French

political class to market fundamentalism, nevertheless came to symbolise the conversion of French Socialists to economic 'realism'.

As previously seen, liberalising and pro-market competition ideas circulated among right-wing intellectuals in the postwar period, and this considerably influenced the conduct of economic decision-making under de Gaulle, Pompidou and Giscard. Yet, 1983 remains a significant ideological and rhetorical juncture, as the remainder of Mitterrand's first term affirmed the Left's capitulation to finance orthodoxy and promotion of the supply-side in the name of European integration, in particular monetary unification, and the type of structural policy and institutional change that France would implement from then on (Amable 2017a, 240).

The economic doctrine which came to become dominant among French Socialist policy-makers did not descend from heaven. It became part of the 'common sense' realm thanks to a carefully nurtured work of persuasion that spanned over several decades, with the development of a myriad of think tanks on the 'reformist' Left side of the political spectrum, and with the advance of what would be dubbed the *deuxième gauche* ('second Left'), with the renewed influence gained by its representatives Michel Rocard and Jacques Delors in the 1980s. Although adherence to the doctrine was not openly stated, ordoliberalism was a powerful referent: the 'German model' started to be praised and coveted by representatives of the governmental Left.

It was indeed under Franco-German impulse that the norms and rules acknowledged in successive European treaties – Single European Act (1986), Maastricht Treaty (1992), Stability and Growth Pact (1997) – came to directly translate ordoliberal tenets into EU law,

thus building-up the fundamental normative structures of the social market economy on the rest of the continent through the supranational door. The commitment of the French Socialists to the 'new constitutionalism of disciplinary neoliberalism' (Gill 1998; Gill 2017) was clear at home, as well as globally, with eminent transnational representatives of the French PS advocating for further liberalisation in international organisations such as the IMF, the EU and the WTO (Abdelal 2005).

Through their efforts, French Socialists gradually shaped what Chris Howell called the 'paradox of French state intervention'. The French state has used its powers to undermine *dirigisme* and reduce state capacity, altogether retreating from interventionism and increasingly exposing its institutions to international market forces (Howell 2009). The war of position of the reformist Left has been very powerful in naturalising the predicaments of European monetary unification, presenting them as necessary steps towards modernisation in a global political economy shaken by the end of the Cold War and amid bombastic post-ideological discourses praising the advent of a novel 'liberal international order'.

The chapter is organised as follows. The first section focuses on the governance and political options adopted by the French Socialist Party when it was in power in the late twentieth century, i.e. under François Mitterrand's presidency (1981-1995) and during the 'plural Left' experience under Lionel Jospin's premiership (1997-2002). In parallel, the section surveys the emergence of 'reformist' think-tanks in the French political ecosystem, and analyses the implications of the growing influence of 'expertise' in political-economic decision-making.

The second section reflects on international and European developments over the same period. It places a particular emphasis on the process of European integration, with the

implementation of the Maastricht Treaty and the birth of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The section problematises these dynamics within the framework of what Stephen Gill terms the *new constitutionalism of disciplinary neoliberalism* and demonstrates that French politicians from the ranks of the Socialist Party have been some of the most ardent defenders of the free circulation of capital globally. Yet, the section emphasises that new constitutionalism remains a fragmented and contested project. As such, it has been and continues to be repeatedly challenged from below.

The French Socialists in Power

From the late nineteenth century to the 1980s, French Socialists placed particular theoretical and strategic emphasis on the role of the state. In consequence, the programmes and public policies implemented were oriented towards the defence of public sector interests, which reflected the significant weight of lower and middle grade civil servants, and to a lesser extent of public sector workers in their electorate (Fulla 2020, 256).

However, the priority conferred to combatting inflation at the expense of the fight against unemployment incited the French Socialists to promise – from 1972 to 1982 – the advent of a strong 'statist renewal' (Lazar 2020) entailing large-scale nationalisations. This revolutionary rhetoric was sufficient to rally Communist voters in the second round of the May 1981 presidential election, but failed to materialise in the long-run once in office.

This section first addresses the relationship of French Socialists to the state from the postwar period to the end of the Mitterrand presidency (1945-1995). It then investigates how the Socialist understanding of the state was gradually reshaped in the wake of the systematic criticisms of Marxism that emerged in the 1970s, first under the influence of the Nouveaux

Philosophes ('New Philosophers'), then following the recommendations of reformist think-tanks such as Fondation Saint-Simon (created by François Furet and Pierre Rosanvallon in 1982). Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the French Socialists operated a strong ideological re-centering, partly manifested in an uncritical appraisal of European integration.

The French Socialists and the State

After the Liberation of France in 1945, the proportional voting system favoured three main blocs of political forces in the National Assembly: Parti Communiste Français (PCF, Communist Party), Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP, Gaullist party) and the aforementioned SFIO (Socialist Party), three political parties whose popular prestige derived from their participation in the resistance movement against the Nazi occupation.

Throughout the tumultuous Fourth Republic (1946-1958), the SFIO defended the parliamentary system of government as the best method of guaranteeing the role and autonomy of the political parties against General de Gaulle's plan to reinforce the executive branch (Bergounioux 2020, 65; see Chapter VII). During its time in power, the SFIO also reinforced the social state: Guy Mollet (1956-1957) thus passed several notable reforms – in particular a national old-age pension fund – but the extension of the public sector was not part of the debate. Moreover, the SFIO proved to be a diligent supporter of European integration, as it was under its command that the negotiations to create the Common Market through the Treaty of Rome (1957) were concluded (Bergounioux 2020, 65). The French Socialists therefore orchestrated in large part the curbing of economic protectionism by accepting the dismantling of protectionist barriers behind which French industries had sheltered (Fulla 2020, 269). As Guy Mollet saw it, the construction of Europe took precedence over absolute state sovereignty in customs matters (Warlouzet 2011).

As the Algerian crisis was deepening, the Fourth Republic proved very unstable and paralysing, and eventually collapsed in a veritable context of 'organic crisis' (Gramsci 1971), that is, a situation of multiple and simultaneous intersecting structural crises in the economy, in ethics, in politics, in society and in institutions. With the return of Charles de Gaulle to power in 1958, the SFIO started a process of irremediable decline. Following the drafting of a new constitution under de Gaulle's command, the question of the state came to occupy a major place in the political debate, at the expense of the Socialists, who were too weak and divided to play a significant role in the elaboration of the new constitutional settlement. In consequence, the new institutions established in 1958 and 1962 gave primacy to the executive branch of government, with a president now elected by universal suffrage. France was adopting a new political and decision-making model, in which the assertion and influence of a state technocracy – at the expense of the parliamentarians – saw its role in driving public policy sanctioned (Bergounioux 2020, 66).

Furthermore, a generation of young activists brought up on anti-colonial politics could not accept that it was a Socialist Prime Minister, Guy Mollet, who had sent troops to quell the growing unrest in Algeria. In 1960, these dissidents abandoned the SFIO to join the new and alternative left-wing party led by Michel Rocard, the Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU). The *coup de grace* for SFIO came at the 1969 presidential election, when its candidate Gaston Defferre only gathered 5 per cent of the ballots, as the Left was divided, a situation which resembled the final blow suffered by the once victorious Parti Socialiste in the 2017 presidential election, for with Benoit Hamon gathered only 6.36 per cent of the votes (see Chapter IV).

In 1971, the creation of the Party Socialiste (PS) had provided a unified platform for the non-Communist Left and helped break with the colonial blunders of the past (Chabal 2016, 247).

In a context of crisis of the Keynesian model, the Socialist Party – which was re-founded in the Parisian suburb of Epinay by François Mitterrand – strove to propose solutions to the flagging Fordist production model. These solutions were based mainly, although not exclusively, on extending the state's economic powers, a statist culture which owed a lot to the enduring electoral success of a powerful Communist Party and a national culture imbued with Colbertism and Jacobinism. In June 1972, the PS thus concluded a Common Programme of Government with the PCF, calling for the nationalisation of the banking system, as well as nine industry groups regarded as strategic (Fulla 2020, 271).

The so-called 'Epinay line', which shaped the socialist programme *Changer la vie* (April 1972), was drafted by Jean-Pierre Chevènement, leader of the left-wing party Centre d'Etudes, de Recherches et d'Education Socialiste (CERES). In consequence, it defended a brand of political voluntarism to restore full independence to the state through large-scale nationalisations (Bergounioux 2020, 68). Gradually, French Socialists accorded the centralised state a more important place in their doctrine and rhetoric. This was done in spite of the adverse European context for Keynesian ideas. Indeed, the oil crisis took a toll on the governments of Helmut Schmidt in West Germany and Harold Wilson and James Callaghan in Great Britain who, far from extending the scope of the state, adopted instead a 'social liberal' approach and sought to restrict growth or make cut-backs in public expenditure (Fulla 2020, 273).

Yet, this appraisal of the role of the state was not unanimous in French Socialist circles. The major conflict over the state's role came with the confrontation of the 'two Lefts' between François Mitterrand and Michel Rocard in the late 1970s. Michel Rocard, who rose to prominence in the newly created PS after a long career in the PSU, argued that 'two cultures'

were in conflict on the Left: one of them was 'Jacobin, centralising, state-based, nationalist and protectionist', while the other (his) was more in favour of so-called *autogestion* ('self-management'), pleading instead for a culture of government that would be 'decentralizing, regionalist, liberalising, refusing arbitrary domination, whether by bosses or the state, and preferring the autonomy of grassroots communities and experimentation' (Bergounioux 2020, 68-9). Michel Rocard, who embodied the second strand of Parti Socialiste, publicly asserted the coexistence of these 'two political cultures' within the French Left at the 1977 Nantes Congress (a position which François Hollande's Prime Minister Manuel Valls would echo some forty years later when he talked about *deux gauches irréconciliables* ('two irreconcilable Lefts') (Le Monde 2016, see also Chapter III). Michel Rocard's line was however defeated at the 1979 Metz Congress, when the Socialist Party adopted a tougher line, reaffirming the need for nationalisations and maintaining its advocacy for a strong state and bold economic alternatives.

The Mitterrand Presidencies

Yet, the return to power in 1981 brought an end to the radical approaches to the state promoted by some strands within the PS, from the nationalisations proposed by CERES to Rocardian self-management, the French Socialists being never as resolutely statist as when the party was in opposition (Fulla 2020, 273).

After his victory against Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in the 1981 presidential election, François Mitterrand did not immediately repudiate his campaign promises, and three Communist ministers were even nominated in Pierre Mauroy's government. After 23 years in opposition, Keynesian-inspired policies for boosting consumer spending, coupled with nationalisations in banking and industry, were launched in the summer of 1981, despite fierce parliamentary opposition from the Gaullist and non-Gaullist Right. With the law of 13 February 1982, large

swaths of the industrial sector (Saint-Gobain, Thomson, Suez, Pechiney, Usinor, etc.) and the banking sector (Crédit Commercial de France, Crédit du Nord, Société Marseillaise de Crédit, Crédit Lyonnais, Société Générale, etc.) were nationalised.

However, nationalisations and Keynesian demand stimulus were above all conceived as a means of modernising an undercapitalised production base, and not as first steps on the path to a break with capitalism. Indeed, the austerity plan of 1983 was not, as many commentators suggested, a sudden volte-face. It was rather a political turn which confirmed the Parti Socialiste elite's shift away from state interventionism and towards industrial modernisation within the framework of the European Economic Community (Fulla 2020, 274).

As early as the fall of 1981, Minister of Finance Jacques Delors thus called for a pause in the reforms, and a series of restrictive measures were enacted in 1982, laying the ground for the austerity policies of the spring of 1983. When the government led by Pierre Mauroy tried to fight the recession, its attempts and initiatives were hindered by speculative activity against the franc in international financial markets. The Socialists thus realised that the traditional instruments of fiscal expansion and capital controls had become less effective in counteracting the recession and the downward move of the franc (Deutschmann 2014, 348).

As stabilisation became the new leitmotiv, aspirations to expansionary Keynesianism came to an end. François Mitterrand decided to commit himself to a policy of wage stringency to maintain the franc within the European Monetary System (EMS), a 'purely intergovernmental fixed exchange rate system' (Ryner 2020) created in 1978 by President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and West-German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. For this, the French Socialists had to turn back on their political platform.

Therefore, Mitterrand abandoned in 1982 the old postwar rule of pegging wages to prices (*indexation des salaires sur les prix*) and adopted a 'strong franc' policy in order to stabilise the franc on currency markets, thus engaging France on the path to financial market liberalisation (De Largentaye and Du Tertre 2019, 139). Jacques Delors persuaded François Mitterrand that France had no choice but to liberalise financial markets and submit to monetary and fiscal discipline, which entailed a gradual disentangling of industry from the state and competitive deflation as a means of maintaining parity between the franc and the mark. In other words, the French state saw its prerogatives severed by the Socialists who pretended to support expansion a couple of years prior. One example is the January 1984 *loi bancaire* ('banking law'), which ended state control over short and long term interest rates.

In addition, the Mitterrand majority gradually lifted exchange controls, which favoured international capital flows, announcing the efforts by the same Jacques Delors at the European Commission to abolish capital controls within the EEC in the second half of the 1980s. For the rest of Mitterrand's first term, the two Socialist Prime Ministers Pierre Mauroy (1981-1984), Laurent Fabius (1984-1986) and the right-wing Rassemblement Pour la République (RPR) Jacques Chirac (1986-1988) facilitated the advent of a new growth regime that gave a predominant role to financial markets (De Largentaye and Du Tertre 2019). Indeed, despite the Socialists' rhetorical rejection of liberalism, Mitterrand accepted budgetary austerity in 1983, and the economic policies of the Socialists became almost indistinguishable from those of Raymond Barre in the late 1970s (Chabal 2016a, 256). The new strategy of *désinflation compétitive* ('competitive disinflation') prioritised keeping France's inflation rate below that of its trading partners through a combination of austerity budgets, de-indexation of wages and tight monetary policy (Levy 2008, 422). In spite of having been elected on resolutely *dirigiste*

promises, the Socialist Party appeared to be abiding by the same ordoliberal rules that governed the policies of its predecessors on the Right.

Indeed, François Mitterrand conceived remaining part of the European Monetary System as a means to 'import' German-influenced ordoliberal conceptions of sound macroeconomic policies (Hall 1994; Clift and Mc Daniel 2017). The construction of the EMS was built upon markedly non-*dirigiste* foundations, drawing heavily on ordoliberal anti-trust ideas which sought to undermine traditional *dirigiste* industrial policy tools, including state aid and industrial subsidies, protected sectors, and preferential public procurement (Clift 2009; Clift and McDaniel 2017, 6). Thus, European unification engaged French socialism in a process of convergence in terms of economic policy with the dominant economic orthodoxy in the Western world: a strong currency, the recognition of the benefits of competition as justification for disinflation and greater trade openness. The main reference point for emulation thus remained West Germany, France's main trading partner and the monetary mainstay of the EEC (Fulla 2020, 275).

In the 1980s, ordoliberal tenets thus permeated the French political economy through the supranational backdoor. François Mitterrand's desire to further European integration was motivated by the paradoxical expectation to find the extra room for manoeuvre in supranational institutions rather than within the framework of the national state, no longer seen as the essential player in the country's modernisation (Bergounioux 2020, 72). The capitulation to ordoliberalism would be further consecrated with the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, strongly supported by President Mitterrand, which is examined in the next section.

What insight can be drawn from François Mitterrand's presidencies in terms of the French Socialists' relationship to the state once in power? Clearly, the years between 1981 and 1984 established the framework of the Socialists' relationship to institutions, administrative organisations and the economic and social role of the state. While the Socialists maintained aspirations for a parliamentary system of government – even opportunistically reintroducing the proportional system for the legislative elections in order to divide the Right vote in 1986, which had the aftereffect of significantly inflating the number of Front National MPs – they acted as a *de facto* presidential party, in accordance with the institutions of the Fifth Republic (Bergounioux 2020, 69). While François Mitterrand had bitterly described the institutions constructed by de Gaulle as fit for the *coup d'état permanent* ('permanent coup d'état') in a book published two decades prior (1964), his mode of governance did not introduce any significant break with the quasi-monarchical conception of the French presidency.

The end of Mitterrand's first term was characterised by a period of *cohabitation*,[29] with Jacques Chirac from Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) appointed as Prime Minister (1986-1988). This provided the Hayekian Right with the occasion to undo some of Mitterrand's most emblematic reforms. The first postwar privatisation programme became law on 6 August 1986. Ambitious and far-reaching, it sought to privatise 66 firms – with a total workforce of 900,000 in the span of five years. The goals of the Chirac government were to rebalance the public and private sectors, improve the financial results of privatised companies, reduce the national debt, encourage firms heavily dependent on the state to have recourse to financial markets and to promote 'popular capitalism' by encouraging shareholding by company personnel (Maclean 1997, 216). Although the programme was cut

[29] In French political life, 'cohabitation' refers to the situation in which the President and the Prime Minister are not from the same political persuasion. That was the case under François Mitterrand (from 1986 to 1988 with Jacques Chirac, then from 1993 to 1995 with Edouard Balladur as Prime Ministers) and under Jacques Chirac (with Lionel Jospin as Prime Minister, from 1997 to 2002).

short by the stock market crash of October 1987, it succeeded in establishing a new shareholding class – with a sixfold increase in the size of the shareholding body between 1986 and 1998 (Maclean 1997, 216).

The nomination of reformist Michel Rocard as Prime Minister after François Mitterrand's 1988 re-election did not entail a change of policy paradigm. Regarding privatisations, Mitterrand chose not to choose with his 'ni-ni' policy (neither privatisation, nor nationalisation). Furthermore, Rocard and his Finance Minister Pierre Bérégovoy agreed on the need to continue the monetarist 'strong franc policy' pursued during Mitterrand's first term. They remained convinced of the necessity to maintain a balanced budget rather than implementing a social policy funded by fiscal stimulus, thus consolidating the shift towards an economic strategy in which supply-side competitiveness constituted a prerequisite for any policy that supported demand (Fulla 2020, 275). This went hand in hand with deregulation policies which included the lifting of most price controls, the easing of workplace laws governing hiring, firing and work hours and the creation of semi-independent agencies to supervise the stock market and the radio and television industry (Schmidt 1997, 230). Gradually, the so-called Left, originally favorable to workers' self-management and characterised by its opposition to Marxism, took up the themes of the Modernists (or *deuxième gauche*) – whose figureheads were Pierre Mendès-France, and later on Michel Rocard – and expressed a strong preference for social bargaining and contract over state intervention and legislation in industrial relations (Amable 2016, 528).

Improvement in social welfare – such as the 1988 Minimum Income (*Revenu Minimum d'Insertion,* RMI) – were implemented as compensation mechanisms in order to help citizens who had the most difficulty finding employment. Unsurprisingly, the end of the 1980s and the

beginning of the 1990s signaled the beginning of the divorce between the Socialist Party and the popular classes. Indeed, while Rocard's social capitalism attracted some elite support, the Socialists increasingly lost their working class support with the adoption of the 'strong franc policy' (Hayward 2007, 364). Certainly, the PS had always been an amalgamation of a number of different factions or *courants* organised around personalities (Clift and McDaniel 2017, 405). However, how can we make sense of such a radical re-centering of the PS once in power? How did the balance of forces shift? What were the intellectual tendencies and influences that triggered this shift towards monetarism and supply-side economics?

The Rise of Think-tanks and Expertise

Intellectually, the 1970s were a decade of entombment for French Marxism. The most famous expression of anti-Marxist critique in the media was the *nouvelle philosophie*, a virulently anti-totalitarian movement underpinned by polemical writings by young philosophers such as André Glucksmann (*La Cuisinière et le Mangeur d'hommes. Réflexion sur l'Etat, le Marxisme et les Camps de concentration*, 1975), Bernard-Henri Lévy (*La Barbarie à Visage Humain*, 1977) and Pascal Bruckner (*Les Maîtres Penseurs*, 1977).

The *Nouveaux Philosophes* ('New Philosophers'), whose main essays were published in the second half of the 1970s, were nevertheless attacked by their peers and teachers (Claude Lefort and Raymond Aron) whose ideas they thought they were introducing to a wider audience (Chabal 2016a, 248). This led for instance historian Julian Bourg (2007) to argue that the 1970s saw the revival of the theme of ethics among French intellectuals, particularly on the Left, where the concern for revolution in the 1960s was turned into a fascination with ethics, responsibility and rights in the 1970s and 1980s. A prime example of that trend were the writings of philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), and the publications of other intellectuals of the centre-left in the journal *Esprit*.

In parallel, the popularity of modernist principles of *autogestion* (self-government) popularised by the 'second Left' played a key role in the ideological reorientation of a certain number of union structures such as Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT). This tended to marginalise ideas of class and revolution, which were still essential programmatic and rhetorical elements of the Parti Communiste Français and of the Left wing of PS in the 1970s, while falling into abeyance in lecture rooms and journals (Chabal 2016).

Beyond the telegenic 'new philosophers', anti-Marxism permeated academic circles as well, especially the network of French *grandes écoles* (Sciences Po, Ecole Polytechnique, Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales, Ecole Nationale d'Administration). As previously evoked, neoliberal economics made considerable headway into these schools that trained generations of public servants and senior officials, but also members of the political parties' apparatuses. By the end of the 1970s, Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA), which was founded in 1945 to train the postwar elites, had been 'conquered' by neoliberal thought, and infiltrated by graduates from prestigious business schools like Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales de Paris (HEC). The situation was similar in Sciences Po Paris (where Jacques Rueff taught economics for many years), although the neo-Keynesian tradition remained represented among the professorial body.

The *grandes écoles* thus played an important role in the symbolic and intellectual devaluation of Marxism, as the teaching of economics in Sciences Po and ENA became progressively more liberal throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Kesler 1985). As a result, the scholarly socialisation at ENA made the 'expertise' that high-ranked public servants and think-tank members pretended to be embodying much more anti-statist than it used to be. The 'common sense' inscribed in the teaching of economics at ENA gradually followed the lines of postwar

'modernisation', seeking 'economic efficiency' under new 'external constraints'. The defunct universalist morals promoting economic expansion and thereby justifying a resolute state interventionism, were progressively substituted by a discourse on 'technical necessity' placing emphasis on the gravity of external financial balances and questioning the rationality of state intervention (Kolopp 2013, 71).

As demonstrated earlier, the Right had rediscovered liberalism in the 1970s and 1980s, with a panoply of clubs and think-tanks created to promote ideas of economic liberty, to defend the necessity of state retrenchment and the soundness of European integration, such as Club 89, Club de l'Horloge, Institut Economique de Paris and Printemps 86 (Denord 2004). Such intellectual activism is also to be found on the Left, where the potentials and merits of liberal thought were praised by representatives of Michel Rocard's so-called 'second Left'. What organisations and *sociétés de pensée* were the primary vectors of this ideological reorientation in the 1980s and 1990s?

Historian of the French Revolution François Furet played a key role in this matter by bringing liberalism to French historiography in his famous 1978 essay *Penser la Révolution Française*, in which he argued that the French Revolution was not about class, but about ideas of political representation, an interpretation that became the new orthodoxy in France at the time of the bicentenary of the French Revolution in 1989 (Chabal 2006a, 251). In 1982, Furet created, alongside political scientist and CFDT member Pierre Ronsanvallon, the Saint-Simon Foundation (*Fondation Saint-Simon*). Conceptualised as a bridge between Left and Right and between public and private actors, the foundation was aimed at strengthening the links between academic and business circles. Indeed, both Furet and Rosanvallon, who had worked previously together in the Raymond Aron Centre for Political Research, shared an anti-

Jacobin view of French state-society relations (Hayward 2007, 351). They thus united their strength in seeking to challenge the 'Jacobin' and 'centralising' tradition of the French Left and laid the ideological foundations for the anti-Marxist *deuxième gauche*, an intellectual project carried out by modernising 'elites' who pretended to defend 'the common good'.

Driven by the ambition to reconcile market rules and state intervention, the thinkers gathered at Fondation Saint-Simon coined the modernist concept of *économie concertée* ('coordinated economy') to describe a system of constant collaboration they wished to establish between high administration, unions and business organisations (Bonelli 1998). Once again, and as was the case on the Right side of the political spectrum, the aim was to find a governing third way that would be neither *laissez-faire*, nor economic planning and would be implicitly inspired by the German model. The Foundation was elitist in its composition (anti-Marxist organic intellectuals François Furet and Pierre Rosanvallon, senior officials and *énarques* close to business circles such as Alain Minc, Simon Nora and Roger Fauroux). Recruited by co-optation, its members were part of what Pierre Bourdieu (1989) termed *noblesse d'Etat* ('state nobility') and were deemed able to have an influence in public life thanks to their journalistic, academic or administrative talents.

The members of Foundation Saint-Simon almost exclusively originated from the 'modernisation' movement and built many bridges between what were then differentiated social spaces of the ruling class. For instance, Roger Fauroux created links between the world of industry and the high public servant class at ENA. Jacques Julliard, who used to teach at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), became editor-in-chief in multiple weekly magazines (*Marianne, Le Nouvel Observateur)* and was close to reformist trade unions (CFDT, alongside his colleague Rosanvallon). A combination of ideological fluidity

and social ubiquity allowed the eminent members of Fondation Saint-Simon to exist in several professional circles simultaneously (Bonelli 1998), which considerably facilitated the propagation of their 'modernising' doctrine.

The Foundation Saint-Simon carried a project that was profoundly elitist and conservative: that of transcending ideological differences between Left and Right and presenting social-liberalism as the unavoidable path towards progress (Bonelli 1998). A few years before Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' narrative, Fondation Saint-Simon's mantra implied that the universe of possible political regime was exhausted. This was in line with the theses exposed by Michel Crozier in the 1970s that discursively imposed binary oppositions between the 'past' and the 'future', the 'blocked' and the 'open', 'stagnation' and 'growth', etc. This new system of classification was applied to the opposition between Right and Left, with the conclusion that this fundamental cleavage had to be surpassed and the suggestion that 'socialism' and 'syndicalism' were synonymous to 'immobile' and 'blocked', that they were in short archaisms belonging to the 'past' (Bourdieu and Boltanski 1976). The ideas supported by the Fondation Saint Simon had a considerable effect on the Parti Socialiste's programmatic and rhetorical shift from the late 1980s onwards.

Legislative arrangements soon created the ideal framework for the proliferation of think-tanks and sociétés de pensée à la Fondation Saint-Simon. In September 1986, Jacques Chirac's right-wing majority adopted the *Loi relative à la liberté de communication*, or Loi Léotard, which created a more accommodating legal and regulatory framework for think-tanks and intellectual organisations. Indeed, it recognised the public utility of these organizations and therefore facilitated their funding through public money, in part thanks to direct tax deductions, and indirectly through tax exemptions for their generous donors. Thus, the pro-

European Fondation Robert Schuman, created in 1991, and the Fondation Jean Jaurès, close to Parti Socialiste and created in 1992, are still to this day exempt from commercial taxes and eligible to patronage. Henceforth, benefactors benefit from a 60 per cent exemption on their income tax if they donate to these organisations, thus increasing the ability of the business world to influence the democratic and ideological game (Rzepski 2019).

The 'Plural Left' Experience

In the meantime, the movement from state to market continued apace. The shift was accelerated by the Right upon its return to power in 1986 with Jacques Chirac as Prime Minister, and sustained by governments of the Left and Right alike, under successive Prime Ministers Michel Rocard (1988-1991), Edith Cresson (1991-1992) Pierre Bérégovoy (1992-1993) and Edouard Balladur (1993-1995). In the process, the once-vast holdings of the French state were reduced to little more than energy production, public transportation and some weapon manufactures (Levy 2008, 423). When Jacques Chirac was elected President of the Republic in 1995, the movement continued unabated, despite the long strike of December 1995 (see next section). Following an ill-advised dissolution of the National Assembly, the *gauche plurielle* ('plural Left') majority led by Lionel Jospin came back to power in 1997 for what would be the third (and last, to date) *cohabitation* of the Fifth Republic.

A superficial reading of the Parti Socialiste programme for the 1997 legislative elections might suggest an aspiration to defend state-owned production, notably in its prominent theme of halting the privatisations initiated by the Right (Fulla 2020, 276), thus giving credit to Jospin's assertion that his government would be enacting 'the most left-wing policies of any Western democracy' (Clasen and Clegg 2004, 97). Instead, his government virtually privatisated more companies than successive right-wing governments: in the air industry (Air France, loss of Air Inter's internal monopoly in 1996), in telecommunications (elimination of

France Télécom's legal monopoly over telephone services), in electronics (Thomson-CSF) and in the banking system (Crédit Lyonnais). The liberalising rules introduced by the Jospin majority were partly a response to deregulation sets and recommendations made by the EU. In the energy sector, however, French industry managed to derail EU proposals in the 1990s (Schmidt 1997, 231). Thus, successive Ministers of Finance under Lionel Jospin (Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Christian Sautter, Laurent Fabius) sold shares in or privatised public companies to the tune of more than 175 billion francs, a historic record (Fulla 2020, 276).

Yet, this retrenchment was once again counter-balanced by rather ambitious social welfare programmes, whose implementation was orchestrated by Minister of Labour and Solidarity Martine Aubry. These included the youth employment programme implemented at the beginning of Jospin's mandate, as well as the Couverture Maladie Universelle (CMU, 'Universal Health Coverage') created in 1999, and the still controversial laws on the 35-hour working week on the same year which, according to many experts, created up to 350,000 jobs. Consequently, during Jospin's five-year mandate (1997-2002), the economic situation recovered: growth picked up and unemployment fell under 8 per cent. Despite the fact that the euro had replaced the franc, inflation did not accelerate and public debt decreased (De Largentaye and Du Tertre 2019, 144).

The divergence between rhetoric and practice in the 1990s did not concern just the economy, but also the French Socialists' conception of the state. Indeed, despite owing his election to a 'plural' parliamentary majority, Jospin opted for a re-presidentialisation of the regime as Prime Minister, by introducing the five-year presidential term of office in 2000. This constitutional reform, which made the presidential election come before the legislative elections, reinforced the powers of the President of the Republic as the head of the executive

against the Prime Minister and the parliamentary majority, a personalisation of the regime which would have sundry detrimental effects in the first two decades of the twenty-first century (see Chapter VII).

Yet, the Socialists still had a high regard for the role of the state, and this explains why they maintained their refusal to adopt the notion of the 'Third Way' favoured by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder, which was precisely about the question of the state's role (Bergounioux 2020, 72; see Chapter VI). For Vivien Schmidt (1997, 239-40), this signaled the fact that French governmental elites had not given up entirely on state interventionism, as they themselves engineered this retreat of the state (through deregulation) in order to transform the business-government relationship at the expense of government direction. In this process, members of the governmental elites were often moved to top ranks of leadership in public and private firms. Over the period, state interventionism became much more circumscribed to businesses in trouble or in strategic areas.

One can conclude from this historical review that Left governments have implemented the most significant neoliberal reforms that have transformed the French model of capitalism: financial deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s, corporate governance reform in 2001, privatisations in the 2000s. (Amable 2016, 531) As in the Anglophone world, most of the neoliberalising transformations have thus originated from the ranks of the established Left (Humphrys and Cahill 2017). Furthermore, this dynamic of re-centering had a continental character. At different moments depending on the party, European socialists abandoned the idea of overturning capitalism and embraced instead a project of 'social market economy' (Lazar 2020, 248). The French Socialists were rather successful in implementing this strategy until the early 2000s. Indeed, thanks to fairly generous social programmes and a favourable

global economic conjuncture, they did not face any major social troubles and remained reasonably associated with social democratic activism in public opinion.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the *dirigiste* French state thus gently completed its metamorphosis into the 'social-anaesthesia state' (Levy 2008, 424), characterised by a mitigation of the advance of market forces through expanding social protection for those most affected by liberalisation measures. Indeed, this relatively smooth transition was made possible because the French Socialists had been careful to preserve labour legislation and social protection, the key institutional areas for their social base (Amable et. al 2012). Therefore, the Jospin government strived to emphasise national peculiarities and rhetorically rejected the idea of a Third Way between social democracy and neoliberalism, despite the aggiornamento provided by Anthony Giddens and Tony Blair (see Chapter XI). Unlike in Britain, social justice was strongly equated to redistribution through progressive taxation in France, not with equality of opportunity. Besides, the historical absence of a centrist constituency worth courting under the bipolar French Republic – with the notable exception of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing – and the presence of a Left flank (Parti Communiste and Les Verts) essential to the maintenance of Jospin's majority, made the concept of the Third Way difficult to translate into French politics at the time (Clift 2000, 136-38).

In fact, the main factor that led to political convergence among social democratic parties has been the political will to agree and implement successfully the Maastricht criteria for the Economic and Monetary Union (Telo 2000; Amable 2017a; Hanley 2017), as is examined in the next section.

New Constitutionalism and the European Union

From the very beginning, the European integration project was constructed on principles of economic constitutionalism, principles that were intended to be mechanisms to extend the internal market whilst at the same time introducing measures of widening scope that would incrementally limit the discretionary power of parliaments in economic policy-making at the European level, in effect keeping many democratic forces out of the governance of key elements of economic policy (Biscahie and Gill 2022). How an economic constitution emerged in the more recent European context is reflected in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which paved the way for the introduction of the Euro as a means to consolidate the EU and laid out the general legal and political framework for the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which had been sketched with the European Monetary System (EMS), engineered under French-German command.

Negotiated at least partly – as Helmut Kohl suggested – to bind a unified Germany to the West, the Maastricht Treaty had both normative and functional dimensions (Jones and Menon 2019, 172). Indeed, the Treaty created the notion of European citizenship (including the right to vote in local elections), established new institutions to address concerns related to elements of foreign policy and cooperation, but most importantly from a political-economic perspective, introduced the euro as a common currency. With the introduction of the euro, fiscal stringency was codified in the treaties and monetary policy was concentrated in the hands of the European institutions, whereas budgetary discipline and some coordination of economic policies remained mainly decentralised to Member States.

In France, European integration proved a key marker between the faction led by the rather sovereigntist CERES, headed by Jean-Pierre Chevènement, and the Rocardians who, under

Jacques Delors' influence, decided that the European space was the best arena for action (Hanley 2017, 142). With Socialist cadres' clear endorsement for the Maastricht Treaty and the campaign led by François Mitterrand himself in favour of ratification, it became clear that the latter strand had become dominant within PS, motivating Jean-Pierre Chèvenement to leave the party in 1993. In the aftermath of Maastricht, EU integrative dynamics promoted a particular ordoliberal conception of export-led growth, but there has not been a clear convergence of European capitalist models.

In the French case, according to Clift and Mc Daniel (2017, 12), one has seen 'the reinforcement of the post-*dirigiste* state at the heart of the French model of capitalism, evidenced in its "market-making" conception of industrial activism to support selected French firms and sectors, and willingness to bend and alter institutional frameworks in order to exert its influence'. Therefore, 'new constitutionalism' (Gill 1998; 2017) should not be equated to a completely fulfilled architecture of rule: it is a ruling-class project that is inherently contingent and contested and, as such, triggers counter-movements and a variety of forms of popular resistance. Indeed, the project from above that is forced upon European nations and France is also contested from below.

The Maastricht Treaty and the Economic and Monetary Union

As previously elaborated, the French Socialists made several major concessions to German ordoliberalism under Mitterrand's presidencies. First, the Single European Act, engineered and promoted by Jacques Delors, committed the twelve Member-states to implementing the four freedoms stated in the Treaty of Rome – free movement of goods, people, services and capital. As the European Commission President, Delors became the architect of the single European market and presided over the gradual abolition of capital controls in the European

Union (Deutschmann 2014, 348). The 1990s marked the acme of European voluntarism with the negotiation of the Maastricht Treaty, which included the Economic and Monetary Union.

As the founding treaty of the European Union – which henceforth replaced the European Economic Community – the Maastricht Treaty provided for strict coordination of fiscal policies, including caps on public debt and budget deficits for all Member-states that had agreed to give up their national currencies in favour of the euro in 1999. The economic policies promoted in the framework of the Maastricht Treaty were aimed at ensuring balanced public budgets, protecting the mechanisms of 'free and undistorted competition' and depoliticising the question of money by delegating monetary policy to the 'independent' European Central Bank (ECB), based a few minutes away from the Bundesbank, in Frankfurt. In 1997, the Growth and Stability Pact further strengthened the ordoliberal-inspired monitoring and coordination of national fiscal and economic policies in order to respect the deficit and debt caps set at Maastricht (De Largentaye and Du Tertre 2019).

In the Maastricht framework, national fiscal policies are restricted in the short term. Since 1992, Eurozone countries are confined to budgetary deficits of no more than 3 per cent, and their debt to GDP levels restricted to a maximum of 60 per cent, so their debts to creditors are seen to be sustainable. It was however without any apparent theoretical or economic grounding that a retrospective European consensus centred on the arbitrary 3 per cent deficit rule emerged in 1981, when France's deficit amounted to 100 billion Francs – which then represented 2 per cent of its GDP. Influential French economist Guy Abeille thus deemed the 3 per cent threshold an attainable goal. Entrenched in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, this regulation was reinforced in the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999, and consistently hardened ever since, notably with the 2013 Treaty on Stability, Co-ordination and Governance (TSCG),

whose Article 3.1b lowered the threshold of authorised budgetary deficit to 0.5 per cent, in effect mandating a virtually balanced budget (Biscahie and Gill 2022, see also Chapter III).

With its norms, caps, and rules, the constitutional architecture of governance erected at Maastricht resonates strongly with the ordoliberal dream of separation between economics and politics. Centralised at the EU level, monetary policy is effectively inflation targeting, with the ECB having set the inflation target close to or below 2 per cent, a threshold very rarely attained as the EU was swamped in deflation during the decade following the financial crisis. Internally and externally, financial markets are liberalised, thus the EU foregoes instruments of controlling credit growth or allocating credit. In the absence of a bail-out clause, neither national governments nor the ECB were allowed to support Member-states which are facing problems in financing themselves. Finally, labour markets are supposed to be flexible, as the European Commission and the European Central Bank regard wage flexibility as the cure to economic imbalances (Stockhammer 2016, 371).

Indeed, orthodox economists praised these innovations as maximising competitiveness and 'economic efficiency' across the Eurozone (Pisani Ferry and Posen 2009) although that claim has yet to be reflected in living standards, political stability and a significant lowering of unemployment. Quite the opposite, French companies exporting from the national territory suffered from a lack of 'non-cost competitiveness', particularly in relation to Germany. Furthermore, the adoption of the euro in 1999 amplified this asymmetry, as French companies were handicapped by an overvalued currency (De Largentaye and du Tertre 147).
By contrast, works in Critical Political Economy (CPE) have analysed not only economic effects but also how discourses emerged and which role they played in political struggles (Jäger and Springler 2015, 3-7), e.g. how these measures may reflect a shift to a more

pervasively ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ (Bruff 2014) or indeed an ‘authoritarian constitutionalism’ (Oberndorfer 2015). Some thinkers have equated the new architecture to a form of ‘transnational authoritarian statism’ (Sandbeck and Schneider 2019) and how crisis management can be understood as a means of restructuring power relations under new constitutional conditions in the European Union (Bieling 2015). The consensus in critical EU scholarship is that the Maastricht Treaty did represent a victory for neoliberalism (Dyson and Featherstone 1999, 791), and that EMU has ‘locked-in’ political commitments to orthodox, market-monetarist fiscal and monetary policies that are perceived to increase government credibility in the eyes of financial market players (Gill 1998, 5).

Part of the ideological logic governing EMU seems to take inspiration from the theoretical framework that American economist James Buchanan advocated, that is, a clear distinction between what he termed ‘constitutional politics’ – the overarching frameworks of ‘quasi-permanent rules’ and ‘ordinary politics’ – struggles and debates *within* constitutional rules that define the limits of the possible. Buchanan thus stated that ‘explicit constitutional limits on the intrusion of politics into the market have the further advantage of providing stability of expectations for persons and groups, internal and external, who might make long-term investments’ (Buchanan 1994, 184-6). Thus, ‘normal politics’ is strictly a politics *within rules*, and for Buchanan constitutions should be considered *quasi-permanent* in order to become elements of ‘*genuine political capital*’ (Gill 2002, 57). At stake in this separation is the protection of capitalist private property, including through macroeconomic policies that will contain inflation – hence the argument made by neoliberals for ‘fiscal and monetary constitutions’.

By fiscal constitution, Buchanan means specific measures to prevent deficit financing by governments, such as balanced budget amendments or precise stipulations as to the size of budget deficits, as with the Maastricht Treaty and its caps on public debt (60 per cent of GDP) and budget deficits (3 per cent of GDP) for all member countries, since such deficits may be linked to inflation and erode the value of capital and assets of creditors. With regard to money and inflation, Buchanan argues that individuals can be made more secure and independent with a regime that 'embodies predictability in the money-good exchange regime' (Gill 2002, 56). The long-term objective is to limit democratic control over economic policymaking in an effort to benefit transnationally-oriented capital (Dierckx 2013). Mechanisms of 'good governance' thus entail the separation of economics from politics on a global scale (Biscahie and Gill 2022).

This architecture of control and its associated measures are meant first and foremost to protect the economy from the democratic populace's influence. This has been further proven after the financial crisis, when developments towards an increasingly authoritarian neoliberalism became the culmination of a long-lasting erosion in the capacity of EU governance to mediate between capital accumulation and social legitimation imperatives, with the continued goal of protecting market relations from what is often construed as 'excessive' mass political pressure (Ryner 2020). Indeed, EMU can be comprehended as part of a set of policies that has shifted the European Union towards a neoliberal and financial, as opposed to a social market or social-democratic, model of capitalism (Gill 1998, 9).

Thus, the 1980s and 1990s bore witness to a remarkable convergence between the criteria and norms enforced by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the OECD and the rules set out in the European Treaties of Maastricht (1992) and Amsterdam (1997).

Whatever the context, priority was given to austerity, balanced budgets, monetary stability and competitiveness, represented ideologically as so-called 'sound policies', and 'good governance' 'best practices' (Gill and Biscahie 2022). This was justified via concepts of limited government, minimal or self-regulation of business and finance, and pro-market reforms, with measures partly locked in by the juridical, legal and regulatory frameworks of the *new constitutionalism of disciplinary neoliberalism* (Gill 2019, 374).

New Constitutionalism and the French Global Defence of Capital

The construction of the Economic and Monetary Union – and related nationally-oriented liberalisation schemes in the European Union – should be understood in the context of global patterns of power and production that structure the political economy of globalisation and are linked to the rising power of internationally mobile capital (Gill 1998, 6). Indeed, the abolition of capital controls created the conditions for a long-term process of 'financialisation' of mature capitalist economies, a process that not only promoted far-reaching changes of macro-economic structures, but also had profound effects on other spheres of society – such as corporate governance, labour markets, fiscal and tax policies, consumer behaviour, household finances – but also led to the collapse of 2008 (Deutschmann 2014, 349-50).

New constitutionalism, or more accurately *the new constitutionalism of disciplinary neoliberalism*, is a world-order project that involves political and legal reforms to redefine the political via a series of pre-commitment mechanisms. These include constitutions, laws, property rights and various institutional arrangements, designed to have quasi-permanent status. Indeed, law is central to the constitution of the power of capital, the nature of the state and its separation from civil society (Gill 2002; Gill and Cutler 2014). Around the globe, constitutional reforms have transferred an unprecedented amount of power from representative institutions to not only the executive branch but also to judiciaries, operating

the astonishingly rapid transition to what may be called a global 'juristocracy' (Hirschl 2004) or what Friedrich von Hayek termed, following Michael Oakeshott, a 'nomocratic' (law-governed) society (Hayek 1973). Indeed, justice is secured on an equal basis through an effective Rule of Law.

As such, new constitutionalism is the legal-juridical anchoring of neoliberal globalisation. It entails efforts at different scales: national (central bank independence or IMF sponsored currency boards as in the 1990s), regional (the European Union (EU) and the European Central Bank (ECB), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its successor) and global (the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Indeed, the latter is a classic case of the new constitutionalist framework (Dierckx 2013, p. 804).

Friedrich von Hayek argued that democracy is only acceptable insofar as it is coupled with strictly limited government: the powers of any temporary majority must be limited by long-term principles, constrained by a constitution that limits the powers of government (Hayek 1960). This forms the basis of what Hayek (1978) called *catallaxy* (the facilitation of spontaneous exchange processes and the associated mutual adjustment of individual economies in a market system), that is, a state that exists only to enforce property rights through constitutional constraints and binding rules and regulations on democratic life, which is the economic component of a *nomocracy* (Gill 2022). For Buchanan, this is key to the creation of an 'efficient social order' premised on individual choice. In this way, neoliberal approaches – based on Constitutional Political Economy and Public Choice – advocate a form of structuralism founded upon methodological individualism as the basis for this so-called 'efficient social order' (Gill 2002, 52-55). This reasoning strongly echoes the precepts of ordoliberal organic intellectuals such as Walter Eucken and Franz Böhm (see Chapter I), for

whom the state must provide a legal framework governing the actions of both public and private actors around a core comprised of strict competition and tight monetary policies.

In the aftermath of the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, capital has been able to move freely across EU borders and investment opportunities were significantly increased, as were the possibilities to both evade and avoid taxation thanks to simplified access to the off-shore world and various fiscal subterfuges. Indeed, 'disciplinary neoliberalism' allows for a decentralisation of power through the protection of private property rights under the constitution and enforcement of *federalism*. This decentralization of power gives corporations and capital owners the constitutional right to make their own quasi-legal arrangements, for example to enforce workplace rules and disciplines in exercising their authority as a right that stems from their labour contracts with workers (Biscahie and Gill, 2022).

Against this background, Adam Harmes (2019) shows how the concept of new constitutionalism can be divided into two distinct but overlapping tendencies.
(1) *horizontal* new constitutionalism, or *direct* measures such as balanced budget amendments, independent central banks and private (intellectual) property rights provisions that do not directly rely on the disciplinary effects of capital mobility and the exit option

(2) *vertical* new constitutionalism, or lock-in mechanisms connected to 'market-preserving federalism' which rely on capital mobility and the exit option for capital. Vertical measures work to separate the 'economic' and the 'political' in a *structural* almost self-enforcing fashion.

The political aim of *market-preserving federalism* (locally and globally) is therefore to impose constraints on socialist or even social-democratic forms of government intervention by locking in inter-jurisdictional competition and, with that, the structural power of capitalist market forces. In this way, the *raison d'être* of new constitutionalism – and its associated market-

preserving federalism – is to make alternative futures – for example socialist alternatives – illegal, in other terms to *prevent future governments* from undoing commitments to a disciplinary neoliberal pattern of accumulation. It thus operates across time and space and, in so doing, entails efforts to politically contain challenges to the disciplinary neoliberalism project through co-optation, domestication, neutralisation and depoliticisation of opposition (Gill 2002, 48).

Yet, it would be restrictive to assume that most of this work of persuasion was carried out simply by American scholars. As Rawi Abdelal (2006) made clear, the role of French organic intellectuals has been absolutely pivotal in erecting the rules governing these far-reaching capitalist frameworks. Indeed, while the Europeans – and particularly the British, Germans and Dutch – supported liberal rules for capital movements, three French policymakers/intellectuals from Parti Socialist played central roles in crafting the informal and formal rules of the EU, OECD and IMF. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Jacques Delors of the European Commission, Henri Chavranski of the OECD, and Michel Camdessus of the IMF took part in proposing new liberalising rules for members of their organisations (Abdelal 2006, 6). This cohort from the Mitterrand era did much more than acquiesce in a new world of increasingly mobile capital. The French government and these French policy-makers attempted to manage it by simultaneously writing the rules of the international financial architecture and building the authority of the organisations (EU, OECD, IMF) that help to govern the system, leaving these institutions much more liberal in orientation than when they integrated them (Abdelal 2006, 20).

A Project from Above that is Contested from Below

Despite its powerful fortifications and faithful institutional support, new constitutionalism remains a strategic political *project*, rather than a completed historical process. As such, it has

a contingent and contested character (Gill 2002, 61). In the French context, defiance to new constitutionalism arose and materialised within three distinct fields:

(1) In intellectual life – through critical engagement.
(2) In the streets – through protests and demonstrations.
(3) In the polling stations – through voting.

One of the first instances of a public intellectual engagement with the phenomenon of neoliberalism in France was the conference on the *nouvel ordre intérieur* ('new internal order') held at the defunct Université de Vincennes in March 1979, with famous critical thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Noam Chomsky and Henri Lefebvre participating in the proceedings (Behrent 2017). At stake was the publication of the 1975 report *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies*, issued by the Trilateral Commission and co-authored by Samuel Huntington, Michel Crozier and Joji Watanuki, which called for a reassertion of social authority, leadership and expertise at a time where the democratic institutions of the postwar political economy were crumbling under pressures from demands from below (Gill 1991). The speakers presciently recognised the demise of postwar social arrangements and warned against neoliberalism's 'soft way', that is, how the apparent liberalisation of social and cultural life masked the reassertion of social hierarchies and economic domination (Behrent 2017, 47). The Vincennes conference grew the first seeds of a French critique of neoliberalism that acknowledged the global scope and politically illiberal tendencies of this new capitalist order. The conclusion of the talks was that social democracy, far from representing an alternative, constituted a form of collaboration with the emerging neoliberal order (ibid, 59).

In 1978 and 1979, Michel Foucault delivered a series of lectures at Collège de France that laid the theoretical basis for a distinction between an American style neoliberalism and the German *Gesellschaftspolitik* (Foucault 2004). The intellectual critique of neoliberalism was therefore vigorous as early as the mid-1970s, and would expand throughout the 1980s and 1990s, from the pen of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (1999) and their *nouvel esprit du capitalism* ('new spirit of capitalism') for instance, as well as Pierre Bourdieu's two volumes of *Contre-feux* (1998; 2001). While Bourdieu's analytical conception of neoliberalism could be criticised for its monolithic and all-encompassing character – encapsulated in his description of the ideology as a form of *pensée unique* ('single thought') – Bourdieu's interventions nevertheless proved vital in the dissemination of an activist critique of the political-economic mutations unfolding in that period. Revisiting the Foucauldian lens, Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2009) also developed a sophisticated critique of neoliberalism, which they referred to as *la nouvelle raison du monde* ('the new way of the world').

Beyond the strictly intellectual realm, popular mobilisations against neoliberalism in France also grew in intensity throughout the course of the 1990s and early 2000s. Indeed, obstinate protests and weeks of demonstrations in French streets happened to pay off politically and socially. One famous example was the series of nationwide strikes led by the public sector in December 1995. Despite Jacques Chirac's campaign promise to reduce *la fracture sociale* ('the social chasm'), his Prime Minister Alain Juppé unveiled an ambitious reform targeting social security, and particularly the health system, with the double aim of reducing budgetary and administrative deficits and taking control over a field until then largely managed by so-called 'social partners' (business organisations and centre-Left union Force Ouvrière, FO).

The aim of the reform was to reduce deficits in order to conform to the Maastricht criteria, whose respect was deemed *sine qua non* for the adoption of the euro in 1999. Juppé unveiled his reform – an all-encompassing, technocratic and opaque bill that covered all fields of social protection – in front of the National Assembly on 15 November 1995. Michel Rocard and the reformist Left warmly welcomed the proposed reform, alongside the press and reformist union CFDT, led by Nicole Notat. Meanwhile, left-leaning unions such as the mighty anti-establishment CGT – led by Louis Viannet – and FO – led by Marc Blondel and created at the Libération to combat the influence of CGT – strongly expressed their opposition to the bill in unison, in spite of their historical rivalry.

Furthermore, one measure added at the last minute to the bill would trigger an unlikely alliance between CGT, FO and even some strands of CFDT: the reform of France's special retirement plans, which allowed public workers to retire after 37.5 years of payment rather than 40, as was customary in the private sector. On November 24, train workers from Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français (SNCF) launched a total and unlimited strike action, joined by Paris public transport workers from RATP (Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens) and followed four days later by employees from La Poste. While the movement grew in the public sector, with hospital workers and public servants progressively joining the ranks of train and post-office workers, Juppé kept a stiff upper lip, remaining sure of himself and even arrogant. Meanwhile, an estimated two-thirds of the French supported the strikes, despite business organisations' and the media's claim that striking workers were 'privileged'.

In the eyes of many commentators, what happened in December 1995 was a *grève par procuration* ('proxy strike'). In a context of budgetary orthodoxy and growing inequalities, public sector workers argued they were striking 'in the name of' the majority of the French

people, against the discourse presenting globalisation and the development of a new class of 'working poor' as an inescapable collective fate, refusing to instantiate the ideological claim that there was 'no alternative' to neoliberal governance. Thus, even against a sweeping Siberian vortex in the first weeks of December, the striking workers held on while Alain Juppé still refused to bend, despite increased violence and tensions in the streets and in the Lorraine region, where miners started a hard line strike.

The workers' movement won a pyrrhic victory on December 12: with two million protestors in the streets of France, Juppé was forced to abandon the special retirement plan – the source of most grievances – but was still determined to implement the more technical reform plan for Sécurité Sociale. From December 14 onwards, the SNCF, then RATP, and finally La Poste workers went back to work. The 1995 strikes were a demonstration of force on the part of the public sector and its unions (particularly CGT), but was only a partial victory. The Plan Juppé was implemented in 1996 and France qualified for the euro one year later. The success was thus only momentary. In 2003, under Jacques Chirac's second term in office, a new reform on special retirement plans for public sector workers was adopted, despite very significant protests – two million people in the streets on 13 May 2003 – whose intimidating effects were mitigated by lower turnout on the picket lines.

Ten years after the 1995 strikes, Jacques Chirac's government was once again defeated in the streets. In the spring of 2006, near the end of Chirac's *quinquennat*,[30] the *Egalité des Chances* ('Equality of Opportunity') bill proposed by Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin triggered significant popular angst. In a similar fashion as in 1995, an amended section was added at the very last minute to the bill: Article 8, which introduced a new contract for young people under

[30] Five years' presidential mandate.

26 years-old, the Contrat Première Embauche (CPE). To satisfy the *patronat*'s desire for 'flexibility', the contract could be broken without justification from the employer for a period of two years, a disposition which incurred the wrath of high schoolers, students and employees alike, who engaged in a series of protests in February 2006.

On February 9, Dominique de Villepin invoked Article 49.3 of the Constitution that allows the government to expedite a bill in front of the National Assembly, a move that is associated by law with a dishonouring motion of confidence.[31] Nonetheless, the motion is seldom threatening thanks to the presidential majority MPs' docility and their adherence to the majoritarian logic of the Fifth Republic institutions. In reaction, protests grew and tended to largely emancipate from party politics. Sorbonne University was occupied on March 8, and Parti Socialiste leftist Jean-Luc Mélenchon was ousted by students, who rejected what they perceived as political opportunism. On March 22, 1.5 million protestors marched in different French regions and towns. De Villepin met with student unions two days later, but refused to bend. The Prime Minister was still supported by Chirac, who announced on TV on March 31 that he was about to promulgate the law, following its validation by the Constitutional Council. In reaction, violent protests erupted that night, and a massive demonstration gathered between 1 to 3 million people on April 4. De Villepin's capitulation occurred on April 10: considering that the conditions were 'not met' for implementing the CPE, the government replaced the controversial Article 8 with measures aimed at improving professional insertion

[31] Bills proposed by the French government must normally be approved by both chambers (National Assembly and Senate) to become laws. However, the government may choose to invoke Article 49.3 of the Constitution if its efforts to pass the bill prove unsuccessful, i.e. if parliamentary proceedings and opposition delay the bill's examination for too long. This allows the government to bypass parliament, resulting in the reform becoming law without a vote. The mechanism was indeed designed to prevent parliamentary crises like those that occurred under the Fourth Republic. Nevertheless, a bill brought in through Article 49.3 can be stopped by a vote of no confidence in the National Assembly. If the *motion de censure* is successfully passed, the government is overturned (this is nonetheless extremely rare, as the no confidence vote requires an absolute majority for adoption). See also Chapter VII.

for the most precarious youth. Yet, as in 1995, the rest of the Loi Egalité des Chances was adopted.

Lastly, popular rejection of new constitutionalism was manifest in the ballot box. On 25 May 2005, after a year-long campaign, 54.5 per cent of French voters rejected the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE) on an impressive turnout of 69 per cent, a result which puzzled commentators, pollsters, and stupefied politicians from across the political spectrum. With this unequivocal rejection, the French electorate expressed a frank distrust towards ordoliberal-inspired Europe. President Chirac and the three main political parties - UMP, PS and UDF – had supported the 'Yes' vote, while the hard Left, leftist unions, anti-globalisation movements, the 'sovereigntist' Right and the far-right opposed ratification. For its proponents, the TCE's constitutional provisions would further protect democratic mechanisms and fundamental freedoms, while enhancing coordination between Member-States with the appointment of a president for the Commission. On the 'No' side, the sovereigntist Right argued that the treaty would further restrict national sovereignty on key areas such as immigration, while the radical Left contended that the treaty would deepen public services liberalisation – a process initiated since the Single European Act of 1986 – and rejected the arguments related to the improvement of competitiveness between Member-states, which, they argued, equated to a flexibilisation of social rights on the continent (Ramaux 2014, 135).

Binary interpretations of the unexpected referendum result have abounded. For some analysts, the 'No' vote was a historic sign of popular revolt against blindfolded, disconnected elites. Conversely, those who supported the 'Yes' vote described the result as bred by inward-looking resentment, ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Alternatively, the fact that president

Jacques Chirac was unpopular at the time – 32 per cent of positive opinions in April 2005 – provided some pundits with a convenient interpretation of the vote, deeming it a rejection of the presidential figure rather than a repudiation of the ordoliberal logic governing the proposed constitutional treaty. Yet, François Mitterrand was also deeply unpopular in 1992, and this only marginally impacted the (short) victory of the 'Yes' at the Maastricht referendum (Lehingue 2007, 124). Something more unusual and politically significant was unfolding with this rejection vote, a game-change linked to the processes of partisan re-alignment that took place since the 1992 Maastricht referendum. In particular, the incoherence, fractures and contradictions within Parti Socialiste became absolutely explicit. The 2005 referendum signaled the end of the pro EU consensus in Parti Socialiste. Despite a large victory for the 'Yes' at the internal referendum organised by the party in December 2004, the campaign reinvigorated the leftist factions, which expressed their fierce opposition to the treaty. These vocal blocs were led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon – whose political stature considerably grew that year –, Henri Emmanuelli, and Laurent Fabius – who, ironically, was the planner of austerity under Mitterrand's first term. Surprisingly, the internal referendum did not reflect the tendencies expressed by Socialist voters in May 2005: while 78 per cent of PS electors voted 'Yes' to Maastricht in 1992, only 44 per cent of them voted 'Yes' to the TCE referendum. On the Right, the pro EU consensus inversely widened. While only 41 per cent of right-leaning electors voted 'Yes' in 1992, 80 per cent supported the TCE in 2005 (Lehingue 2007, 126).

This inversion of values regarding European integration in light of party affiliation had two major consequences on the political system. First, the Parti Socialiste displayed unprecedented lines of fractures between a centrist majority in favor of more Europeanisation and minority factions – some of which would eventually secede from the party – that equated

a deepening of European unification as the path towards further neoliberal 'structural reforms'. On the Right, most of the bosses and militants had become favorable to further liberalisation and Europeanisation, while sovereigntist Gaullist voices from the 1992 referendum – such as Philippe Séguin or Marie-France Garaud – had been marginalised (Pozzi 2014). The re-centering of the two main political forces around a core comprised of European integration and federalist liberalisation was becoming unequivocal. In a surprising fashion which triggered a lot of mockery, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande – respectively president of UMP and first-secretary of the PS at that time – decided to take the pose together on the cover of *Paris Match* on 17 March 2015 in order to symbolise their convergence over European integration and their shared resolve to see the 'Yes' vote succeed.

Despite these comical efforts, analyses of electoral maps made clear that the 'Yes' vote was much stronger in the wealthiest households, while close to 80 per cent of blue-collar workers rejected the treaty (Lehingue 2007, 130). The referendum debate drew new lines of fracture within French society on the topic of European integration. The TCE's rejection was a symbolic tour de force for civil society organisations and parties on the Left – Parti Communiste Français (PCF), Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), the radical wing of Parti Socialiste. Against the background of previous successful politico-institutional attempts at constitutionalising free competition on a European scale and despite the superstructure's unconditional support for the treaty, these latter were able to flourishingly coalesce in their opposition to the treaty.

The victory was nonetheless short-lived. The TCE referendum rejections in France and the Netherlands put on hold the ratification process, and a so-called 'reform treaty' was negotiated shortly after. The German presidency of the EU, under Angela Merkel's

leadership, played an important role in securing agreement on a mandate for an intergovernmental conference which gave birth to a new accord: the Lisbon Treaty, that entered into force on 1 December 2009 (Laursen 2011, 46-51). Despite abandoning all *symbols* of constitutionalism (flag, anthem, motto), the Lisbon Treaty still retained most of the institutional changes proposed in the TCE: more qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers so as to increase 'efficiency', the election of a semi-permanent President of the European Council and more co-decision involving both the Council and the European Parliament in the legislative process (ibid, 60). According to former president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who used to be the head of the convention elaborating the TCE, all the propositions of the TCE were indeed present in the Lisbon Treaty, albeit 'in a different order' (Le Monde 2007). Imposing the Lisbon Treaty in lieu of the TCE two years after this latter's popular rejection equated to a blatant denial of democracy. After one year of public debate and campaigning, the political and technocratic apparatuses' reaction implicitly signified that the French did not vote 'adequately'.

Bypassing the 2005 popular rejection of the TCE had disastrous impacts on public opinion, logically triggering the question of the purpose of casting a vote if that vote could be unilaterally undone two years later. This democratic treachery bred delusions and abstention, and further widened the gap between the citizens and a perceived bureaucratised, foreign, and authoritarian European Union. Jacques Chirac's referendum defeat underscored and reinforced, in the run-up to the 2007 elections, the lame-duck aspects of what some had already labelled during the *cohabitation* period of his previous term Chirac's 'residency' rather than 'presidency' at the Elysée Palace, while one of his ministers – Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy – was vigorously attempting to redefine in the media what 'the Right' was supposed to mean (Ahearne 2014, 4).

The failed 2005 referendum paved the way for Nicolas Sarkozy's 2007 presidential victory by demonstrating that both Chirac's and the Socialists' discourses were exhausted, an opinion which was reinforced a few months later during the riots in the French *banlieues* (Sgard 2007, 14, see Chapter IX). The powerlessness and irrelevance of two ageing and corrupted visions of social-democracy helped Sarkozy in his task of developing a new vision of 'rupture' that French society had to embark on under his leadership. Thus, the next chapter examines the period spanning from Nicolas Sarkozy's 2007 election to the 2017 presidential election, which corresponds to the peak of what I term the 'French ideological crisis'.

Conclusion

As demonstrated, the separation of the economic from the political was first undertaken by the traditional Right from the early 1960s to the late 1970s and was influenced by German ordoliberalism, before being eclipsed by an Austrian and American inspired version of neoliberalism that was being favoured by the free-market oriented strand of the political Right, gravitating around Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF). As the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) started to lose credence in the 1980s, the traditional Left (Parti Socialiste), despite its statist and social-democratic rhetoric, gradually paved the way for the further neoliberalisation of the French political economy. It was indeed under the French Socialists' leadership that the *first* (ideological) *synthesis* of French neoliberalism was surreptitiously orchestrated (see Figure 1). Various institutional arrangements paved the way for the implementation of the Maastricht treaty in 1992 under bipartisan concord in France, with the exception of sections of the sovereigntist Right.

Both the traditional Left and Right were therefore allied under the banner of *new constitutionalism* (Gill 2002; Abdelal 2005), a world-order project imposed through the

supranational backdoor, thus operating a first communion in the French party system, an ideological rapprochement in favour of neoliberalism under the banner of what Adam Harmes (2019) calls 'market-preserving federalism'. The consequence of the *first synthesis of French neoliberalism*, however, has been the development of a profound *ideological crisis* born out of the political-economic convergence between the two traditional parties and the disaffection of these political formations by the French voters, as is examined in Chapter III.

Chapter III

The French Ideological Crisis

> J'appelle discours de pouvoir tout discours qui engendre la faute et, partant, la culpabilité de celui qui le reçoit
> (Roland Barthes, 2015)[32]

Introduction

This chapter addresses the political climate in France in the decade that preceded Emmanuel Macron's 2017 presidential victory. It therefore surveys the period spanning from the election of President Nicolas Sarkozy in the spring of 2007 to the end of the François Hollande presidency (2012-2017). The purpose of this examination is to delineate and investigate the social and ideational lines of fractures that triggered the elimination of the two traditional governing parties of the Fifth Republic – the Gaullist right and Parti Socialiste – from the second round of the 2017 presidential election.

In contrast to the preceding decades, France has not witnessed any clear social movement that entailed the rejection of neoliberal new constitutionalism since 2005 and the popular rejection of the TCE. There are two main factors accounting for this apparent apathy, which this chapter intends to address:

(1) Neoliberal precepts have gradually become part of the '*common sense*' thanks to the 'war of position' of numerous organic intellectuals in French think tanks and popular media. Thus, they have been molding a specific form of language supporting commonsensical political economic precepts that I call the 'neoliberal *lingua franca*'.

[32] 'I call discourse of power any discourse that engenders blame, hence guilt, in its recipient' (extract from Barthes' *leçon inaugurale* in Collège de France, 7 January 1977, my translation)

(2) The zeitgeist has become one of '*ideological crisis*', a stage of development brought about by three successive and overlapping tendencies: the stalemate of the class struggle, the depoliticisation of society and the discrediting of the Left/Right cleavage.

Antonio Gramsci used the expression 'common sense' to refer to the self-evidence of key beliefs and norms that may be relatively uncritically accepted as 'given' or 'natural' within a specific culture. For Gramsci, common sense is the 'philosophy of non-philosophers', or 'the folklore of philosophy'. As he put it (1971, 419 Q11§13), common sense is:

> The conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed. Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. It is the 'folklore' of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless conceptions which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is.

For Gramsci, there are several 'common senses' that form 'the most widespread conception of life and morals' (Gramsci Q1§65) and are distinguishable according to their social connotation and geographical area (Liguori 2021, 125). What Gramsci calls 'common sense' is never fixed and given once and for all: just like ideology – and indeed common sense can be considered one of the sediments of ideology, albeit a 'passively acquired' one – it is constantly changing and needs to be continually manufactured to be sustainable, as the struggle for hegemony is partly dependent upon imposing an overarching conception of the world – a new culture, a new conception of the 'normal' – that benefits certain interests and marginalises others.

Gramsci generally connotes common sense rather negatively and often correlates it to conservatism, as common sense 'is led to believe that what exists today has always existed' (Gramsci Q6§78, cited by Ligori 2021, 127). As such, common sense is a frequently

incoherent and fragmentary ensemble of beliefs and reflections, often passively and uncritically absorbed within a given social stratum. It is interesting to note that the expressions '*sens commun*' or '*bon sens*'[33] are very recurrently employed within French media and political circles to refer to purportedly 'self-evident' values or principles. This casual usage forms one of the many examples of the depoliticisation of language. If a norm, value or principle falls under the principle of self-evidence, it cannot be ideological, as it belongs to the realm of the 'natural', the 'moral' and can therefore be no matter for discussion or contestation. This proves the homogenising and domesticating potentials of language, and the importance that language plays in the articulation of a hegemonic project (Ives 2004).

To address the ideological crisis, the discussion proceeds in three parts. The first section theoretically demarcates the terrain on which the neoliberal war of position is played out in the French media and examines the prominent role of 'experts' in shaping the contours and contents of socio-political debates. Since the early 2010s, think-tanks representatives benefit from a much larger visibility in the French media, and their influence on political parties' rhetoric, semantics and programmes, as well as on public policy, is more manifest than ever. Funded by the wealthiest tax payers, these institutions actively encouraged a move away from traditional working class grievances in order to position the main parties closer to middle-classes' preoccupations. The connivance of think-tank organisers and experts with the rather close circles in which French political journalists evolve explain the omnipresence of the former on television sets and radio programmes. Together, they contribute to shape a new language that appeals to 'common sense', one that is articulated through the use of *euphemism* and *repetition* and that I call the neoliberal *lingua franca*.

[33] The expression has been adopted by a radical right-wing group, *Sens Commun*, created in 2013 in the wake of the largely followed protests against the Taubira bill which legalized gay marriage and adoption the same year.

The second section explores the presidencies of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012) and François Hollande (2012-2017) and demonstrates the interchangeability of the two leaders' programmes and priorities. Nicolas Sarkozy's stylistic rupture with the traditional Gaullist Right standard entailed a glorification of individual effort, secularism and law and order. Yet, Sarkozy's rather skilful co-optation of reformist Leftist figures was short-lived. His discursive radicalisation and creeping authoritarianism led to fratricidal tensions within his party and cost him re-election. Meanwhile, the global financial crisis occasioned large bail out for the big players of French capitalism and a renewed allegiance to neoliberal market discipline for small firms and workers in the European Union. Abiding by the Treaty on Stability, Cooperation and Governance that he initially promised to renegotiate, François Hollande enacted some of the most pro-business policies of the last decades in the form of massive tax cuts to enhance 'competitiveness', creating destabilising tensions within his own party and substantiating the claim that the differences between Left and Right rested on 'the interpretation of reform, rather than antithetical visions for the transformation of society' (Raymond 2018, 422).

The final section theorises these historical developments in the framework of what I call the 'French ideological crisis', which is characterised by three successive and mutually reinforcing dynamics: (1) the stalemate of the class struggle (marginalisation of labour from the governance of the political economy, refusal of antagonism along class lines, undoing of social classes as political actors and fragmentation of legitimate socio-economic vindications); (2) the depoliticisation of society (ideological delusion, political nihilism and democratic withdrawal, with a depoliticised struggle and unprecedented levels of abstention among the popular classes); and (3) the discrediting of the Left/Right cleavage (alignment of political programmes from both the Right and the Left around a commonsensical and

ordoliberal-inspired core comprised of European integration, structural reforms and competitiveness). The loss of substance of the terms 'Left' and 'Right' has therefore provided fertile ground for Emmanuel Macron's political project, that was presented as going 'beyond Left and Right'.

Expertise and Neoliberal *Lingua Franca* in the French Media

Mapping the War of Position

This section intends to map some of the trenches through which neoliberal organic intellectuals manoeuvre in their attempts to set a specific political agenda in France.

As previously elaborated, Antonio Gramsci operated a distinction between the 'traditional' intellectuals and the 'organic' intellectuals. The latter belong to a specific social group: they are in charge of reflecting and projecting the interests and world views of that group to the wider society. Organic intellectuals give form and expression to the values – moral, philosophical, cultural, ideological, scientific, etc. – that shape a hegemonic project, itself carried out and articulated – in Gramsci's time – by a social class or a political party.

The objective is that of building an 'historic bloc' that forms the basis of consent to a given social order. A historic bloc testifies to the unity between 'nature and spirit (structure and superstructure)' (Gramsci 1971, 137 Q13§10). It signals a 'historical congruence between material forces, institutions and ideologies, or broadly an alliance of different class forces politically organized around a set of hegemonic ideas that give strategic direction and coherence to its constitutive elements' (Gill 2008, 60). To reach this goal, organic intellectuals diffuse their ideas within the institutions of 'civil society', the ensemble of

organisms commonly called ‘private’ as opposed to the ‘political society’ which refers to the state and its institutions (Gramsci 1971, 12; Q12§1).[34]

The transformation of civil society is therefore a precondition for radical social change: in complex, industrialised societies, there could be no seizure of power by a social group unless civil society is molded according to the interests of the group that aspires to control state institutions. Thus, the *ruling* class – that often controls the financial apparatuses – aspires to become the *leading* class in order to control the state apparatus and persuade the citizenry of the soundness of its political choices.

Contingents of organic intellectuals play a vital role in this matter. Through their work of persuasion, they seek to bridge the immense gap between the cultural references and socio-economic rationale of the ruling class with those of the working and lower middle classes. Through their arguments, references and vituperations, they shape and manipulate facts and language and pretend to be the vessels and representatives of ‘efficiency’ and ‘rationality’ against the forces of ‘bureaucracy’ and ‘inertia’. Their presence on the media is motivated by an overarching goal: to make the truth of the powerful, or the politically effective in society, become the truth of all.

The Latest Stage of ‘Expertise’

In France, when another wave of think tanks emerged in the 2000s, lobbying and influence were facilitated by online activism, a better insertion of think-tanks’ representatives in media

[34] Gramsci’s analysis nonetheless demonstrates that this distinction is sometimes porous, as some members of civil society are active within government and political society. Thus, some influencial members of civil society (including the ‘organic intellectuals’ and representatives of *haute finance*) also form part and parcel of what we call ‘the state’, albeit a less visible aspect because their influence is more episodic, and these individuals originate and operate predominantly in the ‘private’ sphere. For an examination of the concept of ‘civil society’ and its instrumentalisation under Emmanuel Macron’s presidency, and for an analysis of the Gramscian concept of ‘integral state’, see Chapter V.

circles and increasing revenues from wealthy donors, be they households or corporations (Brookes 2018). Since the early 1990s, these 'philanthropists' benefit from both advantageous tax exemptions resulting from their donations and a defence of their interests on the media. As a result, many new think-tanks have emerged over the last thirty years in France. Furthermore, the expertise professed by their representatives has acquired a much larger visibility in comparison to the sometimes obscure proceedings of the clubs and foundations of the postwar period.

First among them, the liberal (and wealthiest) think-tank Institut Montaigne is supported and financed by firms such as Total (oil and energy producer), Vinci (concessions and construction company), Carrefour (large-scale food retailing) and LVMH (Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton). Founded in 2000, Institut Montaigne is presided by the former CEO of insurance corporation AXA, Henri de Castries. Donors wishing to benefit from tax exemption measures could similarly turn to Fondation Jean Jaurès, created in 1992 and close to Parti Socialiste, an organism that received 1,700 000 euros in public funds in 2018 alone (Rzepski 2019). Equally favored by this system is the Fondation pour la recherché sur les administrations et les politiques publiques (Fondation iFRAP), a think-tank created in 1985, whose telegenic director Agnès Verdier-Molignié is – quite ironically – constantly demonising the alleged 'costs' of French public administrations that are being financed by usurped taxpayers in her reports and TV interventions, while benefitting directly from the very state's largesse she denounces.

Another example is Fondation pour l'Innovation Politique (FONDAPOL), presided over by none other than Nicolas Bazire, the CEO of Groupe Arnault (LVMH and Christian Dior), the holding created by France's wealthiest taxpayer Bernard Arnault, who also partially finances

Institut Montaigne. These organisations and their 'experts' are very present on French all-news channels – BFM TV, C News, France Info, LCI – on public and private radio channels – France Inter, France Culture, RTL, Europe 1 – and newspapers – *Libération, Le Monde, Le Figaro* – tirelessly promoting their reports and studies, always under the guise of 'objectivity' and 'non-partisanship'. Their discourse not only locks in a specific ideology in the viewers' minds, it also contributes to shrinking the political imaginary through the imposition of key words, common sense precepts and social myths (Rzepski 2019).

Their influence goes further than neoliberal advocacy in the mainstream media and runs deep in political parties as well. Indeed, centre-Left and 'progressive' think-tank Terra Nova, created in 2008 with the ambition of reshaping social-democracy, came to play a particularly important role in the ideological trajectory adopted by Parti Socialiste in the wake of its defeat against Nicolas Sarkozy in the 2007 presidential election. In 2011, the think-tank presided by French-Beninese economist Lionel Zinsou published an influential report entitled *Gauche: quelle majorité électorale pour 2012 (*'Left: What kind of electoral majority for 2012?'). One year prior to François Hollande's victory in the 2012 presidential election, their report recommended that the PS should abstain from seeking support from the working classes, whose electoral weight was considered to be shrinking with deindustrialisation. According to the report, the historical Left coalition centred around the working classes was in decline. It invited to envisage 'tomorrow's France' as younger, more feminine and more diverse, thus were the characteristics ascribed to this 'culturally progressive' electorate which the PS needed to court (Terra Nova 2012). The rationale for this change was that the demands and socio-economic values of the working classes – a strong state and developed public services, generous social protection – were at odds with globalised capitalism, and thus incompatible with the political project of the governmental 'Left' (Amable 2017a, 184-85). With its focus on the 'de-alignment' of the traditional relationship between social structural determinants

and political preferences, the Terra Nova report made clear that the second, reformist strand of PS had decidedly won over the Marxist-inspired one. Fourteen years after Anthony Giddens' seminal text (1998) – the British sociologist was indeed 'consulted' by the authors of the Terra Nova report – Socialist France had unofficially adopted its own version of the 'Third Way' manifesto (see Chapter VI).

Les Gracques is another influential reformist think-tank. Founded shortly before the 2007 presidential election, the association gathers high-ranking officials – mostly graduates from ENA, HEC and Polytechnique – with close ties to Parti Socialiste. Members often had a governmental experience in ministerial cabinets under the premierships of Michel Rocard, Pierre Bérégovoy and Lionel Jospin. Among them, Jean-Pierre Jouyet (Secretary General of the Elysée Palace under François Hollande), François Villeroy de Galhau (former CEO of BNP Paribas and current Governor of the Banque de France), Mathieu Pigasse (banker and businessman) and Dennis Olivennes (press tycoon). Officially, Les Gracques is a think-tank and a pressure group that seeks to contribute to the 'intellectual modernisation' of the French Left (Desmarais 2017). Their main propositions consist in cutting spending in a certain number of sectors – secondary education, public investment, welfare and hospitals – while liberalising others, such as coach services – with the goal of creating a 'Greyhound *à la française*' – and increasing indirect taxation – VAT and Contribution Sociale Généralisée (CSG). From the 2007 presidential election onwards, Les Gracques advocated for an alliance between the mainstream Left (PS) and the centre, particularly Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem), the fraction from former Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF) which refused to merge with the RPR to create the large right-wing conglomerate Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) in 2002. In 2007, Les Gracques thus pressed for a pact between

PS candidate Ségolène Royal and centrist candidate François Bayrou (Zyneb 2017), without success.

Against this background, Les Gracques naturally showed clear and enthusiastic support to Emmanuel Macron when he was Minister of the Economy – a position he obtained partly thanks to the support of Jean-Pierre Jouyet from Les Gracques – particularly when Macron decided to liberalise coach services (the '*cars Macron*'). They extended their blessing once Emmanuel Macron became President of the Republic. Indeed, the rise in senior citizens' contribution to the CSG – a poll tax implemented by Michel Rocard in 1990 – demonstrated a total and genuine programmatic convergence with the measures proposed by the think-tank for over a decade.

A particularly striking dimension of the French think-tank landscape is its consanguinity. Think-tanks permeate each other, their personnel frequently integrate such institutions interchangeably, as their representatives frequent the same circles and, inter alia, share and express the same views. Thus, Lionel Zinsou presides over the board of governors of Terra Nova, but he also used to be a member of the more openly neoliberal Institut Montaigne. It is also possible to observe mechanisms of filiation with the previous generation of think-tanks: Thierry Pech, director general of Terra Nova, used to be the right-hand man of Pierre Rosanvallon in Fondation Saint-Simon (Rzepski 2019). These ideological liaisons are fully visible at jointly-organised events, such as *Sommet des réformistes* ('summit of the reformists'), organized in Lyon on 23 and 24 September, 2016. Together, Terra Nova and Institut Montaigne had invited the best representatives of 'social liberalism': Daniel Cohn-Bendit (European MP for Europe Ecologie Les Verts), François Bayrou (MoDem), Pascal Lamy (ex-director of the WTO), Hubert Védrine (former Socialist Minister of Foreign

Affairs), Sigmar Gabriel (former president of the German Social-Democrats, SPD), Matteo Renzi (Italian Prime Minister), Pierre Moscovici (European Commissioner) and the just resigned Minister of the Economy and future presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron, who pronounced the keynote address (Desmarais 2017).

In the same spirit, Fondation Jean Jaurès, Les Gracques, Terra Nova and the right-leaning Fondapol, united in their support of European integration, organised a joint summit aimed at denouncing and formulating responses to combat 'the rise of populism' on 17 November 2018 (Rzepski 2019). Some of the spokespersons of these think-tanks are omnipresent on the television, radio and newspaper press with the aim of disseminating the conclusions and recommendations reached by their experts: Thierry Pech and Lionel Zinsou (Terra Nova), Dominique Reynié (Fondapol), Laurent Bigorgne, Nicolas Baverez and Olivier Duhamel (Institut Montaigne), Gilles Finchelstein (Fondation Jean Jaurès) thus significantly contribute, as organic intellectuals, to the manufacturing of 'public opinion'.

Neoliberal Lingua Franca *in the Media*

In spite of the rapid development of the Internet as a news, information and entertainment provider, a particular locus of organic intellectualism in France remains the television, which has turned into an instrument of symbolic oppression whose access is subject to a formidable censorship, as themes and topics are imposed by the broadcaster, propagating value-judgments, shrinking pluralism and limiting the complexity of discourse by hiding behind time and semantic constraints (Bourdieu 1996). Similar angles and focuses are emulated throughout the televisual field, forming an 'intertext' (Kristeva 1968) of common sense neoliberal values, each major channel or newspaper mirroring the breaking news sticker and mimicking the tone adopted by its competitor.

These homogenising tendencies are reinforced by the strict endogamy of the most visible strands of journalists and editorialists[35], who spend their time in the same social circles. Indeed, strong public and private links between popular editorialists have been thoroughly documented, as has been the importance of high society circles such as Le Siècle, where many journalists, politicians and men and women of influence gravitate and socialise once a month (Halimi 1997; Denord et. al 2011). Securing membership in such closed circles automatically entails the relinquishment of a substantial part of journalistic freedom, as relationships develop and connivance grows between politicians from the traditional Left and Right, news channel editorialists, media tycoons, think-tank managers and business school economists. As Gramsci contended, hegemony is first created and manufactured within the institutions of (bourgeois) civil society – the church, the trade unions, but also semi-secret societies such as the Rotary Club, Freemasonry – those institutions that exist outside direct state control (Ives 2004, 118). Various forms of self-censorship appear as a result of these dangerous liaisons. This technique of co-optation is efficient inasmuch as its mechanisms are almost invisible, as proven by the little suspicion raised by the fact that several former Ministers and elected officials – such as Roselyne Bachelot or Daniel Cohn-Bendit – decided to become themselves zealous editorialists once their political careers were in a stalemate.

[35] Among these TV shows Stakhanovites, one could cite the irremovable Alain Duhamel – present on TV screens since the 1960s – as well as Jules Ferry, Alain Finkielkraut, Christophe Barbier, Arlette Chabot, Laurent Cayrol, Dominique Reynié, Nathalie Saint-Cricq, Jean-Michel Aphatie, etc. Besides, it is interesting to note that the status of '*éditocrate*' (Fontenelle et al. 2018**)** is almost hereditary: haunting TV sets and newspapers editorial sections is a dynastic matter. For instance, breaking news journalism runs in the Duhamel family blood: Alain – whose contributions to TV programmes and newspaper editorial boards are too numerous to count – is the brother of Patrice Duhamel (France 2, *Le Figaro*), who is married to Nathalie Saint-Cricq, the *éditocrate* in chief on public TV channel France 2, as director of the political analysis service. The couple has had several children, including Benjamin who, at only 26, is already an editorialist on 24 hours' news channel LCI – and later on its rival, BFMTV.

The fervent war of position led by neoliberal editorialists has accompanied and relayed semantic shifts and novelties that have progressively pervaded everyday language, institutionalising what I call the *lingua franca* of neoliberalism. This new standard language seeks to replace debate by consensus and privileges intellectual anaesthesia over wit and critical thinking (Hazan 2006, 27). Among the ever-consensual principles consecrated by this novel vernacular: European integration, globalisation and welfare-state retrenchment, the latter being nourished by common sense assertions such as 'public workers are too expensive and not productive enough' and 'the French do not work enough compared to their European neighbours'. Editorialists and pundits have thus developed a rather limited lexicon of a few dozen words that gives a tone to their interventions and shapes, on the long run, very robust mental maps which serve the purpose of inhibiting critical thinking.

Thus, Eric Hazan highlights the abuse of *euphemism*[36] in everyday discourses and commentaries in order to symbolically eclipse pauperism and discontent: *chômeurs* ('the unemployed') become *demandeurs d'emploi* ('job seekers'); *grèves* ('strikes') become *mouvements sociaux* ('social movements'); *syndicats* ('trade unions') become *partenaires sociaux* ('social partners'); *les pauvres* ('the poor') become *les gens modestes* ('the humble') and, for the most dispossessed, *les exclus* ('the excluded'). In a similar vein, *classes sociale* ('social classes') have become reassuringly horizontal *couches sociales* ('social strata').

These semantic shifts aim to invisibilise poverty and neutralise social conflict, thus conveniently eclipsing the deleterious consequences of the sacrosanct 'reforms' conducted in

[36] With different political aims in mind, Marine Le Pen also euphemised the discourse of Front National over the last decade. Indeed, this was an essential component of her *dédiabolisation* (de-demonising) strategy. As Crépon et al. (2015) point out, Marine Le Pen stopped using the traditional concept of *préférence nationale* ('national preference') – to signify the legal primacy of French people over the non-French citizens – and uses instead the politer term *priorité nationale* ('national priority').

the name of ‘modernisation’ and ‘competitiveness’. Indeed, these shifts are the semantic substantiation of the Terra Nova 2012 report: they indicate that France has entered the ‘post-industrial’ age. The factory and its workers are therefore symbolically erased from popular discourses, so are the ‘archaic’ working classes and struggles, delegitimised in the era of the ‘triumphant middle-classes’ (Hazan 2006, 38). It has to be noted that, thus far, stronger emphasis on the rights and grievances of the new ‘precariat’ (gig economy workers) did not come as a counterpart to this erasure and neglect of the traditional ‘working classes’.

Alongside euphemism, *repetition* is the favoured rhetorical method, as demonstrated by the constant reiteration of the same restricted totems and mottos: *reform, modernisation, revolution, pedagogy, populism, insecurity,* etc. The term *reform*, for instance, has become ubiquitous: France would thus be the ‘last European country’ that did not conduct the ‘tough but necessary’ reforms, often presented as measures of ‘equity’ aimed to combat the ‘privileges’ of public servants, train workers, or any type of statutory profession. The mantra has been one of ‘adaptation’ (Stiegler 2019) to the inexorable cycle of globalisation, illustrating the extent to which the Blairite injunction to ‘modernisation’ against ‘decay’ spilled over to the continent. If the citizenry shows reluctance, it is because there has been a lack of ‘pedagogy in properly explaining the reforms, hence episodic protests in the streets. Alongside ‘reform’, some words have also been clearly usurped, emptied from their initial meaning to endorse a totally different signifier. As will be seen in Chapter VII, the prime example has been the word ‘revolution’. The next section explores the political and electoral consequences of this sustained work of ideological persuasion.

A Renewed Commitment to Market Discipline after the Global Financial Crisis

The Rise of Sarkozy

As noted in the previous chapter, Nicolas Sarkozy's rise to power in the 2007 presidential election can be analysed as a blowback, a response to the frustrations that the Chirac years had engendered on the Right side of the political spectrum.[37] Defining himself in clear contradistinction to Jacques Chirac, Sarkozy developed a forceful and broad cultural profile that was 'as opposed to the matrix of values incarnated by Chirac as it was to those projected by the struggling Left' (Ahearne 2014, 5). Indeed, Nicolas Sarkozy managed to build a coherent and crude discourse glorifying individual effort ('*valeur travail*') and exalting secularism, law and order and the nation (Sgard 2007, 17), as well as belligerent, divisive and reactionary postures on immigration, national identity and security (Ahearne 2014, 152).

The strength of Sarkozy was movement: his voluntarist rupture with 'senile Gaullism', populist discourses and skilful exploitation of divisions within the popular classes thus contrasted with the Left's inability to address issues of labour conditions and purchasing power (Kouvélakis 2009, 50). Surprisingly, Sarkozy's first steps in office were characterised by a strategy of *ouverture* ('openness'), with the co-optation of personalities coming from the ranks of the reformist Left – Bernard Kouchner, Fadela Amara, Eric Besson – into the newly formed government, in a manner that would echo Emmanuel Macron's own coalition-building techniques through *trasformismo* a few years later (see Chapter V).

[37] The enmity between Sarkozy and Chirac dates back to at least 1995, when Nicolas Sarkozy betrayed his mentor in the course of the presidential campaign, rallying behind Prime Minister Edouard Balladur – Chirac's competitor on the Right side of the spectrum in the election – who ended up not reaching the second round of the election, which was disputed between Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin. Throughout his time as a minister during Chirac's *quinquennat* (2002-2007), Sarkozy strove to project an image of dynamism to contrast with the 'idleness' of President Chirac, declaring for instance his intention to lead the ruling UMP party and to become France's next president while Chirac was technically still allowed, from a legal standpoint (until the 23 July 2008 constitutional revision), to run again for a third mandate in 2007.

This created a certain ideological confusion in the minds of the electors and further impaired the fragile coherence of the Left, which had been unable to articulate an alternative discourse in the face of Sarkozy's adroit pre-emption of themes reaching out beyond the core clientele of the Right. This was done through the exploitation of societal anxieties and the manufacturing of moral panics in order to attract disaffected 'native French' voters who would otherwise have remained in the orbit of the mainstream Left or the Front National (FN). Indeed, a significant proportion of FN voters opted for Nicolas Sarkozy instead of Jean-Marie Le Pen, who lost one million voters between the 2002 and 2007 presidential elections.[38]

As Nicolas Sarkozy aptly built his arguments on both cultural and ideological fronts – and because he himself admitted a symbolic annexation[39] – there have been many Gramscian analyses of his presidency (Sgard 2007; Kouvélakis 2009, Ahearne 2014, Lindner 2017). Drawing on Stuart Hall, Jeremy Ahearne and Kolja Lindner thus noted striking similarities with the period of British history scrutinised by Hall (the 1970s and 1980s) with the Sarkozy juncture. In both cases, the political competition did not consist of a traditional Left versus Right contest. Instead, the political field was divided into three blocs: a divided and confused Left (Labour Party/Parti Socialiste), an older-consensus seeking Right subject to entropy

[38] Sarkozy's successful poaching of FN voters was due to a double emphasis placed on (1) the importance of law and order and a zero tolerance approach to crime, as well as (2) an offensive approach towards immigration and national identity. The first point relates to the importance of the French *banlieues* (see also Chapter IX) that were the target of Sarkozy's remarks as Minister of the Interior (2002-2004 and 2005-2007). Thus, he argued in June 2005 (a few months before the waves of riots that spanned throughout France in October and November) that 'the Courneuve suburb of Paris should be cleaned out with a *Kärcher* (high-pressure industrial cleaning equipment) and called suburban youth *racaille*' ('scum') (Hewlett 2007, 408). After many attacks against the *foulard* ('headscarf') and Islam throughout his political career, Sarkozy also campaigned on stricter control on immigration and his offensive against multiculturalism was manifest in the creation of a Ministry of Immigration, Integration and National Identity and Cooperative Development in 2007.

[39] In an interview with *Le Figaro* on April 17, 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy contended: 'At the end of the day, I have adopted Gramsci's analysis: power is won through ideas. It is the first time a man on the Right has consciously taken up that battle' (« Au fond, j'ai fait mienne l'analyse de Gramsci: le pouvoir se gagne par les idées. C'est la première fois qu'un homme de droite assume cette bataille-là », my translation).

(embodied by Edward Heath and Jacques Chirac) and a 'new' Right (personified by Margaret Thatcher and Nicolas Sarkozy) programmatically defined by its rejection of the two former poles (Ahearne 2014).

In a diagnosis akin to Hall's, Kolja Lindner contends that France under Sarkozy has experienced a period of 'organic crisis' which manifested itself in a gradual disaffiliation of the citizenry from its representatives, a process of democratic alienation which Sarkozy capitalised on to develop new forms of political legitimacy and organisation through a 'neo-republican' doctrine which notably entailed the idealisation of 'republican values' (Lindner 2017).[40] Jérôme Sgard also extended the Thatcherite metaphor by noting the same 'victorian link' established between private forms of morals – valuing efforts, profits and the nation's relation to the past – and a thorough programme of liberalisation driven by a charismatic leader (Sgard 2007, 11).

In effect, Nicolas Sarkozy's increasingly authoritarian and securitised mode of governance left a profound impact on French society. Sarkozy's endeavour was restorative in nature: republican values were exalted to legitimise a Bonapartist style of government, where verticality and authority were deemed necessary for igniting change. In the second phase of his term, while Socialist defectors had already abandoned ship, Sarkozy's divisive style of government caused internal frictions in his own political family, Union pour un Mouvement

[40] Emile Chabal (2016b, 2) defines neo-republicanism as a product of the ideological reorientations of the 1970s and 1980s, when 'a growing number of historians, intellectuals and political actors began to turn to republicanism as a model of political action and community that could replace the lost ideals of Gaullist grandeur and revolutionary Communism'. This shift led prominent figures from the Gaullist Right (Jacques Chirac, Philippe Séguin) and more predominantly from the mainstream Left (Pierre Nora, Jean-Pierre Chevènement) to defend the idealised 'values of the Republic' against the multicultural and Islamic threats, a discourse that would also be endorsed by Marine Le Pen in the early 2010s, despite the detestation of the Republic that historically characterised the French far-right.

Populaire (UMP). In 2011, the party was thus consumed by deep divisions between its conservative (La Droite Populaire) and moderate (former UDF) factions.

In the 2012 presidential election, Sarkozy's aggressive and polarising stances on immigration and security were not met with the same success in rallying far-right voters as in 2007 – as Marine Le Pen's almost 18 per cent share of the vote demonstrated – and instead precipitated his defeat against Parti Socialiste candidate François Hollande. Nevertheless, attempting to counter competition from the FN by endorsing its discourse and themes eventually shifted the entire French political spectrum further to the Right. It must however be noted that the embrace of sovereigntist and identity politics values by Sarkozy never entailed a critique of the European Union, as his policy choices after the financial crisis demonstrated.

The French Response to the Global Financial Crisis

Sarkozy's inalterable fidelity to European integration was illustrated in the ways in which the financial meltdown of 2008 and its metastases were politically addressed. Starting in 2001, speculative mortgage lending by US institutions and trading of resultant derivative securities by international banks created a vast bubble, which burst in 2007 and led to financial crisis and recession in the United States before spreading to the European continent. State provision of liquidity and capital in 2008-2009 rescued the banks, while state expenditures and so-called automatic stabilisers – unemployment benefits and pension systems – prevented a catastrophic recession in France.

The result in the Eurozone, however, was a sovereign debt crisis which the structural weaknesses of monetary union exacerbated (Lapavitsas et. al 2010). To promote debt deflation, a severe restructuring of European welfare-states was imposed following negotiations between German and French leaders, whose results were then presented to the

Commission and to the rest of the Member-states (Cafruny and Ryner 2012, 44-45). This provided a justification for massive austerity and welfare retrenchment, a neoliberal antidote prepared by decades of fiscal and monetary orthodoxy which led to soaring unemployment, especially in Greece, Spain and Portugal. Thus, the meltdown of the banking system because of excessive private – and not public – debt was guided by a remarkable resilience of neoliberalism (Crouch 2011) and gave way to an acceleration of pre-existing trends, such as the power of financial markets over monetary policy and the subordination of social policy to the economic imperative of competitiveness and fiscal discipline (Crespy 2020).

Indeed, these priorities were reflected in the gigantic socialisation of capital losses (banks, airlines, car manufacturers). These expenditures and their effects on levels of public indebtedness ironically legitimised brutal austerity plans in the European periphery during the so-called 'sovereign debt crisis'. In Greece, the effects of fiscal orthodoxy on standards of living, health, unemployment, poverty and suicide rates have been cataclysmic (Ifanti et. al 2014; Rachioti et. al 2015). Similarly, Italy has experienced a 'lost decade' as a result of austerity, with virtually no growth.

Reflecting the relationship of forces at the EU level, Greece became an easy scapegoat on French media, as editorialists constructed a potential Greek default on its debt as a political-economic moral panic that justified the severe austerity measures imposed to a country where, as the common sense saying went, 'half the properties were not in the cadastral register'. This reasoning implied that the Greek population – through a combination of tax avoidance at the individual level and accounting dissimulation at the elite level – ultimately deserved its fate.

In October 2011, Greek Prime Minister Georges Papandréou decided to organise a referendum on the new austerity plan imposed on Greece by the 'Troika' (European Commission, European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund). These plans were shipwrecked on the rocks of Franco-German intransigence. For the first time, Sarkozy envisaged forcing Greece to leave the EU (Durand and Keucheyan 2013, 94). Papandréou resigned soon after and was replaced by a more accommodating 'technical government' or, as it is often ironically spelt out, a 'government of national unity'.

On the French front, it was contented that the economic problems resulting from the crisis were to be solved on the supply side, not the demand side. Therefore, the stimulus package and tax cuts implemented after the crash were heavily skewed towards business. Out of the 26 billion euros stimulus plan, Sarkozy committed over 24 billion euros to infrastructure spending and aids to businesses and industries. Less than 2 billion euros went to social measures (Levy 2016, 610), paling in comparison to the 360 billion euros rescue package the French government announced for the banking industry in October 2008. In the latter case, the issue of conditionality was trampled: the bailouts initially came with no strings attached other than an obligation to increase lending in 2009, which the banks promptly ignored (Levy 2016, 614). In France as in most of Southern Europe, democratic delusion arose out of the perceived EU reaction to the crisis, with saving plans for the banks and austerity measures for the masses, greatly tarnishing the already limited legitimacy of European institutions. The prominence gained in economic and political decision-making by non-elected bodies (primarily the ECB), the forced resignations of elected leaders and the denial of referenda results reflected the increasingly anti-democratic nature of the EU's institutional architecture, and the semi-authoritarian character of its rigid and doctrinaire policy packages. These efforts culminated in the drafting of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (TSCG)

which the press labelled '*traité Merkozy*' (Biseau 2011) which imposed stringent budgetary rules and was signed on 2 March 2012.

Against this background, the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy durably modified the conduct of policymaking and the conception of the state that both the traditional Left and Right had adhered to. In launching the *Révision Générale des Politiques Publiques* ('French General Review of Public Policies', RGPP) programme in July 2007, Sarkozy aimed at reducing public spending in state administrations while increasing the 'efficiency' and 'quality' of public action. The spirit of the reform was to take inspiration from the methods, knowledges and techniques deployed by private management actors – deemed superior to those of public administrations and *grands corps de l'Etat* – to govern bureaucracies and public services.

From then on, public services began to be evaluated on the basis of specific quantitative performance indicators, and the French state hired various transnational consulting firms which, through a work of international 'benchmarking', brought about a comparative expertise on state responses to particular social issues in order to inform French political decision makers. Traditional strategic functions devoted to public administrations progressively became co-produced with a small number of global management consultancies such as Accenture and Bayn & Company. Obviously, this further installed and normalised a porosity between the public and private spheres, with highly qualified public servants and *haut-fonctionnaires* being hired to increase the firms' expertise, and going back and forth, successively offering their services to public administrations and to private consulting firms. Regrettably, the often opaque added value to these management consultancies' interventions is hard to evaluate in the absence of a clear definition of their missions and the costs that are attached to them (on this issue, see also Chapter VII).

The interpenetration of public and private links at the heart of the French state is central to Ben Clift's concept of *post-dirigisme*, which places significant analytical focus on the state and the ongoing market-making inclinations of French state elites, who serve a crucial role as actors in and enactors of markets (Clift 2012, 2017). For Clift, this approach has become embedded institutionally within French capitalism through an elite education and civil servant training system – with ENA at its centre – which supplies the French state with a homogenous set of technocratic experts trained in the *étatiste* and *dirigiste* policy-making traditions (Clift and McDaniel 2017). As a result, French interventionism's character would be more 'permissive' in helping large firms to help themselves rather than earlier 'directive' French industrial policy.

Nicolas Sarkozy's banking bailouts, for instance, were the manifestation of the 'oligarchic elitist and networked character of French *post-dirigiste* capitalism, and the prevailing comfort with "free", "competitive" markets dominated by a few "national champions" wielding significant market power' (Clift and McDaniel 2017, 7). Interestingly, the small number of key players involved in shaping the recovery plan shared close personal ties forged at France's *grandes écoles*, and very few conditions were imposed during the bailout (Clift 2012). In other terms, Clift argues that *dirigiste* structures and cultures have not been dismantled; they are still there to favour and assist the largest French capital holders.

François Hollande and the Twilight of Social Democracy

In contrast with Sarkozy's zealous respect of the European Treaties, François Hollande's 2012 programme promised to tackle some of the most deleterious effects of EMU governance. The Socialist candidate thus pledged to renegotiate the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the EMU (TSCG), promised the creation of 'Eurobonds' and promoted the implementation of an EU-wide financial transaction tax. In short, his

administration advocated a reorientation of the EU architecture along more Keynesian lines, with the aim to revitalise French industry through reviving more *dirigiste* policy approaches at the domestic level – with the creation of the *Banque Publique d'Investissement* (BPI) to boost targeted funding to small and medium-size businesses – and at the European level (Clift and McDaniel 2017). Yet, much of Hollande's proposed programme was not successfully implemented.

In spite of his campaign vindication against '*his enemy, the world of finance*' (Bourget Speech, January 22, 2012), Hollande very quickly affirmed his continued commitment to market discipline. This loyalty was firmly set from the start, when he signed the TSCG, which reinforced the neoliberal orthodoxy of previous financial agreements in the Eurozone (Hanley 2017, 145) and that he had promised to renegotiate during his campaign. Under TSCG, surveillance reached new heights, with the automatic activation of the Excessive Deficit Procedure (EDP) whenever a Member-state transgresses the 3 per cent deficit limit. The treaty tightened the grip on fiscal policy, as new constitutional debt breaks were introduced in the Euro Member-states, with an automatic obligation to austerity if public debt exceeded the 60 per cent target, which entailed a direct interference from the European Commission into national budgetary processes through the European Semester (Stockhammer 2016, 372).

In sum, the EU policy package had become more rigid and doctrinaire, such that with this crisis the 'New Economic Governance' constitution was being extended (Ryner 2015, 283), with a new ensemble of Directives, Regulations and measures aimed at tightening surveillance procedures pertaining to the 1996 Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) and the implementation of conditionalities with the purpose of deepening neoliberal privatisation and

commodification in the EU in the form of what President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso called a 'silent revolution' (Ryner 2015; Gill 2017).

Against this background, François Hollande's market orthodoxy was hardly surprising. As early as 1985, when the Socialist leader worked at Cour des Comptes, he was a supporter of the reorientation of PS, and the Left in general, towards 'modernisation'. He even anonymously co-authored a book with other ambitious PS figures who would come to endorse significant responsibilities under his presidency – such as Michel Sapin and Jean-Pierre Jouyet – which developed well-known neoliberal themes, claiming competition as a 'Left concept' and blaming excess regulation and bureaucratisation which, they argued, favoured the protection of rents and privileges (Amable 2017a, 187). The semi-anonymous promotion of these tenets inspired by the 'social market economy' strongly anchored Hollande in the ranks of the 'reformists' among PS grandees.

Logically, the years 2012-2014 were characterised by a front-loaded fiscal consolidation which entailed increasing taxation in order to reduce French debt and deficits, in line with EU targets. As early as July 2012, *le Rapport Gallois* provided the scientific and 'expert' legitimation for the decisive step towards the supply-side that would characterise the entire Hollande presidency. A government commissioned report, the Gallois report – drafted under the authority of former CEO of Airbus and SNCF Louis Gallois – explicitly sought French convergence with the German model of capitalism, through greater labour market flexibility and wage costs reductions (Clift and McDaniel 2017). At first, the government of Jean-Marc Ayrault focused on pleasing businesses, with a 20-billion-euro tax relief competitiveness plan – *Pacte national pour la croissance, la compétitivité et l'emploi* – announced in November 2012, a policy that brought on a 31-billion-euro decrease in corporate taxation through to

2017 (Fulla 2020, 277). Thus, starting in 2013, the government implemented the *Crédit d'impot pour la compétitivité et l'emploi* (CICE), followed in January 2014 by the *Pacte de Responsabilité*, an additional 30 billion tax cut designed to reduce the labour costs throughout Hollande's term (Clift and Mc Daniel 2017).

In the second half of the quinquennat, German-inspired internal devaluations led Hollande to undertake a reform of labour legislation which consisted in the removing of legal protection for dismissal of workers (Loi El Khomri and Loi Macron, see next section). Like Gerhard Schröder and Tony Blair before him, François Hollande saw himself as driving a 'third way' for socialism, an alternative path between social democracy and liberalism (Fulla 2020, 277). He therefore tied the PS to a business friendly and liberal line, which turned strongly repressive in terms of civil liberty after the 2015-2016 series of terrorist attacks in France, while ignoring and marginalising any alternative from the Left (Hanley 2017, 146). He therefore placed – in a typical ordoliberal fashion – substantial discursive and policy limits on what was deemed politically possible on ideological grounds, thereby exacerbating what I term the French 'ideological crisis'.

The French Ideological Crisis

> It may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life
> (Gramsci 1971, 184 Q13 §17)

The Conjunctural and the Organic

A decade after the Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy, France appeared stuck in the midst of what Antonio Gramsci termed an 'organic crisis' (Gramsci 1971, 219; Q13§27), the stage *beyond* a mere economic or political crisis. In Gramsci's understanding, an organic crisis is the moment when the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure significantly

weakens. Concomitantly, the relationship between the 'occasional' and the 'permanent' is rearranged. An organic crisis occurs when the cement of the prevailing order, in lieu of providing a perception of cohesiveness inherent to a hegemonic organisation of society, starts to fade away (Briziarelli and Martinez Guillem 2018, 6). The organic crisis is thus both a moment of juncture and a moment of stalemate: the old order is in decay, but the new is late to emerge.[41] In strategic terms, the organic crisis is the terrain on which the class struggle plays out, therefore providing opportunities for both reactionary and progressive forces to mobilise.

In the decade following World War I in Italy, Gramsci witnessed the rise of forces that would precipitate the country into the abyss of the second global conflict. In the peninsula, the crisis of the fragile Italian state and the dissolution of traditional party politics formed an opportunity for the advent of Caesarist figures such as fascist leader Benito Mussolini. But this crisis was by no means circumscribed to Italy: it also had a European dimension, as Gramsci (1971, 318 Q22§15) suggested:

> In Berlin the middle classes had already been ruined by the war and by inflation, and Berlin industry has very different characteristics overall from that of Paris. The French middle classes did not undergo either occasional crises like the inflation in Germany, nor did they suffer the organic crisis of 1929 with the same intensity as Germany.

While national in some of its causes, the Italian crisis was a manifestation of a larger malaise and unrest in European politics, opened up by the Russian Revolution and the Versailles Treaty, and to which Italian and German fascisms were clear responses. The scleroses of the Italian party system, the continued 'Mezzogiornization' of Italy and the disintegration of European civilisation following World War I and the Great Depression formed the

[41] 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear' (Gramsci 1971, 276; Q3§24).

background of Mussolini's ascent. In an analytical fusion of the national and the global, Gramsci perceived the crisis as unique and exceptional: signaling an irremediable process of democratic decay, the crisis had reached a systemic, epochal dimension and was consuming the prevailing socio-political order entirely.

Yet, the 'model of collapse' is not present in Gramsci's *Notebooks*: the crisis is not the end point of capitalism, since capitalism has itself been 'a continual crisis' (Filippini 2017, 89-90). Thus, the crisis is a process rather than an event: it always has remote origins that do not alone explain its subsequent development, and it is an inherent feature of the capitalist mode of production. This implies that immediate economic crises do not of themselves produce fundamental historical events. A crisis that entails vast reconfiguration needs to be organic: it needs to challenge the relationship between the 'occasional' and the 'permanent'. In other words, a crisis becomes 'organic' – as opposed to 'conjunctural' – when it challenges the 'naturalness' of a given social system (Filippini 2017, 98).

Thus, the 'organic crisis' goes beyond the economic downturn and becomes an impasse of the ruling group, a stalling of the mechanisms that legitimate a given social order (Briziarelli and Martinez Guillem 2018, 6). This critical juncture is what Gramsci refers to as the 'crisis of authority' or 'crisis of hegemony' (Gramsci 1971, 210; Q13§23). At that stage, the ideological domination of the leading class starts to crumble, consensus is lost and the repressive function takes over: the government must rule because it cannot lead. The crossroads that opens in consequence is what Gramsci calls an 'interregnum', during which institutional decay provides opportunities for action, but may generate reactionary instincts, Caesarist impulses and restorative passions such as 'passive revolution' (see chapter VII).

From a world order perspective, the economic meltdown resulting from the Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy was global in scope and occasioned the deepest crisis of accumulation since the Great Depression. Thus, in a more or less latent manner, the entire decade (2007-2017) has been a global maelstrom of intersecting perils: continual increases in the turnover time of capital, widening commodification and overexploitation of human beings and nature, rising levels of inequalities and the concentration of wealth and power in ever few giant corporations (Gill 2012, 18). Politically, the global organic crisis has been characterised by the development of strategies of depoliticisation designed to marginalise and discredit political alternatives, and, as has been seen, the imposition of practices of global governance of a new constitutionalist type that facilitate and expand capital accumulation (Gill 2012; 2014). In the European Union, anaemic long-term growth and decades of welfare retrenchment have resulted in a cumulatively developing legitimation crisis to which the 'New Economic Governance' has been responding in through increasingly authoritarian means (Ryner 2020, 97).

Yet, the adverse international context does not alone explain why French politics and society have remained in a state of crisis on a number of fronts from the election of Nicolas Sarkozy to the end of François Hollande's term.

A Depoliticised Struggle and a Discredited Left/Right Cleavage

In France, democratic malaise and ideational numbness preceded the global financial crisis, the sources of which are found in the ideological confusion that spanned over the last couple of decades.

Indeed, the French political class – alongside its Italian and British counterparts – had reached the acme of ideological numbness and confusion, a process which resulted in a dire restriction

of the political imaginary. In the decade leading up to Emmanuel Macron's election, political ideologies failed to galvanise the citizenry and politics have gradually been regarded with disdain. This unfolded a vicious circle of depoliticisation that increased the appeal of managerial and technocratic political formations pledging to bury the Left/Right opposition, a cleavage that was constructed as antiquated.

The French ideological crisis was articulated around three successive yet mutually reinforcing dynamics: (1) the stalemate of the class struggle, (2) the depoliticisation of society, and (3) the discrediting of the Left/Right cleavage.

The stalemate of the class struggle was manifest in the repeated failures of labour to mobilise against capital under both Sarkozy and Hollande. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, a remarkable degree of labour market and workplace flexibility had been enforced, as firms enjoyed greater autonomy from both state regulation and higher levels of collective bargaining, a quiet revolution in industrial relations that contributed to a marked liberalisation of the institutions governing class relations (Baccaro and Howell 2017, 73-74). Following the flexibilisation of labour markets and the symbolic delegitimation of thinking socio-political antagonism along class lines, the individualisation of work has never been as widespread, a trend that has been reinforced by digitalisation and culminated in the normalisation and generalisation of so-called *ubérisation* ('gig economy').

The fundamental transformations brought about by the gig economy were appropriately accounted for by neither governmental, nor union elites. Furthermore, the transition towards an increasingly digitalised economy played out in a context of institutional and rhetorical contempt for collective action and organised labour. As Nicolas Sarkozy sardonically

remarked in 2008: 'these days, when there is a strike in France, no one is even noticing' (Guiral 2008, my translation), a rhetorical dismissal that was associated with the implementation of '*service minimum*', a legislative disposition that weakened the impact of strikes in the public sector.[42] Indeed, the last real union victory dates back to 2006, when several weeks of contestation in the street buried Dominique de Villepin's Contrat Première Embauche. Dialectically, this discursive scorn of union leaders and activists, alongside the eclipse of class references, was counterbalanced by the prominence given to the so-called 'middle-classes' in public discourse. This focus, which generated a re-orientation of social-democratic parties towards middle-class identities, was based on a stereotypical depiction of the margins: at the top, a 'meritocratic' elite; at the bottom, 'unlucky' or 'lazy' outsiders.

The French social class regime, defined first and foremost by professional status, was a system of representation that used to define and rationalise the ways in which inequalities were experienced: it proposed collective narratives, institutionalised lines of conflict, allowed for the definition of social adversaries, and was a core element of workers' dignity. The acceptance of social antagonism provided perspectives and inscribed individual workers within a collective history that promoted a sense of solidarity and togetherness, as well as a rather coherent ideological framework which allowed for a clear structuring of political representation along the Left/Right cleavage. Henceforth, the feelings of injustice experienced by workers are not relayed anymore by traditional Left forces, especially not by Parti Socialiste.

[42] The principle of '*service minimum*' was introduced in French schools with the 23 July 2008 law proposed by Sarkozy's Minister of Education Xavier Darcos. The bill made it compulsory for mayors to find solutions to accommodate and welcome pupils from pre-schools and elementary schools when more than 25 per cent of their teachers were on strike. Under the new law, the strikers also had to provide a 48-hour notice to allow for the implementation of 'service minimum'. On 1 January 2008, a similar law passed by Minister of Labour Xavier Bertrand had already come into effect, applying the same obligation of 'guaranteed service' to French public transportations, in an attempt to mitigate disruption and thereby curb the impact (and influence) of striking organisations.

In parallel, the diminishing hold of (already weak and non-representative) unions and the gradual disaffiliation of workers in a context of rapid capitalist mutations created a myriad of redundancies, with more than 10 per cent of the French population unemployed in 2016. Indeed, mass unemployment has had extremely damaging effects on the mobilising potentials of the French citizenry. Insecurity has become widespread in both the private and public sector, where short-term contracts have multiplied, fostering unhealthy competition and preventing a coalition of the most fragile communities into a revolt against an intolerable present. Limited in their ability to project themselves in the future, the working poor have the worst difficulty to organize politically, as 'flexibility' became the zeitgeist of the last three decades. This 'flexploitation regime' (Bourdieu 1998, 98) has been characterised by the rational management of socio-economic insecurity and has been successful in instilling fear in the minds of the working poor and *précaires*, implying that any hint of rebellion or complaint might threaten their underpaid contracts and might relegate them once more.

The phrasing 'stalemate of the class struggle' does not entail the absence of significant class conflict or the lack of mobilisation to defend the rights of workers, migrants and working-class people over the period. Rather, the expression signifies that, however robust, these mobilisations – including the long 2016 sequence punctuated by the *Nuit Debout* movement and innovative forms of protests against the new labour laws – apparently failed to achieve any short-term political gains. Indeed, unions, autonomous organisations and students' mobilisations were unsuccessful in their attempts to reverse the policy course under Sarkozy – with impressive but eventually fruitless demonstrations against the 2010 pension reform (see Appendix 5). They were not more successful under Hollande – with the adoption of the controversial *Loi El Khomri* through the use of Article 49.3, for instance – despite new alliances and patterns of mobilisation and a large popular (and parliamentary) rejection of the

bill. Yet, the promulgation of these pieces of legislation was not a victory for the governments that crafted them either, since neither Nicolas Sarkozy nor François Hollande were able to get re-elected. Hence the use of the expression 'stalemate': despite vigorous mobilisations on both sides, neither the government nor social forces that took to the streets emerged as clear victors in the struggle. It is out of this impasse in the governance of the French political economy that politicians adopting Caesarist postures *à la* Emmanuel Macron eventually emerged (see Chapters IV and VII).

Increasing socio-political atomisation and anomie have in turn fostered the depoliticisation of society, the second symptom of the ideological crisis. Trapped in often precarious livelihoods, excluded from political discourse and ignored by political parties, the popular classes have come to boycott the polling stations en masse at every election. A genuine crisis of representation has been unfolding, as the gap between the popular classes and their representatives is constantly widening. Out of the 577 French MPs seating in the National Assembly in 2007, only 3 were former manual workers and 7 were former employees. In 2012, under a 'Socialist' majority, there were 12 former manual workers and employees in the National Assembly, accounting for 2.1 per cent of MPs (Lehingue 2015, 35). Detached from the broad masses, elected representatives have exhausted their mobilizing ideals. The professionalisation of politics is partly to blame, as a rewarding political career entails yielding to political conformity and uniformity, and nurturing extremely modest ambitions for change. In consequence, the PS has become, more than ever, a 'notabilised' party dominated by local office holders for whom political office has always been the main occupation (Lefebvre and Sawicki 2006).

Furthermore, without reaching the astronomical sums spent in United States presidential campaigns, campaign funding is another issue haunting the French party system and accounts for the deficit of representation from which the popular classes suffer. Despite a strict legal framework, political funding largely depends on private donations and reflects the state of class relations: only 0.79 per cent of French households donate to a political party every year, but 10 per cent of these donations come from the wealthiest 0.01 per cent of households. While the average donation amounts to 120 euros, the average donation from the wealthiest 0.01 per cent amounts to 5, 245 euros: 44 times more (Cagé 2018). Against this background, it is unsurprising that political parties' programmes increasingly reflect the interests of the wealthier taxpayers.

This sombre state of affairs breeds ideological delusion, political nihilism and democratic withdrawal. Abstention has become widespread: for instance, 65 per cent of French blue-collar workers did not hit the poll stations during the 2014 European elections. Applying Albert O. Hirschman's (1970) delineation of three types of positioning adopted by citizens towards their institutions ('exit', 'voice', or 'loyalty'), Patrick Lehingue suggests that 'exit' has become the prevailing attitude, with a quasi-systematic abstention of a large bulk of the popular classes at every election (Lehingue 2015, 28). A similar phenomenon of defiance is observable in Italy, with a significant decline in citizens' trust in politics and institutions – especially political parties – and a rise in feelings of alienation in a context of significant changes in the social fabric of the country in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, which was followed by neoliberal policies that increased poverty rates and worsened inequalities (Bull and Pasquino 2018). The 'state' is vilified: rather than inspiring devotion or enthusiasm, it is perceived as simply requiring compulsory material contributions, providing nothing in return. At the continental scale, the situation is dire: deprived of European social rights and unable to

make meaningful social and political interventions, the workers have ‘no Europe’ (Durand 2018, 28).

The corollary to this democratic fatigue has been the profound discrediting of the Left/Right cleavage. This societal inclination has been particularly exacerbated by the ever-growing consensus among parties of government to frame political action in line with the instructions and coercive mechanisms of the EMU and its disciplinary neoliberalism (Gill 2017). This entailed a significant re-centering of French Left forces since the 1980s, in particular Parti Socialiste (Amable and Palombarini 2017). Despite notable differences in style and rhetoric, Sarkozy and Hollande thus conducted very similar policies that favored the supply-side and neglected aggregate demand stimulus. Indeed, Sarkozy cut taxes for the rich and partially dismantled the 35-hour working week, thus deepening inequality between capital revenues and wages. Similarly, Hollande raised VAT rates and household’s taxes to compensate for the huge tax and social contributions deductions granted to companies as an incentive to increase employment, with no strings attached and without honouring his campaign promise of curbing unemployment (De Largentaye and Du Tertre 2019, 148).

Both the traditional Left and Right have thus committed themselves to ordoliberalism in privileging the budget balancing principle and in aiming to redress France’s public accounts before reflating the economy after the 2008 crisis, a reduction in public expenditure that aggravated the recession. Furthermore, both the French Left and Right developed an ultra-securitised mode of governance, which was reinforced with a plethora of ‘emergency measures’ in the wake of the 2015-2016 terrorist attacks which targetted the Charlie Hebdo journalists, the Bataclan concert venue and passerby in Paris, Saint-Denis and Nice. These

measures of exception created the ideal legal framework to repress protests against the labour law reforms crafted by Minister of the Economy Emmanuel Macron in the spring of 2016.

To put it simply, it has been deemed 'common sense' that governing efficiently and adapting to globalisation entailed governing in the centre and undoing social protections and regulations in order to enhance national 'competitiveness'. In lieu of a neat ideological cleavage structuring political preferences, the new governing consensus that is proposed by the traditional Left gets closer and closer to the logic of a government of 'national interest' in which the distinctiveness of partisan orientation is denied and erased.

This project nonetheless fails to mobilise a mass, popular appeal. In Italy, this process was consummated by Prime Minister Matteo Renzi from *Partito Democratico* (PD), who attempted to give birth to a so-called *Partito della Nazione*, a sort of revived, all-encompassing Christian democracy occupying the centre and parts of the Left of the political spectrum (Bull and Pasquino 2018, 140), a success that proved rather short-lived. As will be examined in the next chapter, the loss of substance of the terms 'Left' and 'Right' provided fertile ground for Emmanuel Macron's project. In the spring of 2016, François Hollande's Minister of the Economy created his political party *En Marche !* – at first 'not on the Left nor on the Right', and then reframed as 'both on the Left and on the Right' – by clearly capitalising on the tendencies described above.

Conclusion

The development of a new generation of think-tanks thus accelerated the neoliberal war of position and entailed the propagation of a 'neoliberal *lingua franca*', producing a powerful

semantic and ideational framework that marked a strong imprint on political discourses and policy programmes over the last fifteen years.

The rise of Nicolas Sarkozy initially united the French Right around a core comprised of law and order, hierarchy and glorification of '*valeur travail*' – a combination that temporarily succeeded in weakening Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National. Yet, Sarkozy's rhetorical excesses bred tensions in his party, and led to the radicalisation of some fringes of the traditional Right that started to lurk around the FN's new leader Marine Le Pen. The Hollande presidency provoked similar turmoil in Parti Socialiste. The decidedly supply-side oriented economic policy of Hollande created a schism in the Socialist majority between a securitised social-liberal majority led by Manuel Valls and Leftist factions who coalesced in the *frondeurs* group at the National Assembly.

Thus, the contradictions of the French Left and Right in power created the conditions for an 'ideological crisis' that has tended to significantly blur the distinctiveness of partisan orientation. Indeed, the strongest trend has been one of striking similarity between traditional governing parties, 'united especially in an increasingly economically neo-liberal direction of travel' (Hewlett 2017, 379), thus abandoning their ties to traditional ideological positions and fuelling abstention and democratic withdrawal.

Against this background and with the enormous difficulties for French elites to adapt their discourse and policy prescriptions to a rapidly changing gig economy and the digital transition, a political space opened for candidates pledging to govern 'beyond parties', as the winning political positioning of Emmanuel Macron would demonstrate.

Part II

EMMANUEL MACRON'S ELECTION

Chapter IV

The Making of Macron and the 2017 Presidential Election

> Un mouvement politique est là pour définir une idéologie, enrôler des militants et désigner un chef. C'est sa fonction dans la vie politique. Les Républicains et les Socialistes n'ont plus d'idéologie commune, n'enrôlent plus de militants (…) et ne savent plus désigner un chef. [43]
> (Emmanuel Macron, Envoyé Spécial, 12 May 2017)

Introduction

The 2017 electoral cycle – with the presidential election in April-May and the legislative elections in June – has been considered one of the most eventful and stunning electoral contests in the history of postwar France. For the first time in the history of the French Fifth Republic, the candidates representing the mainstream Right and Left– UMP, which was rebranded *Les Républicains* in 2015 and Parti Socialiste – did not win through the second round of the presidential election.

Instead, the second round run-off was between Emmanuel Macron, a total newcomer to electoral politics with his movement *En Marche!* (EM), and Marine Le Pen, the standard bearer of the extreme right and head of the *Front National* ('National Front', FN). Both candidates portrayed themselves as 'anti-system' and successfully positioned themselves above party (Cole 2019, 55). Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the 2017 presidential electoral cycle was the extent to which established politicians across the political spectrum were cast aside, or chose not to participate in the race, e.g. in the case of the incumbent President of the Republic François Hollande (Kuhn 2018, 484).

[43] 'A political movement should define an ideology, enroll militants and appoint a leader. This should be its purpose. The Republicans and the Socialists do not hold a coherent ideology anymore, do not enroll militants anymore (…) and are not able to appoint a leader anymore' (my translation).

What can explain the collapse of the traditional governing parties in the 2017 presidential elections? How did a young Minister, unknown from the general public until 2014, manage to create a party and conquer the Elysée Palace while turning the whole political landscape upside down? Through which *modus operandi* was this wind of change – that violently swept the traditional parties out of the game – orchestrated? Which symbols and narratives did Emmanuel Macron mobilise in his endeavor? Through which mechanisms was he able to duplicate this electoral success in the June 2017 legislative elections, at the head of a newborn party?

This chapter examines the 2017 presidential and legislative elections and exposes the ways in which the interchangeability and deliquescence of the traditional Left and Right in France opened the door for the emergence of a new, seemingly innovative movement whose representatives pretended to think and govern beyond cleavages. Against the background of this ideological crisis, conjunctural events benefited the candidate from *En Marche* and the high degree of support for *Front National*'s candidate Marine Le Pen – who reached the second round but proved her incompetency in the campaign's last weeks – granted Emmanuel Macron his fragile victory and initiated the 'second synthesis' of French neoliberalism.
To address these questions, the chapter is organised as follows. It first critically discusses the 'making' of Emmanuel Macron in mainstream media, and scrutinises the political and ideological journey of the young presidential candidate, from the Attali Commission (2008-2010) to the Élysée Palace. The first section examines Emmanuel Macron's role in elaborating the report for *Commission pour la libération de la croissance française* in 2010, where he enriched his already existing network constituted at the bank Rothschild & Co and at Inspection Générale des Finances, integrated upon graduation from ENA. A pure product of the French elitist tradition, Emmanuel Macron was then introduced to François Hollande,

whom he advised on economic matters during the presidential campaign, before becoming Secrétaire Général de l'Elysée in 2012 and Minister of the Economy in August 2014.

Emmanuel Macron resigned exactly two years later, a few months after founding his political movement *En Marche !* in the spring of 2016. Cheered and joined by several prominent members from the reformist strand of Parti Socialiste, Macron's endeavour articulated a critique of existing parties and a purportedly 'disruptive' style and rhetoric glorifying entrepreneurial values. Supported by new, more 'direct' forms of political communication, EM was meant to project an outdated image of the traditional, ossified political formations in the run-up to the 2017 presidential election. The benevolent editorialist treatment of his candidacy, alongside Macron's public and private ties with media tycoons and billionaires, provided the candidate from En Marche with a generous and copious press coverage.

Against this background, the second section exposes the balance of political forces involved in the presidential election campaign and provides a summary of the unusual 2017 contest, as well as an analysis of its results. The balance of political forces in the run-up to the 2017 presidential contest was unquestionably favourable to the 'traditional' right-wing party Les Républicains. Emboldened by the strong participation in the party's open primaries in the fall of 2016, its candidate François Fillon was in a much better position than the Socialist candidate Benoît Hamon, who won the PS open primaries following François Hollande's statement that he would not run again. Further to the Left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France Insoumise (LFI) was supported by the disappointed PS voters and large sections of the youth as a result of what was perceived as a betrayal of Hollande's social-democratic platform. Further to the Right, the Front National candidate Marine Le Pen had adopted a sovereigntist

rhetoric that capitalised on the general disgruntlement with the European Union that developed in the wake of the Eurozone crisis and its socio-political consequences.

Run mostly on socio-economic issues and France's place within the EU, the campaign was nevertheless sullied by François Fillon's embezzlement accusations. Jean-Luc Mélenchon's campaign proved successful while Benoît Hamon was betrayed by most high-ranked Socialist cadres. On 23 April 2017, both Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen qualified for the second round. The two finalists defined their opposition as one between 'globalists' and 'patriots' – for Le Pen – and one between 'progressives' and 'nationalists' – for Macron. After a disastrous performance of Le Pen in the between two-rounds TV debate and the almost unanimous rallying from the traditional Left and Right to En Marche to counter the FN, Emmanuel Macron won the second round of the election. Although he collected 66.10 per cent of the vote share against the far-right, 12 million French people (25.4 per cent) chose to abstain from voting and 4 million French voters cast invalid ballots to express frustration and discontent at an outcome that was as unexpected as electorally fragile.

The Making of Macron

The first section of this chapter accounts for the specific course of political and electoral events that spanned in the spring of 2017. In so doing, it investigates the figure of Emmanuel Macron and the social construction of his image in French mainstream media. It then explores the specificities of the 2017 presidential election and attempts to analyse its conduct and interpret its results, before contemplating the general partisan recomposing triggered by its unexpected outcome.

The Attali Commission

One of the first actions undertaken by Nicolas Sarkozy after his May 2007 presidential victory was to appoint a commission in charge of drafting recommendations aimed at stimulating economic growth in France. The commission was headed by Jacques Attali, a public intellectual and globalisation enthusiast who had been François Mitterrand's special advisor. In a logic akin to that governing the formation of the Comité Pinay-Rueff in 1958, Nicolas Sarkozy wanted to produce a programme and roadmap for an economic *tabula rasa* in his first months in office. As examined in Chapter III, such an initiative aimed at asking a panel of experts for policy recommendations in order to guide economic reforms was emulated by François Hollande when he commissioned the Rapport Gallois in 2012.

Thus, the *Commission pour la libération de la croissance française* ('Commission for the liberation of French growth') or Commission Attali, started its workings in June 2007 until it published its final report in January 2008. The commission's unambiguous title signaled the presumption that France's economic growth should be 'liberated' or 'unleashed' which implied, by extension, that so-called statist and syndical 'rigidities' would prevent the vital forces of the country to be released in all their breadth. In that respect, the spirit of the Attali Commission echoed that of the Comité Rueff-Armand, published in 1960 by Polytechnicians Jacques Rueff and Louis Armand, under the high authority of Prime Minister Michel Debré.

By Nicolas Sarkozy's own admission, the commission was modeled on the Rueff-Armand Committee, with the mission to make an inventory of the obstacles to economic expansion (Lachevre 2007). The Rueff-Armand Commission was envisaged as a continuation of the 1958 Pinay-Rueff stabilisation plan, whose proceedings had to be accelerated in a context of acute institutional crisis. Both reports were imbued with Jacques Rueff's admiration for the

social-market economy and theoretical proclivity for ordoliberal themes (see Chapter I). However, the recommendations stemming from the Rueff-Armand Commission were deemed too radical to be implemented. The 1960 report targeted corporatism, the use of *numerus clausus* and the 'structural rigidities' of the French economy such as administrative defects, and rent regulations, while castigating the archaic weight of agriculture in the French GDP (Teulon and Fischer 2011, 57) and the lack of competition in trade and services that were accused of obstructing French economic development. Nonetheless, the Rueff-Armand committee report was written against the background of two decades of *dirigisme*, and the leitmotiv of 'breaking the constraints' that poised growth had somehow lost credence in 2007, after decades of neoliberalisation.

The elitism of the Attali Commission's composition was very unequivocal. Three main types of actors can be identified:

(1) Prominent orthodox economists, such as Philippe Aghion, Christian de Boissieu, Michèle Deboneuille, Jacques Delpa.

(2) Well-known CEOs, such as Claude Bébéar (AXA and president of Institut Montaigne), François Villeroy de Galhau (Cetelem and future governor of the Banque de France), Eric Labaye (McKinsey France), René Carron (Crédit Agricole), Peter Brabeck Lemath (Nestlé), Anne Lauvergeon (Areva), Geoffroy Roux de Bézieux (who would become president of the business organisation *Mouvement des Entreprises de France*, or MEDEF).

(3) ‘Organic intellectuals’ from the ranks of civil society who would be able to praise the reports in media circles, such as *Figaro* editorialist Yves de Kerdrel, *Le Monde* journalist Eric Le Boucher, Writer and ‘Les Gracques’ member Erik Orsenna, psychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik.

This motley yet complementary and elitist crew was in charge of proposing a panel of ‘urgent’ reforms aimed at improving the competitiveness of French companies and ensure a better ‘social mobility’ for French citizens. With its 316 sundry recommendations, the ‘non-partisan’ report suggested full-scale liberalisation of financial markets and regulated professions, such as taxis or pharmacies (Attali et. al 2008). Yet, the publication of the report coincided with the 2008 financial crisis, caused by the financial deregulation of certain types of mortgages such as the subprimes, which the Attali Commission recommended. This forced Nicolas Sarkozy to perform a complete U-turn: he decided to bury the first Attali report, and prevented by the same token – in large part thanks to chance – the full introduction of ‘flexisecurity’ in France. In retrospect, the crisis did not change the liberalising course of the French labour markets and rather accelerated it, but the advent of the crisis nevertheless prevented a total and massive change of economic and industrial governance under Sarkozy.

In 2010, the Commission was convened again in order to propose structural reforms that would put France back on the tracks of sustained growth in the wake of the financial crisis. After consultations with parliamentary commissions and several think-tanks, the group of experts thus delivered a second report that was aimed at drafting an appraisal of the 316 initial recommendations. A certain number of recommendations were effectively implemented by Sarkozy’s majority, such as the controversial ‘auto-entrepreneur’ (self-employment) regime, or the merging of large universities (Cossé 2010). More fundamentally, the objective behind

the pack of measures was to replace employers' social security contributions by various raises in indirect taxation such as the Value Added Tax (VAT) or the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* (CSG, 'generalised social contribution'), which hit all individuals indiscriminately, although the latter remained very moderately progressive.

This signaled an explicit willingness to transfer the funding and management of the system of social protection away from the so-called 'social partners' – business and employee's organisations – toward the state, which was considered to be best placed to serve the interests of capital (Godin 2019, 124). This had the potential to trample the rules and procedures through which capital and labour found a minimum of consensus since the immediate postwar period. In accordance with the ordoliberal framework, this was associated with the need to cut spending – 75 billion euros over 3 years – in order to favour public debt reduction – which the authors of the report, relatively presciently, argued would reach 100 per cent of the GDP by 2020. The logic was erroneous but seemingly implacable: the state is an obstacle to growth; easing regulations and cutting public spending is deemed essential to the unleashing of the nation's vital energies.

Emmanuel Macron's Elite Trajectory

In 2010, the person in charge of drafting the final report of the commission was a young member from Inspection Générale des Finances (IGF) – which was headed at the time by Socialist and *Les Gracques* member Jean-Pierre Jouyet – who had recently become an investment banker at Rothschild & Co. This former student from Ecole Nationale d'Administration – he ranked 5th out of 135 at the end of his degree – who was barely entering his thirties and was very much aware that his participation to the commission's debates could significantly boost his career, was none other than Emmanuel Macron.

After refusing multiple times to join ministerial cabinets during Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency (Chaperon 2017), Emmanuel Macron decided to offer his services to the same transnational banking institution that President Georges Pompidou worked for, from 1954 to 1958. From 2008 to 2012, Macron excelled at Rothschild, where he specialised in mergers and acquisitions and became *associé gérant* – one of the highest grades in investment banking – at only 33. He thus brokered important deals: the merging between the French IT company ATOS and the German conglomerate Siemens in 2010, as well as the acquisition of American pharmaceutical Pfizer's baby formula by the world's biggest food group Nestlé in 2012 – one can suppose that the presence of Nestlé CEO Peter Brabeck in the Attali Commission helped his handling of this 12 billion dollars' worth transaction (Jones 2012; Chaperon 2017).

Thanks once again to the support of the same Jean-Pierre Jouyet, Emmanuel Macron was introduced to François Hollande – then First Secretary of the Parti Socialiste – in 2006, before joining his political team shortly before the Socialist primary. In 2010, he started advising the future Socialist candidate on economic issues, alongside his colleague from the Attali Commission, economist Philippe Aghion (Macke 2017).[44] Once Hollande was elected in May 2012, Emmanuel Macron was appointed Deputy-Secretary General of the Elysée, a prominent advising role that he occupied for two years and during which he showed opposition to one of

[44] Economist Philippe Aghion – known for his advocacy for the 'Swedish model' that privileges innovation and intends to lower taxes on capital in order to favour investment – notably worked with Emmanuel Macron to propose an economic programme to François Hollande throughout the year 2011 (Macke 2017). Aghion and Macron thus supervised the brainstorming sessions of the so-called 'Groupe de la Rotonde', a cluster of organic intellectuals that also included economist and former general commissioner of France Stratégie Jean-Pisani Ferry and neoliberal economists Elie Cohen and Gilbert Cette and that met periodically at the Parisian *brasserie* 'La Rotonde', in the Sixth arrondissement. In 2016, Jean-Pisani Ferry, who coordinated the project of Emmanuel Macron, was once again joined by Philippe Aghion to advise the young presidential candidate. On the night of 23 April 2017, Macron and his friends celebrated his qualification in the second round of the presidential election in *La Rotonde*, in a fashion akin to Nicolas Sarkozy's infamous party night at *Fouquet's* restaurant on Champs Élysées, almost exactly ten years prior. This public display of joy was deemed ostentatious and unwise, considering that Macron was qualified alongside far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, who never scored higher than that night.

François Hollande's most controversial measure, the 75 per cent income tax on revenues earned above one million euros which, he argued, was akin to 'Cuba without the sun' (Guélaud 2012).

François Hollande's government underwent a reshuffle in the summer of 2014 and Emmanuel Macron was nominated Minister of the Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs. In parallel with François Hollande's orthodox turn in economic policies at the European level, the Ayrault and especially the Valls government launched a series of pro-business reforms, including the CICE (see Chapter III), culminating with the El Khomri law, which reformed the labour market more drastically than any previous reform implemented by conservative governments during the preceding four decades (Amable 2016). The *Loi El Khomri*'s purpose in revising the *Code du Travail* (labour regulation) was to erode worker rights on layoffs, severance payments and overtime payments, and was associated with the *Loi Macron*, which loosened Sunday trading rules and introduced competition with the state rail network from coach companies.

Both were deeply unpopular bills that prompted intense strike activity and street demonstrations (Hewlett 2017, 385). Indeed, it is in the context of the labour law protests that the movement *Nuit Debout* ('Up All Night') emerged in the spring of 2016, with the occupation of the Republic Square for several weeks in a row. Whereas the laws were ultimately promulgated, this period was a very formative moment not only for the forces of resistance on the Left – as Nuit Debout helped build support for the candidacy of Jean-Luc Mélenchon – but also for Emmanuel Macron, who gained tremendous traction in political circles throughout the more than 500 hours of debates in parliamentary commissions that had been spent discussing and amending the labour law he was carrying. This work of politician

acquaintance and parliamentary persuasion has been, by Macron's own admission, the juncture at which he moved 'from the war of position to the war of movement' (Envoyé Spécial 2017, 31:20).

These events unfolded in a climate of tension for François Hollande and his majority. After the months-long debate over the so-called *déchéance de nationalité* – a bill drafted in the wake of the Paris terror attacks that included the 'loss of citizenship' for binational terrorists – the Socialist majority now found itself divided over a labour law which many MPs considered unjust and pauperising. Thus, towards the end of Hollande's quinquennant, French political life witnessed unprecedented episodes of legislative dissent which paved the way for the deliquescence of traditional parties – and especially PS – in the 2017 presidential and legislative elections. To counter the shift to the Right that occurred in the last two years of François Hollande's mandate, the Left ranks of the Socialist majority gathered in a group of rebellious MPs baptised *les frondeurs*.

Thus, a clique of 50 to 60 Socialists, Green and Radical MPs congregated to signify their loyalty to François Hollande's 2012 social-democratic programme which he himself, they argued, had betrayed. The *frondeurs* became a thorn in the side of Hollande and his Prime Minister Manuel Valls. The constitution of this dissident group was the symptom of an unparalleled weakening of partisan discipline in Parti Socialiste (Boelaert et al. 2017). Interestingly, this parliamentary revolt did not translate into a strategy of individualisation: on the contrary, the dissidence was collective in character and prefigured the partisan restructuring to come (Ecormier-Noccas and Sidois 2019, 487).

The Creation of En Marche !

It was in the midst of this chaos that Emmanuel Macron asserted his presidential ambitions. After creating the youth collective *Les Jeunes avec Macron* in 2015, he started the political movement *En Marche !* in January 2016, alongside some members of Parti Socialiste who used to be Dominique Strauss Kahn's most faithful disciples before the former head of the IMF's political career derailed, following sexual assault allegations in New York City. Among these *quadragénaires,* Benjamin Griveaux – who would become spokesperson of the government – Ismael Emelien – one of Macron's spin doctors, who used to work for the think-tank Fondation Jean-Jaurès – and Cédric O – a future Secretary of State, who co-created the social-liberal think-tank Terra Nova in 2008.

Offering yet another proof of the incestuous relationships between think-tank personnel and politicians and testifying to the importance of the former in the emergence of Emmanuel Macron, *En Marche !* was initially domiciled in the apartment of Laurent Bigorgne, a good friend of Macron and the president of Institut Montaigne, the wealthiest and most powerful French think-tank (Mauduit 2016). Created in 2000 by the Polytechnician Claude Bébéar – the founder and CEO of AXA, by very far the largest French insurance firm – the Institut never hid its exceedingly close ties to the French *patronat* (see also Chapter III).

On 6 April 2016, Emmanuel Macron officially launched his political movement in his hometown of Amiens. The movement, Macron explained, would be 'neither Right, nor Left'. Recalling that he came from a movement from the Left – he was a member of PS from 2006 to 2009 – Macron affirmed that he also wanted 'to work with people who today feel like they belong to the Right'. The purpose of *En Marche !* was thus to 'renew the political offer', especially in a context of increasing support for the Front National. This proclaimed need for

renewal found its root in a reasoning akin to that of Michel Crozier (1970) about the 'stalled society' and the purportedly archaic and inefficient French administration[45] (a criticism of bureaucracy that was shared on the other side of the pond by Milton Friedman), although Crozier regularly denounced the arrogance of France's top bureaucrats *à la Macron* as well. Indeed, Emmanuel Macron explained on April 6 that 'this political movement is the dynamic we need against the blocked society, it's about trying to move on' (*Ce mouvement politique, c'est une dynamique face au blocage de la société, c'est essayer d'avancer*, my translation). Soon enough, he or his entourage realised that the 'neither Left nor Right' motto was not ideal, as it echoed the Front National's lament about the political system being captured by 'UMPS', a discursive political chimera that was meant to signify that both Left and Right elites had failed the French people.

This anti-establishment discourse seemed at odds with Emmanuel Macron's personal background, an ideal-type of the French elite, having studied at Sciences Po Paris and then at Ecole National d'Administration (ENA), before working as an Inspector of Finance.[46] Besides, like former President Georges Pompidou, Macron also spent a period working in the private sector, for the Rothschild bank (Cole 2019, 74). He was therefore part of both public and private elite circles, at ease with both state officials and *haute finance* representatives. This paradox led to a progressive correction of his initial 'populist' inclination. *En Marche* thus gradually relinquished its oppositional stance to pretend being doctrinally 'both from the Right and from the Left'. This would be semantically translated in Macron's favorite motto '*en même temps*' ('at the same time') that was meant to select the best aspects of both sides of

[45] This criticism of public administration would tacitly legitimate the increasing externalisation of certain state missions to private consultancy firms during the Macron *quinquennat* (see Chapter VII).
[46] The students who are best ranked at the end of their two-years spent at Ecole Nationale d'Administration are part of '*la botte*' (between 12 to 15 students every year). They are usually integrated into prestigious administrative *grands corps* such as Inspection Générale des Finances, Conseil d'Etat or Cour des Comptes.

the political spectrum, but in fact attested to the vagueness and ambiguity of his campaign positioning. It became clear that EM was an attempt to mold a new type of political cleavage, i.e. an opposition between 'nationalists' and 'progressives' (see also Chapter XII).

A few months later, when Emmanuel Macron officially announced his presidential candidacy on 16 November 2016, he was immediately cheered and joined by several prominent 'provincial' figures of Parti Socialiste, such as deputy from Brittany Richard Ferrand, mayor of Lyon Gérard Collomb, senator from Cantal Jacques Mézard, senator from Burgundy François Patriat or deputy and mayor of Forcalquier Christophe Castaner. Indeed, it is through his insertion in Socialist parliamentary networks that Emmanuel Macron constituted his own 'primitive political capital' (Lefebvre 2019, 229). It is within these circles that Macron collected the necessary symbolic and institutional support to launch his candidacy. This explains why, according to Rémi Lefebvre, 'Macronism', in its initial shape, can be interpreted as a 'mutation' of the Socialist Party, a new political amalgamation which served to reconvert and 'recycle' a section of its elites (Lefebvre 2019).

Nevertheless, this proximity was not immediately reflected in the rhetoric of En Marche !, which was articulated around the idea that the Left/Right cleavage had become a senseless relic of the *ancien monde* ('old world'). Once again, there was undeniably a form of populism in the genesis of the party, a willingness to oppose the broad masses – and particularly the meriting 'middle-classes' – to the political class from the ranks of both the traditional Left and the Right (Rouban 2018, 87-88). For Alistair Cole (2019, 63), the movement's positioning bears similarities with the Union pour la Nouvelle République (UNR), founded in 1958 to succeed to Charles de Gaulle's Rassemblement du Peuple Français (RPF). Like UNR,

En Marche was framing itself as both cross-party – picking the best talents – and anti-party – accusing parties of being self-serving and undermining governmental authority.

But there is once again a contradiction in this critique of existing parties and their purported inability to speak to their citizenry. Unlike his opponents on the radical Left and Right, Emmanuel Macron never promised significant institutional reforms aimed at filling the gap between the people and its institutions. Macron never envisaged a clear constitutional break with the Fifth Republic. On the contrary, he would embrace all the ceremonials and the prerogatives of executive pre-eminence, from the very beginning of his *quinquennat* onwards (see Chapter VII). This full embrace of the Fifth Republic institutional logic notwithstanding, the ethos which En Marche pretended to incarnate was one of 'renewal' and 'disruption', with a managerial and entrepreneurial discourse stemming from the universe of start-ups. Indeed, the prospect of France becoming a 'start-up nation' – that Macron formulated as Minister of the Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs after his 2015 visit to Israel and his attendance to the 2016 *Consumer Electronic Show* in Las Vegas – quickly became part of En Marche's 'transgressive' propaganda (Quijoux and Saint-Martin 2020, 17). A decade after the global financial crisis, the start-up narrative was aimed at legitimising the '*nouveau monde'* which En Marche supporters intended to create. The glorification of entrepreneurial values and its seemingly grassroots character can thus be analysed as a tentative reframing of elements of a neoliberal doctrine and language that had already been largely delegitimised (Quijoux and Saint-Martin 2020, 20).

Therefore, Emmanuel Macron placed considerable attention on translating this supposedly disruptive doctrine into words, messages and web campaigns. As Minister of the Economy, Macron's communication was already centered around social media – Facebook, Twitter,

Instagram and Snapchat – which he used abundantly to value and expose his action, prefiguring his intense use of TikTok in the second half of his term. Yet, beyond the image of 'modernity' that was projected through the use of these platforms (Leroux and Riutort 2019, 57), the Minister's self-promotion was meticulously controlled.

Indeed, Emmanuel Macron and his partisans conceptualised a form of 'direct' communication, a strategy of maximal exposure that excused the candidate Macron from the potentially negative intermediation of journalists. Thus, the constructed image of a young candidate, attuned with social media and well-aware of the need for new strategies of communication, formed the backbone of the nascent project of 'start-up nation' that was being proposed (Cazeres 2017). The creation of *En Marche!* was a formidable enterprise of advertisement and branding, with an explicit discursive rupture with the so-called *ancien monde* ('old world') (Siraud and Wesfreid 2017). The branding endeavor of Macron's supporters and communication advisors demonstrated a willingness to position the candidate as a newcomer in the political competition arena by projecting an outdated image of his adversaries, the fossilised traditional parties (Fretel 2019, 57).

Figure 2: The initial *En Marche !* logo (April 16), handwritten by Emmanuel Macron.

Graphically, the initial *En Marche!* logo confirmed the rupture with traditional party semantics: both the handwritten sentence and the signature of Emmanuel Macron placed the movement at odds with the more austere logos of his presidential competitors. Besides, the fact that the movement adopted the same initials as its founder (EM!) substantiated the personalist approach taken by Emmanuel Macron. Despite the use of semantics related to participative democracy and to the Habermasian notion of 'deliberation' in an article that he published in the centre-left journal *Esprit* at the beginning of François Hollande's term (Macron 2011), this personalisation thus failed to conceal Macron's rather vertical, oligarchic and elitist approach to public affairs

With its imperious exclamation mark, the injunction '*En Marche*!' is reminiscent of the martial admonition featured in the chorus of *La Marseillaise* ('*Marchons !*') and undeniably seeks to provide an ethos of movement and dynamism to the organisation. Semantic novelties were listed in the movement's organisation and organigram as well: members from *En Marche!* are not adherents or partisans, they are '*marcheurs*' ('walkers'). Following the start-up ethos, neologisms and anglicisms were used en masse: *marcheurs* are gathered in '*teams*' who, under the guidance of '*helpers*', do practice '*team building*' in order to rationalise the instructions sent to them by the '*staff*' from the national headquarters (Fretel 2019, 66). The introduction of this new language and the manufacturing of novel keywords have directly contributed to the institutionalisation of *En Marche!* and to its relatively efficient distancing from traditional political parties, at least with regards to semantics. They soon were borrowed by journalists and editorialists and enriched the lexicon of the neoliberal *lingua franca* (see Chapter III). Yet, this claimed distance from traditional parties lacked clarity from a programmatic standpoint, as the *En Marche!* manifesto came out late and Macron's teams remained elusive and vacuous for the largest bulk of the campaign.

Furthermore, the populist claim to represent novelty in the face of a corrupted and ageing political class was morphed into new marketing techniques, corporate-inspired counseling and principles and methods imported from the world of management firms, with a clearly claimed start-up ethos. Indeed, most of Emmanuel Macron advisors graduated from (private and elite) business schools, such as HEC or ESSEC and (public and elite) *grandes écoles*, such as Sciences Po Paris, ENA or Polytechnique. They are therefore perfectly attuned to the tenets of 'new public management' and to communication techniques associated with its promotion. They have thus provided the candidate Macron with lexical and graphic solutions in order to adapt his image and political endeavor to the linguistic and semiotic norms of corporate culture.

Applying the rules of merchandising to the world of politics, Macron's communicants strove to create a 'disruptive' brand whose name had to meet three main objectives. A former executive at the French multinational advertising and public relations company Havas, Adrien Taquet invented the *En Marche!* name and logo and later became an MP for Macron's party in 2017. He argued that the name of the movement had to reflect: 'differentiation; disintermediation and risk-taking' (Fretel 2019, 61). For Gilles Finchelstein, the CEO of the purportedly Left-leaning Fondation Jean Jaurès – a close friend of Emmanuel Macron who is also involved with Havas – the strength of the former Minister of the Economy has been to position himself in 'a strategy of supply, and not a strategy of demand' (Cornudet and Pogam 2017).

From the very beginning, the activists of EM! therefore promoted an image and cultivated a discourse of opposition with the traditional conception of the political 'party' in order to fully embrace the more fluid dynamics of the 'movement'. Although similar attempts had been

conducted by traditional political leaders beforehand – Nicolas Sarkozy's rebranding of *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* as *Les Républicains* in 2015, or Jean-Luc Mélenchon's rebranding *Le Front de Gauche* as *La France Insoumise* in 2016 – the invention of *En Marche !* has been notably efficient in its stretching of the metaphor of movement, dynamism, or 'revolution', while presenting the Macronite adventure as one devoid of ideology, bias, cleavages and polarities (Fretel 2019, 62).

Emmanuel Macron said it himself in April 2016 during the foundational meeting in his home-town of Amiens: '*En Marche ! n'est pas un parti mais une dynamique*' ('En Marche! is not a party, it is a dynamic'). To sustain this dynamic, Emmanuel Macron's endeavor was characterised by a strong digital positioning. In order to 'break the codes' of the traditional parties, being a member of *En Marche!* just required a few clicks and was made completely free of charge. Unlike PS, LR or even FN, there were no dues to the party for members of En Marche. From the outset, Emmanuel Macron's movement developed a claim to horizontality, a promise which certainly had a boomerang effect, particularly with the *Gilets Jaunes* movement that was formed partly as a reaction to the superficiality of the start-up inspired horizontality praised by Macron's supporters (see Chapter IX). The mainstream press, however, was warmly welcoming the audacity of Emmanuel Macron's endeavour.

In the exceedingly unified sociological field that forms the French *éditocratie* (see Chapter III), Emmanuel Macron garnered curiosity and even admiration, and a lot of energy was devoted to introduce and legitimise the candidate to the readers and viewers, and later on, to have him elected. In particular, various weekly magazines – *L'Obs, Le Point, Paris Match,*

L'Express, Challenges[47] – dedicated a lot of front pages to Emmanuel Macron as soon as he became Minister of the Economy back in 2014, although a neat acceleration can be noted after his August 2016 resignation. The trend is noticeable with celebrity news outlets such as *Paris Match* – a weekly magazine that sells almost 700,000 units – that dedicated its front page to Emmanuel Macron as soon as the party was created in April 2016, a first stone in a long series of laudatory covers.[48]

Faithful to its traditional efforts to spot any emerging figure that would 'disrupt' sometimes dreary electoral campaigns, the press was naturally pleased by Macron's candidacy. Although they were sometimes ironic or doubtful, front titles were clearly aimed at giving credibility and at legitimising Macron's nascent enterprise. Beyond front-pages, individual journalists have openly declared their admiration and publicly expressed the hopes they placed in Macron's presidential candidacy. Jean Quatremer, who writes about European affairs for *Libération* since 1990, made a literal declaration of love on Twitter (15 March 2017): '*Pour la première fois de ma vie, je viens de faire un don à un parti politique, en l'occurrence En Marche*' ('I have just made a donation to a political party for the first time in my life, it was to *En Marche*', my translation). He would later explain on Facebook that he pledged allegiance

[47] One of the editorialists from *Challenges*, Bruno Roger Petit, would later leave the weekly business-oriented magazine to become spokesperson of the Presidency at the Élysée Palace in September, 2017 (Le Point 2017a).

[48] The interest paid by the *presse people* ('celebrity press') is directly related to the breadth of Macron's networks. Following Xavier Niel's advice, the Macrons work with Bestimage, an important photography agency created by the co-founder of the website *Purepeople*, gossip-provoking and ex-con Michèle ('Mimi') Marchand, who strove to impose a transgressive narrative about the Macrons (Benilde 2017). Michèle Marchand is a controversial character, with a colourful life journey. The influential businesswoman was first a mechanic, before becoming a night-club manager and finally creating her own website and photo agency. Before founding Bestimage, her love affair with a radical-left bank robber led her straight to prison in 1994, after she was arrested while driving a truck packed with cannabis. She is now a successful gutter press tycoon, in a long-term relationship with a policeman, and cultivates a faithful friendship with the Macron couple (Lecadre 2018). A few months later, Emmanuel Macron would choose XO Editions to publish his campaign book entitled *Révolution* (2016), an audacious pick, as it were, as XO is the publisher of the 'stars', with personalities as diverse as Gérard Depardieu, Max Gallo, Guillaume Musso, Christine Ockrent, Muriel Robin, Patrick Sebastien, Michel Sardou, Elizabeth Teissier, among other prominent figures of 'the arts and letters'…

to Macron because he was ready 'to do everything he could to counter the triumph of fascism' in his country (Fontenelle et. al 2018, 75).

Brice Couturier, a former Socialist Party supporter who intervenes every day on public radio *France Culture,* is also part of the fervent converts. His hagiographic book, *Macron, un président philosophe* (2017), alongside his repeated love statements for the new president on radio, made him one of Emmanuel Macron's most vibrant defenders. Christophe Barbier, editorial director at *L'Express* and mainstay of superficial debates on 24 hours/7 TV channels, is a fierce worshiper as well. On 28 April 2017, three days after the first round of the election, he shared his enthusiasm in *L'Express*: '*Emmanuel Macron incarne déjà la plus incroyable aventure de la Vème République (…) Nous avons été témoins de la consécration d'un enfant du siècle. (…) Il faut voter Emmanuel Macron*' ('Emmanuel Macron already embodies the most formidable adventure of the Fifth Republic (…) We have been witnessing the triumph of the child of the century (…) We must vote for Emmanuel Macron') (Barbier 2017). It would be difficult for an endorsement to be made clearer.

Christophe Barbier's fellow Laurent Joffrin, chief editor at *Libération* – the centre-left newspaper co-created by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1973 – adopted a similar discourse on the very same day: '*La République, les choses étant ce qu'elles sont, c'est le vote anti-Le Pen. C'est donc le vote Macron*' ('To support the Republic, as things stand, is to vote against Le Pen. It therefore means voting for Macron') (Joffrin 2017). QED, and *Libération's* front page on May 6-7 thus unequivocally enjoined: '*Faites ce que vous voulez mais votez Macron.*' ('Do as you please, but vote for Macron'). The list of editorialists and pundits who explicitly endorsed the candidate Macron is very long and includes a multitude of other media figure such as

Arnaud Le Parmentier (*Le Monde*), Franz-Olivier Giesbert (*Le Point*, then *La Provence*), Romain Goupil (former May 68 leader who intervenes regularly on LCI and France 2), etc.

But media advocacy went beyond those written or oral soliloquys in the press on a regular basis. Tycoons, shareholders, eminent patrons and CEOs also intervened in favour of the candidate in the media, precisely because they control most of them. Indeed, media convergence and concentration – i.e. the growth of media conglomerates involved in various types of media outlets – has been a defining feature of twenty-first century France (Kuhn 2011; Badillo et. al 2016).

Thus, the richest French citizen, LVMH chairman and chief executive Bernard Arnault, unapologetically endorsed Macron during the presidential election. The multi-billionaire – the world's richest person in 2021 (Forbes 2021) – wrote a tribune on 5 May 2017 in *Les Echos* – a newspaper he owns – which was entitled *Pourquoi je vote Emmanuel Macron* ('Why I will vote for Emmanuel Macron'). Without mentioning the fact that he would greatly benefit from Emmanuel Macron's massive tax cuts a few months later, the magnate argued:

> … le programme d'Emmanuel Macron est bâti sur la conviction que l'entreprise privée constitue le seul levier efficace de création durable, saine et massive d'emplois en France. Cette conviction fondatrice, je la partage sans ambiguïté. [49]

It should come as no surprise that such eminent *haute finance* figures would endorse the former Rothschild investment banker in the press. In France, the vast majority of press organs are owned by billionaires.

[49] '… Emmanuel Macron's programme reflects the conviction that private enterprise is the only efficient lever for massive, lasting and sound job creation in France. I share this guiding conviction without any ambiguity' (my translation).

Bernard Arnault, for instance, owns both *Le Parisien* and *Les Echos* – around 200,000 and 120,000 copies a day respectively – as well as the radio channel *Radio Classique*. Yet, as judiciously noted by Michel and Monique Pinçon-Charlot (2019, 89), his influence goes further, as the advertising revenues from LVMH play an important role in the financing of other newspapers and magazines. On a more anecdotal note, the first lady Brigitte Macron is officially dressed by Louis Vuitton (Assor 2017). In fact, she happened to be teaching Bernard Arnault's sons at the very select Franklin private high school in the Sixteenth Arrondissement of Paris, before becoming friend with Bernard Arnault's daughter Delphine, herself married with another businessman and media magnate, Xavier Niel. This latter is a shareholder of *Le Monde* – the French '*journal de reference*' printed at around 300,000 copies every day – and of the centre-left weekly magazines *Télérama, L'Obs* and *Courrier International*. It was during the inaugural ceremony of his friend Xavier Niel's 'Station F' – a new business incubator for start-ups built in La Halle Freyssinet, a former train station on the Left bank of the Seine – that Emmanuel Macron mentioned the infamous distinction that could be made in train stations between the people 'who succeed' and those 'who are nothing' (Bauduin 2017).

Among other French media tycoons, one could cite Patrick Drahi, who partially controls *Libération, L'Express* and the 24hour/7 TV station BFMTV. In France, a scarcely limited number of national and widely-circulating press titles remain independent from financial tycoons. Notable exceptions include the Communist newspaper *L'Humanité*, the Catholic newspaper *La Croix*, the weekly satirical *Le Canard Enchaîné* and the critical monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique*. When it comes to TV – especially 24 hours/7 news channels – besides Patrick Drahi who partly owns BFMTV, the rest of the market is shared between billionaires Vincent Bolloré – Canal +, CNEWS, CStar – and Martin Bouygues, who owns TF1, LCI and

TMC. It is thus on this oligarchic and oligopolistic media terrain that the neoliberal 'war of position' takes place in France.

To put it bluntly and despite his claim to the contrary, Emmanuel Macron quickly became the darling of the media. His pro-European, Atlanticist and liberal discourse represented the apt synthesis of the editorials of *Le Monde, Libération, L'Obs* and *L'Express* together. This media craze accounted in large part for the dazzling speed with which Emmanuel Macron built his political career and stamina. Despite a very traditional elitist journey – Sciences Po Paris, Ecole Nationale d'Administration, Inspection Générale des Finances, Rothschild & Co – the rapid accumulation of substantive political capital in the media distinguished him from his competitors, whose careers were slow-built after sometimes decades of mostly invisible local or parliamentary work and scarce media appearances. It is on this symbolic capital that Emmanuel Macron built in order to impose a 'disruptive' style of narrative, in spite of a conventional bourgeois upbringing and development and a political programme that remained vague throughout the campaign and loudly resonated with the protection of the status quo.

Throughout his 'radiant' career, Emmanuel Macron became well-inserted in the public/private or the 'state-industry-finance nexus' (Clift and McDaniel 2019) at the heart of the French managing classes. His proximity with important figures from both public and private circles – in media, politics, industry, finance, culture – proves that his chosen habitat is that of the propertied, the wealthy and the celebrities, as was the case of Sarkozy before him.[50] Yet, his chameleon-like behaviour and ambiguous positioning allowed him to be

[50] Throughout his long political career, Nicolas Sarkozy did not hide his 'unashamed desire to enrich himself and move in monnied circles' (Hewlett 2007, 410). As soon as he got elected in 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy was photographed vacationing aboard his billionnaire friend and conservative media mogul Vincent Bolloré's yaght, a few days after a much-criticised party-night with many show-business guests in the brasserie *Fouquet's* on the Champs Élysées. In public policy terms, this personal inclination was translated in his government's fiscal reforms, notably *bouclier fiscal* ('fiscal shield'), a

perceived as a rule-breaker from below, a kind of Rastignac of the twenty-first century who left his province to meet recognition in Paris.[51]

Against this background, what can be said about the balance of political forces at the turn of the year 2017? What competitors was Macron faced with? In what shape were the parties from the Left and Right, and how strong were the 'anti-system' forces at both ends of the spectrum? What were the main political dynamics that led up to the 2017 presidential election?

The 2017 Presidential Election

The Balance of Political Forces

For the Right, the electoral year 2017 promised to be a vengeful one. The defunct UMP – which was rebranded as *Les Républicains* (LR) on Nicolas Sarkozy's initiative in 2015 – had been experiencing five years in opposition against François Hollande, as well as a few episodes of severe internal frictions that culminated with the embarrassing duel between François Fillon and Jean-François Copé for ravishing the presidency of the party in 2012, an internal vote that was marred by obvious electoral fraud, bad faith and opportunism on both sides. In spite of all this, the party had regained vigour thanks to its alliance with *La Manif pour tous*, the social movement which formed in opposition to the Loi Taubira that legalised gay marriage and adoption in 2013. This was an opportunity for Les Républicains to attract a younger generation of militants that was more conservative socially and closer to the Catholic Church than the typical Sarkozy supporter.

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system of tax reduction for wealthy capital holders, whose scope nevertheless pales in comparison to the much more comprehensive fiscal packages passed under Emmanuel Macron (see Chapter VII).

[51] Eugène de Rastignac was a pushy and cunning protagonist in several of Honoré de Balzac's novels, whose personality is often compared to that of Julien Sorel, the main character in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et Le Noir,* a novel that is prominently featured on Emmanuel Macron's desk in his official presidential photograph, alongside de Gaulle's memoirs (see Appendix 3 and Chapter VII).

As party membership was rising again, the strength of the neo-republican party was further reinforced throughout the year 2016, when François Hollande reached his nadir of unpopularity in opinion polls. As Hollande slipped towards the abyss, the mainstream Right began its recovery from the two *anni horibili* that had followed the defeats of May and June 2012 (Knapp 2018, 560) and won a few intermediate elections – the mayoral elections in 2014 and the regional elections in 2015.

In order to contain the internal tensions within the party, which notably manifested themselves in the creation of sub-sections – *La Droite Forte, La Droite Populaire, La Droite Sociale* – the solution was to designate the candidate in the 2017 presidential election through open primaries. Indeed, it was acknowledged that the experiment of open primaries had united the Socialist camp in 2011 and had reinforced the PS in the run off to the 2012 election, after the victory of François Hollande against Martine Aubry. As far as LR was concerned, two candidates commanded two-thirds of voting intentions in the first half of 2016: former President and leader of LR Nicolas Sarkozy and former Prime Minister Alain Juppé. Former Prime Minister François Fillon, who was the 'underdog' alongside Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, Bruno Le Maire, Jean-Frédéric Poisson and Jean-François Copé, had suffered badly from the bruising contest with Copé for the party presidency in 2012. Henceforth he began to abandon his earlier 'social Gaullist' stance and repositioned himself as a firm conservative, with a programme of economic rupture and an ostensible Catholicism which rallied the most societally regressive strata of LR who had mobilised against gay marriage and adoption a few years prior and had coalesced in the political group *Sens Commun* ('common sense').

Convinced that Fillon was no real challenger, Sarkozy and Juppé spent most of the campaign attacking one another. Yet, quite unexpectedly, Nicolas Sarkozy did not qualify for the second round and it was ultimately François Fillon who was nominated to be the official candidate of LR and its centrist ally UDI on 27 November 2016, thanks to his two-thirds majority in the second round against Alain Juppé (66.49 per cent against 33.51 per cent). In December 2016, it seemed that the LR primary was a resounding success, as it attracted both media attention in four televised debates and some 9 per cent of all registered voters had taken part in the election, that ultimately produced a clear and uncontestable result. Yet, the primary had attracted far more well-off retired voters than ordinary wage earners (Knapp 2018, 563-566). This could potentially account for the radicalisation of the base in favor of François Fillon, a choice that would nevertheless prove poisonous in the weeks ahead.

The party finding itself in the grimmer situation in the run-off to the presidential election was without a doubt Parti Socialiste. On the first day of December 2016, François Hollande announced on TV that he decided not to run for a second mandate, a first in the history of the Fifth Republic. Plagued by a long-lasting unpopularity as well as compromising confessions shared with *Le Monde* journalists Gérard Davet and Fabrice Lhomme which were largely publicised (2016), François Hollande realised that his chances of winning the electoral contest were close to non-existent. This opened a window of opportunity for ambitious PS personalities to make some bold moves in perspective of the party's open primaries, that were to be organised on 22 and 29 January 2017.

Once again, the Hollande presidency had underlined irreparable lines of fracture within the Party as early as 2013, when the Ecology Minister Delphine Batto was forced to give up her portfolio after publicly criticising cuts to her ministry's budget. The 2012 alliance made

between PS and Europe Ecologie Les Verts (EELV) was disbanded one year later, with the resignation of EELV representatives in government Cécile Duflot and Pascal Canfin. Indeed, the replacement of Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault with Manuel Valls in 2014 shifted the tone of the presidency towards the Right, creating tensions that culminated in August of the same year with the collective exit of Ministers Arnaud Montebourg, Aurélie Filipetti and Benoît Hamon, respectively responsible for the economy, culture and education (Raymond 2017, 418).

On January 29, Benoît Hamon (58.69 per cent) won the second round of the PS primary against Manuel Valls (41.31 per cent), affirming a temporary victory of the demand-side Left over the securitisation and supply side economics programme proposed by Valls and the reformists. The figure of Hamon thus represented a clear break with the Hollande-Valls period, having been eased out of his post of Minister of Education in 2014 and having placed himself in clear opposition to the majority government (Hewlett 2017, 385). Yet, Benoît Hamon's candidacy was weakened from the very beginning, as his line did not align with the *ligne majoritaire* ('main current') of the PS and his nomination was very coldly received by PS *éléphants* (the older, almost exclusively male clique that ruled the party). Many of them ended up betraying Hamon along the course of the presidential campaign (see Chapter IV), or not expressing any support for his candidacy (National Assembly president Claude Bartolone, PS First Secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis or President François Hollande). The outcome of both open primaries was thus the nomination of 'radicalised' candidates for both LR and PS. This mirrored polarising opened up a political space in the centre in which Emmanuel Macron skilfully created the ideal conditions for an ambitious partisan realignment (Lefebvre 2019).

Indeed, the defeat of Emmanuel Macron's most serious competitors – i.e. those who pretended to incarnate the 'centrist' strand of their respective political parties, Alain Juppé for LR and Manuel Valls for PS – left the political 'centre' to Macron and his allies (Durovic 2019, 1490). The primaries therefore had paradoxical effects. They were designed to unite parties, but they divided further both PS and LR by shedding light on the parties' lack of ideological cohesion and their diminishing fit with the constituencies they purported to represent (Raymond 2017, 419). Despite François Fillon's and Benoît Hamon's indisputable victories, the two candidates never succeeded in fully bringing their respective formations together in support of their candidacies (Kuhn 2018, 486). Indeed, their policy programmes proved too divisive within their own ranks.

The economic propositions of Benoît Hamon – who was advised, among others, by economist Thomas Piketty – included implementing a tax on financial transactions, creating a European minimum wage and mutualising debts at the EU level, while opening up the door for the *revenu universel* ('universal income'). After François Hollande's decidedly neoliberal quinquennat, this policy programme sounded like that of an emerging political party on the Left, and certainly did not abide by the cautious standards of Parti Socialiste. From the very beginning, the most neoliberal factions within PS abstained from endorsing Hamon's candidacy, before finally joining Macron when the defeat of the PS was acted in the polls.

François Fillon's programme, on the other hand, was resolutely Thatcherite. Primarily aimed at reducing budgetary deficit, it promised to set the retirement age at 65, to raise VAT and to undertake a massive labour law reform that would lead to the abolition of the 35-hours work week. Although members of Les Républicains considered Fillon to be a serious candidate, worries were raised regarding the austere brutality of his economic programme. Already, the

most moderate factions within LR were leery of Emmanuel Macron, whose policy programme was, at the time, considered more incremental and whose persona was perceived to be more pragmatic and less confrontational.

Perhaps paradoxically, this 'radicalisation' of PS and LR policy programme and ideological positioning favored the entry of new political movements such as En Marche and La France Insoumise (LFI), headed by former Socialist grandee Jean-Luc Mélenchon, whose popularity increased after the rather successful campaign but ultimately disappointing 11.11 per cent he garnered in the 2012 presidential election. In large part thanks to a carefully constructed image of verve but also erudition, Mélenchon's candidacy was slowly gaining traction in the months prior to the election, especially among young voters. The LFI programme entailed curtailing the power of the banks and the improvement of working conditions by reducing the length of the working week, increasing employees' control over their work environment and imposing financial penalties on companies seeking to make employees redundant. Mélenchon's programme thus promised the creation of 3.5 million jobs and a raise of the minimum wage.

The two fronts where the LFI candidate was the most innovative were the institutions and Europe. Indeed, Mélenchon proposed to draft a new constitution for a Sixth Republic, which would notably entail the creation of a constituent assembly whose members would be nominated by election or casting lots. His purported willingness to reform the institutions was shared with Benoît Hamon, who also advocated for the drafting of a new constitution for the Sixth Republic. Regarding European unification, Mélenchon called for negotiations to take place in order to make the EU more democratic and less neoliberal (Hewlett 2017, 388),

going as far as to propose a 'Plan B' if the negotiations failed, an alternative method that required France to unilaterally exit the existing treaties.

Finally, Marine Le Pen and her party Front National (FN) were for a long time in a lead position in opinion polls, credited a few months before the election with around 26-27 per cent of vote share. This traction had the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy, actively sustained by the media and poll companies, and this had the consequence of leading the other four 'major' candidates – François Fillon, Emmanuel Macron, Benoît Hamon and Jean-Luc Mélenchon – to effectively compete against each other to fill what was perceived as the remaining slot against Le Pen in the second round of the election (Kuhn 2018, 488). With the help of her organic intellectual Florian Philippot, Le Pen had adopted a very sovereigntist rhetoric that castigated the European Union – which, in her opinion, was guilty of condoning illegal immigration – and especially the Euro, which, she argued, allowed competition from other EU states to have a deleterious effect on French companies. This was accompanied with a critique of *mondialisation sauvage* ('wild globalisation') and the various threats occasioned by free trade frameworks in terms of unfair competition and 'uncontrolled' immigration.

However, Le Pen's economic programme remained rather opaque and confusing, with a mix of neoliberal and state interventionist policies designed to appeal variously to a disillusioned working-class electorate as well as to the world of business. What transpired from most of her arguments was the rejection of a political system that had been monopolised for decades by the traditional, governmental Right and Left, which she used to ironically dub 'UMPS' to signify the inter-changeableness of their economic and social policies. Although the FN could rejoice at some episodic electoral breakthroughs during the Hollande presidency, the party still suffered from a deficit of credibility, and the inconsistent positioning of Marine Le Pen

were oftentimes deemed erratic or even amateurish. Nevertheless, Le Pen had been able for a couple of years to impose a certain narrative in the media, with various press outlets and pollsters presenting her as 'the first opponent to François Hollande'.

The balance of forces in the run-up to the presidential campaign can thus be described as follows: a revengeful but divided traditional Right, a weak and divided traditional Left, and three political formations at the far-left (LFI), the far-right (FN) and the centre (EM) sharing the ambition to shake the existing partisan equilibrium.

The 2017 Presidential Election Campaign

The context of the 2017 presidential election was a martial one, with stringent anti-terrorism measures at home and abroad. In metropolitan France, the series of terrorist attacks (Charlie Hebdo and Hyper Cacher massacres in January 2015, Paris and Saint-Denis attacks in November 2015 and the Nice attack in July 2016) led to the deployment of Opération Sentinelle, with 10,000 regular soldiers patrolling the streets of Paris and other French cities (see also Chapter IX). The declared and extended states of emergency blurred the distinction between war and policing, endowing front-line police with a heightened sense of impunity in policing non-white inhabitants and Muslims, but also dissent in all its forms (students and labour organisers, strikes and *Nuit Debout* actions). Furthermore, terrorist threats have a transnational dimension in the French context. As Stefan Kipfer (2017a) aptly put it, transnational terrorism 'attests to a geopolitical reason that links social spaces in Europe to territories off the continent', creating a 'geopolitical continuum of security threats' that

coincides with the now conflicted territories associated with French colonial history, first and foremost Mali.[52]

Remarkably, the 2017 electoral campaign was mostly run on socio-economic issues and France's place within the EU. While the topic of European integration was on the whole traditionally absent or under-discussed in French political debate – a neglect that is reflected in the generally poor participation rates in European elections – it became an important line of fracture during the 2017 campaign. The debate on that issue was mostly structured by three candidates: the pro-European Macron, and Mélenchon and Le Pen who adopted a critical stance towards the EU (Durovic 2019, 1491). Indeed, the presidential election campaign produced new types of symbolic positioning in terms of boundaries, borders and spaces. Thus, Marine Le Pen described the battle being fought as one between 'globalists' and 'patriots', while Macron identified a combat between 'progressives' and 'nationalists' (Cole 2019, 63).

[52] The Mali war is an ongoing armed conflict that started in January 2012, when several insurgent groups – the Tuareg rebellion, initially allied to Islamist groups such as Ansar Dine, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa – took control of Northern Mali and renamed it Azawad. The central government in Bamako, weakened and delegitimised by a coup d'état in March, was unable to fight back against the rebels and asked for foreign military help to re-take the North. In response, the French military launched Opération Serval in January 2013 and led a series of airstrikes that quickly stopped Islamist columns heading towards Southern Mali. In the following weeks, the French and Malian forces recaptured the cities under jihadist control such as Douentza, Gao and Timbuktu. Yet, what was initially a clearly defined, successful and rather popular operation turned into a prolonged conflict, with months of guerilla phase and the establishment of the UN peacekeeping operation in Mali (MINUSMA). In August 2014, France started Opération Barkhane, in coordination with five Sahel countries that used to be French colonies: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger (the so-called 'G5 Sahel'), in order to consolidate Opération Serval (Mali) and Opération Épervier (Chad). Despite a continuous French presence since 2013, the conflict spread to Niger and Burkina Faso (in the *région des trois frontières*, Liptako-Gourma region) and violence in the three countries has increased since 2017. The killing in action of Chad's dictator and old friend of Paris Idriss Déby in April 2021, the Malian coup d'état fomented by Assimi Goïta and his junta in May 2021, the prolonged involvement of the Russian mercenaries' Wagner Group in Mali and growing tensions with Bamako and Ouagadougou forced Emmanuel Macron to announce the end of the Barkhane operation in June 2021 and the withdrawal of the about 5,000 French troops started in March 2022.

Throughout the fall and winter months, Emmanuel Macron pursued his ascension. His first large meeting held on 10 December 2016 was a large success and surprised the press. In January 2017, opinion polls credited him with 18 per cent of voting intentions. To reiterate, one of the achievements as well as a paradox of the campaign was the way in which Macron reinvented himself as a 'transgressor' and presented himself as an anti-establishment figure, in spite of a cv that included an elite background in civil service and as a merchant banker with Rothschild, before becoming the main advisor of François Hollande and Minister of the Economy (Kuhn 2018; Endeweld 2015). Thus, *En Marche!* presented itself as vigorously 'anti-party', as a movement transcending Left and Right which relied more on marketing techniques – broadcasted via social media –, on co-creation in public policy – the so-called 'presidential platform' that encouraged suggestions from EM members – and on civic and political mobilisation. EM portrayed itself as novel, with a much-declared spirit of 'deliberation' channeled with the help of the *marcheurs* (Cole 2018, 508).

Emmanuel Macron's declared voluntarism was also reflected in his campaign semantics and metaphors. This involved the intense mobilisation of audiovisual and haptic verbs in Macron's speeches, especially before his election (Stroebel 2019).[53] The sudden decrease in these verbs right after the election signified that they were mainly used to seduce the voters, as audiovisual verbs create a feeling of interaction or connectivity with the audience, while haptic verbs – such as *donner* (to give), *prendre* (to take) or *porter* (to carry), which all bear a repertory of tactile and kinesthetic sensations – evoke electoral gift, or the implementation of political visions. In this respect, the choice of naming the movement *En Marche !* is not neutral either and suggests a path of vigour and determination (Stroebel 2019, 138-39). One

[53] Liane Stroebel (2019) studied the use by Macron of what she calls 'sensorimotor-based concepts' (SBCs), a variation of political metaphors frequently used in political discourse that effectively activates mental images and that frames and influences people's beliefs, attitudes and values.

specific keyword abundantly employed by the candidate deserves attention: the lexeme *projet* ('project') was used nearly 500 times in the campaign corpus, often co-occurred with the verb *porter* ('to carry'). The invocation of a corporate feeling in the sentence *porter un projet* is crystal clear, as the alleged participatory character of start-ups encourages the whole *team* to jointly 'carry a project'. With a few exceptions, one can observe a significant drop in the use of SBCs after Emmanuel Macron's election. Once elected, the candidate changed his linguistic strategy from persuading to governing (Stroebel 2019, 141). The rhetoric of democratic inclusion and participation reached its limits at the gates of state institutions (see also Chapter VII).

Beyond the 'novelty' brought about by Macron's candidacy, what durably marked the campaign and shook the balance of political forces was the 'Affaire Fillon'. Indeed, the satirical weekly paper *Le Canard Enchaîné* revealed on 25 January 2017 a financial affair that torpedoed François Fillon's electoral ambitions. It was disclosed that Fillon, who had been an MP since 1981, had employed his wife on public funds as his parliamentary assistant from 1998 to 2007. Penelope Fillon, who always was extremely distant from political life, had thus earned 500,000 euros throughout the period, but there was no significant proof that she had actually performed any work. Hours after the first of what would be a long series of *Canard Enchaîné* articles appeared, a preliminary inquiry was opened and François Fillon was then issued a summons on March 1, placing him under investigation for embezzlement of public funds. While Fillon ignored the media, public opinion and party pressure and refused to withdraw from the race, his public image was irreversibly damaged (Durovic 2019, 1491; Knapp 2018). Indeed, he lost his place of favorite in the polls and fell behind Macron, never regaining the second place before polling day on April 23.

This revelation was particularly uncomfortable for François Fillon, who placed integrity at the heart of his primary campaign, in a clear opposition to Nicolas Sarkozy's accumulation of legal pursuits.[54] Despite what was considered to be blatant hypocrisy in his posturing, Fillon refused to stand down. Instead, he went on to accuse François Hollande of organising a 'dirty tricks office' in the Élysée Palace and declared himself victim of a 'political assassination' (Knapp 2018, 568). On March 1, Fillon still refused to leave the electoral contest, a stubbornness which led many of his senior supporters to defect, including his campaign director Patrick Stefanini, as well as prominent members of Les Républicains who would soon join Emmanuel Macron, such as Thierry Solère, Bruno Le Maire, the UDI centrists, etc. With no party statuses or provisions for this type of situation and no Plan B available – Alain Juppé repeatedly rejected solicitations to step up – François Fillon was impossible to dislodge. He thus carried out an increasingly contested campaign, with a reduced team composed of the most socially conservative members of LR.

Further to the Right, Marine Le Pen's *Front National* seemed to be in a strong position, with an impressive recovery since she succeeded to her father Jean-Marie and took control of the party in January 2011. The FN's electoral progression was undeniable: since the 2014 European elections, the party collected more votes than both Les Républicains and Parti Socialiste, without however being able to win new strongholds. As Crépon et al. (2016, 16) point out, this progression is explained by *longue durée* factors (long-term high levels of unemployment, growing rejection of the governing elites and the traditional Left and Right representatives, refusal of the European integration project, fear of Islamism) and by conjunctural elements (the so-called 'refugee crisis' and the terrorist attacks of Paris and Nice

[54] On 28 August 2016, Fillon had cruelly declared in reference to Sarkozy's brushes with the law: '*Qui imagine un seul instant le général de Gaulle mis en examen?*' ('Who could ever imagine General de Gaulle being indicted?') (Le Figaro 2016)

in 2015-2016). Marine Le Pen's strategy of *dédiabolisation* ('de-demonisation') also greatly contributed to the increased respectability of her party, with a change of discourse aimed at ridding the FN of the labels of racism and anti-Semitism. Furthermore, Le Pen successfully closed the gender gap in relation to popular support to the party: unlike her father, she rallied many women behind her by playing on subtler gendered themes to soften her image.[55]

Turning to the moderate Left, Parti Socialiste found itself in a difficult situation as well. Indeed, various PS grandees – starting with former Prime Minister and defeated primary candidate Manuel Valls – gradually abandoned Benoît Hamon in favour of Emmanuel Macron. They usually did not say it outright, suggesting to voters that Emmanuel Macron was the safest bet to keep out both the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen and the candidate of the Right François Fillon from the second ballot (Hanley 2018, 523). A thorough enterprise of treachery and co-optation was at play during the campaign: after Manuel Valls, other Socialist figures followed suit to support En Marche, such as former President of the Assemblée Nationale Claude Bartolone, Minister of Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian, or former mayor of Paris Bertrand Delanoë. Faced with this wave of separatism, the PS threatened to evict the dissenters, but very few evictions were in effect pronounced, as the party could not afford to close the door so early to a hypothetical agreement with En Marche for the June 2017 legislative elections (Lefebvre 2019, 232-33).

Partisans of a conversion of social democracy into social liberalism did not find the PS to be the adequate political vessel to fulfill this purpose anymore. In particular, the younger

[55] For Dorit Geva (2018), Marine Le Pen played on three main gendered themes: (1) the political daughter who jointly carries the history of France and the history of her party (that had always been a 'family affair'); (2) the 'matriarchal avant-garde' (Geva 2018, 12), a women of the times who represents a symbol of the future; (3) the masculine values, exhibiting authority and even 'virility' with frequent references to Joan of Arc and the exaltation of national grandeur.

generation of PS cadres – Florian Bachelier, Jean-François Césarini, Guillaume Chiche, Stanislas Guérini, Benjamin Griveaux, who used to be close to Dominique Strauss-Kahn before his full disqualification following the 2011 New York Sofitel affair[56] – gradually recognised themselves in Emmanuel Macron's endeavour and openly expressed their support to En Marche (Lefebvre 2019, 232). As a result of what Benoît Hamon himself labelled a succession of 'treasons', a lot of PS voters realised that not much hope could be placed in Hamon's candidacy and turned to Jean-Luc Mélenchon instead, sensing that this latter would be the only candidate that could ensure a Left presence in the second round. Once Hamon started to dip in the polls and lose ground to Mélenchon, his candidacy never recovered: he was squeezed between the social liberalism of Macron to his right and the statist protectionism of Mélenchon to his left (Kuhn 2018, 488). Furthermore, Mélenchon's witty and authoritative performances during the two main televised debates strengthened his position as the challenger from the Left in the run-up to April 23.

Emmanuel Macron's candidacy gained tremendous momentum in late February 2017, when self-proclaimed centrist and head of Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem) François Bayrou chose to sign an alliance with En Marche. The centrist figure from Béarn, many times a minister in conservative governments and who had unsuccessfully stood in the 2002, 2007 and 2012 presidential elections, was credited with 4 to 5 per cent of voting intentions. Once the alliance

[56] In the spring of 2011, rumours were growing about the potential presidential bid of Dominique Strauss-Kahn ('DSK') – the managing director of the International Monetary Fund since 2007 and Lionel Jospin's former Minister of the Economy, Finance and Industry (1997-1999) – in the 2012 presidential election. A reformist figure in PS, Strauss-Kahn would still have had to go through the party's open primaries to become the official challenger to Nicolas Sarkozy. These plans shipwrecked on 14 May 2011, when Dominique Strauss-Kahn was arrested at John F. Kennedy International Airport, charged with the sexual assault and attempted rape of 32-year-old Nafissatou Diallo, a housekeeper at the Sofitel New York Hotel that Strauss-Kahn had left a few hours before. The highly publicised prosecution eventually resulted in a dismissal of all charges against Strauss-Khan, officially due to the inconsistencies of the accuser. DSK returned to France in September 2011, and as several other accusations of sexual misconduct were raised, including in front of the courts (i.e. the Lille's Carlton Hotel case), it became clear that his political and administrative career had come to an end.

was sealed, those 5 per cent automatically aggregated to Emmanuel Macron's opinion poll results. Three presidential elections on a row, François Bayrou carried the flag of the '*bloc bourgeois*' (Amable and Palombarini 2017), rallying the skilled and better-off segments of the Left and Right blocs by promoting European integration and advocating for orthodox economic policy and 'structural reforms'. In this respect, Emmanuel Macron was, at least in rhetoric, his worthy successor.

The dream of Les Gracques had become true: in lieu of an alliance between François Bayrou and the candidate of Parti Socialiste – as they hoped for in 2007 with Ségolène Royal – the leader of MoDem instead rallied a candidate who was even more openly social-liberal. This accord greatly increased the likelihood that Emmanuel Macron could reach the second ballot. In the context of François Fillon's destabilised campaign and Benoît Hamon's failure to get the support of his own party, the endorsement of François Bayrou created a large window of opportunity for Emmanuel Macron to claim a monopoly over the centre.

The Results

The 2017 presidential election campaign was singular in many respects. The circumstances were very adverse for the two candidates of the mainstream Left and Right: while Fillon's candidacy had been sullied with credible accusations of corruption, Benoît Hamon's campaign was polluted by the treacheries and betrayals from within Parti Socialiste. Both these developments strengthened the appeal of the three self-proclaimed 'anti-system' candidates: Marine Le Pen, Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Emmanuel Macron. For the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, four major candidates were likely to qualify for the second round: François Fillon (LR), Marine Le Pen (FN), Emmanuel Macron (EM) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon (FI). This revealed the deeply fragmented character of the political space and

announced a paradigmatic shift in the party competition in French politics (Durovic 2019, 1490). Below are the results of the first round of the presidential election, held on April 23.

Candidate	Votes	% Registered voters	% Votes cast
Emmanuel Macron	8 656 346	18.19	24.01
Marine Le Pen	7 678 491	16.14	21.30
François Fillon	7 212 995	15.16	20.01
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	7 059 951	14.84	19.58
Benoît Hamon	2 291 288	4.82	6.36
Nicolas Dupont-Aignan	1 695 000	3.56	4.70
Jean Lassalle	435 301	0.91	1.21
Philippe Poutou	394 505	0.83	1.09
François Asselineau	332 547	0.70	0.92
Nathalie Arthaud	232 384	0.49	0.64
Jacques Cheminade	65 586	0.14	0.18

Table 1: 2017 Presidential Election Results (First Round)
Source: Ministère de l'Intérieur

As Table 1 shows, Emmanuel Macron was the leading candidate on the evening of April 23, with a 24.01 per cent vote share, followed by Marine Le Pen, with a 21.30 per cent vote share. The traditional governmental parties (LR and PS) obtained 20.01 and 6.36 per cent respectively, which amounted to 26.29 per cent of first-round votes, down from 55.81 per cent in the 2012 presidential election. Jean-Luc Mélenchon achieved a breakthrough, with 19.58 per cent of the vote share, compared with 11.11 per cent in 2012. The abstention level for this first round reached 22.20 per cent, the second highest for the first round of a presidential election, while the amount of blank and null ballots amounted to respectively 1.78 and 0.78 per cent of the votes cast, for a total of 2.56 per cent of spoiled ballots (see Table 2).

	Numbers	% Registered Votes	% Votes Cast
Registered voters	47 582 183		
Abstentions	10 578 455	22.23	
Votes Cast	37 003 728	77.77	
Blank Votes	659 997	1.39	1.78
Invalid/Null Votes	289 337	0.61	0.78
Valid Votes	36 054 394	75.77	97.43

Table 2: Participation and Abstention in the 2017 Presidential Election (First Round)
Source: Ministère de l'Intérieur

For the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, the two traditional parties of the Left and Right were eliminated from the second round. Indeed, from 1958 to 2012, a mainstream right-wing candidate had reached the run-off of every French presidential election: this was not the case in 2017, as François Fillon's relatively mediocre percentage can attest. As in 2002, the Socialist Party candidate failed to qualify for the second round, surpassed once more by the Front National candidate. The two second-round contenders, Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen, were well-positioned in terms of the two key defining features of the 2017 campaign: the rejection of existing parties and a clear position in terms of the progressive/nationalist cluster of issues (Cole 2018, 512). This was reflected in the respective electoral support bases for both candidates: Macron leading in the metropolises – especially Lyon, Paris, Toulouse and Rennes – and Le Pen ahead in her relatively recent bastions in de-industrialised Northern and Eastern France, while maintaining satisfactory results in traditional, wealthier strongholds along the Mediterranean coast.

Indeed, the core of Le Pen's electorate now firmly resides in departments such as Nord, Pas-de-Calais, Ardennes and Somme, where coal mines and textile plants have closed and been replaced by Auchan grocery stores or Amazon plants. With the overrepresentation of low-skilled employees and manual workers, these districts used to be those where the Communist

Party obtained its best scores. Nationwide, 35 per cent of manual workers, 31 percent of unemployed people, 24 per cent of employees and 23 per cent of farmers voted for Marine Le Pen in the first round of the 2017 presidential election (Perrineau 2017, 265-266). At first sight, it could seem that the Front National had successfully reinvented itself as the party of *la France des oubliés de la mondialisation* ('the French forgotten by globalisation'), and that it had indeed, as Marine Le Pen pretended, become the primary recourse for a majority of the popular classes that was anxious about immigration and critical of the European Union. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to assume an electoral supremacy of the Front National when the primary behaviour of the popular classes vis-à-vis voting is now also characterised by what Alfred Hirschman called *exit* (1970). In addition to voting *en masse* for the far-right, the majority of the popular classes – confronted to the depoliticising logics and neoliberal policies of the traditional Left and Right for decades – simply abstain from voting all together.

Thus, the territories that voted the most for Marine Le Pen were also those with the highest abstention rates. De-industrialized Northern and Eastern parts of France – Hauts-de-France, Grand-Est – experienced the lowest voter turnout in 2017, alongside Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA) and Corsica (Baillieul and Dufreutelle 2017). Despite being the most followed and galvanising electoral contest of all, the 2017 French president election turnout was the lowest since 1969: the abstention rates for the first and second ballot were respectively of 22.20 per cent and 25.40 per cent (Muxel 2017, 157).[57] As Table 1 shows, once abstention and invalid ballots are taken into account, only 16.14 per cent of registered voters chose Marine Le Pen in the first round. The ominous message of defiance to the whole

[57] A scrutiny of abstention rates at every intermediary election since 2012 demonstrates that the presidential contest remains the preponderant and most followed electoral event in French politics. In comparison, for the first round of the 2014 municipal elections, 36.4 per cent of voters abstained, while they were 50 per cent to do so during the 2015 regional elections and 57.6 per cent for the 2014 European elections (Muxel 2017, 157).

political class was clear, and it came from the most socio-economically and territorially excluded sections of the population: manual workers (29 per cent), employees (29 per cent) and the unemployed (27 per cent) (Muxel 2017). One of the challenge in the two weeks separating the two ballots was therefore, for both Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen, to strive to mobilise stay-away voters for the second round of the election, on May 7.

On the night of the first round, Emmanuel Macron benefited from the quasi-automatic endorsement of François Fillon and Benoît Hamon, a proof that the programme of the former did not significantly differ from the one proposed by the candidate from En Marche, and for the latter, that the *Front Républicain* – 'republican front', i.e. the aggregation of votes from across the political spectrum in order to beat the Front National – was still a reflex among Parti Socialiste supporters. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, however, initially refused to give a voting instruction to his 7 million supporters, but he nevertheless claimed on April 28 that he would never vote for the FN. The same day, Marine Le Pen was strengthened by the rallying of Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, who scored 4.7 per cent in the first round with his sovereigntist party *Debout la France* (DLF, 'France Arise'), a further proof that her enterprise of *dédiabolisation* ('de-demonisation' or 'de-toxification') had enabled her to attract supporters and allies beyond her traditional far-right circles.

The alliance with Dupont-Aignan's party nevertheless imploded as soon as Le Pen lost the election, but proved the relative fluidity of the two electorates. Several figures on the fringes of the Right – Jacques Bompard, Christine Boutin, Christian Vanneste, Marie-France Garaud – rejoiced at Le Pen's accession to the second round and seized the opportunity to lend her their support. However, Le Pen failed to convince any significant member of Les Républicains to rally behind her for the second round, although many of them – Nadine Morano, Brice Hortefeux, *La Droite Populaire* members such as MPs Jacques Myard and

Lionnel Luca – urged voters to abstain from choosing between her and Macron by casting a blank ballot.

The two-weeks campaign between the two ballots was marked by two events: the campaign visit of both Macron and Le Pen to workers from the Whirlpool Corporation plant in Amiens (Somme) and the traditional TV debate between the two runners-up. On April 26, Emmanuel Macron made a trip to his hometown of Amiens in order to meet with the inter-union grouping fighting against the closing of the Whirlpool plant. While the leader of En Marche decided to meet the inter-union delegates at the *Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie* ('Chamber of Commerce and Industry'), he got outrun by Marine Le Pen, who paid a surprise visit to the striking workers on the parking lot of the Whirlpool plant, on the same morning. Although Le Pen mostly indulged in 'selfies' and barely addressed the social conflict at stake with the workers, the image was disastrous for Macron, who was accused of understanding the issue solely through a technocratic lens, and even fearing contact with Whirlpool workers on site. He nonetheless visited the plant after Marine Le Pen left, under a sea of cameras and journalists. Although very few doubts were raised regarding the ability of Macron to beat Le Pen largely on May 7, the sequence tended to equalise the symbolic stature of both candidates in the run up to the traditional TV debate, organised on May 3.

While Jacques Chirac had refused to debate with Jean-Marie Le Pen when they were both qualified for the second round in 2002, the question of avoiding the exercise did not arise once in 2017, another proof that Marine Le Pen's stategy of *dédiabolisation* had paid off: more than ever, she was considered to be 'part of the system'. The two-hours and a half long televised debate was articulated around three main themes: economics, terrorism and Europe, and, to a lesser extent, tackled other issues such as education, foreign policy and the reform of

institutions. Although the debate did not fail to emphasise the massive programmatic differences between the FN and EM, the quality of the exchanges was generally poor, with a very aggressive and rhetorically bordering on the caricatural Marine Le Pen proving her amateurism against an arrogant and technical Emmanuel Macron, who repeatedly accused her of *dire des bêtises* ('talk nonsense').

The debate was rather cacophonous: both candidates unapologetically interrupted each other and talked over one another in several instances. While Marine Le Pen accused multiple times Emmanuel Macron of showing 'submission'[58] – vis-à-vis globalisation and the unfair competitive practices it introduced, vis-à-vis Islamic terrorism, vis-à-vis Germany, European federalism and the European Monetary Union – Macron retorted that he was, on the contrary, embodying the French *esprit de conquête* ('spirit of conquest') and that France needed to 'take its responsibilities' by undertaking the necessary 'structural reforms' – with regards to unemployment, professional training, etc. – in order to regain credibility internationally. To this, Le Pen responded with the need to restore borders' sovereignty in both commercial and immigration terms, with her proposition to leave the Euro[59] and to create an 'alliance of free

[58] This seemed to be a reference to Michel Houellebecq's novel *Soumission* (2015), which depicts the journey of an opportunistic and depressed literature professor in the aftermath of the fictive 2022 French presidential election, whose imaginary second round is disputed between Marine Le Pen and Mohammed Ben Abbes, an *énarque* representing the Islamic party *La Fraternité Musulmane.* After winning the election – ironically thanks to the rallying of François Bayrou! – the latter undertakes a thorough Islamisation of France that relies much more on consent and co-optation than on coercion. The novel came to prove very controversial, as it was released on 7 January 2015, the day of the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack. A couple of years later, *Soumission* appeared in the reading-list sent to Front National's cadres and militants (Colly 2017). In 2021, Houellebecq's novel would also serve the communication of Macron's government in its fight against so-called 'Islamo-leftism' in the universities (see Chapter IX), with Minister of Education Jean-Michel Blanquer arguing in an interview with *Le Monde* (De Royer 2021) that *Soumission* was a 'visionary' novel that echoed the 'cowardice' within certain university circles and their purported ambiguity towards political Islam.

[59] The debate sequence on monetary policy was perhaps the most catastrophic for Marine Le Pen's image. When asked by Macron if leaving the Euro would mean going back to the Franc as a currency, Le Pen's discourse turned more and more confusing: she claimed her wish to see the Euro become a 'common' instead of 'single' currency, so that it would still be used, but not by ordinary citizens. She pretended that such a system would take inspiration from the ECU (European Currency Unit), created in the framework of the European Monetary System (EMS) in 1979. In a very professorial fashion,

and sovereign European nations' in lieu of the existing European Union, which would allow for the implementation of what she called *protectionnisme intelligent* ('smart protectionism'). Macron called her proposition to exit the Eurozone 'dangerous' and 'mortifying', and proclaimed he was, by contrast, the candidate of a 'strong France in a protective Europe'. The candidate from En Marche stressed the inability of Marine Le Pen to enter into any kind of technicalities, and often sarcastically exposed the lacuna of the Front National's programme in terms of industrial affairs, foreign trade and institutional reform. On those grounds, Macron's insistence on his experience as former Minister of the Economy was aimed at delegitimising the Le Pen candidacy which, he argued at the very end of the debate, was just aimed at 'sullying others' and lived 'off fear and lies' and that she therefore was the 'parasite' of the system that she denounced. Indeed, Le Pen's performance consisted in constant attacks on Macron rather than in a thorough presentation of her project, a behavior that contradicted the moderate and soft image promoted by her *dédiabolisation* strategy.

Four days later, the French hit the polling stations again for the second round of the presidential election. Predictably, Emmanuel Macron won, with 66.10 per cent of the vote against Marine Le Pen, who scored 33.90 per cent (see Table 3). Emmanuel Macron became the youngest ever French president, and the first candidate to win the presidency without being elected for office before and without support from the traditional political parties. Of course, there was a large element of luck involved in the rise of Macron, which largely resulted from his principal opponent's downfall at the hands of a satirical newspaper (Hewlett 2017, 381) and from the downfall of an irreparably divided Parti Socialiste.

Macron swept away her arguments by pointing out that the ECU never actually 'existed' and that it was a unit of account that never circulated, which ridiculed Marine Le Pen and shed light on the lack of technical backing to the main objective of the Front National, which was to exit the Eurozone.

Candidates	Votes	% Registered Voters	% Cast Votes
Emmanuel Macron	20 743 128	43.61	66.10
Marine Le Pen	10 638 475	22.36	33.90

Table 3: 2017 Presidential Election Results (Second Round)
Source: Ministère de l'Intérieur

All things considered, this was a very temperate victory for Emmanuel Macron. Although ridiculed in the TV debate, Marine Le Pen still managed to double the score of her father in the 2002 presidential elections (from 5.5 to 10.6 million votes). This achievement was reinforced by the fact that the levels of abstention were at a record high (see Table 4). Indeed, 12 million French voters (25.44 per cent) decided to abstain in the second round of the 2017 presidential election. The level of abstention in fact grew by around three percentage points between the two ballots, a rather unusual situation, as turnout has historically tended to increase between the two rounds (Durovic 2019, 1494).

	Numbers	% Registered Votes	% Votes Cast
Registered voters	47 582 183		
Abstentions	12 101 366	25.44	
Votes Cast	35 467 327	74.56	
Blank Votes	3 021 499	6.35	8.52
Invalid/Null Votes	1 064 225	2.24	3.00
Valid Votes	31 381 603	65.97	88.48

Table 4: Participation and Abstention in the 2017 Presidential Election (Second Round)
Source: Ministère de l'Intérieur

Another noteworthy dimension to this second round was the unprecedented amount of blank and spoiled ballots: 11.5 per cent of voters chose to express their frustration and rejected both Le Pen and Macron by casting blank or invalid ballots, which itself spoke volumes. Indeed, almost all spoiled ballots are protests votes, rather than a reflection of accidental damage of ballot papers (Braconnier and Dormagen 2017, cited by Hewlett 2017). As Table 4 shows,

8.52 per cent of the votes cast were blank (more than 3 million) and 3 per cent of the votes cast were invalid (more than one million). If one adds the absentees with those who voted blank or null, more than 16 million French voters refused to choose between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen on May 7, 2017.

Conclusion

In the early summer of 2017, the French political landscape was barely recognisable. Parti Socialiste was drained from its right-leaning, 'moderate' factions by En Marche, while its left-leaning, social democratic wing joined the ranks of Jean Luc Mélenchon's La France Insoumise, that had already sealed an electoral alliance with the Communist Party (PCF) in the presidential election. The PS presidential candidate, Benoît Hamon, announced that he was leaving the party on 1 July 2017, three days after former Prime Minister Manuel Valls operated the same move.

With the eclipse of the traditional Left party, La France Insoumise seemed to be in a position to claim leadership on the Left. The traditional right-wing party Les Républicains was not as bankrupt as PS but saw a significant number of his cadres join the presidential majority, under the banner of 'Les Constructifs' (see Chapter V), while its ideological line became blurrier than ever, torn apart between the Front National, which now exerted an unprecedented force of attraction – despite a pitiful end of campaign for Marine Le Pen – and the younger, more progressive and 'disruptive' president occupying the centre of the political space.

After a long electoral cycle that started one-year prior but was yet to be completed with the June 2017 legislative elections, the French had chosen a new president. Yet, the weak electoral basis of his qualification in the second round – with only 18.5 per cent of registered voters – and the historically high abstention rate and number of invalid ballots in the second

round meant that the legitimacy of Emmanuel Macron was, from the very beginning, extremely fragile (Rouban 2018).

Alongside Jacques Chirac in 1995 and 2002, Emmanuel Macron was elected with an exceedingly narrow base in the first round, entrusted by less than 20 per cent of registered voters (Dolez, Fretel and Lefebvre 2019, 13). In light of this frail adhesion, the legislative elections, organised on 11 and 18 June, did not necessarily bode well for Emmanuel Macron and En Marche. Yet, as demonstrated in the next chapter, the new party eventually obtained a very comfortable majority in the National Assembly, in large part thanks to the co-optation of well-known figures from Parti Socialiste and Les Républicains in the manner of what Antonio Gramsci termed *trasformismo.*

Chapter V:

A Transformist Electoral Cycle

> *En Marche*, c'est quoi ? (…) *En Marche* c'est des traîtres de gauche et des traîtres de droite (…) Ceux qui y sont viennent du PS et des Républicains.[60]
> (Former Keeper of the Seals Rachida Dati (LR) on public radio France Inter, 21 June 2021)

Introduction

In the wake of the presidential election, it seemed to many commentators unlikely that Emmanuel Macron's one-year old party *En Marche* – which was re-baptised for the legislation elections *La République En Marche* (LREM) – would be able to put forward a credible candidate in each 577 French constituencies. It was widely acknowledged that the luck with which Emmanuel Macron manoeuvered his way to the presidency did not necessarily prefigure a sweeping victory at the legislative election one month and a half later. Indeed, La République En Marche was a new and untested organisation which had never previously fought an election at any level prior to 2017.

Yet, the outcome of the 2017 legislative election turned out to be an incontestable victory for LREM, with 306 deputies elected out of 577 – to which one should add the 44 deputies elected under the banner of LREM's ally Mouvement Democrate (MoDem), who did not face any candidate from Macron's party and became faithful backers to the presidential majority. In virtually every constituency, a candidate from LREM or Modem was facing a candidate from the remaining parties (LR, LFI or FN) in the second round. How was this electoral *tour de force* made possible? Who were these new MPs from 'civil society' which were praised as

[60] 'What is *En Marche*? (…) *En Marche* is a group of traitors from the Left and traitors from the Right. The people in the party come from PS and Les Républicains' (France Inter 2021, my translation).

the new, de-ideologised faces of French politics? Did their election signal a profound 'renewal' of French political personnel?

To elucidate these questions, this chapter examines the contemporary mutations of the French party system brought about by the 2017 electoral cycle in light of the Italian concept of *trasformismo* ('transformism'). A profound shift in the balance of social and political forces followed Emmanuel Macron's election in May 2017, orchestrated by *trasformismo*, a process whereby Left and Right's programmes converge until there ceases to be any significant difference between them (Gramsci 1971, 58-9 Q19§24). In a similar fashion to Prime Minister Agostino Depretis who decided to recruit his ministers 'indiscriminately from both sides of the parliament' in 1876 in Italy, Macron decided to nominate Edouard Philippe, the mayor of Le Havre and MP from centre-right party *Les Républicains* (LR), as the Prime Minister of France on 15 May 2017.

Edouard Philippe – who used to be one of the leading organisers of Alain Juppé's campaign for LR primaries in the fall of 2016 – in turn decided to recruit prominent figures from his soon to be ex-party to form his government. He decided to nominate Bruno Le Maire (LR) at the Ministry of the Economy and Gérald Darmanin (LR) at the Ministry of Finances, thus sowing discord among the ranks of his *famille politique.* The new governmental clique did not stop there. Edouard Philippe – under the aegis of Emmanuel Macron – also chose ministers from the ranks of Parti Socialiste – such as Jean-Yves Le Drian (Hollande's former Minister of Defence) as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Gérard Collomb (the former Socialist mayor of Lyon) who became Minister of the Interior. In late nineteenth century Italy, this *trasformismo* was 'nothing but the parliamentary expression of the fact that the Party of Action was co-opted, bit by bit, by the Moderates, and that the popular masses were

decapitated, rather than absorbed into the ambit of the new state' (Gramsci 1966, 100, as cited in Bates 1975, 354). In early twenty-first century France, this opportunistic circulation of the most neoliberal factions of the political personnel towards the 'centre' of the political space formed the limpid manifestation of an ideological crisis that ran the risk of tearing the whole political and partisan landscape apart.

After the government nomination phase, *trasformismo* became a behaviour observable among the candidates to the 2017 legislative election. Indeed, Emmanuel Macron's presidential victory provided an unprecedented opportunity, a divine surprise for political executives – whether at the local or national level – whose political careers were at a standstill. In June, *trasformismo* became a behaviour observable among candidates to the 2017 legislative election. Disillusioned with their original political grouping, they repudiated their former partisan affiliation to join a nascent and potentially fruitful political enterprise.

After a short genealogy of the concept of *trasformismo* in the Italian context, the first section reviews the sociological and ideological background of the new LREM majority, whose deputies entered Palais Bourbon after the second round. Their professional background – as consultants, entrepreneurs, senior executives and to a lesser extent senior officials or university professors – serves as an illustration to the strongly elitist conception that Emmanuel Macron's party gave to the celebrated notion of 'civil society' (see Appendix 1).

Second, the chapter focuses on the conduct of the legislative elections of June 2017 and demonstrates the analytical relevance of *trasformismo* for interpreting the series of mutations that unfolded in the course of the 2017 electoral cycle. The section thus distinguishes two

different and overlapping phases to this process, based on a distinction established by Italian political scientists (following Gramsci) between 'molecular' and 'group' transformism.

The 2017 Legislative Elections: Elite Survival in Times of Political Re-alignment

In the direct aftermath of the 2017 presidential election, Parti Socialiste and especially Les Républicains were expected to threaten, or at the very least limit Macron's success due to the local presence and rootedness of their candidates and outgoing deputies. At that stage, the prospect of a hung parliament, or even a new coalition, seemed to be taking shape (Dolez and Laurent 2018, 803). Indeed, the legislative elections of June 11th and 18th were to be specifically scrutinised, with pundits and observers pondering whether the transformation of the political relations of force resulting from the presidential election outcome was going to be reflected in the composition of the new assembly. In this context, doubts were raised on the traditional likelihood for the legislative elections to 'confirm' the results of the presidential contest, as had been the case since the 2000 constitutional reform that introduced the *quinquennat* and relegated the parliament to a subaltern role (see Chapter VII).

Yet, the outcome of the legislative elections held on 11 and 18 June 2017 substantiated this 'confirmation function' once more, with results that magnified the May 2017 victory. Indeed, Emmanuel Macron's party obtained a very large parliamentary majority. A generation of newcomers in politics made its way to the Palais Bourbon: 72 per cent of En Marche deputies were never elected before – an even larger number than in 1958, when 65 per cent of the deputies had been elected as MPs for the first time. Never before had the National Assembly welcomed such a large number of novices and beginners in politics, both as elected officials and party members (Boelaert, Michon and Ollion 2018, 777). The new cohort of deputies was also younger, and more feminine than its predecessor, which, according to many

commentators, was a testimony to the growing democratic fatigue vis-à-vis the established political elite and demonstrated the widespread wish for political renewal in 2017.

However, it would be very restrictive to assume that most of these new MPs were total newcomers to politics. In lieu of a renewal, the dynamics have been twofold in the composition of the 2017 National Assembly:

1). A large section of the LREM majority came from the ranks of *pre-existing parties*, most notably from Parti Socialiste and MoDem, but also from Union des Démocrates et des Indépendants (UDI), Les Républicains (LR) and Parti Radical de Gauche (PRG). The nature of this party-switching, or vest-turning on the part of those renegades who chose to coalesce in the centre, is examined in the next section within the framework of the Italian practice of *trasformismo*.

2). The class composition of the National Assembly has simply never been as elitist: despite gender and generational renewal, the National Assembly has never been populated with as many representatives from the upper managerial classes, with the notable difference that, this time, the vast majority of them came from the private instead of the public sector. Although not a new development, this highlighted the classist foundations of the crisis of representation.

After a short genealogy of the concept of *trasformismo* in the Italian context, the first section reviews the results of the 2017 legislative elections. It then delves into the sociological and ideological background of the new LREM majority, whose deputies entered Palais Bourbon

after the second round. It concludes that their profiles substantiate the strongly elitist conception of the concept of 'civil society' espoused by Emmanuel Macron's party.

A Genealogy of Trasformismo

Antonio Gramsci's reflections about the concept of *trasformismo* ('transformism') can be traced back to the history of Italy's relatively recent inception. After the unification of the peninsula in 1871, Italian political life was structured around the opposition between the Moderate Party and the Action Party. The former, born out of the Neo-Guelphian movement in 1848, was pro-confederation, but later abandoned federalism for unification. Led by the Count of Cavour and representing a homogeneous, conservative social group, it was leaning towards the Right and became the main beneficiary of the *Risorgimento*.

For Gramsci, the Moderates were 'the real, organic vanguard of the upper classes, to which economically they belonged' (Gramsci 1971, 60 Q19§24). The Action Party, on the other hand, was born in 1853 and led by Giuseppe Garibaldi. It represented the democratic parliamentary Left after the unification, but did not base itself on any historical class. Despite their lack of popular representativeness and support, the Moderates came to gradually dominate the Action Party by subjugating it through the exercise of 'intellectual and moral leadership' – one of the components of hegemony, together with coercion (or threat thereof). This led to the progressive but continuous absorption of the Action Party by the Moderates, which meant its domestication, decapitation and subsequent ideological neutralisation. The parliamentary phenomenon known as *trasformismo* reflected this intellectual and moral hegemony.

Trasformismo is therefore a term that was used from the 1880s onwards to refer to the process whereby the so-called 'historic' Left and Right parties which emerged from the *Risorgimento* tended to converge in terms of programme during the years which followed, until there ceased to be any substantive difference between them (Gramsci 1971, 58 Q19§24). In 1876, Italian Prime Minister Agostino Depretis – an influential representative of the 'Historic Left' who ruled over the kingdom from 1876 to 1887, with some interruptions – thus decided to recruit his ministers indiscriminately from both sides of the parliament.[61]

This political art was further refined by Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti – several times in office from 1892 to 1920 – a few years before the rise of Mussolini. Indeed, the objective of Giolitti was to entice leaders of opposition parties into leading positions in his own group, thus neutralising their oppositional stances. This was done through the gradual and continuous absorption of the active elements produced by allied groups, but also of the personnel from antagonistic groups to which they seemed, at first sight, irreconcilably hostile (Gramsci 1971, 59, Q19§24). From that moment on, the two main parties disintegrated into personal cliques and factions, and this scattered state of political affairs characterised Italian parliamentary life until the rise of fascism in the early 1920s.

For Gramsci, *trasformismo* was a 'real historical document' of what he called 'revolution/restoration' as a synonym for 'passive revolution' (see Chapter VII). Indeed, this progressive but incessant absorption by the Moderates reflected the fact that the *Risorgimento* was 'a revolution without a revolution', or a 'passive revolution' (Gramsci 1971, 105-120 Q15§§59, 17, 11, 15, 25, 61, 62). The Moderates' organic concentration – the fact that they

[61] During a speech to his constituents in his hometown of Stradella (Lombardy) on 11 October 1876, Depretis declared that his ultimate goal was to 'facilitate that fruitful transformation of parties, that unification of the Liberal elements of the Chamber, which would constitute the solid majority so long evoked…' (Valbruzzi 2014, 171).

acted as the 'organic intellectuals' of the ruling class, since they were closely linked to it – made possible the hegemony or power of attraction which this grouping exercised on other sections of society, notably on the intellectuals from the subordinate or 'subaltern' classes. *Trasformismo* is therefore part of the process by which dominant groups are able to co-opt oppositional forces into their ranks, thus securing power by the spread of their ideas and influence (Schwarzmantel 2015, 99-100).

In his writings, Gramsci distinguishes two periods or phases of *trasformismo:* the first phase (from 1860 to 1900) – which he terms *molecular trasformismo* – refers to the individual incorporation of political figures representing the democratic opposition parties into the conservative-moderate 'political class' which stood against the intervention of the popular masses in state life. At that stage, *trasformismo* remained an essentially positive term: it was considered to be the parliamentary device to realise the transformation, if not the complete elimination, of the tired old parties. At the time, pundits often compared – in quite a Darwinian fashion – these political and partisan transfigurations to the evolution of species and living organisms (Valbruzzi 2014, 172), thus naturalising and normalising the practice.

Later on, *trasformismo* occured at the level of the *group* and signalled the co-optation and incorporation of entire cliques of leftists who passed over to the moderate camp (from 1900 onwards). The beginning of the century had thus witnessed *trasformismo* transitioning from the level of the *individual* to the level of the *collective*. Far from being circumscribed to a peculiar conjuncture, *trasformismo* became a systemic feature of the Italian political system, and its connotation turned decidedly pejorative, as parliamentary opportunism and inconsistency did not simply signal the ambition of going 'beyond Left and Right'. Indeed, under the pretence of favouring partisan realignment and political renewal, these shifts in

allegiance were rather envisaged as a method to marginalise the extremes and 'anti-system' parties in order to favour the (bourgeois) status quo.

Gradually, the practice became an organic feature of Italian politics and came to be considered a 'peculiarity' of Italian parliamentary representation, a systemic calibration 'at the centre' of the political space, with little dynamism dedicated to developing alternative forms of politics, which in some places took the form of passive inactivity (Bianchi 2015, 549-50). For Giovanni Sabbatucci (1998; 2003, cited in Valbruzzi 2014), *trasformismo* is a pattern of government from the 'centre' of the political space that is rooted in the 'imperfect' character of Italian democracy. It constitutes therefore an attempt to marginalise the 'anti-system' forces prone to destabilisation. Obviously, this behaviour of self-preservation confines to the status quo and prevents alternative political groups from seizing power: it can be interpreted as a mechanism of defence to preserve the existing order, even if this comes at the cost of political inconsistency.

In the postwar period, the Italian political system continued to rely on the old practice of centrist majorities fabricated in Parliament after the elections, blocking the alternation of power and marginalising further the Italian Communist party, while consolidating the domination of the Christian Democratic party and its liberal satellites, such as the Italian Democratic Socialist Party, the Italian Liberal Party and the Republican Party. However, this calibration at the centre did not eschew the pitfall of governmental instability, with fifty-nine governments between 1948 and 2013 (Valbruzzi 2014, 175). In the mid-1970s, transformism became total: Italian democracy was more blocked than ever, with the possibility of alternation between two distinct political groups disappearing completely from the political horizon (ibid, 177).

In the early 1990s, the demise of the First Italian Republic and the nationwide scandal and investigation *Mani Pulite* (1992)[62] led to the disappearance of several political parties, including the centre-right Christian Democracy, the Socialist Party of Italy, the Italian Socialist Democratic Party and the Italian Liberal Party. But the practice of *trasformismo* nonetheless persisted. Even though these events were greeted as the death knell for any kind of *trasformismo*, the 'second Italian party system' (or 'Second Republic') was based on purely transformist foundations, a great example being none other than the Italian Communist Party (PCI), that suddenly changed its name in a day while its party leaders, suddenly struck by collective amnesia, denied ever having been Communists.

After a phase of 'group transformism' before 1994, party switching or 'molecular transformism' – i.e. change of party affiliation by a single legislator – became a significant and frequent phenomenon from the mid-1990s to the mid-2010s (Valbruzzi 2014, 177-78). From the 1990s onward, it was possible to notice a return of *trasformismo* in regional parliaments as well, with dynamics that could be traced back to the practice of 'group transformism' (Bianchi 2015, 557). Over the years, Italian politicians have thus mastered this strategy of manipulation of the electoral process that consists in creating amorphous centrist majorities that encompass the pro-system parties in order to exclude the popular classes, which were represented in Parliament by the extreme/anti-system political parties.

[62] Operation *Mani Pulite* ('Clean Hands') started on 7 February 1992, when a Milanese magistrate ordered the arrest of Mario Chiesa, a representative of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). Hundreds of investigations and arrests ensued and became the symptoms of the structural and systematic corruption of the Italian political class (La Croix 2017). Facing multiple charges of corruption, PSI Prime Minister Bettino Craxi left Italy for exile in Tunisia in 1994 and was replaced by media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, who took advantage of the collapse of the Italian First Republic to create his party (*Forza Italia*) and take office in May 1994.

As Gramsci put it from his fascist prison, *trasformismo* as a form of life-support for the governing liberal elites remained 'a form of historical development' that had not yet 'been adequately emphasised' (Gramsci 1971, 109 Q15 §11). A similar assessment could be carried out regarding the French political system and its current mutations. Therefore, the next section will seek to fill this gap by analysing the June 2017 legislative elections in light of the concept and practice of this weapon of the status quo that is *trasformismo*.

Yet, before delving into the intricacies of French transformism and the thorough recycling of political elites that it has occasioned, it is necessary to first study the results of the election, as well as the official narrative born out of the 2017 legislative elections, i.e. that of an election of political 'renewal', with a new assembly full of newcomers from 'civil society' who replaced the old barons of French politics.

The 2017 Legislative Election Results

With only 48.7 per cent of French people hitting the poll station, the first round of the 2017 legislative elections has been marked by the lowest participation rate since 1871 (Martin, 527; see Table 5). One week later, this record low was confirmed in the second round of the legislative elections, for which only 42.64 per cent of the French citizens hit the poll station. Furthermore, only 90.14 per cent of the cast votes were valid, as 6.99 per cent of the votes were blank, and 2.87 per cent were null. All in all, the results of the second round of the legislative elections reflected the political opinions of only 38.43 per cent of the French electorate (see Table 6). Abstention, therefore, in a clear echo to what had happened during the second round of the presidential election one month earlier, has been the uncontestable thread of the 2017 electoral cycle.

The first round of the legislative elections confirmed the rejection of the incumbent parties. In a mirror image to the poor results that it had collected in the first round of the presidential election, Parti Socialiste was decimated. While it had obtained 29.3 per cent of the votes in the 2012 legislative elections, the party collected 7.44 per cent of the votes five years later, performing barely better than Benoît Hamon one month prior. For Les Républicains and their allies (UDI and DVD), the collapse was more limited, but serious nonetheless. They lost one third of their electorate, scoring at 21.4 per cent on the first round, their worst legislative results since 1945 (Martin, 530). La République En Marche obtained 28.21 per cent of the votes – and managed to elect two MPs directly in the first round – and its ally MoDem 4.12 per cent, while the Front National saw its vote share reduced by half in comparison to the presidential election (13.20 per cent).

	Numbers	**% Registered Votes**	**% Cast Votes**
Registered voters	47 293 103		
Abstentions	27 128 488	57.36	
Votes Cast	20 164 615	42.64	
Blank Votes	1 409 784	2.98	6.99
Invalid/Null Votes	578 765	1.22	2.87
Valid Votes	18 176 066	38.43	90.14

Table 5: Participation and Abstention in the 2017 Legislative Election (Second Round)
Source: Ministère de l'Intérieur

Thus, the parties that had presented the five main candidates in the presidential election together won 75.65 per cent of the votes in the first round of the parliamentary election. The first round results signaled the virtual disappearance of the traditional Left and Right (PS/LR) antagonism in almost all constituencies, with only 16 such second-round confrontations disputed, compared to 443 in 2012. Indeed, candidates from the LREM-MoDem coalition

qualified for the second ballot in nine out of ten constituencies (Dolez and Laurent 2019, 806).

Political Party	Votes Cast	% Cast Votes	% Registered Voters	Number of Seats
La République En Marche	7 826 245	43.06	16.55	306
Les Républicains	4 040 203	22.23	8.54	112
Modem	1 100 656	6.06	2.33	42
Parti Socialiste	1 032 842	5.68	2.18	30
Union des Démocrates et Indépendants	551 784	3.04	1.17	17
La France Insoumise	883 573	4.86	1.87	17
Divers Gauche	263 488	1.45	0.56	11
Parti Communiste Français	217 833	1.20	0.46	10
Front National	1 590 869	8.75	3.36	8
Divers Droite	306 074	1.68	0.65	6
Régionaliste	137 490	0.76	0.29	5
Parti Radical de Gauche	64 860	0.36	0.14	3
Divers	100 574	0.55	0.21	3
Ecologiste	23 197	0.13	0.05	1
Debout la France	17 344	0.10	0.04	1
Extrême Droite	19 034	0.10	0.04	1

Table 6: 2017 Legislative Election Results (Second Round).
Source: Ministère de l'Intérieur.

Political Party	Number of Seats
La République En Marche	308[63]
Les Républicains	112
Modem	42
Parti Socialiste	30
Union des Démocrates et Indépendants	18
La France Insoumise	17
Divers Gauche	12
Parti Communiste Français	10
Front National	8
Divers Droite	6
Régionaliste	5
Parti Radical de Gauche	3
Divers	3
Ecologiste	1
Debout la France	1
Extrême Droite	1

Table 7: Results in the distribution of seats per political party (2017 Legislative Election)
Source: Ministère de l'Intérieur

Logically, the second round was marked by an imposing and uncontestable victory for *La République En Marche*. The governmental coalition obtained 348 seats out of 577: 306 for LREM, 42 for their ally MoDem (see Table 8). Macron's coalition gathered 43.06 per cent of the cast votes, but owed a very large majority to only 16.55 per cent of registered voters. This demonstrated the extent to which the existing two-ballots uninominal voting system led to over-representation in terms of seats.[64] This extremely fragile numerical advance

[63] It remains controversial whether 306 or 308 deputies were elected under the LREM banner: on this matter, sources are contradictory. This is primarily explained by the transformist behaviour of a certain number of aspiring MPs who have muddied the waters. In this respect, the cases of Stella Dupont (Maine-et-Loire 2) and M'jid El Guerrab (Français de l'Etranger 9) are worth scrutinising because it is unclear whether they could be considered LREM deputies or not. Stella Dupont – the PS mayor of Chalonnes-sur-Loire – was initially invested by Parti Socialiste (Ouest France 2017) but announced on Facebook on 13 May 2017 that she decided to run under the colours of LREM instead. The case of El Guerrab is a bit more disconcerting. He initially tried to be invested by PS, unsuccessfully, and then by LREM, without more fortune since the presidential majority decided to invest a representative from MoDem (Leïla Aïchi) following their electoral alliance with François Bayrou's party. Yet, Aïchi was disavowed by the majority due to alleged sympathies with Front Polisario – the armed movement fighting for Western Sahara's independence. El Guerrab seized the opportunity to present himself and was elected as a dissident, but he could not obtain the LREM endorsement for legal reasons.

[64] As Table 6 demonstrates, the final results show a profound lack of proportionality between the vote share and the allocation of seats in Assemblée Nationale. The two-ballots uninominal system of the

notwithstanding, France had undertaken a profound transformation of its party landscape, going from having a locked-in two-party system to a multiparty system.

The LREM Majority: A Certain Vision of 'Civil Society'

While François Hollande's main campaign argument was *le changement* ('change'), Emmanuel Macron's and En Marche's promise was *le renouveau* ('renewal'). Indeed, the movement's website affirmed the conviction that 'making France work again means placing civil society and the citizens that compose it at the heart of political life'.[65]

With only a fourth of the incumbent MPs re-elected and the arrival of so many newcomers within its ranks, the National Assembly of 2017 was profoundly reshuffled in comparison with the previous legislature. The LREM team argued that this was due to the care with which they strove to make their candidates as representative of the French population as possible. At first sight, the parliamentary renewal appeared to be substantial, with 72 per cent of the members of the new National Assembly elected deputies for the very first time, an unprecedented proportion under the Fifth Republic (Boelaert et al. 2018, 777). Furthermore, 27.7 per cent of the new 2017 MPs had never engaged in politics previously, against 5 per cent in 2012 and 1.1 per cent in 2007. Besides, even though a majority of the LREM MPs

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legislative elections necessarily works against radical or extreme parties, because there is often a coalition of 'moderates' voting against them in the second round. Thus, while Modem obtained 42 deputies with 1.1 million votes in the second round, the FN obtained just 8 deputies with 1.59 million votes, a score that placed it underneath the threshold of 10 MPs that is required to form an official parliamentary group. With this election, the long-running story of the need for more proportional representation thus re-emerged, and Emmanuel Macron pretended to tackle it by promising to his MoDem allies that he would introduce 'a dose' of proportional representation in the National Assembly. Nevertheless, only a significantly high percentage of seats elected with the proportional system would make a real change towards a more equitable allocation of seats in terms of vote casts. Besides, a true, ambitious electoral reform would need to involve a modification of the electoral calendar – that is, not organising the legislative elections in the direct wake of the presidential contest – in order to allow the National Assembly to get rid of its subordinate status (see Chapter VII).

[65] « Remettre la France en marche c'est remettre la société civile et les citoyens qui la composent au coeur de la vie politique. » 7 April 2021. Retrieved on *En Marche* website: https://en-marche.fr/articles/actualites/5-ans-en-marche

were previously involved in electoral politics, it was only for 10.6 years, against 18.5 years in 2012 (Boelaert, et al. 2018, 782).

Thus, LREM invested slightly more women than men (52 per cent, against 47 per cent for LFI, 44 per cent for PS and 39 per cent for LR) and their candidates were comparatively younger (47 years-old on average against 48.5 across the political spectrum and 54.6 years-old in 2012). Out of their 524 candidates, 281 had never held a political mandate of any sort. Yet, *Le Monde* journalists estimated that the promise to opening up the movement to 'civil society' was only partially fulfilled: the cohort of aspiring deputies was very homogenous socially, with a large majority of upper class representatives such as professors (87), medical professionals (42), lawyers (28) and engineers (17). Most problematically with regards to potential conflicts of interest, professionals working in the field of consulting were overrepresented in the cohort. With 71 aspiring deputies coming from the world of consulting, they made up 1/8th of the total (Le Monde 2017c).

In common-sensical French parlance, *société civile* ('civil society') designates personalities who accept to become involved in politics – as ministers, MPs or members of cabinet – but who were not hitherto known for being involved in party politics, or for openly expressing their political persuasion before being appointed. In the Western world, the term has been used at length during the 1980s and 1990s, frequently in reference to Eastern European political activity, but its meaning often remained vague. In Antonio Gramsci's understanding (1971, 12 Q12§1), the term civil society has much more complex roots that go back to his very peculiar understanding of the state as 'integral', which means that it is composed of:

> …two major superstructural "levels": the one that can be called "civil society", that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called "private" and that of "political society" or "the state". These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of "hegemony" which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of "direct domination" or command exercised through the State and "juridical" government.

Thus, assimilating the 'state' with the sole government apparatus would be a misleading assumption. Civil society also forms part and parcel of what is called 'the state' (Gramsci 1971, 235 Q13§24):

> … in the most advanced states, civil "society" has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic "incursions" of the immediate economic elements (crises, depressions, etc.). The superstructures of civil society are like the trench systems of modern warfare.

This excerpt suggests three remarks. First, Gramsci's analysis of civil society focuses primarily on Western states, with a specific attention to France and Italy. One can furthermore infer that Gramsci's concept of civil society is intertwined with his theory of hegemony in that it 'exposes the mechanisms and modulations of power in capitalist states that purport to be democratic' (Buttigieg 1995, 3). Lastly, civil society's structure is very complex and resilient: like a trench system, it is able to resist conjunctural crises without incurring too much damage. In that sense, forces of civil society in Western countries are perennial in character, although they occasionally mutate. They form the defence mechanisms which the ruling classes and the most visible aspect of the state ('political society') require to counter the blows of resistance in times of unrest.

Civil society's most notable protagonists in Gramsci's time were the Moderates, whose leadership derived from their place and function in society. Despite having no 'official' party programme, organisation or pre-established strategy, they were perfectly positioned in civil society to lead Italy's relatively homogenous upper classes and extend their influence among the potential organisers and leaders of the subordinate social strata, as 'they were themselves a prominent presence in virtually every major sector of the "private" sphere', i.e. 'intellectual

and political organisers, heads of business, great landowners-administrators, commercials and industrial entrepreneurs' (Buttigieg 1995, 21).

In Emmanuel Macron's phraseology, civil society is similarly imbued with entrepreneurial and elitist undertones and came to signify the replacement of MPs who originally emerged from the public sector by MPs whose career was primarily conducted in the private sector. As Table 7 demonstrate, out of the 306 LREM MPs elected in June 2017 who were not previously directly involved in politics, 61 were entrepreneurs, 23 were lawyers, 21 worked in consulting, 20 were university professors, 18 were senior executives, all leading positions in the 'private sphere' where consent is being manufactured (the universities, the big companies, the tribunals, etc.). Indeed, as Joseph Buttigieg (1995, 7) eloquently put it, 'the power to manufacture consent is not evenly distributed in society'.

As examined in the previous chapter, the parliamentary majority of François Hollande (2012-2017) was characterised by its very strong 'professionalisation', with at least 16 per cent of the deputies from the 2012 cohort having had no other professional activity than politics, understood as being employed by a party or being an elected official (Boelaert et al. 2017). Yet, the 2017 electoral cycle seems to have put a halt to this process of professionalisation or 'notabilisation' (Lefebvre 2019).

Previous Political Occupation	Number of MPs
Entrepreneur	57
(Engagement in Professional Politics among the total)	(51)
MPs	30
Lawyer	23
Senior Executive	22
Consulting	21
University Professor	20
Public Servant	20
Engineer	16
Medical Doctor	14
Teacher	11
Political Assistant (Parliamentary, Ministerial, Mayoral)	10
(Pensioners among the total)	(10)
Local Official (Mayor, Councilor)	9
Senior Official	8
School Director	8
Employee	6
Chief Human Resources Officer	5
Medical Profession (nurse, fireman, paramedic)	5
Trade Representative	4
Farmer	4
Pharmacist	2
Dentist	2
Physiotherapist	2
Artist	2
Party Politics	1
Journalist	1
Magistrate	1
Policeman	1
Non-profit Organiser	1
Clinic Director	1
Total	**306**

Table 8: Previous political occupations of LREM MPs
(Source: Appendix 1)

The new demographics of the June 2017 assembly, in large part influenced by the emergence of new figures from the ranks of LREM, thus reveal a generational renewal: for the first time since 1981, the deputies elected in 2017 are on average below 50 years-old. What is more, the 2017 cohort is characterised by an increased feminisation, with 39 per cent of women elected in the National Assembly , against 27 per cent in 2012 and 19 per cent in 2007 (Boelaert et al. 2018, 785).[66]

However, there are specific conjunctural reasons, which are not tied to political competition per se, that explain this apparent regeneration of the National Assembly. Indeed, many former MPs were prevented to run again due to the passing of the February 2014 *Loi sur le non-cumul des mandats* which prohibited the simultaneous holding of a parliamentary mandate and a local executive mandate – typically, deputy and mayor. Several *députés-maires* therefore decided to abandon their local function, but others preferred to dedicate their time to their municipal stronghold and decided not to run again as deputy for that reason.

Following the same conjunctural explanatory logic, the increased feminisation of the Assembly is directly related to the elevated financial penalties set since 2014 for infringement of the 2000 parity law, a policy package aimed at filling the gender gap by inflicting financial penalties on parties – such as Les Républicains – who repeatedly fail to nominate or endorse the same number of men and women during election periods. In addition to these relatively new legal provisions, the general wish for political renewal and the democratic fatigue

[66] As sociologist Luc Rouban explains (2018, 130-31), the list of the 529 candidates endorsed by LREM reached perfect parity – 267 women and 262 men – and included a majority, although thin, of political novices (284), who were on average 44 years-old – against an average of 51 years-old for candidates that already were holding an elected position.

resulting from the ideological crisis offered an opportunity for LREM to campaign on new themes, with a lot of fresh faces.

With the very notable exception of the defectors whose partisan journey will be addressed in the next section, the majority of LREM deputies had to 'apply for the job' of deputy. Candidates had to fill out an online questionnaire and attach a curriculum vitae, cover letter and recommendation letters with it, in an ostensibly entrepreneurial logic that led LREM to go as far as to equate representing the nation to joining a new company, implying – once more in a rather populist fashion and following a highly debatable analogy – that a state could be 'managed' in a similar manner than a business (Rescan 2019, 15). Thus, no less than 19,000 applicants were reviewed by LREM campaign staff, with the aim to present a candidate of the presidential movement in most constituencies. One may assume that such an important number of applications would guarantee a relative diversity of socio-economic profiles in the selection of the candidates, something that is however not reflected in the final composition of the National Assembly.

Indeed, as far as the social origin of the new deputies is concerned, there has been no renewal at all. Instead, the social selectivity of deputies has never been stronger, and the elitism of the political personnel has never been as pronounced (Dolez et al. 2019, 16). Thus, the 2017 assembly is composed of 55 per cent of senior managers and intellectual professions, with only 1 per cent of the deputies coming from the popular classes – i.e. employee or manual workers, who represent respectively 18 per cent and 48 per cent of the French population.[67]

[67] According to Le Monde (2017c), only two manual workers were invested among the 524 LREM candidates: Dennis Sommer (Doubs) – a former trade-unionist close to PS – as well as textile worker Claude Thirard (Vosges), who ended up not being elected.

Therefore, the 2017 legislative elections' outcome did nothing to mitigate the lack of social representativeness in Assemblée Nationale. It rather bore witness to a dynamic within the upper classes and to a shift in favour of the private sector, at the expense of the public sector, with a drastic rise in the number of entrepreneurs (more than 1/6th of the total), consultants (20), senior executives (18) and university professors (20) (see Appendix 1 and Table 8) within the ranks of the newly elected deputies, a population that had partially disappeared from the ranks of MPs for decades.

Thus, instead of emphasising their technocratic competences, the 2017 deputies highlighted their managerial capabilities. They embodied the return of economic elites – entrepreneurs, consultants, senior executives – in positions of legislative power (Boelaert et al. 2018, 778-785). Indeed, the entrepreneurial culture was very present among these novices, who were often active in jobs related to consulting, communications, the Internet and start-ups specialised in benchmarking and comparative public policy evaluation. The nature of their professional experiences in the private sector went hand in hand with a claimed 'pragmatism' when it came to economic matters and to a criticism of 'ideological radicalism' that justified their attraction for the 'de-politicised' relationship towards the spirit of enterprise that Emmanuel Macron espoused (Lefebvre 2019, 239).

As a result, the narrative of renewal that accompanied the structuring of the 2017 National Assembly only concerned a minority of French citizens, those who already were sociologically part of the higher classes, but were working in the private sector, deconstructing the traditional figure of the MP coming from the ranks of high administration or civil service. The endogamy of the LREM neophyte's cohort apparently gives credit to the thesis developed by Bruno Amable and Stefano Palombarini (2017) that France has witnessed

the construction of a 'bourgeois bloc' that gathered the affluent pro-EU social groups within the electorate, both in terms of staff and supporters. Thus, representatives of the minority of French people that were part of the educated middle-classes, receptive to the narrative of an obsolete Left/Right cleavage and who wished to promote instead a 'pro' versus 'anti' European Union divide found their way to the national legislature.

Trasformismo as a Two-phased Phenomenon

In June 2017, while the legislative elections' campaign was going full swing in France, a Kafkaesque situation was unfolding in the 18th constituency of Paris. Myriam El Khomri – François Hollande's former Socialist Minister of Labour, formerly in charge of the contested labour law reform and whose ministerial mandate ended with the election of Emmanuel Macron in May – was running against Pierre-Yves Bournazel, the candidate for *Les Républicains* in this district of the capital. Rather comically, both candidates asserted that they were campaigning in favor of Emmanuel Macron and his movement *La République En Marche*, without however being members of that movement. Disavowing their respective partisan affiliation to PS and LR, Myriam El Khomri pretended to be personally supported by Emmanuel Macron, and Pierre-Yves Bournazel claimed the endorsement of newly appointed Prime Minister Edouard Philippe.

How did the French political field reach this level of individualisation and fragmentation in the span of only a few months? Why were partisan affiliations – on both sides of the political spectrum, but especially in PS – so quickly repudiated in the wake of Emmanuel Macron's presidential victory?

Molecular Phase

As the incongruous duel between El Khomri and Bournazel illustrates, *trasformismo* is first and foremost a parliamentary phenomenon. Yet, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is a process that had originally started during the presidential campaign, albeit in a 'molecular' manner, to borrow Gramsci's phrasing.

A first stage of individual defections and rallying to Emmanuel Macron's party occurred during the presidential campaign and spanned from January to May 2017. This constituted the first phase of 'molecular' *trasformismo*.[68] Indeed, many Socialist officials – such as Richard Ferrand, Gérard Collomb, François Patriat, Christophe Castaner, Bertrand Delanoë, Manuel Valls – showed support to Emmanuel Macron in the last few months of the presidential campaign. They were joined by figures from the ecological parties, such as former Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV) members Barbara Pompili and François de Rugy – the latter had been candidate at the Socialist primary and, like Valls, broke his oath to support the primary winner Benoît Hamon – as well as CAP 21 founder and Jacques Chirac's former Environment Minister Corinne Lepage.

Two main factors account for these early defections:

1). The unusually Left-leaning programme of Benoît Hamon, that was clearly at odds with the orientations of many PS cadres adhering to the rather centrist *ligne majoritaire*.

[68] For a summary of the phenomenon's characteristics in both its 'molecular' and 'group' dimensions, see Table 11.

2). The double 'anti-system' threats of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who scored strongly in the polls and were often put on an equal footing by representatives of the mainstream political parties, following an 'anti-populist' strategy analysed in Chapter VIII.

The second phase of 'molecular transformism' started in the direct wake of the presidential election, when Macron decided to nominate Edouard Philippe – the mayor of Le Havre and member of *Les Républicains* – as the Prime Minister of France on 15 May, 2017. Philippe, in turn, was in charge of forming the first government of the quinquennat and decided to nominate several prominent figures from his soon to be ex-party, Les Républicains.[69] Thus, Philippe and Macron decided to nominate Bruno Le Maire (LR) at the Ministry of the Economy and Gérald Darmanin (LR) at the Ministry of Finances, thus sowing discord among the ranks of the traditional Right's political 'family'. Using the same methods than Agostino Depretis, who chose his ministers from both sides of the parliament, Edouard Philippe – under the aegis of Emmanuel Macron – chose ministers from both the ranks of Les Républicains and Parti Socialiste, such as Jean-Yves Le Drian – Hollande's former Minister of Defence, who accepted to lead the newly labelled Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs – or Gérard Collomb, the former Socialist mayor of Lyon, who became Minister of the Interior.

To be more specific, the government headed by Edouard Philippe had 23 members: 18 ministers and 4 secretaries of state. As Table 8 shows, this government was made up of people coming from the traditional Right (LR), the centre (MoDem), the centre-left (PS and Mouvement Radical, MR), and personalities from the so-called 'civil society'. A bit more than a third of government members came from the traditional or social-liberal Left – with 7

[69] Edouard Philippe was excluded from *Les Républicains* in late October 2017, alongside four ministers and MPs from LR who rallied Macron: Gérald Darmanin, Sébastien Lecornu, Franck Riester and Thierry Solère (Le Point 2017b).

members from PS and 2 from MR joining the new government – and a bit less than one third of government members came from the ranks of the traditional Right and the centre-right – with 4 members from LR at very prominent positions, and 3 members from MoDem.

As Table 8 shows, Emmanuel Macron's governing team was built around veterans from existing parties – mostly PS, LR and MoDem – who came out early in Macron's favour. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Gérard Collomb, Richard Ferrand and Christophe Castaner from the right-wing of PS promptly integrated governmental spheres. The new defectors and converts from the mainstream Right were Edouard Philippe (a fellow of Alain Juppé as Prime Minister), Bruno Le Maire (who was an unsuccessful candidate at LR primary, where he obtained 2.4 per cent of the votes, as Minister of the Economy), Gérald Darmanin (one of Nicolas Sarkozy's most faithful lieutenants, as Minister of the Interior) and Jean-Michel Blanquer (a senior official at the Ministry of Education under Nicolas Sarkozy). Finally, the government also welcomed prominent members from MoDem, such as François Bayrou as Keeper of the Seals, Marielle de Sarnez as Minister of European Affairs and, to a lesser extent, Sylvie Goulard as the Ministry of the Armed Forces, the new martial coinage for the former Ministry of Defence.

Meanwhile, less than a third of government members came from 'civil society', such as environmental activist Nicolas Hulot (Ecology), medical doctor and senior official Agnès Buzin (Health), human resources business executive Muriel Pénicaud (Labour), épée fencer Laura Flessel (Sports), biochemist Frédérique Vidal (Higher Education and Research), publisher Françoise Nyssen (Culture) and non-profit executive Sophie Cluzel (Secretary of State for Disabled People).

All in all, this is as far as can be from a *tabula rasa* and closer to a thorough recycling, forming a mosaic of status-quo oriented political currents existing on both sides of the traditional parties.

This circulation of the political personnel from one party to the other, from one majority to the next, has strongly contributed to a blurring of political frontiers and to an increasing indecipherability of the French political landscape (Mauger 2017, 103). Destabilised by these nominations, Les Républicains decided – in quite a controversial move – to threaten with exclusion the Prime Minister and the other grandees who joined Macron. Understandably, the legislative campaign of Les Républicains was shaken and lacked cohesion due to the nomination of Philippe, Le Maire and Darmanin, and the prospect of imposing a *cohabitation* to Macron was short-lived.

Indeed, it appeared pretty clearly that a traditional right-wing majority in the Assembly was improbable, and most of the caciques adopted the perspective of a victory of governmental forces. At that time already, a significant fraction of LR expressed its desire to cooperate with the newly elected President, including Jacques Chirac's ex-Prime Minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, alongside ambitious MP Thierry Solère. In sum, with its presidential candidate eliminated in the first round – a first under the Fifth Republic – and its unity shattered by the impact of Macron's bent on 'recomposing' the party system, the mainstream Right's prospects were in tatters, despite sometimes excellent local support (Knapp 2017, 559).

Position	Name	Party of Origin
Prime Minister	Edouard Philippe	LR
Ministers of State		
Minister of the Interior	Gérard Collomb	PS
Minister of Ecological and Solidary Transition	Nicolas Hulot	'Civil Society'
Minister of Justice	François Bayrou	MoDem
Ministers		
Minister of the Armed Forces	Sylvie Goulard	MoDem
Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs	Jean-Yves Le Drian	PS
Minister of Territorial Cohesion	Richard Ferrand	PS
Minister for Solidarity and Health	Agnès Buzyn	'Civil Society'
Minister of Culture	François Nyssen	'Civil Society'
Minister of the Economy	Bruno Le Maire	LR
Minister of Education	Jean-Michel Blanquer	LR
Minister of Labour	Muriel Pénicaud	'Civil Society'
Minister of Agriculture and Food	Jacques Mézard	MR
Minister of Public Action and Accounts	Gérald Darmanin	LR
Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation	Frédérique Vidal	'Civil Society'
Minister for Overseas France	Annick Girardin	MR
Minister of Sports	Laura Flessel-Colovic	'Civil Society'
Deputy Ministers		
Minister for Transport	Elisabeth Borne	PS
Minister for European Affairs	Marielle de Sarnez	MoDem
Secretaries of State		
Secretary of State for Relations with Parliament, Government Spokesman	Christophe Castaner	PS
Secretary of State for Gender Equality	Marlène Schiappa	PS
Secretary of State for Disabled People	Sophie Cluzel	'Civil Society'
Secretary of State for the Digital Sector	Mounir Mahjoubi	PS

Table 9: Ministers and Secretaries of State from the 40th Government of the French Fifth Republic (formed on May 15, 2017).

In the days following Macron's election, most of the centrist elements in LR expressed their willingness to adopt a benevolent attitude towards the new president's reformist ambitions. After all, Macron's pro-European and managerial inclinations seduced those who were orphans of the defunct Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF), Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's centrist party which had been swallowed with the creation of UMP in 2002. The centrists in LR had felt particularly uncomfortable during the presidential campaign, when the scandal around the schemes and embezzlements of François Fillon were added to the general disappointment they felt towards their political family and supporters for selecting a representative from the most conservative strands of the party as their presidential candidate.

Thus, the appointment of Bruno Le Maire and Gérald Darmanin facilitated the attempted rapprochement of 173 important (but not leading) party figures – such as former Environment Minister Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet and senior MP Thierry Solère – who called on the party to take a 'constructive' approach vis-à-vis the new government in the middle of May. There again, as a result of these declarations of good will, Macron's party ensured that, among this 'constructive' group, 15 parliamentary candidates in mainland France and a handful in Overseas Territories faced no LREM candidate in June. Thus, Thierry Solère, Gilles Boyer, Franck Riester, Pierre-Yves Bournazel, and obviously Bruno Le Maire and Gérald Darmanin, were spared from opposing a candidate from the presidential majority in their constituencies. The implicit agreement was that, upon winning, they would automatically be co-opted within the ranks of LREM and their allies. This was an affront for the right-wingers in LR, such as Laurent Wauquiez and Eric Ciotti, who virulently opposed any alliance (Knapp 2018, 573).

On the other side of the centrist bloc was Parti Socialiste. Weakened by its elimination from the second round of the presidential election, the party had taken the path of inward conflicts

and internal divisions in the direct aftermath of Macron's election. Led by the uncharismatic Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, the PS dreaded (with reason) that the political line of Benoît Hamon – which allowed him to collect a score of only 6.36 per cent – would lead the party to a similar debacle in the parliamentary election. This fear of marginalisation was the catalyst that led dozens of former Socialist MPs to dump their PS affiliation in an attempt – more or less desperate and successful – to secure a Macron ticket, that is, to be elected under the colors of La République En Marche.

The dynamic had a territorial character, born out of the influence of four local underbosses from PS – Richard Ferrand in Brittany, Gérard Collomb in Lyon, François Patriat in Burgundy and Christophe Castaner in Provence – who defected from the ranks of Parti Socialiste fairly early on in the campaign in order to boost, quite revengefully, their political career that were in a standstill. For instance, out of the 14 constituencies of the Rhône department – whose capital is Lyon, with its mayor Gérard Collomb – 12 were won over by deputies from LREM. Out of these 12 elected deputies, 7 were former Socialist municipal officials, such as Hubert Julien-Lafferière, Jean-Louis Touraine, Yves Blein, Thomas Radigoz or David Kimelfeld. A similar course of events was unfolding in Brittany (see footnote 69), as well as in Burgundy, where 8 out of the 11 elected deputies in 2017 were coming from the ranks of the centre-left, including 5 directly from PS: Fadila Khattabi, Frédéric Barbier, Denis Sommer, Danielle Brulebois and Rémy Rebeyrotte (Lefebvre 2019, 237-38).

Group Phase

The territorial dynamic described above formed the first phase of 'group *trasformismo*', when Socialist MPs who shared the same social-liberal persuasion simultaneously defected in the hope of being absorbed into the ranks of the presidential majority in becoming. The comical duel between Myriam El Khomri and Pierre-Yves Bournazel previously mentioned is very representative of that collective move of many PS deputies who dumped their PS affiliation in the hope of securing a Macron ticket. Some were unsuccessful, such as François Hollande's Health Minister Marisol Touraine, who first got her PS ticket and then proclaimed adherence to the 'presidential majority', before being clobbered in the vote by Sophie Auconie, a Macron-friendly candidate who was originally a member of Union des Démocrates et Indépendants (UDI), a centrist party close to Les Républicains.

Emmanuel Macron's party was also adamant not to welcome former Prime Minister Manuel Valls in its ranks, despite the latter's early, resounding and repeated proclamations of support for Macron. Indeed, Valls' request to join the presidential majority was very coolly received – after all, he had thus far been the main competitor for the social-liberal space – and he was refused endorsement, although no Macron-backed candidate was run against him (Hanley 2018), which is akin to a 'non-aggression pact' in the absence of a formal backing. Other defectors from PS were more successful in securing an endorsement. Therefore, 21 former PS deputies obtained a seat in the 2017 National Assembly after repudiating their Socialist affiliation to pledge allegiance to LREM (for a detailed overview, see Appendice 1).[70] In

[70] In alphabetical order, with their constituency: Yves Blein (Rhône 14), Eric Bothorel (Côtes d'Armor 5), Florent Boudie (Gironde 10), Brigitte Bourguignon (Pas-de-Calais 6), Jean-Jacques Bridey (Val-de-Marne 7), Christophe Castaner (Alpes de Haute Provence 2), Jean-Michel Clément (Vienne 3), Yves Daniel (Loire Atlantique 6), Françoise Dumas (Gard 1), Sophie Errante (Loire Atlantique 10), Richard Ferrand (Finistère 6), Monique Iborra (Haute-Garonne 6), Anne-Christine Lang (Paris 10), Jacqueline Maquet (Pas-de-Calais 2), Paul Molac (Morbihan 4), Hervé Pellois (Morbihan 1), Gwendal Rouillard (Morbihan 5), Jean-Louis Touraine (Rhône 3), Stéphane Travert (Manche 3), Patrick Vignal (Hérault 9), Olivier Véran (Isère 1). See Appendix 1 for more details.

many cases, these candidates did not face any representative from LREM in their constituencies: such was the case for Richard Ferrand in Finistère,[71] Christophe Castaner in Alpes-de-Haute-Provence as well as in four constituencies of Lyon, whose mayor Gérard Collomb was one of the first PS grandees to join Macron (Lefebvre 2019, 233).

In a mirror reflection to what had happened with *les frondeurs* during the Hollande quinquennat (see Chapter III), a large section of PS officials – at the right of the party, this time – decided to secede from their original parliamentary group, switching their partisan affiliation by the same token. A couple of representatives from Europe Ecologie Les Verts emulated their former Socialist allies and were elected under LREM colors: Eric Alauzet (Doubs 2) but most notably François de Rugy (Loire-Atlantique 1) and Barbara Pompili (Somme 2), who were rewarded for this party-switching with a nomination to the Presidency of the National Assembly (2017-2018) and to the Ministry of Ecology (2018-2019) for the former, and to the Ministry of Ecological Transition (since July 2020) for the latter. The rallying to LREM on the part of De Rugy and Pompili constituted a tremendous career booster for two rather dull political figures, and it also signaled the total disappearance of the Groupe Ecologiste – and its 18 deputies elected in 2012 – in the National Assembly, following the complete absorption of its rare survivors within the ambit of the presidential majority.

In addition, two former MPs from Parti Radical de Gauche (PRG), a long-standing ally of PS, were also incorporated within LREM in the manner of *trasformismo:* Annick Girardin (Saint-

[71] It was in the Brittany region – the stronghold of newly nominated Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian – that the number of defections from Parti Socialiste to La République En Marche were the most numerous and noticeable: six incumbent Socialist deputies publicly supported Emmanuel Macron and were endorsed by LREM: Richard Ferrand, Eric Bothorel, Dider Le Gac, Liliana Tanguy, Hervé Pellois and Gwendal Rouillard (Lefebvre 2019, 238).

Pierre et Miquelon), who had already been appointed as Minister of the Overseas in May 2017, and Joël Giraud (Hautes-Alpes 2). Demonstrating an even larger ideological stretch, former boss and candidate for the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) at the 2002 presidential election Robert Hue, who publicly supported Emmanuel Macron during the campaign (Hue 2017), negotiated the LREM endorsement for two members from his new movement, *Mouvement des Progressistes* (MDP), who were elected and joined the presidential majority on June 18: Sébastien Nadot (Haute-Garonne 10) and Cécile Rilhac (Val-d'Oise 3).

Among the professional politicians who got elected in the National Assembly for the first time on 18 June 2017, one can also find local elected representatives from diverse affiliations – PS, LR, PRG – who seized, through LREM, an opportunity to enter national politics that was denied to them by their former parties. According to Rémi Lefebvre (2019), 28 locally elected officials decided to turn their backs on their previous affiliations to join LREM.[72] Among them, Anne Blanc (PRG mayor of Naucelle) or Didier Le Gac (mayor of Lampaul-Plouarzel and department councillor from PS), etc. (see Appendix 1). Furthermore, a certain number of cabinet members and ministerial advisors (7) who worked for the previous Socialist administration were also duly co-opted, such as Emilie Cariou (former PS member working for the Ministry of Culture), François Cormier-Bouligeon (former PS member working for the Ministry of Economy and then Ministry of Sports) or Guillaume Gouffier-Cha (former PS member working for the Ministry of Defence), etc. (see Table 10 and Appendix 1). This also happened at the local level, with 4 mayors renouncing their previous affiliation to join LREM, such as Anne Blanc (PRG mayor of Naucelle), Didier Le Gac (PS mayor of Lampaul-Plouarzel) or Xavien Roseren (UDI mayor of Les Houches). This was also

[72] Based on data from Appendix 1, I estimate the number of vest-turners to 30.

the case for several local officials – Adam Lénaïck (PS), Pascale Boyer (PS) Thomas Rudigoz (MoDem) – and one mayoral assistant (Anne Brugnera).

Previous Occupation	Number of MPs
Member of Parliament	30
Ministerial Assistant	7
Local Official	4
Mayor	4
Parliamentary Assistant	4
Mayoral Assistant	1
Party Politics	1
Total	**51**

Table 10: LREM MPs with a Direct Professional Engagement in Politics.

In sum, 51 newly elected MPs out of 306 were professional politicians, that is, politics was their main professional activity before being elected under the LREM banner. This represents one sixth of the cohort (see Table 10 above).

Last but not least, a cohort of new and younger deputies originally from PS – who had not yet been elected at the national level – entered the National Assembly. Two groups can be delineated:

1). Those who came from the circles gravitating around Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the former Minister of the Economy of Lionel Jospin and former head of the IMF before his downfall in 2011.

2). Those who came from the ranks of the *Mouvement des Jeunes Socialistes* (MJS) – the Socialist Party youth organisation – and who had been the founders of *Les Jeunes avec Macron* (2015), En Marche's ancestor.

Many of these turncoats – who were too young to perform any significant political function in Parti Socialiste – joined LREM very early on and got elected on June 18. Among the first group composed of forty-years old 'Strauss-kahniens', Stanislas Guérini (Paris MP and LREM executive officer), Adrien Taquet (MP from Hauts-de-Seine), Benjamin Griveaux (formerly departmental and city councillor of Chalon-sur-Saône, before becoming MP from Paris and spokesperson of the government). Two former Dominique Strauss-Kahn aficionados also joined the ranks of the LREM majority, as special advisor for strategy, communication and speeches (Ismaël Emelien) and as special advisor, and Secretary of State for the Digital Economy (Cédric O).

The second group, even younger than the former Strauss-Kahn supporters – although close to them ideologically – originated from the ranks of *Union Nationale des Etudiants de France* (UNEF, the most important student union) and from *Mouvement des Jeunes Socialistes* (MJS). A few of them studied together at Université de Poitiers, hence the nickname 'Bande de Poitiers' ('the Poitiers crew') attached to this faction of ambitious political entrepreneurs in their early 30s, such as Guillaume Chiche (who became MP from Les-Deux-Sèvres), Pierre Person (who became a Paris MP) and Sacha Houlié (who became MP from Vienne). Both Person and Houlié co-created the youth movement *Les Jeunes avec Macron* ('The youth with Macron') in 2015, under the patronage of Stéphane Séjourné – Emmanuel Macron's political advisor when he was Minister of the Economy – who also started his political career at UNEF and MJS.

Among the prominent former PS youth militants who switched to LREM, one can also cite Gabriel Attal – MP from Hauts-de-Seine and partner of Stéphane Séjourné, who would become spokesperson of the government – as well as Aurélien Taché, a MP from Val d'Oise,

who was heading the UNEF section in Limoges and was close to the Bande de Poitiers. For all those political progenies of Dominique Strauss Kahn who were already well-inserted in Socialist circles thanks to years of militancy, committing to LREM was an undeniable asset to fast-track their political career.

Similar opportunistic behaviours were found on the Right side of the spectrum, in Les Républicains. The creation of the parliamentary group *Les Constructifs*, right after the legislative elections, constituted the acme of 'group *trasformismo*', as it was practiced in assiduous manner by younger members from LR aiming to join LREM. Out of the 118 deputies elected with LR's endorsement on June 18, only 100 rallied the main Les Républicains parliamentary group.

Indeed, 18 of them joined several of their colleagues from Union des Démocrates et des Indépendants (UDI), who had formed a group of 35 MPs around the figures of Thierry Solère (MP from Hauts-de-Seine) and Franck Riester (MP from Seine-et-Marne) called *Les Constructifs: républicains, UDI, indépendants* (Knapp 2018, 573; Goar and Lemarié 2017). Composed of members from several sub-sections of LR, *Les Constructifs* was created on June 27, and comprised 35 MPs out of 577, with Thierry Solère – who used to be one of François Fillon's spokesmen – as the unofficial head of this renegade faction.

These divisions and defections resulted in an unofficial schism within LR, with a portion of party members pressing the party leader François Baroin to exclude the renegades (Le Monde 2017b), a measure that would not materialise until the fall. Indeed, the whole process was consummated on 25 November 2017, when Thierry Solère, alongside Gérald Darmanin and Sébastien Lecornu, announced that they were from that moment on members of Macron's

movement, *La République En Marche* (RFI, 2017). This last move reflected the fact that the collective defections of the spring were deeper than a temporary parliamentary-level split. These were early warnings that the contradictions besieging LR's party line had to be addressed, and that implosion could be on the horizon if party leaders and bosses continued to manifest deleterious and deceptive behaviour. From that moment on, it became clear that the dynamics of attraction and absorption in the French political field had anchored themselves firmly 'at the centre'.

Previous Political Affiliation	**Number of MPs**
Parti Socialiste (PS)	78
Union des Démocrates et des Indépendants (UDI)	14
Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem)	10
Parti Radical de Gauche (PRG)	8
Les Républicains (LR)	8
Europe Ecologie Les Verts (EELV)	5
Cap 21	4
Divers Droite (DVD)	2
Alliance Centriste (AC)	1
Parti Radical (PR)	1
Guadeloupe Unie, Solidaire et Responsable (GUSR)	1
Total	**132**

Table 11: LREM MPs with a Previous Political Affiliation
(Source: Appendix 1)

In sum, at least 132 MPs elected in June 2017 had previous political experience, understood as being a national elected official, a local official, a youth organiser or a rank-and-file member of a political party (see Table 11 above). A disproportionate majority came from the

ranks of Parti Socialiste (78), followed by dissenters from UDI (14) and MoDem (10)[73] and to a lesser extent by renegades from PRG (8) and LR (8).

Molecular Phase	Group Phase
First stage: Individual defections and rallying; Support to EM during the presidential campaign (January-May 2017)	**First stage:** Party Alliances (LREM-MoDem); Local and tacit 'non-aggression pacts' during the legislative elections campaign (May-June 2017)
Second stage: Appointment of the Philippe government, following Emmanuel Macron's presidential election victory (May 15, 2017)	**Second stage:** Legislative elections victory for LREM; Absorption of whole groups of MPs supportive of the new majority ('Les Constructifs') (June 2017)

Table 12: A typology of *trasformismo* in the 2017 election cycle

Table 12 above summarises the different stages of *trasformismo* in the 2017 legislative elections, in both their *molecular* and *group* phases.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of Emmanuel Macron's election, the traditional French governmental parties were decimated on the parliamentary terrain, too. It took them only a handful of weeks after the presidential election to not only disintegrate electorally, but also doctrinally. The speed with which selected authoritative figures within their ranks got absorbed by LREM left many LR and PS cadres stunned and immediately exacerbated existing internal conflicts. Indeed, LREM offered invaluable opportunities for well-inserted members of PS and LR to reconvert, professionalise, and get promoted to a more significant national role. With LREM, they became the self-entrepreneurs of their political destiny.

[73] The 10 former MoDem members who joined En Marche were therefore not part of the group of 42 MPs elected under the banner MoDem (who did not face any LREM candidates in their constituency).

The renegade MPs from PS, in particular, came to form the backbone of LREM architecture of rule in the first two years of the quinquennat. Christophe Castaner thus became the executive officer of the party before being appointed Minister of the Interior in 2018, while Richard Ferrand initially headed the parliamentary group in the National Assembly, before being appointed President of the chamber one year later. The younger converts, i.e. Benjamin Griveaux, Gabriel Attal and Aurélien Taché, all from the right-wing line of the PS, became the whips for LREM deputies in the Assemblée Nationale (Lefebvre 2019, 241).

During his forced confinement in the early 1930s, Gramsci referred to the 'so-called *dictatorships*' of Agostino Depretis, Francesco Crispi and Giovanni Gilotti and to the parliamentary phenomenon of *trasformismo* in the following terms (1971, 227 Q3 §119):

> The government in fact operated as a 'party'. It set itself over and above the parties, not so as to harmonise their interests and activities within the permanent framework of the life and interests of the nation and State, but so as to disintegrate them, to detach them from the broad masses and obtain 'a force of non-party men linked to the government in paternalistic ties of a Bonapartist-Caesarist type'.

It is in a similar manner that the French episode of *trasformismo* should be analysed. With a selection scheme akin to that of a political party, the first Philippe government encompassed members from seemingly different political persuasions and disparate political horizons in order to display an appearance of 'moderation'. *Trasformismo* thus 'poses in a new way the manner in which the given space of power provides opportunities for intervention and recuperation by emergent political and social forces' (Hall 1988, 124). A historical parallel can also be drawn with early 1980s Britain and the creation of the British Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1981, a period that Stuart Hall argued (1988, 158) had witnessed:

> …the de facto erosion of the two-party dominance of the parliamentary scene, and the opportunist construction of temporary parliamentary coalition, alliances and pacts for the most-short term and pragmatic ends (…), which is a sign of the undermining of the representative parliamentary democratic system, and characteristic of the slow drift towards a 'government of national interest'.

Despite significant parallels to be inferred between the two emerging forces positioning at the centre of the political space (British SDP and LREM), it has nonetheless proved impossible for a centre party to get off ground level in the United Kingdom (Cole 2019, 80), and the 'little Caesars of social democracy' (Hall 1981, see also Chapter VII) effectively dissolved the SDP in March 1988. This small grouping at the centre ('Gang of four') never found the traction to emerge as a political force mighty enough to shaken the dominance of the Labour-Tory competition, let alone the triumphant and martial hegemony of post-Falklands Thatcherism, the latter of which might very well be compared to the martial climate of the mid-2010s in France (see Chapters III and IV), against the background of French military interventions in Mali, Central-African Republic and Syria, and the deployment of *Opération sentinelle* at home (see Chapter IX).

By contrast, LREM appeared to be a successful new political force in the centre that emerged from nowhere, or 'a political start-up led by a ruthless entrepreneur' (Cole 2019, 80). The next chapter thus adopts a historical and comparative perspective in order to address Emmanuel Macron's claim to the centre in more details.

Chapter VI

Centrism and Extremism in France

> La recomposition naturelle du champ politique doit se faire autour de deux pôles : entre une politique économique progressiste, qui marie l'ouverture à la protection et à la redistribution nécessaire pour la rendre acceptable, et une politique de fermeture – fermeture au progrès technologique, fermeture au commerce international – proposée par les populistes.
> (Amiel et al. 2017, 70) [74]

Introduction

This verbose admonition constitutes an attempt at sketching a narrative of ideological recomposing which LREM strove to impose in the wake of Emmanuel Macron's election. This rather vague diagnosis on the recomposing French political space was proposed in an article co-authored by Macron's advisor (David Amiel) and ghostwriter (Quentin Lafay) and two representatives from a moderate-right think-tank (Céline Bähr and Yohann Marcet) in philosopher Marcel Gauchet's journal *Le Débat.* This panel of young activists thus expressed the promises and merits of erecting a dialectic of 'openness' versus 'isolation' in lieu of the traditional Left/Right cleavage. The former rhetorical divide – with its moral denunciation of 'populism' – was clearly envisaged as more rewarding electorally than the latter.

As has previously been made clear, the 2017 electoral cycle has been characterised by vigorous attempts to redefine and reconceptualise the political and ideological space and the positioning of parties within this ecosystem. In all logic, Emmanuel Macron's denunciation of both the traditional parties – moderate Left and Right – and the extremes – far-right and far-left – positions his political offer at the 'centre' of the political landscape.

[74] 'The natural recomposing of the political landscape must be structured around two poles: on the one hand a pole of progressive economic policies that associate openness to protection and to the necessary measures of redistribution that makes it acceptable, and on the other hand a politics of closure – closure to technological progress, closure to international trade – that is proposed by the populists' (my translation)

While Macron was celebrated for being the one who ‘finally’ was capable of demolishing the long-lasting and seemingly exhausted Left/Right cleavage in France, can we really consider his venture as new, or innovative? Indeed, how could Emmanuel Macron’s election be situated in the history of the political ‘centre’ in France?

This chapter thus intends to interrogate Emmanuel Macron’s claim to the centre by adopting both a historical and comparative European perspective.

In different national settings, politicians construct what the ‘centre’ means by taking advantage of voters’ beliefs about the configuration of the political space and the location of policies and parties within it (Hindmoor 2004, 43-44). Throughout presidential or legislative campaigns, they also attempt to mold these representations in their favour, often positioning themselves in a third dimension, a ‘third way’ that purportedly renounces the sharp statements and trenchant positioning that characterise the discourse of their adversaries from the traditional Left and Right.

Indeed, policies are not inherently right-wing, left-wing or centrist but constructed as such, and voters’ beliefs about policies can be changed. Through rhetoric and semantics, parties and movements can attempt to tie particular policies to particular spatial locations in voters’ minds (Hindmoor 2004, 54). Typically, centrist movements will claim that their policy views and options are ‘moderate’ and ‘reasonable’ and will present them as balanced compromises, resulting from a search for ‘consensus’ that allegedly eschews sterile debates and petty divisions. Because political positions are constructed, they are also contested and those that manufacture them sometimes stumble on their own contradictions, which are often met with various forms of resistance (see Chapter IX).

To counter these compunctions, parties and movements may leave moderation aside and attempt to regain legitimacy by arguing that their opponents' policies are politically extreme and dangerous on socio-economic grounds, a claim that materialised in France in the 'anti-populism' of La République En Marche in power (see Chapter VIII). But before examining these rhetorical stratagems, this chapter scrutinises Emmanuel Macron's initial and tacit claim to the centre and considers the potential for rupture or continuity of such types of positioning in the French context.

To do so, the chapter first reviews elements of discourse and programmes that seem to substantiate Emmanuel Macron's claim to the centre – the fact of taking programmatic inspiration 'both from the Right and from the Left' – before examining this positioning in light of Anthony Giddens' concept of the 'Third Way', which formed the ideological backbone of Prime Minister Tony Blair's New Labour governance, which Chantal Mouffe (1998) labelled as 'radical centrist'. One may conclude that the social-liberalism of the Third Way resonates much more with François Hollande's and the Socialists' practice of government than with Macron's.

The second section first investigates the ideological underpinnings of 'centrism' in a French context by reflecting on Maurice Duverger's concept of the *éternel marais* which posits that France has, for most of its history since the French Revolution, been governed at the centre (1951; 1964). After tracing the lineage of the centrist positioning in French politics, the section engages with Pierre Serna's stimulating claim that we are witnessing, with Macron, the emergence of a new 'extreme centre' (Deneault 2016; Ali 2018; Serna 2019) imbued with totalitarian ambitions. The final section thus interrogates the potentials of the 'extreme centre' as a conceptual tool to characterise Emmanuel Macron's political and socio-economic creed.

Social Liberalism: Centrism as 'Radicality'

'…En même temps': *Emmanuel Macron's Claim to the Centre*

In the aftermath of the 2017 electoral cycle, the election of Emmanuel Macron was celebrated as a form of symbolic revenge on the part of a Fifth Republic that had been, throughout the campaign, criticised by the Left for its Bonapartist anachronism, its concentration of power and the conservatism of the bipolar electoral option – PS against LR – offered thus far to the citizenry. Against this background, Macron's election purportedly signaled the overcoming of the existing party system, the genuine encounter between 'a man and a people' – a classic of Gaullist mythology – without intermediation, on the basis of a newborn movement whose (populist) backbone was the rejection of the traditional parties.

This rejection was translated – among other rhetorical tricks – with '*en même temps*' ('at one and the same time'), a motto that – in spite of its patent vacuity – became an ideological slogan. Indeed, in order to break with the practices of what his partisans deemed *l'ancien monde* ('the old world'), Emmanuel Macron presented himself as the champion of pragmatism with his mantra *en même temps,* affirming a commitment to the centre that was reminiscent of the Third Republic and that had lost political credence under the bipolar Fifth Republic. Beyond the rejection of the old system,[75] the expression *en même temps* can be ideologically interpreted as 'both Left and Right', implying that both political persuasions provide inspiration, ideas and talented people on which a modernising president, likened to the curator of a museum, should draw (Cole 2019, 84).

[75] In an interview with the weekly magazine *Le Point* on 30 August 2017, Emmanuel Macron declared that 'the forces of the old world are still very present, engaged in the battle to make France fail' (« Les forces du monde ancien sont toujours là, bien présentes, et toujours engagées dans la bataille pour faire échouer la France », my translation) (Dupont et al. 2017).

While promising the advent of new political practices within a party, La République En Marche, that would be 'open to free and sincere debate', Emmanuel Macron's election was analysed by his partisans and ideologues as an opportunity 'to reconcile equality with liberty' (Amiel et al. 2017, 64-65). Thus, the narrative was that Macron – a young and brilliant leader apparently morally beyond reproach – had achieved a victory that was explicitly and proudly centrist, rallying Left, Right and non-aligned men and women of talent who coalesced so as to make France an advanced capitalist society that would offer success at the top and trickle down benefits all the way to the bottom (Hewlett 2017, 389). What was not perceived at the time was that this strategy of 'openness' – which was assimilated at first sight to a form of political pragmatism more commonly found in parliamentary systems than in presidential regimes – would involve a permanent process of (re)-adjustment.

What is certain is that Emmanuel Macron partly owed his victory to the rallying of the traditional centre of the political game in French politics, that is, François Bayrou's party Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem). Indeed, the rallying of Bayrou had put Macron's flagging campaign back on track in February 2017, a debt which was acknowledged by the freshly elected Macron, who rewarded Bayrou with the position of *garde des sceaux* ('keeper of the seals', or Minister of Justice) and a couple of his lieutenants – including Bayrou's faithful ally Marielle de Sarnez, who became Minister of European Affairs[76] –and ensured that MoDem was generously endowed with winnable seats in the parliamentary elections (Cole 2019, 83).

[76] It has to be noted that these appointments were rather short-lived. Indeed, the weekly satirical *Le Canard Enchaîné* revealed that MoDem had created no-show jobs at the European parliament, taking advantage of the funding available to hire parliamentary aides to make these latter work for the party instead of working on parliamentary proceedings ('*affaire des assistants européens du MoDem*'). The situation was rather convenient for Macron, who seized the opportunity to get rid of potentially vocal allies, as the three MoDem ministers – François Bayrou, Marielle de Sarnez and Sylvie Goulard – were indicted in early June 2017. After only 35 days in office, the MoDem ministers had to resign on 21 June 2017, and were replaced respectively by Nicole Belloubet as Minister of Justice, Nathalie Loiseau as Minister for European Affairs and Florence Parly as Minister of the Armed Forces.

Emmanuel Macron's brand of centrism was original insofar as it had emerged from the Left, although it was not embodied by one of Parti Socialiste's most prominent members. Shaped by 'progressive' cultural and societal values, Macron's social liberalism was aiming to reconcile French society with market forces and enthusiastically embraced globalisation (Raymond 2017, 426). Societally, Macron initially adopted 'progressive' views on access to lesbian couples to Assisted Reproductive Technology, on France's colonial past – he affirmed during an interview with Algerian TV channel Echorouk TV that France committed 'crimes against humanity' during the colonisation of Algeria (Le Monde 2017a) – and demonstrated a relatively liberal attitude towards immigration and refugees.

On the economic side, Macron sought further deregulation of conditions of employment – especially the 35-hour work week – and his manifesto promised a series of pro-business measures with tax-cuts for companies (from 33 to 25 per cent of profits), 60 billion euros of cuts in public expenditure over the span of five years, and a drastic reduction in the size of the public sector. Besides, Macron always presented himself as an ardent supporter of the European Union and expressed his wish to develop a close relationship with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Macron's Europeanism and his political and social liberalism led several commentators to compare him to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who also was elected president at a young age and was similarly – through a rejection of the main political parties – building-up a dialectic of rupture and continuity, order and disorder, mixing the new with the old, combining the contingent with the structural (Dolez et al. 2019, 12-13). In light of these socially liberal, economically neoliberal and pro-EU stances, many have also suggested that 'Macronism' was reminiscent of Blairism, an interpretation which was reinforced by the fact

that both currents were characterised by youthful and charismatic leadership (Hewlett 2017, 379-80).

With his Janus-inspired claim to be 'both from the Left and the Right', Emmanuel Macron's election in May 2017 was thus deemed evocative of the 1990s, when the United Kingdom adopted a 'modern' and 'revived' attitude towards globalisation and entrepreneurship with the election of the young and dynamic Tony Blair. Both Blair and Macron were thus described as 'centrists who believed the centre had lost its way', both came to office 'on a wave of euphoria and hope after what had felt like years of inertia', and both 'had an almost messianic belief in themselves and in their ability to change the system' (Bell 2018). Other commentators saw in Macron an anachronistic copycat: 'when he arrived at the Elysée Palace, Macron was hailed as a new breed of politician but he was really the past, not the future (…), the last technocratic centrist in the tradition of Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder' (Eliott 2018).

French people would thus have elected a 'reprocessed version of the Blair-Schröder manifesto',[77] a reclaimed rendition of the Third Way, this social-liberal doctrine that associates welfare-state withdrawal with citizens' 'responsibilisation' (Média 2018). How can these claims be assessed? Is Macron really the 'new Blair'? Can Macronism be legitimately equated to a contemporary, continental rendition of the Third Way? If not, how could Macron's political thinking and policy programme be described? What light does his mode of

[77] In June 1998, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder published a document entitled *Europe: The Third Way/Die Neue Mitte*. The first paragraph of the short document states the following: 'Social democrats are in government in almost all countries in the Union. Social democracy has found new acceptance – but only because while retaining its traditional values, it has begun in a credible way to renew its ideas and modernise its programmes. It has also found new acceptance because it stands not only for social justice but also for economic dynamism and the unleashing of creativity and innovation' (Blair and Schröder 1998).

government cast on the options opened and closed to political expression and activity in France?

Giddens' 'Radical Centre' and the Third Way

To address these questions, it is necessary to examine the seminal Third Way pamphlet, written by Tony Blair's organic intellectual in chief, sociologist Anthony Giddens, in order to unveil the tenets of what Chantal Mouffe (1998) has described as the 'radical centre'. In a dated and unpalatable outline published at the dawn of Tony Blair's decade in power (1997-2007), Giddens exposed the fundamentals of his new doctrine aimed at 'renewing' social democracy and at making post-Thatcherite Britain the laboratory for the propagation of his creed, or as he put it, 'the sparking point for creative interaction between the US and Continental Europe' (Giddens 1998, IX).

Presented as an alternative to traditional social-democracy – dubbed the 'Old Left' – the Third Way aimed to transcend the Left/Right division by articulating themes and values from both sides in a new synthesis (Mouffe 1998, 11). Giddens arguments appear analytically flawed on a number of terrains: misconceptions about Thatcherism abound and globalisation is perceived and presented as an inexorable process, against which adaptation must be the sole envisaged solution. With its catalogue of catchwords, which came to form the backbone of New Labour's identity – 'governance', 'equality of opportunity', 'community', 'social entrepreneurship' – the piece reads more like a private firm pamphlet rather than a political manifesto, and this falsely-inclusive, corporate tone might indeed have influenced *En Marche*'s communication strategy.[78]

[78] In this respect, it is interesting to notice that the *Élysée* website largely promotes the notion of 'equality of opportunity', with a specific webpage dedicated to it, on which the French motto (*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*) is purposefully reframed as '*Liberté. Fraternité. Égalité des Chances*'. URL: https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/liberte-fraternite-egalite-des-chances (accessed October 28, 2021). See also Appendix #2.

Firstly, Gidden's fundamental misinterpretation of the Thatcherite project consists in depicting it as a 'mode of government' that was developed as Margaret Thatcher 'went along' rather than a 'full-fledged ideology' (1998, 5). While the British government forcefully manufactured some of the most intimidating, robust and brutal policies in the history of modern Britain (Hall 1983; 1988; Jessop 1987; Gamble 1988), Giddens assures that Margaret Thatcher was a promoter of 'minimal government' (1998, 8), and thus largely eclipses the role of the (strong) state in his depiction of the profound, almost anthropological transformations brought about by Thatcherism. Far from being just anecdotal, this fundamental misconception on the role of the state in neoliberalism influences the vision of statecraft informing his revamped social democracy. This leads him to equate state intervention with welfarism, thus conveniently concealing that the recipe of Blair's mode of government is akin to that of Thatcher's: further entrenching and institutionalising the combination of monetarist economics with moral authoritarianism and coercion (Callinicos 2001).

Furthermore, Giddens' argument on the criminal legacy of 'old Labour' seems rather partial, affirming that 'the equalitarianism of the old left was noble in intent, but as its rightist critics say has sometimes led to perverse consequences – visible, for example in the social engineering which has left a legacy of decaying, crime-ridden housing estates' (1998, 16). Quite the opposite, recent studies have demonstrated that crime in Britain skyrocketed following aggressive Thatcherite policies (Farrall and Hay 2014). Giddens' assessment of Thatcherism as a critical juncture in British politics is a false start that makes for a rather weak analytical endeavor, notwithstanding a touch of 'good sense' in pinpointing – although very unsubtly – the fundamental contradiction at the heart of Margaret Thatcher's brand of neoliberalism: the tension between its 'two halves – market fundamentalism and conservative

morals' (1998, 15). Yet, this dialectic entanglement between a future oriented conception of the 'market' and a nostalgic Victorian ethos and morals was already cogently formulated by Stuart Hall in the 1980s with his revealing concept of 'regressive modernisation' (see Chapter VII).

Moreover, Giddens' second analytical pitfall relates to his depoliticisation and naturalisation of phenomena such as the 'intensifying processes of globalisation and technological change' and the 'advance of the global marketplace (…) affecting the structure of states or the legitimacy of governments' (1998, 71). Far from an irrevocable process, these developments are the product of strongly politicised, state-led capitalist orientations and decisions. Yet, they serve as a justification for a long overdue 'modernisation' which would necessarily entail 'breaking away from classical social democratic positions' (1998, 67). For Giddens, exogenous processes of global change must therefore be met with structural adjustments, and this forms the horizon of all possible action. Indeed, 'adapt or die' is the implicit, often explicit demand that commands the urgency New Labour attached to its programme of modernisation (Bastow and Martin 2003, 68).

Helping citizens 'pilot their way through the major revolutions of our time: *globalisation, transformations in personal life* and our *relationship to nature*' (1998, 64) is presented as the ultimate objective of Third Way politics. Sympathetic to the purportedly self-driven operation of globalised markets – or, at the very least, silent on a potential regulation of their operations – Third Way proponents contest economic and cultural protectionism, depicted as 'the territory of the far right, which sees globalisation as a threat to national integrity and traditional values' (ibid).

In fact, the irrevocability with which globalisation processes are apprehended by Third Way zealots forms the backbone of 'post-politics' (Mouffe 2000, 118-127): economic and social change are understood as non-political and unavoidable. The purported inevitability of change therefore enforces a closure on alternative political discourses and ideological developments. In a neo-Darwinian fashion, citizens are exhorted to embrace a new mindset, to subject to the dynamics of global capitalism in order to survive. Emulating Thatcherite politics under novel discursive conditions is presented as the pragmatic political 'adaptation' to these global developments.

Consecrating the depoliticisation of public action under the auspices of globalisation, Giddens presents the keyword of 'governance' as 'a more relevant concept to some forms of administrative or regulatory practices' (1998, 33). Similarly vague ethical principles are prescribed to tackle the challenges of the new millennium: the 'community' is deemed fundamental to the 'partnership' to be established between state and civil society – i.e. responsibilities must be transferred away from the state to the voluntary sector. Nowhere is this intention clearer than in the restructuring of unemployment benefits – which, it was argued, discouraged active employment search – through the 'Welfare to Work' ('Workfare') programmes, imposed from above in an uncompromising manner. Compelling the unemployed to accept any work offered or retraining, these policies were aimed at punishing 'dysfunctional' citizens who refused to work and thus failed to accept their responsibilities towards the wider 'community' (Bastow and Martin 2003, 56). Hence the quasi-biblical admonition: 'no rights without responsibilities'.

By the same token, this 'partnership' ethos introduced private companies into new areas of public service provision, notably through the Public Private Partnerships (PPP), designed to

finance the building of hospitals, the delivery of transport services, and to allow some schools and prisons to be run by private firms.

In sum, Giddens' new ethical compromise meant to create a new balance between the spheres of government, the economy and civil society through the development of new forms of 'governance'. In order to pacify what remained of the workers movement, New Labour promoted timid notions of social solidarity and encouraged self-fulfilment from the bottom-up – through 'equality of opportunity'. While Tony Blair had allegedly 'always believed that politics is first and foremost about ideas' (Blair 1998), New Labour policies entrenched the technocratic 'idea' that politics should be read not in terms of a partisan confrontation, but rather as the neutral management of public affairs. By aiming to escape 'sterile debates' that had polarised politics for too long, New Labour escaped from political debate altogether, furthering the relentless commodification of the world through an unequivocal embrace of neoliberalism and the corporate contamination of every aspect of social life (Callinicos 2001, 64-65).

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, New Labourism was the most advanced form of social-liberalism in Europe, i.e. the political formation that most actively introduced neoliberal ideas, arguments and governmental practices among the European social-democrat and socialist parties. In a manner akin to the misleadingly coined 'social market economy' (see Chapter I), the 'social' adjective in 'social-liberalism' did not mean that this ideology was more 'social' in character, but rather that neoliberal ideas had to acclimate to social-democratic elite representations, i.e. they needed to be transformed and reframed in order to be properly embedded in social-democratic narratives and programmes (Rioufreyt 2017, 31).

Blairism has thus promoted the image of 'the businessman' and the 'entrepreneur' as the principal social role model, sustaining the sell-off of critical public assets, forcing the public sector to 'mimic' the market and fatally blurring the public/private distinction by encouraging the corporate penetration of parts of the public sector (Hall 2003, 13). Meanwhile, inequalities widened, and incomes at the very top of the distribution saw the strongest growth of all (Joyce and Sibieta 2013, 179).

In light of the Blairite experiment and with the fundamentals of the Third Way in mind, how could Emmanuel Macron's ideology and policy regime be comprehended? Undeniably, some Giddensian and Blairite assumptions prefigured and penetrated the doctrine known as 'Macronism', the most preponderant being the perception of globalisation as an inescapable dynamic. Their youth, projected dynamism and voluntarism also account for the ubiquitous comparison between Macron and Blair. Furthermore, both Blair and Macron indulge in the glorification of entrepreneurship, although the latter tends to adopt the semantics of the start-up (see also Chapter VII). Indeed, the start-up ethos and organisation is conceived as a method to transform public action by creating a symbiosis between a modernised civil service and private partners united 'in the service of general interest', as Emmanuel Macron put it in the preface of a collective book (Algan and Cazenave 2016). Under the label of 'progressivism' and with the help of new technologies, La République En Marche's promise was the deep transformation of public service, a metamorphosis that all technocratic modernisers aspired to in the previous decades (Quijoux and Saint-Martin 2017, 18).

No similarity nonetheless regarding their political journeys: while Blair was a Labour Party veteran and experienced parliamentarian, Macron created his political movement in 2016, and had never been elected prior to May 2017. Besides, the discursive innovations mobilised by

Giddens and Blair inevitably grew old, and Macron's semantics are only marginally reminiscent of New Labour's. Discursive and ideological similarities are however easier to observe between Blairism and the policies of Macron's direct predecessor, François Hollande, which can lead us to safely posit that the spirit of the Third Way had been soluble in Parti Socialiste for a long time.

In line with Blair's search for 'consensus', François Hollande had always been the man of the *synthèse* ('synthesis') in Parti Socialiste. A firm believer in party politics, Hollande considered partisan affiliation the *sine qua non* for electoral success. Blair and Hollande were first elected MPs in 1983 and 1988 respectively, when a legislative mandate constituted the inescapable first step to start a political career. In clear contradistinction, Emmanuel Macron has never been a MP, or an elected official of any sort. His attachment to the legislative branch of government is therefore minimal, and so is his respect for parliamentary debates, proceedings and accountability (see Chapter VII). Blair's and Hollande's journeys have been more traditional: acquainted to partisan negotiations and parliamentary workings, they were often ready to seek consensus in order to consolidate majorities. On both sides of the Channel, 'modernising' trends therefore came from *within* the established Left parties. Indeed, Tony Blair needed to work through the existing structure to be able to take advantage of Labour's organisation and electoral strength (Barlow 2017, 402), a position of leadership and solidity which the PS was absolutely unable to provide for the ambitious Emmanuel Macron towards the end of Hollande's term.

Building up on Sarkozy's immense unpopularity, Hollande's campaign promised new financial regulations, redistributive taxation, and ambitious 'reindustrialisation' policies. A surprising positioning indeed, for someone known for embodying the dominant internal

coalition (*ligne majoritaire*) in PS, a very moderate centre-left lineage dating back from Michel Rocard, Jacques Delors and Lionel Jospin (Clift 2013, see also Chapters II and III). Indeed, the Socialist presidential campaign witnessed a radical – albeit very ephemeral – rhetorical shift towards a critic of the market-economy, partly as a result of the financial crisis. The January 2012 Bourget speech, in which Hollande virulently expressed his opposition to 'the world of finance', is a case in point (Hollande 2012). Yet, despite a 'democratic socialist' campaign rhetoric – a tactical positioning largely motivated by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's strong polls showings – François Hollande's early policies in office reflected typical Third Way tenets in their most tepid manifestations. Deriding Nicolas Sarkozy's opulent penchants, Hollande declared he would be the 'normal president'. This bizarre stance quickly translated into a vigorous attachment to the status quo and a listless form of leadership domestically and abroad.

As demonstrated in Chapter III, the Hollande presidency holds important lessons for understanding social democracy in times of economic crisis and austerity (Milner 2017). The radical centrist inclinations in the first phase of Hollande's term (2012-2013) were indeed quickly supplanted by liberalising and authoritarian forms of governance on a variety of terrains. His 2012 manifesto commitments – favouring youth employment, securing employment rights, increasing investment in training, committing to social dialogue – echoed Blairite principles but were abandoned with the appointment of Prime Minister Manuel Valls in June 2014, and with Emmanuel Macron's appointment as Minister of the Economy two months later, which marked the decisive shift towards a brutal reformist agenda.
By contrast, New Labourism thus experienced a breakthrough in France with the rise of Manuel Valls in government, but social liberalism had already permeated Parti Socialiste, although the party was not 'officially' social liberal. Indeed, this allusive positioning came

with much ambiguities. As Thibaut Rioufreyt (2017, 33-34) argues, social liberalism became 'the only possible policy' for the French Socialists after their abandonment of national-based socialist policies on the altar of European integration (see Chapter II). Yet, it occurred to PS cadres that running a campaign on social liberal themes was not electorally rewarding – indeed, Manuel Valls never won in the PS primaries because his line was a minority in the party – hence the necessity to conduct social liberal policies *à la Hollande,* i.e. surreptitiously, without saying it outright.

Like Blair, Valls was an economic 'moderniser' [79] who decided to become 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime', trapping the PS in a security spiral following the Islamist terrorist attacks of Paris and Nice in 2015-2016. With these identity and security focused policies, the French Socialists hoped to get rid of the *laxisme* ('laxity') that had for so long been attached to the party on themes of insecurity and immigration, and which allegedly caused the traumatic elimination of Lionel Jospin from the second round of the 2002 presidential election. Endorsing Sarkozy's legacy, Valls went along with intellectual influences that were at the core of Blairite modernising principles and were embodied in Britain by the 'guru' Peter Mandelson (Dixon 2013, 112). By 2014, the social-liberal shift of PS was therefore limpid, and the rest of the *quinquennat* would confirm this inclination, as well as the decisive drift from a mild radical centrist political approach to a firm authoritarian-centrist mode of 'governance'.

However, Hollande and Blair came from the ranks of the established social-democracy – respectively PS and Labour. They did not have the same temptation and pretention to erect

[79] Mimicking Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown's famous 'Labour – the party of enterprise' narrative, Manuel Valls declared 'J'aime l'entreprise' at the MEDEF (employer union) summer school, shortly after being appointed Prime Minister (France Info 2014).

themselves as the paragons of the 'moderates' of both camps. In that respect, Macron's endeavor remains very original. The new president's rejection of bipolarism, and his authoritative and central approach to political positioning and competition require new interpretative schemes that would go beyond the mere radical-centrist reading. Comparing Macron with Blair and the Third Way is therefore useful, but remains analytically limited. Indeed, Emmanuel Macron adopted a social liberal discourse during the campaign but he was not elected on a social liberal platform: he reached the second ballot of the election because he rejected traditional parties and pretended to overcome existing cleavages, in a personalist approach that Christopher Bickerton and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti termed 'technopopulism through the leader' (see Chapter VIII). The next section interrogates Macron and LREM's doctrine inlight of the concept of the 'extreme centre'.

The Authoritarian Tilt: Centrism as Extremism

At first sight, it may appear that the French party system has for a very long time been based on bipolar competition between coalitions and parties of Left and Right. This long-lasting binary configuration has admittedly been transformed by the result of the 2017 elections (Kuhn 2018, 496). It is true that, throughout the Fifth Republic, presidentialism has favored – in principle and *de facto* – a strict and sharp bipolarisation. With the notable exception of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, no president before Macron was able to get elected on a ticket that was not linked to the hegemonic party on the Right or the Left.

Yet, it would be extremely short-sighted to assume that the political forces in the centre only played a minor role in French history. While a more detailed institutional analysis of French presidentialism is offered in Chapter VII, this section conceptualises the French centre of the political landscape in the *longue durée*, or at the very least since the French Revolution. Returning to the work of French political science pioneer Maurice Duverger (1957; 1964) is

very useful for this purpose. The second half of the section investigates the instances in which this 'centrism' can take on an 'extreme' character and thus intends to assess the analytical value of the concept of 'extreme centrism' to make sense of the LREM venture.

Maurice Duverger and the French 'Eternel Marais'

Maurice Duverger stood against the 'dualist' interpretation – positing a systematic dual split between Left and Right (François Goguel and René Rémond) – and against the 'pluralist confusion' model – which mapped a factionalised multi-party structure (Raymond Aron) and dominated the schemes of analysis of French political life since the Revolution. Instead, Duverger proposed a third explicative model, that of the '*éternel marais*' ('eternal swamp').

For Duverger, rather than a succession of Left and Right governments, French party politics have been dominated by the *éternel marais*, or 'centre' (centre-right and centre-left) throughout the Directoire, First Empire, July Monarchy, Second Empire and Third and Fourth Republics. As he put it bluntly, the main characteristic of French politics has been 'centrism' (Duverger 1964, 34). Since 1789, the *conjonction des centres* ('union of the centres') has dominated French politics, with a clear rejection of both extremist Left and Right parties, and a condemnation of both revolutionaries and ultra-conservatives. Thus, from 1789 to 1958, Left governments have governed for a dozen years only, and Right governments have been in office for a bit more than two decades: 80 per cent of the time, France was governed by centrists.[80] It is in this sense that the 'marais' is 'éternel' (Elgie 2018, 18).[81] For almost 240

[80] Duverger explains that the only genuine Left-wing governments were the Jacobins (1793-1794), the temporary government of the Second Republic (February-May 1848) and the Front Populaire (1936-1938). Conversely, the only Right-wing governments were those of Richelieu (1815-1816 and 1820-1822), the Villèle and Polignac governments (1822-1828 and 1830), the National Assembly government (1871-1875), the Vichy regime (1940-1944) and the Pinay government of 1952 (Duverger 1964, 35)

[81] As Robert Elgie reminds us, the term 'marais' originated in the context of the Convention and was used to refer to a set of *députés* who occupied a middle ground between the Girondins and the Montagnards – both factions which used to be part of the Jacobin movement. Although these deputies

years, France experienced centrist forms of governance, hence the comparison of French political life with a coarse marshland where centre-left and centre-right share power in a stagnant and ossified manner, marginalising the extreme, 'anti-system' parties for the sake of stability.

Indeed, Duverger suggests that the French Revolution and its brutal aftermath are the source of this distrust towards clearly delineated political ideologies. The brutality of the Terror (1793-1794) and the atrocities of the Restoration (1814-1815), were episodes of red violence and white violence which marked the French psyche for a very long time (Duverger 1964, 40). From the 1830s onwards, the *conjonction des centres* signaled the failures of both the Revolution and the Restoration and imposed a 'compromise' between 'moderates' of both sides. This accommodation was deemed sine qua non to the return of stability and gave birth to the Empire, a form of 'republican monarchy' based on plebiscite, papal blessing, and the search for a '*juste milieu*' ('fair middle'), which was then reframed as 'concentration' with the development of more democratic forms of parliamentarianism under the Third Republic (1870-1940) and renamed the 'third force' under the Fourth Republic (1946-1958).

However, the manufacturing of this central political force had deleterious effect on democratic pluralism. The ideological lines of fracture between parties tended to resorb and the party system gradually took the shape of a dull and homogenised 'continuum' which, in fact, tended to resolutely bend towards the centre-right, relegating the differences between successive centre-right and centre-left majorities to the realm of rhetoric rather than action;

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were more typically known as *La Plaine* ('the plain', or 'the lowland'), Maurice Duverger decided to employ the more derogatory term of *marais* that was sometimes used against them, thus not concealing the normative dimension inherent to his article. Indeed, Duverger already adopted a very dualist conception of political competition in *Political Parties* (1957), and he consolidated his argument in favour of bipolarisation in this 1964 article (Elgie 2018, 16-17).

parties were thus reformist in discourse but conservative in practice (Duverger 1964, 44-46). The institutionalisation of a French *marais* where centre-right and centre-left congregated engendered many morbid symptoms and fostered feelings of alienation on both extremes of the political landscape. The backlash to the continuing sequence of indistinguishable governments dedicated to administration and management rather than redistribution and transformation manifested itself in radical parties' symbolic cornering and social construction as fomenters of agitation and turmoil. Deprived from a proper tribune, revolutionary and ultra-conservative parties reinforced their opposition to the current regime and, by the same token, their symbolic and political marginalisation (see also the section on anti-populism in Chapter VIII).

Specialist of French presidentialism Robert Elgie updated Duverger's figures in the wake of the 2017 elections, with the aim of assessing the analytical value of the *marais* metaphor for the Fifth Republic, a period not covered by Duverger. Paying tribute to the prescience of this latter's argument, Elgie borrows his method and counts 13 years of Left governments, 35 years of Right governments and ten years of *marais* governments from 1959 to 2017, which amounts to 17 per cent of the period (2018, 21-24).[82] Against this background, the election of Macron challenged the established bipolarisation of the French party system and possibly signaled a return to a Duverger-style marais government. Indeed, LREM includes representatives of both the moderate Left and the moderate Right and as such, it corresponds to Duverger's portrait of a centre party.

[82] Robert Elgie's methodology used to identify Left and Right governments is based on the following observations: 'First, we observe cases where there was a union of the left between the PCF and the moderate left (1981-84 and 1997-2002) (…) By extension, we class as right governments those cases were the right was in office and where there was a formal union of the left in opposition, because in these cases there was no collaboration between the right and the moderate left against the centre left' (Elgie 2018, 20).

Besides, the Philippe I government can be described as a 'standard *marais* mix of moderate Right and moderate Left ministers' (Elgie 2018, 24-25, see also Chapter V). From this new political conjuncture, Elgie proposes two hypotheses for the future of the French political landscape. The political-ideological space could restructure in the form of a *tripartition* – with the extreme Left including La France Insoumise, PCF and a rump of PS; the extreme Right with the Front National and a set of small allies; and a third pole opposing both the extreme Left and Right with LREM, MoDem and Les Constructifs. In this hypothesis, Elgie does not specify what would become of Les Républicains. At this stage, betting on the demise of the traditional Right party may seem premature, in spite of LR's incessant divisions. This diagnosis was shared by Emmanuel Macron in an interview he gave to Le Monde a couple of weeks before the first round of the presidential election (De Royer et al. 2017).
Alternatively, the reconfiguring could also take the form of a *quadripartition* – with an anti-system Left – LREM operating as the de facto Left party – Les Républicains and various allies as a moderate Right group and FN on the extreme right (2018, 26-27). Under this postulate, the prospects for ongoing *marais* governments would be very high. Yet, such hypothesis could only be plausible if LREM kept commitments to a moderate Left political agenda, a claim that is not consistent with the interpretation provided in Chapter VII. The caveat which Elgie rightfully raises is the fact that French political parties are the victims of the personalised nature of presidential elections and are therefore less institutionalised than in many other countries. This is even more so the case for LREM, a one-year-old movement with very few executives which may, according to Elgie, turn out to be a 'flash party' (2018, 27) that would, in the manner of a mirage, only momentarily eclipse the purportedly perennial bipolarisation of French politics.

As Elgie reminds us, Duverger adopted a very dualist conception of political competition in *Political Parties* (1957), positing that competition took place between the Left and the Right but that there could also be a basic division within both the Left and the Right, between extreme and moderate versions of it. The possibilities for a self-styled centre party also exist, in which case it would bring together both the moderate Right and Left tendencies under one roof. Yet, according to Duverger, there cannot be a discrete centrist ideology (2018, 17).

Extreme Centrism between Zeitgeist and Tradition

Yet, the centrist denomination is sticky in Macron's case, and several observers have equated Emmanuel Macron's election to a victory of the 'extreme centre', to a symptom of the 'intellectual mediocrity' and 'moral misery' of French elites sold to the power of big corporations (Deneault 2017). With his disdain for 'intermediary bodies', his claim to be 'anti-system' and his ambition to speak 'directly to the people', Emmanuel Macron would thus embody a particular brand of populism: the 'populism of the extreme centre' (Godin 2016, see also Chapter VIII). Denouncing a political system that he presented as corrupted and officially wishing to politically materialise the idea of a 'fair middle-ground', Macron's endeavor was, for some, reminiscent of the years 1794-1799, when 'moderate' parliamentarians denounced both the Jacobins and the Royalists in an attempt to protect the Republic against its political demons (Serna 2017).

How could the 'extreme' centre be characterised, and how does it relate to the 'radical' centre previously evoked? Is there simply a difference of degree between these two notions – the 'extreme' centre referring to a radicalisation of the 'radical', so to speak? Is the 'extreme centre' a recent development, a new mode of government? Could Emmanuel Macron's ideology be described as extreme-centrist?

One fundamental element of the doctrine seems to be the attempt to suppress the Left/Right antagonism by appealing to 'rationality', 'pragmatism' and 'realism', thus abating the relevance of cardinal distinctions which used to structure a 'coherent axiology of ideological principles' (Deneault 2016, 59-64). It is through this angle that one should analyse François Hollande's pledge to 'normalcy' for instance, which correctly underlines his feat: presenting everything that departs from an arbitrarily proclaimed 'fair middle-ground' – which is partly defined by corporate actors due to the pervasive influence of corporations, lobbies and *haute finance* representatives in political life – as 'pathological' (ibid, 43).

Often, the expression 'extreme centre' is used as an umbrella term encapsulating the contemporary faces of neoliberalism (Ali 2018). Thus, 'throughout the heartlands of capital, we have witnessed the convergences of political choices: Republicans and Democrats in the United States, New Labour and Tories in Britain, Socialists and Conservatives in France; the German coalitions, the Scandinavian centre-right and centre-left, and so on' because, in virtually each case, 'the two-party system has morphed into an effective 'national government'' (Ali 2018, 175). With regards to Emmanuel Macron's election, Ali asserts (2018, 224):

> …with the two traditional 'extreme centre' parties [UMP and PS] wrecked, and the majority of the electorate fearful and desperate at the thought of an extreme-right victory, many flocked to the banner of a Bonapartist banker whose new party was a de facto merger of the worst elements of the French extreme centre. This is a national government that wishes to dismantle what's left of the French 'exception' and turn it into a half-Atlantic, half-German hybrid.

Reiterating Chantal Mouffe's diagnosis twenty years prior (1998), Ali avers that the hallowed notion that political parties and the differences between them constitute the essence of modern democracies has begun to look like a sham (2018, 175). However, while Mouffe was mostly concerned with the mutations at play in New Labour's Britain, Ali's definitional endeavor

seeks perhaps to assimilate an overly vast variety of political actors under the unitary banner of ‘extreme centre’.

For a more historicised account, one can turn to historian Pierre Serna’s remarkable book, *L’Extrême Centre ou le Poison Français* (2019). A specialist of the French Revolution, Serna undertakes a magisterial demonstration spanning from 1789 to 2019 that illustrates the particularly French tendency to acclaim or elect ‘saviours’ and ‘providential men’ whose dirigisme and authority provides them with the institutional means to eventually curtail freedoms and the prerogatives of the legislative branch of government. The extreme centre, Serna argues, is a very old French tradition, albeit ‘invisible’ most of the time.

In the wake of the French Revolution, while France was at war with its neighbours and Paris was at war with the rest of France, *députés* from the Committee of Public Safety created a centrist front tolerating no opposition. Thus was born, in the name of *raison d’état*, the oxymoronic *gouvernement révolutionnaire* (‘revolutionary government’). In front of the Convention, Maximilien de Robespierre quickly designated the ‘extremes’ – Right and Left – as enemies and deemed the concentration of power in the hands of the Committee of Public Safety *sine qua non* to revolutionary victory. A few months later, this logic resulted in the physical elimination of the *Hébertistes* on the Left and the *Dantonistes* on the Right. For Serna, such decapitation of the popular movement, alongside the violent refusal of legislative parliamentarianism, amounted to a ‘Thermidor before Thermidor’ (Serna 2019, 65-68). Leaving no trace of ideology and mediation, constructing their camp as liberated from any pre-existing political or ethical principle, the representatives of the extreme centre refused to recognise the conflictual character of society, and spoiled the revolutionary legacy by savagely repressing all forms of opposition.

Indeed, this doctrine survived Robespierre's ousting in July 1794, and continued unabated with the installation of a bourgeois revolutionary order founded on private property and voting rights. Faced with a spiral of protests in the spring of 1795, the Thermidorians consistently repressed in blood the dissenters, and wiped out the protagonists of the Terror, even those who contributed to the fall of Robespierre. From 1795 to 1799, the French Directory fulfilled the Thermidorian project of a 'republic of the centre', and paved the way for a French political economy of liberalism permeated by bourgeois thinking that would span throughout the Industrial Revolution (Serna 2019, 95-106).

Against widely accepted narratives, Maximilien de Robespierre and Napoleon Bonaparte were thus not the two faces of respectively Left and Right authoritarianism. For Serna, Robespierre and Bonaparte were, on the contrary, occupying the centre of the political stage, strongly incarnating a genuine French exception with weak ideological bases but core tenets composed of elitism, private property and security: the extreme centre, or, as it would later be called, *le parti de la France* (ibid, 107-108, 141; Serna 2005).

For Pierre Serna, 'Macronism' is the last – to date – avatar of an extreme centrist tradition that developed since 1793, and was transfigured under different masks since. Three elements are indeed common to the context in which Emmanuel Macron accessed the presidency and the period spanning from 1789 to 1815:

1) The pervasiveness of a *discourse of moderation* framing a politics of the centre above partisan affiliations, legitimised by a mastery of technical affairs and the resolve of a pragmatic man of destiny against the various 'extremes'.

2) The *treachery of individual politicians* who resort to what Serna calls *girouettisme* – political betrayal through party switching – in order to re-centre their position on the political spectrum, supposedly in the name of the nation's 'superior interests' – what I referred to as *trasformismo* in Chapter V.

3) Behind an initial rhetoric of moderation, the extreme centrists hide their political rigidity and their desire for the *pre-eminence of the executive branch* over the legislative branch, and pledge to establish a law and order regime preventing any sort of pluralism and antagonistic debate (Serna 2019, 205).

Indeed, the extreme centre always re-builds itself in times of crisis. Capitalising on conjunctures of exception and itself carefully manufacturing reasons to enact measures of emergency, the extreme centre attracts, poaches, welcomes, unites and reconciles new opportunistic converts. The renegades who left their former political ship in the hope of advancing their career elsewhere do not betray, so they pretend: they choose the side of 'pragmatism'.

As previously demonstrated, Emmanuel Macron's party secured its majority in the National Assembly thanks to the individual treachery of dozens of former bosses from *Les Républicains* and *Parti Socialiste*, who turned their vests on their previous party and colleagues, shamelessly behaving like 'littles Caesars of social-democracy' (Hall 1981). Emmanuel Macron and LREM have been able to co-opt the most centrist sections of both PS and LR by playing on what these cliques value the most: a blind adherence to the European Union and its neoliberal policies. Thus doing, Macron has been able to shape divergent social

interests into a relatively fragile ‘power bloc’, a coalition of forces brought together by a hegemonic project that nonetheless remains flimsy due to its thin sociological base.

Pierre Serna’s depiction of *girouettisme* would thus benefit from a comparison with the practice of *trasformismo*, the Italian legislative vice *par excellence* since the Risorgimento, and the process whereby the so-called ‘historic’ Left and Right parties which emerged from Italian unification tended to converge in terms of programme during the years which followed, until there ceased to be any substantive difference between them. Therefore, although industrious on the matter, Italian lawmakers and politicians do not hold the monopoly of duplicity. This shows that France has experienced in the *longue durée* various forms of ‘patching-up of cliques and cabals’ (Hall 1981) that are characteristic of the transformist phenomenon. Although its re-emergence in 2017 was speedy and largely unforeseen, opportunistic forms of party-switching at the centre are therefore nothing new in the French parliamentary ecosystem.

Against this background, Emmanuel Macron has indeed dangerously radicalised existing trends, confirming the social reproduction and recycling of elites, delegitimising existing parties and eventually breeding feelings of frustration and alienation in the larger population. Under the guise of ‘neutrality’, Emmanuel Macron would in fact strive to impose ‘neutralisation’: a neutralisation of political debate by refusing the confrontation of opposite viewpoints, a neutralisation of civil society organs that are eclipsed by the overarching presence of the presidential figure, a neutralisation of cleavages by paralysing what is left of the Right and the Left, a neutralisation of the legislative branch of government through constitutional reforms, and a creeping physical neutralisation of protesters by police forces

since the beginning of the Yellow Vests movement (Serna 2019, 266-67, see also Chapters VII and IX).

Like his predecessors, Emmanuel Macron's extreme centrism would thus be a reflection of a Republic haunted by a permanent state of emergency. Although compelling and erudite, Pierre Serna's historical parallelism tends to remain very state-centric, and neglects the European framework in which the Macron presidency is enshrined. The oversight of the European constraint – EMU rules in particular – accounts for an incomplete and 'isolated' characterisation of the contemporary French extreme centre. In particular, it brushes aside the types of constraints France is faced with in fiscal and budgetary terms and does not address the lack of discretion in national policies entailed by processes of financial and monetary unification at the European scale (see Chapters II and III).

Conclusion

The election of Emmanuel Macron thus put a halt to the long-established bipolarisation of the Fifth Republic, breaking the hegemony of PS and LR at the institutional level and marking the onset of a new period of political competition in France, possibly a return to what Maurice Duverger called *le marais* (Elgie 2018). Macron's election has indeed called into question the relevance of the Left/Right bipolar cleavage, but this apparent novelty has been counterbalanced by a strict respect of the Fifth Republic scriptures. Indeed, the newly elected president expressed a strong resolve to restore the prestige of the presidential office – theorised in terms of 'Jupiterean presidency'[83] – and the appropriateness of rules, norms and

[83] In an interview with the magazine *Challenges* in October 2016 – co-conducted by journalist Bruno Roger-Petit, who would become spokesperson of the French presidency in 2017-2018 – Emmanuel Macron described himself in contrast to his former boss and future predecessor François Hollande. Macron criticised this latter's original pledge to 'normalcy' and regretted that Hollande did not 'believe in the Jupiterean presidency' (Challenges 2016).

expectations inherited from the early years of the Fifth Republic (Cole 2018). Yet, this development at the centre, this merging of centre-left and centre-right may be interpreted as logical or even 'natural' given that, especially in terms of economic policy, the PS and LR had acted in almost indistinguishable ways over the last decades.

This chapter has made clear that the meaning of the 'centre' in French politics encompasses a *spatial* characteristic in the political field, that is, a position relatively to a designated single political actor, or more symbolically vis-à-vis a political grouping. Often, its representatives claim to embody a positioning 'beyond' or 'above' the 'Left' or/and the 'Right'. Ideological substance is a secondary preoccupation for partisans of the centre, whose actions are primarily guided by pragmatism and adaptability in a context of rapidly changing circumstances, i.e. (ideological) crises. Thus, the imperatives of 'moderation' and 'consensus' are justifying the cornering and marginalisation of 'populists' and 'extremes' from both sides of the spectrum. Once constituted, the centrist bloc will continuously strive to irradiate in order to attract and poach the thwarted ambitions of representatives from the traditional Left and Right, as the logic of the centre is one of relentless absorbency, hence the systematic recourse to *trasformismo*, as both a mode of expansion and survival.

For this reason, positioning in the centre of the political space is fundamentally precarious from a strategic standpoint. Particularly given its pretense to transcend traditional parties, the central bloc is also vulnerable to their attacks on all fronts. Its popularity is never a given, all the more so in the case of a brand new formation such as En Marche, which benefitted from a fortunate conjunction of circumstances but can only pretend to represent 18.5 per cent of registered voters in the first round, a very narrow victory (see Chapter IV). That is why the enduring success of Macron's political strategy depends upon the stability of the 'social bloc'

that had him elected (Amable and Palombarini 2017). Against this background, the main demands of that bloc, i.e. the pursuit of European integration and the implementation of neoliberal reforms, need to be met diligently. In this process, La République En Marche will have to resolve its ambiguities and will need to engage with its paradoxes. Indeed, Emmanuel Macron and his party attempt to project an image of convergence and unity, while their emergence is the direct symptom of unprecedented social fragmentation (Rouban 2018). The next chapter addresses these apparent contradictions and analyses the main facets of Emmanuel Macron's governance in light of Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'passive revolution'.

Part III

THE PITFALLS AND CONTRADICTIONS OF MACRONISM

Chapter VII

The Passive Revolution of French Neoliberalism

> Often, ideological shifts take place, not by substituting one, whole, new conception of the world for another, but by presenting a novel combination of old and new elements. (Stuart Hall 1988, 158)

Introduction

Once the tension and frenzy of the electoral contest had receded, representatives from the newly elected presidential majority tended to send contradictory signals. On the one hand, parliamentarians, ministers and journalists were heralding the advent of a 'new world' ('nouveau monde'): the electoral success of Emmanuel Macron's pro-European Union and pro-business stances meant that the 'old world' of traditional parties had come to an end.

On the other hand, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe made no claim that Macron's reformist presidential agenda was bred by any radically new ideology. In an interview with the *Financial Times* (Chassany and Stothart 2017), Philippe suggested that 'Macronism' was the direct legacy of his mentor Alain Juppé, who had been the unsuccessful centre-right presidential hopeful defeated by François Fillon during the LR primaries. When FT journalists alluded to the fact that the government's plans for a more flexible labour market, tax cuts for businesses and emphasis on public spending curbs were all right-wing measures, Edouard Philippe burst into laughter and replied: 'Yes, what did you expect?'

With the mobilisation of specific semantics, rhetorical apparatuses, symbols and signs, Emmanuel Macron thus made some of the French believe he was some kind of a revolutionary; a blessed prophet from outside who decided to impose a merciless *tabula rasa* to the existing order. Quite the opposite, Macron mixes the old and the new and often exalts a

certain form of republican nationalism, and his political-economic governance tends to follow and radicalise the tracks of his predecessors. How is it possible to make sense of this paradox?

The chapter analyses the contradictions of Macronism by interrogating the dialectics of modernity and modernisation in France. It does so by asking a series of questions about the current French predicament. How innovative is the social and economic programme of LREM? What are the elements of rupture and continuity in Emmanuel Macron's governance? How can we characterise the presidential majority's political-economic creed? How could Emmanuel Macron's mode of governance be defined?

The chapter addresses these questions by drawing three main lines of inquiry. First, it analyses the symbols, signs and rhetoric mobilised by Emmanuel Macron, against the background of a survey and assessment of French political institutions under the Fifth Republic. It then examines the large variety of economic reforms undertaken in the first two years of Macron's quinquennat, from May 2017 to May 2019. Against this background, the chapter evaluates the prospects and limits of the concept of 'passive revolution' to make sense of Emmanuel Macron's mode of governance and attempts to interpret this concept in light of the French history of neoliberalism in the *longue durée*.

The chapter therefore starts with an overview of the institutional and political specificities of the French presidential regime. It does so by exploring how Emmanuel Macron fully espoused and eventually aggravated the verticality of presidentialism, with the executive logic of power concentration and the subordinate status of the legislature in France consistently reinforced on both legal and symbolic grounds. These practices of governance are consistent with the Gramscian notion of 'Caesarism'. The section also reviews the symbols, signs and

semantics that Emmanuel Macron mobilised and how they attest to a certain ‘distance’ that has sometimes been interpreted as a form of contempt for the French population.

On the economic front, the first two years of the quinquennat had the character of a legislative blitzkrieg, with several reform packages hastily passed through ordinances and decree-laws, with the ultimate goal to augment French ‘attractiveness’ and ‘competitiveness’ in the framework of the European common market. Thus, the second section focuses on the immediate economic objectives of the Philippe government, which included (1) budgetary austerity, (2) lower taxation of businesses, (3) measures of liberalisation and privatisation and (4) political-economic convergence with Germany, and especially with Great Britain.

These priorities were informed by a trickle-down economic logic and based on the conviction that the wealthier citizens are the motor of the economy, and that lowering taxation in an open economy necessarily garners positive collective outcomes in terms of productive investment and employment. Trade liberalisation in services, privatisation measures and more accommodating taxation schemes for the well-off are thus considered key to economic success and presented as the necessary remedies to trade unbalances and mass unemployment. In that sense, Emmanuel Macron’s and Edouard Philippe’s economic policies are ‘market-preserving federalism’ (Harmes 2019) in action.

The ultimate section reflects on Antonio Gramsci’s concept of ‘passive revolution’ and posits that it is a very useful analytical lens through which the strategy and contradictions of Macronism can be apprehended. This multifaceted concept can refer broadly to developmental projects from above through which systemic transformations are achieved by non-revolutionary means (Callinicos 2010). Guided by the interests of capital owners, this

socio-political transformation is undertaken without the active participation of the masses. Passive revolution can also be interpreted as a defence strategy aimed at containing or limiting popular pressures in a situation where an authentic form of hegemonic leadership does not prevail (Gill 2008).

It shall be stressed that a passive revolution is a deeply uneven and contradictory process involving a dialectic of change and permanence and a combination of novelty and conservatism. It is fundamentally a *compromise* that allows for the subsistence of the old alongside the new, a political attempt to promote modernity that preserves the features of the existing system. Thus, social relations are reorganised in a seemingly 'progressive' manner in order to perpetuate class domination, keeping intact the existing relations of forces inherent to the prevailing mode of accumulation. Often, the lack of popular legitimacy associated with this recomposing explains why these changes are mediated through *trasformismo*, as the balance of forces necessitates the co-optation and incorporation of leading elements from the subaltern classes and the use of sundry political and symbolic subterfuges to be sustained.
At first sight, Emmanuel Macron's election and presidential term seem to fit well within the analytical framework of passive revolution, in both strategic and ideological terms. Yet, a *longue durée* perspective on French liberalisation reveals that the passive revolution of French neoliberalism can be traced back to the early 1980s and that the ideological novelty of Macronism ('regressive modernisation 3.0'), appears rather limited. With the radicalisation of executive pre-eminence, the new presidential majority seems to privilege imposition over persuasion. In lieu of its renewal, the Macronite governance might therefore signal both the acme and the impasse of the French passive revolutionary process.

A Caesarist Turn

After an overview of the institutional and political specificities of the French presidential regime, this section demonstrates that the pre-existing verticality of presidentialism in France has been exacerbated by Macron, and that the subalternity of both the National Assembly and Senate has been consistently reinforced on both legal and symbolic grounds.

French Presidentialism and Executive Preeminence

The French presidential regime is a European oddity. The prerogatives of the executive branch of government stand out from many of its neighbors, and so does the substantial political and policy influence exercised by the President of the Republic. In most European democracies (Britain, Italy, Belgium, Spain, etc.), the Prime Minister – the leader of a majoritarian coalition constituted after the parliamentary elections – is the central power figure. France is the only country of the European Union where the President of the Republic monopolises all powers of government (François 2012, 60), including of course the power to nominate the Prime Minister.

Yet, the Fifth Republic is still, from an institutional point of view, considered a model of 'semi-presidentialism',[84] because there is both a directly elected president and a prime minister and cabinet that are collectively responsible to the legislature (Elgie and Grossman 2016, 181). Nevertheless, the regime has evolved over time and a steep concentration of

[84] In *President and Assemblies. Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (1992), Matthew Soberg Shugart and John M. Carey explain that there are two forms of semi-presidentialism: president-parliamentarism, where the government is responsible to both the president and the legislature; and premier-presidentialism, where the government is responsible solely to the legislature. The comparative literature provides ground that the president-parliamentarism model is conducive to worst democratic performances than the premier-presidentialism model (Elgie and Grossman 2016; François 2012).

power in the hands of the executive can be observed since the 1960s, a politico-institutional drift that Emmanuel Macron – and his predecessors – have unequivocally embraced.

After the highly unstable Fourth Republic, with 24 governments in 12 years from 1946 to 1958, the Fifth Republic Constitution was deliberately designed to strengthen the executive at the expense of the legislature amidst the institutional chaos resulting from France's military expedition to quell the Algerian independence movement, but this came progressively. Surprisingly, the 1958 Constitution of the Fifth Republic had created a relatively weak president, which at the time was elected by a special electoral college comparable to the one electing the French Senate (Elgie and Grossman 2016, 183). A fundamental change took place in 1962, when Charles de Gaulle introduced the direct election of the president by universal suffrage. From that moment on, the Fifth Republic would be dominated by ultra-personalist logics and the presidential election would become the keystone of the regime, a reflection of the Bonapartist legacy taken over by both the traditional Right (RPR, then UMP and LR) and Left (SFIO and PS).

The strong majoritarian tendencies of the regime were nevertheless shaken in 1986, when the first experience of divided government *à la française* – when the president and the prime minister are not from the same political persuasion – occurred. The frequent re-iteration of this situation of '*cohabitation*' – in 1993 between François Mitterrand and Edouard Balladur, and then in 1997 between Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin – encouraged the legislators to envisage another constitutional change that would get rid of that tendency that was making the French political system resemble the experience of classical parliamentary government. This major constitutional reform took place in 2000. The constitution was amended in order

to reduce the length of the presidential term from seven to five years, the same length as the National Assembly term.

At first sight, this change could be interpreted as a reduction of presidential power, but the exact opposite result was achieved. The presidential election now takes place a few weeks before the legislative election. This means that the composition of the National Assembly automatically reflects the same relations of force as those expressed in the presidential election results. In other words, the color of the political majority elected at the National Assembly is ineluctably that of the newly elected president. The immediate consequence of the October 2000 constitutional revision was to make 'cohabitation' less likely or even impossible, as French voters are less likely to split votes across two elections that take place within about six weeks.

The constitutional law number 2000-964 therefore made the political system de facto more 'presidential', with the president as the effective head of the executive under unified government (Elgie and Grossman 2016, 184). Although it largely prevented the occurrence of 'cohabitation', the reform just encoded in law a practice that was ongoing since 1962: the automatic dissolution of the National Assembly by the president in the direct aftermath of every election, which institutionalised the de facto primacy of the President of the Republic over the marginalised national representation in parliament. Thus, virtually all the constitutional revisions conducted since 1958 have been aimed – more or less openly – at increasing presidential power and at reducing the prerogatives of the parliament, an institution that has never been able to escape the subaltern position it was assigned to since the beginning of the Fifth Republic. Indeed, all presidential figures and parliamentary majorities have

consistently ensured that power would not change hands and no constitutional revision were launched at the initiative of parliament in more than sixty years (Portelli 2018, 69).

In France, the parliament votes the law but only marginally contributes to its elaboration: the vast majority of the texts scrutinised in the National Assembly and in the Senate are government-made bills and the parliament's role is to amend or lightly modify them. From both a qualitative and quantitative perspective, the true holder of legislative power is the government, and the parliament is solely powerful in its capacity to marginally amend governmental bills (Portelli 2018, 75). Compared to its European counterparts, the French parliamentary session is shorter, question time is rarer, and the government enjoys almost complete control over the parliamentary agenda (Elgie and Grossman 2016, 187).

Because of the parliament's legal and symbolic subordination, the legislative elections do not garner the citizenry's enthusiasm. Conducted in the direct aftermath of the almost interminable presidential contest, the legislative election campaign is often botched: political parties are exhausted and penniless, the voters cannot wait to see the election period come to an end, and the candidates are usually hiding behind the newly elected presidential figure instead of campaigning on their own. Accordingly, a worrying trend of abstention has developed since the beginning of the 1980s: while the difference in electoral participation between the presidential and the legislative elections was of 10 per cent in 1981 and 6 per cent in 1988, this gap reached 19 per cent in 2002, 24 per cent in 2007, 25 per cent in 2012 and a staggering 32 per cent in 2017, when the participation rate fell below the 50 per cent threshold (48.7 per cent) for the first time in the Fifth Republic history (Portelli 2017, 74).

In the rare instances where parliament disagrees with the president or its governmental majority, there exists a panoply of efficient mechanisms to undo the opposition of MPs. Among these measures, the *vote bloqué* (Article 44.3 of the Constitution) allows government to force the plenary of the National Assembly to vote on the entire text rather than an article-by-article reading. Furthermore, the frequent recourse to *ordonnances* ('decree-laws') to speed up the legislative process is allowed by Article 38 of the Constitution, alongside the accelerated procedure permitted by Article 45, which limits scrutiny to a single reading of the bill being discussed (Portelli 2018, 71).

However, none of those stratagems holds the same persuasive might as Article 49.3 of the Constitution, i.e. the parliamentary behemoth that immediately terminates legislative debate. As soon as the government invokes this article, a given bill is deemed adopted unless the government is forced to resign following a no-confidence vote, as laid out in Article 49.2. Considering the tight control on parliamentary majorities imposed by the government, not a single no-confidence vote has been successful since 1962. The 49.3 procedure has been used more than fifty times since 1988 – no less than 28 times by the government of Michel Rocard! It has proven its efficiency in shutting down controversies, protests and proceedings. Prime minister Manuel Valls has also been a champion of 49.3 usage, invoking the procedure no less than six times during his legislature (Alemagna 2017).

In spite of denouncing the 'permanent coup d'état' (Mitterrand 1964),[85] Parti Socialiste representatives never challenged the fundamentally personalist and majoritarian logics of the Fifth Republic. While in charge of elaborating the PS's institutional programme for the 2012

[85] In a famous pamphlet published in 1964 and entitled *Le Coup d'État permanent,* François Mitterrand denounced the personalist practice of power of Charles de Gaulle, a fair criticism which did not prevent him from perfectly embodying the institutions of the Fifth Republic for fourteen years when his time as head of state came.

election, Manuel Valls thus explained that the party should not succumb to the 'old-fashioned temptation of "classic" parliamentarianism' but that it should also reject the revolutionary 'temptation' of participative democracy, implying that the development of mass media and the decline of grand ideological discourses had given new credit to the necessity of personifying power (François 2012, 58).

In sum, the pre-eminence of the presidency over all other institutions is total. Indeed, Article 5 of the Constitution stipulates that the President of the Republic is the guardian of the constitutional scripture. To this purpose, the president possesses the ability to orchestrate a coup in all legality: Article 16, a special emergency power regime with few strings attached, can be mobilised whenever the president reckons that there is 'a serious and immediate threat to the institutions of the Republic'. For instance, Charles de Gaulle invoked this measure during the war with Algeria on 22 April 1961.

Beyond situations of emergency, the presidential supremacy provokes more tacit, invisible democratic concerns with regards to the everyday exercise of power. Among these, the strong endogamy of state elites, what Pierre Bourdieu dubbed the 'state nobility' (1989), i.e. graduates from *grandes écoles* like Sciences Po and ENA, whose representatives have dominated executive politics since the end of World War II. The importance of *énarques* (graduates from ENA) increases the closer one gets to the centre of the executive and is particularly prevalent in ministerial cabinets. The influence of ENA networks is also very noticeable among Prime Ministers: the vast majority of them (16 out of 21) have studied at ENA (Elgie and Grossman 2016, 186). These strong mechanisms of endogamy lead to a marked homogenisation of socio-economic policies and confirm the fact that the government

and the *magistrature suprême* ('supreme magistracy', i.e. presidency) are cut off from the concerns of the wider population.

Against this background, Leftist representatives – Arnaud Montebourg, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Benoit Hamon – have long called for the advent of a Sixth Republic that would break the predominance of the president to favour decision-making and initiatives emerging from proportional parliamentary representation or citizen choice. Emmanuel Macron's perspective on institutional issues could not be farther removed from these viewpoints, especially with a new generation of unexperienced MPs who have proven to be easily malleable and extremely faithful to the new president, to whom they were owing their nomination and subsequent election.

Besides, until the project of constitutional revision was postponed in the wake of the tumultuous 'Benalla affair' (see Chapter IX), Emmanuel Macron's majority did not hide its willingness to reinforce the Bonapartist and majoritarian tendencies of the Fifth Republic institutions. Indeed, the reform included a 25 to 30 per cent reduction in the number of MPs (currently 577), which would necessarily include some form of gerrymandering whose neutrality might easily be called into question. To tackle the blatant lack of representativeness that is plaguing the current National Assembly – where the Front National and La France Insoumise, who collected respectively 13.20 and 11.03 per cent of the votes in the first round of the legislative election, only got 8 and 17 MPs elected out of 577 – the project aimed to introduce a dose of proportional representation, but a mostly symbolic one amounting between 10 and 25 per cent of the total of MPs, a move aimed at pleasing Emmanuel Macron's allies who came from the ranks of François Bayrou's MoDem.

Furthermore, the constitutional revision planned to make the right to propose and discuss amendments to the texts being discussed in parliament depend on the size of the parliamentary groups so as to avoid forms of 'legislative obstruction' that would slow down the pace of debates (de Mareschal 2018). This intended restriction once again signified that parliamentary debate was considered no more than 'legislative chatter' (Macron 2016) and that parliamentary proceedings – conceived as mere validations of executive decisions – must be swift, rapid and efficient. It is in sum no wonder that the expression 'republican monarchy' has re-emerged since Emmanuel Macron's election. Indeed, he mobilised specific symbols and signs, as well as a vocabulary of contempt that demonstrated his Caesarist penchants.

Symbols and Signs of Caesarism

As Gramsci contended, Caesarism 'always expresses the particular solution in which a great personality is entrusted with the task of "arbitration" over a historico-political situation characterised by an equilibrium of forces heading towards catastrophe' (Gramsci 1971, 219 Q13§27). Indeed, Gramsci theorised the emergence of fascist rule under the rubric of Caesarism, which can be understood to have three significant features: the logics of charismatic leadership, molecular state change and the police form (Short 2015, 113). Caesarism – whether in its 'progressive' or 'reactionary' form[86] – is a symptom of political-economic stalemate and increasing social anomie. It acts as a magnifying glass, both revealing and aggravating the powerlessness of existing political parties. It is born out of the

[86] Gramsci was indeed making a difference between 'progressive' and 'reactionary' Caesarism: 'Caesarism is progressive when its intervention helps the progressive force to triumph, albeit with its victory tempered by certain compromises and limitations. It is reactionary when its intervention helps the reactionary force to triumph – in this case too with certain compromises and limitations, which have, however, a different value, extent, and significance than in the former. Caesar and Napoleon I are examples of progressive Caesarism. Napoleon III and Bismarck of reactionary Caesarism' (1971, 219, Q13§27). It is surprising to notice that Gramsci's distinction partly echoes the writings of Auguste Romieu (1800-1855) – a senior offical and intellectual who pledged allegiance to Napoleon III and wrote reactionary pamphlets praising law and order – who made a similar distinction in his portrayal of Napoleon I 'as a great leader who performed deeds similar to those of the ancient Caesars', while Louis-Napoleon is assigned 'a much more humble role' (Prutsch 2021, 80).

crisis of representation and power vacuum which enables a seemingly heroic or charismatic leader to seize control of the state in a context of political turmoil. The ultimate purpose behind this intervention is to bring about a new ordering of social blocs that would settle for a time the tensions and fractures that the current, crisis-ridden configuration is provoking. As seen above, the institutions of the Fifth Republic were built in a context of unrest and turmoil; they have therefore been designed to accommodate the recourse to a Caesar.

Analysing the increasing tendency for the British political system to turn to Caesarist solutions in periods of crisis, Stuart Hall observed (1988, 66):

> 'Caesarism' is a type of *compromise* political solution, generated from above, in conditions where the fundamental forces in conflict so nearly balance one another that neither seems able to defeat the other, or to rule and establish a durable hegemony.

Furthermore, Hall was very much aware of the parliamentary dimension of the Caesarist phenomenon which Gramsci himself depicted, adding with regards to the British Social Democratic Party that emerged in 1981 (ibid):

> Gramsci reminds us that 'Caesarist solutions' can exist without 'any great "heroic" and representative personality' – though in the earlier period there were indeed contenders for this role 'above party and class'. But, he adds, 'The parliamentary system has also provided a mechanism for such compromise solutions The "Labour" governments of Macdonald were to a certain degree solutions of this kind… Every coalition government is a first stage of Caesarism…'. The Social Democrats are our 'little Caesars'.

Parliamentary Caesarism of the kind described by Stuart Hall loudly echoes the episodes of *trasformismo* depicted in Chapter V. The final section of the present chapter goes back to Hall so as to explore the tight connection between Caesarism, *trasformismo* and passive revolution, and how this amalgamation manifested itself in terms of programme and governance.

However, before its social and political-economic dimensions became limpid, Emmanuel Macron's Caesarism was first and foremost reflected in visual symbols, projected in cultural signs and formulated through semantic excesses. In the direct aftermath of his election, Macron's team strove to create *mises en scènes* with emblems and symbols that were aimed at rehabilitating presidentialism in its purest monarchical form, giving life and breadth to the seemingly oxymoronic saying *monarchie présidentielle* ('presidential monarchy'). With the wish to inscribe himself in the *roman national* ('national narrative'), the newly elected president used and abused monarchic, martial and military symbols that are reminders of French royal past. He thus intended to give substance to his claim that the figure of the King – who, he contended, the French fundamentally did not want to see dead – is the 'absentee' of the French democratic system (Le Un 2016).

In the French context, 'Bonapartism' can be understood as a specific national form of Caesarism. As Karl Marx (2007) observed in *Le 18 Brumaire de Louis Bonaparte,* Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (Napoleon III) concentrated power in the executive branch and weakened the legislative wing after his coup d'état of 2 December 1851. Bonapartism is thus an exceptional form of political rule, whose history dates back to the rules and *reigns* of Napoleon I (1799-*1804-1815*) and Napoleon III (1848-*1852-1870*). A Bonapartist moment occurs when a charismatic leader steps in to solve the class stalemate, whereby neither the ruling class nor the working class is able to assert sufficient authority, or when the country is engulfed in a severe crisis, as Charles de Gaulle did at the height of the Algerian war.[87]

[87] While Gaullism was strongly imbued with elements of Bonapartism (charismatic leadership, cult of authority, posture beyond parties, modernising impulses, a strong executive branch and a weak assembly), there was also a strong Bonapartist dynamic to Nicolas Sarkozy's success in the 2007 presidential election, as he projected the image of a tough, innovative leader that was prepared to embrace drastic measures to solve the problems plaguing France (in Sarkozy's case, unrest in the *banlieues*), and to defend a law and order project in the name of the greater good of the nation (Hewlett 2007, 406-08).

The night of his election, Emmanuel Macron solemnly crossed the Napoleon courtyard of the Palais du Louvre to join the platform on which he delivered his victory speech, while Ludwig van Beethoven's Ode to Joy – the official European anthem, used in the final movement of the ninth symphony – was playing in the background. A month later, in late May 2017, Macron received Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin with great fanfare at the Château de Versailles, reinvesting the Sun King palace at the occasion of the Russian leader's official visit to France. Versailles proved a key location for Emmanuel Macron throughout the quinquennat. In early July 2017, it was there that the newly elected president delivered his general policy speech in front of the Congress, with members of the National Assembly and the Senate 'summoned' to leave Paris' Left bank so as to attend an enthroning speech. Accordingly, this speech was pronounced on the eve of the Prime Minister Edouard Philippe's general policy speech in front of the newly elected National Assembly so as to set the tone and symbolically signify the pre-eminence of the executive branch over the subordinated legislature. Le château was also the theatre of the four Choose France summits – the yearly gathering aimed at promoting France's economic appeal among small and large foreign businesses – held in January 2018, 2019, 2020 and June 2021, attended by CEOs and entrepreneurs of transnational firms such as Samsung, Nokia, Mitsubishi, Coca Cola, Toyota and Rolls Royce (Le Point 2020).

Alongside monarchical symbols, Emmanuel Macron has also amply mobilised military symbols and nourished a martial ethos. Perhaps to compensate for the fact that he did not himself perform his military service – which was abolished in France in 1996, when he was 19 years-old – Emmanuel Macron displayed a vivid enthusiasm towards military affairs in the first months of his presidential term. After rebranding the Ministry of Defence as *Ministère des Armées* (Ministry of the Armed Forces), he decided to parade on the Champs Elysées in a

military command car during his inauguration day on 14 May 2017, an unusual choice when all his predecessors favored the traditional unmarked sedan car. Macron's willingness to assert his constitutional role of commander-in-chief in the first months of presidency provoked the resignation of French Chief of the Defense Staff General Pierre de Villiers on 19 July 2017 to denounce budgetary cuts and the inflexibility of the President of the Republic.[88]

In May 2017, Macron's first official visit abroad was a tribute to the French troops deployed in Mali for the sake of Opération Barkhane, a military operation that spans over five former French colonies in the Sahel region – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Niger and Mali – and which intends to fight insurgent terrorist groups active in these areas, such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Nusrat al-Islam. The newly elected French President decided to break the protocol by landing directly in Gao, in central Mali, more than a thousand kilometers away from the capital Bamako. In a classical neocolonial fashion, he therefore paid a visit to the French contingents without greeting his Malian counterpart Ibrahim Boubakar Keïta first. This latter had to travel from Bamako to Gao in order to meet Emmanuel Macron on the tarmac of Gao airport (RFI 2017). Indeed, there is a clear international dimension to Emmanuel Macron's Bonapartist leanings, the latter being not only infused with the business-oriented managerial processes that permeate his government, but also with Macron's enthusiastic extension of France's imperial foreign policy – pushing for a

[88] On 12 July 2017, while in the National Assembly, this latter had criticised the budgetary cuts to military spending that had been planned by the government. One day later, on the eve of Bastille Day and its traditional military parade in Paris, Macron severely condemned the general's intervention – without naming him personally – in a speech he gave at the Ministry of the Armies, adding that he was expecting 'more discretion' on the part of high ranked officials. The scandalised general resigned a week later, thus marking his opposition to both the budgetary cuts and to the manner in which he was being publicly admonished by Macron.

proper EU security and military apparatus while sustaining France's military missions in Francophone Africa (Kipfer 2017b).

Emmanuel Macron's official presidential picture is also charged with symbols and signs (see Appendix #3). The president is leaning against his office in a nonchalant yet determined and slightly sneering pose. Chromatically, the tone is blue: surrounded by both the French and European flags, Macron stares at the viewer with his azure eyes as a Botticellian sky lightens the background through the open window. On his left, a clock symbolises the fact that Emmanuel Macron is fixing the tempo of the quinquennat: indeed, he previously declared he was *le maître des horloges* ('the clock master'), an allusion to Voltaire who, as an agnostic, used the parable of the *grand horloger* ('the great clockmaker') to refer to a hypothetic God in 1772, an analogy previously used by René Descartes in his philosophical essays (James 2017). The message is clear: Emmanuel Macron is in charge; he is the master of time.

Right next to the clock lie two books: Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (*The Red and the Black*) published in 1830, and André Gide's *Les Nourritures Terrestres* (*The Fruits of the Earth)* published in 1897. Both novels are *bildungsromane* that focus on the psychological and moral growth of their protagonist from youth to adulthood. Showcasing Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* on the desk is far from innocent: the book chronicles the attempts of Julien Sorel, a young and ambitious provincial man, to rise socially beyond his modest upbringing through a combination of talent and deceit. An allegory of Macronism? Perhaps, with the caveat that Emmanuel Macron did not come from a modest background, despite his claim to 'not being an heir' (Dupont 2019). Indeed, both his parents are medical doctors – his father is a neurology professor, one of the most prestigious branches of medicine – which solidly places

Figure 3: Official Portrait of President Emmanuel Macron.
© Soazig de la MOISSONNIÈRE.

the president into the ranks of the high provincial bourgeoisie, a position rather remote from what one would call a 'self-made man' or an ascent of a 'meritocratic' type.

Literary parallels do not stop here: on the left side of the picture (i.e. on Macron's right), Charles de Gaulle's *Mémoires de guerre* ('War Memoirs') are open. With this reference, Emmanuel Macron takes on the foundational personalist Gaullist legacy and wishes to place himself above all parties. Right next to Charles de Gaulle's memoirs, two iPhones are piled up. The ethos of the start-up nation is thus reconciled with the Republican historical legacy: the future and the past are inextricably enmeshed and symbolically fused under the high patronage of 'Jupiter'. Once more, the message is limpid: the presidency to come shall be placed under the signs of heroism, patriotism, courage, engagement and transcendence.

Emmanuel Macron's election would thus signal the return to a 'quasi-divine republican monarchy' (Cole 2019), signifying a vigorous restoration of the vertical precepts of the Fifth Republic in the wake of François Hollande's 'normal' presidency. Following the example of Charles de Gaulle, Macron seems to believe that France historically possesses a particular mission in Europe and in the world. Arguably, this tradition inherited from *Gaullism* – itself a reflection of *Bonapartism*– might explain how Macron's positioning could initially seduce French from both sides of the political spectrum. Like de Gaulle, Macron wished to set himself above the parties and developed a heightened, more sovereign form of governance. This is reflected in his clear inclination towards privileging the executive branch of government: indeed, he referred to parliamentary work as 'legislative chatter' in his book entitled *Revolution* (Macron 2016, 244). The next sub-section studies the issue of language to demonstrate the ways in which Caesarism also pervades the discourse of the newly elected president.

The vocabulary of contempt

From a semantic point of view, nowhere are Emmanuel Macron's Caesarist impulses better reflected than in his now infamous *petites phrases.* The expression *petite phrase* ('soundbites') belongs to the category of the untranslatable: it refers to a brief comment made by a political actor in order to produce an effect on public opinion. In other words, a *petite phrase* is a seemingly trivial and concise phrase that aims to make a lasting impression in the opinion (Boyer and Gaboriaux 2018, 9). Very diverse sorts of statements belong to the category of *petites phrases*, but the expression is often used in a derogatory manner. Indeed, the adjective *petite* implies that the phrase is brief, but also rather 'petty': it suggests that the statement is axiologically mediocre. Accordingly, *petites phrases* are considered one of the symptoms of political life's debasement: style and rhetoric would prevail over ideas, gossip and scandal would triumph over arguments.

At first sight, the depoliticising effects of *petites phrases* are evident: they tend to favor the trivialisation of political life, or what is pejoratively called '*politique politicienne*'. Yet, because they are so ubiquitous, *petites phrases* need to be taken seriously as linguistic and discursive devices. For Boyer and Gaboriaux (2018, 12-16), *petites phrases* are linguistic segments, borrowed from a longer discursive ensemble, which are reproduced – more or less faithfully – in media circles, often in a decontextualised manner, for polemical aims. In that sense, *petites phrases* are part of a complex discursive strategy to ensure a maximal media exposure. Far from being innocent, incidental or anecdotal, they reflect and synthetise ideological cleavages.

What is noticeable with Emmanuel Macron's *petites phrases* is that they are symptomatic of the social gap between a representative of the republican elite and what are considered every

day, ordinary concerns. Emmanuel Macron's *petites phrases* are often perceived to be discursive manifestations of the scorn of the powerful, or linguistic symbols of the class divide.

While he was Minister of the Economy, Macron did not hesitate to affirm on radio that the striking women from the slaughterhouse Gad in Finistère were '*pour beaucoup, illettrées'* ('for the most part, illiterate') (Europe 1, 2014). The outcry was immediate, but did not stop the dashing Minister's classist instincts to reoccur in May 2016, when he was singled out by strikers in Hérault who reproached him to 'buy fancy suits with all his money' ('*s'acheter des costards avec son pognon'*), to which he bluntly replied: '*vous n'allez pas me faire peur avec votre T-shirt: la meilleure façon de se payer un costume c'est de travailler'* ('you're not going to scare me in your T-shirt: the best way to afford a suit is to work') (Bouchet-Petersen, 2016): quite a provocative stance for a Minister of the Economy when France unemployment rate peaked at 10 per cent.

Galvanised by his presidential victory, Emmanuel seemed to have broken the chains of his superego. Visibly at ease before an audience of entrepreneurs and 'start-uppers' at Xavier Niel's 'Station F' – a new business incubator for start-ups built in La Halle Freyssinet, a former train station – the newly elected President did not hesitate to affirm that, in a train station, '*on croise des gens qui réussissent et des gens qui ne sont rien*' ('one comes across people who succeed and people who are nothing') (Bauduin 2017). One year later, Emmanuel Macron lamented in a supposedly 'off the record' video posted on Twitter by communication officer Sibeth Ndiaye (L'Obs 2018): '*on met un pognon de dingue dans les minima sociaux et les gens sont quand même pauvres*' ('we spend a damn ton of money in social safety nets, and yet people are still poor'). One particular phrasing featured in the short video clip that media

did not spend much time commenting on is worth the focus: Macron raucously asserted that '*ceux qui tombent pauvres, ils restent pauvres'*. In proper French – a level of language that Emmanuel Macron aptly masters – one '*devient*' ('becomes') poor, one does not '*tombe*' ('falls') poor. However, one 'falls' ill *('tombe' malade*): Emmanuel Macron seems to semantically equate poverty to a disease in this short excerpt, and it is hard to believe this semantic oddity is coincidental.

Despite abundant criticisms, the French President persisted in his discursive and affective disdain, deploring in August 2018 in front of the Queen of Denmark that he was heading a country peopled by '*Gaullois réfractaires au changement'* ('Gauls who resist change'), as opposed to the Lutheran Danish (L'Express 2018). Not even a month later, Emmanuel Macron backslides again in the gardens of the *Élysée* palace, and offered a lesson of paternalism to a small crowd that came to visit the presidential residence during the *Journées du Patrimoine* (European Heritage Days). To a young unemployed horticulturist who regretted not finding a job in his field, Macron retorted: '*Si vous êtes prêt et motivé, dans l'hôtellerie, le café, la restauration… ou dans le bâtiment! (…) Je traverse la rue et je vous en trouve! Ils veulent simplement des gens qui sont prêts à travailler, avec les contraintes du métier*' ('If you are prepared and motivated, there are jobs available in the hospitality industry, in service, in restaurants… or in construction! (…) I just need to cross the street and I can find you a job! They're simply looking for people who are ready to work, and who accept the constraints of the job'), without however making the relationship between working in horticulture and in the hotel-catering sector very clear (Euronews 2019). The promise 'to find a job by crossing the street' became an enduring mockery that Macron's detractors would mobilise for the rest of the presidential term.

This succession of *petites phrases* aptly captures Macron's elitist creed, but in the summer of 2018, Macron did not hesitate to use provocation in his video interventions as well. While entangled in the grotesque but disturbing Alexandre Benalla episode – Macron's former security officer and deputy chief of staff, caught on video on 1 May 2018 illegally kicking protesters while dressed like a policeman – a video of a speech from Emmanuel Macron in front of his troops at *Maison de l'Amérique Latine* in Paris, was opportunely 'leaked' online (L'Opinion 2018). Castigating in a very Trumpian way the press that supposedly '*ne cherche plus la vérité*' ('does not seek the truth anymore'), Macron admitted his faults regarding the Benalla affair in a very daring way: '*S'ils cherchent un responsable, (…) vous l'avez devant vous. Qu'ils viennent me chercher*!' ('If they want to hold someone accountable for this, this person is in front of you. Let them come to catch me!'). Yet, Macron's arrogance is institutionally inconsequential: Article 67 of the Fifth Republic Constitution stipulates that the President of the Republic is fully immune from prosecution. This provocation and Macron's feeling of impunity did not however fall on deaf ears: at the height of the Yellow Vests protests a few months later, many *Gilets Jaunes* expressed their intention to 'go catch Macron' or even, like truck driver Eric Drouet, to 'enter the Élysée Palace' (L'Express 2018). Indeed, it is partly through the use of these repeated *petites phrases* charged with symbols that Macron slowly antagonised vast sections of the citizenry, as is explored in Chapter IX.

Such unsung manners are surprising on the part of someone who has been praised as a 'philosopher President' (Couturier 2017), or heroically described as a 'character from a novel' (Besson 2017), with a level of culture that is 'superior to the average', according to spokesperson of the government and future Minister of the Interior Christophe Castaner (Rieth 2017). Indeed, literacy, erudition and high culture are part of the founding myths of Macronite exceptionalism. With his elitist background, Macron's symbolic capital is

extremely high and is reflected in what Pierre Bourdieu would call his 'habitus', i.e. his posture, accent, level of language, cultural references, mental habits and schemes of perception. It is also true that Emmanuel Macron is more deeply engaged with intellectual life than any French President since François Mitterrand, and that his deep familiarity with music, literature and philosophy is on constant display (Cohen 2019).

What has also captured the interest of journalists and analysts is Emmanuel Macron's proximity with late philosopher Paul Ricoeur, as his former research assistant in the early 2000s, even though the exact prerogatives of Macron's intellectual assistance to Ricoeur remain somewhat unclear. In his book *Révolution* (2016), Macron payed a warm tribute to the protestant philosopher and ensured that he tried to nourish his action with his thought. As Paul Cohen (2019) notes, it is possible to detect elements of Ricoeur's philosophical vocabulary in Macron's rhetoric, especially in the President's frequent use of the Janus-like adverbial phrase '*en même temps*' ('at the same time') to weigh competing positions, thus recalling Ricoeur's taste for paradox. Beyond semantics, it seems that the doctrinal path pursued by Ricoeur towards economic reformism has also evidently influenced the current French President. Emblematic of this shift is the petition initiated by centre-Left journal *Esprit* that Ricoeur signed in 1995 – alongside fellow '*deuxième gauche*' and 'reformist Leftists' Alain Touraine, Pierre Rosanvallon, Jacques Julliard, etc – to support the cost-cutting reforms of Alain Juppé which were eventually defeated in the streets. But as Paul Cohen notes, there is a conceptual mismatch between Ricoeur's dense body of thought that advocates for a form of pluralism based on regulated forms of conflict and Macron's 'timeworn recipe of OECD-approved structural reforms' (Cohen 2019).

Furthermore, it is worthwhile adopting a genealogical approach to Emmanuel Macron's syntax and vocabulary, as his discourse is traversed – consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly – by discourses from his predecessors in the form of political intertextuality (Mayaffre and Vanni 2020). Taking advantage of Artificial Intelligence and textual statistics (with a corpus of 1,100 speeches from 1958 to 2017), Damon Mayaffre and Laurent Vanni (2020, 6-7) thus note that most of Macron's discursive borrowings link him to Nicolas Sarkozy's *intertext* (29 per cent), François Hollande's (26 per cent) and to a lesser extent Georges Pompidou's and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's intertexts (respectively 7 and 3 per cent).

Beyond the 'novelty' that Emmanuel Macron strives to embody, his discourse also echoes the legacy of the Fifth Republic presidents, with a very clear imprint of Nicolas Sarkozy's discourse, i.e. thematically with the neoliberal celebration of 'work', its emancipatory potentials and the research of competitiveness; stylistically with ego-centered postures and a martial and authoritarian vocabulary, and more generally the combination of a strong lexicon with a weak syntax (Mayaffre et. al 2020, 2-3). At the institutional level, both Nicolas Sarkozy and Emmanuel Macron assumed a very strong, personalist posture that placed the president at the centre of the political game. Sarkozy – who told the press that his Prime Minister François Fillon was a mere 'collaborator' (Le Figaro 2007) – was often described as a 'hyper-president' and Macron followed in his path.

On the economic front, the similarities between Sarkozy and Macron are very evident: both presidents started their term with a wide-ranging fiscal reform – Macron's slashing of the wealth tax is reminiscent of Sarkozy's '*bouclier fiscal*' ('tax shield') – as well as the reduction in taxation for overtime work. 'Work' ('*travail*') is indeed an ubiquitous political

and philosophical referent for both politicians: they both envisage work as 'emancipatory' as opposed to alienating. Macron also rephrased Sarkozy's mantra about '*gagner plus*' with his own, synonymous formula '*gagner davantage*' ('earn more'), and they both associate work with notions of 'value', 'merit' and 'efforts' (Mayaffre et. al 2020, 4-6). As explored in the section on passive revolution, the thematic of work – and its neoliberal policy corollary, labour market reforms and the transformation of labour relations – captures the singularity and the contradictions of the French political economy (Masquelier 2021). The next section thus examines the characteristics of Emmanuel Macron's political-economic doctrine.

Political Economy of Macronism

> La vérité, c'est que le sérieux budgétaire est l'apanage des nations libres.
> (Gérald Darmanin, 6 July 2017)

In many respects, the burst of economic reforms introduced by the LREM majority in the first two years of the quinquennat can be likened to a legislative blitzkrieg.

The nomination of LR caciques Bruno Le Maire at the Ministry of the Economy and Finance and Gerald Darmanin at the Ministry of Public Action and Accounts provided very early signals to the budgetary orientations to come. In late June 2017, Le Maire set the fiscal and budgetary tone of the *quinquennat* in an interview with *Le Figaro* by declaring that France should give up its 'addiction to public spending'. For this purpose, the newly appointed minister delineated four sets of objectives in the interview (De Capèle et. al 2017):

1). Take 'difficult decisions' in order to bring back public deficit below the 3 per cent GDP threshold.

2). Engage negotiations with private companies to transform the Crédit d'Impôt Compétitivité Emploi (CICE, see Chapter III) into a permanent bill to lower employers' fiscal contributions.

3). Withdraw the public capital share in a series of non-strategic companies.

4). Convergence with Germany on corporate taxation.

Differently put, the four immediate purposes of the government Philippe were: (1) budgetary austerity, (2) lower taxation of businesses, (3) measures of liberalisation and privatisation, (4) political-economic convergence with Germany (through further European integration) although, as seen below, it seems to draw at least as much inspiration from the United Kingdom model. This section intends to address each of these priorities in detail.

Budgetary Politics and Social Expenditures

In a speech he gave on 6 July 2017, Gerald Darmanin argued that public money was being 'dilapidated' and warned that a genuine political alternation ought to be accompanied with 'budgetary alternation'.[89] He went on to declare that 'budgetary discipline is the prerogative of free nations'.[90] In consequence, he announced that 5 billion euros had to be cut in the 2017 budget if France wished to honour 'its word', that is, staying below the 3 per cent deficit limit (Darmanin 2017).

This discourse intervened exactly one week after the publication of the Cour des Comptes' audit, which provided a solid technocratic legitimation to the budgetary austerity to come.

[89] 'Il n'y aura pas d'alternance dans l'action politique, pas d'alternance dans les pratiques, sans alternance budgétaire c'est-à-dire sans changement'.
[90] 'La vérité, c'est que le sérieux budgétaire est l'apanage des nations libres' (my translation above).

Indeed, the document dramatised the budgetary emergency, explaining that the deficit would reach 3.2 per cent of the GDP if nothing was being done to undo the existing policies, i.e. if 5 to 6 billion euros were not cut from the 2017 budget. This 'independent' report provided Edouard Philippe – who pledged to follow these recommendations – with an administrative validation to the first significant cuts in public spending of Macron's term (Godin 2017b). [91]

Thus, the first austerity plan of the quinquennat was launched in July 2017: 4.5 billion euros were slashed out of the 2017 budget. These savings included the freezing of public workers' index points, the slashing of credits that were initially routed towards public investment, including in the security and defence sectors, as well as the end of *contrats aidés* (130,000 subsidised jobs created under Hollande's term) and a universal cut of 5 euros per month for every household that benefited from APL (Aides Personnelles au Logement, i.e. housing support benefit), including for students and the most precarious households. This latter measure clearly proved the most indiscriminate and controversial of the package in the eyes of public opinion (L'Humanité 2017, L'Obs 2017).

What was the official justification for those cuts? For Bruno Le Maire, the aim was to bring France's deficit below 3 per cent, a threshold that he considered 'not as a totem, but as a *symbol*' (De Capèle et. al 2017, emphasis mine). Indeed, the percentage of public spending relative to GDP was deemed too high for France to 'restore Germany's confidence' in order to pursue European integration. However, there was no official guarantee that exiting the Excessive Deficit Procedure would suffice to dampen Germany's resistance about budgetary

[91] The Cour des Comptes' admonition was reiterated in another report published one year later, on 27 June 2018 (Cour des Comptes 2018).

mutualisation in the Eurozone. Budgetary austerity was therefore legitimated by an extremely arbitrary, if not irrational indicator (see Chapter II).

Alongside the 3 per cent mantra, the argument of social expenditures' weight in public spending has also been ubiquitous. Indeed, it is often alleged that France's public spending ratio to GDP would be close to 57 per cent, that is, much higher than that of its European counterparts, with the exception of Finland and Austria. But that indicator is similarly fallacious. What does count as public spending? The means to measure public spending vary from country to country. In many countries, health expenditures are largely privatised – as in the United States – or externalised through public delegation contracts – as in Germany, with civil society organisations like the churches. Obviously, this means that the percentage of public spending relative to GDP is lower in these countries, precisely because health expenditures – 8.6 per cent relatively to GDP in France in 2019 (DREES 2020) – are not included into the calculus of public spending in Germany and the US: in the latter case, taxpayers are paying a separate (often expensive) bill for health care (Godin 2017c). In other words, in the sectors where France engage in *public* social expenditures – 31.5 per cent of GDP in 2016 (OECD 2017) – other nations engage in *private* social expenditures. Thus, comparative data on public spending is often manipulated in order to justify the neoclassical economic logic positing that public spending is blocking private initiative. By contrast, it is argued that decreasing public spending would necessarily bolster growth and competitiveness.

Despite decades of neoliberalisation, a comparatively high level of social spending has remained part of the French experience. Its role of 'automatic stabiliser' has allowed France to weather the global financial crisis without seeing domestic levels of inequality explode. Indeed, social spending tends to reduce inequality, and France is among the OECD countries

where poverty rates are the lowest, especially for the older generations who benefit from a relatively generous pension system. Although an imperfect indicator, the French Gini coefficient[92] actually improved over the period spanning from 2012 to 2016 (from 0.305 to 0.303), while it regressed in other countries such as Sweden (from 0.266 to 0.278) and the Netherlands (from 0.285 to 0.303) (Godin 2018b). While neoliberals often blame its 'inefficiency' (L'Obs 2018), social spending thus plays a protective role in time of crisis for the most socially fragile households, but also for large categories of the population such as public workers, whose employment is relatively secured in the front of economic instability.

More fundamentally, these cuts were a political choice. On 9 July 2017, Bruno Le Maire laid out the government's objective at the *Rencontres économiques d'Aix-en-Provence*, a yearly ruling-class meeting organised by the liberal economists' association Cercle des Economistes. In Aix-en-Provence, the Minister of the Economy argued in front of economists and business executives that the majority intended to reduce public spending and simultaneously ('en même temps') reduce the taxation of households and businesses (Dancer 2017). But who really benefited from these tax reductions?

Indeed, the 4.5 billion euros of budgetary austerity resulting from the 2017 budget have not been saved or publicly invested. Rather, this sum has, so to speak, been transferred as subsidies to the private sector through an array of tax exemptions that benefitted mostly corporations and the wealthier French taxpayers. Thus, in the first two years of the *quinquennat* (2017-2019) the compression of social expenditure openly served to finance tax cuts by re-routing the money partly spent on public workers – who saw their index point

[92] The OECD provides the following definition of the Gini coefficient: 'The Gini coefficient is based on the comparison of cumulative proportions of the population against cumulative proportions of income they receive, and it ranges between 0 in the case of perfect equality and 1 in the case of perfect inequality' (OECD 2021).

frozen – towards the private sector, in the hope that this supply-side policy would favour private investment, create jobs and ultimately bolster the French growth rate.

Moreover, the creed consisting in compressing public expenditure in order to lower taxation governed the Finance bills of 2019 and 2020. Despite the 5 billion cut in income tax benefitting the lower middle classes, which were hastily budgeted to calm the ire of the Yellow Vests (see Chapter IX), the government strove to institutionalise tax abatements for large capital holders and businesses. It is fair to argue that the French model of capital taxation has been entirely reshuffled in the span of Emmanuel Macron's term so as to gain 'competitiveness' and encourage productive investment? What were the policies that governed this new philosophy of taxation and this redirection of public spending? What concrete results did they garner?

Fiscal Policies and the Trickle-down Myth

Emmanuel Macron's majority reform agenda with regard to taxation has been extremely ambitious, orchestrating an exhaustive revision of the tax system for businesses and large capital holders. Four main axes of reform came to be gradually drawn by minister Bruno Le Maire as the presidential term unfolded:

1). Perpetuation and transformation of *Crédit d'Impôt pour la Compétitivité et l'Emploi* (CICE), made permanent in 2019 by setting lower fiscal contributions for businesses.

2). Reform of the *Impôt de Solidarité sur la Fortune* (ISF, 'wealth tax') in the fall of 2017, with the exemption of financial assets from the wealth tax, now solely based on real-estate assets ('Impôt sur la Fortune Immobilière', IFI).

3). Implementation of the *Prélèvement Forfaitaire Unique* (PFU, 'flat tax') of 30 per cent in 2018, a keystone of Emmanuel Macron's presidential programme.

4). Slashing of the 'exit tax' – a mechanism aimed at fighting tax evasion – in 2018, legitimated by the need to increase France's 'attractiveness'.

The aim of this reform package was clear: 'simplifying' and lowering taxation in order to augment French attractiveness and encourage private industrial investment, in the hope of ultimately favouring the move upmarket of French products and increasing the competitiveness of the French economy in the framework of the European common market, while absorbing France's comparatively high unemployment rate by the same token.

The influence of trickle-down economics (what the French dub *théorie du ruissellement*) is limpid in the reasoning of the presidential majority: they posit that the wealthier citizens are the motors of the economy. Indeed, they assume a causal link between taxation, productive investment and employment. In their perspective, lowering taxation will always garner positive collective outcomes: the money that the state does not collect will automatically be re-invested in the 'real' economy.

As mentioned in Chapter III, CICE was a tax credit that most companies could benefit from, irrespective of their sector of activity, that was introduced in 2013 based on the recommendations formulated in *Rapport Gallois* (2012). In François Hollande's majority reasoning, CICE was supposed to enhance the competitiveness of French companies via an increase in marginal rates and investment, which would in turn have positive effects on employment thanks to a drop in the cost of labour. Yet, the effects of CICE on French growth

and on direct and indirect job creation have not turned out to be convincing, considering the large amounts of public money deployed (between 11.3 and 19 billion per year).[93]

On 1 January 2019, Emmanuel Macron's government took the decision to replace the CICE by a reduction in employer's social contributions by an equivalent amount. Thus, 'in 2019 employer's contributions on all wages between 1 and 2.5 times the minimum wage would be reduced by 6 per cent (i.e. a reduction of 20.4 billion euros). In addition, they would receive the CICE for wages paid in 2018 (20.2 billion euros)' (INSEE 2018). A tax deduction total of 40.6 billion euros has therefore been budgeted in 2019, exclusively for businesses. This admittedly significantly relieved cash flow problems for many companies, the problem being that the reduced social contributions applied irrespective of the financial situation of said companies. It is against this background that the governmental budgetary austerity described in the previous sub-section should be understood: the implementation of fiscal rebates for businesses without strings attached leads to a compensatory reduction of social transfers to households. The same creed of lower social contributions for businesses and compression of social expenditures found its way into the 2020 Finance bill, despite a 5 billion euros cut in income tax hastily budgeted to appease the anger of the *Gilets Jaunes* (see Chapter IX).

Alongside the reform of business taxation, the complete reshuffle of capital taxation was also a keystone of Emmanuel Macron's programme. This took the form of two complementary legislative endeavours: the reform of the emblematic *Impôt de Solidarité sur la Fortune* (ISF, 'wealth tax') which the traditional Right only dared to marginally amend under Chirac and

[93] According to France Stratégie (an autonomous institution created in 2013 and placed under the authority of the Prime Minister), the impact of CICE on growth between 2013 and 2015 was + 0.2 per cent. The highest estimate of jobs created or safeguarded over these 3 years amounts to 300,000. The lowest estimate amounts to 110,000 (France Stratégie 2018, 28-29).

Sarkozy, and the implementation of the *Prélèvement Forfaitaire Unique* (PFU), a 30 per cent *flat tax* on moveable assets.

Since 2018, the wealth tax – a disposition first implemented by François Mitterrand as *Impôt sur les Grandes Fortunes* (IGF) and which was gradually amended since – was replaced by *Impôt sur la fortune immobilière* (IFI), a simple levy on real estate. Moveable assets such as financial shares were therefore exempted. As Thomas Piketty (2017) points out, the share of moveable assets in the capital stock of taxpayers grows proportionally with their wealth. The wealthier the capital holder, the higher the share of moveable assets in their capital. Thus, 90 per cent of assets belonging to the richest 0.1 per cent (who saw their capital multiplied by 5 between 1980 and 2016) is financialised and therefore moveable abroad. In a context where the richest taxpayers are doing well and not leaving the country *en masse*, Piketty equates the suppression of ISF to an economic, political and moral failure.

This measure was tightly associated and simultaneously implemented with *Prélèvement Forfaitaire Unique* (PFU), a 30 per cent flat tax that includes both an income tax (‘*impôt sur le revenu*’) of 12.8 percent and social contributions of 17.2 per cent. Implementing a flat tax on investment incomes, capital gains on transferable assets and life insurances has the advantage of broadening the tax base. From a budgetary standpoint, the tax cuts for the richest derived from the suppression of ISF were thus directly counterbalanced by tax hikes for the rest of households.

Thus, the rather high rate of 30 per cent – which was based on the Swedish model, celebrated by Macronite economist Philippe Aghion – remains fundamentally unequitable because the reform is financed by the lower sections of the tax base and purposefully favours the richest

taxpayers and investors (Godin 2017a). Furthermore, Gabriel Zucman (2017) suggests that the PFU might be up to 10 times more expensive for public finances than the 1.5 billion euros claimed by the presidential majority. Indeed, it might generate a lot of tax avoidance, considering the 15 points difference between the labour taxation rate (65 per cent) and the dividends taxation rate (50 per cent). For Zucman, the PFU is thus tantamount to 'a ticking bomb for public finances'.

In fact, the LREM majority strove to facilitate the recourse to tax evasion. On 1 May 2018, Emmanuel Macron announced in the US *Forbes* that he would slash the 'exit tax' (Lane 2018).[94] Beyond the provocation of choosing Labour Day to officially announce that news – large protests turned violent in Paris on that day – this was intended to be a strong signal given to foreign investors, legitimated by the need to improve the 'attractiveness' of France. Implemented at the end of Nicolas Sarkozy's *quinquennat* in 2011, the 'exit tax' was a dissuasive and rather technical levy that targeted taxpayers owning a portfolio of stocks and bonds worth more than 800,000 euros, or who owned a share of a company's capital and wished to domicile it abroad – typically in Belgium – in order to evade taxation on capital gains (Tonnelier 2018). The slashing of the exit tax was therefore intended to ease the circulation of capital across the French borders.

The same logic presiding over the scrapping of exchange controls in the 1980s and 1990s guided the slashing of the exit tax. Indeed, neoliberals make a concerted effort to promote and facilitate the 'exit option' of capital, i.e. the right of investors to exit or enter a specific political jurisdiction with their capital intact. The exit option of course includes the right to

[94] The front-page of the 1st May 2018 edition of the US *Forbes* features a giggling Emmanuel Macron associated with the following eulogy: 'Leader of the Free Markets'.

move capital to the so-called offshore world and in so doing, exercises a disciplinary effect on governments (Biscahie and Gill 2022). Indeed, Friedrich von Hayek considered any form of state control on foreign exchange (such as capital controls) as a decisive advance on the path to totalitarianism and the suppression of individual liberty (Hayek 1965, 92). For Milton Friedman, capital controls were the 'most effective way to convert a market economy into an authoritarian economic society' (Friedman 1962, 57). In the name of freedom, neoliberal thinkers have therefore promoted the cross-border mobility of capital and encouraged the preservation of the associated 'exit option' in order to discipline governments, parliaments and national trade unions to introduce and accept neoliberal economic policies as both efficient and justifiable (Lesage et. al 2014). This is the essence of what Adam Harmes (2019) terms 'market-preserving federalism', a policy framework that emphasises the 'locking-in' of free-market policies through the creation of an exit option and policy competition. The slashing of the 'exit tax' is market-preserving federalism in action.

This tacit leniency towards tax evasion was also reflected in the priorities expressed by the Ministry of Economics and Finance (colloquially termed 'Bercy'), with some internal restructuring at *Direction générale des finances publiques* (DGFiP). Without being transparent about the numbers, minister Gérald Darmanin alluded to the fact that less agents and funding would be dedicated to control and investigate suspicions of tax evasion in Bercy. Economic newspaper *Les Echos* unveiled that a bit less than 20,000 agents out of 103,000 would be eliminated in the span of 5 years (against the background of 13,000 prior suppressions since 2005). In a typical techno-solutionist fashion, Darmanin argued that the development of artificial intelligence and various data processing software would compensate for these job losses in the field of tax control, a testimony to the government's disinterest with regards to the fight against tax evasion (Godin 2018c).

In addition to budgetary austerity and to measures aimed at reassuring the business community, Emmanuel Macron and his majority engaged in various liberalisation reforms, which the next sub-section addresses.

Mimicking the British Equation

> I think that people do think we need reforms. We want to do reforms, so we will do reforms. When you compare with the UK in the 1980s, the main difference is that we did not deliver at the time. So French people now recognise that the others decided to move, and we are the only ones not reforming their own system.
> (Emmanuel Macron, televised interview, BBC2 2015)

While most of the public discourse on 'reform' is centred around Germany in an aspiration to 'converge' with the current political-economic compromise beyond the Rhine, the main source of inspiration – although untold most of the time – remains Great Britain, where Emmanuel Macron travelled four times during the presidential campaign so as to raise funds.

In the French context, mimicking the British equation entails a gradual enhancement of global competitiveness and attractiveness by means of privatisation and liberalisation domestically. At the core of this objective, the ideological belief and implicit, often explicit assumption that the private sector is inherently more *efficient* than the delegitimised and indebted public sector. As France's wealthiest citizen Bernard Arnault put it in 2016 (BFM Business 2016): 'public jobs are not real jobs'.[95]

[95] In an interview with BFM Business in February 2016, Bernard Arnault said that the 'majority of French people are interested in entrepreneurship, and understand that France can only progress if it favours its entrepreneurs' who are 'the only ones who create real jobs'. The CEO of LVMH went on to argue that 'we are creating public jobs, but they are not real jobs, market-sector employment in companies are real jobs. Only those jobs can lead to a drop in unemployment and to a global purchasing power improvement in the country'. Only one member of the Valls government found favour in the sight of Arnault: Emmanuel Macron, whose actions 'move in this direction' although, he lamented, 'he is not being followed often, unfortunately' (BFM Business 2016, my translation).

Following this logic, six main lines of interventions can be identified:

1). *Liberalisation of finance*

The Brexit context serves Emmanuel Macron's purposes well. The presidential majority has indeed attempted to create the conditions to encourage the relocation of financial activities from London to Paris – in direct competition with Frankfurt – in an effort to make Paris a financial hub. Thus, the Brexit vote might offer the opportunity for France 'to capture key geopolitical and economic assets that the United Kingdom owns within the European Union', including 'the roles of key partner of the United States and the most attractive place for financial and creative activities' at the expense of the City of London, hence the urge to cut the taxes on the wealthy, to reduce employment and investment in the public sector and to curtail labour protection and benefits (Askenazy 2018). In June 2017, Edouard Philippe announced measures for banks that considered moving from London to Paris, including the scrapping of the highest bracket of payroll tax on bankers and the opening of English-language classes in Paris (Chassany and Stothard 2017).

The willingness to turn France into a pro-business destination and to make Paris a financial hub is a translation of the ideological belief that the financial sector would be able to bolster French prosperity, itself supported by the conviction that financial activities necessarily stimulate growth and are ultimately the motor of the economy. Various fiscal arrangements serve the purpose of attracting foreign capital, including the gradual lowering of French corporate tax in order to please international (especially American) investors. Thus, in 2022, all companies' profits will be taxed at the rate of 25 per cent – which is close to the average in developed nations – against 33.3 per cent at the beginning of the quinquennat, with a cost for public finance estimated at 11 billion euros (Couet 2021).

This might be a high cost to pay for a goal that might prove illusory and unreachable. In the framework of a common market tied together with a common currency, the freedom of capital to move freely across borders will make any progress in attracting foreign investors irremediably fragile. The constant pressure on tax revenues – and the accompanying steady adjustment on expenditures – could, however, prove costly for the social state and could increase already existing divergences between territories, in a dynamic akin to that observable on the other side of the Channel, between a prosperous South and a more pauperised North.

2). *Public Services Delivery Liberalisation*

The same liberalising priorities govern the report '*CAP 22 – 22 propositions pour changer de modèle*' ('CAP 22 – 22 propositions for a paradigmatic shift'), a political-economic roadmap published in July 2018. This umpteenth iteration of an expert committee established by a government in order to draft a programme of reforms imbued with neoliberal common sense summoned once again well-known organic intellectuals, some of whom were already president in the Attali Commission one decade earlier, such as economist Philippe Aghion and Institut Montaigne director Laurent Bigorgne (see chapter IV).

The world is changing, the report argues, and France has to adapt by improving public services while making substantial savings in their operating costs, as the level of public spending is deemed unsustainable. While the report points out that the delivery of public services must be made more 'equitable', it is urging to put a halt to 'useless expenditures', paving the way for austerity as the only possible horizon. The contributors thus propose to instil 'trust' and 'responsibilisation' in administrative matters and public service delivery (Comité Action Publique 2022). They suggest that public services could be made more 'efficient' thanks to digitalisation and through better management practices, which would

involve transposing some organisational and managerial methods from the private sector to the public sector. What kind of propositions are formulated to reach this goal?

For the contributors, the state should first restrain itself from intervening in sectors where public action is already the prerogative of local authorities, such as youth and associative life, social and solidarity action, training, energy provision, urban planning and environmental protection, in order to avoid duplicating public interventions at too many levels. This type of rationalisation could operate, they suggest, through a better coordination between the central state and the territories. Furthermore, the report recommends to terminate public funding in sectors where its efficiency has not been 'proven', for instance the subsidies to small airports or the tax exemptions aimed at incentivising energy transitions (they notably propose to hike up VAT rates on energetic renovation services).

Besides, the report encourages the mutualisation and externalisation of public action in certain sectors, with the transfer of a series of administrative controls in health and hygiene and in matters pertaining to competition, consumer protection and frauds to the private sector, opening the gate to potential conflicts of interest which the report fails to address. The end of the report gets more controversial and 'revolutionary' inasmuch as it suggests to make the user pay for some public services in health and safety controls, transportation (with the use of urban tolls) and consulate services.

The stated objectives are vague enough to seem consensual – improving life expectancy through better access to healthcare, making housing more affordable, improving conditions of learning in higher education, avoiding delays in juridical proceedings, simplifying the taxation system, digitalising payments to avoid frauds. The proposed solutions and the vision

of the state developed in the report remain, however, unabashedly neoliberal and fully consistent with the Révision Générale des Politiques Publiques framework (RGPP, see chapter III) with the institutionalisation of public/private coordination reminiscent of the British Public-Private Partnerships (PPP, see chapter VI),[96] the privatisation of certain prerogatives and the duplication of practices and forms of organisation originating in the private sector to the public sector, all this informed by the belief that the former is intrinsically more efficient and innovative than the latter.

3). *Labour Market Liberalisation*

In the first few months of his presidential term, Emmanuel Macron and his majority laid the last milestones of a process of labour market reform initiated under François Hollande in 2015. It did so by completing the array of reforms already undertaken by the previous majority (notably Loi El Khomri, which gave greater scope to company-level bargaining, see chapter III) with a last series of ordinances enacted in the fall of 2017. Emmanuel Macron and his government thus presented a package of 5 decrees containing 36 measures in September 2017, and the ordinances were approved by parliament by November of the same year.

The official aim of these packages was to lower the unemployment rate from 9.5 per cent in May 2017 to 7.5 per cent near the end of the quinquennat. The pieces of legislation clearly reflected the assumption that giving employers – especially in small and medium-sized companies – greater flexibility was the key to bring France's unemployment rate down. What kind of measures were engineered to reach this goal?

[96] Even in the United Kingdom, Public-Private Partnerships had fallen from grace at the end of the 2010s. Indeed, devastating reports from the National Audit Office encouraged the conservative government of Theresa May to renounce to PPP because of the extra-costs they occasion in terms of higher borrowing rates (2 per cent for the state, 4 per cent for private companies on average) and the need to remunerate shareholders (between 2 and 4 per cent) (Les économistes atterrés 2018, 73).

Two main paradigmatic changes are introduced with the purpose to (1) weaken the power of trade-unions and (2) weaken the rights of workers against unfair dismissal. Firstly, the ordinances intended to simplify collective bargaining by removing the need for any trade union oversight during negotiations in companies of less than 50 employees (Parsons 2017). Secondly, an employer became allowed to dismiss an employee for any reason without warning. But while French labour courts ('Conseil de prud'hommes') could thus far not impose workplace reinstatement, they nevertheless had the freedom to determine the amount of compensation for unfairly dismissed employees. With the new laws, they no longer have this freedom and are legally bound to conform to certain limits. In these circumstances, the potential gains are often too low and tend to discourage dismissed workers taking their claims to court (Askenazy 2018).

This reform means that compensation payments are now organised by scales linked to years of service, that the time limit for claims has also been reduced, and that a ceiling on payments has been established in order to please the financial sector, that lobbied for a long time to weaken the influence of Conseil de prud'hommes.[97] Although this reform was met with opposition from the political Left and some trade-unions – especially CGT, but even the reformist CFDT expressed criticisms – the protests in the streets were rather limited. Further implications of these packages for French industrial relations are elaborated in the next section.

[97] In France, Conseil de prud'hommes are labour courts whose origins date back to the nineteenth century that resolve individual disputes arising out of an employment contract. The court first attempts conciliation. If conciliation proves unsuccessful, the dispute is resolved by a judgment. Half the labour court members represent employers, and half represents employees. The power of these courts was substantially weakened by one of Macron's ordinances in the fall of 2017, which was aimed at 'caping' compensatory allowances afforded for wrongful dismissal. With the reform, the average severance payment would plummet from eight months of wages to between three to six months of wages, at the expense of unjustly dismissed employees (Cailhol 2017).

4). *Public transportation Liberalisation*

The liberalisation of public transportation in France over the last decade was enhanced thanks to two complementary pieces of legislation that had programmatic and strategic goals. In a similar fashion to the labour market legislations mentioned above, they spanned over both the Hollande and Macron quinquennats.

The law 2015-990 pour '*la croissance, l'activité et l'égalité des chances économiques*' (for 'growth, activity and economic equality of opportunity'), promulgated on 6 August 2015, was the first step on the path to liberalisation in the transportation sector and was mostly concerned with the development of a freely-organised intercity bus services, what has been dubbed '*les cars Macron*' ('the Macron buses'), as this reform was crafted when Emmanuel Macron was Minister of the Economy.

For the Socialist majority, the liberalisation of coach services was aimed at providing cheaper, alternative routes to the train network. With an average distance of 350 kilometres per journey and less emphasis placed on speed, the new supply of intercity buses was intended to be attractive for young people, students and families who could not afford the SNCF (Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français) fares. Indeed, Emmanuel Macron pretended that this liberalisation would benefit 'the most modest families, the most precarious, the most fragile' (Kestel 2018, 103), a transformist way to present a policy that increased inequalities toward access to public transportation – with the trains for the middle-classes and the coach for precarious citizens, as practiced in Britain with National Express – as a policy favourable to the poorest households. In all logic, the quality of service proved very *low-cost* and was often not integrated in its urban environment, with bus stops devoid of any existing urban infrastructure: 77 out of the 171 municipalities served in 2017 did not have a bus terminal –

which implies no access to bathroom, shelter, water or catering service, but also more safety concerns for travellers who are dropped in more isolated locations (Guihéry 2017, 61-63).

Predictably, this liberalisation very quickly morphed into oligopolistic concentration, with only two operators still standing six years after the reform: the SNCF-owned Ouibus (that bought competitor Starshipper in 2016) and Flixbus (the Munich-based behemoth that swallowed Megabus Europe and Eurolines/Isilines in in 2016 and 2019 respectively). Indeed, the sector tilts strongly towards concentration because it is not profitable (Guihéry 2017, 61). Besides, coach services are immensely more polluting than the train: a bus passenger emits 18 times more CO2 than a train passenger (Kestel 2018, 104). Lastly, this liberalisation did not occasion any significant job creations, as the leader of the market Flixbus is built on a digital model akin to that of Uber: it does not own vehicles or directly employs drivers but hires subcontractors (Kestel 2018, 106).

These concerns appear nonetheless meaningless in light of the real objective of the reform: to weaken the SNCF – a public company created by the Front Populaire in 1938 – by introducing unfair competition practices, thus legitimising the need for a deep reform of the French railway company. Constant media-bashing with regards to the purportedly 'abysmal' debt of the company (Kestel 2018, 20) helped the newly elected LREM majority to set the reform on top of its legislative agenda.

The spirit of the SNCF reform, as presented by Prime Minister Edouard Philippe in February 2018, included three main lines of transformation:

1). *Abolishing of the railway worker status* ('cheminot' status) for new hires, although existing railway workers can still benefit from a package of rights and guarantees – job security, a few additional days of paid vacation, specific pension schemes that allow workers to retire slightly earlier than average, reduced price for train tickets (Le Monde 2018a) – which were established as a compensation for the arduousness of *cheminots*' working conditions.

2). *Change of status for the SNCF* to become a public joint-stock company ('société anonyme publique'). The SNCF would remain officially publicly-owned, but would meet stronger constraints regarding its indebtedness.

3). *Opening up to competition* for regional trains (TER, Intercités, Corail) and for high-speed trains (TGV) in 2020. This was a long-standing European Commission demand since the 1990s, as public monopolies are rhetorically constructed as a burden for public finances and economic growth, an obstacle to affordable ticket pricing, and a breach of the principle of 'free and fair' competition in the framework of the European common market.

Despite a three months-long strike that spanned from 3 April to 28 June 2018, the bill '*Pour un nouveau pacte ferroviaire*' ('For a new railway covenant') was conclusively adopted on 14 June 2018. Although this was the most important social movement of Macron's term before the Yellow Vests, the strategy adopted by the striking railway workers – what was dubbed a '*grève perlée*' because it entailed only two to three days of labour disruption per week – did not prove a strategic success.

It is worth highlighting that this reform ran fully against the tide. In Britain, the pioneering country for railway privatisation under Margaret Thatcher and especially under John Major, similar measures led to a profound degradation of the network, with more accidents, delays and dizzying tariffs hikes for the travellers. In consequence, the British government recently scrapped rail franchising and announced plans to extend support for train firms (Burridge 2021).

5). *Partial privatisation of social housing*

In 2018, some 2.1 million French people were officially on the waiting list to secure a social housing accommodation, while less than 500,000 units are allocated each year. While France – with 4.6 million of such units – remains better endowed than its neighbours when it comes to affordable housing, the chances to secure a HLM (Habitation à Loyer Modéré) are therefore thin, with a success rate of 22 per cent nationwide, and under 10 per cent in Paris (Rey-Lefebvre et al. 2019). In France, there is therefore no shortage of demand for the affordable apartments which the British call 'council housing'.

It seems to be once again beyond the Channel that the Philippe government looked for inspiration for the ÉLAN law ('*Loi portant Évolution du Logement, de l'Aménagement et du Numérique*'), promulgated on 27 November 2018 and seemingly directly inspired by the Housing Act, passed by the British Parliament in 1980, which opened the door for Margaret Thatcher's 'Right to Buy' (RTB) policy.

Throughout the 1980s and to a lesser extent the 1990s, the RTB allowed tenants in publicly-owned council housing to buy their rented accommodation at a heavily subsidised price. This emblematic Thatcherite policy was responsible for a rapid and significant increase in the share of home ownership among households in the UK, from 55 per cent in 1979 to over 70

per cent in the early 2000s (Disney and Luo 2017, 51). Perhaps one of the most meaningful reforms of the 1980s, the RTB was a momentous pillar to the British 'passive revolution', as further analysed in the next section.

While Emmanuel Macron's presidential programme promised to build more social housing 'where needed', the Edouard Philippe government expressed its willingness to sell more public housing each year, with the goal to multiply the sales by 2.5: 20,000 units throughout the term against 8,000 yearly average in 2017 (Godin 2018a). Although this figure seems extremely modest compared to the scale of the Thatcherite sell-off, there is ground to believe the sales will increase over time. In July 2018, Minister of Territorial Cohesion Jacques Mézard mentioned an objective that was double the number initially provided by the government: 40,000 accommodations sold every year, or 1 per cent of the total stock of housing (Poussart 2018). This sale needs to be considered against the background of the universal cuts in housing benefits (APL) that were acted in 2017 and mentioned earlier in this section. Deprived of several billions of funding (indeed, the state often directly transfers APL to public housing authorities instead of transferring it to renters), the government aimed to compensate for these cuts and bail out of housing associations through partial privatisation of the social housing stock.

6). *Privatisation of selected publicly-owned companies*

Last but not least, a neoliberalisation programme worthy of the name would not be complete without the privatisation of selected publicly-owned companies. This was the purpose of the law PACTE ('*Plan d'Action pour la Croissance et la Transformation des Entreprises*'), promulgated on 22 May 2019, which aimed to 'remove obstacles to business growth, at every step of their development'.

The Loi PACTE was a piece of legislation strategically focused on deregulation, 'simplification', liberalisation of businesses and the transfer of state assets to the private sphere. Its targets were clearly threefold: Groupe ADP (formerly Aéroports de Paris, that exploits Charles de Gaulle, Orly and Le Bourget, the three airports surrounding Paris), Engie (formerly group GDF Suez which operates in the fields of energy transition, electricity and gas generation and distribution) and Française des Jeux (FDJ, the operator of France's national lottery games).

Although the French state in 2017 did not own the same percentage of capital in each of these companies (only 24.1 per cent for Engie), it remained the majority shareholder of Groupe ADP (owning 50.6 per cent of the company) and Française des Jeux (owning 72 per cent of the assets). Yet, in an interview with the liberal daily newspaper *Les Echos* (Lefebvre and Honoré 2018), Minister of the Economy Bruno Le Maire argued that the state 'does not have the authority to manage competitive companies instead of shareholders that have the abilities and the know-how to do so better' ('(L'Etat) *n'a pas vocation à diriger des entreprises concurrentielles à la place d'actionnaires qui ont les compétences et les savoir-faire pour le faire mieux que lui*', my translation).

Why is this programme of privatisation – the largest in a decade – problematic? First and foremost, these companies are profitable. In 2017 alone, Groupe ADP has reaped a net profit of 571 million euros. Since 2006, ADP and FDJ together remitted an average of approximately 265 million euros per year to the state in the form of dividends (174 million for ADP and 90 million for FDJ). In 2017 alone, Engie, ADP and FDJ provided a return of 712 million euros in dividends to the state (Alix et al. 2018). With privatisation, the French state will be impoverished in the long run by giving up the regular transfer of dividends.

One might retort that the French state will directly benefit from these privatisations. Indeed, Bruno Le Maire indicated that the government intended to create a 'fund for innovation' of 10 billion euros that would be financed thanks to the transfer of assets. Yet, one may question the relevance of privileging a stock (the selling price of those assets) over a flow (the regular transfer of dividends and the continuing ownership) for financing such long-term investments in innovation. Once more, the short-term vision of the government seems to prevail against longer-term concerns that are far from trivial: Charles de Gaulle airport is the busiest French border point, as such, the sovereignty and safety of France is theoretically at stake. Furthermore, the privatisation logic runs against the meagre ecological commitments of the Philippe government: if private operators took over, it would be in their interest to neglect environmental norms and protections, while the latter are technically protected by the logic of 'general interest' that governs public tutelage.

Even more problematically, these activities are *monopolistic.* This is especially true in the case of Groupe ADP. Indeed, not a single private company could have the leverage to build a brand new airport in the Paris region to compete with the Charles de Gaulle hub, which remains in the top five busiest airports in the world in terms of passengers. If Groupe ADP was to be privatised, the current public monopoly would therefore become a de facto *private monopoly*. Beyond the obvious problems of breaching of competition and potentially corruptive practices that this could occasion, this is once more consistent with the government's belief that the private sector is a more efficient operator than the public sector. The same logic applies to the lottery operator Française des Jeux, notwithstanding an additional ethical problem posed by the logic of privatisation. Indeed, the mercantile reasoning implies that Française des Jeux shall make more profits once privatised: making FDJ a mere commercial activity automatically means that the private shareholders will do

whatever it takes to make French people gamble more. In lieu of using the wealth accumulated from gambling to finance measures intended to restrict access to those games – in a logic akin to the logic governing the taxation of tobacco or alcohol, for instance – profits will directly go to private shareholders. This is naturally done at the expense of gamblers, who are statistically more likely to be poor than well-off (Godin 2019).

Despite the recourse to transformist rhetoric – with notably the introduction of the notion of 'general interest' as part of corporate social responsibility, a vow that is nevertheless not accompanied with any new legal obligations for companies –, the loi ELAN did not depart from the economic creed of the Philippe government that has been exposed throughout this section. It is strongly informed by the belief that unlocking blockages and rigidities at the microeconomic level will lead to greater macroeconomic welfare. In this framework, trade liberalisation in services, privatisations and more accommodating taxation schemes are considered key to economic success and presented as the necessary remedy to mass unemployment. Full confidence is indeed placed in the private sector, as these legal, fiscal and budgetary adjustments are expected to generate more private investment in key industrial sectors.

Quite surprisingly, the movement of resistance against the privatisation of ADP found a powerful echo in the spring that followed the Yellow Vests revolt. An online petition launched against the privatisation in February 2019 by economist David Cayla and public intellectual Coralie Delaume garnered some 300,000 signatures. Nevertheless, the *référendum d'initiative partagée* (RIP) initiative[98] launched in April 2019 by 248 MPs from all political

[98] Article 11 of the Constitution stipulates that a referendum ought to be called when it is commended by a fifth of Members of Parliament, themselves supported by more than a tenth of registered voters. The referendum must take the form of a draft bill ('*proposition de loi*') and cannot abrogate a law

persuasions against the project ended up failing in March 2020, mostly because of the near impossible threshold of 4,6 million signatures needed to initiate the process. In the absence of a decent media coverage, this impressive threshold would indeed have required significant funds and organisational means in order to reach out to the population.

Incidentally, the social conflict about the pension reform later that year, and most obviously the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020 onwards, forced the government to delay this reform and it has now become clear that it could not go through unless Emmanuel Macron is re-elected. Unlike London Heathrow that was privatised in 1987, Groupe ADP remains to this day a public company.

The Passive Revolution of French Neoliberalism

A Genealogy of Passive Revolution

In *The Prison Notebooks,* Gramsci often utilises concepts that were previously formulated by others and shifts their meaning, thus formulating a new concept in practice (Filippini 2017, 114), a method presumably stemming from his training in linguistics. Such was the case for the concept of 'passive revolution', borrowed from influential Neapolitan conservative thinker Vincenzo Cuoco (1770-1823). Cuoco described the Neapolitan Republic of 1799 as an episode of 'passive revolution' because it was the work of an 'enlightened bourgeois class' that involved no mass participation. A fervent supporter of Napoleon, he came to endorse the recourse to 'passive revolution' as a method to prevent revolutions modelled on the French experience.

promulgated less than one year prior. Contained in the constitutional revision of 23 July 2008, this disposition came into being during the Sarkozy presidency.

Gramsci's reflections about passive revolution can be traced back to the history of Italy's relatively recent inception. After the unification (1848-1871), the Moderate Party and the Action Party were structuring Italian political life. Led by the Count of Cavour, the Moderates were pro-confederation but abandoned federalism for unification. Leaning towards the Right, they represented a homogeneous social group and became the main beneficiary of the *Risorgimento*: they were 'the real, organic vanguard of the upper classes, to which economically they belonged' (Gramsci 1971, 60 Q19§24). Led by Garibaldi, the Action Party represented the democratic parliamentary Left after the unification but did not base itself on any historical class. Gradually, the Moderates subjected the Action Party through the exercise of 'intellectual and moral leadership' – the consensual tilt of hegemony –, leading to the progressive but continuous absorption of the latter by the former. The parliamentary phenomenon known as *trasformismo* (see Chapter V) reflected this decapitation and subsequent annihilation.

Indeed, Gramsci considers *trasformismo* to be a 'real historical document' of what he calls 'revolution/restoration'[99] as a synonym for 'passive revolution'. The Moderates' organic concentration – i.e. their function of 'organic intellectuals' of the ruling class, deriving from their close links to it – made possible the hegemony or power of attraction which this grouping exercised on other sections of society, notably on the intellectuals of the subordinate or subaltern classes. *Trasformismo* is therefore part of the process by which dominant groups are able to co-opt oppositional forces into their ranks, thus securing power partly by the spread of their ideas (Schwarzmantel 2015, 99-100). This gradual but continuous absorption

[99] Gramsci borrowed the expression 'revolution/restoration' (Q8§25) from French historian Edgar Quinet (1805-1875).

by the Moderates reflected the fact that the *Risorgimento* was 'a revolution without a revolution', or a 'passive revolution' (Gramsci 1971, 105-20 Q15 and Q10).

This multifaceted concept seems to incorporate different meanings throughout the notebooks. It was first intended to characterise the process of Italian unification as an incomplete revolution that had failed to create a new state that incorporated the mass of the population, unlike the French Revolution which saw the determined Jacobins adopt a leading, or *dirigente* role that allowed them to convincingly link up with the rural masses. The Moderates' strategy was fundamentally different: they established a state that promoted the interests of capital through a gradual process directed from above which was based on a compromise between the bourgeoisie and the old (feudal) social classes (Callinicos 2010, 492).

This understanding of passive revolution thus refers to a socio-political transformation guided by the interests of capital owners and undertaken without the active participation of the masses. Passive revolution therefore theoretically captures processes through which systemic transformations are achieved by non-revolutionary means (Callinicos 2010, 494). Indeed, the *method* to carry out these changes can be regarded as a *molecular* political transformation in which oppositional movements were so to speak decapitated by having their leadership co-opted into the ranks of the ruling elite (*trasformismo*).

As Gramsci put it (1971, 109 Q15 §11):

> One may apply to the concept of passive revolution (documenting it from the Italian Risorgimento) the interpretative criterion of molecular changes which in fact progressively modify the pre-existing composition of forces, and hence become the matrix of new changes.

In lieu of a mere fluctuation, passive revolution involves a combination of novelty and conservatism. Thus, social relations are fundamentally reorganised (revolution) in a manner

that may initially be interpreted as 'progressive'. Ultimately, progressive governmental promises aimed at calming protest or resolving the stalemate of the class struggle are nonetheless unkept and popular initiatives are neutralised so as to perpetuate class domination.[100] As such, the term 'passive' was employed to characterise the difference between a 'national-popular' movement from below that entailed the extensive involvement of the subaltern classes – i.e. movement of a radical Jacobin type, as in France – versus a revolution from above – a compromised bourgeois transition between industrialists and the old feudal classes, as in Italy (Hesketh 2017, 398-99).[101]

This alliance between the nascent industrialist and the old aristocratic classes lacked national-popular appeal, hence the extremely fragile hegemony over the rest of Italian society (especially the South) and the poor capacity to economically transform the peninsula. The lack of popular legitimacy associated with this recomposing thus manifested in molecular co-optation, incorporation and absorption (*trasformismo*) of the subaltern classes' leading elements – in the form of the individual or the group, or both alternatively – into an already

[100] A quintessential example of this logic has been the handling by Emmanuel Macron of the recommendations drafted by the *Convention citoyenne pour le climat* ('Citizens' convention for climate'), a participative democracy initiative gathering 150 randomly sorted French citizens that was initiated in October 2019 in order to address some of the Yellow Vests' grievances about the lack of popular representation in national institutions and the absence of democratic decision-making processes pertaining to the fight against climate change. The objective of the convention was to propose socially just structural measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent by 2030 (based on the total of emissions in 1990). After the delivery of the convention's recommendations on 21 June 2021, the government proposed a climate bill in the fall. When they convened one last time to discuss the latter, members of the citizens' convention had to assess how well the government considered and integrated their recommendations to the climate bill, and gave a severe grade of 33 per cent, deploring the government's 'lack of ambition' and the continuing 'influence of lobbies' (Barroux and Garric 2021).

[101] Gramsci often contrasts the French Revolution, during which the Jacobins were able to gather the consent of the peasant population – i.e, to create an 'organic link' between urban and rural areas – with the perennial North/South (urban/rural) divide that structured Italian social and political life and was perpetuated with the Risorgimento, as 'the Italian bourgeoisie was incapable of uniting the people around itself, and this was the cause of its defeats and the interruptions in its development' (Gramsci 1971, 53 Q25 §5).

established hegemonic *project*. Thus, the Risorgimento was nothing more than a transformation of political forms undertaken by elites, 'garbed in the rhetoric of previous revolutionary movements, but without the extensive involvement of subaltern classes that had led to the placing in question of social and economic relations in earlier transformations' (Thomas 2006, 72).[102]

The concept underlines an apparent opposition between innovation and conservation in a dialectic of change and permanence. Gramsci explains that the 'problem' is 'to see whether in the dialectic "revolution/restoration" it is revolution or restoration which predominates; for it is certain that in the movement of history there is never any turning back, and that restorations *in toto* do not exist' (1971, 219-20 Q13 §27). Thus, a passive revolution does not entail the return to an old order that was once in dereliction. It is rather a re-combination, an active and malleable amalgamation of elements from the past and elements from the present, a compromise that allows for the subsistence of the old alongside the new.[103]

Moreover, Gramsci looked beyond the Risorgimento. He tried to think along similar lines to comprehend the rise of fascism, as well as the anchoring of Fordism as a mode of production. Gramsci noted that both phenomena were seeking to develop the productive forces of

[102] For Peter Thomas (2006, 74-5), the successful imposition of passive revolution had involved political choices. First, the choice of the ruling classes to develop strategies to disaggregate the working-classes and to confine them to an 'economic-corporate level' within the existing society. Secondly, the political choices of the subaltern classes had resulted in a failure to elaborate their own hegemonic apparatuses that would be capable of resisting the absorptive logic of the passive revolution.

[103] For instance, the period known as 'Restauration' (1814-1830) in France did not signify the rejuvenation of the state of affairs which the revolutionaries dismantled in the years following 1789. Rather, that period witnessed the relinquishment of the most progressive revolutionary conquests and the simultaneous strengthening of the bourgeois order on a new basis, which testified to the potential for innovation and adaptation on the part of the new capitalist class.

modernity, but the masses were not involved in the process: any possible radical challenge from below was therefore averted.

On Fordism, Gramsci notes (1971, 119-20 Q10I §9):

> There is a passive revolution involved in the fact that – through the legislative intervention of the State and by means of the corporative organisation – relatively far-reaching modifications are being introduced into the country's economic structure in order to accentuate the 'plan of production' element; in other words, that socialisation and cooperation in the sphere of production are being increased, without however touching (or at least not going beyond the regulation and control of) individual and group appropriation.

Gramsci sees the new mode of standardised mass production known as Fordism as a strategy of development towards modernity. However, the financial benefits of these modern production methods – based on the rationalisation of labour and its associated gains in terms of efficacy and productivity – remained in the hands of the ruling class. The techniques that seemed to constitute a new stage of capitalist society were aimed to secure the prevailing socio-political order by preserving the intrinsically classist stratification that prevailed before their introduction. Gramsci thus studied Fordism in terms of its molecular moulding of the workforce through high wages and the strict control over the private life of workers (Filippini 2017, 41). Unlike the Turin factory councils – which were clear, revolutionary, subaltern-led attempts to reorganise work, the American system represented by Ford and Taylor might be seen as the 'passive revolution' in the organisation of work (Denning 2009, 72-73). Fordism was a top-down hegemonic project whereby the coercive puritan values were counterbalanced by high wages in order to ensure persuasion and consent, although Gramsci considered these higher remunerations as a 'transitory' mode of regulation (1971, 310 Q22 §13). In this framework, passive revolution does not refer to a particularly recognisable event but takes a more general significance, as a logic of (a certain type) of modernisation (Thomas 2006, 73). In Braudelian terms, this means that passive revolution ceases to account for *événementiel* dimensions of socio-political life to embrace a perspective of the *conjuncture* that properly

encapsulates the persisting and entrenched features of a mode of production and its associated means of governance.

Furthermore, Gramsci understood fascism as a developmental project, but one that would remain detached from the broad masses because it kept intact the existing relations of forces inherent to the prevailing mode of production and accumulation, but modified the socio-political subterfuges – i.e. the accommodating arrangements for capital that marginalised or suppressed any democratic or socialist politics – that sustained it. Like the Risorgimento, fascism was a modernising phenomenon that was carried out without the active participation of the mass of society. Mussolini's regime had thus the character of a revolution from above: it was 'a defensive ruling class stratagem of developmental catch up that sought to augment their own dominant position while transforming social relations in line with the competitive pressures emanating from the international political economy' (Hesketh 2017, 402).[104] The massive changes introduced in what Gramsci called 'the plan of production element' were not accompanied, however, by any type of empowerment for the subaltern classes. In the case of fascism, Gramsci seems to envisage passive revolution as a defence strategy aimed at containing or limiting popular pressure and democratic striving two years after the end of the *Biennio Rosso*.[105] The fascist passive revolution can thus be interpreted as a double reaction.

[104] Indeed, Chris Hesketh (2017, 395) argues that passive revolution informs 'the dialectic relationship between national (and subnational) state formation and the international context (and subsequent ramifications that change brings)'.

[105] The Biennio Rosso refers to the period of very intense social conflict in Italy that spanned from the spring of 1919 to the fall of 1920. These months of unrest in the direct aftermath of the First World War took place mostly in the Northern, metal-working cities of the peninsula (with Turin as their epicentre) and took the form of mass-strikes and factory occupations. In an article published in *Unità* in October 1926, Gramsci reflected on the working class capacities that the factory movement demonstrated, such as 'the capacity for self-government, the capacity to maintain production, the capacity for defense' and even the capacity for 'Sunday's theatrical performances, in which *mise-en-scène*, production, everything was devised by the workers', but he also noted the failures, such as 'the inability to solve problems of communication, transportation, and financing, the national and international problems that only a challenge to state power could address' (Denning 2009, 69).

It was first a fearful petty-bourgeois reaction against the possibility for the working-classes to organise politically and re-organise work in the factory councils. It may also be interpreted as a reaction against the international crisis, that occasioned an upward transfer of wealth from the disenfranchised small and medium bourgeoisie to the 'big bourgeoisie', which was partly linked to the rise of finance-associated new technologies of accumulation such as the joint-stock company (Short 2015, 108-09). The implementation of a fascist regime can thus be understood as a strategy for averting a complete revolution: the state developed the productive forces of industry and temporarily improved the lot of workers, but kept those latter under the direction of the traditional ruling class.

Moreover, Gramsci applied the category of passive revolution beyond the borders of the peninsula to designate processes of state formation in Europe (1971, 118 Q1OI §9). In many European countries, the ruling-classes sought to achieve developmental catch up and to transform social relations, but without relying on significant input from below (Hesketh 2017, 400). A prime example was Bismarckian Germany, which was similarly characterised by 'transformations of the political forms of a society that nevertheless failed to place in question their economic contents' (Thomas 2006, 72). The period of European history which Gramsci envisaged as passive revolutionary spanned over the second half of the nineteenth century, once the energetic ideals of the French Revolution had dissipated. That stretch opened with the grim years 1848-1849, which saw the defeat of countless national-popular revolts on the continent ('the springtime of nations') and opened up long decades of 'revolutions from above' or 'restorations'. After France (with Napoleon III's accession to power) and severe repressions in what would become Italy twenty years later, restorations quickly followed popular insurrections in Prague, Budapest and Vienna, where the Austrian Reichstag was

dissolved and a new imperial constitution was enacted. Historically, passive revolutions are thus political and institutional responses to serious challenges from below.

Scholars working with historical materialist frameworks have also extended the use of passive revolution beyond the West. Robert Cox, in particular, argued that passive revolution and the associated notion of *trasformismo* were extremely apposite concepts for developing regions that had 'imported' a specific mode of capitalist production (Cox 1983, 165-67). By extension, Adam David Morton, who wrote at great length on the Mexican state, described passive revolution as a hallmark of postcolonial capitalism (Morton 2010; 2011). Thus, one should envisage the 'universal experience of passive revolution' (Hesketh 2017) by moving from a usage that confines the term to a Western phenomenon. Thus, Cihan Tugal (2009) has explored the concept to account for the transformations headed by Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey and the absorption of Islamist activists into existing power structures, while Kevin Gray (2010) and Elaine Sio-ieng Hui (2018) have applied the concept to labour agency in the framework of the People's Republic of China's socio-economic modernisation, against the background of the new global division of labour.[106] There is a passive revolution dimension to the neoliberal period at large, since the institutions of global governance are built on

[106] Debates have arisen regarding an over-stretching that Gramsci himself would be guilty of. Therefore, while Alex Callinicos argues that the mode of passive revolution fits well the 'revolutions from above' that instituted the dominance of modern industrial capitalism across the nineteenth century, he is less convinced with the way Gramsci applied that concept to fascism, assimilating that endeavour to a tricky 'concept-stretching' (Callinicos 2010, 492). Indeed, while for Callinicos the *Risorgimento* can plausibly be described as 'revolution without revolution' because the outcome of this gradual, molecular, top-down process of change was the establishment of bourgeois domination, the same cannot be said of Fordism or fascism, which did not involve any kind of systemic transformation (ibid, 498). Even though there is a displacement of revolutionary impulses under fascism and Fordism, Callinicos implies that Gramsci is wrong to assimilate the structures of bourgeois and socialist revolutions. Yet, the methods and stratagems performed by the leading classes did not differ fundamentally from those experienced in the early phases of unification. Indeed, the fascist movement in power had effectively incorporated what Robert Cox termed 'the praxis of *trasformismo*' and Mussolini's first government was 'as broadly comprehensive a coalition of existing parliamentary fragments as Giolitti ever could have mustered' (Cox 1987, 195-96).

transformist foundations. Indeed, the return to finance 'co-opted the mechanisms of the Keynesian period, including the institutions of international finance of the 'embedded liberal' order, and developed new technologies of accumulation that similarly capitalized on such mechanisms' (Short 2015, 118). In this process, the priorities informing these institutions (World Bank, International Monetary Fund) were modified and they shifted their emphasis away from full employment to focus instead on price stability.

The Dialectics of Passive Revolution

In Gramsci's context, passive revolution referred to a political attempt to promote modernity that sought to preserve the features of an exploitative, segregated and class-divided society. Conservation was therefore disguised as rejuvenation. This is close to the acceptation that Stuart Hall (1988) adopted of passive revolution when he referred to Thatcherism as a doctrine of 'regressive modernisation' by the fact that it presented itself as a modernising force, but was deeply reactionary and regressive at the same time. The most efficient way to oppose that strategy is to wage a war of position: continuously attempting to exercise a leading role within civil society through the control of its institutions, up to the point where hegemony is attained. Once societal and political structures can be challenged, the war of manoeuvre can start and power is potentially sizable.

Furthermore, Gramsci's treatment of the relationship between hegemony and passive revolution is ambiguous and sometimes inconsistent. Callinicos hits the nail on the head on that matter: it is not clear whether hegemony needs to be stabilised for a passive revolution to be delivered, or if precisely passive revolution is part of the long process – i.e. war of position – that contributes to the building up of a potential hegemony – through a modification of the pre-existing composition of forces that later 'becomes the matrix of new changes'.

The relationship between hegemony and passive revolution should be understood in dialectical rather than antithetical terms. This is consistent with Stephen Gill's argument that conceives passive revolution and hegemony as 'end-points of a continuum of actual historical (and indeed possible) transformations' (2008, 59): both notions are not fully opposite, they rather express different stages of a same process and should therefore be put thoroughly into dialogue. For Gill, passive revolution refers broadly to situations where an authentic form of hegemonic leadership does not prevail: either under the shape of a revolution without mass participation – often prompted or led by external forces – or in the form of a slower, more 'molecular' or 'capillary' social transformation where the emerging class forces must advance cautiously and 'surreptitiously' (Gill 2008, 62).

Indeed, the dynamic dialectical framing of 'revolution' and 'restoration' is reflected in the peculiar attention the concept pays to contradictions and oxymora. The dialectics of passive revolution are exposed in the table below in both their strategic and ideological dimensions:

	Strategy	**Ideology**
Revolution	Socio-political stalemate, crisis of authority; Construction of a historic bloc through *trasformismo*; New balance of socio-political forces	'Modernisation' of the productive base; New social relations of production, new fiscal and budgetary arrangements
Restoration	Consolidation of class power through containment of popular pressures (disaggregation of the subaltern classes)	Non-involvement of the masses in the transformations; Regressive social policies; Caesarism as method

Table 13: The Dialectics of Passive Revolution

The socio-political mutations usually commence with the 'revolutionary' part above. The logic of passive revolution first commands the constitution, through molecular means, of a

historic bloc with hegemonic ambitions. Presenting itself as new, this political grouping gradually and continuously absorbs opposition forces through the praxis of *trasformismo.* Progressively, the political ecosystem is affected, giving shape to a new partisan configuration. Notwithstanding a great deal of confusion, a new balance of socio-political forces arises.

Once the new historic bloc has reached hegemony and seized power, the metamorphosis is complete, and the promised transformations can be undertaken. The 'modernisation' of the productive base ensues, associated with new fiscal and budgetary arrangements that testify to the objectives, ambitions (or lack thereof) of the coalition in power. Gradually, new relations of production take shape, as technological breakthroughs provide incentives to modify workplace rules and the general conditions that organise wage labour. The 'plan of production element' is therefore transfigured, but not in a revolutionary manner: cosmetic reconfigurations serve to conceal the endurance of the current ideology's guiding principles.

The drift to the 'restorative' phase comes promptly. Fundamental to the consolidation of class power, this restructuring initially obeys the logic of hegemony, understood as mostly non-violent 'intellectual and moral leadership'. Elements of revolution are counterbalanced by restorative instincts that manifest primarily in a convulsive fear of the masses. To circumvent this existential threat, popular pressure is contained in the manner of *trasformismo,* i.e. the dominant force disaggregates the working-classes by co-opting their most promising representatives. In parallel, the coalition in power strives to confine to an economic-corporative level the elements of struggle involved in protests and collective action (i.e. the mantra that 'workers oppose everything that threatens their corporatist interests'), thus

depoliticising ‘the need for reforms’ and strongly implying that those resisting change are unfit for ‘modernity’.

This anguish justifies institutional arrangements that restrict the masses’ involvement in the unfolding transformations. In this context, leaders often adopt Caesarist postures; they affirm the pre-eminence of the executive branch and neglect the workings of parliament. To sustain their legitimacy, they resort to a populist discourse tainted with authoritarianism. Thus, the promotion of conservative mores, for instance, can serve as legitimation (consensual part) for a drift towards the coercive end of the spectrum (coercive part), whereby repression is always a threat but large-scale violence is cautiously avoided. Hegemony is in peril when one of these conditions is absent.

There is a whole set of questions left unanswered by Gramsci regarding the temporality and duration of these phenomena. Undeniably, leadership is essential to the establishment of class rule. However, considering the molecular aspect of *trasformismo*, does leadership necessarily equate to hegemony? Would hegemony not be completed when all the potential counter-movements have been properly decapitated and absorbed (as exemplified by the Moderates and the Action Party)? Could we not consider the resort to transformist political manoeuvre as a sign that hegemony is not attained yet? Is *trasformismo* a *way through which* hegemony is conquered, or is it the *consequence* of intellectual and moral leadership? Could the co-optation of elite figures be sufficient to ensure hegemony, knowing that the masses are not involved at all? In other words, are *trasformismo* and passive revolution part of a process, or do they signal the outcome and potential success of such process? Surely the variety of contexts in which Gramsci summons this concept does not help clarify this question and, as

often with Gramsci, interpretations are open to debate, and indeed passive revolution manifests itself in a large variety of manners.

That is why passive revolution should not be conceived as an explanatory concept, but rather as an ensemble of questions and insights that could help shed light on situations whose contours are obscured by the complicated schemes of the life and framework of the nation and parties. Thinking in terms of passive revolution lends considerable sophistication to the large movements of opinion that result from political and ideological shifts, whose structural importance is often neglected. As such, it provides a more politicised understanding of the present (Hesketh 2017). Indeed, the passive revolution lens can potentially illuminate the salience of actual processes of class struggle and state formation, grounding the places and spaces of revolutions sociologically, including the stratagems of ruling classes aimed at disaggregating and domesticating subaltern class struggles (Morton 2010). The analytical purchase of the term is therefore immense, although it does not per se answers questions in a definit(iv)e way. A broad and fertile category of interpretation, passive revolution 'presents a dystopian vision of modernity as continual degeneration' (Thomas 2006, 74). This conceptual richness provides an apposite intellectual armature to study political endeavours aimed at separating the economic from the political. This makes it particularly relevant to analyse the contemporary French historical moment

The Passive Revolution of Macronism

At first sight, the characteristics of Emmanuel Macron's election and presidential term seem to fit perfectly within the analytical framework of passive revolution. The table below, based on theoretical elements from Table 13, attempts to summarise and substantiate this claim.

	Strategy	Ideology
Revolution	Attempt to address social tensions, dissent or abstention ('stalemate of the class struggle') with a new political movement; Construction of a historic bloc 'in the centre' (above Left and Right) through *trasformismo*; Recomposing of the French party system	Enhancement of French 'attractiveness' and competitiveness; Entrepreneurship and start-up narrative; Far-reaching labour market reforms
Restoration	Consolidation of class power through coercion; Executive pre-eminence and verticality => social movements react => repression; 'Authoritarian anti-populism'	Concentration of power and marginalisation of the parliament; Preservation of the interests of capital through fiscal reforms; Rise in feelings of alienation in the popular classes

Table 14: The Dialectics of Macronism's Passive Revolution

Revolution/Strategy

To borrow Gramsci's words, it might legitimately be assumed that the victory of Macron and LREM was the work of an 'enlightened bourgeois class'. As with the victory of the Moderate Party over the Action Party, the success of LREM over the rest of its political competitors was indeed the work of a homogenous social group, and its elected members can legitimately be considered the 'real, organic vanguards of the upper classes, to which economically they belong' (Gramsci 1971, 60 Q19§24; see also Chapter V).

Furthermore, this victory can be analysed as a media-inspired and stimulated phenomenon (see Chapter IV). Stuart Hall's words (1981, 57) about the Social Democratic Party in the early 1980s resonate strangely with the advent of Macronism:

> Its "pragmatism, soul-searching 'good sense', the eminent 'reasonableness' of its leading figures, the agony of their hesitations, the renunciation of 'doctrinaire extremes', the rhetoric of 'novelty', are all calculated to project just that illusion of a viable centre, free of monetarist and Marxist 'dogma', dear to the centrist instincts of many sections of the press.

The credence gained by Macron's 'novel' political enterprise allowed for the construction of a social bloc 'above Left and Right', performed in the manner of *trasformismo*, a molecular political transformation through which opposition movements are largely decapitated and co-opted into the ranks of the ruling elite, provoking a re-alignment of parliamentary political forces and ultimately a profound recomposing of the French party system.

Revolution/Ideology

As the earlier depiction of Emmanuel Macron's and LREM's economic policies attests, the project of the new majority seems indeed to 'develop the productive forces of modernity' and to impose systemic transformations by non-revolutionary means.

This willingness to enhance French economic attractiveness and competitiveness took the form of a complete reshuffling of taxation rules, the implementation of far-reaching labour market and liberalising reforms. It was sustained by a discourse on entrepreneurship, flexibility and the need for reforms (see Chapter IV).

This endeavour included elements of both change/novelty (in rhetoric and symbols) and permanence/conservatism (pursuing the reformist track of Hollande on labour and taxation).

It truly presented itself as a compromise that allowed for the subsistence of the old alongside the new, a political attempt to promote modernity that preserved the features of the existing system.

Restoration/Strategy

When it comes to the restorative aspect, it may seem that LREM's purpose consists in establishing a state that promotes the interests of capital through a gradual process directed from above, with the aim to preserve the continuity of existing power structures without significant subaltern empowerment, with no institutional reform or attempt to increase popular participation in political affairs. At stake is the further disaggregation of working classes demands and their confinement to an economic-corporate level. A success in that respect was reached with the 2018 social conflict that opposed the government and SNCF workers, which failed to concern and mobilise large sections of the population in support for the railway workers. Indeed, the government's refusal to modify the bill and the long-standing media and political propaganda about the purported 'privileged status' of SNCF workers and 'abysmal' nature of the SNCF debt was aimed at delegitimising the struggle of train workers and ultimately sent the signal that any possible revolt from below would be quelled.

However, such a consolidation of class power through coercive mechanisms cannot be successful if it does not really on what Gramsci called 'national-popular' elements. Indeed, although it was arduous for PS and LR cadres to resist the absorptive logic of LREM, the same is not true of the subaltern classes, who do not recognise themselves in the default election of Emmanuel Macron, performed in the absence of any genuine 'Jacobin force' (see Chapter IV). On this topic, Gramsci noted (1971, Q13§1):

> Any formation of a national-popular collective will is impossible, unless the great masses of peasant farmers burst simultaneously into political life. It was Machiavelli's intention through the reform of the militia, and it was achieved by the Jacobins in the French Revolution. That Machiavelli understood it reveals a precocious Jacobinism that is the (more or less fertile) germ of his conception of national revolution. All history from 1815 onwards shows the efforts of the traditional classes to prevent the formation of a collective will of this kind, and to maintain 'economic corporate' power in an international system of passive equilibrium.

The absence of national-popular element in Macron's election, associated with the executive pre-eminence and verticality of his mode of governance, is likely to ignite movements of resistance (see Chapter IX), whose repressive backlash may take the shape of what I call 'authoritarian anti-populism' (see Chapter VIII and IX). This may signal the impasse of the passive revolutionary process, which is supposed to be stationary and relatively limited in violence.

Restoration/Ideology

The absence of national-popular support thus delegitimises the processes of concentration of power and the marginalisation of parliament. Furthermore, the lack of legitimation associated with the blatant imposition of neoliberal reforms provokes a rise in feelings of alienation in the most pauperised sections of the electorate.

In this context, i.e. a situation where an authentic form of hegemonic leadership does not prevail, passive revolution may become a defence strategy aimed at containing or limiting popular pressure and democratic striving. To reach this purpose, various processes and subterfuges of scapegoating are implemented, the last iteration to date being the moral panic around a purported 'Islamo-Leftist' ('*islamo-gauchiste'*) ideology that purportedly corrupts the French university, in the words of Minister of Education Jean-Michel Blanquer (Le Point 2020) and Minister of Higher Education Dominique Vidal (Bérichel 2021). In those instances,

the restorative instincts of the government were substantiated in a clear far-right veer on the part of the presidential majority (see Conclusion).

Nevertheless, adopting a *longue durée* perspective on French liberalisation reveals that the passive revolution of French neoliberalism can be traced back to the early 1980s onwards. In lieu of its renewal, the Macronite governance might therefore signal both the acme and the impasse of the French passive revolutionary process.

'Regressive Modernisation 3.0' and the Passive Revolution of French Neoliberalism

To put these elements into perspective, one might turn to the 1980s juncture in the United Kingdom. Thatcherism was a project that entered the political field in a historic contest for power, popular authority and hegemony (Hall 1987, 16). The peculiarity of this project – confusing in many respects for the Left – was that it was 'simultaneously regressive and progressive'. It was regressive and archaic because it nourished the idea that the best the future held (for the British people) was for them 'to become, for a second time, 'Eminent Victorians'. Yet, it also had a clearly 'progressive' dimension, as it drew a trajectory of entry into the era of 'modern bourgeois civilisation': Britain, the Conservatives argued, never made that transfer to modernity and 'had never institutionalised the civilisation and structures of advanced capitalism – what Gramsci called Fordism' (ibid, 17).

Thus, Thatcherism was a project of 'regressive modernisation' built on Margaret Thatcher's conviction that there was 'no serious political project in Britain (…) which is not also about constructing a politics and an image of what *modernity* would be like for our people'. It did so 'in a regressive way', by drawing on the past and 'looking backwards to former glories rather than forwards to a new epoch' in order to inaugurate the project of 'reactionary

modernisation' (Hall 1987, 17). This was a hegemonic project that was 'designed to renovate society as a whole' (Hall 1988, 91).

Stuart Hall's eerily well-put oxymoron directly relates to Gramsci's notion of passive revolution. As Gramsci contended, fascist corporatism was indeed a developmental project: it was a modernising force, while being deeply reactionary and regressive in other respects. Italian fascism and Fordism thus dialectically combined elements of old and new in order to preserve the existing system. For Hall, 'regressive modernisation' gave substance to Gramsci's argument that 'often, ideological shifts take place, not by substituting one, whole, new conception of the world for another, but by presenting a novel combination of old and new elements' (1988, 158).

Beyond the prescient ideological analysis provided by Hall, one must elucidate the material aspect of the Thatcherite transformation. Nowhere is the logic of passive revolution clearer than in the Right to Buy policy, which formed the material substantiation of Margaret Thatcher's promise to make Britain a 'property-owning democracy' in her first speech as leader of the Conservative Party (Thatcher 1975). Indeed, the objectives of public housing privatisation in the UK were framed 'in terms of enabling a larger section of the population to enter home ownership. It was claimed that the status of public tenant was one of stigmatised serfdom, an experience of oppressive bureaucratic procedures in an unpopular tenure form' (Forrest 1991, 202). At the macro level, privatisation was thus presented as the course of action through which greater social mix could be achieved in public estates. At the micro level, property was envisaged as the way through which the lower middle-classes could emancipate.

To ensure consent in the wide-ranging transformations happening in British politics and society, the Thatcher government made sure that the sales were encouraged with the use of incredibly large discounts on the value of properties. By 1986, renters in houses qualified for a discount on market value of 60 per cent after 30 years' tenancy, while for flat dwellers, discounts started at 44 per cent after two years' tenancy, rising to a maximum of 70 per cent after 15 years (Forrest 1991, 205). The Right to Buy policy was pivotal in moulding the *consent* of the population when it came to the larger processes of privatisation that spanned British society in its entirety. For the great majority of those who purchased their council homes, privatisation offered something real and tangible which represented an improvement in their social and economic status (Forrest 1991, 212). The RTB – which was the largest privatisation undertaken in the UK in this period, exceeding the proceeds from sales of any other major public utilities – flattered possessive-individualistic instincts: the pride in home ownership provided popular legitimation to the global liberalising trajectory of the Tories.

Although by the mid-2000s around 2.8 million council houses had been sold in the UK, large sections of the population had been left behind. Local authorities, that had received little of the receipts from sales and had still a statutory duty to rehouse the homeless and those with pressing housing needs, did gain very little in the process. Furthermore, subsequent generations of would-be council tenants were obviously disadvantaged with the shrinking of the rental properties stock and faced longer and possibly indefinite waiting times. The answer to alleviate feelings of alienation consisted in extending eligibility and spending on Housing Benefits (Disney and Luo 2017, 53-54) in order to avoid a complete pauperisation of the low-income British families that were now deprived of a subsidised housing accommodation.

The political art of passive revolution was hackneyed – with far less brio – by Tony Blair in the late 1990s, whose terms in office ought to be placed in the continuity of the Thatcherite turn: his Third Way perspective can be seen as a passive revolution 'attempting a genuine hegemonic politics just as bold as Thatcherism' (Legett 2009, 138). However, the intense social dislocation engendered by the Thatcher years required Blair to frame this continuation under slightly more welcoming auspices. The New Labour project has thus been presented as a new ethical compromise that was meant to create a new balance between the spheres of government, the economy and civil society by promoting timid notions of social solidarity and self-fulfilment from the bottom-up (by increasing people's 'equality of opportunity'). In other words, the Third Way was a means of 'selling' a form of neo-liberalism, accepting the globalised neo-liberal world as 'given', and adjusting what remained of the traditional labour movement to this new reality (Schwarzmantel 2009, 14, see also Chapter VI).

New Labour did not challenge any of the fundamentals of Thatcherism: it accepted the diminished power of trade-unions, unequivocally embraced supply-side economics, diligently continued privatisations (Townshend 2009, 159). Yet, just as Thatcher had mobilised large sections of the lower middle-classes with her Right to Buy policy, New Labour also promoted minimalist redistributions of wealth and income. In the early 2000s, the New Labour government thus allowed a relaxation of the restrictions on the purchase of properties held by social housing associations: this was done under the provisions of the 'Right to Acquire' (Disney and Luo 2017, 54).

The neoliberal creed of the Thatcher legacy was thus properly protected and emulated: the labour force was kept flexible, social expenditures maintained their downward slope, the logic of minimal intergenerational wealth redistribution was continued, and the decrepitude of social-democracy was further reinforced. In a typical transformist move, social-democracy –

the subaltern strand of the New Labour project – was subordinated, decapitated and transformed into a particular variant of free market neoliberalism – the dominant strand (Hall 2003, 12). New Labour's historic role has been in effect to consolidate the Thatcherite passive revolution (Townshend 2009, 156). As it emerged at the turn of the millennium, it can be considered a form of 'regressive modernisation 2.0'.

How can these elements help us to assess (1) the French regressive modernisation and (2) Macronism's historic role?

First, the passive revolution character of French neoliberalism did not start with Emmanuel Macron. In a fascinating piece, Charles Masquelier (2021) places its focus on labour relations and in the important role played by both the technocratic elite and firm-level negotiations in surreptitiously legitimating neoliberal practice in France, notably through the decentralisation of collective bargaining, inspired by principles stemming from *autogestion* (see Chapter I). This took place in two different instances, under socialist governments, against the background of weak union representation in small and medium-sized enterprises:

1). The 1981 *Auroux Laws*: Mitterrand's Labour Minister Jean Auroux set out to rewrite the French Labour Code and transform industrial relations by giving workers the right to self-expression and encouraging the emergence of firm-level bargaining, without however increasing the power of trade-unions. For this reason, firm-level agreements turned out to work in favour of employers and facilitated the de-regulation of French industrial relations which became 'firm-led' and 'uncoordinated' (Masquelier 2021, 67-69).

2). The 1998 *Aubry Laws*: Minister of Social Affairs Martine Aubry introduced a set of laws reducing working time (35-hours work week) in an attempt to boost employment. To adapt to this far-reaching change, non-union representatives were authorised to sign collective agreements. Thus, many employees had to rely on non-union representatives who, without the bargaining power afforded by the organised labour, were less likely to contradict the employers' interests: a shorter working week therefore came with the price of increased flexibility in work organisation (ibid, 69).[107]

As Masquelier put it (2021, 75), 'decentralised collective bargaining could be regarded as an institutional mechanism adopted by the state in order to guide entrepreneurial conduct'. By increasing the participation of workers, firm-level negotiations made the workers the agents of neoliberal change, serving the 'control of individuals through their freedom', masking a form of state intervention through which workers were responsibilised for choosing to conform with the norms of labour market flexibility, which was therefore not so much superimposed by the state but *facilitated* by conditions created by the state. Crucially, neoliberalism's legitimation in France depended on the production of a new subjectivity for French workers (ibid).

There was therefore a passive revolution involved in the fact that the Auroux and Aubry laws favoured decentralised, negotiated and uncoordinated consent for flexibility, which often

[107] It is commonly held that the failed negotiations over the 35-hours weekly work time considerably weakened the employers' organisation CNPF (*Conseil National du Patronat Français*) and accelerated its transformation into MEDEF (*Mouvement des Entreprises de France*) under the presidency of Ernest-Antoine Seillière in 1998 (Woll 2006, 255). In reality, as Mark Vail points out (2020, 115), MEDEF's outcry against the measures 'had more to do with the manner of their formulation and symbolic associations with the Left's agenda than with any principled objection to their content'. Indeed, the measures 'increased employers' social-contribution exemptions and their discretion over the allocation of labour (for example allowing them to calculate overtime on an annual rather than a weekly basis)'.

resulted in a power imbalance between strong employers and weak employees. This eventually fostered consent for the restoration of the power of capital (Howell 2009). Leading to a significant rise in firm-level agreements, these laws were stepping stones in the liberalisation of the French labour market. Yet, both reform projects involved concessions made to workers in the form of greater rights to self-expression (Auroux Laws) or a shorter working week (Aubry Laws). Consent for the reforms and for the individualisation of rights and casualisation of work were therefore secured by fostering a participatory decision making culture within the firm and giving the reforms a distinctively collectivist flavour, thus relying on both the seductive and disciplinary character of power (Masquelier 2021, 78-79).

One may very well extend Masquelier's analysis to the twenty-first century. Indeed, elements of regressive modernisation are visible under Nicolas Sarkozy's and François Hollande's terms and apply to terrains beyond labour relations.

Like Thatcher, Nicolas Sarkozy promised to make France a nation of homeowners ('*France de propriétaires'*) during the 2007 presidential campaign, but this turned out to be wishful thinking as Sarkozy's plans – that were supposed to be achieved through facilitating private indebtedness – shipwrecked against the subprime mortgage crisis less than two years later. Nevertheless, the Fillon governments implemented measures aimed at directly improving the purchasing power of the lower-middle classes (the infamous slogan '*travailler plus pour gagner plus*') with the implementation of tax exemptions on overtime work in October 2017, a clear compensation for the dislocations engendered by UMP liberalising programme (with tax cuts for the rich and budget cuts for *fonction publique*). A same analysis can be applied to the creation of a self-employed status ('*auto-entrepreneur*') in 2008. This was intended to bolster a new entrepreneurial subjectivity among low-paid workers, and occasioned by the

same token the further casualisation of work, the purported 'simplification' of entrepreneurial procedures and accommodating taxation schemes coming with the cost of limited rights and an attached framework of social protection that was nonexistent.

What seemed to constitute a new stage of opportunities for the working class under Sarkozy was aimed to secure the prevailing socio-political order and preserved the intrinsically classist stratification of French society. In this context, higher wages for workers who had the opportunity to engage in overtime work was meant to ensure persuasion and consent and to flatter the possessive-individualistic instincts of those who adhered to *valeur travail* and lamented about those that Sarkozy's lieutenants dubbed *les assistés* ('the assisted', i.e. the unemployed and those on welfare). Thus, the creation of a new entrepreneurial/neoliberal subjectivity was the essence of Nicolas Sarkozy's passive revolution.

Similar compensatory mechanisms were implemented under Hollande, although they adopted a more 'societal' tone, notwithstanding the *contrats aidés* ('subsidised jobs') which were certainly aimed at symbolically counterbalancing the dozens of billion euros spent on policy mechanisms that benefitted the business world, such as CICE (see Chapter III). Most notably, François Hollande's majority passed a certain number of important 'societal' bills, the most significant of which was the 18 May 2013 law allowing same sex marriage in France. In that case, the measures were not aimed to financially or materially compensate for what was perceived as the unjust subsidising of the private sector and the business world, but rather to build and nourish a thorough social-democratic 'good conscience' in the electorate.

The aim was to symbolically relegate the right-wing opposition to conservatism and puritanism and to cautiously avoid to question the extremely limited objectives of the

'Socialist' government in terms of social justice and wealth redistribution. This was also consistent with the strategy laid out in the Terra Nova report (2012) that advised the Socialist majority to focus on identity politics and middle-class demands rather than on traditional working-class grievances. In parallel, the material or socio-economic mechanisms of compensation for dislocations – what Jonah Levy called the 'anaesthetic state' (2008) – got thinner and thinner, a fact that largely accounts for the prolonged tensions that surrounded the passing of Loi El Khomri, which consecrated the precedence of firm-level agreements over labour law in 2016.

Unlike Nicolas Sarkozy's and François Hollande's, the Macron quinquennat did not introduce significant measures to compensate for the dislocations engendered by LREM liberalising crusade. One can still delineate elements of regressive modernisation in Macron's governance, however uneven, considering the extensive neoliberal measures described in the rest of this chapter. Listed below are some of the seemingly 'progressive' dimensions to the Macronite developmental project in the realms of (1) ideology, (2) strategy and (3) discourse:

1). *Entrepreneurial **ideology** articulated in a start-up narrative*

Entrepreneurship seems to be the ideological and sociological thread to Macron's party, from his discourse at the annual Parisian tech conference Viva Technology in June 2017, where he expressed his resolve to see France becoming 'a start-up nation' that would work 'with and for' the start-ups and would 'think and move like a start-up' (Macron 2017) to the careful selection of entrepreneurial profiles for the political 'novices' who were candidates for LREM without a previously known party affiliation (see Chapter V).

In addition to the start-up narrative, this entrepreneurial ideology is articulated with a certain form of techno-solutionism (Morozov 2013), with a proclaimed belief in the ability of electronic applications, communication technologies and internet innovations to foster growth and employment. Thus, although the panorama offered in Chapter VI demonstrated that this entrepreneurial logic was not devoid of elitist undertones, the project intends to be 'inclusive' and to incorporate sections of the pauperised middle-classes through a tacit support for the growing 'gig economy', whose development is called in France '*ubérisation*'. During the presidential campaign, Emmanuel Macron thus argued that it was better for a young person to be driving a VTC ('*Véhicule de Tourisme avec Chauffeur*', i.e. Uber) than 'to be on welfare' ('toucher le RSA') (Mouv' 2016) or 'to be dealing drugs', if one came from the suburbs like Stains, in Seine-Saint-Denis (Mediapart 2016).

2). *Managerial **strategies** imported from the private sector*

A large of part of Emmanuel Macron's governance has consisted in imitating workplace hierarchies by spreading principles of top-down authority from the world of business to public policies in general (Quijoux 2021), transposed rhetorically though the use of specific semantics stemming from managerial pidgin.

In public policy terms, this entailed the unfolding of new techniques derived from marketing, such as the 'nudge economics', often colloquially referred to as 'libertarian paternalism' by its founders Nobel Prize winners Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein (Al Shams 2017). The recourse to nudge was to become manifest during the Covid-19 health crisis, in association with expensive collaborations with transnational consultancy firms such as Mc Kinsey (Krug 2021), Capgemini or Deloitte.[108]

[108] In March 2022, a senatorial commission headed by LR senator Arnaud Bazin and PCF senator Éliane Assassi pointed to the regular (if not systematic) recourse to private consultancy firms, that

3). ***Discursive*** *and societal progressivism*

The major strategic strength of Emmanuel Macron's campaign has been to place on the agenda the notion of 'progress', to talk enthusiastically about the future in a period beset with moroseness.

Yet, it quickly became clear that the vision of progress Emmanuel Macron availed himself was only defined negatively, i.e. against what was constructed as multiple threats to democracy (the extremes, the populists, etc.). It remains unclear what this vision has to offer from a positive standpoint, what it stands for in and of itself.

The inconsistencies of Macron's positions on the important question of migrations offer the best example of this opportunistic doublespeak: on the one hand, warmly congratulating Angela Merkel for welcoming close to 900,000 refugees in 2015 and for 'saving Europe's dignity' by the same token (Europe 1 2017), and on the other hand adopting much more doctrinaire, rigid and xenophobic policies and positions with regards to legal and illegal immigration once in power.

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were in charge of carrying numerous missions (945 different ones, according to the commission) on behalf of the French state. The report underlined that the budget dedicated to these externalised missions had more than doubled under Emmanuel Macron's *quinquennat,* more specifically between the years 2018 and 2021 (Bazin and Assassi 2022, 8). Thus, the French state paid various consultancy firms more than 1 billion Euros in 2021, including 646.4 million for digital consulting missions. Indeed, the state does not employ many web developers nor digital project managers: Ministry of the Interior's representatives had to admit in front of the senatorial commission that digital consultants did not bring a specific expertise, but were recruited to fill staffing gaps in the midst of a difficult budgetary situation (Martinon et al. 2022). This demonstrates the absolute lack of strategic vision of the Macron's governing team, whose ministers prefer to pay more on the short-term to have the state's missions fulfilled by representatives of the private sector rather than investing in public servants' training in the long-run. The paradoxical effects of budgetary austerity are here manifest: occasional and costly expenditures are engaged at the expense of structural investments in the administrative bodies. Indeed, 180,000 jobs were destroyed in the state civil service between 2006 and 2018 (ibid). Beyond substantiating the obvious objective behind this recourse to consultancy firms, i.e. to weaken the capabilities of French public administration and trample the notion of *intérêt général*, future research should seek to clarify the links and potential conflicts of interest between these transnational consultancy firms and the Macronite administrators and decision-makers, many of whom used to be consultants before becoming MPs or senior officials (see Chapter V).

Conclusion

In sum, the ideological novelty of Macronism, what I call 'regressive modernisation 3.0', appears rather limited. Besides, no significant material compensation is offered to counterbalance the expansion of the competitive market logic and the social violence that ensues. On the contrary, Emmanuel Macron often associates symbolic violence with it, assimilating the French people to '*Gaullois réfractaires au changement'* ('Gauls who resist change'), thus strongly implying that those sections of the citizenry that are resisting change are unfit for 'modernity'.

In recent history, the technocratic political elite has sought to legitimate ideas like flexibility *off the political scene.* Given the lack of popular support for neoliberal ideas, it chose this 'quieter avenue and gave workers concessions in return for their responsibility to negotiate the terms of workplace flexibility with employers holding a lot more bargaining power than them' (Masquelier 2021, 80).

With Emmanuel Macron, this subtle strategy seems to have reached its limits. With the radicalisation of executive pre-eminence and the passing of decree-laws, the new presidential majority's creed seems to privilege imposition over persuasion. Like Thatcher, Macron is not afraid to engage in outright conflict when his policies are met with opposition, however widespread. This is consistent with a strategy of *authoritarian anti-populism* whose contours will be sketched in the next chapter, and whose limits – in a context of weakened mediating bodies such as unions and civil society organisations – will be exposed in Chapter IX. Indeed, the Yellow Vests movement might well have put an end to the longer than assumed passive revolution of French neoliberalism.

Chapter VIII

Towards 'Authoritarian Anti-Populism'?
The Democratic Limits of Anti-Populism in France

> Nous sommes de vrais populistes, nous sommes avec le peuple, tous les jours.[109]
> (Emmanuel Macron in front of mayors at the Elysée Palace, 21 November 2018)

Introduction

On 20 January 2020, French Minister of the Environment Brune Poirson argued in an interview with *Le Figaro* that France was witnessing the rise of 'green populism' (Weisfred 2020). This rather bizarre assertion was intended to denounce political activists who purportedly 'exploit the popular anguish caused by climate change'. Poirson identified two categories of 'green populists': those who use ecology 'to promote economic and cultural isolationism', and those who use these arguments to 'break the existing system'. Meanwhile, most opinion polls suggested a surge in voting intentions in favor of environmental candidates for the upcoming March 2020 municipal elections in France. Against this background, Brune Poirson's denunciation of 'green populism' demonstrates that the use of the term 'populism' by political actors is never neutral.

Thus, La République En Marche is a political formation that uses the populist label with a constant eye on electoral considerations. In the first two years of Macron's term, the denunciation of populism has been at the heart of LREM representatives' interventions. Yet, it is through the use of a 'populist' strategy that they consistently tried to delegitimise oppositional forces in order to reinforce the status quo. This proved to be an important symbolic positioning in the campaign narrative for the 2019 European elections, which was the only 'intermediary' elections where Emmanuel Macron's party scored well during the

[109] 'We are the real populists, we are with the people every day' (Jublin 2018, my translation).

presidential term. One can notice a drop in the use of the term following the end of the Gilets Jaunes uprising – which spanned from the winter of 2018 to the spring of 2019 (see Chapter IX) – and once the May European elections were passed. In this heated context, a criticism of populism would have been interpreted as a further provocation by the protesters. This larger trend did not however prevent the epithet from being episodically mobilised in the second half of the quinquennat, as the vacuous remarks of Brune Poirson demonstrate.

Beyond the obvious and conjunctural electoral motives that motivated Poirson's parlance, what can be noted more structurally is the rhetorical and lexical inflation in the use of the term 'populism' in academic, media and policy circles over the last two decades, in France and in the whole European Union. Who uses this label? In which contexts? What are the performative effects of using this label? Does it serve the purpose of scientifically assessing a style of political leadership or the content of specific political claims? Or is it a convenient epithet used to delegitimise a political adversary? While the democratic or undemocratic dimensions of populism have already been discussed at length in the literature, how can we assess the impact of 'anti-populism' on democracy? What forms does 'anti-populism' take in France?

Since the 2008 global financial collapse and the subsequent deep 'sovereign debt crises' and austerity measures experienced in various EU countries, the term 'populism' has been widely used to account for the rise of anti-establishment movements on the continent. It has also been widely contested. Indeed, the 'populist' epithet tends to amalgamate a myriad of different political tendencies, from the radical-right to the radical-left. This has led some scholars to argue that the term has come to encompass too many political persuasions to remain analytically meaningful (Art 2020). An intense concept-stretching would thus be at play,

especially when the term leaves academic circles to be mobilised by pundits, editorialists and self-proclaimed 'centrist' politicians. To avoid this confusion, there is a clear analytical distinction to be made between the academic understanding of populism – which is not consensual but relies on a prolific and diverse literature – and the far more deficient journalistic and political conceptions of populism, that do not designate a meaningful political category but fall rather within the realm of value judgment.

Ultimately, the 'populist zeitgeist' (Mudde 2004) leads – under the pressure of both 'populist' and 'anti-populist' political actors – to a symbolic weakening of traditional political cleavages and to their replacement by unhelpful, superficial binary categories such as 'nationalists' *versus* 'progressives' – as in Emmanuel Macron's phrasing – or 'patriots' *versus* 'globalists' – to borrow Marine Le Pen's phrasing – or 'winners' *versus* 'losers' of globalisation (Fourquet 2017). It is therefore essential to study populism alongside 'anti-populism' in order to contextualise the phenomena within 'the broader hegemonic struggle' that constructs and reinforces the emerging 'populism/anti-populism frontier' (Stavrakakis et al. 2017; Moffitt 2018).

This chapter takes some perspective to reflect on French, European and global developments. The chapter posits that 'populism' does not constitute a threat or a corrective to democracy in and of itself. Instead, whether populist forces threaten or renew democracy eventually depends on the specific socio-cultural context in which they emerge and develop. In this framework, Emmanuel Macron and his party LREM adopted some ambiguous postures and seem entangled in a surprising dialectic of populism and anti-populism. At times, the presidential majority positioned itself above traditional parties and rejected an old political class presented as corrupted, as in the 2017 campaign. After the presidential election, they

have also exploited European-wide anxieties regarding the populist phenomenon – with direct or indirect reference to Viktor Orbán, Matteo Salvini and of course Marine Le Pen – by presenting themselves as the only credible forces to counter them in a period spanning from the beginning of the quinquennat to the Gilets Jaunes crisis (2017-2018).

The discussion proceeds in three parts. The first section briefly surveys the literature on populism and posits that scholars interpret populism either as an *ideology*, a *discourse*, or a *strategy*. This characterisation has implications for assessing populism's effects on the political system. The second part of the section explores the links between neoliberalism and populism, and poses that there is a causal relationship between the former and the latter: populism can thus be understood as a political blowback from 'the neoliberalisation of social-democracy' (Judi 2016).

The second section investigates the political parties or movements that do not fit within the 'populist' or 'anti-populist' cleavage because they clearly offer a synthesis of expertise and the appeals to the people, which makes them very difficult to categorise within the terms of the traditional Left/Right divide, as they make a point to evade this sort of politics. This development, which Bickerton and Accetti (2021) have labelled as 'technopopulism', seems apposite to study several Western European political movements such as New Labour, Movimento Cinque Stelle and En Marche. Yet, as will be seen in the latter case, the populist dimension of the political movement was circumscribed in time in order to meet specific strategic goals – namely, to ridicule as obsolete the existing, traditional political options.

Lastly, against widespread anguish regarding the 'populist surge', the third section analyses the democratic consequences of 'anti-populism' as a political discourse, strategy, and

ideology in Western European countries, and in particular in France. Referring to one's adversary as a 'populist' is always pejorative and aims to discredit, neutralise and delegitimise any political claim that does not conform to the status quo. In that sense, anti-populism has detrimental effects on democracy inasmuch as it socially constructs political deviance through simplistic dichotomies and thus places considerable discursive framing limits on what is politically possible on ideological grounds. The section then draws some lines of inquiry regarding the value of comprehending anti-populism as a *discourse*, *strategy* and *ideology*. It ends by drawing on Stuart Hall's concept of 'authoritarian populism' which described 'an exceptional form of the capitalist state' (1979) in order to advance the analytical potentials of the concept of 'authoritarian anti-populism' to make sense of the ambiguities and contradictions of Emmanuel Macron's mode of government in contemporary France.

Theorising Populism

Academic Conceptions of Populism: Ideological, Discursive and Strategic Implications

Although the academic interest for the topic developed in the 1970s, there has been a surge of publications about populism over the last two decades. As Noam Gidron and Bart Bonikowski (2013) argue, three main conceptual approaches can be delineated from the vast literature on populism in political science and sociology. The literature generally refers to populism as an *ideology*, a *discursive style*, or a *strategy*, but there is some porosity and these approaches are not mutually exclusive.

Populism can first be comprehended from an ideational perspective, as a set of interrelated ideas about the nature of politics and society. Focusing on European right-wing populist parties, Cas Mudde (2004, 543) thus defines populism as a 'thin-centered ideology' that

‘considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’. Following the ideational approach, populism relates to an interpretative framework that posits a strict opposition between the people and the elites. In his study on Polish right-wing populism, Rafal Pankowski (2010) uses the term ‘mental framework’, which comprises not only specific ideas related to the relationship between the people and the elites but also encompasses a certain number of cultural resources and traditions anchored in what he calls – in a very Gramscian way – the ‘common sense’ ordinariness’ of a given population – hence the reference to Catholicism in populist stances in Poland, as ‘common sense ordinariness’ supposes that the vast majority of Polish people are Catholics.

Most importantly for our present purposes, Cas Mudde’s definition of populism as a thin-centered ideology stresses that populism can be found across ideological cleavages, fused with either Left or Right appeals. Therefore, ‘which ideological features attach to populism depend upon the socio-political context within which the populist actors mobilise’ (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012, 2). In other words, because populist ideational commitments are sparingly defined, they can be the vessels of different ideological streams.

A similar yet distinct manner of thinking about populism interprets the phenomenon as a discursive style, as a way of making claims about politics. This category of interpretation has notably been developed to account for Latin American populist movements, whose leaders mobilise a ‘rhetoric that constructs politics as the moral and ethical struggle between *el pueblo* (the people) and the oligarchy’ (De la Torre 2000). Populists therefore propose a Manichean discourse that assigns a binary moral dimension to political conflicts (Hawkins

2010). Thinking about populism as a specific style of political expression is useful because it emphasises its 'performative dimensions' and allows to reflect on 'the complex relationship between style and content' (Moffitt and Tormey 2014, 394). Indeed, such constructivist frameworks of analysis pertinently underline that the essence of populism does not lie in a specific content or ideology, but rather in the idea of performance (Moffitt 2016): how the message is delivered becomes more important than the message itself.

Political philosopher Ernesto Laclau (2005) was very influential in shaping the discursive approach to populism: his analyses demonstrate that the 'us' and the 'them' at the core of populist discourse are in fact 'empty signifiers' that symbolically structure the socio-political environment but ultimately can take on a varied content depending on social context. Indeed, the crux of Laclau's work and that of the Essex School of discourse analysis is to comprehend populism not as a 'fixed constellation', but as 'a series of discursive resources which can be put to very different uses' (Laclau 2005, 176; cited by Stavrakakis 2014, 514). In accordance with the ideational approach, the discursive perspective does not view populism as a fixed, stabilised essence, but rather as a political discourse that is adaptable across contexts and sometimes shifting over time. Thus, the meaning ascribed to the 'us' and 'them' is contingent to specific national socio-political cultures, and the degree of populism that a given political actor employs can also vary over the course of their political career. The discursive approach to populism, of whom Laclau is one of the prime representatives, is significant in so far as it assesses that populism is not necessarily linked to a specific side of the political spectrum. Indeed, it sees populism as something that is *being done*. With its focus on populist *leaders* as opposed to political parties, the discursive approach takes a wider view of actors that can and do utilise populism and uses more nuance by positing that populism is a 'gradational rather than binary category' (Moffitt 2018, 3-4).

From a more pragmatic standpoint, populism can also be analysed as a strategy, that is, a form of mobilisation and organisation. Again, it is mostly in reference to the Latin American terrain that such interpretations have emerged, but they have also been applied to the European context. Indeed, surveying countries as diverse as the Netherlands and Peru, Taki S. Pappas (2012) argues that populism is successful when a certain political entrepreneur is able to polarise cleavages based on the interaction between 'the people' *versus* some establishment, thus forging a mass political movement. The aim of populism as strategy is therefore to create a community of action that would foster political change. Principles of popular sovereignty and majority rule thus have the potential to mobilise vast sections of the citizenry and would signal a return to a 'true' democracy led by 'the people' and not by professional political elites (Canovan 2002, 25). In this perspective, populist methods and strategies become part of the struggle over hegemony and power. For Chantal Mouffe, 'the strategy of Left populism seeks the establishment of a new hegemonic order within the constitutional liberal-democratic framework' (2018, 45). Nevertheless, definitions of populism as strategy tend to miss both the stylistic and ideational elements of populism, emphasising mostly material aspects of politics such as coalitions, historical preconditions and policies (Hawkins 2010, 39) and leaving out the classic referent in discussions of populism: 'the people' (Moffitt and Tormey 2014, 386).

The rich literature on populism clearly shows that there is scientific validity to the term. However, the diversity of 'populisms' – whether understood as ideology, discourse or strategy – demonstrates that the democratic or undemocratic nature of populist claims is always contingent upon a specific cultural, socio-economic and political context. Once again, it is necessary to underline that the three approaches described above are not mutually exclusive and that there can be significant overlap between populism as an ideology, a discourse and a strategy. For Kaltwasser and Mudde (2012), populism can be both a corrective and a threat to

democracy, depending on the degree of democratic consolidation of a given society, and on whether populists sit in opposition or in government. However, other interpretations of populism do not reflect the same scientific rigor, particularly when the word is employed by pundits, editorialists and political actors. Indeed, as will be seen in the second section of the chapter, the tension between 'populism' as an object of social and historical study and as a word talked about in everyday discussions is 'dense and opaque' (Venizelos 2019). Before elaborating on this distinction, the next section investigates the causal links and dialectical entanglements between the neoliberal project and populism.

Neoliberalism and Populism

It is generally admitted that calling someone a populist neutralises any critique, discards any discussion, and discredits any alternative that leader or party could offer, in an implicit reproduction of the determinist Thatcherite motto: 'There Is No Alternative'.

Yet, populist movements precisely emerged because of the Thatcherite legacy, and the variegated yet forceful implementation of neoliberal economic policies in Western democracies. Indeed, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) point out that populism disappeared almost entirely in Europe in the prosperous post World War II decades. This was partly due to the protective framework offered by the Bretton Woods system – this international economic compromise that John Ruggie termed 'embedded liberalism' (1982) – which fostered a large increase in global trade and investment and saw rapid economic development in both the advanced and developing economies (Rodrik 2018, 16). The re-emergence of populism coincided with the reversal of this course of action, i.e. the deepening of European economic

integration, the abandonment of Keynesian economic policies,[110] the weakening of the welfare state, the proliferation of free trade agreements designed with the needs of capital in mind, and the spread of neoliberal ideas and practices in all spheres of social life (see Chapter II on 'new constitutionalism').

John Judi (2016) goes further and identifies a causal relationship between the 'neo-liberalisation of social-democracy' and the rise of populism in Europe and in the United States. Furthermore, the abandonment of capital controls played a key role in this process (Abdelal 2006; Rodrik 2018, see also Chapter II). After the freeing of capital movements in Europe – especially after the creation of the European currency union in 1999 – and because of specific territorial production factors, industrial investments went in priority to where they were the most profitable, that is, in the core European countries, leading to European industrial polarisation and accelerating the deindustrialisation of peripheral economies such as Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal, but also France (Cayla 2019).

Populism is thus a reaction to neo-liberal business-led agendas, the promotion of trickle-down economics and the ostracising of labour interests. Indeed, there seems to be a link between the decline of specific macroeconomic regimes – with the marginalisation of labour from the governance of the political economy since the mid-1970s – and attendant forms of politics, specifically the rise of populism (Blyth and Matthijs 2017). In other words, the shift from a growth regime favourable to investors and creditors had profound consequences on the programmes of political parties that grew up under the precedent regime (1945-1977), shifting

[110] As Dani Rodrik put it, 'the global economic arrangements of the immediate postwar era were built around John Maynard Keynes' insight that sustaining a world economy reasonably hospitable to international trade and investment would require carving up space for domestic macroeconomic management. For Keynes, this meant capital controls in particular, which he viewed not as a temporary expedient but as a permanent feature of the international economic order' (2018, 16).

from parties of mass integration to catch all parties (Hopkin and Blyth 2019, 194-95), blurring the frontiers between the mainstream Left and Right and breeding the 'ideological crisis' whose characteristics were developed in Chapter III. The surge in populist and anti-system votes would thus be a reaction to the ideological and socio-economic deadlock caused by the neoliberal cartel in power in Western democracies since the beginning of the 1980s.

Against this background, populism forms another manifestation of the 'double-movement' that political economist Karl Polanyi identified in *The Great Transformation* (1944), when active unrest from various social groups and the establishment of protectionist institutions result from the endeavour to 'disembed' the economy from society through *laissez-faire* policies (Polanyi 1944, 214). For David Cayla, the strengthening of European populist movements can be assimilated to a Polanyian countermovement, as they constitute a response to the financial and European crisis of 2008-2009. Brutalised by pro-market policies, societies would call for the cure of wounded welfare institutions by rejecting the traditional, mainstream Left and Right political forces, identified as the main threat to social institutions (Cayla 2019). This was particularly the case in the EU countries, which suffered from an anemic growth along the 'lost' 2010s decade beset by stagnation and delusion, a far cry from the full Keynesian economic policy implemented by the US Federal Reserve after the global financial crisis, which set out very low interest rates and indulged in quantitative easing, with public deficits above 10 per cent of GDP from 2009 to 2011.[111] The lack of ambition of the European Union recovery plans and the strengthening of budgetary rules with the European Fiscal Compact (2013) did nothing to alleviate the plight of millions of European citizens suffering from rising inequalities and chronic unemployment. Indeed, the European

[111] A similar asymmetry can be noted between the economic response – recovery and investment plans – of the Joe Biden administration and that espoused by the European Union during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the July 2020 European Recovery Plan.

institutions – whether referred to as the European Central Bank, or the European Commission, or more prosaically 'Brussels' – are the prime targets of the populists from both Left and Right due to their lack of democratic accountability and their doctrinaire policy packages.

Therefore, populist movements and leaders in Europe are seen as a threat to the existing liberal order and to democracy because they criticise the status quo associated with the expansion of neoliberal measures. This is not to say that globalisation, the financial crisis or the dogmatic European policy packages are directly responsible for the inception of all populist parties. While some right-wing parties – the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) or Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany – and left-wing formations – SYRIZA in Greece and Podemos in Spain – have emerged in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial meltdown and its European consequences, many populist parties predate these events and occupied a marginalised yet vocal platform in their respective countries – that is the case of the French Front National and the Belgian Vlaams Belang on the far-right, while left-wing populism was clearly more of a Latin American phenomenon prior to the 2008 crisis.

In virtually all cases, the pre-existing populist forces' appeal was strengthened after the Lehman Brother shock and its metastases. As Yannis Stavrakakis put it, 'the neoliberal policies implemented have become increasingly *unpopular*, triggering *popular* mobilisations that, in turn, are denounced as *populist*' (2014, 505). This denunciation demonstrates the extent to which editorialists and the 'traditional' political class adopt a very minimalist, almost Schumpeterian definition of democracy based solely on (highly regulated) free speech and the right to vote, which constitute mere conditions to the maintenance of democracy. In response, populist forces are arguing that what democracy should also guarantee is pluralism

within the range of policy options that are proposed to the citizenry. In the framework of the Economic and Monetary Union, the relinquishment of monetary, fiscal and budgetary sovereignty (see Chapter II) confirms that the right to vote and free speech are not enough to ensure democratic accountability. In Western Europe, the surge of populism is thus a reaction to this lack of pluralism, to the accelerated sell-off of critical public assets and to the dismantling of the welfare-state commended by the European Commission, following the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and its accompanying 'convergence criteria' that have constitutionalised austerity on the continent, in an architecture of rule that is reminiscent of the one imagined by Friedrich von Hayek, for whom an economic federation should be conceived in order to prevent any national or federal economic intervention, with the aim to replace 'social justice' with 'market justice' (Streeck 2014, cited by Cayla 2019).

Similarly, most of the so-called populist mobilisations in Latin America were driven by a refusal to abide by the Washington Consensus dictates and related IMF programs that entailed rapid trade opening and entry by foreign corporations in sensitive domestic sectors such as mining or public utilities (Rodrik 2018, 14). Labelling those on the Right and the Left who criticise this state of affairs as 'populist' conveniently overshadows and marginalises their claims and arguments. Chantal Mouffe describes a 'populist moment' resulting from a growing 'oligarchisation' of Western European societies (2018, 17). A variety of anti-establishment movements, both from the Right and the Left, are calling into question the neoliberal hegemonic order and aim to recreate political frontiers in a context of 'post-democracy' characterised by the erosion of equality and popular sovereignty (2018, 5; 11-13). Against this growing 'oligarchisation', Mouffe contends that populism can in fact support inclusionary politics that combine populism with socialism and wish to expand democratic participation to previously marginalised groups on socio-economic or ethnic grounds.

The history of Latin American populism is a direct testimony to this emancipatory potential, as populist movements emerged in countries situated in the peripheries of global capitalism. Against this background, they were tasked with undoing the entrenched legacies of colonialism and the relations of economic dependency that ensued (Gunder-Frank 1966; Hawkins 2010). In addition to overcoming the colonisers' racial hierarchies – with *mestizo* nativism allowing for the symbolic inclusion of the excluded – some populist leaders carried out agrarian reforms that favoured impoverished peasants – Jacobo Árdenz in Guatemala, Lázaro Cardenas in Mexico – or implemented ambitious economic measures that benefited the working classes – such as a fixed minimum wage, paid vacations, recognition of trade unions, as was the case in Argentina under Juan Perón or in Brazil under Getúlio Vargas (Filc 2015, 270-71). Thus, populism can be an inclusionary response to socio-economic distress and racial exclusion, be they *structural* features – as a vestige of colonialism – or more *conjunctural* ones – as a backlash against a crisis of confidence and political defiance resulting from a financial shock for instance, and whose consequences may lead to the impoverishment of those already experiencing precarious livelihoods, such as the working poor, the unemployed and those who already suffer from processes of marginalisation in all their forms.[112]

[112] As Anne Freeland argues (2020, 206-07), Gramsci considered that 'the production of a national-popular collective will corresponds to a process of desubalternisation of the popular masses'. Drawing on the concept of 'subaltern' (see Chapter IX), Freeland explains that the national-popular embodied in the historical nationalist and populist movements in Latin America consisted in the 'erasure of difference' (for example, 'the erasure of indigeneity through the ideologeme of *mestizaje*'). Thus, the various populist and nationalist movements in Latin America 'had at their core the expansion of the nation to formally and symbolically include the majority of the people through the construction of mestizo national identities within the cultural and intellectual spheres'. Candidate from *Union Populaire* Jean-Luc Mélenchon took inspiration from the concept of mestizo when he argued, drawing on Martiniquan poet and philosopher Edouard Glissant, that 'créolisation' (the process through which creole languages and cultures emerge, i.e. the mixing together of different people and cultures to become one) was 'the future of humankind' (BFMTV 2021).

In the European context, none of the so-called right-wing populist actors and movements have any credibility when it comes to overcoming neoliberalism. Historically, racist populism can in fact be apprehended as a neoliberal project. Indeed, Enoch Powell, Britain's best known racist and first neoliberal politician – before Margaret Thatcher and Sir Keith Joseph – has been one of the first ideologues to 'embed race within the political rationality of neoliberalism' (Shilliam 2020, 2). In continental Europe, the Alternative für Deutschland party seeks to bring ordoliberalism into the service of an authoritarian project in Germany and beyond, with the purpose of using the neoliberal principle of competition to justify inequality among German citizens, but also among European countries (Havertz 2019). In Hungary, where the terms 'authoritarianism', 'fascism' and 'populism' seem inadequate to make sense of the robustly entrenched regime that Viktor Orbán has established, the term 'ordonationalism' (Geva 2021) has been used to capture the combined elements of ordoliberalism and nationalism that define the increasing consolidation of power of Fidesz, with three main features: 1). the re-emergence of a centralised state that very aggressively manages capitalist investments; 2). the capture of the state by clientelist networks gravitating around the figure of Viktor Orbán; 3). A novel regime of social reproduction that promotes the reproductive growth of the middle-classes at the expense of economic redistribution.

In France and Italy, the far-right 'populist' parties have initially presented themselves as anti-neoliberal. Yet, the constant shifts in discourse and alliances of both the *Lega* and *Rassemblement National* proved that this positioning was a lure. In Italy, Matteo Salvini's Lega and the M5S (*Movimento Cinque Stelle*) have respectively positioned themselves 'above Left and Right' on an anti-European and nationalist platform and in a position of rejection of elected officials and 'privileged' elites, in an attempt to defeat the cartel of parties – mostly *Partito Democratico* and *Forza Italia* – that thoroughly abided by the European Central Bank

roadmap, particularly under Prime Ministers Mario Monti, Enrico Letta, Matteo Renzi and Paolo Gentiloni. Yet, their electoral victories in 2018 and unsuccessful governmental experiences did not prevent the nomination of former European Central Bank president Mario Draghi as Prime Minister of Italy in February 2021, who was presented as a providential personality 'above traditional parties' whose enlightened expertise would help the country out of the rut (Palombarini 2021). In an impressive transformist move, both the Lega and M5S immediately forged alliances with Draghi so as to form a governmental coalition alongside the European technocrats they pretended to despise a few months prior.

In France, even though Marine Le Pen mobilised her base with viscerally anti-Euro and anti-European Union stances throughout the 2017 electoral cycle, her appalling performance on economic and monetary issues during the presidential TV debate against Emmanuel Macron, as well as her failure to mobilise the older sections of the electorate – that were too worried about the effects that a potential withdrawal from the Eurozone would have on their savings – consistently moderated her anti-establishment stances in the years that followed. The leader of the newly rebranded Rassemblement National went as far as to argue, in the French neoliberal newspaper *L'Opinion*, that 'paying back one's debts is an essential moral principle' (Le Pen 2021). Le Pen made this pledge to ordoliberal normalcy in the context of a languishing Covid-19 crisis that required massive quantitative easing, in a move that was reminiscent of her father's Reaganite proclivities in the 1980s. In sum, far-right populist forces do not offer a break with neoliberal policies.

Between Technocracy and Populism

A certain number of tensions exist within the populist logic. One of them emanates from a development that has shaped the current and recent Western European political landscape, a synthesis between populism and technocracy which Christopher J. Bickerton and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti have aptly called 'technopopulism' in a recent book (2021).

'Pure' Cases of Technopopulism

In their fascinating comparative study, Bickerton and Accetti (2021, 39-40) identify three 'pure cases of technopopulism' to refer to political parties or movements that very clearly offer 'a synthesis of the appeals to "the people" and to expertise' and are therefore very difficult to categorise within the terms of the traditional Left/Right divide – either because they make a point to evade this sort of politics, or because they do not fit within this conceptual framework. Three paradigmatic types are operationalised in their analysis: technopopulism *through the party* (New Labour), technopopulism *through the electoral base* (Movimento Cinque Stelle) and technopopulism *through the leader* (La République En Marche), alongside more 'hybrid' cases such as the Spanish Podemos or the Italian Lega.

The New Labour experiment – the longest stretch of continued government incumbency in Britain (1997-2010) – anticipated and influenced many of the technopopulist tendencies visible in other European political parties,[113] with an obsessive invocation of the category of 'the people' in the manner of a new political label and a replacement of the old Left/Right cleavage with a disdainful way of treating political opponents as 'relics of the past', as

[113] Indeed, several contemporary continental European leaders and movements can be identified as 'epigones' of Blair's Third Way politics, such as Matteo Renzi during his time as leader of the *Partito Democratico* (PD), Pedro Sanchez at the Spanish *Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol* (PSOE) and of course Emmanuel Macron with En Marche! (Bickerton and Accetti 2021, 41).

representatives of the ‘old’ order as opposed to the ‘new’ Labour (ibid, 42-43). Indeed, the very logic of the Third Way was to propose an ‘overcoming’ of previous ideological orientations (Blair 1998, Giddens 1998, see also Chapter VI) that claimed ‘exclusive representation of the peoples’ interests and left no place for alternative ideational outlooks. Thus, political opponents were not seen as ‘adversaries’ with an equal claim to political legitimacy but were disqualified as ‘enemies’ standing in the way of the people’s true interests (Bickerton and Accetti 2021, 44. See also Chantal Mouffe 1998 on the ‘radical centre’). New Labour’s mode of political organisation similarly obeyed the populist logic, with a plebiscitarian ethos and vertical communication from the top to the bottom in lieu of traditional horizontal party communications.

These populist tendencies were moreover counterbalanced by strong technocratic strains. Politics was seen by partisans of New Labour as ‘a matter of administration’ or ‘*good governance*’ supported by a ‘judicious mix of institutional correctness and expert, non-partisan judgments (Mair 2000: 32-33, cited by Bickerton and Accetti 2021, 45), hence New Labour’s reliance on ‘independent experts’ and ‘autonomous’ regulatory bodies. This was associated with the assumption that ‘there exists objectively “right” policy solutions, independent of particular interests or values, from which it follows that ideological conflict and disagreement are at best obsolete, and at worse covers-up for the illegitimate pursuit of special interests’ (Bickerton and Accetti 2021, 46). The appeal to ‘the people’ was therefore tightly connected to an emphasis on competence and expert judgement from external professional – such as spin doctors, opinion pollsters and media strategy consultants – a series of technocratic commitments that made New Labour the epitome of the ‘post-democratic’ party (Crouch 2004).

For Bickerton and Accetti (2021, 49), Tony Blair's New Labour thus exhibited two dimensions of the technopopulist political logic: the 'direct appeal to the people', and the emphasis on expertise combined with a presentation of policies as based on objective, scientific grounds as opposed to partisan – and hence more biased – orientations. Because New Labour's identity and rhetoric were based on a claim about renewal or renovation of an *existing* party structure, the technopopulist logic occurred within the political party itself (see also Chapter VI), making it a prime example of *technopopulism through the party* (ibid, 50).

The second pure case the authors describe is technopopulism *through the electoral base*, embodied by the Italian Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S), whose creator Beppe Grillo had made a point of being anti-establishment and 'neither Left nor Right'. The populist dimension was clear, with the characteristic opposition between a 'virtuous and hard-working people and a self-interest and exploitative elite', as well as virulent attacks against political opponents and a refusal to comply with established codes of political correctness (Bickerton and Accetti 2021, 52-3). Nevertheless, the movement also displayed many technocratic features and developed a conception of politics as a purely technical activity, an exercise of problem-solving requiring practical skills and competence rather than ideology, best performed by technicians and experts who come directly from 'the people' rather than professional politicians (ibid 55-6).[114]

The peculiarity of M5S is organisational: under Grillo, the movement united in a curious fashion the elements of a 'personalist party' and an online 'grassroots movement', testifying to an essentially unmediated relationship between the leadership and the base (Bickerton and

[114] For instance, Bickerton and Accetti (2021, 55) explain that Beppe Grillo claimed that, in case of a M5S victory, he would appoint 'a housewife with three kids', not 'an economics professor' at the Ministry of Finance. The 'household analogy' is thus very ingrained among populist politicians, too (see footnote 24).

Accetti 2021, 54). Indeed, the notion of competence dear to Grillo is not concentrated in certified bodies or professional institutions, but diffused amongst the population at large. Furthermore, this competence is harnessed and rationalised thanks to new technologies in a reasoning that is reminiscent of what Evgeny Morozov would term 'technological solutionism' (2013). Since 'everyone is an expert', citizens are addressed using the language of competence and expertise, not the more traditional language of rights (ibid 58-9).

Lastly, Bickerton and Accetti conceptualise a final category: technopopulism *through the leader*, incarnated by Emmanuel Macron and his movement La République En Marche. As explained in Chapter IV, Emmanuel Macron's political enterprise was from the very beginning presented as 'post-ideological', 'both from the Left and the Right' and even downright populist – although an 'elegant' or 'velvety' form of populism as Pierre Rosanvallon and Marcel Gauchet respectively argued (Bickerton and Accetti 2021, 60-1). Indeed, during the 2017 presidential campaign Emmanuel Macron deployed anti-establishment and anti-elitist rhetoric, opposing France's political elite, *corps intermédiaires* and traditional political parties – who purportedly only focused on their own interests – to 'the people'. He thus fed a *dégagiste* ('ousting') rhetoric that was not completely foreign to the one used by so-called 'exclusionary' populist forces on the Left (LFI) and the Right (FN).

Macronism as 'Technopopulism through the leader'

Transcending traditional political cleavages was aimed at broadening the appeal of Macron: his promise to take on the crumbling system allowed for a thorough social construction of his positioning 'outside the system' – refusing indeed the traditional labels (including centrism)

as well as elite recruitment patterns and mediated politics.[115] His populist appeal relied on an explicit critique and rejection of intermediate bodies – be they trade unions or parts of the press – combined with specific calls to the French people (Perrotino and Guasti 2020, 545-46). This 'populism from the extreme centre' (Godin 2016, see Chapter VI) successfully entrenched the dynamic that would lead up to Emmanuel Macron's presidential election victory in May 2017.

The high degree of personalisation that characterises LREM – with Emmanuel Macron at the forefront of magazines but also at the apex of the decision spheres of a movement that is entirely focused on the personal characteristics of Emmanuel Macron himself – make the movement a good case of technopopulism *through the leader*. Like Tony Blair, Macron emphasised his youth and dynamism and strove to depict his opponents as antithetical to his purported modernity and incorruptibility. He thus strongly suggested that he would be 'the harbinger of change, novelty and progress', with the discursive opposition between the 'new' and the 'old' functioning similarly to the traditional populist cleavage between 'us' and 'them' (Bickerton and Accetti 2021, 60-1).

Indeed, LREM can be considered a personalist party whose main objective is to serve as a vehicle for Emmanuel Macron's presidential election. Yet, the image which LREM wished to project was that of a movement formed from the bottom-up that would be able to transform traditional modes of militancy and organisation that were deemed too bureaucratic or 'top-down'. Yet, despite a discourse that praised horizontality and relied on the participatory ethos of start-up culture, Macron's organisation is highly centralised and centred around his person

[115] In November 2018, Emmanuel Macron presented himself and LREM as 'the real populists, we are with the people, every day' and drew a line between 'populism' and 'demagogy' – the latter, he suggested, was the realm of the extremes (Jublin 2018).

in an attempt to establish a direct link with the broader electorate (Bickerton and Accetti 2021, 63).

In lieu of internal deliberation and collective management, LREM is a top-down movement that embodies the essence of 'technocratic populism' (Perrotino and Guasti 2020, 550), i.e. a 'thin ideology' based on the rejection of traditional political parties and on the promise of apolitical expert solutions that benefit 'the ordinary people' (Bustikova & Guasti 2019). For Lenka Bustikova and Petra Guasti, technocratic populism – just like technopopulism – therefore combines the ideology of expertise with a populist political appeal to ordinary people. Paradoxically, while Emmanuel Macron criticised and rejected the French political elites and wished to communicate directly with the people, he associated the use of personal competence as a form of legitimation and of distinction from his anti-establishment competitors on the Left (LFI) and the Right (FN) (Perrotino and Guasti 2020, 547).

Furthermore, it is undeniable that LREM displays a myriad of technocratic traits. Built with collaborators chosen primarily for their competence, achievement and devotion to Macron, En Marche! came together in the spring of 2016 and was constituted entirely by graduates from *grandes écoles*, communication specialists, consultants, former political advisors and MPs (see Chapter IV). Moreover, the personalities appointed in the first Philippe government were remarkable for their technical profile (see Chapter V). Therefore, competence – rather than ideology or political affiliation – was deemed the necessary prerequisite for serving on Emmanuel Macron's team: this made the political case for this latter's programme of reforms, presented as 'the best policy to pursue and the one most likely to resolve the problem at hand' (Bickerton and Accetti 2021, 65). Thus, although this may seem counterintuitive given his

populist campaign positioning, Emmanuel Macron also relied on technocratic competence as a legitimation mechanism to get elected (Perottino and Guasti 2020).

The 'synthesis' between populism and technocracy thus takes place through the figure of the providential man, or the personal hero who is able to act in ways that established politicians cannot (Bickerton and Accetti 2021, 68). This heroic posture against the representative of the far-right notably served Emmanuel Macron to dissimulate that he was elected 'by default'.[116] Moreover, this positioning is hardly surprising once we consider the 'populist' origins of the Fifth Republic. Indeed, Macron seems to follow in the steps of Charles de Gaulle, presenting himself as the 'embodiment' of the French people, with a claim to speak to them 'directly' and to have the ability to 'fix' the problems plaguing the nation. Combining a conventional claim about embodying the popular will with an emphasis on his own competence and expertise, Emmanuel Macron thus developed a form of personalised 'technopopulism from above' (ibid, 69).

Christopher Bickerton's and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti's demonstration is very compelling indeed, and their apt and original arguments are strongly supported by empirical evidence. Their discussion is both analytically cogent and theoretically astute and provides an original perspective on both populism and technocracy. However, one element that the authors fail to properly underscore is the function of technology in Emmanuel Macron's strategy, which they tend to downplay when they compare it to the one the M5S had adopted. Unlike the latter, Bickerton and Accetti argue that 'Macron and LREM do not seem to place as much emphasis on the idea that technology – and especially online platforms – can help to harness

[116] In an interview with *Der Spiegel* in 2017, Macron explained that there was a need to rediscover a sense of 'political heroism' in French political life. He added: 'these people (the *Front National*) are my enemies and (I) engage them in battle. Exactly that is the story of the second round of the presidential election in France' (Brinkbaumer 2017).

the collective intelligence of the people' (2021, 67). This argument is not the most convincing, as the 'start-up narrative' mobilised by Emmanuel Macron and LREM is largely built upon technological advances and the use of social media and other online marketing techniques (Quijoux and Saint-Martin 2017, see Chapter IV as well as Chapter VII on 'regressive modernisation 3.0'). Emmanuel Macron has also multiplied initiatives aimed at improving France's position as an investment destination for banks and new technologies through the multiple iterations of the 'Choose France!' summits (RFI 2021). He also frequently lionised digital entrepreneurship at the Viva Technology conferences, held every year since 2016 at Porte de Versailles, in Paris. The function performed by technology in Macron's and Grillo's rhetoric is nonetheless different: while in the case of the M5S technology is supposed to devise 'efficient solutions to collective problems' (ibid 67), Macron by contrast envisaged technology as the vessel through which *les premiers de cordée* ('lead climbers', Le Figaro 2018) trace the path to economic progress for the more passive and less able masses.

To be clear, Macron's populism was fundamentally strategic and lasted only a limited amount of time, i.e. throughout the presidential campaign, before being gradually eclipsed by anti-populist postures, as demonstrated in the next section. Populism was indeed largely embraced during the campaign because LREM needed to aggregate as many voters as possible by coalescing the 'moderate' sections of the electorate that were disappointed with the traditional governing parties. Emblematic of this strategy was the 'Grande Marche' ('Great Walk'), a large door to door campaign started in May 2016 which led 4,000 volunteers to survey 100,000 citizens in order to provide the basis for LREM's programme. The survey was later processed and analysed by 200 experts and spin doctors, both giving voice to ordinary people to draft the party programme as well as using expert competence to aggregate the answers in a

typical technocratic fashion (Perottino and Guasti 2020, 550). Macron's populist positioning was therefore only episodic because such postures were electorally beneficial for only a short period of time. Once power was won, it became more electorally rewarding to 'freeze' the current equilibrium of forces between the 'centrist' bloc and the 'far-right' bloc in order to marginalise other opponents and to secure a fragile hegemony as the 'democratic' recourse against the demonised far-right, hence the resort to an 'anti-populist' rhetoric as a stabilisation mechanism as soon as 2018.

Once elected, strategic priorities changed for Emmanuel Macron and LREM as they realised that the current balance of forces worked to their advantage. Thus, strategic anti-populism is aimed at stabilising and consolidating this equilibrium in maintaining the dialectical relationship between Macron on the one hand and Le Pen on the other hand. Once in power, it was difficult for LREM representatives to espouse the same anti-elite discourse that they deployed during the election, making a populist positioning on the long-run very complicated to keep. This did not stop Emmanuel Macron, however, to draw from populist methods in order to combat the populists from the Left and the Right – he notably borrowed the use of 'false dichotomies' from the populist playbook in order to denounce them (see next section).

Lastly, the limits to Emmanuel Macron and LREM populist postures were expressed in two main ways:

1). *Through the very elitist sociology of LREM voters*. Indeed, the citizens who voted for Emmanuel Macron are clearly representatives of the well-off sections of society. This is an electorate that very marginally overlaps with that of other French populist forces (FN and LFI). Indeed, 32.7 per cent of *cadres et professions intellectuelles supérieures* ('higher

managerial (senior executive) and intellectual professional positions') voted for Macron (against 14.25 per cent for Mélenchon and 8.9 per cent for Le Pen). Furthermore, only 14.7 per cent of employees voted for the LREM candidate (against 19.7 per cent for Mélenchon and 24.6 per cent for Le Pen). Lastly, only 11.4 per cent of manual workers voted for Macron (against 19 per cent for Mélenchon and 29.6 per cent for Le Pen). A similar assessment can be made regarding the higher wage earners (above 3,500 euros per month), who were three times more likely to vote for Emmanuel Macron (31.7 per cent) than for Jean-Luc Mélenchon (12.3 per cent) or Marine Le Pen (10.6 per cent) (Lehingue 2015, 146-47).

2). *Through the Yellow Vests backlash*. As will be further developed below and in Chapter IX, the Yellow Vests movement constituted the eruptive backlash to Emmanuel Macron's seemingly populist strategy. Indeed, LREM placed the organisational emphasis neither on activists nor on the political party but rather on the leader (Emmanuel Macron) who attempted to build a direct and personalised relationship with 'the people' (Bickerton and Accertti 2021, 69). The blowback to this posturing was quite simple: with no intermediary between Macron and the people – in that case, the Yellow Vests, whose actions were supported by a majority of the French citizenry – Emmanuel Macron and his majority lost all leverage to forestall the social crisis. This explains the recourse to anti-populism as a last resort solution.

The Democratic Limits of Anti-Populism

One should now turn to the ideological deadlock and destructive democratic consequences of the binary battle between 'populism' and 'anti-populism' which both groups of forces seek to impose in lieu of a healthy deliberative and 'agonistic' confrontation between political rivals.[117] Over the last decade, a certain number of 'mainstream' populism scholars have tended to adopt an overly normative and moralising view on populism by opposing it to pluralism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017) or even to liberal democracy (Urbinati 2014; Müller 2016, see also Stavrakakis and Jäger 2018 for a critique).[118] This vision is restrictive in so far as it identifies all critics of technocratic institutions to populism and that it does not take into account populist agendas that are consistent with constitutional democracy, pluralism, the protection of minority rights (Howse 2019) and even to technocracy itself, as is examined in the first part of this section. Moreover, this type of reasoning has made its way into the rhetoric and symbols used by self-described 'centrist' politicians who seek to regain legitimacy by positioning against political forces that they construct as 'threats' to the existing liberal democratic order. Emmanuel Macron's 'anti-populist populism' (Bordignon 2017) is a prime example of that logic, even though his positioning gets closer to what I characterise below as 'authoritarian anti-populism'.

It seems that the 'populist' characterisation becomes particularly abusive whenever the term leaves academic discussions and starts being employed by media pundits and political actors.

[117] Even though democratic 'antagonism' – a struggle between political *enemies* – should never be completely eliminated, the democratic battle of ideas has to eventually take the form of what Chantal Mouffe (2013, 7) calls 'agonism' – a struggle between *adversaries* – in which opponents are not enemies but adversaries among whom there exists a conflictual consensus. When institutional channels – such as political parties, unions and associations – do not exist for antagonisms to be expressed in an agonistic way, dissensus is likely to explode into violence (Mouffe 2013, 122).

[118] What partisans of this normative approach often forget to mention, among other things, is that the right-wing populist parties of Poland (Law and Justice) and Hungary (Fidesz) did not come to power carried by a mass movement or after a popular revolt. Instead, they used the standard democratic machinery.

Indeed, it is often very hard to find a common ideological denominator between the political leaders or movements that are labelled 'populists' in popular media and centrist political circles: far-right and far-left are profoundly and purposefully amalgamated, as demonstrated by the drawing below, from *Le Monde* caricaturist Plantu, which was published in the weekly magazine *L'Express* in January 2011.

Figure 4: 'The Rise of Neo-Populisms'. Drawing from Plantu, *L'Express,* January 19, 2011.

No clear definition of 'neo-populism' is provided by Plantu, but the drawing explicitly suggests that both Marine Le Pen's radical Right stances on immigration and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's radical Left stances against oligarchy are characterised by the same demagogic, proto-fascist – they both wear a red armband – and anti-elitist verve. It has become very commonplace for Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen to be indistinctively labelled as 'populists' in the French media, echoing an outdated debate on how 'the extremes meet',

which Nonna Mayer aptly closed (Mayer 2011).[119] Indeed, although the Rassemblement National (RN) and La France Insoumise (LFI) share a few common features – a criticism of the European Union and globalisation, a rhetorical rejection of the ruling-class – they are opposed on practically every other aspect of their programmes: on immigration, institutions, economic redistribution, foreign policy, etc.

To understand the implications of anti-populism, I intend to draw new lines of inquiry by extending the traditional schemes employed in the literature on populism to the study of 'anti-populism'. Thus, it is my contention that anti-populism can be analysed and studied as a *discourse*, as a *strategy* and as an *ideology*.

Anti-Populism as Discourse

The political amalgamation reflected in Plantu's drawing is reminiscent of what Anglophones call 'horseshoe theory' and what French commentators dub *les vases communicants*. It illustrates the purpose of 'anti-populism' as a 'discursive style': the label clearly serves the purpose of delineating the limits of the acceptable on ideological grounds. Labelling an adversary as 'populist' is aimed at excluding, disqualifying, neutralising and discrediting. The 'populist' label, when used by 'experts'[120] and centrist politicians, thus virtually excludes from political 'decency'. Populist parties are socially constructed as a political deviance in

[119] As the strength of both the extreme Right and Left made France an exception in Europe, political scientist Nonna Mayer revisited the 'convergence of the extreme theory', focusing her analysis on Front National (FN) and Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) voters. After an examination of the 2007 presidential election results, Mayer (2011, 117) argues that voters for both these parties remain socially and politically contrasted: while Nicolas Besancenot's (NPA) scores 'double among young voters and the lower service class, and rise as one moves towards the left of the political scale', Jean-Marie Le Pen's (FN) scores rise 'among the elderly, the uneducated, the unemployed, and also rise as one moves towards the right of the political scale'. Thus, whatever the past and future ups and downs of the extreme Left and Right, one thing is sure for Nonna Mayer: 'they do not meet'.

[120] Dominique Reynié from Fondapol (see Chapter III), who assiduously visits political shows on the radio and TV – C dans l'air on France 5 in particular – is a case in point, as he constantly presents populism as if it were the worst peril facing French society.

Western European societies, as ‘populism’ becomes a moral panic and is always considered in a derogatory manner: it is equated to an anomaly, a pathology of liberal democracy, with the implication that it would be inherently problematic to address or appeal to the population at large. As Robert Howse put it, the populist label is a ‘form of “othering” that eschews serious engagement with those who see more promise than peril in today’s disruptive politics’ (2019, 642). Thus, populism is often seen as being ‘opposed to rationality and common sense, characteristics that are commonly recognised to be universal features of the human species’ (Stavrakakis 2014, 510).

These systematic criticisms of populism appear unfounded, as there is nothing essentially reactionary or progressive either in the popular element, or in a politics that appeal to ‘the people’. Therefore, self-proclaimed defenders of liberal, or elite democracy – positioning mostly at the ‘centre’ of the political spectrum – present a binary false choice between restoration or renewal of elite politics and a populist slide into authoritarianism and xenophobia (Howse 2019, 641-44), as if populist politics inherently involved nativist, seditious or suspicious moral instincts. In lieu of a dangerousness that would necessitate the delimitation of a *cordon sanitaire*, populism can denote ‘*any* kind of disruption of elite-directed politics in mature liberal democracies’ (ibid). For instance, since the beginning of the so-called ‘Second Italian Republican’ in the early 1990s, the peninsula has witnessed the rise of three different kinds of populist parties: the initially secessionist and nativist *Lega Nord* (which Matteo Salvini renamed *Lega*), the party of media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi *Forza Italia*, and the anti-establishment, anti-globalist and pro-direct democracy *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S), three movements that have very little in common but are all susceptible to fall under the umbrella term ‘populist’.

However, it seems that the demonisation of the populist right is not a systemic feature of Western European party systems. In an analysis of Western European mainstream parties' Twitter profiles and communications as well as speeches from German party conferences, Jakob Schwörer and Belén Fernández-García (2019) reveal that demonising radical-right populist parties – i.e. portraying them as close to right-wing extremism or fascism – is not a widespread phenomenon for West European centre-right formations, whose representatives are ideologically closer to the radical right and have, at times, collaborated in national and regional governments with them, as in Austria, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Norway and Switzerland. Rather, such demonisation seems to be the exclusive of centre-left parties, such as the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (SPOE), the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ), the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), the French Socialist Party (PS) and the Italian Democratic Party (PD) (Schwörer and Fernández-García 2019, 12). One may assume that these moralising postures are used to detract attention from the fact that the majority of European centre-left political formations have slowly drifted to the Right in the context of new constitutional constraints and ideological crisis (see Chapters II and III).

In sum, the anti-populist discourse is very convenient in so far as it pretends to 'draw the frontier between the "good democrats" and the "evil extreme right"': the 'them' is then considered as a sort of moral disease which needs to be condemned morally, not fought politically (Mouffe 2005, 57). There is thus a very strong moralising aspect to anti-populist discourse and rhetoric which favours the recourse to 'antagonistic' rather than 'agonistic' solutions, to borrow Chantal Mouffe's phrasing. Even more conveniently, 'irresponsible' populists of the Left – SYRIZA, Spanish 15M movement – and 'dangerous' populists of the Right – French Front National, AfD, Dutch Party for Freedom – are joined together as a threat against the very existence of Europe, as 'Europe and populism are viewed as the two extremes

of a radical antithesis' (Stavrakakis 2014, 510), thus crushing any sense of nuance and subtlety in the assessment of the balance of social and political forces.

Anti-Populism as Strategy

The populist phenomenon does not express an opposition to democracy per se, but signifies however a widespread defiance towards the existing principle of representation. Indeed, populists are often eager to increase democratic participation through other means – local democracy, referendum, etc. Sometimes, personalist politics take over and a shift can be observable from the 'representation' to the 'embodiment' of the general will by a charismatic man or woman of destiny. Nevertheless, such Caesarist postures are not exclusive to populist movements and can be found within 'social-democratic' regimes as well – such as Matteo Renzi's in Italy or Emmanuel Macron's in France. In many cases, populist movements are in fact inclusionary: Latin American populists thus strive to galvanise ethnically and socioeconomically diverse constituencies (Gidron and Barnikowsky 2013, 20).

The surge of populism could therefore become an opportunity for extending the definition of democracy by diversifying the forms of political action and the levels and channels of popular expression. In France, the institutional schemes proposed by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, with the calling of an *Assemblée Constituante* ('constituent assembly') or the demands of the *Gilets Jaunes* for the implementation of the *Référendum d'Initiative Citoyenne* (RIC, 'Citizen's initiative referendum') sound more apt to get closer to the concept of 'deliberative democracy' developed by liberal democratic theorists such as Jürgen Habermas (1996) among others, than the rigid and top-down modes of governance preferred by LREM and Emmanuel Macron (see Chapters VI and VII).

As Stavrakakis put it with reference to the growth of Syriza in Greece, 'the axis between *populism* and *anti-populism* emerges as the dominant cleavage, an ideological rupture that organises the political meaning of our current predicament…' (2014, 505). Similar dynamics and restructuring are at play in both France and Italy, and they are similarly the sign of a profound decay of democratic politics. Indeed, anti-populist rhetoric is also mobilised by political actors, especially by the centrists, who hypocritically pretend to place consensus at the core of their politics, and whose political hegemony is severely under threat. In this context, 'anti-populism' becomes a *strategy* for maintaining power.

Emmanuel Macron's suggestion that the current predicament constitutes a 'return to the 1920s' (Von der Burchard 2018) is in fact a very convenient distraction. Under the broad 'populist threat' catchphrase can be classified all the actors and movements that depart from the 'post-political' zeitgeist, or the technocratic status quo. It can thus be used by the guardians of the existing order to adopt personalist postures that serve them to delegitimise whatever political forces stand against them: Matteo Renzi capitalised on it (Financial Times 2020), so did Emmanuel Macron and Justin Trudeau (Biscahie 2019, Tunney 2019). In order to present all political outsiders as 'dangerous', the best method consists in co-opting the very stratagems populists allegedly use at length: false dichotomies. Thus, we would be witnessing a strife between 'reason' and 'emotion', between 'expertise' and 'demagogy'. The traditional distinction between Left and Right is abolished since all populists are indistinctly associated: it is replaced by a simplistic cleavage between 'progressives' – the anti-populist camp – and 'nationalists' – the populist camp.

In fact, centrists and right-wing populists are in a dialectical relationship: they co-constitute and reinforce one another in their respective attempts to restructure the political landscape

around the progressive/nationalist cleavage. The political forces standing between these two poles – i.e. the traditional governing parties – are considered residual and have therefore seldom been targeted in FN and LREM discourses in the two years that followed the election. Yet, adopting this type of discourse can be interpreted as a sign of weakness, or a symptom of strategic stalemate. It signals that centrists' strategies, policies and popular support are exhausted and that their sole option left is to position 'against': 'it is us or the chaos', as the French presidential majority suggested during the 2019 European elections campaign.[121]

This narrative was made official on 4 March 2019, when Emmanuel Macron decided to publish an open letter (Macron 2019) entitled 'Pour une renaissance européenne' ('A European Renaissance') in daily newspapers in all 28 European Union Member-states in order to fight against the 'nationalist regress' ('repli nationaliste'). The aim was clear: to gather and strengthen the camp of 'humanists', 'democrats' and 'liberals' in order to contain their enemies: the 'populists', 'authoritarians' and 'protectionists' (Geisser 2019, 3-4). The binary representation of 'two France' or 'two Europe' constituted an attempt by Macron to *transnationalise* the anti-populist platform that he used at home. It found an obvious echo in the list of the presidential majority. Baptised 'Renaissance' and led by Nathalie Loiseau, the list supported by LREM built on a moral strategy that eluded social and economic questions and focused instead on countering the nationalist 'leper' in Europe, an expression the President mobilised during a speech given in Quimper one year prior (Macron 2018a). Indeed, the moral register often proves a very useful argument for political actors facing a legitimacy crisis (Geisser 2019, 5). One famous instance of anti-populist strategy in France dates back to 1986, when President François Mitterrand cynically modified electoral rules in

[121] This video, posted online by the French government account in the fall of 2018, is very representative of the over-dramatisation and binary logics underlying LREM's stance toward the European elections of May 2019: https://youtu.be/2ZY27-DjzOE

order to artificially boost the score of the Front National during the legislative elections – which allowed him to weaken the traditional RPR right, although this did not prevent the latter from obtaining a majority and imposing the first cohabitation of the Fifth Republic to the Socialist President.

The 2019 European elections were marked by a lower abstention in Europe (51 per cent of participation in the EU, against 42 per cent in 2014) and in France (50.12 per cent of participation, against 44 per cent in 2014). Furthermore, the results indicated the moderate and contained growth of nationalist parties and the unforeseen breakthrough of Green parties. Alongside the collapse of traditional parties, these dynamics reshuffled the composition of the European parliament (Motsch 2019, 242). In France, the list '*Prenez le pouvoir*' ('Take power') supported by Marine Le Pen came first, with 23.34 per cent of cast votes, while the 'Renaissance' list supported by Emmanuel Macron came second, garnering a solid 22.42 per cent of cast votes, followed by Europe Ecologie Les Verts (13.48 per cent). Although LREM's list had been numerically beaten by 200,000 votes by that of the Front National, the presidential majority reached its strategic goal: the balance of forces remained very favourable to LREM after two years in power. Indeed, the self-fulfilling prophecy of LREM representatives came true: both Macron and Le Pen's parties maintained leading positions, face-to-face in the recomposed French political landscape.

Indeed, from an electoral standpoint Emmanuel Macron needs Marine Le Pen – a representative of the populist far-right – to survive politically in the face of popular defiance: his best chance of winning the 2022 presidential election is to confront Le Pen again in the second round and to benefit, once more, from an increasingly fragile *cordon sanitaire*. In this instance, anti-populism becomes a strategy of political survival in a non-hegemonic political

situation (i.e. a passive revolution, see Chapter VII), when massive changes to the social fabric of a specific country are imposed from above without legitimate popular support. By restricting the political debate to this eerie confrontation, anti-populist politicians severely restrict the limits of the possible on ideological grounds, and prove that their influence is at least as toxic for democracy and pluralism than that of the populists they supposedly abhor.

Anti-Populism as Ideology

In light of the journalistic and political appropriations of the term, it seems that 'populism' outside of academia has been elevated at the level of what Roland Barthes (1957) called a 'myth'. The term 'populism' has indeed become a mode of signification, a system of communication that semantically and symbolically excludes certain ideas from political respectability: it delineates the limits of the acceptable on ideological grounds. Adopting a Barthesian perspective could have the potential to go beyond Laclau's discursive approach to populism understood as a form without pre-given substance, which is itself based on Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language (Miró 2018, 2). It might offer the opportunity to step away from the propensity to denigrate populism on moralising grounds and could potentially bridge analytically the discursive and ideological aspects of anti-populism by paying closer attention to the symbols and signs that are being mobilised by populists and anti-populists alike.

More or less tacitly, anti-populism informs an ideology which posits that the popular classes are – unlike the technocrats – incompetent when it comes to the democratic process, an implacable value judgment that paves the way for elite domination. Indeed, anti-populism is by definition very elitist (Venizelos 2019). Anti-populists ultimately assume that people-centric discourses and demands for popular sovereignty are irrational, chaotic, irresponsible

and ignorant. Anti-populist politicians are thus very quick to blame the popular element and to assimilate it to a threat to the courts or the rule of law. Too often, the direct sounding of the people is associated with anti-liberal or reactionary consequences, as elite liberal democrats accuse disruptive democrats of being ignorant to the need for 'expertise' in political and economic policy-making and of being indifferent to 'the facts' (Howse 2019, 648-55). For a large number of societal matters and socio-economic concerns, technocracy is thus deemed more efficient than popular sovereignty and 'anti-populism' becomes, indeed, a scornful *ideology* that obeys the same logic to ordoliberalism and its strategies of 'de-proletarianisation' (Bonefeld 2012) and depoliticisation, i.e. the separation of the economic from the political. The epithet 'populism' has therefore become a very important contemporary component to the *neoliberal lingua franca* whose characteristics were exposed in Chapter III.

Both ordoliberalism and anti-populism are thus ideological, discursive and strategic manifestations to what John Mc Cormick (2019) termed 'ochlophobia', or the fear of the masses on the part of technocratic elites and self-proclaimed experts. These often contemptuous anti-populist ripostes are fundamentally *oligarchic* in character: they are claims to aristocratic privilege, to a privileged access to reason and European values and they are used to legitimise galloping inequalities (Stavrakakis 2014, 513). In parallel, and quite disturbingly, elitist liberal democrats exhibit complacency about the oligarchic tendencies in contemporary liberal democracies (Howse 2019, 649), especially regarding the increasing power of big tech companies, whose fiscal and social practices and algorithms constitute a threat to both socio-economic rights and liberal pluralism, but whose influence is seldom denounced by anti-populists. This 'ochlophobia' was particularly manifest as a backlash to the Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Vests) protests – the most irruptive European popular movement of

the last decade – giving way to a form of 'authoritarian anti-populism' as a new mechanism for the defence of the status quo.

Towards 'Authoritarian Anti-Populism'

In his remarkable study of the political and social transformations unfolding in Britain at the turn of the 1980s, Stuart Hall (1983; 1988) observed that Thatcherism was a hegemonic project initiated in the mid-1970s that became a reality in the 1980s, but that never gained universal content, as the divide-and-rule nature of Thatcherism provided a form of 'authoritarian populism' that left the country in a state of division and chaos for the larger part of the decade. In *The Great Moving Right Show* (1979, 15), Hall observed that:

> What we have to explain is a move toward 'authoritarian populism' – an exceptional form of the capitalist state – which, unlike classical fascism, has retained most (though not all) of the formal representative institutions in place, and which at the same time has been able to construct around itself an active popular consent. This undoubtedly represents a decisive shift in the balance of hegemony (…). It has entailed a striking weakening of democratic forms and initiatives, but not their suspension.

The emergence of Thatcherism – with its anti-unions, anti-statism and anti-welfare programmes rhetoric and policies – led Hall to argue that the year 1979 brought the 'most radical-right government of the postwar period to office' (2017, 193). He explained that Margaret Thatcher managed to reach hegemony by harnessing an appeal to populist discontents – such as the 'moral panics' related to mugging that he already described in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (1979), or immigration and youth culture. Different themes have been drawn into service of Thatcher's authoritarian populist project in order to capture 'common sense for traditionalism and the right', such as race, rationality, foreign policy, law and order, thus helping to give 'what the nation is' and 'who the people are' its particular traditionalist inflection (Hall 2017, 204).[122]

[122] The Falklands War (April-June 1982) was an ideal occasion for Thatcher to harness the populist appeal of the conflict by playing on British fears following the loss of empire and the increasingly

Indeed, Hall (2011, 712-13) contended that Thatcherism had been successful in socially mobilising 'widespread but unfocussed anxiety about social change, engineering populist calls from "below" to the state "above" to save the country by imposing social order', the slide towards 'law and order' marking a key stage in the contradictory advance towards 'authoritarian populism'. The founder of cultural studies nonetheless remained careful to avoid the conflation between 'popular' and 'populist'. Populist Thatcherism mobilised people through their fears, anxieties and lost senses of identity in order to strengthen the legitimacy of its regime.

'Authoritarian anti-populism' – a theoretical attempt to characterise Emmanuel Macron's doctrine – is a phenomenon that builds on similar foundations. Indeed, LREM's anti-populism also works and mobilises through fear and anxiety, with the rhetorical construction of a looming 'populist' threat – as well as capitalisation on other phenomena constructed as threatening and whose importance is discursively magnified (i.e. the arrival of migrants from the Global South, episodes of violence in street protests, the influence of radical Islam, etc.) in order to breed a relentless and never-ending logic of authoritarian securitisation (see Chapter IX).

Authoritarian anti-populism as a method of government tends to deplete the traditional channels of democratic debate. It purposefully neglects economic responses to social crises and strives to erect the far-right as its legitimate – indeed, its only – adversary, contributing directly to the further depoliticisation of vital socio-economic issues and to the shrinking of

marginal status of the country on the world stage. On another theme, Thatcher and her party's authoritarian stances on homosexuality following the AIDS/HIV epidemic a few years later – especially with the Section 28 legislation that was part of the Local Government Act 1988 that banned discussions of same-sex relationships in schools – were envisaged as a populist appeal to traditional family values at the expense of a generation of LGBTQ people that was quite literally dying in a deafening silence.

pluralism. Its authoritarian part consists in securitising more and more elements of the social in order to sustain the legitimacy of the regime, hence the deeply repressive approach which Macron and his majority espoused towards the migration question, which consisted in frontal attacks against aid and support organisations, and more generally in the criminalisation of solidarity towards refugees and migrant workers (Amnesty International 2019a), following in the direct tracks of Nicolas Sarkozy and Manuel Valls in this domain. Indeed, Emmanuel Macron's approach to migration consists in transposing the populist discourse from national borders to European borders, i.e. borrowing the anxiety-driven categories that characterise the nationalist discourse on domestic borders to apply them to the EU's borders (Geisser 2019, 11). More fundamentally, the authoritarian anti-populist drift is a direct blowback to the multiple waves of dissent and resistance to Emmanuel Macron's policies that were met with state violence from the end of the year 2018 onwards.

Indeed, since the unprecedented *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vests) movement that started in November 2018 in France, Emmanuel Macron's government has shifted towards more and more authoritarianism. After a few weeks of digital gestation on social media, the movement started occupying traffic roundabouts during the weekdays and demonstrating in Paris' wealthier neighborhoods on Saturdays for several months on a row. The main actors of the movement were people who were initially only loosely interconnected, ranging from the far-left to the far-right and who met on social media and at roundabouts. The movement's longevity testified to the deep political crisis in France and in Europe and became a symbol of the combativeness of the 'subaltern' classes, that had been disarticulated from organised politics – parties, labor unions or social movements, the very institutions which Emmanuel Macron sought to weaken – for several decades. Populist in its style and vindications, the movement quickly moved beyond a critique of the gas tax which had been introduced by

Emmanuel Macron's majority to criticise the president's slashing of wealth and corporate taxes and to rebel against inequalities and a political discourse that symbolically made them inferior (Kipfer 2019, 214). Generic demands for tax cuts were thus overshadowed by demands for social justice, redistribution and democratic participation, with the proposition to implement a new system of referendum: the Référendum d'Initiative Citoyenne (RIC).

The repression of the movement throughout the winter months of 2018-2019 has been ferocious (The Guardian 2019). Amnesty International (2019b) denounced the 2,500 wounded protestors, the 24 protestors who had been blinded and the 5 hands that had been torn off due to police violence in the course of the demonstrations, castigating the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of LBD (blast balls) and grenades against protesters and the multiple instances of police brutality caught on camera.

This tilt towards the coercive end of the spectrum is nothing surprising: by definition, (centrist) politics that purport to place 'consensus' at the core of their doctrines do not tolerate dissent. Beyond testifying to the unresolved fractures within French society, the repression of the Gilets Jaunes demonstrated that Macron's mode of governance could be dubbed, following Stuart Hall, as a form of 'authoritarian anti-populism'. This term intends to theoretically capture the combination of technocratic, neoliberal economic policies described in Chapter VII with the rigidity of an omnipotent and repressive architecture of rule, itself supported by a populist discourse that projects a binary representation of political strife built around arbitrary categories. In an era of fiscal and budgetary stringency, the recourse to authoritarian anti-populism serves to express a principled rejection of redistributive demands. Strategically, resorting to authoritarian anti-populism signals that the crux of the presidential majority's political project now consists in maintaining a fragile balance of forces that

institutionalises a political space in which what they construct as the 'centre' *versus* the 'extremes' becomes the ultimate and solely desirable form of polarity.

Conclusion

In many respects, the rise of populist movements and parties constitute what Antonio Gramsci termed 'morbid symptoms' (Gramsci 1971, 276; Q3§24) because they arise out of democratic decay and emerge out of conditions of 'organic crisis'. As such, they can be both reactionary or progressive. Some populist parties and leaders can be exclusionary and nativist in their rhetoric and ideology, but others can also be conveying a demand for more accountability on the part of domestic and transnational elites, self-proclaimed experts and austerity-minded technocrats. In political discourse, 'populism' thus emerges as the empty signifier *par excellence* but often becomes 'the synecdoque of an *omnipresent evil* and associated with all its manifestations imaginable: irresponsibility, demagogy, immorality, corruption, destruction and irrationalism' (Stavrakakis 2014, 509). However, as shown in this chapter, populism's thin nature means that it does not stand alone as a practical political ideology because it 'lacks the capacity to put forward a wide-ranging and coherent programme for the solution to crucial political questions' (Stanley 2008, 95), particularly when far-right populists are concerned.

The same cannot be said of anti-populism, a political attitude that is more susceptible to stand alone as a practical and exclusionary political ideology. Anti-populism will remain the discourse and the strategy of unfulfilled hegemony and is thus part of the repertoire of passive revolutionaries, hence the recourse to *trasformismo* in an attempt to decapitate and subvert the social forces whose pressures increase the fragility of an already frail hegemonic order (Gramsci 1971; for the situation in Italy see Dousson 2018). As such, it is inherently adaptable, contested and chameleon-like. Yet, one common ideological feature of anti-

populists can be identified: their profound elitism, against the purported lunacy and irrationality of the masses. In this respect, anti-populism obeys to the same logic as ordoliberalism and its objectives of 'de-proletarianisation' (Bonefeld 2012, see Chapter I), an authoritarian and social-darwinist mode of governance that is explicitly praised by some of the most extreme right-wing populist parties, such as the Alternative für Deutschland (Havertz 2019). Anti-populism is therefore the last iteration to date of a long-nurtured strategy of depoliticisation.

Thus, in order to avoid the moral trap of the binary 'us versus the chaos' narrative, one should rehabilitate the role of strife in social life and envisage democratic conflict as a healthy process. More than ever, the erection of robust lines of ideological demarcation between Left and Right is necessary to develop a conflictual/agonistic approach conducive to emancipatory change. Finally, one should be cautious not to give too much credence to the relentless struggle centrists are fighting to 'protect liberal democracy'. As soon as electoral or coalitional opportunities arise, they turn their vests in a typical transformist move, and associate with the 'populists' they once loathed. The parliamentary alliance forged in September 2019 between the Democratic Party – Matteo Renzi's former organisation – and its erstwhile enemy the Five Star Movements, is a case in point (BBC News, 2019).

Chapter IX:

Subalternity and Resistance in Contemporary France

> On ne peut pas être chef par beau temps. S'ils veulent un responsable, il est devant vous. Qu'ils viennent me chercher. Je réponds au peuple français.[123]
> (Emmanuel Macron, in a 'leaked' video in front of LREM Ministers and MPs, 24 July 2018)

Introduction

Once more, it was through an unofficial, 'leaked' footage that Emmanuel Macron's words in front of Ministers and MPs from La République En Marche in the courtyard of Maison de l'Amérique Latine on 24 July 2018 were brought to the general public. The President made this declaration in reaction to pressures from the press and public opinion and in the midst of parliamentary hearings related to the 'Benalla affair', named after Alexandre Benalla, a 27-year-old former Élysée security chief and Macron's personal bodyguard, who was caught on video beating May Day protesters in Paris while wearing a fake police armband (McNicoll 2018). Against the background of a political economic legislative blitzkrieg since May 2017, Alexandre Benalla's absence of sanctions before the press released the compromising video, as well as Emmanuel Macron's arrogance, fuelled the anger of many French people a few months before the start of the Yellow Vests protests in November 2018. Over the winter months of 2018-2019, the Élysée Palace thus had to be thoroughly protected following calls from *Gilets Jaunes* ('Yellow Vests') on social media to 'go get Macron' ('*aller chercher Macron*'), in an echo to his July soundbite.

This final chapter addresses the forms and scales of resistance faced by Emmanuel Macron during his presidential term. Thus, the chapter covers the period spanning from the summer of

[123] 'One cannot be a leader only in good times. If they want someone to be held accountable, here I am. Let them come get me. I answer to the French people' (France 24 2018).

2018 – marked by the 'Benalla affair' – to the spring of 2021 and accounts for the various forms of 'subaltern' (Gramsci 1971) protestations that have considerably complicated Emmanuel Macron's reformist ambitions. Thus, the *Gilets Jaunes* movement, anti-racist mobilisations, the protests against the pension reform and the protests against the *loi de sécurité globale* ('global security law') are addressed in detail in this chapter, as well as in Appendix #5.

After a comprehensive examination of the Yellow Vests uprising – arguably the most unexpected and impactful social movement in France since May 1968, during which protesters wore the fluorescent safety waistcoats mandatory in French cars – – the chapter problematises this popular revolt as a crisis of social reproduction bred by widespread intergenerational anguish that the progenies of the Vests will suffer from deteriorating standards of living and decaying environmental conditions. The chapter argues that such bouts of resistance signal a 're-proletarianisation' of French society. In parallel, the development of anti-racist grievances – centred around Comité Vérité et Justice pour Adama, led by Assa Traoré – have put on the agenda the question of racism and police impunity, fifteen years after the 2005 riots in the French *banlieues*. Despite significant differences, common experiences of subalternity have initiated a de facto alliance between the Yellow Vests and anti-racist activists. Furthermore, the largely followed strikes and demonstrations against the pension reform in late 2019-early 2020 showed that mass-scale mobilisations were still possible in France, some 25 years after the strikes against Plan Juppé (see Appendix #5).

The chapter also addresses the backlash to these mobilisations, which consisted in a strengthening and radicalisation of the logic of 'authoritarian anti-populism'. It does so by engaging with the notion of 'securitisation' (Waever 1995) in order to analyse the various

forms of constitutionalising of emergency in France that followed not only the 2015-2016 terrorist attacks, but also the Yellow Vests movement and its ferocious repression. Yet, these efforts were once again met with blowback in the streets, particularly when the controversial and creepingly authoritarian *loi de sécurité globale* – which made a point to forbid the filming of police officers in duty in an attempt to prevent the denunciation of widespread police violence and the identification of faulty officers – brought thousands of people in the streets to protest a regime whose legitimacy appeared markedly eroded.

I). The Yellow Vests Movement

Legislative initiatives for carbon taxes are not a recent development in France. Alongside the Crédit d'Impôt pour la Compétitivité et l'Emploi (CICE, see Chapters III and VII), the Socialist government of Jean-Marc Ayrault introduced the '*composante carbone*' in 2014. This contribution – which the government was careful not to call a 'carbon tax' – served the alleged purpose of funding the transition to alternative energy sources. By integrating negative externalities into the market, this Pigouvian tax[124] had 'the express goal of reorienting household consumption toward less polluting products and to contribute the revenue to the struggle against climate change' (Chédikian et al. 2020, 879). In the same fashion as the VAT, this regressive tax applied to all consumers indiscriminately and therefore came to be apprehended as a profoundly unjust legislative instrument penalising the poorest households, who were unable to afford lower-emission cars or to reduce their car use.

It was not until 2018, however, that real opposition to the tax came to be expressed. The explosive 'Gilets Jaunes' (Yellow Vests) revolt must indeed be understood against the

[124] Named after English economist Arthur Cecil Pigou (1877-1959), a Pigouvian tax is a tax on market activities that generate negative externalities, i.e. that create costs that are borne by unrelated third parties or cause harm to the community at large.

background of two years of Emmanuel Macron's political economic governance (see Chapter VII), with a beginning of term marked by the abolition of the ISF (wealth tax) and its replacement by IFI (real estate tax), earning Emmanuel Macron the nickname of 'President of the rich'. These tax giveaways to the rentier class and to financial capital were not well received in the French population, but had not yet triggered any significant upheaval.

With this in mind, how can we understand the seemingly sudden and unexpected revolt of the Gilets Jaunes? How did the protests start and which form did they take? Who were the protestors and what were their grievances? How can this revolt be understood in the long trajectory of French neoliberalisation described in the previous chapters? What does the Gilets Jaunes crisis say about the state of French society and the standards of living of its population? To which extent can this uprising be considered a crisis of social reproduction?

Chronology of the uprising and articulation of political grievances

Early sparks of the movement

On 1 July 2018, the decree n° 2018-487 limited the driving speed to a maximum of 80 kilometres per hour instead of 90 km per hour on the French '*routes nationales*' (secondary roads), as excessive speed is considered the first cause (31 per cent) of car accidents in France (Sécurité Routière 2018). Yet, the reduction of the speed limit was perceived as imposed from 'above' (which meant 'Paris' and its ministries) and disconnected from the reality of workers living in rural or 'peri-urban' areas. Against the background of the proliferation of (sometimes very imposing and armoured) traffic enforcement cameras in many French territories, this measure was seen as punitive and purely opportunistic (i.e. 'a cash machine for the government').

The gas tax hike had been a mostly invisible trend until 2018, because petroleum prices were historically low in the first part of the decade. Yet, the increase in the price of the oil barrel felt throughout 2018 fostered a very tense and complicated conjuncture, and the government considerably underestimated the wrong signal that they sent by increasing the tax in a time where oil prices were already extremely high. Thus, the litre of diesel jumped from 1.24 euros in October 2018 to 1.51 euros in early November, although only 8 cents out of the 24 extra was directly imputable to the gas tax hike (Déléaz and Pérou 2018).

On 29 Mai 2018, Priscillia Ludosky, a 33-year-old entrepreneur of Martiniquan descent from Seine-et-Marne, launched an online petition on Change.org to denounce the government's narrative that presented the gasoline tax hike as a measure to favour energy transition (Ludosky 2019, 10). Early in the fall, Ludosky managed to get on a local radio station to explain the reasons for her petition. Her intervention reached Eric Drouet, a 33-year-old *routier* (private truck driver) from Ile-de-France region. Eric Drouet and Priscillia Ludovsky created the Facebook page '*La France en colère*' ('angry France') and the Facebook event '*Blocage national contre la hausse du carburant*' ('national blockade against rising gas prices') scheduled to take place on 17 November 2018. On October 21, Eric Drouet launched a call on social media to block all national roads, highways and oil depots.

This moment of 'digital gestation' (Brancaccio 2020, 849) in mid-October was crucial: the petition received hundreds of thousands of signatures and the 'virtual *agora* of the movement' was created. Many videos were gradually posted on Facebook, dozens of pages and groups formed on social media to denounce Emmanuel Macron's strategy of offloading the costs of ecological transition on the poorer part of the population and the page *La France en colère* went viral (Camell Gali et al 870).

On Saturday 17 November 2018, yellow-vested protesters slowed traffic on rural roundabouts across France and streamed through the streets of large French cities, including Paris, where they blocked up the *périphérique* ring road. The idea of using fluorescent yellow safety vest – which every French driver is required by law to be carrying since 2008 – also originated on Facebook: 'on 24 October, Ghislain Coutard posted a video of himself in his car: "We've all got a yellow vest in the car. (…) Chuck it on the dashboard so people can see it… a little colour code to show that you agree with us, with the movement"' (Bristow 2019, 66). What was retrospectively dubbed 'Acte I' (Act I) of the movement occasioned more than 2,000 road blockades as well as many *operations péages gratuits* ('free toll' operations, whereby protesters took control of highway tollbooths and allowed drivers to pass without paying) throughout France.[125] The 'Gilets Jaunes' were born, and the media started to designate the nascent movement under that name.

In a televised interview on the day following Act I, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe affirmed that he 'heard the anger, the suffering' of the 290,000 protesters but he nonetheless reaffirmed his commitment to implement the gas tax hike in the name of the ecological transition, adding that his government had the objective to 'free (the French) from their car dependency' (Le Monde 2018b). Predictably, Philippe's intransigence did not tame the motivation of the Yellow Vests, who embarked on a second Saturday of mobilisation on 24 November 2018. More than 166,000 Vests were protesting that day, including 8,000 in Paris, where some of them clashed with the police on Champs Élysées.

[125] In 2005-2006, the government led by Dominique de Villepin privatised the large majority of French motorways. Although the concessions delivered to various private companies – VINCI, Eiffage, Bouygues – are set to end from 2031-2036, re-nationalisation is not guaranteed, and highway tollbooths tariffs have greatly increased since 2006.

In an almost never-ending speech pronounced on November 27 in front of MPs, social partners, associations and intellectuals involved in the ecological transition, Emmanuel Macron acknowledged '*la grogne*'[126] but refused to scrap the gas tax hike (Élysée 2018).

An insurrectional December

The President's obstinacy opened the door for weeks of heated protests that spanned across France throughout December 2018. On December 1, Act III of the movement triggered a vast convergence between Yellow Vests, railway workers, anti-racist collectives, high school and university students, trade unions and young people from *banlieues* (Bantigny 2020, 858). The protests were particularly vehement in Paris, where demonstrators were met with tear gas and stun grenades as early as 9 AM. They targeted the wealthy neighbourhoods, the large and austere avenues in the 8th and 16th arrondissements that are referred to as *beaux quartiers*, where several riots erupted. For the first time in the history of Parisian demonstrations, the Arc de Triomphe was stormed, tagged and degraded, and several affluent properties and luxury shops in the wealthy 8th arrondissement were looted (C Politique 2019, 39'). With more than 10,000 stun and tear gas grenades used that day (Envoyé Spécial 2018, 6'45), it became clear that police forces had never been as overwhelmed in Paris since May 1968.

The atmosphere was also insurrectional in the French provinces. In Haute-Loire, scenes of urban guerrilla in Le Puy-en-Velay culminated with the throwing of Molotov cocktails, causing an arson in the prefecture. Indeed, while many traffic enforcement cameras were being vandalised on the side of French roads since the beginning of the movement, prefect Yves Rousset had ordered some 80 new machines in September (Carpentier 2018), a fivefold increase that was meant to enforce – 'reap the benefits of', as the protesters argued – the new

[126] The term '*grogne*' in French, which can be roughly translated as 'grumbling', has some animalistic undertones that made Emmanuel Macron's use of the term sound, once again, quite disrespectful.

speed limit of 80 kilometres per hour. Emmanuel Macron travelled to Le Puy-en-Velay on 4 December to show support to the prefect, who appeared visibly shaken. He was met with an angry crowd of Gilets Jaunes who chased his car while shouting '*Macron démission*!' ('Macron resign!'), one of the movement's mottos. Earlier that day, Edouard Philippe had announced that the project to raise the gas tax was being suspended for six months. On December 5th, the government announced that the project was abandoned. Yet, this did not calm the contestation.

Indeed, the movement had gradually politicised and articulated more holistic grievances. From early December onwards, the *problématique* of the Référendum d'Initiative Citoyenne (RIC) was being pushed by many Yellow Vests, alongside fiscal vindications such as the re-establishment of the abolished Impôt de Solidarité sur la Fortune (ISF), which Emmanuel Macron again publicly refused to reinstate on December 5. Thus, the mobilisation did not weaken and Gilets Jaunes from all over France congregated in Paris on Saturday, December 8th. In addition to the systematic body search of each protester who had travelled to Paris (often by night bus) to march on that morning – which allowed officers to confiscate the masks and goggles that demonstrators brought by fear of being incommoded by tear gas – the police and gendarmerie deployed armoured vehicles and, later on the day, water cannons in the capital. All in all, 120,000 policemen, gendarmes and firemen were mobilised throughout France to tackle the estimated 125,000 Yellow Vests protesters nationally, including 10,000 in Paris (Ministère de l'Intérieur 2018).

Footage from the Paris demonstration (CLPRESS 2018) show an initially pacific protest of a mostly male and non-Parisian crowd – there were women, but in lower proportions than on the roundabouts outside Paris, where they were very mobilised – walking through deserted,

frozen and ghostly Champs Élysées, often singing the Marseillaise while waving the French flag and demanding more social justice and dignity for all, lamenting that the wealthier taxpayers were not contributing their fair share to the collective effort. Indeed, the gas tax increase was not on the agenda anymore; the grievances had significantly expanded to a critique of political representatives' ignorance and disdain for the day-to-day economic difficulties experienced by the majority of the French people. Against this background, the symbolic reference to '1789', i.e. the French Revolution and the 'end of the privileges', was also ubiquitous.[127]

Very clearly, the authorities' crowd control strategy was shaped by the following objectives: (1) kettling the protesters on Champs Élysées, (2) heightening tensions in the netting, and respond to those with tear gas, and (3) gradual dispersion of the crowd, tolerating urban equipment damage as the remaining factions of the protestors moved towards Eastern Paris after dusk. The footage shows that, although the *gendarmes mobiles* (military force specialised in crowd control) seemed professional with the use of multiple warnings before resorting to tear gas, the most aggressive factions of the police forces came later in the day, with squad units ('Brigade Anti-Criminalité', BAC) making use of Flash Balls rubber-pellet guns against the protesters (see last section). All in all, 1,723 people were arrested and 1,220 were placed in custody on December 8 (Ministère de l'Intérieur 2018), and hundreds of protesters had been injured since the beginning of the movement.

On December 10, the revolutionary spirit had spread throughout the territory and the movement was largely supported in opinion polls, with above 70 per cent of favourable

[127] The French Revolution lexicon and symbolism also included the guillotine. Indeed, several fake (but full scale) guillotines had been built up on roundabouts. This was for instance the case in Redon (Brittany), where one protestor argued this was a message for the government ('they should leave'), before the gendarmes eventually took down the installation (L'Obs 2018).

opinions. This forced Emmanuel Macron to speak on prime-time television. Pledging to take immediate measures to relieve the hardship expressed in the streets, Macron announced a series of tax cuts (on CSG for pensioners, on extra-hours pay) and incomes increases ('*prime d'activité*') aimed at the struggling middle-class and the working poor, vowing to raise the pay of minimum wage earners thanks to the *prime d'activité,* an employment bonus issued by Caisse d'Allocations Familiales (CAF). In addition, Macron promised to organise a nationwide consultation process baptised '*le grand débat national*' ('Great national debate'), the modalities of which would be announced after the Christmas and New Year season.

This set of measures – costing roughly 10 billion euros – nevertheless failed to satisfy the majority of the Yellow Vests, although rioting in Paris ceased for the remainder of December. Yet, Macron's intervention was successful in creating some dissent among the Gilets Jaunes: some considered that the initial grievance of the gas tax hike had been settled and that there was no need to continue the mobilisation, while others deemed these announcements cosmetic at best and shifted 'from an anti-tax politics, to a demand for tax justice, to a demand for justice *tout court,* to anti-systemic demands for direct democracy' (Bristow 2019, 67). From the middle of December onwards, roundabouts started to be evacuated. On December 18, hundreds of encampments and cabins had been disassembled in Brittany, Normandy and Burgundy regions (Le Monde 2018d).

Roundabouts and Democracy

Most of the media coverage focused on the events unfolding in Paris on Saturdays, highlighting the Vests' targeting of the centres of symbolic, economic and political power in Paris and other large cities such as Nantes, Lyon, Toulouse, Bordeaux or Marseille. However, the least visible but at least equally significant aspect of the movement was to be found in the

occupation of roundabouts in the French countryside and industrial or commercial areas. In these areas, the blockage and slowdown of traffic spanned throughout the week.

Remarkably, the occupation of the roundabouts made it possible to create new spaces of sociability, with the formation of hundreds of local assemblies that constituted hubs for 'the socialization of suffering' (Camell Gali et al. 2020, 871). In these circles, the overall conditions into which society had fallen were, at last, collectively discussed rather than experienced alone. On the roundabouts, the Gilets Jaunes built cabins and wooden houses, shared food and coffee, created meeting spaces, fostered links of solidarity, new relationships of mutual aid and support networks between friends, families, neighbours or simply people who crossed paths every day but were not until then in the habit of speaking or discussing their difficulties (Chédikian et al. 2020, 881). The Vests converged on the feelings of hardship, loneliness and sometimes shame that go hand in hand with low wages and job insecurity, providing the most socially excluded citizens with 'a reason to wake up in the morning' (Envoyé Spécial 2018, 3').

Thus, the 'roundabout democracy' recreated social life on the archetypical 'no place' ('non-lieu'): the crossroads, around which automobiles circle but seldom stop. With between 40,000 and 50,000 across the country (Zéau 2017), France is the world champion when it comes to roundabouts. These *carrefours* have become the symbol of the expansion of suburban living and have accompanied the multiplication of shopping centres around small urban areas over the last 50 years. For this reason, blocking the roundabouts effectively means blocking the flow of commodities, with small communes forming a 'complex network of organizational microstructures, interconnected and disseminated throughout the territory of France' (Chédikian et al. 2020, 880). In the collective imaginary, roundabouts have been associated

with what the weekly Télérama dubbed in 2010 '*la France moche*' ('ugly France'), i.e. the proliferation of road interchanges, suburban housing estates, shopping malls and roundabouts that had incrementally debased the French countryside (de Jarcy and Remy 2010). Before turning into spaces of socialisation, the roundabouts were the urban testimony to the increasingly fragmented and isolated way of life in the French suburbs and countryside. Yet, fragmentation was often simplified and dichotomised through the ubiquitous media and politician reference to public intellectual Christophe Guilluy's *La France périphérique* (2014). Guilluy's concept of 'peripheral France' presents a schematic opposition, an unbridgeable spatial and cultural gap between the globalist 'metropoles' and the national, home grown 'peripheral' social spaces. This 'one-sided and politically dangerous territorialisation of social relations' is akin to 'social reification', as it neglects the relationality of the social world, and thus risks a spatially determinist rendering of political action (Kipfer and Dikeç 2017, 36). For Stefan Kipfer and Mustafa Dikeç (2017, 38-44), the rigid and essentialist distinction between 'centre' and 'periphery' tends to consolidate orders and hierarchies of space and time; and this may institutionalise and legitimise practices and forms of domination that are strongly shaped by the state. This dichotomy is ultimately feeding extreme-right sensibilities,[128] while glossing over the depths of class-based and racialised exploitation and exclusion in 'metropolitan France'. Far from being only a space of relegation, 'peripheral France' combines *multiple* subaltern residential and employment zones with *other* spaces, including middle and upper class spaces of privilege (Kipfer and Dikeç 2017, 44).

[128] During the presidential campaign, Marine Le Pen posited a fundamental distinction between the 'globalists' (the cosmopolitan, urban elite) and the 'patriots' (those she argued were 'forgotten by globalisation'; '*la France des oubliés*'). See Chapter IV.

Who, then, were the people on the roundabouts? Is it possible to sketch a broad sociological profile of the Yellow Vest protester?

Sociology of the Yellow Vests

The leading figures of the movement – who were not chosen by their fellow Vests but rather selected by the media due to the role they had in the movement, their telegenic ease or 'virality' on social media – were only loosely connected with regards to gender, age, geography or socio-professional status. Thus, Jaclin Mouraut – who posted a viral video on Facebook in October 2018 – was a 52-years-old self-employed hypnotherapist from Morbihan (Brittany), while Ingrid Levavasseur – who posted a much shared letter to Emmanuel Macron on Instagram – was a 31 years-old caregiver from Eure (Normandy). Fabrice Schlegel – who created a Facebook page opposing the gas tax hike – was a 46-years-old entrepreneur from Jura (Franche-Comté). Maxime Nicolle – who shared videos about the movement under the pseudo of Fly Rider – was a 32-years-old unemployed driver from Côtes-d'Armor (Brittany). As previously mentioned, Priscilla Ludosky was self-employed and Eric Drouet was a truck driver, both from Ile-de-France.

On site observations, early surveys and interviews suggest that the Yellow Vests are slightly older than average and disproportionately white (Kipfer 2019, 212). Remarkably, they are composed of an unusually large proportion of women, which reflects the weight of care work in today's capitalism (nurses, caregivers, childminders). In class terms, they are drawn from a core of working-class occupations (active employees and workers, retirees, unemployed) but also include a wide range of self-employed people and small entrepreneurs (ibid).

The wide socio-professional diversity (servers, maintenance technicians, factory workers, teachers, nurses, chefs, small merchants, artisans, unemployed, etc.) and the intergenerational dimension of the movement (students, active employees and workers, retirees) have also been noted. This led Ludivine Bantigny to argue that 'the entire country is represented' in the movement, and that this uprising is, indeed, a 'popular revolt' (Bantigny 2020, 857-58). What is certain is that the movement drew categories of the population that are often ignored in political discourses and symbolic representations, and are thus not accustomed to 'traditional' political mobilisation, such as women, the unemployed (Bourdieu 1998) and the retirees.

What united the Yellow Vests was the experience of certain forms of social vulnerability, whether related to contractual situations (casual, interim, short-term), working conditions (pressure to increase production, taxing work) or remuneration (Blavier 2021, 9). During his fieldwork in the Centre region, Pierre Blavier observed a local unemployment rate of 23 per cent among the Gilets Jaunes, far above the average regional rate of 9 per cent. Besides, many of the protesters expressed a deep diversity in the forms of professional vulnerabilities: 'redundancies, short-term or casual contracts, difficulties finding interim jobs or clients, difficulty finding work as a disabled person or finding a job that is closer to home, difficult working conditions (under-equipment, forced night shifts, intense rhythms)' (ibid).

The sometimes complicated relationship to the automobile – i.e. the need to use the car every day for reasons related to work, child-rearing or care work – seems to be the common thread of the Yellow Vests living in peri-urban spaces (see next section on social reproduction). Indeed, many Gilets Jaunes live *at the edge* and *between* the larger urban centres and their inner suburbs, which attests to the territorial fragmentation of the French labouring classes (Kipfer 2019, 212, my emphases). This explains why professions connected with mechanics

and the automobile industry – truck drivers, public transport drivers, mechanics, forklift drivers – were very well represented among the Yellow Vests protesters. All these professionals are used to wearing a yellow vest, as they often had to wear one on the job (Blavier 2021, 6).

Against this background, what can we say about the Gilets Jaunes' political persuasions and grievances?

Political grievances

Many Yellow Vests claimed that the movement was 'apolitical' – by this, they often meant 'non-partisan', as the two terms are almost interchangeable in French parlance. They also disproportionately self-described as stay-away voters. In consequence, no political party has been able to hold sway over the movement, despite the relentless efforts of several key protagonists of the French political scene. Unions were similarly disaffected: in the first months, they were incapable of channelling the *angst* of protesters. Yet, although the movement continued to be non-partisan – refusing the opportunistic support of personalities from the far-right (Marine Le Pen from RN, Nicolas Dupont-Aignan from DLF) and the traditional right (Laurent Wauquiez from LR) – it very quickly became extremely 'political' in successfully articulating a large variety of coherent political grievances.

The Gilets Jaunes clearly enunciated three types of political grievances:

1). The first type of grievance was socio-economic and related to *purchasing power* and *socio-economic dignity*. The movement showed that a significant number of French people were not able to make a dignified living. The eruption on the public sphere, with very visible attires, of those who earned the lowest wages, felt excluded on socio-economic grounds and

struggled to make ends meet testified to the sharp decline in living standards that had affected the lower French middle classes. Symbolically, the Yellow Vests movement was grounded in the *visibility* of economic hardship, the public acknowledgement of widespread social precariousness. These vulnerabilities are often reinforced spatially: those who live outside of French metropoles have a poorer access to both public services and public transportation, and are therefore compelled to rely exclusively on the individual car for most of their journeys. Furthermore, Emmanuel Macron's arrogance and his purportedly off-the-cuff statements (see Chapters IV and VII) have symbolically increased the feelings of exclusion, shame and anger felt by the Vests. In sum, the Gilets Jaunes are 'increasingly worried and concerned with issues such as labour market flexibilization, underemployment and crises of social reproduction' (Kipfer 2019, 212). This latter point – envisaging the Gilets Jaunes revolt as part of a crisis of social reproduction – is examined at length below.

2). The second kind of grievance – closely related to the first one – was *fiscal justice*, with a general feeling of anger that working people had difficulties 'to end the month' while an economic elite was able to find mechanisms – licit or not – to escape taxation. Against this background, although the carbon tax hike only affected very marginally the Yellow Vests' budget with a few additional cents paid for each gas litre, it was *perceived* to be financially unbearable. The gas tax hike was infuriating because the measure was decreed after the implementation of a series of governmental tax exemptions (the most emblematic of which was ISF) that benefitted mostly large capital holders. Disturbing on symbolic grounds, the projected tax hike also pursued a tendency to augment revenues from regressive forms of taxation such as the VAT and other forms of indirect levies. Indeed, the Yellow Vest movement was not a revolt against taxation per se, but rather 'a firm and determined demand for equity': The Yellow Vests asserted that common assets must be protected from

privatisation, and that the reestablishment of the wealth tax should go hand in hand with the redistribution of funds in public services (Bantigny 2020, 860). The need to reduce inequalities by combating tax avoidance, reinstating the ISF, raising the minimum wage and implementing lower consumption taxes thus became the rallying cry of the Gilets Jaunes.

3). Finally, the issue of *political representation* and *democratisation* remained a critical grievance. This was born out of the perceived growing disconnection between French people's day-to-day experiences and the concerns of those who governed them. The Vests expressed a strong desire to become more directly involved in the making of laws and to be consulted on a regular basis through referendum – hence the focus placed on the *Référendum d'Initiative Citoyenne* (RIC), a mechanism of direct democracy that would allow citizens to petition for the organisation of a referendum to propose or oppose laws, or revoke a politician's mandate. Thus, horizontal practices of democracy were envisaged as a terrain of struggle against the verticality of 'Macron and his world': direct democracy was considered the political expression of social counter-power (Camell Gali et al. 2020, 873).

The three grievances hereby presented explain why the Gilets Jaunes movement has triggered a repoliticisation and reproletarianisation of large sections of the French population, as studied in the next section. Against this background, how did the movement evolve after the end of 2018? Which new forms did the mobilisation adopt in the first half of 2019?

Continuing the struggle

On 5 January 2019, Act VIII of the movement saw a larger mobilisation than a week prior and caused some havoc in Paris again, with telegenic images of a professional boxer, Christophe Dettinger, fighting a fully-armoured CRS with bare hands. On that day, protesters targeted institutional sites, such as Hôtel de Rothelin-Charolais, the office of government spokesman

Benjamin Griveaux, whose gates were broken by a Gilet Jaune driving a lift truck (Le Parisien 2019), forcing Griveaux to be evacuated from his own ministry. Despite wintry conditions, social gatherings were still happening on many roundabouts. One week later, the movement grew again, with the mobilisation of some 84,000 protesters throughout France, including 8,000 in Paris, and the deployment of some 80,000 policemen and gendarmes (Le Monde 2019).

On the side of the government, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced on January 7th that the government would be working on a new law to set limits to the right to protest, an 'anti-rioters' bill ('*Loi anti-casseur*') that would reinforce the material and legal means of the police. On January 15th, Emmanuel Macron inaugurated the 'Grand débat national' in the Eure department, with a seven hours' discussion with more than 600 mayors who were expected to relay citizens' day-to-day preoccupations to the president (Elysée 2019).

On the side of the Yellow Vests, the movement started to organise on a more permanent and transregional basis, with the gathering of '*assemblée des assemblées*', a forum in which members from different regions of France coalesced in Commercy (Meuse), holding debates and roundtables on January 26 and 27. Similar concrete proposals for unification emerged from different cities in France – Saint-Nazaire (Loire-Atlantique), Montreuil (Seine-Saint-Denis), Montpellier (Hérault) – expressing a political wish for direct democracy in a form akin to communalism (Bantigny 2020, 861).

Gradually, the issue of police violence became present in the media, while it initially had been denied by editorialists and political representatives. Jérome Rodrigues, one of the unofficial leaders of the movement, lost an eye in a protest after a shot of LBD (*Lanceur de balles de*

défense, or 'Flash Ball') on January 28th. On March 6th, United Nations Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet urged the French government to fully investigate all reported cases of excessive use of force occurring during the Gilets Jaunes protests (UN Human Rights Council 2019). One week later, the anti-rioting bill was officially adopted by the French parliament.

After countless town hall meetings designed to place Emmanuel Macron at the centre of a seated and carefully selected audience, the 'Grand débat national' was officially closed on 15 March 2019.[129] Although they were widely broadcasted on 24-hour TV channels throughout the winter months, the meetings were used by Macron to lecture citizens and reshape discourse largely towards the Right, injecting questions of migration, national identity and security into the 'debate', while none of those were part of the Yellow Vests grievances (Kipfer 2019, 219). For Chédikian et al. (2020, 882), the Great debate was an exercise of 'false participatory democracy in which the contempt and condescension of the ruling classes' took 'precedence over the true needs of citizens, as well as their very capacity to define those needs and identify the means to fulfil them'.

These meetings were always several hours-long. Emmanuel Macron's soliloquies were presenting the necessary reforms 'with pedagogy', while saturating the media with governmental propaganda. For Gérard Mauger (2019, 112), this cycle of debates was the occasion for Macron to play the role of the 'mass educator' in neoliberal times, a display of symbolic violence that painted the president as 'an expert', a 'highly-ranked manager'. This kind of contempt was also demonstrated in a cosier décor, at the Élysée Palace, where Macron

[129] The *Grand Débat National* garnered almost 2 million online contributions, fostered 10,000 local citizen meetings and led more than 16,000 French communes to place 'cahiers de doléances' (lists of grievances) at the disposal of their citizens. See: https://granddebat.fr/ (accessed 26 March 2022).

received some 65 intellectuals from all horizons – sociologists, economists, physicists, anthropologists and essayists – with whom he 'exchanged' for no less than eight hours in an event broadcasted by public radio station France Culture (2019).[130] As was the case throughout the town halls meetings, Emmanuel Macron behaved as if he was passing the oral examination at ENA or the *grand oral* at Sciences Po: several intellectuals were asking questions on a row, and Macron was addressing their queries one by one, as if he was passing an examination of *culture générale*. However, the guests had no opportunity to respond. In all instances, the president was committed to having the last word.

The day that followed the end of the 'Grand débat' was a Saturday. The so-called 'Act XVIII' provided a fair share of symbols for the media to exploit. The Black Blocs influence had become increasingly visible Act after Act, and March 16 was a prime example of their disruptive potentials, with the breaking and looting of some 80 luxury shops on the Champs Élysées and the ignition of an arson at the famous restaurant Le Fouquet's, which became part of popular culture when Nicolas Sarkozy lavishly celebrated there his victory in the second round of the 2007 presidential election, with various celebrities, on 6 May 2007.

These renewed displays of symbolic and material degradation led various cities – including Paris, whose police prefect was replaced by the confrontational Didier Lallement on 20 March – to use their administrative power to forbid demonstrations by the end of the month. Although this did not stop many protests to happen, these legal provisions and a visible increase in police violence tended to dissuade many demonstrators from showing up. After a summer through which the movement remained dormant, it continued its actions in the fall of

[130] The event was thematically divided into six sections: (1) economics, inequalities, environment, (2) the human condition, democracy and role of the intellectuals; (3) religion, *laïcité* and Algeria; (4) sciences and bioethics; (5) wages, gender inequalities and the presidential function; (6) social media, power distribution, university and ministerial interventions (France Culture 2019).

2019, joining environmental protests in September, and demonstrating its lasting fervour on 16 November, the biggest Saturday since March 9. In December, many Yellow Vests associated with the movement of protest against the pension reform and participated in several marches with union leaders and rank and files, as examined in the next section. The Phillipe government's pension reform and the social mobilisations that ensued, a crucial aspect of the struggle against the French crisis of social reproduction, are addressed in detail in Appendix #5.

A Crisis of Social Reproduction

> These activities were less disconnected than might appear, since the new methods of work are inseparable from a specific mode of living and of thinking and feeling life. (Gramsci 1971, 302; Q22 §11)

The second half of this section examines the Gilets Jaunes movement through the lens of feminist social reproduction theory and posits that this revolt can be analysed as the symptom of the French crisis of social reproduction.

Social reproduction theory examines the processes through which members of a political community perpetuate and reproduce themselves. The focus of study of social reproduction theory is therefore the *daily* and *intergenerational* labour of reproduction, 'not only the ideological reproduction of capitalist subjects, but also the meeting of basic needs, like food, shelter, and love' (Backer and Cairns 2021, 1095). Social reproduction is intrinsically connected with capitalist production, but it takes place in different, often more concealed realms, i.e. the private sphere, the 'home', where most of women's unpaid work is performed. As George Caffentzis (2003, 13) put it, social reproduction theory contrasts with Karl Marx's view that value is only created in the process of commodity production: thus, housework

greatly shapes the labour of daily and generational reproduction and constitutes ‘a value producing activity’.

The need to secure adequate means of subsistence has been the central focus of the Yellow Vests movement. The revolt was bred by the impossibility for the Vests and their families to project themselves in the future, on the one hand because they were hindered by their tight budgets, on the other hand because they had experienced feelings of depression linked to what was perceived to be a ‘blocked’ trajectory of upward mobility in a context of chronic high unemployment. From this stems their difficulty to envisage intergenerational social reproduction in a serene manner, as it is widely held that progenies of the Gilets Jaunes are expected to experience poorer standards of living than their parents.

Indeed, the Yellow Vests movement has offered a demonstration that it is becoming increasingly difficult, in contemporary France, to perpetuate the ‘social processes and human relations associated with the creation and the maintenance of the communities upon which production and exchange rest’ (Bakker 2003, 66). The noticeably large presence of women on the roundabouts testified that the restructuring of state forms that accompanied the process of French neoliberalisation has been occurring on a strongly gendered terrain as well, as women are ‘at the crossroads of production and social reproduction’ (ibid).

The discussion proceeds with three questions.

1). *How can we define social reproduction?*

For Isabella Bakker (2003; 2007), there are three fundamental aspects to social reproduction:

a). *Biological reproduction,* or procreation, refers to child-bearing. The physical development of human beings 'is a basic component for the reproduction of the labor force' (Bakker 2003, 77) and deeply structures the conditions and social constructions of motherhood (Bakker 2007, 541).

b). *Reproduction of the labour force*, refers to 'the daily maintenance of workers and potential labor and the processes by which they become workers' (Bakker 2003, 77). Domestic labour is of key importance here, as it is most often than not women who are involved in the 'subsistence, education and training' (Bakker 2007, 541) that the labour force requires to meet its daily needs.

c). *Reproduction of provisioning and caring needs,* refers to homework activities that have functional value for the reproduction of the system, such as cooking a meal, or caring for one's children. However, one does not care only for children, as the increasing burden of elder care in contemporary capitalist societies attest (Bakker 2003, 77-78).

As Tithi Battacharya (2017, 2) put it, while 'capitalism acknowledges productive labor for the market as the sole form of legitimate "work"', the fundamental insight of social reproduction theory is that 'human labor' – conceived as familial as well as communitarian work that goes on to sustain and reproduce the worker – 'is at the heart of creating or reproducing society as a whole'. Thus, the sphere of social reproduction 'is articulated to the sphere of production and is an integral, interrelated part of the economy' (Bakker 2003, 78). Yet, the ensemble of practices, tasks and duties associated with social reproduction is often 'naturalized into nonexistence' (Battacharya 2017, 2).

Social reproduction largely depends on some form of income (Gill and Bakker 2008, 22). From pre-industrial times to World War II, women and (more occasionally) men who were living in the countryside could thus access arable land, chop wood, collect raw materials or raise stock, and city dwellers could partake in informal sector activities to ensure additional revenues, all in the service of 'making end meets' and ensuring their subsistence and that of their loved ones. During the postwar period of 'embedded liberalism' (Ruggie 1982), this income took the form of social wages and transfers by governments in many Western nations following the Bretton Woods settlement. These state provisions were however eroded and constrained on the budgetary terrain since the crisis of Fordism, and the higher rates of women's participation in the workforce have led to a 're-privatisation' of social reproduction.

Indeed, the neoliberal moment in the global political economy has led to increasingly privatised forms of social provisioning and risk. As Isabella Bakker put it, 'the everyday activities of maintaining life and reproducing the next generation are increasingly being realised through the unpaid and paid resources of (largely) women as states withdraw from public provisioning' (Bakker 2007, 541). For Bakker (ibid, 552), this gradual infiltration of social reproduction by capitalist market relations resonates with Fernand Braudel's writings on capitalism, the material economy and material life: 'there is a dialectical relationship between the necessities of the "lower levels" of economic activity (material life, the market economy) and the imperatives of capitalism', which Braudel associates with 'large corporations that specialise in accumulation rather than production. Indeed, capitalism is seen as a power *over* production and social reproduction'.

2). *How does social reproduction relate to new constitutionalism?*

As a governance framework, new constitutionalism (see Chapter II and Gill 1998; 2002) reconfigures governments and constitutional forms in order to guarantee the freedom of

movement for capital and greater property rights that protect investments against expropriation. The increased global mobility of capital and greater market discipline have extended the scale and scope of the commodification of land, labour and money and weakened the fiscal health of many governments, creating a 'fiscal squeeze' that limits their social expenditure capacity (Gill and Bakker 2008, 20-21 and 29). In so doing, these governance frameworks reshape the conditions under which the care and reproduction of human beings is taking place.

Following the new constitutional framework, the *reshuffling of taxation* – with corporations and economic elites' reduced contributions to public goods – has shifted the tax burden towards the middle and working classes by creating sundry regressive sales and value-added taxes. In his case study of a Yellow Vest family, Pierre Blavier (2021, 10) calculated that the percentage of taxes that the couple and their son paid in overall gross salary was 44 per cent, that is, 1658 euros per month in housing taxes, VAT, income tax, general social contributions and gas and cigarettes taxes. The gas tax hike decided by Emmanuel Macron and the French government in 2018, against the background of various tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations implemented a year prior, is an archetypical example of that logic.

For Bakker and Gill (2008, 24), this fiscal squeeze is part of a global dynamic whereby governments in both the global North and South collect less revenue and are 'forced' to cut capital expenditures on infrastructure and social expenditures related to health, education, welfare and social safety nets. This institutionalises a lower socialisation of risks, with the poorest and most vulnerable people – often women, children and the aged, but also small farmers and other producers – tending to be hardest hit when these key provisions for social reproduction are removed or reduced.

Progressively, specific legal arrangements extend the potential scope of the commodification of land labour and money, creating new markets and replacing former systems of livelihood and property relations with exclusively capitalist forms of accumulation. For Bakker (2003, 76), this vast process of reprivatisation implies that social reproduction will once again be assigned to the private sphere in various guises', i.e. 'offloaded to households and women's unpaid work'.[131]

3). *How can the Gilets Jaunes revolt be understood as a symptom of a crisis of social reproduction?*

In a recent contribution, Nancy Fraser spelled the fundamental contradiction of the current capitalist predicament in the following terms: 'on the one hand social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other hand, capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies' (Fraser 2017, 22). This 'social-reproductive contradiction of capitalism' triggered what Fraser calls a 'crisis of care'. The latter encompasses a 'generalised crisis of the system's ability to reproduce itself, brought on by the depletion and decimation of social reproductive functions' (Bhattacharya 2017, 12).

[131] The 'growing contradiction between the intensified power of capital and the pursuit of profits for accumulation, versus life-making/sustaining processes, including the condition of bodies (…) and the biosphere' (Bakker and Gill 2019, 504) seems to have reached its acme with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. The latter can indeed be described as a planetary crisis of capitalist life, a systemic crisis of social reproduction that acts as a magnifying glass, 'both revealing and amplifying the vulnerabilities and inequalities in the governance of life-making sectors, the restructuring of the world of work and the racialized processes manufacturing different kinds of surplus objects under neoliberalism' (Mezzadri 2022, 381-82). Paradoxically, the pandemic has brought a (variegated) interregnum in the rich countries in terms of setting aside some aspects of fiscal squeeze – under the form of temporary wage or rent supports, for instance – so as to confront the emergency and cope with the consequences of hastily declared lockdowns. Nation-states did not hesitate to finance these mitigation measures through sovereign debt, even under a mutualised form in the framework of the European Union (see Biscahie and Gill 2022). Class responses from above or below will determine whether fiscal squeeze will be further halted or deepened in the coming years, as processes of precarisation of work and their role in hardening class, gender and racial inequalities confirm that 'we are still firmly into neoliberal capitalism and its reproductive regime' (Mezzadri 2022, 388).

In concrete, material terms, the everyday manifestations of a crisis of reproduction may consist in a 'sudden loss of one's entitlements to food and/or the means of subsistence' (Caffentzis 2003, 2). This also manifests more gradually in everyday working class experiences through constrained budgets and laborious schedules, and the widespread and alienating mental load of spending time juggling with logistic difficulties and impromptu expenses.

There are two lenses – one pragmatic and material, the other symbolic and existential – through which one can analyse the Yellow Vests revolt as a crisis of social reproduction:

a). *Material: Considerable and continuous strain on household budgets*

In many respects, the Yellow Vests movement was fundamentally a combat for the means of *subsistence*. It constituted more than 'a shared struggle against high living costs' (Bantigny 2020, 859), although the revolt shed light on the importance of 'committed expenses' in household budgets,[132] that is, 'outgoings that the Vests know in advance they will have to pay each month' (Blavier 2021, 9). The importance of committed expenses, associated with the rise in mechanisms of regressive taxation explain why the subsistence of many Gilets Jaunes is at stake: in many territories, entitlement to transportation, food, medical or social care is getting scarcer.

Although necessary to navigate fragmented social spaces, car ownership has become a burden for many French people. This dependency stems from vulnerability: large sections of the French population are today vulnerable to cutbacks to public services such as subsidised

[132] Pierre Blavier (2021, 2) defines as 'household budget' the 'ensemble of temporal, spatial, monetary and non-monetary means, combining elements like work, transport or tastes, which allows a yellow vest household (…) to 'make end meets'.

regional trains and bus lines, but also postal and health services (see Chapter VII). This forced them to rely on automobility to negotiate residential spaces, employment zones and shopping malls and forces them to engage in regressive expenditures for car ownership (Kipfer 2019), i.e. gas prices, new speeding rules and controls and increasingly severe roadworthy requirements for older vehicles. This results in acute difficulties to extricate oneself from ecologically degrading ways of life (ibid, 212). As Chédikian et al. (2020, 880) note, the poorest households are unable to buy lower-emission/electric cars or reduce their car use because they live in neighbourhoods located farther from metropolitan centres. In this context, the tax law appeared all the more regressive inasmuch as it applied to all consumers, irrespective of income.

Housing is also a considerable strain on most of the Yellow Vests' budget. Indeed, it is often the increasing cost of real estate that has forced many Vests to move away from urban centres. They therefore inhabit places that are 'neither city, nor country', locales that are nevertheless strongly dependent on urban centres, despite being spatially removed from them. As Camell Gali et al. (2020, 870) put it, 'abandoned by public services, these areas constitute a zone of limbo as much from the socioeconomic point of view as the political'. As a result, homeowners paying mortgages were overrepresented among the protesters, with some 26 per cent of them falling into this category (against a national average of 20 per cent). By contrast, the rate of Vests who were outright homeowners (25 per cent) was much lower than the national average of 37 per cent (Blavier 2021, 12). The sum of these committed expenses explain why many Gilets Jaunes explain that they have 'no room for extras'. This creates forms of alienation born out of the lack of time and financial means for leisure.

However, there is no fatality to these financial struggles, as the Vests living in rural or peri-urban areas often developed 'everyday forms of resistance', that involve techniques that are 'relatively safe', that 'often promise vital material gains' and 'require little or no *formal* coordination let alone organization' (Scott 1989, 35). These forms of resistance that form a 'hidden realm of political conflict' (ibid, 33) should be distinguished from more typical and confrontational forms of conflict, but they are socially and politically significant insofar as they challenge – although quietly and often indirectly – established property relations.

This involves various money-saving measures which Pierre Blavier (2021, 4 and 13-17) illustrates in his case study as a repertoire of tricks and techniques that concern the management of alternative forms of resources embedded in what the Vests call '*système D*' ('D' stands for '*débrouille*', or 'resourcefulness'). For instance, the outdoor spaces that the family studied by Blavier has at its disposal give rise to manual maintenance jobs (gardening, mowing), but also various paid activities that play a structural role in the household's economy, such as cutting and storing wood for heating, stocking waste metal to be sold, a car yard and tools used on building sites to repair and maintain vehicles and attempts to grow vegetables. These domestic activities require time outside of the primary job, as well as physical effort.[133]

[133] My personal experience as a teenager in the French countryside (in Forcalquier, Alpes-de-Haute-Provence) has taught me that navigating tight budgets in rural spaces often involves finding alternative, non-monetary and non-capitalist ways to heat one's house (such as picking up dry wood in the forest), have access to fresh produce (growing fruits or vegetables on a plot of land or picking those which farmers forgot or neglected to collect in the fields, raising chickens and hens for meat and eggs, picking up wild, seasonal fruits such as nuts or berries) or avoiding to engage costly maintenance expenses (relying on friends' skilfulness for car or house repairs). The importance of barter is also significant (exchanging repairs or tools against vegetables for instance, or an hour of housecleaning against a haircut), which proves the extent to which these various techniques are deeply embedded in a network of friends and acquaintances.

In this context, the line between ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ is sometimes extremely thin: picking up wood or wild fruits always take place during walks in the countryside, raising chickens and hens often amuses kids and exchange of services and barter occur among friends, neighbours or acquaintances. These kind of quid pro quo can happen either in the form of an exchange of products (fruits in exchange for vegetables) or a barter of services (a session of psychotherapy in exchange for a complete housecleaning or a car repair). Furthermore, the rising costs of gas leads many workers and neighbours to carpool for short distances. Various recycling initiatives have also been undertaken in rural areas, with the development of *ressourceries*, i.e social structures that manage the recuperation, recycling and resale of goods in rural territories, raising awareness to ecological issues while proposing jobs for the socially excluded.

b). *Symbolic and existential: Intergenerational anguishes and lost hopes of upward mobility*
The other lens through which one can interpret the Yellow Vests movement as symptomatic of a crisis of social reproduction is more existential: it is tightly connected to the social and ecological future of the French population and thus deeply inscribed in the *longue durée* of French political-economic development.

First, the movement revealed the impasse of upward social mobility, with hindered trajectories of progression in terms of social class and financial means. In other words, the myth of ‘meritocracy’, i.e. a social system in which people meet success on the basis of their abilities, talents or efforts – which the traditional Right and in particular Nicolas Sarkozy, and Emmanuel Macron as well, capitalised on in their rhetoric – has been progressively deconstructed. What was perceived as a gradual loss of various forms of material and non-material entitlements resulted in *intergenerational* anguishes whereby many Vests considered

that the standards of living of their progenies will be worse off than theirs. This signalled in many ways the end of a social contract between the state and its citizens.

Second, social reproduction understood as 'the physical development of human beings' (Bakker 2003, 77) is also considered at risk due to forced ecologically degrading ways of life in a time of environmental crisis. Indeed, with the Yellow Vests, it has become 'impossible to separate the issues of environmental disaster and climate change from questions of social and political justice', a process of broadening ecological demands (…) regarding all spheres of social life, the production of counter-knowledge and the promotion of a new material culture (Chédikian et al. 2020, 879).

In discursive terms, this increasing awareness for social and ecological justice, rooted in everyday life, was reflected in one of the Gilets Jaunes' most celebrated slogan: '*fin du monde, fin du mois, même combat*' ('end of the world, end of the month, same struggle', my translation). Thus, the Vests tended to a 'redistributive, even egalitarian form of economic-ecological transformation that would advance a shift from fossil fuels by targeting corporate polluters and luxury consumption while linking green taxation to changing working conditions and mobility patterns' (Kipfer 2019, 215). Indeed, it appeared unbearable to the protesters that aeroplane's kerosene or tankers' petroleum was not taxed at all, while their daily car rides were, and heavily so. In sum, the Gilets Jaunes were able to 'subvert the frustration and sad passions of social and geographic "declassing", turning it into an economic struggle and reappropriation of the political' (Camell Gali et al. 2020, 868).

The Yellow Vests movement has given substance to the argument that 'if the unwaged also produce value, then their struggles are a key aspect of the class struggle, and can threaten the

production of value': this conflict 'can lead to major crises of reproduction appearing as dramatically falling (or rising) birth rates, urban riots, or agrarian revolts' (Caffentzis 2013, 14 and 16). The elements elaborated above were thus fundamental to the 'repoliticisation' and 'reproletarianisation' of subaltern strands of the French population, as examined in the next section.

II). Discontent, Subalternity and Reproletarianisation

This section draws on Antonio Gramsci's concept of subalternity and explores its relevance to study contemporary displays of socio-political resistance in France.

Although Gramsci often uses the term 'subaltern classes', his analysis is never reductionist. On the contrary, the Gramscian perspective underlines the colonial and racialist character of the subaltern condition that has symbolically legitimised the marginalisation suffered by Southern Italians in the aftermath of unification. The subaltern condition is thus intersectional: it designates the conjunction of numerous forms of domination and exclusion (social, gendered, ethnic, religious, spatial, cultural, territorial, etc.). In other words, the 'subaltern' is the dominated, invisibilised 'other', whose conditions are not addressed and whose fate is ignored by traditional political representation.

Subalternity and Reproletarianisation

In everyday parlance, the term 'subaltern' has come to refer widely to someone or something of an inferior rank. In the army, a subaltern is an officer whose rank is lower than captain, and who therefore takes commands from a superior.

In Gramscian thought, ‘subalternity’ is a category used to ‘identify and analyze subordinated social groups whose political activity was either ignored, misrepresented, or on the margins of dominant history’ (Green 2013, 116). In Notebook 25 – which Gramsci dedicated exclusively to the conditions and political activities of various Italian social groups – the category of subaltern is understood very widely. Far from designating exclusively the proletariat, it refers to forms of marginalisation targeted at certain groups based on their race, culture and religion as well. Indeed, subalternity in the Italian context was constituted through ‘exclusion, domination and marginality in their various forms’ (Green 2011, 388).

The concept of subaltern is a powerful lens through which relations of social domination and subordination between various social groups can be apprehended. It illuminates the mechanisms through which political and economic power are organised and defended with often brute force, but also contested and resisted with new strategies of resistance and politicisation.

Gramsci used the concept in reference primarily to the Risorgimento’s passive revolution (see Chapter VII). As Marcus Green (2013, 118-19) put it, the Risorgimento, understood as a process of national and political unification, was a ‘myth’: what took place instead was a colonisation of Southern Italy by Northern Italy, whereby ‘the dominant classes consolidated their power and territorially unified the state without a mass base and without fundamentally altering the previous social relations’. The petit bourgeois Action Party held a paternalistic attitude towards the peasant masses, who resisted the North’s authority and organised tax strikes, urban riots, land seizures and occupations, a repertoire of methods extremely similar to that of the French Yellow Vests.

Indeed, the Gilets Jaunes resorted to similar means as the political excluded Italian peasants: tax strikes (refusal of the gas tax hike), urban riots (especially on Champs Élysées and in Paris *beaux quartiers*), arson (*préfecture* in Puy-en-Velay), land seizures and occupations (especially on roundabouts) (see also previous section).

In both cases, these spontaneous forms of resistance were considered 'outbursts caused by inherent biological or mental defects' and were not viewed as 'indications of differing political projects or counter political forces' (Green 2011, 399). As Gramsci put it (Gramsci, Q25§1; SPN: 50, as cited by Green 2013, 122, emphasis mine):

> Such was the cultural habit of the time: instead of studying the origins of a collective event and the reasons why it spread, the reasons why it was collective, the protagonist was singled out and one limited oneself to writing a pathological biography (…) *For a social élite, the members of subaltern groups always have something of a barbaric or pathological nature about them*

The Yellow Vests were subjected to a similar social scorn in the French media. Initially, the seemingly anti-taxation character of the movement pleased a certain number of journalists and editorialists, but they changed their mind and stopped talking positively about the movement as soon as urban damage recurred. The tone swiftly shifted and media outlets adopted an anxiety-driven narrative about the movement, notably on 24-hours news channels such as BFMTV,[134] with often alarmist analyses produced ahead of the 'Acts' that were meant to act as self-fulfilling prophecies.

[134] See: https://www.acrimed.org/Manifestation-des-gilets-jaunes-les-editocrates (Accessed 12 February 2022).

Figure 5: 'Nope, sorry: the dress code for the redneck party is a yellow vest this year'. Xavier Gorce, *Le Monde* November 7, 2018 (my translation).

One leitmotiv consisted in presenting the Gilets Jaunes as uncultured 'rednecks', as the drawing from Xavier Gorce featured in *Le Monde* on November 7 can attest (see above). Similarly, *Libération* journalist Jean Quatremer wrote on Twitter on November 10 that the Yellow Vests were '*un mouvement de beaufs – j'ajoute poujadiste*[135] *et largement d'extrême droite*' ('a movement of rednecks – I would add poujadist and largely far right in allegiance', my translation). Journalist Yves Calvi also incessantly targeted the Vests.[136] On 18 February 2019, Bernard-Henri Lévy affirmed that the Yellow Vests movement represented 'a

[135] *Poujadisme* was a French reactionary movement formed in the 1950s by populist politician Pierre Poujade. Starting as a shopkeepers' tax protest, the Poujadist movement flourished in the last years of the IVth Republic and developed a fiercely xenophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-parliamentarian and anti-intellectual rhetoric, while supporting the cause of French Algeria. *Poujadisme* was a quintessentially petit-bourgeois movement, whose members were fearing 'proletarianisation', inasmuch as they were 'caught between the bourgeoisie proper, whose interests work agains them economically, and the proletariat, which they fear becoming and whose interests threaten their own small property capitalism' (Short 2015, 110).

[136] See: https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/medias/yves-calvi-l-anti-gilet-jaune_2060181.html
See also: https://www.arretsurimages.net/articles/gilets-jaunes-calvi-voit-rouge-1 (Accessed 12 February 2022).

minuscule fraction of the French population that pretended to be "the people"' (Europe 1 2019, my translation). Accusations of antisemitism, racism and homophobia also abounded.

Furthermore, the media consistently reduced the movement to looting and violence, eclipsing the reasons for anger. Accordingly, the Vests emphasised the *mépris de classe* ('class contempt') with which they were being addressed. Emmanuel Macron himself used discriminatory language, deploring on 31 January 2019 that '*Jojo avec un gilet jaune a le même statut qu'un ministre ou un député*' ('Jojo with a Yellow Vest has the same status as a minister or a MP', my translation) on TV sets (RTL 2019). Often, 'class struggle was confused with brigandage' (Green 2015, 159). In late nineteenth century Italy, the popular movement was met with a strong security response, with the deployment of over 100,000 troops to violently suppress the revolts of 'brigands', an initiative supported by Northern conservatives as well as progressives and liberals (ibid). Thus, no less than 89,000 policemen and gendarmes were mobilised on 8 December 2018 (Le Monde 2018c).

For Gramsci, marginal groups are inclined to act according to 'an incoherent conglomeration of ideas drawn from "common sense", such as everyday experience, popular science, folklore, traditional conceptions of the world' (Green 2015, 157): indeed, the beginnings of the mobilisation led many commentators to believe that the Vests were an aggregate of *poujadistes*, anti-taxation business owners who reacted both to the gas tax hike and to Macron's arrogance. A social mobilisation becomes politically meaningful by developing what Gramsci calls 'conscious direction', so that subaltern groups transform their 'common sense' into 'good sense' (i.e. a vision of the world informed with elements of historical and critical awareness). In the case of the Gilets Jaunes, this conscious direction came

progressively, as problems linked to social justice, environmental degradation, wealth redistribution and participative democracy came to the fore.

Progressively, the Gilets Jaunes operated a shift from the refusal of the carbon tax to more general demands and a rejection of constituted power – i.e. the resignation of the President – and the movement thus expressed both the *reproletarianisation* and the *repoliticisation* of significant sections of the lower and middle classes. Indeed, these social strata were affected 'by the psycho-economic suffering brought about by neoliberalism and by the gradual phasing out of all attempts at social and geographical mobility, two closely linked dimensions in a centralized country like France' (Camell Gali et al. 2020, 868). This 'reappropriation of the class struggle' took the form of a 'reappropriation of political experience' (ibid, 872) which entailed the sharing of multiple experiences of injustice and the readiness of the poorest social classes to fight for socio-economic dignity and democratic renewal, with the practice of direct democracy and the invention of new common institutions – with fierce debates about the RIC, in particular, a major means to reclaim and revitalise democracy that constituted a concrete, genuine institutional vindication on which the movement was based.

Against this background, the movement's self-organisation has been remarkable, with profound transformative effects on many formerly depoliticised citizens. It made the Yellow Vests 'encounter co-protestors while sharing experiences of mobilization and forging common perspectives, rebuilding social ties, claiming public space and mobilizing passions of solidarity, generosity and self-determination' (Kipfer 2019, 222). This gave way to a reappropriation of space: the revolt did not occupy the traditional spaces of struggle such as factories, offices and shops, but rather the tollbooth and roundabouts (Bantigny 2020, 863), where protesters gathered, socialised and organised. Concrete propositions for unification

followed suit even after the movement receded, with the January 2020 ‘Commune des communes’ in Commercy (Lorraine region).

Furthermore, repoliticisation also entailed an increasing awareness of environmental issues. Indeed, the ecological stakes were very present in the movement, and consistently tied to a politics of equality (Bantigny 2020, 861). Ecological grievances included the opposition against all forms of privatisations of strategic infrastructures such as airports, dams or forestry management organisations. The Gilets Jaunes have thus introduced ‘a new radicality to traditional ecological organizations in terms of the modes of action and watchwords that they use’ (Chédikian et al. 2020, 883). This means that climate justice can take place beyond legality, and the division between city and country in French ecology should be overcome. As Chédikian et al. (2020, 884) put it, the main question raised by the Yellow Vests is the following: who should pay in the fight against climate change?

Finally, the repoliticisation of large sections of the French lower classes was a reaction against *violence*, be it social violence (with 14 per cent of the French living under the poverty threshold) or police violence (with serious injuries and fractures suffered by protesters and even the death of an 80-years-old woman, Zineb Redouane, in Marseille on 2 December, 2018). The ‘link between socio-economic injustice and state repression’ (Kipfer 2019, 222) became increasingly clear with the brutality of the police and state apparatus, and tactics exported from the stratagems used to contain unrest in the French *banlieues*. As studied below, this shared experience of police violence created new solidarities with many non-white inhabitants and established concrete points of convergence among Yellow Vests and anti-racist militants.

Spatial Segregation and the French Banlieues

Indirectly, the Gilets Jaunes movement shed light on other forms of spatial segregation that were thus far largely ignored by political activists and organisers, except when sporadic conflicts with the police erupted, as in the 'riots' that occurred in the years 2005 and 2007 in the French *banlieues*. The '*quartiers*' are suburbs located in the direct outskirts of large metropolises that have been segregated on social, economic, political and racial grounds since the 1970s. From the 1950s to the 1970s, housing shortages following war destructions, the development of urban slums and several waves of immigration led successive governments to undertake the construction of huge housing projects outside large French cities. Although rarely talked about in depth in the media, these suburban spaces are very densely populated: thus, 80 per cent of the inhabitants of Paris metropolitan area live outside of the city.

Today, the word *banlieues* has become pejorative and refers to low-income housing projects (HLM) populated by many French citizens of foreign descent. Etymologically, the word *banlieues* signifies '*lieux du ban*' ('places of banishment'), i.e. peripheral and stigmatised spaces where the poorest citizens are banished and isolated. Although the situation in the French *banlieues* is extremely variegated, some towns suffer from a lack of public services, the dereliction of public and private buildings and municipal infrastructures, and from a process of spatial enclosure that breeds higher unemployment rates and the development of illegal trafficking. Yet, the situation of French *banlieues* is extremely varied and popular depiction of these territories often lacks nuance. Even before the intense riots of 2005 and 2007, most media analyses of events unfolding in the *banlieues* were already depicting them as peripheral spaces concentrating societal issues such as unemployment, crime, insecurity and academic failure (Garcin Marrou 2007, 25). Thus, although these neighbourhoods experience multiple social and economic *problématiques*, essentialist discourses about the

banlieues abound, so do prejudices relayed by biased media and politicians since the 1980s, when *banlieues* were turned into France's major social problem.

The concentration of socio-economic difficulties in French '*quartiers*' started in the 1970s, when middle-classes families left housing projects to live in detached houses. In parallel, policies of family reunification for foreign workers that followed the 1974 decision to restrict new arrivals led many commentators, housing associations and policymakers to argue that the French suburbs would experience similar processes of 'ghettoization' as those experienced in North American cities ('black ghettos'). This, in turn, fostered the development of what has been dubbed '*politique de la ville*' ('urban policy') in 1977. '*Politique de la ville*' was first and foremost an ensemble of policies targeted at the French suburbs – which were often euphemistically dubbed '*sensible*' ('sensitive') or '*prioritaire*' ('priority') – instead of developing a cohesive urban planning strategy (Blanc 2007, 71-74). The lens of analysis was misleading from the beginning: instead of envisaging the segregation at play in French '*grands ensembles*' ('housing projects') as somehow akin to the ghettoization processes observed in the United States, one should rather inscribe these dynamics in the colonial and postcolonial history of the former French empire (Kipfer 2012).

From the 1990s onwards, several incidents and upheavals in the *banlieues* illuminated the state of relegation of these areas. In 1990, a young man was killed following a police 'blunder' in Vaux-en-Velin (close to Lyon), triggering riots in an area that was deemed a successful example of '*politique de la ville*'. In a symbolic response, the French government created the *'Ministère de la ville'* (Ministry of City Affairs), a rather light structure which did not bring more cohesion or financial means to *politique de la ville*. Thus, while only 50 neighbourhoods were concerned in 1977, this number was multiplied by fifteen in the early

2000s (750 neighbourhoods), without significant extra financial means (Blanc 2007, 75-77). The main economic component to *politique de la ville* was the creation of *Zones Franches Urbaines* (ZFU) from 1997 to 2006, whose socio-economic impact on 'sensitive neighbourhoods' has been modest at best, if not counter-productive.[137]

These events were presented in the French press as 'barbaric' and 'savage' scenes of 'urban guerrilla' (as in *Le Figaro*), discursively constructing the angst of the young people in *banlieues* as deviant, marginal and removed from the socio-political mainstream (Garcin Marrou 2007, 33). Similar derogatory terms were used in *Le Monde* and *La Croix*, presenting 'the youth' as threatening and violent, displaying impressive photographs of damage that justified the security response and social control advocated by political authorities, whereas *Libération* and *L'Humanité* presented young people first and foremost as victims of violence and repression (ibid, 35).[138] The aim of this reactionary media treatment was clear: to depoliticise the anger of the young inhabitants of the *banlieues* – who felt marginalised on

[137] Zones Franches Urbaines were implemented in three waves (1997, 2004, 2006) with the aim to incentivise private firms to settle and create jobs in 100 selected dispossessed neighbourhoods where unemployment rates were high, through a system of tax exemptions that cost more than 500 million euros in 2009 (Givord and Trevien 2012). Although the ZFU system bolstered economic activities in the first years of implementation, its impact was much more limited after 2002, and even more so after 2004, when it was estimated that half of the new firms' settlements came from companies that simply relocated their offices in order to benefit from tax exemptions, without creating new jobs in the affected areas.

[138] In echo to the rather biased media treatment, it is interesting to notice a gradual shift in the perspective of French movies that depict the experience of police violence in the *banlieues*. Thus, while Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995) chronicles the life of three young inhabitants of *banlieues* and adopts a very critical stance towards police violence, Ladj Ly's *Les Misérables* (2019) adopts both the perspective of *banlieues* youngsters and that of the police squad, while its scenario tends to contextualise and legitimise the police officers' (accidental) abusive use of force. The most recent movie that evokes suburbs' inhabitants/police relationships was Cédric Jimenez's *Bac Nord* (2020) that adopts solely the point of view of three policemen from Brigade Anti-Criminalité in their fight against – and later embezzlement in – drug trafficking in Marseille's northern districts. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, young people from the banlieues have thus been pictured as increasingly more violent in French cinema as well. However, the feminist turn in *banlieues* cinema production shifted away from this focus on violence – as in Cécile Sciamma's *Bande de filles* (2014) or Houda Benyamina's *Divines* (2016) – to engage with the challenges of coming-of-age females in the French urban periphery, attesting to the profoundly gendered representations that still structure the public and artistic vision of French *banlieues*.

socio-economic and political grounds and vulnerable to police violence and arbitrary arrests – by reducing it to individual acts of delinquency as opposed to spontaneous forms of collective resistance.

Since then, *politique de la ville* continued its modest course of action, promoting '*mixité sociale*' (a term not directly translatable in English), i.e. a combination of measures aimed at financially valuing the social housing stock with the purpose of favouring the relocation of middle-classes families in *quartiers*. To achieve the ideal of 'social mixity', the 2003 Borloo Law introduced large-scale demolition and redevelopment projects (Horvath 2019, 135). Yet, this had the adverse effect of socially de-structuring working-class neighbourhoods and favouring the intervention of police and paramilitary forces in mostly non-white locales in an attempt to prevent the dialectical formation of socio-territorial solidarities among subaltern social groups (Kipfer 2012). In the mid-2010s, debate over *banlieues* became concerned with home-grown terrorism and discourses pointed at the causal relationship between the failed social mobility of *banlieues* youth and their radicalisation. As Christina Horvath (2019, 139) point out, Emmanuel Macron alluded to the responsibility of French society for letting a *terreau* ('breeding ground') develop on which Islamic radicalisation could prosper in a speech that followed the terrorist attacks of 2015, mentioning the luxury of France's increasingly endogamous elites to live away from the locations where 'the Republic had surrendered' and social mobility had faded away.

Anti-racism, Repoliticisation and Convergence

As previously elaborated, Gramsci never reduced subalternity to class. His analysis of subalternity in Italian society was rooted in the semi-colonial nature of the Italian state. Theories of Southern inferiority (stemming from the ideology of 'Southernism') were erected

in an attempt to hinder political solidarity between Northern workers and Southern peasants. Thus, Southern Italians were depicted as biologically inferior and barbaric; it was argued that their upheavals were not due to unfair political conditions but to race, biology and their propensity for immorality and criminality (Green 2013, 120). These racist theories therefore contributed to 'the depoliticization, disempowerment and subordination of Southerners' (ibid, 121): indeed, the subaltern condition is intertwined with national and colonial processes and with the power of intellectuals in shaping culture and political discourse.

The insistence on '*mixité*' – with the implication that urban neighbourhoods be not 'mixed-income' but 'mixed-race' is a particular hallmark of French racism, insofar as it intends to demonstrates that French cities and society are not racist. For Claire Hancock (2021, 261-69), the phrase 'racism by denial' is fitting in France, where the very term 'race' has become taboo and been removed from all legislation – including the Preamble of the Constitution, where it was used to state that no discrimination on the basis of race, among other criteria, should exist. Indeed, no country has gone further than France to maintain colour-blindness, remove the vocabulary pertaining to race and legally prohibit the collection of data on race – as they are considered dangerous for social cohesion – thus making it impossible to articulate the pervasion of racism, substantiate discrimination, quantify racial segregation and discuss the racialised impact of gentrification. This is due in large part to the fact that the Republican citizen is expected to be individual, abstract and universal, with no legally recognised community attachments or organised 'communities' based on religion or ethnic origin. Therefore 'action taken by Republican movements against racism are strictly colour-blind, in accordance with Article 1 of the French Constitution' (Martin 2019, 110). Yet, the language of the Republic is highly malleable and may also be used as rhetorical cover for any political position, including ones that stigmatise and exclude minority populations (see Chapter III on

Nicolas Sarkozy and 'neo-republicanism' and Emmanuel Macron's depiction of *banlieues* as locations where the Republic 'has surrendered', above)

In recent years, however, a conjunction of national factors -– the public stigma of immigrants and French people of foreign descent by the far-right, the Yellow Vests movement, the light shun on brutal and sometimes deadly identity checks and arrests by the police of Black and Arab individuals in France – and global factors – the marked but tacit refusal to welcome non-white refugees, the criminalisation of solidarity for migrants, the transnational waves of protests following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis – has reinvigorated anti-racist movements in France.[139]

As with the Yellow Vests movement, the renewal of anti-racism in France was triggered by a new usage of social media, allowing for the spread of feminist and anti-racist speeches from both activists and politically unexperienced individuals. Yet, these testimonies and grievances were often relayed and shared by transnational networks of activists, journalists, scholars who mobilised in the face of the reactionary backlash of the 2010s (Hajjat 2021, 24). In reaction to

[139] Until the end of the 2010s, anti-racist organisations in France were roughly divided into two tendencies that adopted divergent positions on Republicanism. The mainstream, consensus seeking anti-racist organisations – *SOS Racisme* (that has strong historical ties with PS), *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, Ligue Internationale Contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme* – consider that racism is antithetical to the egalitarian values of the Republic and that it should be fought through a reassertion of these values of individual freedom and secularism. Indeed, they promote a liberal form of multiculturalism and *social mixité*, as ethnic difference and communautarianism are considered ideologically at odds with the Republic. By contrast, the *Mouvement des Indigènes de la République*, created in 2005 by a group of anti-colonial and radical Left activists, argues that the French Republic was historically responsible for the 'forced civilisation' of supposedly 'inferior races' during the colonial period. Pointing to the imperial aspect of the French social formation, they believe that universalist principles and the 'colour-blind' response to racial discrimination constitute a denial of social reality, as they maintain that the status of *indigénat* (whereby non-white inhabitants of the French colonies were denied full citizenship) continues to haunt the French Republic. Thus, they consider that 'the Republic is not a safeguard against racial inequalities; it is fundamentally based on racial inequalities' (Martin 2019, 114). Future research should attempt to analyse the discourses and references mobilised by *Comité Vérité et Justice pour Adama* in order to more accurately determine the movement's militant and ideological lineage against the background of these two historical trajectories of French anti-racism.

the public smothering of political subjectivities, anti-racist militants have thus resorted to social networks and virtual space to organise and support each other (Hancock 2021, 262): the online sphere was thus the medium and arena through which new forms of organising and politicising took shape.

The catalyst to these mobilisations has been the ubiquity of racist impunity – with recurrent judicial dismissal of racist offences, the liberation of racist speeches in the media and among politicians – and police violence (see next section), in a context of extra-legality following regressive anti-terror legislations adopted in the aftermath of the 2015-2016 attacks in Paris and Nice. For Abdellali Hajjat (2021, 28), while the contemporary predicament cannot be conflated with the former colonial situation, the current state of police impunity is a reminiscence and a 'postcolonial prolongation' of the French past. Yet, it was only recently, with the brutal repression of the Gilets Jaunes protests (see next section), that the struggle against police violence has expanded beyond the working-class *banlieues.*

The *Comité Vérité et Justice pour Adama* ('Committee Truth and Justice for Adama') has been at the forefront of the joint struggle against racism and police violence. On 19 July 2016, Adama Traoré, a 24-years-old Black construction worker from Beaumont-sur-Oise (Val-d'Oise), was killed after an arrest by three gendarmes in his hometown. Since then, Assa Traoré – Adama's sister – has been leading the movement demanding justice for her brother and other victims of police violence (such as Lamine Dieng, who died in 2007 after a police arrest in central Paris, Gaye Camara, who died after a police intervention in Epinay-sur-Seine in 2018, or Ibrahima Ba, who died after a police arrest in Villiers-le-Bel in 2019) through this collective. Assa Traoré's Comité found a large echo in sections of French youth in 2018, 2019 and 2020. Foregrounding of minorities took place at the June 2018 Paris Pride for instance,

which began with a banner ‘Queer, trans, racialized against homonationalism’, or on the May 26th ‘*Marée Populaire*’ (‘People’s Tide’) led by the Comité Adama (Hancock 2021, 264). On 2 June 2020, more than 20,000 protestors demonstrated outside of Paris High Court to demand justice for Adama.

Indeed, common experiences of police repression greatly facilitated a convergence between the Yellow Vests and young inhabitants of colour of the *banlieues.* During a public speech she gave in Beaumont-sur-Oise on 21 July 2019, Assa Traoré asserted that members of the committee ‘did not join the Gilets Jaunes’, as she contended that ‘in the *banlieue*, we have been Gilets Jaunes for forty years’. She thus powerfully highlighted a significant overlap with regards to, as well as growing solidarity between, the forms of activism and police backlash faced by both French racial minorities and the pauperised Yellow Vests – a certain number of whom, including Priscillia Ludosky and Maxime Nicolle (Chollez and Segura 2019), made the trip to Beaumont-sur-Oise. This signalled the embryonic formation of a community of fate based on experiences of territoriality and everyday life in the French socio-economic and political margins.

Both the Yellow Vests and anti-racist organisations carried new, innovative ways of speaking of class, gender and race issues in France. Indeed, ‘the violence of police repression the Gilets Jaunes encountered when they made inroads into the privileged parts of central Paris contributed to the sense of a common condition, and common experiences, with inhabitants of the peripheries of the city, the *banlieues*, where such police action, maiming, repressing, and sometimes killing, has been the norm for decades’ (Hancock 2021, 268). Thus, the Gilets Jaunes who, for the most part, had never experienced such harsh levels of state violence, suddenly realised that they, too, were part of the subaltern sections of the French citizenry.

For activist Youcef Brakni (2019, 35-37), it was because the Vests were not engaged in political parties and because their grievances revolved around misery and living conditions that solidarity towards the movement quickly grew in the *banlieues*, which led many militants and organisations (Action Anti-fasciste Paris-Banlieue, train workers, but also trade unions and political parties such as Nouveau Parti Anti-capitaliste and La France Insoumise) to join during Act III, on 1 December 2018, although people from the *banlieues* did not go on the Champs Élysées (where they would have been the prime targets of police violence) but mobilised instead within their neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the movement was partly built thanks to people of colour – Priscillia Ludosky, who as a Black woman inspired and galvanised rural and peri-urban dwellers alike – and the symbol of convergence on the struggles against economic precariousness and police violence became Zineb Redouane – an 80-year-old Algerian woman who was hit by a tear gas canister as she was watching a demonstration from her window in Marseille, and who died in hospital in December 2018.

Ever wider sections of the white proletariat have therefore realised that the forms of violence that they had suffered during the movement were targeting racial minorities and migrants in France for decades, and that the *banlieues* and *quartiers populaires* – which Youcef Brakni (2019, 39) deemed 'the laboratory of authoritarianism' – were also experiencing social difficulties and marginalisation, as the rural, peri-urban and so-called 'peripheral' territories. Thus, a shimmering piece of fabric that one puts on to be visible in case of a road emergency has become a striking symbol of social, economic and political emergency, the symbol of a movement 'of all colours' that denounced a global history of oppression (Jonsson 2019, 58). The next section examines the police and institutional backlash to these insurrections in more detail.

III). Emergency, Securitisation and the French State

This last section examines the repertoire of repression engineered by the French state to tackle the increasingly violent protests that spanned from the fall of 2018 to the winter of 2020. It does so by pointing at the historical trajectory of law enforcement in France and intends to demonstrate how this is today intertwined with the strategy of 'authoritarian anti-populism', i.e. a mode of governance from above that seeks to build its legitimacy on the moral necessity to position 'against the extremes', even if this comes with the cost of restricting public liberties and strengthening the security state.

These developments are inscribed in a larger repressive cycle, one that has led to the securitisation of a large repertoire of collective action and that took advantage of the regime of 'exception' that was created through multiple anti-terrorist legislations (i.e. the state of emergency) to repress and dissuade the French from taking the streets and expressing their grievances.

Police Repression and Authoritarian Anti-Populism

French law enforcement strategies were reinforced following the three-week-long riots in the suburbs in 2005. Despite the breadth of the revolt and significant material damage – 300 townships involved and 200-million-euro worth of damages – there were no seriously injured or deceased individuals in the ranks of the protesters, nor in those of the police: 'no one died' was the authorities' mantra.[140] For Fabien Jobard (2015, 76-77), the official narrative was that of the absence of an 'illegitimate use of force' thanks to the excellence of French police

[140] French Minister of Foreign Affairs Michèle Alliot-Marie was so proud of this outcome that she controversially proposed, on 12 January 2011, the assistance of French law enforcement specialists to Tunisia's dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali – a personal friend of her – when his country was home to the protests that ignited the Arab Spring (Le Monde 2011).

forces, and indeed television journalists did not document any such abuse of power nor any humiliating words on the part of law enforcement officers.

Since the 1970s, the law enforcement strategy's legitimacy rests on the 'immutability of the riot' (Jobard 2015, 78). This follows a familiar scheme: a violent event between police forces and inhabitants provokes a series of clash with young people in their neighbourhood of residence, occasioning a degradation of public and private goods. Yet, these clashes remain for the most part sedentary: they take place within the restricted perimeter of the *quartier* and seldom reach the city centre, let alone large French metropolises, that hold the most value from a commercial and patrimonial standpoint.

Yet, the end of the 2010s has born witness to an intensification and an increasing visibility of law enforcement's violence in France. Indeed, the United Nations Human Rights Commission expressed its concerns on 6 March 2019, condemning the excessive use of force observed during the Gilets Jaunes protests and calling France to reform its law enforcement policies (Mauger 2019, 109).

Two main factors explain this stiffening of law enforcement strategies:

1). *An increased militarisation of law enforcement*

Multiple reports produced in the aftermath of the 2005 riots recommended to improve the equipment of law enforcement officers, both in terms of surveillance – helicopters, drones and sophisticated flash lights – and of offensive means – with the provision of blast balls (LBD 40) in addition to the traditionally used 'flash balls', sting-ball grenades and the (re)-

formation of police motorcycling teams.[141] The police's armament was reinforced under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy – despite significant cuts in the number of police officers for budgetary reasons – but it was under Emmanuel Macron's presidency that the binomial motorcycle teams – *Brigade de répression de l'action violente motorisée* (BRAV-M) – were reintroduced by Paris prefect Didier Lallement in March 2019.

One structuring element to the militarisation of French police forces that accounts for more brutality in law enforcement was the creation of *Brigade Anti-Criminalité* (BAC, 'crime squad'), first at the departmental level in 1971, and then reorganised nationally in 1992. The BAC were created by Pierre Bolotte, the former prefect of Algiers from 1955 to 1958 (in office during the 1957 'Battle of Algiers') and of Guadeloupe from 1965 to 1967 (where he brutally repressed the May 1967 strikes, shooting and killing protesters, the real number of casualties being still unknown). From 1969 to 1974, Bolotte became the first prefect of the newly created department of Seine-Saint-Denis (93), where his colonial expertise served him to create and train the pioneering unit of law enforcement in the (mostly non-white) French suburbs. Thus, the repressive practices used in a colonial context in both Algeria and Guadeloupe strongly informed the conduct of law enforcement in the French *banlieues*, before extending to law enforcement throughout France in the second half of the 2010s.

[141] Formed after May 68, police motorcycling teams (so-called '*voltigeurs*') were dissolved in the late 1980s, following the death of 22 year-old French-Algerian student Malik Oussekine, a simple bystander who happened to be exiting a jazz club in Quartier Latin at the same time as a protest against Law Devaquet (named after Prime Minister Jacques Chirac's Minister of Higher Education) was being dispersed. Malik Oussekine was beaten to death by police officers, and his murder precipitated the downfall of the bill, the resignation of Minister Alain Devaquet and the dissolution of the *voltigeurs*.

The formation and multiplication of 'commando-style' units such as BAC largely contributed to a marked militarisation of French law enforcement. This militarisation took two main forms:

a). *The doctrine of 'projection'*: The end of the 2000s bore witness to a reorganisation of BAC, with the creation of 'departmental sections' ('BAC-D') who did not specialise on a limited terrain or a strictly delineated perimeter anymore. Instead, the scale of intervention became 'infra-departmental', that is, the BAC could be 'projected' wherever their action was required, losing the detailed knowledge of the complex social reality of neighbourhoods or constituencies where they previously were exclusively detached. As Fabien Jobard (2015, 85) noted, this is problematic because members of BAC are manoeuvring in locations further remote from their hierarchy, on terrain that they barely know and where they are therefore more likely to use force indiscriminately. These *Détachement d'Action Rapide* (DAR) proved responsible for the huge majority of harmful flash-ball shots against the Yellow Vests protesters throughout 2018-2019 (Streetpress 2019: 14'30).

b). *The generalisation of 'non-lethal weapons'*: In 1995, Director general of national police Claude Guéant –Nicolas Sarkozy's future Minister of the Interior – introduced the 'flash ball' (a so-called 'less-lethal weapon' produced by French hunting firearms manufacturer Verney-Carron), whose use was supposed to be restricted to self-defence. From 2002 to 2009, the use of the flash-ball was generalised to police units who intervened in *quartiers sensibles* under the leadership of Nicolas Sarkozy, both as Minister of the Interior and President of the Republic.

In November 2007, a new wave of riots erupted in the French suburbs following the death of two teenagers – 15-years-old Moushin Sehhouli and 16-years-old Laramy Samoura – who

were hit by a police car on a motorbike during a chase. Simultaneously, a large student movement erupted against the 'Pécresse law', i.e. Liberties and Responsibilities of Universities (*Loi relative aux libertés et responsabilités des universités*, LRU). To counter these separate but parallel revolts, the French government secretly experienced the use of LBD 40, a powerful defence-ball launcher (of a speed of over 300 kilometres per hour and a shooting distance of over 50 metres) with a much higher accuracy than that of traditional flash-balls. This led sociologist Pierre Douillard (Streetpress 2019, 16'23 to 23') to argue that France is witnessing 'a gradual fading of the boundary between a war operation and a law enforcement operation', drawing a parallel between the means being used in the French 'peace-keeping' operation in Central African Republic – armoured vehicles and rubber bullets – and those being used to repress protesters in the French suburbs and beyond, with a move from the use of tear gas to push back a collective movement towards the act of shooting individual bodies, increasingly marking flesh, targeting the head, the back, or the genitals.

In the face of sundry and intensifying demonstrations and strikes, recent strategies of law enforcement in France have thus been characterised by the use and abuse of 'non-lethal' or 'less-lethal' weapons – tear gas, explosive grenades, rubber bullets, water cannons – the very availability of these weapons leading to an increasing brutality of crowd control. As Paul Rocher (2021) notes, journalists, NGOs, demonstrators and bystanders with smartphones have provided a mounting catalogue of evidence of police brutality, with violent practices that have been 'part of everyday life in the poorest neighbourhoods of France for decades – where it targeted the black and Arab minorities in a highly disproportionate fashion'. During the 2010s these brutal police practices were extended to social movements, i.e. environmental activists, unions and eventually the Gilets Jaunes protests. Indeed, the French state mobilised a lot of resources to tackle the movement – LBD 40, sting-ball grenades GLI-F4, armoured vehicles

and water cannons, tear gas – so much so that according to the Ministry of the Interior, 2,060 protesters had been injured as of 4 February, 2019 (Mauger 2019, 109).

2). *A shift in the repertoire of protests and in their legal repercussions*

As the eruption of the Yellow Vests protesters in Paris' *beaux quartiers* – and the large-scale degradation and looting that ensued – attested, the previous repertoire of action has tremendously shifted in the span of a decade and a half: the riot form is not confined to peripheral suburbs anymore, but extends far beyond the urban fringes to reach peri-urban zones and the very centres of economic and symbolic power.

The brutality of police violence was not the only adaptation to this new reality, as the repressive *dispositif* deployed to depoliticise collective action and discourage the French from publicly voicing their grievances by fear of state reprisals extended to the judiciary. A judicial and administrative arsenal was also exploited, as attested by the generalisation of *comparutions* immédiates, i.e. very rapid 'immediate trials' (30 minutes on average) during which protesters are sentenced on the very day of their arrests, often without parole despite the limited speaking time of the defendants. Thus, between November 2018 and June 2019, 3,000 Yellow Vests have been sentenced, including one third without parole (Codaccioni 2021, 53).

The administrative machine also responded to the turmoil, with prefectural bans on protests alongside the mobilisation of intelligence services and the sporadic deployment of anti-terrorist military officers of the Opération Sentinelle[142] to 'protect' selected public spaces.

[142] *Opération Sentinelle* is a French military operation that started on 12 January 2015, following the 7 to 9 January 2015 terrorist attacks in the Ile-de-France region. With 10,000 soldiers and 4,700 policemen and gendarmes deployed throughout France, Opération Sentinelle is part of the measures of exception allowed by the state of emergency.

According to Vanessa Codaccioni (2021, 47), these elements are shaping a new logic of *répression préventive* ('pre-emptive repression', or 'arrest on suspicion'), whereby some protesters are arrested before the beginning of the demonstration (thanks to Article 78-2-2, born out of two years of state of emergency, that gives a disproportionate power to police forces to apprehend bystanders and demonstrators).

All this was reinforced by a culture of impunity in law enforcement, with a denial of police violence on the part of Minister of the Interior Christophe Castaner during the Yellow Vests protests. Indeed, there is an obvious conflict of interest in the fact that the *Inspection Générale de la Police Nationale* (IGPN), i.e. the French police disciplinary body, is being administered by policemen. Thus, while more than 200 queries for alleged episodes of police violence had been brought to the IGPN in April 2019, no policemen had been suspended or officially questioned (Mauger 2019, 109). Meanwhile, the large availability of footage showing instances of police violence on the internet led to a vast acknowledgement of the problem, in spite of the initial silence of the news media on this topic.

What is more, the French authorities have engaged in a criminalisation of protest. Thus, Christophe Castaner declared on 11 January 2019 that 'those who would go protest will be considered accomplices of the hooligans' (Nice Matin 2019). The aim of this state offensive was to directly answer a movement whose magnitude and politically destabilising potential surprised the French elites. Yet, for Codaccioni (2021, 48), the violence of the repression is also inscribed in a larger cycle, one that illustrates the simultaneousness of three self-reinforcing punitive logics: 'the pre-emptive logic, the depoliticisation process and the willingness to punish'.

All these elements are consistent with the logic of 'authoritarian anti-populism'. The chosen method of government through crisis since the beginning of the Gilets Jaunes movement works and mobilises through *fear and anxiety* – towards what Emmanuel Macron himself indiscriminately called *une foule haineuse* (a 'hateful mob') on his 31 December 2018 speech – with the implication that the protesters were driven by the willingness to destabilise the state and its institutions, assimilating protesters to thugs and looters, purposefully conflating opposition with irrationality. A prime manifestation of this logic has been the law n° 2019-290, or '*Loi visant à renforcer et garantir le maintien de l'ordre public lors des manifestants*', colloquially known as '*Loi anti-casseurs*' ('anti-rioters law'), promulgated by the Philippe government on 10 April 2019. The law increased the power of police forces to check individuals before and during protests (Article 2), banned face coverings during protests (Article 6) and made more severe the participation to unlawful protests (Article 7).

Thus doing, the French government depleted and delegitimised the traditional channels of democratic expression, i.e. the right to participate in peaceful protests and assemblies. In lieu of proposing economic responses to social crises, the French government strove to intensify the repression of dissent and the depoliticisation of socio-economic grievances. This is far from being a new tendency, as the depoliticisation of oppositional activism has been common in France since the nineteenth century, with discursive strategies aiming to stigmatise, disparage and delegitimise popular vindications and to assimilate political activism to terrorism (Codaccioni 2021, 50). Old discursive strategies and new legislative arrangements therefore led the French government to securitise more and more elements of the social in order to sustain the legitimacy of its regime.

The logic of this state response is reinforced on the media by editorialists and politicians. Former Minister of Education Luc Ferry thus declared the following on *Radio Classique* on 8 January 2019 (Ouest-France 2019):

> Frankly, when you see lads who are kicking an unfortunate policeman on the floor… They should use their guns once and for all. This is enough![143] (my translation)

These aggressive and moralising stances in the media legitimised the ferocious repression of the movement throughout the winter months of 2018-2019, with more than 2,500 wounded protestors, including 24 protestors who had been blinded and 5 protesters whose hands were torn off, a testimony to the indiscriminate and disproportional use of LBD 40 and grenades in demonstrations (Amnesty International 2019b). This proves that 'non-lethal weapons' are not only a technical choice but part of a political project. For Paul Rocher (2021), the neoliberal project's crisis of hegemony explains the attractiveness of this type of armament: the intensification of exploitation and inequalities makes it difficult for governments 'to obtain the consent of a significant proportion of the population. In reaction, coercion comes to the fore', hence the large-scale recourse to 'non-lethal weapons' as a neoliberal means to maintain social order. The next section places these elements in a wider historical context of securitisation and constitutionalising of emergency.

Securitisation and Constitutionalising Emergency

The securitisation of French society is a massive, structural trend that can best be measured in the *longue durée*.

[143] 'Ecoutez franchement, quand on voit des types qui tabassent à coups de pied un malheureux policier qui est par terre. Qu'ils se servent de leurs armes une bonne fois. Ça suffit !'. Luc Ferry, 8 January 2019 (Ouest France 2019).

The concept of securitisation was born in the early 1990s out of the work of the so-called 'Copenhagen School' of International Relations, identified with scholars such as Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. The aim of this approach was, for Wæver (1995, 46-48) to deconstruct the traditional conceptions of security, which posited that (1) security was a 'reality prior to language', whose meaning was therefore uncontested and (2) that 'the more security, the better', i.e. the realm of security should encompass not just the military but larger areas of social life, larger aspects of the social and political agenda should be 'securitised'.

Debunking these common-sensical arguments with language theory, Wæver (1995, 54-57) argued that one should consider security as (1) a *speech act* through which a threat is defined as existential, i.e. as a challenge to sovereignty and even to the *survival* of the state unit. Thus, 'in naming a certain development a security problem, the "state" can claim a special right, one that will, in the final instance, always be defined by the state and its elites'. In consequence, the state would not be limited in what it could or might do to tackle this menace.

The spiral that ensues consists in (2) broadening the security agenda through the implementation of specific measures in response to the security problems: 'urgency; state power claiming the legitimate use of extraordinary means; a threat seen as potentially undercutting sovereignty, thereby preventing the political "we" from dealing with other questions' (Wæver 1995, 51). Thus, using the security label is always a decision to conceptualise an issue through a specific angle, it is always a political choice that opens the door to specific state-centred ways of addressing a certain problem. To put it differently, the transformation of a given social problem into a security issue allows for the recourse to specific *means* and, thus doing, often depoliticises the management of the social question into a mere security issue.

As a speech act, securitisation works like a grammar that creates a series of exclusions and closures. There are three main components to the securitisation grammar: (1) oligarchisation of decision-making procedures, as illustrated by the infamously opaque and centralised '*Conseils de Défense*' ('defence councils') presided by Emmanuel Macron during the Covid-19 pandemic, (2) closure of political options (i.e. there is no alternative to what the elites are proposing to tackle a security issue) and (3) a drastic restriction of public deliberation. Indeed, the security agenda is considered too sensitive to be open to public debate and contestation, this is for instance the case for the treatment of terrorism in France, where political reactions and the means employed are subjected to the logic of common sense: they *go without saying*. At stake is the *durability* of the mechanisms implemented to answer the security problem, as the latter tend to depoliticise the issue (through the grammar of 'emergency' and the extra-legal measures that are being deployed in its name) and offer simplistic technical solutions to complex problems (through techno-solutionism, surveillance and repression).

Gradually, the grammar of securitisation has extended beyond concerns defined in strictly material or physical terms (i.e. the physical harm potentially caused by terrorist attacks, the unrest and destruction potentially caused by protests) to enter the realm of the 'societal' through the construction of security threats to the very *identity* of the French population. Ole Wæver (1995, 63-67) had anticipated this development by suggesting a re-conceptualisation of the security fields 'in terms of a duality of *state* security and *societal* security. State security has *sovereignty* as its ultimate criterion, and societal security has *identity*. Both usages imply survival'. The increasing salience of 'societal (in)security' carries the idea that there are 'situations in which significant groups within a society feel threatened, feel their identity is endangered by immigration, integration, or cultural imperialism, and try to defend themselves' (ibid, 67).

Constructing this kind of 'existential' societal threat to the survival of the 'native French population' has been the preserve of the far-right in the person of Marine Le Pen (RN), and in the most recent, extreme iteration of 'far-right civilizationism' (Stewart 2020), in the person of fascist pundit Éric Zemmour and his conspiracy theory of the '*grand remplacement*' ('the great replacement') which posits that Muslim nationals and immigrants serve the larger purpose of 'replacing' the white French population (see Conclusion). Codifying a societal issue in the language of security therefore has strong political effects, and justifies a series of emergency measures whose legitimacy is seldom challenged.

At the governmental level, societal securitisation crystallised around Islam as well. This was translated in the so-called 'anti-separatism law', or *Loi confortant le respect des principes de la République*, promulgated on 24 August 2021, a legislation tightening state controls over non-profit organisations, restricting private education outside the official curriculum and enshrining the neutrality of public servants in tendentious ways (Kipfer and Mohamud 2022, 278). Numerous speech acts of prominent Ministers confirmed this ideological posture. It is in light of societal securitisation – and of an unequivocal zest of anti-intellectualism – that the numerous interventions of Minister of National Education Jean-Michel Blanquer and Minister of Higher Education Frédérique Vidal against the so-called '*islamo-gauchisme*' ('islamo-leftism') embodied by social scientists in French universities should be understood.

One major consequence of securitisation has been the constitutionalising of emergency, with the inscription of measures and provisions pertaining to the state of emergency into ordinary law by Emmanuel Macron's government in the fall of 2017, after five renewals of the state of emergency under François Hollande from 2015 to 2017. For Vanessa Codaccioni (2021, 48-49), each crisis or critical event in France over the last seven years – terrorist attack, health

crisis – has led to the mobilisation of this *dispositif d'exception* whose powers are used in an indiscriminate manner and often serve the purpose of repressing every form of dissent. This windfall effect opened the gates for what she calls 'pre-emptive repression' and the use of anti-terrorism's methods to systematically target political activists and social movements.

Thus, as French inhabitants in the *Hexagone* and in the Overseas Territories spent much of their lives since 2015 under a declared or effective state of emergency, it became clear that the vast majority of the searches, arrests, curfews and house arrests facilitated by emergency powers had no value for police investigations of terror attacks and touched thousands of uninvolved people, Muslim migrants, protestors and inhabitants of stigmatised neighbourhoods (Kipfer and Mohamud 2022, 276). For Kipfer and Mohamud (ibid, 277), such a development is hardly surprising, as the legal logic of the state of emergency is deeply rooted in France's imperial past and present: it was declared during the Vichy regime, but also in 1955 to counter the Algerian war of independence, in several instances in the 1980s to counter independence movements in the Overseas Territories (Kanaky/New Caledonia, Wallis-and-Futuna, Tahiti-Nui), and of course in the French *banlieues* in 2005.

The (post)colonial logic governing the suppression of dissent was very visible again in 2020, when the decades-long history of politicised revolts and anti-racist organising in France (see previous section) were reactivated by the global outrage that followed the gruesome murder of George Floyd in the hands of police officers in Minneapolis (Minnesota). Thus, thousands of young people demonstrated in Paris every Saturday in May and June 2020. On June 13, Assa Traoré led the demonstration that denounced police violence and racism, in a protest that was not formally authorised by the prefecture (France 24 2020).

Yet, the state backlash to the new forms of mobilisation was, again, quick to come. This took the form of *Loi sur la sécurité globale*, a response to both anti-racist mobilisations by the Comité Vérité et Justice pour Adama and the Yellow Vests movement, and in particular to the decisive light that was shone on police violence thanks to individual recordings of police exactions. The law was adopted in the National Assembly on 24 November 2020, with the purpose of expanding police surveillance powers and facilitating data sharing across police forces, while protecting police officers from being identified by cameras. The bill's most controversial provision included the surveillance of protests by drones, forbidding the recording of police interventions, and provisions for police officers to keep their weapons with them off duty. Thus, Article 24 of the bill introduced up to a year in prison and a maximum 45,000 euros fine for 'disseminating by any means or medium whatsoever, with the aim of harming their physical or psychological integrity, the image of the face or any other identifying element of an officer of the national police or member of the national gendarmerie when engaged in a police operation'.

Despite being met with several highly attended protests – in particular the 28 November 2020 demonstration that ended up filling entirely the Republic square – the law was passed and confirmed 'France's leadership in building European security apparatuses' (Kipfer and Mohamud 2022, 278).

Conclusion

The authoritarian anti-populist project of Emmanuel Macron remains an unfinished and highly contested project. The active unrest and the fierce opposition that his government has faced over the five-years presidential term have strongly contributed to the re-politicisation of many pressing topics and social issues. Indeed, the pauperisation and discrimination

experienced by large sections of the French population have created growing constituencies for progressive change.

These movements were unified by their vehement calls for more dignity that contributed to the universalisation of the struggle against Emmanuel Macron's governance. Thus, in contradistinction to the Zeitgeist of 'possessive individualism', the Yellow Vests movement has demonstrated that large sections of the French population that were not linked to traditional social movements were able to mobilise and genuinely enjoy collective action on the roundabouts. This allowed universal grievances related to the crisis of social reproduction to be expressed out loud for the first time. Moreover, the large movement of protest against the Philippe government's pension reform shed light on the complex intergenerational dimensions of the social reproduction crisis, against the background of a proposed points-system that was perceived as particularly unfair for women and the most precarious workers. Furthermore, the vigorous actions of anti-racist committees highlighted the stigma suffered by inhabitants of the *banlieues* as well as the continuing discrimination targeting French of African and North African descent, while fiercely denouncing pervasive and unpunished instances of police violence.

This conjunction of struggles led to the *reproletarianisation* of large sections of the French citizenry, i.e. the acknowledgement, partly through class consciousness, of one's subaltern status and the unfairness of that condition. Furthermore, these mobilisations have led to the *repoliticisation* of citizens who had thus far remained removed from political action, i.e. the acknowledgement that social movements and political action can still have an impact on the governing elite's decisions. These protests have thus raised universal questions of global and

domestic governance, including reducing inequality, fighting against racism, addressing climate change as well as the crisis of social reproduction.

One cannot stress enough the importance of repoliticisation in the endeavour to de-securitise French political economy and society. Indeed, repoliticising the reforms which the LREM majority considered to be technical and pragmatic measures and rejecting the scapegoating, scorn and socio-economic marginalisation suffered by subaltern social groups in France remains the most efficient manner to *de-securitise* the vast sections of the social that have been submitted to surveillance, repression and punishment and to give voice and shape to democratic contention and civil resistance.

Conclusion

> Quand vous voyez le premier tour de l'élection présidentielle, les trois quarts des électeurs (…) se sont exprimés pour trois projets. Un projet d'extrême droite, ce qui est une radicalité, un projet d'extrême gauche (…) et ce que je qualifierais comme un projet d'extrême centre, si on veut qualifier le mien.[144]
> (Emmanuel Macron on public radio France Culture, 4 April 2022)

This dissertation adopted a *longue durée* perspective and used a neo-Gramscian framework to analyse the historical trajectory of French neoliberalisation and the historic role played by Emmanuel Macron in the implementation of the 'second synthesis of French neoliberalism'. This research therefore analysed Macron's project in terms of molecular and group-specific *trasformismo* from the 'extreme centre' and depicted elements of continuity – the consolidation of the French productive, social reproductive and accumulative regimes, interpreted as a passive revolution with Caesarist elements – and a few elements of apparent rupture – the complete recomposing of the French party system, the increasing porosity between the public and the private spheres, the use of managerial practices and the development by the leader of LREM of a specific form of governance that I termed 'authoritarian anti-populism'. In the Macronite dialectic of 'revolution/restoration', it is nonetheless restoration which predominates, with a strong attachment to elite rule, a deepening of neoliberal patterns of accumulation, a consolidation of the vertical logics of the Fifth Republic and a willingness to separate the economic from the political through extra-legal and increasingly repressive means.

These concluding remarks are divided into two sections. The first section is dedicated to an overview of French neoliberalisation as the first Macron *quinquennat* came to an end, with a

[144] 'If you look at the first round of the presidential election, three-fourths of the voters (…) have chosen three projects. A project of extreme Right, which is a form of radicality, a project of extreme Left (…) and what I would term a project of extreme centre, if we want to qualify mine' (France Culture 2022, my translation).

review of the two syntheses of French neoliberalism, an interpretation of the presidential term in light of the concepts of 'passive revolution' and 'organic crisis', and an analysis of the outcomes of Emmanuel Macron's strategy of 'authoritarian anti-populism'. The second section examines the continuing phenomenon of *trasformismo* and suggests that it has become a systemic feature of French political life. This last section reviews the state of the different French political formations by offering an assessment of the 2022 presidential contest and its results, and by examining the reconfiguring balance of political forces leading up to the June 2022 legislative elections. Lastly, I acknowledge a number of limitations of this study and outline some potential directions for future research that build on the historical and theoretical arguments developed throughout this dissertation.

French Neoliberalisation and the Macron *Quinquennat*

The Two Syntheses of French Neoliberalism

From the very beginnings of the Fifth Republic, French organic intellectuals and policymakers have endeavoured to envisage and manufacture a 'third way' between *laissez-faire* and economic planning. The influence of German ordoliberalism on the French Right was clear from the 1960s to the 1970s, with the aim to organise a legal interference from the state, informed by principles of economic constitutionalism that served the purpose of prioritising free trade, a balanced budget and a stable currency, and more fundamentally of separating the economic from the political. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it was under the French Left (PS) leadership that principles of 'new constitutionalism' (Gill 2002) became imposed at the supranational level, with various institutional and market-federalist arrangements, such as the Economic and Monetary Union, furthering the neoliberalisation and financialisation of the French economy. The mainstream Left and Right's political economic

convergence on principles of (neoliberal) economic constitutionalism signalled the *first synthesis of French neoliberalism*. Nevertheless, the programmatic and ideological rapprochement of the traditional Left and Right created the conditions for an *ideological crisis* that blurred the lines of partisan distinctiveness and facilitated the emergence of seemingly new and alternative political formations such as Emmanuel Macron's movement *En Marche*, created in 2016.

Emmanuel Macron thus campaigned on the promise of a radical transformation of French society, a 'revolution' that would entail a *tabula rasa* to the existing but ossified order. After being qualified with an exceedingly narrow base in the first round, he largely won the second-round against far-right candidate Marine Le Pen and secured a large majority at the National Assembly thanks to its MoDem ally, but most importantly thanks to the individual and collective defections of dozens of MPs and cadres from Parti Socialiste and Les Républicains. This intense episode of *trasformismo* fully de-structured the French party system and decimated the traditional parties on the parliamentary terrain. The use of this opportunistic practice emulates the entrepreneurial ethos dear to En Marche: indeed, every political official whose career was in a standstill jumped on the occasion to join the new political formation, as one would bid and capitalise on a promising start-up pledging 'disruption' and promising 'efficiency'. Thus was acted the *second synthesis of French neoliberalism*, with the reunion of the most pro-EU and economically liberal strands of the two largest parties in a political space 'in the centre', a place of proudly proclaimed symbolic disdain for the relevance of political ideologies and the conflictual nature of politics.

Emmanuel Macron, Passive Revolution and Organic Crisis

This second synthesis was nothing but a compromise meant to preserve and modernise the features of the decried 'old' system. This passive revolution has intensified the rigid 'regressive modernisation' of the French economy from above, rhetorically supported by a lauding discourse on entrepreneurship and flexibility. For the first two years, the purpose of enhancing French competitiveness motivated the reshuffling of taxation rules in favour of capital and the business world, alongside the implementation of far-reaching labour market and liberalising reforms, principally through decrees and with minimal parliamentary oversight. Yet, the recurrence of crises since the fall of 2018 (the Yellow Vests movement, pension reform strikes and anti-racist mobilisations) has demonstrated that the transformations and structural reforms associated with Emmanuel Macron are lacking in legitimacy and are not subject to popular consent. In this respect, the Yellow Vests crisis has revealed the salience of socio-economic inequalities and offered a stern panorama on the unresolved fractures of French society. Moreover, the strong participation of women among the Gilets Jaunes, as well as the alliances that were built with strengthened anti-racist movements, were a testimony to the strongly gendered and racialised logics that define socio-economic and political marginalisation in contemporary France. To these grievances, Emmanuel Macron responded with the doctrine of 'authoritarian anti-populism' (see Chapters VIII and IX), an attempt to secure legitimacy to the intensification of neoliberal reforms through the demonisation of the political 'extremes', the criminalisation of dissent and the securitisation of ever larger dimensions of social life.

While the logic of passive revolution was intended to safeguard a discredited system, Emmanuel Macron's presidential term has in fact intensified the organic crisis of French capitalism. Some of the causes of this organic crisis are endogenous: the social reproduction

crisis bred by lower standards of living, a harder access to public services and intergenerational anxieties related to the looming environmental threat, but also the multiple forms of dissent and protest that have emerged out of rising inequalities, regressive economic measures and the impunity of racism and police violence. Others are exogenous: the Covid-19 crisis, that had the windfall effect of increasing the scope of securitisation, and the war in Ukraine that heightened the tensions in Europe and fostered a large influx of refugees. The latter have hindered the conduct of the 2022 presidential election, making the campaign proceedings start later than usual and significantly limiting the time dedicated to debate – especially discussions pertaining to the assessment of the Macronite governance, which the current president cautiously avoided. Against this background, the rigid neoliberal governance of Emmanuel Macron has increased already existing vulnerabilities, further blurred the ideological and partisan frontiers and further restricted the limits of the possible on social and economic grounds.

Progenies of Authoritarian Anti-Populism

The dialectics of passive revolution are also useful to study one of the progenies of Emmanuel Macron's strategy of 'authoritarian anti-populism': the rise of Eric Zemmour, a genuinely fascist pundit who divided the far-right bloc in the short term by competing with Marine Le Pen, motivated by the objective to extend the far-right bloc in the long haul by pursuing an old strategy of '*union des droites*' ('alliance of the Rights'). For Robert Paxton (1998, 21), fascism is 'a system of political authority and social order intended to reinforce the unity, energy, and purity of communities in which liberal democracy stands accused of producing division and decline'. Indeed, fascism may appear 'wherever democracy is sufficiently implanted to have aroused disillusion' (ibid, 11) and is characterised by a profound ambiguity in its relationship to revolution, modernity and restoration (see Chapter VII). The parallel with Emmanuel Macron's governance is clear insofar as the fascist pseudo-revolutionary promise

consists ‘of hardening the character and purifying and energizing the community rather than making the social structure or the economic system more just or free’ (ibid, 7). Indeed, the minimalist economic programme endorsed by Eric Zemmour and his newly-found party *Reconquête !* is entirely in line with Emmanuel Macron’s: fighting against ‘social benefits fraud’ instead of tax evasion, pushing the legal age of retirement to 64, lowering businesses’ taxes, in addition to drastic measures to limit immigration. By disparaging Marine Le Pen as a ‘socialist’, Zemmour really proved that he was the messianic and xenophobic ‘strong man’ awaited by radicalised sections of the French bourgeoisie.

The role of the French private media has been pivotal in Eric Zemmour’s rise, especially the TV channels controlled by Breton oligarch Vincent Bolloré (see Halimi 2022) such as C8, Canal+, CStar, and especially the all-news CNews, where Zemmour appeared prime time in the early evening show *Face à l’Info* several nights a week for two years. It would be an understatement to argue that the far-right has been at ease on TV during the Macron quinquennat, as hate speeches on French Muslims and immigrants have become completely normalised. Gradually, themes that used to be the sole preserve of the far-right have been saturating mainstream media’s political discourse (Kouvélakis 2021). This trivialisation of far-right ideas was reinforced by the moral panics about the ‘enemy within’ engineered by prominent ministers following the assassination of teacher Samuel Paty by an Islamist terrorist, around the so-called ‘islamo-leftist’ ideology that purportedly corrupted young people in French universities’ social science departments. From the fall of 2020 onwards, the presidential majority has consistently dragged public debate further to the Right. This led Minister of the Interior Gérald Darmanin to accuse Marine Le Pen of being ‘too soft’ on the fight against radical Islam during a TV debate in February 2021 (Bertholomey et al. 2021).

Indeed, the LREM majority was well-aware that their best chance of success in the 2022 presidential election would be to face a candidate from the far-right in the second round again.

While Marine Le Pen had polished her image with her strategy of *dédiabolisation*, Éric Zemmour's discourse was by contrast much more aggressive. Remarkably, Zemmour insisted on civilisational cleavages, an ontological and discursive choice aimed at managing and co-opting popular anxieties that was thus far very popular in ultra-nationalist and violent groups such as *Génération Identitaire* or in the defunct *Occident* and that was common in Jean-Marie Le Pen's discourses from the 1970s to the 2000s. This form of 'far-right civilizationism'[145] (Stewart 2020) was born out of a rejection of the 'globalist, liberal elites' who, after making traditional ideological signifiers redundant within the mainstream democratic process, actively campaigned and funded 'transnational support networks for refugees and immigrants as a means to undermine national sovereignty, drive down domestic wages and dilute the culture and ethnic homogeneity of nation states' (ibid, 1210). This assumption sheds light on the obsessive identitarian politics of Zemmour, who is constantly talking of a 'great replacement' ('*grand remplacement*') of France's white population by immigrants, calling for measures to securitise the country's struggle for ethnic survival. Indeed, far-right civilizationism is a world order project that abhors cosmopolitanism, as well as 'multiculturalism, universal human rights and multilateralism and seeks to replace the liberal

[145] For Blake Stewart (2020, 1214-15), the ontology of civilisational blocs owes much to Samuel Huntington (1993) and consists in the sharing of fundamental assumptions about world order that loudly echo Zemmour's rhetoric: imminent threat posed by immigration, preference for authoritarian leadership, chauvinistic conceptions of Western civilisation, mythic or revisionist historical claims, conservative Christianity, antipathy towards 'political correctness', Islamophobia, opposition towards taxation and the bureaucratic state, climate change denial, anti-feminism, Euroscepticism and anti-marxism. The major difference, however, lies in Zemmour's anti-atlanticism and claimed admiration for Vladimir Putin, which apparently stands against the 'far-right civilizationist' reproduction of US-centred transnational hegemony.

social and cultural norms, with a new basis of popular consent based primarily in a civilizational nativism' (ibid, 1212).

Yet, the hyper-mediatised polemicist does not solely owe its success to Emmanuel Macron's strategy of authoritarian anti-populism, i.e. cynically erecting the 'extremes' as its main enemy in order to impose an artificial and vacuous cleavage between 'progressives' and 'populists'. Indeed, his emergence is also the direct result of *trasformismo*, as Zemmour took advantage of the dire fragmentation of the political space triggered by this legislative and partisan practice, especially the discord which Emmanuel Macron sew within *Les Républicains*. Indeed, *trasformismo* has become a systemic feature of French political life.

Trasformismo as a Systemic Feature of French Political Life

On 20 November 2021, 600 French local officials (mayors, regional and departmental councillors) signed an open column in *Le Journal du Dimanche*[146] in order to express their wish to see 'a second *quinquennat* with Emmanuel Macron'. These officials had not been elected under the LREM banner – indeed, the presidential party did not conquer any large city in the 2020 municipal elections, nor any region in the 2021 regional elections – but they chose to endorse the current president before the latter even mentioned a potential bid for a second mandate. Out of the 20 first signatories, 5 were from LR, 4 from Divers Droite (DVD), 3 from PS, 2 from Parti Radical (PR), 2 from regional movements, 2 from MoDem, 1 from a citizen's movement. Only one of them had no previous political affiliation than LREM. At the local

[146] The open column can be found at this address: https://www.lejdd.fr/Politique/exclusif-plus-de-600-elus-locaux-dont-edouard-philippe-nous-voulons-un-second-quinquennat-de-macron-4078131 (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

level, the great partisan migration thus continued unabashed, although this time the renegades came in majority from the traditional Right.

The Drawn and Quartered French Right

The party *Les Républicains* saw a considerable number of high-ranked cadres defecting to join LREM throughout the quinquennat, such as Nice mayor Christian Estrosi, Orléans mayor Olivier Carré, or Toulon mayor Hubert Falco. With the rise of Eric Zemmour, the party becomes drawn and quartered between the proclaimed 'centre' and the xenophobic far-right, tearing apart the semblance of cohesion it sought to recover in the wake of its second successive presidential defeat in 2017.

The 2022 presidential bid of LR candidate Valérie Pécresse is emblematic of these tensions: torn apart between the pro-EU, neoliberal line of Emmanuel Macron and the civilisational and identitarian profile of Zemmour, she had the deepest difficulties to propose anything departing from the status quo in the campaign. She was not helped by her party, with the defection of meaningful political figures in the fall 2021 and winter 2022.[147] Thus, although LREM repeatedly failed to implant locally from an electoral standpoint, the party nevertheless came to be represented by local barons, who pretexted that the 'Rightisation' of their party (LR) left them no choice, and happily turned their vests to join the presidential majority, convinced as they were that the Macron's re-election in 2022 would be a formality. In the 2022 campaign, former President Nicolas Sarkozy refused to publicly support Valérie

[147] These figures were national officials – such as Eric Woerth (MP and Sarkozy's former Minister of Budgetary Affairs), Jean-Pierre Raffarin (former Prime Minister) or Nora Berra (former secretary of state under Sarkozy) – or local officials, especially from the South of France (Rof 2022) – such as Renaud Muselier (president of Provence-Alpes-Côtes-d'Azur region), Martine Vassal (president of Aix-Marseille metropolis), Natacha Bouchart (mayor of Calais) or Bruno Gilles (LR senator for Marseille).

Pécresse's shipwrecking presidential bid, keeping intact the ambiguity that had characterised his relationship to Emmanuel Macron throughout the presidential term.[148]

The rise of a dissident candidate on the far-right has had more ambivalent effects on Marine Le Pen's *Rassemblement National* (RN). Although the considerable symbolic damages stemming from her second-round debate's performance in 2017 were progressively repaired, her party did not garner any victory in the intermediary local elections,[149] although it scored well in the 2019 European elections. This inability to conquer any region or major city substantiated Zemmour's argument that Le Pen 'could never win' and that the RN, with its organisational amateurism and its financial difficulties, was bound to lose the presidential contest once more. A wave of *trasformismo* ensued in January and February 2022,[150] bringing reminiscences of the tensions that had accompanied the 1999 schism within *Front National*, when several defectors left Jean-Marie Le Pen's party to join Bruno Mégret's newly created competitor *Mouvement National Républicain* (MNR). Nevertheless, Marine Le Pen also benefitted from Zemmour's absurd excesses and hateful extravagances. Indeed, one may observe a softening, and even a gentrification of her party in the media (Kouvélakis 2021). Unexpectedly, Zemmour's ferociously identitarian and more openly bourgeois and neoliberal

[148] While he had endorsed François Fillon only a few days before the first round in 2017, Nicolas Sarkozy has remained silent during the whole 2022 presidential campaign. Thus doing, he kept an ambiguous stance towards Macron. In June 2017, *Le Canard Enchaîné* reported Sarkozy's admiration for Emmanuel Macron's journey: '*Macron, c'est moi en mieux !*' ('Macron is like me, but better!') (Bonnefoy 2017). It was also reported that Emmanuel Macron held regular personal meetings with Nicolas Sarkozy throughout the *quinquennat*, on the phone and at the Élysée Palace. Moreover, Macron made several references to themes dear to Sarkozy during the presidential campaign, with an emphasis on 'merit' in the spirit of the former president's motto '*travailler plus pour gagner plus*'. In a discursive transformist move, Macron also cited Socialist figure Jean Jaurès, as Sarkozy did during the 2007 presidential campaign so as to appeal to social-democrats. In the weeks leading up to the June 2022 parliamentary elections, it was whispered that Nicolas Sarkozy was building a 'coalition agreement' with Emmanuel Macron's teams, and that he expressed the wish to 'choose the Prime Minister' while negotiating a group of 50 MPs in the National Assembly, who would be seating alongside LREM deputies (Gattinois and de Royer 2022).

[149] With the notable exception of Perpignan, conquered by Marine Le Pen's former partner Louis Aliot in the 2020 municipal elections, that became the largest French city ever won by the RN.

[150] European MPs Gilbert Collard and Jérôme Rivière left the RN to join Zemmour's movement *Reconquête !* in January 2022. A few weeks later, prominent RN spokesperson Nicolas Bay followed suit, alongside Marine Le Pen's own niece Marion Maréchal.

strand of the far-right has 're-centred' Le Pen – who denigrated *le grand replacement* as a conspiracy theory and refused to liken Islam to Islamism, for instance – in an effort to appear more credible, more respectable and less dangerous from a democratic standpoint, while her programme was akin to that of 2017, with even less social and redistributive measures. This paid off, as Marine Le Pen came second on April 10th, with 23.15 per cent of the votes.

Disparagement and Preparedness on the Left

While the Pécresse candidacy experienced an even worst fate than the Benoît Hamon's candidacy in 2017 (she collected 4.78 per cent of the votes in the first round of the 2022 presidential election), the situation of *Parti Socialiste* in the run up to the April 10 first round was particularly hopeless, with the party's candidate – Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo – painfully credited with 2 per cent of voting intentions, a potential first round result that would terminate once and for all what is left of the PS, despite the party's significant local implantation (Hidalgo ended up collecting 1.75 per cent of the votes). Beyond Hidalgo's vacuous programme, the historically hegemonic 'Left' party suffered from an unrelenting succession of defections in the early months of 2022. Thus, prominent former ministers from previous PS legislatures openly pledged allegiance to Emmanuel Macron in the winter and spring of 2022.[151]

Further on the Left, *La France Insoumise* was active on the parliamentary terrain throughout the quinquennat, but failed to implant locally and scored rather poorly at most intermediary elections. Yet, the restructuring of the movement in the form of *Union Populaire* (UP) gave

[151] This was the case for Jean-Pierre Chevènement (Minister of National Education and Minister of Defence under François Mitterrand), Elisabeth Guigou (Minister of Justice under Jospin), Marisol Touraine (Minister of Health under Hollande), Claude Bartolone (National Assembly President under Hollande) or François Rebsamen (mayor of Dijon and Minister of Labour under Hollande). These former national figures were joined in their endeavour by a fraction of parliamentary underbosses – former Socialist MP Eduardo Rihan-Cypel, Pas-de-Calais senator Michel Dagbert – and local officials – such as Clichy-sous-Bois mayor Olivier Klein.

way to a sustained and rather sophisticated war of position since the fall of 2020, with a large outreach on social media and a thorough and detailed programme that included a very large environmental dimension and had visibly been worked, with measures pertaining to economic redistribution and institutional renovation that were already forming the core of the 2017 manifesto. In a dynamic akin to that of 2017, the tenacious figure of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the popular movement carrying his candidacy gained traction in the last few weeks of the 2022 presidential campaign, with a slow but constant progression in voting intentions, in spite of the fact that *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF), led by Communist MP Fabien Roussel, decided to run on its own for the first time since 2007. L'Union Populaire collected 21.95 per cent of the votes on 10 April 2022 and failed to qualify for the second round with an even smaller margin than in 2017 (with only 400,000 ballots between Le Pen and Mélenchon).[152]

Finally, the Green party *Europe-Ecologie Les Verts* (EELV) was quite successful in the intermediary elections, scoring rather well in the European elections and conquering several large cities such as Lyon, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Annecy or Grenoble. Yet, EELV's primary in the fall of 2021 showed that the party was split almost evenly between a radical, eco-feminist strand headed by Sandrine Rousseau and a pragmatic, pro-market strand embodied by Yannick Jadot, who ended up being the official candidate for EELV in the 2022 presidential election (and collected a disappointing 4.63 per cent in the first round). The 2022 presidential campaign demonstrated that a strategy of union for the presidential election was absolutely impossible on the Left side of the political spectrum, as the repeated and resounding attacks from both Yannick Jadot and Anne Hidalgo in order to disparage Jean-Luc Mélenchon attested.

[152] All the results for the two rounds of the 2022 presidential election can be found on the Minitry of the Interior's website: Ministère de l'Intérieur (accessed 11 May 2022).

La République En Marche: An Empty Partisan Shell

Finally, one must examine the state of the (extreme) centre. Has La République En Marche successfully operated its moult from a movement to an institutionalised political party? Did the political group find cohesion in the National Assembly, where it was very strongly represented in the first months of the quinquennat (see Chapter V)?

The transformist practice did not stop at the gates of Palais Bourbon. Thus, more than 45 deputies – 14 per cent of the total – had left the LREM parliamentary group half-way through the mandate, in November 2019 (Boichot 2019). In the first year of the legislative term, many LREM deputies complained about the immense workload associated with the labour laws and SNCF railways reforms, for a wage that was significantly less than in the private sector jobs which many of them had just left. They also realised that the real power of a deputy was limited, in large part because voting discipline within the LREM group was considered primordial, i.e. MPs voting against governmental bills were threatened with exclusion, and parliamentary proceedings left very little room to individual initiative. Several MPs publicly criticised the lack of transparency and internal democracy within the movement, while the initial promise and ethos were those of a grassroots initiative that pretended to favour participative democracy.

One turning point after which discontent came to be heard more distinctly was the promulgation of the law related to asylum and migration in September 2018 (*Loi sur l'immigration maîtrisée, un droit d'asile effectif et une intégration réussie*). Against the background of Minister of Ecology Nicolas Hulot's recent resignation and following the embarrassing Benalla affair, members of the 'Leftist' wing of LREM (MPs who had made a previous political career in PS), started to leave the group. Another moment of tension

occurred during the 2020 municipal elections campaign, when several MPs complained about opportunistic local alliances with incumbent mayors from LR which some of them had fought against in the past. In Paris, a dissident candidate – mathematician and MP Cédric Villani – ran alongside the official LREM candidate Benjamin Griveaux and prevented the party from ravishing the capital to incumbent mayor Anne Hidalgo. These individual vest-turning initiatives, i.e. what Gramsci called 'molecular *trasformism*', were nevertheless quickly supplanted by 'group *trasformismo*'. In the National Assembly, the initial LREM group thus quickly fragmented into different legislative groupings that became official political parties.[153] Dominated by the distant figure of its founder Emmanuel Macron and now only populated by MPs from so-called 'civil society', LREM has the appearance of an empty shell. Hence the attempt to create a *maison commune* ('common house') for the legislative elections that would congregate all the presidential majority's streams evoked above, alongside MoDem (Le Monde 2021). This organism, intended to be the governmental vessel for the June 2022 legislative elections, came to life on 5 May 2022 and gathered LREM (rebaptised with a name that almost sounds like a tribute to Gramsci – 'Renaissance'), MoDem and Horizons under the banner '*Ensemble !*'.

Widespread and blatant recourse to transformist practices on almost all sides of the French political field is a signal that a certain threshold has been reached and that the institutions of

[153] The social-reformist *Territoires de Progrès* was the first born in January 2020, gathering 51 members, including many former PS members such as Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister of Public Accounts Olivier Dussopt and Minister of Health Olivier Véran. In April 2020, Minister of Ecological Transition Barbara Pompili founded *En Commun !* alongside MPs Hugues Renson and Jacques Maire, gathering 22 deputies who pretended to incarnate the environmentalist strand of LREM. The same number of MPs joined *Agir Ensemble*, the centre-right party that attracted former members of UDI such as Olivier Becht, Pierre-Yves Bournazel and Valérie Petit. Finally, former Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and MP Christophe Béchu, alongside 12 other deputies who joined them, created *Horizons* in October 2021, in order to represent the traditional Right strand of the majority, i.e. early defectors from LR, as well as to welcome the newly converts after the 2022 presidential campaign.

the plebiscitary Fifth Republic are having difficulties to accommodate the increasingly complex and blurry distribution of forces on the political arena. A certain phase of degeneracy of the Fifth Republic institutions has commenced, whereby the legislative and executive institutions have become less representative and less prepared to face and tackle the complex challenges of rising inequalities and looming environmental threats. Paradoxically, the intensification of these transformist manoeuvers in the National Assembly did not occasion a symbolic or technical rehabilitation of the French parliament, that remains constitutionally and de facto subordinated to the executive branch.

The perpetuation of transformist practices and strategies undoubtedly reveals that French partisan bipolarism, on the grounds of which the Fifth Republic developed since the early 1970s, is a thing from the past. It is too early to affirm that the trends associated with *trasformismo* – novel partisan fragmentation, ideological polarisation and electoral volatility – signal an 'Italianisation' of French politics, although certain developments – the rise of oligarchic media tycoons tightly connected to political life, the rhetoric of governments of 'national interest', the consistently dipping participation rates at every elections and the emergence of a fascist force within the far-right bloc (Eric Zemmour's *Reconquête* and *Fratelli d'Italia*) – demonstrate that the parallels between French and Italian politics at the beginning of the twenty-first century are numerous and deserve further comparative scrutiny.

In the face of such a metamorphosis of the political field and in acknowledgement of the further closure of political options, a thorough process of reflection concerning the future of democratic institutions must be engaged. It is becoming urgent to evaluate the pertinence of anti-vertical forms of civic engagement, whether in the form of participative democracy – with citizens' consultations and communal forms of organising – or direct democracy – with a

more frequent recourse to referenda and the development of the RIC. At the very least, a complete rejuvenation of parliamentary politics should be envisaged, a restructuring which would not necessarily eschew the pitfall of instability, but could foster the creation of new coalitions and alliances, and therefore the ignition of new debates and discussions between non-hegemonic parties, whose fragmentation would prevent the constitution of a rigid and majoritarian political force 'in the centre' of the political field.

An Unusual Presidential Election

As was the case in 2017, the 2022 presidential election happened in unusual circumstances. The campaign was not perturbed by accusations of embezzlement, but rather by exogenous crises – first, the lingering Covid-19 pandemic that delayed the start of the campaign, then the war in Ukraine since February 24 – that have considerably hindered the ability (and willingness) of candidates to debate and engage with one another about their project and propositions. For a few weeks, Emmanuel Macron used his diplomatic credentials to project an image of 'protector of the nation', and he indeed benefited – although briefly – from a 'rallying around the flag' effect in opinion polls that gradually faded as the first round was nearing.

In the midst of mounting tensions at home and war at the gates of the European Union, the presidential campaign debates were initially monopolised by the ferociously anti-immigrant and islamophobic stances of fascist polemicist Éric Zemmour. In the winter months, inflation and rising fuel and gas prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine placed the issue of purchasing power high on the agenda. Pretexting that his predecessors did not engage with other candidates in their bid for re-election, Macron consistently refused to cross swords with his competitors. In mid-March, Emmanuel Macron presented his economic programme and

demonstrated that a second quinquennat under his leadership would lead to an intensification of the trajectory followed since 2017. Competitiveness and liberalisation are on the agenda again, with the proposition to increase autonomy for and competition between universities and the strengthening of public education's ties to the private sector in order to make a symbolic and financial distinction between the 'professionalising' disciplines and the rest. Similarly, and despite widespread shortage, no measure aimed to build new social housing were announced. Problematically, the candidate also proposed to suppress licencing fees for public radio and TV – what the French call '*relevance audiovisuelle*' and amounts to 138 euros per household yearly – a measure that might lead to the privatisation of some public media while reinforcing the growing oligarchisation of the French media sector.

Furthermore, Macron's programme promises to intensify the insidious 'workfare' logic governing the provision of benefits, with the proposition to condition the allocation of *Revenu de Solidarité Active* (RSA, whereby the maximum allocated amount is 575 euros) to 15 to 20 hours of weekly work. The aborted pension reform has also been brought back on the agenda, with the proposition to push the legal retirement age to 65. No significant measure of economic redistribution has been budgeted: quite the contrary, the objective of LREM is to lower taxes on succession, which would exempt from taxation the donations made within wealthy families, demonstrating the continuing belief in trickle-down economics that informs the presidential creed. On taxation, the aim will also be – alongside what LR and Reconquête are pleading for – to lower the companies' value added-tax ('*impôts de production*'), a tax whose revenues had already been divided by two (from 15 to 7 billion euros' revenue) during the quinquennat. In short, a second Emmanuel Macron presidential term might very well align France fully with Britain in terms of economic and fiscal policies.

Beyond the formulation of a programme of continuity that does not reflect on the lessons learnt throughout the pandemic, nor acknowledges the intensity of social movements opposing the trajectory of reform sketched in the first quinquennat, the 2022 presidential campaign is singular in the sense that it has not given way to any significant debate between Emmanuel Macron and the other candidates. Indeed, the incumbent president refuses to engage with his competitors, pretexting the volatility of the international situation in the midst of the Ukraine war, and arguing that none of his predecessors had debated with political contenders when running for their re-election. Admittedly, there is a significant degree of scorn in this refusal to debate. As LREM MP from Hérault Jean-François Eliaou candidly admitted in the pages of *Libération:* 'the quality of running competitors does not justify us stooping to discuss with them' (my translation).[154]

In the eyes of many commentators, the first round results on April 10 were a 'remake' of the 2017 presidential contest, with Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen qualified for the second round, improving their scores with, respectively, 27.8 per cent and 23.1 per cent of the vote share. Yet, Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his movement *Union Populaire* scored higher than ever, failing to qualify for the second round with almost 22% of the votes, some 400,000 ballots behind Le Pen. In consequence, three opposing blocs now seem to be structuring French politics: a pro-European, economically neoliberal bloc centered around Emmanuel Macron, a nationalist and economically neoliberal bloc structured around Marine Le Pen, and an ecological, economically redistributive bloc with Jean-Luc Mélenchon at its helm. Two preliminary remarks about the first round can be made (Biscahie 2022):

[154] « La qualité des personnalités en lice ne justifie pas que l'on s'abaisse à discuter avec eux » (Equy and Daoulas 2022).

1). The two parties that have traditionally dominated French politics are completely decimated. Once hegemonic, the mainstream Left (PS) and Right (LR) painfully scored 1.75 per cent and 4.78 per cent respectively (for a combined total of 6.53 per cent, against 26.37 per cent in 2017). Already shaken five years ago, the political landscape has now definitely capsized. The bipartisan logic that had structured French politics for the last forty years now belongs to the past.

2). France is ideologically and generationally more divided than ever. While the youth and Overseas Territories' residents favoured Mélenchon's promise of ecological planning and socio-economic redistribution, those concerned with issues stemming from immigration and real or perceived insecurity chose Le Pen. Meanwhile, Macron garnered much support among senior citizens, who are not concerned with his proposition to increase the retirement age or to condition benefits eligibility to 15-20 hours of weekly work. Representing divergent interests, these three blocs will continue to oppose one another on most societal and economic issues.

On April 24, Emmanuel Macron won the second round of the election, garnering 58.55 per cent of the ballots against Marine Le Pen, who gathered 41.45 per cent of the votes. As a testimony to the lack of popular interest in the duel and the demobilisation of many Left-wing voters, the second round's abstention rate was the highest since 1969 (28.01 per cent). Emmanuel Macron was joylessly re-elected, and as of 11 May 2022 has still not formed a new government.

The 2022 legislative elections will take place on June 12th and 19th. The stakes are high for each party, as it remains to be seen whether the perennial logic of 'validation' of the presidential election results by the legislative elections results will manifest itself once more.

Indeed, many disappointed LREM deputies announced that they would not run for a second mandate (Bonvarlet 2022), and the 'novelty' represented by LREM has largely faded out. Larger alliances might thus be necessary to ensure a majority in the National Assembly, after Emmanuel Macron's victory. The piteous perspectives offered by the sinking presidential bid of their candidate Valérie Pécresse might therefore push many LR parliamentarians to ally with the presidential majority in the hope of saving their seat. In this respect, it is rather surprising to hear LR MP from Yonne Guillaume Larrivé – who wrote a vitriolic book on Emmanuel Macron entitled *Le coup d'Etat Macron: le Prince contre la Nation* (2018) – publicly embracing the hypothesis of an alliance with LREM for the legislative elections if Valérie Pécresse failed to reach the second round (Compigne 2022). As the defections of LR MPs Robin Reda (Essonne) and Constance Le Grip (Hauts-de-Seine) to join the presidential majority in early May 2022 attest, *trasformismo* seems to have a rosy future in France.

On the Left, the first days of May were very busy ones, with long and headed negotiations between representatives of Union Populaire, Europe-Ecologie Les Verts, Parti Communiste Français, Parti Socialiste and Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste to sign an electoral agreement for the legislative elections, with the aim to capitalise on Jean-Luc Mélenchon's strong score at the presidential election and to impose a *cohabitation* to Emmanuel Macron. Surprisingly, the negotiations were successful with all parties, except NPA. On May 7th, the heads of Leftist political formations celebrated the creation of NUPES (*Nouvelle Union Populaire Écologique et Sociale*) in Aubervilliers. For the first time in 25 years, the French Left was able to unite, despite feverish tensions regarding the allocation of constituencies to each party and considerable criticisms on the part of PS *éléphants* (François Hollande, Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, Anne Hidalgo, etc.). It remains to be seen whether this union will be strong enough to impose a cohabitation to Emmanuel Macron on June 19th.

As this manuscript is drawing to a close, a taste of paradox with regards to the political situation in contemporary France persists. Against the grain of a purported '*droitisation'* ('Rightisation') of the country that is indeed diagnosed in the media by editorialists and think-tanks representatives, the spirit of egalitarianism is still very vivid in France, more so than in other Western European democracies. Despite the high voting intentions expressed in favour of Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour, immigration and insecurity are far from being the main concerns of the French population.[155]

Could it be, as sociologist Roger Sue (2022) put it, that 'France is a Leftist country that votes for the Right'? Indeed, strong and durable movements in favour of emancipation, solidarity and tolerance have developed throughout the Macron quiquennat, and citizens' collectives, associations and more or less structured political movements – including the Gilets Jaunes – have incessantly endeavoured to voice support for public services and proposed new institutional mechanisms to remedy the democratic crisis. It may be that the traditional Left has bred too much disappointment over the years to galvanise or exert leadership on these struggles. Perhaps the political translation of these aspirations is still unfulfilled and bridges and alliances should still be more thoroughly built between various grievances and vindications.

What is certain is that these aspirations to change cannot be expressed in a satisfactory manner within the current institutional framework. The most minimalist institutional reform would need to include a reversal of the electoral calendar (organising the legislative elections

[155] The latest electoral investigation (28 March 2022) conducted jointly by Sciences Po's CEVIPOF, *Le Monde* and Fondation Jean Jaurès reveals that (1) spending power is the main concern of the French, followed by (2) the health system, (3) the environment, (4) immigration, (5) the pension system, (6) the war in Ukraine, (7) social inequalities and (8) delinquency (CEVIPOF – FJJ – Le Monde 2022).

a few weeks prior to the presidential election) in order to strengthen the parliament and limit presidential verticality. The recognition of spoiled ballots should also be envisaged, alongside a stipulation that an election should be cancelled and reorganised above an agreed upon threshold/percentage of blank and invalid ballots. These measures remain, however, very cosmetic: a constitutional reshuffle for a Sixth Republic should be more radical and all-encompassing and would require the mobilisation of large sections of the citizenry to collectively devise new methods of government and new norms of representativity. In sum, the refusal of political verticality and the importance of creating new forums where debates could be articulated, ideas could be nourished and contested, and democratic strife could be channelled and echoed constitute the minimal but necessary conditions to encourage and construct widespread civic participation and rebuild fraternity and social cohesion in contemporary France.

To conclude, I would like to recognise a number of limitations of this project and make a few suggestions for future research. I believe the main limitation of this project is the unfulfilled problematisation of French neoliberalism in terms of *historic blocs of rule*. While the dissertation exposes frameworks of elite rule and governance, explores patterns of discipline, defection and dissent in French political parties and society and interrogates ideological shifts and continuities with the concept of passive revolution, it has proven difficult to delineate these blocs of rule with certainty and clarity, although their composition and dynamics are repeatedly hinted at. Part of this reservation stems from a fear of essentialising the complex and multifaceted reality of the French social formation, and from a wariness to eschew the pitfalls of determinism and economism and to avoid the sometimes static readings of French historic blocs that have recently been published. I believe a clearer delineation of these blocs

of rule could be achieved with further historical and sociological research. Three suggestions to pursue this objective and broaden the research programme are sketched below.

First, one should engage in a comparative analysis of the politics and ideas of the French far-right, in order to survey the doctrinal, theoretical and partisan relations that they have historically built with representatives of the neoliberal Right. Their trajectories and visions of the political economy could thus be compared, and many conceptual insights could be yielded with regard to the class composition of these ideological groupings, and their potential overlap.

Second, an analysis of the far-right should allow for an increased focus on the central question of empire and the importance of race and gender in the French capitalist social formation, as well as the importance of these factors in the formulation of the doctrines of both the neoliberal Right and the extreme Right. Furthermore, an increased historical materialist focus on French colonial history would have the benefit to uncover more systematically the processes of primitive accumulation that have been constitutive and continue to shape the contours of French capitalism.

Third, the two points above should encourage a more thorough problematisation and integration of *the international* in the analysis of French capitalism. Thus, processes of (North-Atlantic and European) elite transnationalisation and the role of *haute finance* should be more integrated to the analysis of the neoliberalisation of the French political economy.

I hope that future research efforts, including my own, will explore these avenues while building on the insights developed here in a meaningful manner.

CHRONOLOGY

1930s

Fall 1931: Creation of the technocratic movement X-Crise.

August 26-30, 1938: Organization of the Lippmann Colloquium in Paris.

September 29-30, 1938: Conclusion of the Munich Agreement.

September 3, 1939: France declaration of war on Germany.

1940s

July 10, 1940: Dissolution of the Third Republic. Marshal Philippe Pétain is granted dictatorial powers by the National Assembly.

August 19-25, 1944: Liberation of Paris.

October 9, 1945: Creation of Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA).

January 3, 1946. Creation of the Commissariat Général du Plan (French General Planning Commissariat) by Charles de Gaulle.

October 13, 1946: Creation of the Fourth Republic.

June 20, 1948: Creation of the Deutsche Mark.

1950s

November 1, 1954: Start of the Algerian Revolution.

March 25, 1957: Signature of the Treaty of Rome creating the European Economic Community (EEC). The treaty came into force on 1 January 1958.

August 1, 1957: Creation of the Bundesbank.

June 3, 1958: Charles de Gaulle becomes the last President of Council of the Fourth Republic.

October 4, 1958: Fall of the Fourth Republic and adoption of the Constitution for a Fifth Republic.

December 23, 1958: Adoption of the Plan Pinay-Rueff.

1960s

January 1, 1960: Creation of the "new franc" (1 new F = 100 old F)

July 21, 1960: The committee Rueff-Armand delivers its report to Prime Minister Michel Debré.

March 18, 1962: Signature of the Evian Accords that formalizes the full independence of Algeria.

May 2 – June 23, 1968: May 68 uprising.

April 28, 1969: Charles de Gaulle resigns.

June 29, 1969: Georges Pompidou becomes president.

1970s

June 11-13, 1971: Parti Socialiste (PS) is created by François Mitterrand at the Epinay Congress.

October 1973: First oil crisis.

May 27, 1974: Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (VGE) is elected president.

August 25, 1976: Raymond Barre is appointed Prime Minister, following Jacques Chirac's resignation.

December 6, 1976: Creation of Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) by Jacques Chirac.

February 1, 1978: Creation of Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF) by VGE.

March 13, 1979: The European Monetary System (EMS) officially enters into force.

1980s

May 10, 1981: Election of François Mitterrand.

February 13, 1982: Nationalization of large swaths of the industrial and banking sectors.

1982: Creation of Fondation Saint-Simon.

July 1, 1987: The Single European Act (SEA) comes into effect under the Jacques Delors commission.

May 8, 1988: François Mitterrand is re-elected president. He appoints Michel Rocard as Prime Minister.

1990s

February 7, 1992: Signature of the Maastricht Treaty creating a single market.

May 7, 1995: Jacques Chirac is elected president.

November 24 – December 15, 1995: Strikes of the public sector against the Plan Juppé.

May 2, 1997: Anthony Blair becomes Prime Minister in the United Kingdom.

June 2, 1997: Formation of Lionel Jospin's government of "plural left".

June 17, 1997: Adoption of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP).

January 1, 1999: The Euro comes into existence. It would start circulating in 2002.

2000s

November 12, 2002: Creation of Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP), merging RPR and UDF.

April 21, 2002: Jean-Marie Le Pen (Front National) faces Jacques Chirac in the second round of the presidential election. Chirac wins with 82.21% of the votes on May 5.

May 25, 2005: Rejection of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE) by 54.5% of French voters.

May 10, 2006: Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin abandons the Contrat Première Embauche (CPE) project.

May 6, 2007: Election of Nicolas Sarkozy.

July 2007: Launching of the Révision Générale des Politiques Publiques (RGPP).

January 23, 2008: Publication of the Commission Attali's final report.

September 18, 2008: Bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers.

December 1, 2009: The Lisbon Treaty comes into force.

2010s

May 2011: Think-tank Terra Nova publishes the report "*Gauche: quelle majorité électorale pour 2012".*

March 2, 2012: Signature of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Eurozone (TSCG), a stricter version of the SGP.

May 6, 2012: Election of François Hollande.

July 2012: Publication of the Rapport Gallois, that signals a shift towards the supply-side.

January 1, 2013: Creation of the Crédit d'Impôt pour la Compétitivité et l'Emploi (CICE).

January 1, 2014: Presentation of the Pacte de Responsabilité et de Solidarité.

August 26, 2014: Emmanuel Macron is appointed Minister of the Economy.

January 7, 2015: Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack.

May 30, 2015: Creation of Les Républicains (LR).

August 6, 2015: Promulgation of law 2015-990 ‘pour la croissance, l’activité et l’égalité des chances économiques’ (‘cars Macron’)

November 13, 2015: Series of Islamic terror attacks in Paris.

April 6, 2016: Creation of En Marche! (EM) in Amiens.

August 8, 2016: Promulgation of the labour law “El-Khomri”.

2017 Election Cycle

November 16, 2016: Emmanuel Macron is officially candidate in the presidential election.

November 27, 2016: François Fillons wins Les Républicains’ presidential primary.

December 1, 2016: François Hollande announces he will not be running for a second mandate.

January 25, 2017: Publication of the first article about François Fillon’s wife employment (or lack thereof) in *Canard enchaîné*.

January 29, 2017: Benoît Hamon wins the Left presidential primary.

February 22, 2017: Emmanuel Macron seals an alliance with François Bayrou (MoDem).

April 23, 2017: First round of the presidential election. Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen are qualified for the second round.

May 3, 2017: Emmanuel Macron is elected president.

May 15, 2017: The first government of Edouard Philippe is appointed.

June 11, 2017: First round of the legislative elections.

June 18, 2017: La République En Marche (LREM) obtains an absolute majority in the second round of the legislative elections.

Emmanuel Macron’s Presidency

July 3, 2017: Emmanuel Macron’s speech in front of the Congress, in Versailles.

November 18, 2017: The National Assembly adopts the ordinances reforming labour laws which Emmanuel Macron presented on August 31.

July 18, 2018: Beginning of the ‘Benalla Affair’.

November 17, 2018: First mobilisation of the *Gilets Jaunes* (Acte 1).

November 27, 2018: Promulgation of loi ELAN (Loi portant Evolution du Logement, de l’Aménagement et du Numérique.

December 10, 2018: Macron’s speech on TV to address the Yellow Vests movement

January 15, 2019: Launching of the *Grand débat national*.

May 22, 2019: Promulgation of law PACTE (Plan d’Action pour la Croissance et la Transformation des Entreprises).

May 26, 2019: Rassemblement National (RN) obtains the highest score at the European elections, closely followed by the list of the presidential majority.

December 5, 2019: Largest demonstration of Emmanuel Macron’s quinquennat against the pension reform (more than 800,000 protesters)

March 17, 2020: First day of the French *confinement*, the first mandatory lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

March 15 and June 28, 2020: First and second round of the municipal elections.

May 25, 2021: Promulgation of *Loi pour une sécurité globale protégeant les libertés*.

June 20, 2021: Regional elections.

April 10, 2022: First round of the presidential election.

April 24, 2022: Second round of the presidential election.

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APPENDIX #1 – List of Elected LREM Deputies in June 2017

First and Last Name	Constituency	Previous Occupation	Previous Political Affiliation	Election Ticket	Predecessor	Status
ABADIE Caroline	Isère 8	Entrepreneur		LREM	Binnet E. (PS)	
ABBA Bérangère	Haute-Marne 1	Entrepreneur	**DVD**	LREM	Chatel L. (LR)	
ADAM Lénaïck	Guyane 2	Local Official	**PS**	LREM	Berthelot C. (AGEG)	
ADAM Damien	Seine-Maritime 1	Banking Executive		LREM	Fourneyron V. (PS)	
AHAMADA Saïd	Bouches-du Rhône 7	Entrepreneur	**PS**	LREM	Jibrayel H. (PS)	
ALAUZET Eric	Doubs 2	**MP**	**EELV**	**EELV** to **LREM**	Himself	
AMADOU Aude	Loire-Atlantique 4	Entrepreneur		LREM	Raimbourg D. (PS)	
ANATO Patrice	Seine-Saint-Denis 3	Entrepreneur		LREM	Pajon M. (PS)	
ANGLADE Pieyre-Alexandre	Français établis hors de France 4	Parliamentary Assistant		LREM	Cordery P. (SER)	
ARDOUIN Jean-Philippe	Charente-Maritime 3	Entrepreneur		LREM	Quéré C. (PS)	
AREND Christophe	Moselle 6	Dentist		LREM	Kalinowski L. (PS)	
ATTAL Gabriel	Hauts-de-Seine 10	Ministerial Assistant	**PS**	LREM	Santini A. (LR)	
AVIA Laetitia	Paris 8	Lawyer		LREM	Mazetier S. (PS)	
BACHELIER Florian	Ille-et-Vilaine 8	Lawyer	**PS**	LREM	Rogemont M. (PS)	
BAGARRY Delphine	Alpes de Haute Provence 1	Medical Doctor		LREM	Sauvan G. (PS)	Left the group **(NI)**
BAICHERE Didier	Yvelines 1	Chief Human Resources Officer	**PS**	LREM	de Mazières F. (DVD)	

BALANANT Erwan	Finistère 8	Artist	**MoDem**	LREM	Le Bris G. (PS)	Left the group **(MoDem)**
BARBIER Frédéric	Doubs 4	Senior Executive	**PS**	LREM	Moscovici P. (PS)	
BATUT Xavier	Seine-Maritime 10	Senior Executive	**DVD**	LREM	Chauvel D. (PS)	
BEAUDOIN-HUBIERE Sophie	Haute-Vienne 1	Chief Human Resources Officer		LREM	Rodet A. (PS)	
BELHADDAD Belkhir	Moselle 1	Consulting	**PS**	LREM	Filippetti A. (PS)	
BERGE Aurore	Yvelines 10	Senior Executive	**LR**	LREM	Poisson J.F (LR)	
BERTA Philippe	Gard 6	Professor (Biology)	**MoDem**	LREM	Cavard A. (EELV)	Left the group **(MoDem)**
BERVILLE Hervé	Côtes d'Armor 2	Senior official (Development)		LREM	Dissez V. Le (PS)	
BESSON-MOREAU Grégory	Aube 1	Entrepreneur		LREM	Dhuicq N. (LR)	
BESSOT BALLOT Barbara	Haute-Saône 1	Entrepreneur		LREM	Chrétien A. (LR)	
BLANC Anne	Aveyron 2	Mayor	**PRG**	LREM	Marcel M.L (PS)	
BLANCHET Christophe	Calvados 4	Entrepreneur		LREM	Améline N. (LR)	Left the group **(MoDem)**
BLEIN Yves	Rhône 14	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
BOIS Pascal	Oise 3	Entrepreneur	**PS**	LREM	Françaix M. (PS)	
BONNELL Bruno	Rhône 6	Entrepreneur		LREM	Crozon P. (PS)	
BONO-VANDORME Aude	Aisne 1	Engineer	**UDI**	LREM	Dosière R. (PS/SE)	
BOROWCZYK Julien	Loire 6	Medical Doctor	**MoDem (R&F)**	LREM	Salen P. (LR)	

BOTHOREL Eric	Côtes d'Armor 5	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
BOUDIE Florent	Gironde 10	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
BOURGUIG-NON Brigitte	Pas-de-Calais 6	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Herself	
BOUYX Bertrand	Calvados 5	Pharmacist	**UDI**	LREM	Attard I. (EELV)	
BOYER Pascale	Hautes-Alpes 1	Local Official	**PS**	LREM	Berger K. (PS)	
BRAUN-PIVET Yaël	Yvelines 5	Lawyer	**PS (R&F)**	LREM	Myard J. (LR)	
BRIDEY Jean-Jacques	Val-de-Marne 7	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
BROCARD Blandine	Rhône 5	Lawyer		LREM	Cochet P. (LR)	Left the group (for MoDem)
BRUGNERA Anne	Rhône 4	Mayoral Assistant	**PS**	LREM	Nachury D. (LR)	
BRULEBOIS Danielle	Jura 1	Pensioner (School Director)	**PS**	LREM	Pélissard J. (LR)	
BRUNET Anne-France	Loire-Atlantique 3	Entrepreneur		LREM	Daniel K. (PS)	
BUCHOU Stéphane	Vendée 3	Senior Executive		LREM	Moreau Y. (LR)	
BUREAU-BONNARD Carole	Oise 6	Physiotherapist		LREM	Carvalho P (PCF)	
CABARE Pierre	Haute-Garonne 1	Dentist	**Cap21**	LREM	Lemorton C. (PS)	
CALVEZ Céline	Hauts-de-Seine 5	Entrepreneur	**PS (R&F)**	LREM	Balkany P. (LR)	
CARIOU Emilie	Meuse 2	Ministerial Assistant	**PS**	LREM	Dumont J.L (SOC)	Left the group **(NI)**
CASTANER Christophe	Alpes de Haute Provence 2	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	

CATTELOT Anne-Laure	Nord 12	Parliamentary Assistant		LREM	Bataille C. (PS)	
CAUSSE Lionel	Landes 2	Entrepreneur	**PS**	LREM	DUFAU J.P (PS)	
CAZARIAN Danièle	Rhône 13	Entrepreneur		LREM	Meunier P. (LR)	
CAZEBONNE Samantha	Français de l'étranger 5	School Director		LREM	Leroy A. (PS)	
CAZENEUVE Jean-René	Gers 1	Engineer		LREM	Martin P. (PS)	
CAZENOVE Sébastien	Pyrénées-Orientales 4	Public Servant		LREM	Aylagas P. (PS)	
CELLIER Anthony	Gard 3	Entrepreneur		LREM	Prat P. (PS)	
CESARINI Jean-François	Vaucluse 1	Entrepreneur		LREM	Fournier-Armand M. (PS)	Deceased
CHALAS Emilie	Isère 3	Public Servant		LREM	Destot M. (PS)	
CHALUMEAU Philippe	Indre-et-Loire 1	Medical Doctor	**PS**	LREM	Gille J.P (PS)	
CHAPELIER Annie	Gard 4	Nurse	**Cap21**	LREM	Verdier F. (PS)	Left the group **(AE)**
CHARRIERE Sylvie	Seint-Saint-Denis 8	Public Servant		LREM	Pochon E. (PS)	
CHARVIER Fannette	Doubs 1	Employee		LREM	Romagnan B. (PS)	
CHASSAING Philippe	Dordogne 1	Senior Executive		LREM	Deguilhem P. (PS)	
CHICHE Guillaume	Deux-Sèvres 1	Public Servant	**PS**	LREM	Gaillard Geneviève (PS)	Left the group **(NI)**
GIRARDIN Annick	Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon	**MP**	**PRG**	LREM	Herself	
CLAPOT Mireille	Drome 1	Engineer		LREM	Labaune P. (LR)	

CLOAREC Christine	Ille-et-Vilaine 5	Teacher (Dance)		LREM	Le Callennec Isabelle (LR)	
CLEMENT Jean-Michel	Vienne 3	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	Left the group
COLAS-ROY Jean-Charles	Isère 2	Entrepreneur	**PS (R&F)**	LREM	Issindou M. (PS)	
COLBOC Fabienne	Indre-et-Loire 4	Entrepreneur		LREM	Baumel L. (PS)	
CORMIER-BOULIGEON François	Cher 1	Ministerial Assistant	**PS**	LREM	Fromion Y. (LR)	
COUILLARD Bérangère	Gironde 7	Senior Executive		LREM	Rousset A. (PS)	
CROUZET Michèle	Yonne 3	Entrepreneur	**UDI**	LREM	Fort M.L (LR)	Left the group **(MoDem)**
DA SILVA Dominique	Val-d'Oise 7	Entrepreneur		LREM	Chartier J. (LR)	
DAMAISIN Olivier	Lot-et-Garonne 3	Trade Representative		LREM	Costes J.L (LR)	
DANIEL Yves	Loire-Atlantique 6	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
DAVID Dominique	Gironde 1	Entrepreneur		LREM	Doucet S. (PS)	
DE COURSON Yolaine	Côte d'or 4	Pensioner (Entrepreneur)		LREM	Sauvadet F. (UDI)	Left the group **(MoDem)**
DE LAVERGNE Célia	Drome 3	Engineer		LREM	Mariton H. (LR)	
DE MONTCHALIN Amélie	Essonne 6	Senior Executive	**LR**	LREM	Lamy F. (PS)	
DE RUGY François	Loire-Atlantique 1	**MP**	**EELV**	LREM	Himself	
DE TEMMERMAN Jennifer	Nord 15	Public Servant		LREM	Allossery J.P (PS)	Left the group **(LT)**
DEGOIS Typhanie	Savoie 1	Lawyer		LREM	Dord D.	

					(LR)	
DELATTE Marc	Aisne 4	Medical Doctor		LREM	Bechtel M.F (SRC)	
DELPON Michel	Dordogne 2	Pensioner (Trade Representative)		LREM	Allain B. (EELV)	
DEMOULIN Nicolas	Hérault 8	Entrepreneur		LREM	Assaf C. (PS)	
DESCROZAI-LE Frédéric	Val-de-Marine 1	Consulting	**PS/MoDem**	LREM	Berrios S. (LR)	
DI POMPEO Christophe	Nord 3	Professor (Mathematics)	**PS**	LREM	Pauvros R. (PS)	
DIRX Benjamin	Saone et Loire 1	Entrepreneur		LREM	Thévenoud T. (PS)	
DJEBARRI Jean-Baptiste	Haute-Vienne 2	Entrepreneur		LREM	Boisserie D. (PS)	
DO Stéphanie	Seine-et-Marne 10	Ministerial Assistant		LREM	Brémier E. (PS)	
DOMBREVAL Loïc	Alpes-Maritimes 2	Entrepreneur	**MoDem**	LREM	Ginésy C.A (LR)	
DUBOIS Jacqueline	Dordogne 4	Pensioner (Teacher)		LREM	Peiro G. (PS)	
DUBOS Christelle	Gironde 12	Public Servant		LREM	Faure M. (PS)	
DUBOST Coralie	Hérault 3	Lawyer		LREM	Dombre-Coste F. (PS)	
DUBRE-CHIRAT Nicole	Maine-et-Loire 6	Pensioner (Senior Official Health)	**Cap21**	LREM	Bardy S. (PS)	
DUFEU SCHUBERT Audrey	Loire-Atlantique 8	Clinic Director		LREM	Bouillé M.O (PS)	
DUMAS Françoise	Gard 1	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Herself	
DUMAS Frédérique	Hauts-de-Seine 13	Artist (Movie Producer)	**UDI**	LREM	Devedjan P. (LR)	Left the group **(LT)**

DUPONT Stella	Maine-et-Loire 2	Employee	**PS**	**PS** to **LREM**	Goua M. (PS)	
DEMOULIN Nicolas	Hérault 8	Entrepreneur		LREM	Assaf C. (PS)	
EL GUERRAB M'jid	Français de l'étranger 9	Senior Official (Caisse des Dépots)	**PS**	**PS** to **DIV** to **LREM**	Amirshashi P. (PS)	Left the group **(AE)**
ELIAOU Jean-François	Hérault 4	Medical Doctor	**PR**	LREM	Roig F. (PS)	
ERRANTE Sophie	Loire-Atlantique 10	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Herself	
EUZET Christophe	Hérault 7	Professor (Law)		LREM	Denaja S. (PS)	Left the group **(AE)**
FABRE Catherine	Gironde 2	Professor (Management)		LREM	Delaunay M. (PS)	
FAURE-MUNTIAN Valéria	Loire 3	Senior Executive		LREM	Roche-bloine F. (UDI)	
FAUVERGUE Jean-Michel	Seine-et-Marne 8	Senior Official (Police)		LREM	Rihan-Cypel Eduardo (PS)	
FERRAND Richard	Finistère 6	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
FIEVET Jean-Marie	Deux-Sèvres 3	Fireman		LREM	Grellier J. (PS)	
FONTENEL-PERSONNE Pascale	Sarthe 3	Entrepreneur		LREM	Chauveau J.M (PS)	
FORTEZA Paula	Français de l'étranger 2	Entrepreneur		LREM	Coronado S. (EELV)	Left the group **(NI)**
FRESCHI Alexandre	Lot-et-Garonne 2	Entrepreneur		LREM	Fekl M. (PS)	
FUCHS Bruno	Haut-Rhin 6	Entrepreneur	**MoDem**	LREM	Hillmeyer F. (UDI)	Left the group **(MoDem)**
FUGIT Jean-Luc	Rhône 6	University Professor		LREM	Fenech G. (LR)	
GAILLARD Olivier	Gard 5	Public Servant	**PS**	LREM	Dumas W. (PS)	Left the group

GAILLOT Albane	Val-de-Marne 11	Employee		LREM	Le Bouillonnec J.Y (PS)	Left the group **(NI)**
GASSILLOUD Thomas	Rhône 10	Entrepreneur		LREM	Guilloteau C. (LR)	Left the group **(AE)**
GAUVAIN Raphaël	Saône-et-Loire 5	Lawyer		LREM	Sirugue C. (PS)	
GAYTE Laurence	Pyrénées-Orientales 3	Entrepreneur		LREM	Olive R. (PS)	
GENETET Anne	Français de l'étranger 11	Medical Doctor and entrepreneur		LREM	Mariani T. (LR)	
GIRARDIN Eric	Marne 3	Senior Executive		LREM	Martin P. (LR)	
GIRAUD Joël	Hautes-Alpes 2	**MP**	**PRG**	LREM	Himself	
GIVERNET Olga	Ain 3	Engineer	**MoDem**	LREM	Pernod-Beaudon S. (LR)	
GOMEZ-BASSAC Valérie	Var 6	Professor (Law)		LREM	Pons J. (LR)	
GOUFFIER-CHA Guillaume	Val-de-Marne 6	Ministerial Assistant	**PS**	LREM	Abeille L. (EELV)	
GOULET Perrine	Nièvre 1	Senior Executive		LREM	Carrillon-Couvreur M. (LR)	Left the group **(MoDem)**
GOUTTEFAR-DE Fabien	Eure 2	Senior Official (Defence)		LREM	Destans J.L (PS)	
GRANDJEAN Carole	Meurthe-et-Moselle 1	Chief Human Resources Officer		LREM	Khirouni C. (PS)	
GRANJUS Florence	Yvelines 12	Senior Public Servant		LREM	Douillet D. (LR)	
GRAU Romain	Pyrénées-Orientales 1	Lawyer	**PS/UDI/ LR**	LREM	Cresta J. (PS)	
GREGOIRE Olivia	Paris 12	Entrepreneur		LREM	Pinville M. (PS)	
GRIVEAUX Benjamin	Paris 5	Ministerial Assistant	**PS**	LREM	Dagoma S. (PS)	

GUEREL Emilie	Var 7	Teacher (English)		LREM	Vialatte J.S (LR)	
GUERINI Stanislas	Paris 3	Entrepreneur	**PS**	LREM	Lepetit A. (PS)	
GUEVENOUX Marie	Essonne 9	Party Politics	**LR**	LREM	Colas R. (PS)	
GERARD Raphaël	Charente-Maritime 4	Senior Executive		LREM	Bussereau D. (LR)	
HAI Nadia	Yvelines 11	Banking Executive		LREM	Benassaya P. (LR)	
HAMMERER Véronique	Gironde 11	Senior Public Servant	**MoDem (R&F)**	LREM	Plisson P. (PS)	
HAURY Yannick	Loire-Atlantique 9	Pharmacist		LREM/ MDM	Rabin M. (PS)	
HENNION Christine	Hauts-de-Seine 3	Pensioner (Senior Executive)		LREM	Kossow-ski J. (LR)	
HENRIET Pierre	Vendée 5	Teacher		LREM	Fourage H. (PS)	
HOLROYD Alexandre	Français de l'étranger 3	Consulting		LREM	Lemaire A. (PS)	
HOUBRON Dimitri	Nord 17	Lawyer		LREM	Doulez M. (PS)	Left the group **(AE)**
HOULIE Sacha	Vienne 2	Lawyer	**PS**	LREM	Coutelle C. (PS)	
HUPPE Philippe	Hérault 5	Professor (Law)	**PR/UDI**	LREM	Mesquida K. (PS)	Left the group **(AE)**
HERIN Danièle	Aude 1	Professor (Computer Science)		LREM	Perez J.C (PS)	
IBORRA Monique	Haute-Garonne 6	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Herself	
JACQUES Jean-Michel	Morbihan 6	Mayor		LREM	Noguès P. (PS/DVG)	
JANVIER Caroline	Loiret 2	Consulting		LREM	Grouard S. (LR)	

JERRETIE Christophe	Corrèze 1	Entrepreneur		LREM	Ballay A. (PS)	Left the group **(MoDem)**
JOLIVET François	Indre 1	Senior Executive	**LR**		Chanteguet J.C. (PS)	
JOSSO Sandrine	Loire-Atlantique 7	Entrepreneur	**AC**	LREM	Priou C. (LR)	Left the group **(MoDem)**
JULIEN-LAFERRIERE Hubert	Rhône 2	Professor (Economics)	**PS**	LREM	Muet P. A	Left the group **(NI)**
KAMOWSKI Catherine	Isère 5	Professor (English)		LREM	Ribeaud P. (PS)	
KASBARIAN Guillaume	Eure-et-Loir 1	Consulting		LREM	Gorges JP (LR)	
KERBARH Stéphanie	Seine-Maritime 9	Entrepreneur	**PRG**	LREM	Grellier E. (PS)	Left the group **(LT)**
KERLOGOT Yannick	Côtes-d'Armor 4	School Director		LREM	Le Houérou A. (PS)	
KERVRAN Loïc	Cher 3	Banking Executive		LREM	Gallut Y. (PS)	Left the group **(AE)**
KHATTABI Fadila	Côte d'Or 3	Teacher (English)	**PS**	LREM	Bouziane-Laroussi K. (PS)	
KHEDHER Anissa	Rhône 7	Paramedic		LREM	Geoffroy H. (PS)	
KOKOUENDO Rodrigue	Seine-et-Marne 7	Banking Executive	**PS**	LREM	Albarello Y. (LR)	
KRABAL Jacques	Aisne 5	**MP**	**PRG**	LREM	Himself	
KRIMI Sonia	Manche 4	Consulting		**DIV** to **LREM**	Cazeneuve B. (PS)	
KURIC Aina	Marne 2	Entrepreneur		LREM	Vautrin C. (LR)	Left the group **(AE)**
LAABID Mustapha	Ille-et-Vilaine 1	Non-profit (Director)	**PS (R&F)**	LREM	Chapde-laine M.A (PS)	
LABARONNE Daniel	Indre-et-Loire 2	Professor (Economics)	**DVG (R&F)**	LREM	Greff C.	

					(LR)	
LAKRAFI Amal-Amélié	Français de l'étranger 10	Entrepreneur		LREM	Marsaud A. (LR)	
LAMBERT François-Michel	Bouches du Rhône 10	**MP**	**EELV/UDE/SOC**	LREM	Himself	Left the group **(LT)**
LANG Anne-Christine	Paris 10	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Herself	
LARDET Frédérique	Haute-Savoie 2	Senior Executive		LREM	Tardy L. (LR)	
LARSONNEUR Jean-Charles	Finistère 2	Senior Official (Diplomacy)		LREM	Adam P. (PS)	Left the group **(AE)**
LAUZZANA Michel	Lot-et-Garonne 1	Medical Doctor		LREM	Lousteau L. (PS)	
LAZAAR Fiona	Val d'Oise 5	Senior Executive		LREM	Philippe D. (PS)	
LE BOHEC Gaël	Ille-et-Vilaine 4	Engineer/ Entrepreneur		LREM	Marsac J.R (PS)	
LE FEUR Sandrine	Finistère 4	Farmer		LREM	Lebranchu M. (PS)	
LE GAC Didier	Finistère 3	Mayor	**PS**	LREM	Bleunven J.M (DVG)	
LE GENDRE Gilles	Paris 2	Consulting		LREM	Fillon F. (LR)	
LE MAIRE Bruno	Eure 1	**MP**	**LR**	LREM	Himself	
LE MEUR Annaig	Finistère 1	Physiotherapist		LREM	Urvoas J.J (PS)	
LE PEIH Nicole	Morbihan 3	Farmer		LREM	Le Roch J.P (PS)	
LE VIGOUREUX Fabrice	Calvados 1	Professor (Management)	**PRG (R&F)**	LREM	Duron P. (PS)	
LEBEC Marie	Yvelines 4	Consulting	**LR**	LREM	Lequiller P. (LR)	
LECLABART Jean-Claude	Somme 4	Pensioner (Farmer)		LREM	Gest B.	

					(LR)	
LECOCQ Charlotte	Nord 6	Consulting		LREM	Lazaro T. (LR)	
LEGUILLE-BALLOY Martine	Vendée 4	Lawyer		LREM	Besse V. (MPF)	
LEJEUNE Christophe	Haute-Saône 2	Senior Executive		LREM	Villaumé J.F (PS)	
LENNE Marion	Haute-Savoie 5	Engineer	**UDI**	LREM	Francina M. (LR)	
LESCURE Roland	Français de l'étranger 1	Consulting (Economist)		LREM	Lefebvre F. (LR)	
LIMON Monique	Isère 7	Pensioner (Public Servant)		LREM	Barbier J.P (LR)	
LIOGER Richard	Moselle 3	Professor (Ethnology)	**PS**	LREM	Zimmer-man M. J (LR)	
LISO Brigitte	Nord 4	Entrepreneur		LREM	Daubresse M.P (LR)	
LOUIS Alexandra	Bouches-du-Rhône 3	Lawyer		LREM	Andrieux S. (PS)	Left the group **(AE)**
MAGNE Marie-Ange	Haute-Vienne 3	Public Servant		LREM	Beaubatie C. (PS)	
MAHJOUBI Mounir	Paris 16	Entrepreneur	**PS**	LREM	Cambadé-lis J.C (PS)	
MAILLARD Sylvain	Paris 1	Entrepreneur	**UDI**	LREM	Lellouche P. (LR)	
MAILLART-MEHAIGNE-RIE Laurence	Ille-et-Vilaine 2	Entrepreneur	**UDI**	**UDI** to **MoDem** to **LREM**	Appéré N. (PS)	
MAIRE Jacques	Hauts-de-Seine 8	Senior Official (Development)	**PS**	LREM	Guillet J.J (LR)	
MAQUET Jacqueline	Pas-de-Calais 2	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Herself	
MARILOSSI-AN Jacques	Hauts-de-Seine 7	Consulting	**PS**	LREM	Ollier P.	

					(LR)	
MARSAUD Sandra	Charente 2	Senior Executive		LREM	Raynaud M.L (PS)	
MARTIN Didier	Côtes d'or 1	Medical Doctor	**PRG**	LREM	Grandguillaume L. (PS)	
MASSEGLIA Denis	Maine-et-Loire 5	Engineer		LREM	Bourdouleix G. (CNIP)	
MATRAS Fabien	Var 8	Professor (Law)	Proche de Collomb	LREM	Audibert Troin O. (LR)	
MAUBORGNE Sereine	Var 4	Nurse (lib)		LREM	Couve J.M (LR)	
MAZARS Stéphane	Aveyron 1	Lawyer		LREM	Censi Y. (LR)	
MBAYE Jean-François	Val-de-Marne 2	Lawyer		LREM	Cathala L. (PS)	
MELCHIOR Graziella	Finistère 5	Professor (Economics)		LREM	Guittet C. (PS)	
MENDES Ludovic	Moselle 2	Entrepreneur	**PS**	LREM	Jacquat D. (LR)	
MESNIER Thomas	Charente 1	Medical Doctor		LREM	Pinville M. (PS)	
MEYNIER-MILLEFERT Marjolaine	Isère 10	Entrepreneur		LREM	Huillier J. (PS)	
MICHEL Monica	Bouches-du-Rhône 16	Entrepreneur		LREM	Vauzelle M. (PS)	
MICHELS Thierry	Bas-Rhin 1	Senior Executive		LREM	Elkouby E. (PS)	
MIRALLES Patricia	Hérault 1	Public Servant	**PS (left in 2012)**	LREM	Roumégas J.L (EELV)	Left the group (for TDP)
MIS Jean-Michel	Loire 2	Parliamentary Assistant	**PS**	LREM	Gagnaire J.L (PS)	

MOLAC Paul	Morbihan 4	**MP**	**EELV/ PS**	LREM	Himself	Left the group **(LT)**
MOREAU Jean-Baptiste	Creuse 1	Farmer		LREM	Vergnier M. (PS)	
MOTIN Cendra	Isère 6	Entrepreneur		LREM	Moyne-Bressand A. (L)	
MOUTCHOU Naima	Val d'Oise 4	Lawyer		LREM	Sebaoun G. (PS)	
MULLER-QUOY Isabelle	Val d'Oise 1	Professor (Law)		LREM	Houillon P. (LR)	
MUSCHOTTI Cécile	Var 2	School Director	**PS**	LREM	Vitel P. (LR)	
MORCH Sandrine	Haute-Garonne 9	Journalist		LREM	Borgel C. (PS)	
NADOT Sébastien	Haute-Garonne 10	Professor (History)	**MDP**	LREM	Arif. K. (PS)	Exclu-ded **(LT)**
NOGAL Mickael	Haute-Garonne 4	Senior Executive	**PS**	LREM	Martinel M. (PS)	
O'PETIT Claire	Eure 5	Entrepreneur	**PS/MoDem**	LREM	Gillard F. (LR)	Left the group
OPPELT Valérie	Loire-Atlantique 2	Entrepreneur		LREM	Clergeau M.F (PS)	
ORPHELIN Matthieu	Maine-et-Loire 1	Engineer	**EELV**	LREM	Belot L. (PS)	Left the group **(NI)**
OSSON Catherine	Nord 8	School Director	**PS**	LREM	Baert D. (PS)	
PALUSZKIEWICZ Xavier	Meurthe-et-Moselle 3	Banking Executive		LREM	Fournel J.M (PS)	
PANONACLE Sophie	Gironde 8	Entrepreneur		LREM	Foulon Y. (LR)	
PARIS Didier	Côte d'Or 5	Magistrate		LREM	Suguenot A. (LR)	

PARK Zivka	Val d'Oise 9	Banking Executive		LREM	Blazy J.P (PS)	
PELLOIS Hervé	Morbihan 1	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
PEREA Alain	Aude 2	Public Servant	**PS (left in 2012)**	LREM	Fabre M.H (PS)	
PERROT Patrice	Nièvre 2	Entrepreneur		LREM	Paul C. (PS)	
PERSON Pierre	Paris 6	Lawyer	**PS (left in 2012)**	LREM	Duflot C. (EELV)	
PETEL Anne-Laurence	Bouches-du-Rhône 14	Senior Executive		LREM	Ciot J.D (PS)	
PETIT Valérie	Nord 9	Professor (Management)		LREM	Gérard B. (LR)	Left the group **(AE)**
PEYROL Bénédicte	Allier 3	Lawyer		LREM	Charasse G. (PRG)	
PEYRON Michèle	Seine-et-Marne 9	Employee		LREM	Geoffroy G. (LR)	
PICHEREAU Damien	Sarthe 1	Trade Representative		LREM	Dubois F. (PS)	
PIETRASZEWSKI Laurent	Nord 11	Chief Human Resources Officer		LREM	Durand Y. (PS)	
PIRON Béatrice	Yvelines 3	Engineer/ Entrepreneur		LREM	Guaino H. (LR)	
PITOLLAT Claire	Bouches-du-Rhône 2	Engineer		LREM	Tian D. (LR)	
POIRSON Brune	Vaucluse	Consulting		LREM	Maréchal M. (FN)	
POMPILI Barbara	Somme 2	**MP**	**EELV**	LREM	Herself	
PONT Jean-Pierre	Pas-de-Calais 5	Medical Doctor	**UDI**	LREM	Cuvillier F. (PS)	
PORTARRIEU Jean-François	Haute-Garonne 5	Senior Public Servant		LREM	Imbert F. (PS)	

POTTERIE Benoit	Pas-de-Calais 8	Entrepreneur		LREM	Lefait M. (PS)	Left the group **(AE)**
POULLIAT Eric	Gironde 6	Senior Public Servant	**PS**	LREM	Récalde M. (PS)	
POUZYREFF Natalia	Yvelines 6	Engineer		LREM	Morange P. (LR)	
QUESTEL Bruno	Eure 4	Lawyer	**PS**	LREM	Loncle F. (PS)	
RACON-BOUZON Cathy	Bouches-du-Rhône 5	Senior Executive		LREM	Carlotti M.A (PS)	
RAPHAN Pierre-Alain	Essonne 10	Consulting		LREM	Boutih M. (PS)	
RAUCH Isabelle	Moselle 9	Consulting	**PS/UDI**	LREM	Weintein P. (LR)	
REBEYROTTE Rémy	Saône-et-Loire 3	Professor (Economics)	**PS/Cap21**	LREM	Baumel P. (PS)	
RENSON Hugues	Paris 13	Ministerial Assistant		LREM	Lamour J.F (LR)	
RILHAC Cécile	Val d'Oise 3	School Director	**MDP**	LREM	Carpentier J.N (MDP)	
RIOTTON Véronique	Haute-Savoie 1	Consulting		LREM	Accoyer B. (LR)	
RIST Stéphanie	Loiret 1	Medical Doctor		LREM	Carré O. (LR)	
RIXAIN Marie-Pierre	Essonne 4	Consulting		LREM	Kosciuzko-Morizet N. (LR)	
ROBERT Mireille	Aude 3	Teacher		LREM	Dupré J.P (PS)	
ROMEIRO DIAS Laetitia	Essonne 3	Lawyer		LREM	Pouzol M. (PS)	
ROSEREN Xavier	Haute-Savoie 6	Mayor	**UDI**	LREM	Dion S. (LR)	

ROSSI Laurianne	Hauts-de-Seine 11	Senior Public Servant	**PS (left in 2011)**	LREM	Sommaruga J. (PS)	
ROUILLARD Gwendal	Morbihan 5	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
ROUSSEL Cédric	Alpes-Maritimes 3	Consulting		LREM	Salles R. (UDI)	
RUDIGOZ Thomas	Rhône 1	Local Official	**MoDem**	LREM	Hobert G. (PRG)	
RUPIN Pacôme	Paris 7	Entrepreneur	**PS**	LREM	Bloche P. (PS)	
SAINT-MARTIN Laurent	Val de Marne 3	Senior Executive	**PS (left in 2012)**	LREM	Schwartzenberg R.G (PRG)	
SAINT-PAUL Laetitia	Maine-et-Loire 4	Senior Official (Army)		LREM	Piron M. (UDI)	
SARLES Nathalie	Loire 5	Nurse			Nicolin Y. (LR)	
SAVATIER Jacques	Vienne 1	Engineer		LREM	Claeys A. (PS)	
SEMPASTOUS Jean-Bernard	Hautes-Pyrénées 1	Teacher (High school)	**UDI**	LREM	Glavany J. (PS)	
SERVA Olivier	Guadeloupe 1	Teacher (Accounting)	**GUSR**	LREM	Jalton E. (FRAPP)	
SIMIAN Benoit	Gironde 5	Chief Human Resources Officer	**PS**	LREM	Got P. (PS)	Left the group **(LT)**
SOMMER Denis	Doubs 3	Teacher (Management)	**PS**	LREM	Bonnot M. (PS)	
SON-FORGET Joachim	Français de l'étranger 6	Medical Doctor (Surgeon)	**PS (R&F)**	LREM	Schmid C. (LR)	Left the group **(NI)**
SORRE Bertrand	Manche 2	Teacher		LREM	Huet G. (LR)	
STUDER Bruno	Bas-Rhin 3	Teacher	**UDI (R&F)**	LREM	Schneider A. (LR)	
SYLLA Sira	Seine-Maritime 4	Lawyer		LREM	Bachelay G. (PS)	

TACHE Aurélien	Val d'Oise 10	Senior Public Servant	**PS**	LREM	Lefebvre D. (PS)	Left the group **(NI)**
TAMARELLE-VERHAEGHE Marie	Eure 3	Medical Doctor	**UDI**	LREM	Morin H. (UDI/LC)	
TAN Buon	Paris 9	Entrepreneur		LREM	Lang A.C (PS/LREM)	
TANGUY Liliana	Finistère 7	Senior Public Servant		LREM	Le Loch A. (PS)	
TAQUET Adrien	Hauts-de-Seine 2	Consulting		LREM	Pietrasanta S. (PS)	
TERLIER Jean	Tarn 3	Lawyer		LREM	Gourjade L. (PS)	
TESTE Stéphane	Seine-Saint-Denis 12	School Director	**PS**	LREM	Popelin P. (PS)	
THILL Agnès	Oise 2	School Director		LREM	Mancel J.F (LR)	Excluded **(UDI)**
THILLAYE Sabine	Indre-et-Loire 5	Entrepreneur		LREM	Briand P. (LR)	Excluded **(MoDem)**
THIEBAUT Vincent	Bas-Rhin 9	Engineer		LREM	Sturni C. (SE)	
THOMAS Valérie	Puy-de-Dome 1	Consulting		LREM	Saugues O. (PS)	
THOUROT Alice	Drome 2	Lawyer		LREM	Reynier F. (UDI)	
TIEGNA Huguette	Lot 2	Engineer		LREM	Launay J. (PS)	
TOURAINE Jean-Louis	Rhône 3	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
TOURRET Alain	Calvados 6	**MP**	**PRG**	LREM	Himself	
TOUTUT-PICARD Elisabeth	Haute-Garonne 7	Senior Official (Hospital)		LREM	Lemasle P. (PS)	
TRAVERT Stéphane	Manche 3	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
TRISSE Nicole	Moselle 5	Employee		LREM	Lett C. (LR)	

TROMPILLE Stéphane	Ain 4	Employee	**PS (R&F)**	LREM	Voisin M. (LR)	
TUFFNELL Frédérique	Charente-Maritime 2	Pensioner (Senior Public Servant)		LREM	Tallard S. (PS)	Left the group **(MoDem)**
VALETTA ARDISSON Alexandra	Alpes-Maritimes 4	Parliamentary Assistant	**LR**	LREM	Guibal J.C (LR)	
VANCEUNEBROCK-MIALON Laurence	Allier 2	Police Officer		LREM	Lesterlin B. (PS)	
VERDIER-JOUCLAS Marie-Christine	Tarn 2	Banking Executive		LREM	Valax J. (PS)	
VIDAL Annie	Seine-Maritime 2	Senior Executive (Health)		LREM	Guégot F. (LR)	
VIGNAL Patrick	Hérault 9	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
VIGNON Corinne	Haute-Garonne 3	Trade Representative		LREM	Arribagé L. (LR)	
VILLANI Cédric	Essonne 5	Professor (Mathematics)		LREM	Olivier M. (PS)	Exclu-ded **(NI)**
VUILLETET Guillaume	Val d'Oise 2	Consulting	**EELV**	LREM	Poniatowski A. (LR)	
VERAN Olivier	Isère 1	**MP**	**PS**	LREM	Himself	
WONNER Martine	Bas-Rhin 4	Medical Doctor		LREM	Rohftrisch S. (LR)	Exclu-ded **(LT/NI)**
ZANNIER Hélène	Moselle 7	Senior Public Servant		LREM	Zannetti P. (PS)	
ZULESI Jean-Marc	Bouches-du-Rhône 8	Engineer		LREM	Maggi J.P (PS)	

Methodological note:

The table above details the members of the La République En Marche majority elected in June 18, 2017. Are referenced in each case the constituency in which the deputy was elected, their former occupation, their former known political affiliation, the banner under which they got elected, the name of their predecessors, and finally their position towards the LREM group as of late 2021 (if they were excluded or made secession).

The information provided in this appendix originates from articles of the regional and national press.

A total of 314 LREM deputies is listed above, against the number of 306 or 308 that is mentioned in Chapter V. Various situations created caveats that explain this discrepancy:

First, several MPs have run for their position as dissidents, i.e. without a formal LREM or MoDem endorsement, either for legal reasons (M'jid El Guerrad) or because they were not invested by the presidential majority but chose to rally it after their election (Sonia Krimi).

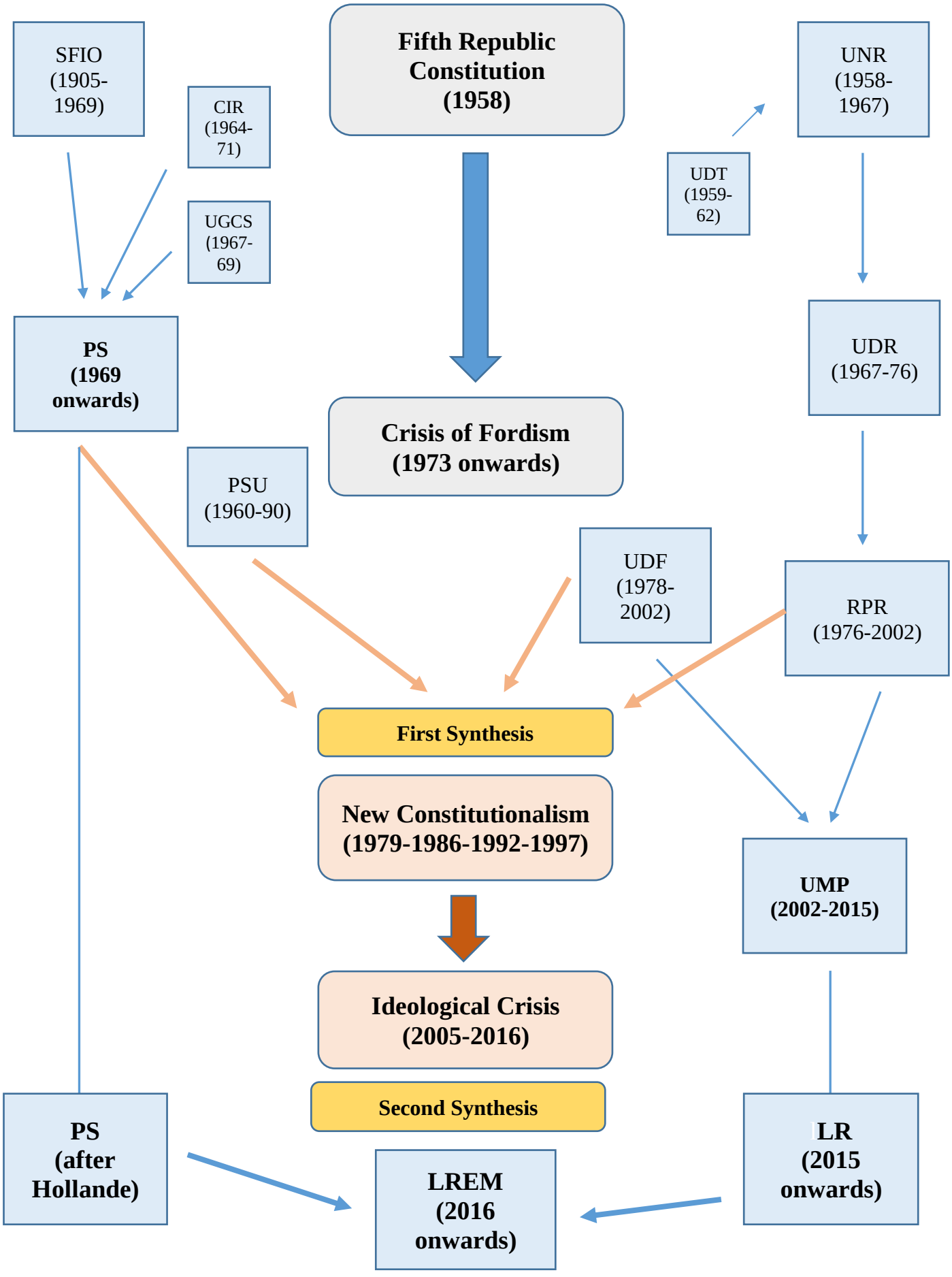
Others have zigzagged around two or more endorsements prior to being elected under the LREM banner, such as Stella Dupont – initially endorsed by Parti Socialiste –, Eric Alauzet – initially endorsed by Europe Ecologie Les Verts – and François Jolivet –

who initially ran as a dissident to Les Républicains who did not afford their endorsement but was co-opted by Bruno Le Maire to join La République En Marche (Rigodanzo 2017).

A last category of MPs owed their election to the entente concluded between LREM and MoDem, which allowed the latter to elect 42 deputies in the National Assembly (the party held 2 seats in 2017).

In some cases, the changes of banner were so numerous that they make any form of identification arduous. Such is the case of Laurence Maillart-Méhaignerie (Ille-et-Vilaine), who was initially invested by UDI in 2016, before joining La République En Marche one year later. Yet, she ran under the banner MoDem. Indeed, the constituency was initially promised to Gaspard Glanzer – the former communication aid of François Hollande, who had a transformist behaviour and left his former party to join LREM and MoDem – but his nomination was too contested and Laurence Maillart-Méhaignie replaced him and got elected. Once again, the intervention of a governmental figure – in that case, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian – was capital to the success of this *parachutage* (Vernay and Cléret 2017).

<u>Appendix #2</u>: « Liberté. Fraternité. Egalité des chances. »
A Reframing of the French Motto on the *Élysée* Website.


Fifth Republic Constitution (1958)
SFIO (1905-1969)
CIR (1964-71)
UGCS (1967-69)
PS (1969 onwards)
UNR (1958-1967)
UDT (1959-62)
UDR (1967-76)
Crisis of Fordism (1973 onwards)
PSU (1960-90)
UDF (1978-2002)
RPR (1976-2002)
First Synthesis
New Constitutionalism (1979-1986-1992-1997)
UMP (2002-2015)
Ideological Crisis (2005-2016)
Second Synthesis
PS (after Hollande)
LREM (2016 onwards)
LR (2015 onwards)

<u>Appendix #3:</u> Political Party Reconfiguring under the French Fifth Republic.

Appendix #4: The Struggle against the 2019 Pension Reform

The struggle against rapidly degrading living conditions associated with the crisis of social reproduction also crystallised around the pension reforms strikes and demonstrations that spanned from December 2019 to the breakout of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. The French pension scheme has long been a crucial issue of political struggle insofar as it directly connects to the funding of social benefits, and its successive reforms always triggered substantial demonstrations of force on the part of unions, student organisations and left-wing parties. In popular and media parlance, pension reforms are considered '*la mère des batailles*' (mother of all battles), not only for the government that attempts to impose one, but also for the social forces that seek to oppose it.

For instance, the contest movement against the 2003 pension reform engineered by Minister of Social Affairs François Fillon – who would become the main architect of more extensive pension reforms throughout the decade (see Table 15) – provoked a massive wave of strikes in public services and public transportations that strongly echoed the 1995 strikes, without however garnering the same kind of fragile legislative respite.

Law or Reform	Date of promulgation	Prime Minister	Legal retirement age	Yearly Contribution period
Loi du 22 juillet 1993 (Réformes Balladur)	July 1993	Edouard Balladur	60 years-old	From 37.5 to 40 years for the private sector
Loi du 21 août 2003 portant réforme des retraites	August 2003	Jean-Pierre Raffarin	60 years-old	41 years for both the public and private sector
Loi du 15 février 2008 sur les régimes spéciaux (Réforme Fillon)	February 2008	François Fillon	60 years-old	From 37.5 to 40 years for special pension schemes (‘régimes spéciaux’)
Loi du 9 novembre 2010 (Réforme Woerth)	November 2010	François Fillon	62 years-old (except for special pension schemes)	41 years for general schemes, 40 for special schemes
Loi garantissant l’avenir et la justice du système de retraites	January 2014	Jean-Marc Ayrault	62 years-old	43 years (except for special pension schemes)

Table 15: The neoliberalisation of the French pension schemes: five reforms that modified the legal retirement age and the contribution period to receive a full pension.

In effect, since the early 1990s, the pension schemes in France have gradually evolved towards private insurance models, with an increasingly large capitalisation and individualisation of pension contributions. Thus, both the mutualist ‘*retraites complémentaires*’ (a mutual insurance system led by AGIRC-ARCO and that obeys a points-system logic) and private hedge funds and insurance groups have progressively been competing with the solidarity-based system inherited from Conseil National de la Résistance (CNR), whose parameters and functioning were often deemed too costly by politicians from both the traditional Left and Right. In consequence, various reforms have been implemented to extend both the retirement legal age and the yearly contribution period. The five main

reforms that served these purposes spanned from 1993 to 2014 and are summarised in the table above.

In December 2019, after months of 'concertation', the Edouard Philippe government proposed a reform that intended to reshuffle the current pension framework by introducing a points-system logic in an effort to harmonize France's 42 separate retirement schedules, a system disparaged by the presidential majority as absurdly complex. They proposed instead a 'universal system', a single points-based system that acted the mandatory retirement age of 62 while installing a bonus system to encourage people to work until 64 years-old, compensated by the introduction of the 1000 euros' minimum monthly pension for those who have worked a full career. Yet, the universal system proposed by the government was to be calculated by points, with the logic that each euro earned would count towards future pension benefits. This change automatically disadvantaged most professionals, as in the private sector pension benefits are calculated using an employee's 25 highest-paid years of work (only 10 years prior to the 1993 Balladur reform), and the benefits are calculated using the last years of employment in the public sector. This also disadvantaged many professions – such as subway and sewer workers or professional dancers – who had socially mobilised to earn the right to contribute to the pension scheme for a shorter period of time because of their job's physical arduousness.

It quickly became obvious that the purpose of the reform was to tighten the conditions for receiving a complete pension, and thus to encourage and facilitate the financialisation of the French pension scheme and the recourse to hedge funds and private insurance firms, notwithstanding the risk that such private actors can prove very vulnerable in financial crises. The American multinational corporation BlackRock was particularly pointed at, as a

document of recommendations leaked by *L'Humanité* (Crépel 2019) showed their satisfaction with the promulgation of Loi PACTE (see Chapter VII) and their expectations with regards to the possibility for the French population to shun the *modèle par répartition* in order to move towards a more capitalised and financialised system that would allow pensioners to maintain certain standards of living once retired.

Despite the inability of social movements to prevent the implementation of the 2008 and 2010 bills, Emmanuel Macron's pension reform was met with very large and sustained protests, with an inter-union front gathering CGT, FO, FSU, Solidaires and CFE-CGC, as well as several high school and student organisations and many Yellow Vests protesters. Strikes were massive in SNCF, RATP and public education, but also among lawyers, hospital workers and artists. For the first time, the issue of gender was at the forefront, as a testimony to the scale of the social reproduction crisis. Indeed, women were particularly disadvantaged with the points-system proposed by the government, as their careers are often interrupted by the availability required by unpaid care and domestic work, and they are paid on average less than men.

Although references to 1995 were ubiquitous, the movement was not as successful for reasons related to the restructuring of the labour market and public sector. Thus, less train workers were on strike because CGT is less hegemonic than it used to be within SNCF. Furthermore, the failed strikes of 2018 have damaged the morals of the *cheminots*, and many more train workers have since been hired with a less accommodating status and are therefore harder to mobilise. Other public sector employees – with the exception of hospital workers and teachers – have also shown less solidarity, such as Electricité de France (EDF) and La Poste workers, two mixed entities that have been profoundly restructured since the mid-1990s, as were the oil refineries, which were blocked but whose production was not completely interrupted. Lastly,

student organisations were less involved, partly because of the widespread delusion among young people that they would not experience pension benefits anyways: indeed, French students are much more pauperised in 2019 as they were in 1995. Generally speaking, unions – whether revolutionary or reformist – are less powerful than in the 1990s.

Yet, the pension bill was not passed, for several reasons. First, the social conflict was particularly long: it started on 5 December 2019 (with between 806,000 and 1,500 000 protesters throughout France, the largest mobilisation since 2010) and continued through the winter holidays, spanning over the months of January and February, despite the weakening of strike actions and participation from 17 January onwards. Second, the government made several mistakes: the proposed bill was too complex and the BlackRock scandal, as well as the apparent conflict of interest concerning the High Commissioner for Pension Reforms Jean-Paul Delevoye, who was revealed to be funded by the French Federation of Insurances (Gasté 2019), profoundly undermined the government's credibility and forced it to recourse to the 49-3 procedure in parliament. Third, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in France and the hastily declared lockdown interrupted parliamentary proceedings and forced the government to abandon the pension reform – and the proposed points-system – altogether.